



THE FACULTY OFFICE

Complaints policy

Introduction

1. The Faculty Office is responsible principally for the appointment and regulation of approximately 750 public notaries in England and Wales and for the grant of the Archbishop's Special Marriage Licence.
2. The Faculty Office consists of a small team which is committed to operating in a trustworthy, sensible and correct manner. In its dealings with the public it is committed to being helpful, polite, effective and efficient. The Faculty Office commits to not discriminating against members of the public on the basis of age, disability, gender identification, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity/paternity, race, religion or belief or sexual orientation. Where it does not perform in this way, it welcomes expressions of concern so that failings can be addressed, and complaints resolved.
3. This policy covers complaints made against the Faculty Office as a whole or members of its staff. It is not intended to cover complaints about individuals notaries, for which there are separate rules – see our [guidance](#).

What is a complaint?

4. We consider a complaint to be "an expression of dissatisfaction however made, about the actions taken or a lack of action."

Who can make a complaint?

5. Any member of the public, corporate body or a member of staff of the Faculty Office may make a complaint if they have a proper interest, eg having an interest in a matter relating to the appointment and regulation of notaries; or the obtaining of a Special Licence.

Where this policy does not apply

6. It may not always be possible for complaints to be handled according to or within this policy. For instance, when the complaint is also the subject of a criminal investigation or by a governmental or regulatory authority or is the subject of a claim brought in a court or expected to be brought in a court, it may be necessary to depart from the policy for reasons of confidentiality or so as not to prejudice the course of an external investigation or litigation. Some complaints will need to be handled under a separate process because there are specific rules governing that matter¹. In such case, we will tell you what that other process involves.

How to make a complaint

7. The best way to make a complaint is to complete the form which follows this policy and to email or post it to the Faculty Office. Alternatively, you can write to or email the Faculty Office at:

The Registrar
The Faculty Office
1 The Sanctuary
Westminster
London SW1P 3JT

Email:- faculty.office@1thesanctuary.com

You can also make a complaint by telephone although we will normally encourage you to put your complaint into writing. Our telephone number is 020 7222 5381.

How complaints are handled

8. In the first instance, your complaint will normally be addressed by the person or team whose action or lack of action have caused you to be dissatisfied, or their immediate line manager. This is because they are normally the person or people who know most about the matter and who might be able to provide an explanation, correct a mistake or provide you with assistance.
9. All complaints however will be brought to the attention of the Registrar, who manages the Faculty Office, at a weekly management meeting, and the Registrar will ask for information on no less than a weekly basis about how the complaint is being handled.
10. If your complaint relates to poor behaviour on the part of a member or members of staff which the Registrar considers to be an accusation of dishonesty or other misconduct on the part of a member or members of staff, he or she will normally refer the complaint to be handled by another member of staff, who has not previously been

¹ For example, the substantive issue of whether a practicing certificate is or is not issued to a notary to enable him or her to practice would usually be the subject of specific rules. Similarly, a complaint about the refusal to issue a Special Marriage Licence (as distinct from how an application has been dealt with) would normally be referred to the Episcopal Adviser appointed by the Archbishop of Canterbury.

involved. Additionally, if the member or members of staff complained against consider that the complaint would be better handled by someone else, then they may ask the Registrar to appoint another member of staff to look into it.

11. The purpose of the internal investigation of the complaint is to ascertain whether the Faculty Office has made a mistake or has performed poorly or has acted in a discriminatory or unfair way. If the member of staff cannot quickly resolve the mistake by putting matters right (eg performing an action which has been delayed) and apologising, then the member of staff must report in writing to the Registrar with an explanation of the events, what was done and not done. The report should set out what loss or damage has been suffered or might be suffered by the events complained about.
12. If the complaint amounts to an accusation of dishonesty or other misconduct on the part of the Registrar, the Registrar shall make a report to the Master of the Faculties.
13. A full report to the Registrar on the complaint should be made within a period of 14 days from receipt of the written complaint (or telephone call if the complainant is unable or willing to put the complaint into writing). Within 21 days of the receipt of the written complaint (or telephone call if the complainant is unable or willing to put the complaint into writing), a written reply should be sent to the person who made the complaint setting out:
 - (a) whether the complaint is upheld or not or partially upheld
 - (b) giving reasons for his or her conclusion (although these need not be lengthy or full)
 - (c) apologising if appropriate
 - (d) setting out any action that the Registrar proposes to take to rectify any failing either in the specific case or more generally and in what timescale
14. When considering complaints, the Faculty Office should consider the following aspects both in relation to how it should act and how it responds to complaints:
 - (a) being open and transparent
 - (b) acting in the public good
 - (c) acting to further the regulatory objectives²
 - (d) acting professionally and objectively
 - (e) getting things right

² These are set out in section 1 of the Legal Services Act 2007:

- (a) protecting and promoting the public interest;
- (b) supporting the constitutional principle of the rule of law;
- (c) improving access to justice;
- (d) protecting and promoting the interests of consumers;
- (e) promoting competition in the provision of services within subsection
- (f) encouraging an independent, strong, diverse and effective legal profession;
- (g) increasing public understanding of the citizen's legal rights and duties;
- (h) promoting and maintaining adherence to the professional principles

- (f) being sensitive to the views of both the person making the complaint, any staff members complained against, and any affected third parties
- (g) responding as quickly as possible
- (h) acting proportionately according to the importance of the issue.

15. The Registrar or other Faculty Office staff may need to communicate with the person who made the complaint or other persons in order to get further information and where that or other reasons would mean that a full reply cannot be made in 21 days, then the Registrar may send a preliminary reply to the person making the complaint, setting out the next steps he or she will be taking to investigate the complaint and when he or she expects a final response to be sent.
16. If the person who made the complaint is not satisfied with the response to the complaint, then they may ask the complaint to be sent to the Master.
17. If a complaint is sent to the Master then the Master may review the initial response with a view to determining whether it adequately addresses the complaint and the matters set out in paragraph 12 above. The Master may also refer the complaint to be considered by an expert referee of his or her choosing and for recommendations to be made by him or her to the Master. That referee may be an independent person, not connected with or having an interest in the work of the Faculty Office and who may be remunerated for his or her time or unpaid.
18. The Master will aim to send a final response to the person who made the complaint within three months of the complaint, although this will depend on how quickly the person making the complaint and other parties provide the information that the Master needs in order to be able to make an informed decision.
19. The Master is not obliged to accept the recommendations of a referee to which he or she has referred the complaint but will normally disclose to the complainant what those recommendations were and his or her reasons for either accepting or not accepting them.
20. If a complaint is made against the Master, the Master will normally seek to respond in the first instance but if the person making the complaint remains unsatisfied the Master will normally refer the complaint to be considered by an expert referee for recommendations and if the expert referee finds fault with the Master a report should normally be made to the Bishop at Lambeth.
21. A record of all complaints, whether made in writing or by any other means, is to be logged and kept up to date by Faculty Office staff with a record of what has happened and any resolution.
22. At all times Faculty Office staff should bear in mind that persons making complaints may not be experts in legal matters or the work of the office and may require assistance and explanation in articulating their concerns. If this help cannot be given internally, for reasons of a conflict of interest, the person making the complaint should

be referred to speak to an independent person for help, such as a Citizens Advice Bureau or Pro Bono Legal Advice Centre. All documents should be provided in an accessible format and using plain English where the person making a complaint is not an expert.

23. The Faculty Office should be mindful that a complaint made against a member of staff can be the cause of anxiety, loss of morale and hurt. All appropriate steps should therefore be taken to give or provide support to the member of staff, minimise the effect that any investigation might have on their work or private life and to avoid unnecessary, disproportionate or inappropriate recrimination or blame.
24. Complaints about the Faculty Office which concern its issuing of Special Marriage Licences or advising on issues relating to Marriage in the Anglican Church in England or Wales can be, where they are not resolved by the Faculty Office, addressed to the Bishop at Lambeth, whose contact details are: The Bishop at Lambeth, Lambeth Palace, London, SE1 7JU.
25. The Faculty Office expects that members of the public will not communicate to staff members in a way that is offensive or discourteous, while recognising that dissatisfaction can give rise to strong emotions. If telephone communications are significantly or persistently offensive or discourteous, Faculty Office staff may cease to take such calls. Additionally, where a complaint has been fully addressed under this policy or is of such a trivial nature that it would not warrant further investigation, it may be necessary to cease replying to persistent repetitive or vexatious correspondence.
26. The outcomes of complaints will not be publicised. However, the Faculty Office will aim to give brief details of complaints received in the annual report of the Registrar.

Last revised: January 2022

The Registrar keeps the effectiveness of this policy under review and advises the Master accordingly.