



An Roinn Leanáí, Comhionannais,
Míchumais, Lánpháirtíochta agus Óige
Department of Children, Equality,
Disability, Integration and Youth

Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth

Customer Service Action Plan and Customer Charter 2022-2025

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Foreword by the Secretary General

The mission of the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth is to enhance the lives of everyone in Ireland, from childhood onwards, by upholding rights, promoting equality of opportunity, recognising diversity and delivering supportive legislation, policies and services across the range of areas for which my Department and I are responsible. Our Vision is for a fair, equal and inclusive society where rights are respected, and where everyone can reach their potential.

Our values and goals are set out in our [Statement of Strategy 2023-2025](#).

The Programme for Government outlines a broad range of commitments for the Department spanning policy development and delivery of key services.

We engage with partner organisations across Government, State Bodies, Communities and Non-Governmental Organisations to develop evidence based and deliver policy and service delivery.

We are individually and collectively accountable for what we do. We are open to change. We are customer-focused and we are respectful in our dealings with the public and work colleagues.

The Customer Service Action Plan & Charter 2022-2025 sets out how the Department will seek to ensure that the highest possible standards of customer service are achieved.

Kevin McCarthy
Secretary General

1. Working with key external partners and stakeholders

The Department works in close partnership with other Government Departments, agencies and offices, service providers, members of the public, elected representatives, non-governmental organisations, international organisations and voluntary and representative Groups (including groups representing the interests of children and young people).

The Department deals with members of the public for a number of schemes it operates. It has a very wide range of interactions with key community, voluntary and not-for-profit sectors organisations.

The provisions of the Customer Service Charter & Action Plan also applies to the staff of the Department.

2. Training

We are committed to investing in customer service training for all staff so that they have the knowledge and skills to provide a quality service. We recognise the value of this training in familiarising staff with the commitments set out in our Customer Charter the policies and practices outlined in the Action Plan.

3. Statutory obligations

The Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth is committed to fulfilling all relevant statutory obligations. In addition to undertakings given in our Customer Service Action Plan & Charter, it is important that all Departmental staff are aware of their statutory obligations.

4. Who's who

Information on where to address your specific query is available on [our website](#).

For general queries, you can contact the Department by email at contact@equality.gov.ie

5. Our commitment to our customers

Our commitment to our customers, as well as the responsibilities of the customer when contacting the Department, are listed in our **Customer Charter** at **Appendix A**.

6. Quality Customer Service

We are committed to providing the highest levels of service to all our customers in accordance with the following **Principles of Quality Customer Service**:

(1) Quality Service Standards

Publish a statement that outlines the nature and quality of service that the customer can expect and display this statement prominently at the point of service delivery.

(2) Equality/Diversity

Ensure that the rights to equal treatment established by equality legislation (on the grounds of gender, marital status, family status, sexual orientation, religious belief, age, disability, race and membership of the Traveller Community) are fully addressed.

Identify and work to eliminate barriers to access services for people experiencing poverty and social exclusion, as well as those facing geographic barriers to services.

(3) Physical Access

Provide clean, accessible public offices that ensure privacy, comply with occupational and safety standards and, facilitate access for people with disabilities and others with specific needs.

(4) Information

Take a proactive approach in providing information that is clear, timely and accurate, is available at all points of contact, and meets the requirements of people with specific needs. Ensure that the potential offered by Information Technology is fully exploited and that the information available on public service websites follows the guidelines on web publication. Continue the drive for simplification of rules, regulations, forms, information leaflets and procedures.

(5) Timeliness and Courtesy

Deliver quality services with courtesy, sensitivity and the minimum delay, fostering a climate of mutual respect between provider and customer.

(6) Complaints and Appeals

Maintain a formalised, well-publicised, accessible, transparent and simple-to-use system of appeal/review for customers who are dissatisfied with decisions and/or service levels experienced.

(7) Consultation and Evaluation

Provide a structured approach to meaningful consultation with, and participation by, the customer in relation to the development, delivery and review of services. Ensure meaningful evaluation of service delivery.

(8) Choice

Provide choice, where feasible, in service delivery including payment methods, location of contact points, opening hours and delivery times. Use available and emerging technologies to ensure maximum access and choice, and quality of delivery.

(9) Official Languages Equality

Provide quality services through Irish and/or bilingually and inform customers of their right to choose to be dealt with through one or other of the official languages.

(10) Better Co-ordination

Foster a co-ordinated and integrated approach to delivery of public services.

(11) Internal Customer

Ensure staff are recognised as internal customers and that they are properly supported and consulted with about service delivery issues

The manner in which we will honour these principles is set out in our **Customer Charter (Appendix A)**. To ensure that our Customer Charter commitments are met, we have developed a number of standards and performance indicators against which we will measure our performance.

Appendix A: Customer Charter 2022–2025

The Customer Charter sets out what people can expect when dealing with us.

1. Our Commitment to our Customers

Customer satisfaction is very important to us and we aim to achieve this by –

- treating customers in a proper, fair, impartial and courteous manner;
- giving our customers the best possible service and advice;
- aiming to ensure that rights to equal treatment set out by equality legislation are upheld in the delivery of our services;
- aiming, where possible, to meet any special needs our customers may have.

2. Telephone Enquiries

We will be available to answer telephone calls during normal office hours (9:15am - 5:30pm Monday to Thursday [5:15pm on Friday]). Our aim is to answer all calls quickly. We will identify ourselves and our area of work. We will be polite and helpful and provide our customers with clear and correct information. If we cannot give an answer straight away, we will take the customer's details and call them back at a suitable time.

3. Written Communications

We seek to acknowledge written communications, including email, within 5 working days of receiving them, and provide a final reply within 20 working days. In cases where it is not possible to meet this timeframe, we will explain this to our customers by way of an interim reply within the 20-day period.

If the correspondence is for another Government Department or public body, we will, with your consent, pass the correspondence on to them.

4. Personal Callers

We will be available to meet, by appointment, with our customers during normal office hours on matters relating to the work of the Department. We will greet visitors politely, be fair and helpful, and deal with their enquiries as quickly as possible. We will provide suitable facilities for meetings and will make sure that our offices are clean and safe. We will also make sure that our offices are accessible for people with disabilities.

5. Equal Status Policy

We are committed to providing a service that all our customers can avail of and that treats all customers equally. We will do our best to ensure that the services we provide take account of the needs that particular groups of customers may have. Where appropriate, we will consult with our customers to make sure that their accessibility needs are looked after. We will provide suitable staff training to support these commitments.

6. Equality/Diversity

We will ensure our staff have knowledge about equality and diversity and we will do this through training, information and communication. In our dealings with our customers, we will make sure that their rights to equal treatment, set out by equality legislation, are upheld.

7. Séirbhís trí Ghaeilge/Service in Irish

Tabharfar freagra as Gaeilge ar chomhfreagras a gheofar i nGaeilge. Déanfar gach iarracht freastal ar fhiafraithe teileafóin i nGaeilge agus freastal ar dhaoine a thagann i láthair ar mian leo a ngnó a dhéanamh trí Ghaeilge.

We will ensure that customers who wish to deal with us through Irish can do so.

8. Irish Sign Language (ISL) Interpretation Services

We will ensure that customers who require and wish to use Irish Sign Language (ISL) to deal with us can do so.

We can provide an Irish Sign Language (ISL) interpreter in person or by video link where required. Please contact us, as we will need to set up an appointment to provide this service.

9. Language Interpretation Services

The International Protection Accommodation Service (IPAS) is a division of the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth (DCEDIY).

IPAS is responsible for the provision of accommodation and related services to people in the International Protection process. We can provide information and documentation on our website to access IPAS services in up to 13 languages, based on common languages in IPAS accommodation centres.

IPAS customer facing staff can access a language interpreter via a telephone conversation to assist residents who are in direct contact with them.

Please ask for this service in advance if you require it.

While help from English speaking family or friends, or translations apps can be used in very limited circumstances, (for example when requesting an application form or asking basic information), they should not be relied on for official IPAS meetings.

We will try to provide an appropriate interpreter for such engagements.

10. Training

We will invest in customer service training for our staff, in particular staff who are in contact with the public.

11. Our Customers' Responsibilities

We expect that our staff will be treated with courtesy and respect. Customers must afford our staff with the opportunity to respond to enquiries made.

Our staff have the right to make a decision to terminate a telephone call if the caller exhibits aggressive or abusive behaviours. In the event of this happening, the staff member will advise the caller that their behaviour is unacceptable and advise that the call will be terminated should the behaviour continue.

The Department's **Unreasonable Actions Policy** can be found in **Appendix C**.

12. Feedback

If a customer wants to make a suggestion on how we could improve our service, they can e-mail our Customer Service Officer, who can be contacted at contact@equality.gov.ie

Customers can also write to

The Customer Service Officer
Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth
FREEPOST F5055
Block 1, Miesian Plaza
50-58 Baggot Street Lower
Dublin 2.
D02 XWI4

13. Customer Complaints

Our **Customer Complaints Procedure** is outlined in **Appendix B** below.

Our Access Officer's contact point is below and on our website if you are making a complaint under the Disability Act (2005).

14. Help Us to Help You

We can help you best if you

- provide any information you have which is relevant to your inquiry
- provide any relevant documents and reference numbers you have
- follow any checklists or guidelines which you have been given
- treat our staff and other customers with courtesy and respect

15. Contact Points / Telephone Numbers / Email

Customer Service Officer

Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth
FREEPOST F5055
Block 1, Miesian Plaza
50-58 Baggot Street Lower
Dublin 2. D02 XWI4
Telephone – 01 647 3167
Email – contact@equality.gov.ie

Access Officer

Access Officer – Jill Robinson
Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth
FREEPOST F5055
Block 1, Miesian Plaza
50-58 Baggot Street Lower
Dublin 2. D02 XWI4
Telephone – 01 647 3070
Email – jill.robinson@equality.gov.ie

Freedom of Information Officer

Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth
FREEPOST F5055
Block 1, Miesian Plaza
50-58 Baggot Street Lower
Dublin 2. D02 XWI4
Telephone – 01 647 3167
Email – foiequality@equality.gov.ie

Complaints Appeals Officer

Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth

FREEPOST F5055

Block 1, Miesian Plaza

50-58 Baggot Street Lower

Dublin 2

D02 XWI4

Telephone – 01 647 3000

Email - contact@equality.gov.ie

Appendix B: Customer Complaints Procedure

Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth

What is a complaint?

We define a complaint as an expression of dissatisfaction concerning the provision of a service or services by the Department, as laid out under the commitments in our Customer Charter.

How to make a complaint?

- If you have a cause for complaint, it should be directed initially to the relevant unit of the Department. Our staff there will try to deal with the problem without delay or, if the complaint does not relate to a service provided by us, direct you to the appropriate body. If you do not know the name of the person in the unit to contact, or if you are unsure which body you should make your complaint to, our Customer Service Officer will be happy to advise you. (Contact details are in the Customer Charter in Appendix A)
- If the staff of the unit cannot resolve your complaint, or you are unhappy with their response, you can ask for the matter to be reviewed by a senior member of staff from that unit.
- If you are still unhappy with the response, you should make a formal complaint to the Customer Service Officer, who will investigate the complaint on your behalf.

You can make a complaint to the Customer Services Officer in writing or by e-mail.

What information should you provide?

You will help to speed up the investigation of your complaint by providing the following details:

- Your name, address and e-mail address.
- The reason for your complaint or dissatisfaction.
- The name of the official or unit you dealt with.
- A daytime telephone number.

Our commitments when dealing with formal complaints

We will acknowledge complaints within 5 working days and try to deal with them within 15 working days. If we need to carry out further investigations, we will let you know and will try to have this completed within 20 working days. We will maintain regular contact with complainants if we have not been able to address the matter with this timeframe.

- All complaints will be treated promptly, fairly, impartially and in confidence.
- We will keep records of complaints separate from other records.
- We will ensure that no complaint you have made in good faith will be used to your disadvantage in the future.
- We will endeavour to learn from mistakes to ensure that errors are not repeated.

Can you appeal?

If you are not satisfied with the outcome of the investigation of a complaint, the matter may be appealed to the Appeals Officer. The deadlines for responding to appeals will be the same as those for formal complaints (outlined above).

Appeals Officer

The Complaint Appeals Officer
Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth
Freepost F5055
Block 1, Miesian Plaza
50-58 Baggot Street Lower
Dublin 2
D02 XW14

Email - contact@equality.gov.ie

If you are still not satisfied with the outcome, you can write to:

The Office of the Ombudsman

18 Lower Leeson Street
Dublin 2

Tel. (01) 639 5600

LoCall 1890 22 30 30

Email: info@ombudsman.ie

Appendix C: Unreasonable Actions Policy

Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth Policy for dealing with unreasonable actions by members of the public

Introduction

The Department believes that all members of the public who contact us have a right to be heard, understood and respected. We work hard to be open and accessible. In dealing with the public, we require our staff to communicate clearly the reasons for our decisions and why, where relevant a complainant's argument or preferred outcome is not tenable.

We are conscious that the circumstances that lead people to contact our Department can be upsetting and distressing and may lead people to act out of character. We do not view behaviour as unreasonable just because it is forceful or determined. However, there may be times when the behaviour of people contacting the Department makes it difficult for us to deal with the issues they raise. In a small number of cases, the actions become unreasonable because of the way they treat our staff or the demands they make on the Department.

We have a duty to protect our staff and do not expect them to be subjected to behaviour that is abusive, offensive or threatening, or which places unreasonable demands on the work of the Department.

What actions can be considered unreasonable?

- Unreasonably demanding or persistent actions
- Aggressive or abusive behaviour

Unreasonably demanding or persistent actions involve frequency of contact that takes a disproportionate amount of time and resources of the Department and impacts on the time available to deal with other complaints.

Examples of such actions include:

- Demanding responses within an unreasonable timescale
- Persistent requests for information
- Continuous phone calls and/or letters
- Repeatedly raising unrelated concerns
- Persistent refusal to accept a finding made in relation to a complaint
- Persistent refusal to accept explanations of what is excluded from this Department's remit
- Persistent insistence on outcomes that cannot be achieved

- Persistent refusal to follow procedures explained by this Department
- Continuing to pursue a closed case without presenting any new information
- Threat of self-harm

Aggressive or abusive behaviour

We expect

- our staff to be courteous and respectful in their interaction with the public, professionals, and
- that staff should also be treated courteously and respectfully by those who are contacting this Department.

The Department understands that people contacting us may feel angry about the issues they are raising. However, it is not acceptable to behave in an aggressive, abusive, threatening or violent manner with staff. Any such behaviours will not be accepted.

Aggressive or abusive behaviour includes behaviour or language (verbal or written) that may cause staff to feel intimidated, threatened or harmed. It includes threatening comments or actions, physical abuse or assault, derogatory or offensive comments and rudeness.

How we will manage unreasonable demanding or persistent behaviour

If we think a person's behaviour is unreasonable we will write to them and explain why we find their behaviour unacceptable. We will also explain that if the behaviour continues we will need to consider taking other steps. Actions that we may consider include:

- Restricting telephone calls to particular times and limiting the time for the calls
- We may require contact to take place with a named staff member only
- Requesting contact in a particular format, for example letters only
- Where a complaint is concluded and the person has been advised of the decision and our reasons for this, on-going correspondence may be acknowledged but there will be no further engagement by this Department
- Ceasing all contact where the person continues with unreasonable actions. (This decision can only be taken with the agreement of the Secretary General).
- Taking other action which the Department considers appropriate

How we will manage aggressive or abusive behaviour

We will not accept behaviour or correspondence that is abusive or threatening to staff. Physical violence, threats, verbal abuse or harassment will not be tolerated and is likely to lead to a termination of all contact with the person. Incidents may be reported to An Garda Síochána. This will always be the case if physical violence is used or threatened.

We will not accept correspondence that is abusive or threatening to staff. We will not respond to any correspondence containing such language.

We will tell the person if we think their language during telephone calls is rude and offensive and ask them to stop using such language. Staff have the right to terminate the telephone call if the behaviour continues and we may record such calls. We will inform a caller if we are going to take this action.

How we will manage a threat to self-harm

If a customer threatens to self-harm, staff in the Department may determine that the best course of action is to contact the emergency services with or without informing or seeking the consent of the customer.

The process we follow to make decisions about unreasonable behaviour

All actions by a person that are considered to be intimidating, threatening, abusive or unreasonably demanding or persistent or represent a threat to self-harm will be notified to a senior manager. Any member of staff who directly experiences aggressive or abusive behaviour has the authority to deal immediately with the behaviour in a manner they consider appropriate and in line with this policy.

With the exception of such immediate decisions taken at the time of the incident, decisions to restrict or limit contact with the Department are taken after careful consideration of the situation by a senior member of staff. Wherever possible we will give the person an opportunity to change their behaviour before such a decision is taken.

How we let people know we have made this decision

When a staff member makes an immediate decision in response to unacceptable behaviour, the person is advised at the time of the incident.

In all other cases we will write to the person and tell them what action we are taking and why. However, where the behaviour is so extreme that it threatens the safety and welfare of staff, we will consider reporting this to An Garda Síochána or instigating legal action. In such cases, we may not give prior notice of this.

How we record and review a decision to restrict contact

We record all incidents of unreasonable actions by people contacting the Department.

A decision to restrict contact from a person may be reconsidered if the person demonstrates a more acceptable approach.