

**OXFAM GB (OGB): ANNUAL LEARNING REVIEW FROM COMPLAINTS AND FEEDBACK (1 April 2016-31 March 2017)**

1. **Introduction**

This report is OGB’s 6th Annual Learning Review and provides an overview of OGB complaints activity and any related actions and learnings during 2016-17. It also reports back on progress on the actions for 2016-17 to which we committed last year.

The Review has six sections: this Introduction, then a Synopsis, followed by separate sections on each of the Complaints Group, Programme, Trading and Supporter Relations (including Campaigning and Policy). The Review also has two appendices: (1) a report against 2016-17 action plan and (2) a 2017-18 action plan.

Ensuring that our stakeholders can hold us to account will improve the quality of our work. OGB strives to be excellent in all it does but recognises that this cannot always be the case. When we make a mistake, we want and need to be informed. We will use that information to endeavour to put things right and to help us become more effective.

In Oxfam’s Operational Plan 2017-18, OGB committed to continuing to report to the INGO Accountability Charter[[1]](#footnote-1) and to actively contributing to the Oxfam International (**OI**) Accountability Global Platform with a particular focus on improving complaints reporting.

1. **Synopsis**
* ***Complaints Group:*** the Group met twice during the year to review complaints communications and activity and to share learning. Good progress was made on objectives during 2016-17, with a number of completed actions. However, responsibility for collating Programme-related complaints has shifted from the OGB Programme team – aand will now be included in the OI annual reporting (Oxfam-wide Operational Report – **OOR**) which will be available later in 2017.
* ***Programme:***
* ***Trading:*** for the first time in a number of years, there was an increase in centrally-logged complaints– although the increase was small and there were no centrally-logged complaints in relation to over 400 of our 640 shops. Most complaints related to claims of poor customer service, an area to be covered in shop team training in 2017-18.
* ***Supporter Relations (including campaigning and policy):*** the overall number of recorded complaints has decreased significantly from 2015-16 – down from 2751 to 1534. This continues a downward trend in overall complaints year on year since 2013. It’s particularly encouraging given the significant media focus in 2016-17 on fundraising practices.
1. **Complaints Group**

The Complaints Group is convened by the Director of Finance (as owner of OGB’s Complaints Policy) and meets at least twice each year. Its membership includes the managers responsible for shop support and supporter relations, along with the Company Secretary & General Counsel and the Head of Governance.

The Group has two aims: first, to receive information about – and conduct a thorough peer review on- feedback/complaints figures and trends from throughout the organisation[[2]](#footnote-2), as part of a learning and continuous improvement process. Second, to report to OGB’s Trustees and publically (by way of this Review), as evidence of our commitment to accountability and to show how processes are being improved.

At its June 2017 meeting, the Group noted that the Complaints Policy and associated processes are easily accessible on our website (just two clicks from the home page), with clear contact information (by email, post and telephone). However, some improvement is needed to ensure, for example, that previous years’ versions of this Review are on the website.

The current Complaints Policy was developed in 2012 and therefore is due for review this year (unless a cross-federation Policy is developed by OI in the meantime).

The Group’s remit includes the review of any appeals heard in the year under the Appeals Process. However, there were no appeals in 2016-17.

1. **Programme**

**About our Complaints Handling Processes**

OGB, as part of the Oxfam confederation worldwide, is undergoing major change in order to achieve the global “One Oxfam” model. As part of this, a number of our Regional Centres have closed, with others planned to close by the end of June. Accordingly, our website now encourages anyone who has a complaint about a programme or activity in our International Programme to contact the Country Office concerned. However, we also provide an email address which is currently monitored by OGB’s Supporter Relations team – who pass on comments and queries to the relevant Country Director. Supporter Relations’ procedure would be to forward any complaints received via this email to our Whistleblowing Team but to date (May-June 2017), there have not been any.

As in previous years, significant complaints (“serious complaints about programmes/partners”) are reported to us in each country’s Quarterly Management Reports (**QMRs**). However, the information in the QMRs is seen as being mainly operational in nature and for Country Director/OI Regional Director use. Hence it has not been collated for the purposes of this Review.

The OOR 2016-17, for which OI is currently collating content from each Programme country, will include formal written complaints received from individuals directly affected by Programmes, partner organisations and the general public. The OOR will show numbers of complaints in each category which have been responded to or resolved and a summary of themes in the nature of complaints.

Under Oxfam’s confederation structure, complaints in countries and regions are channelled mainly through the Executing Affiliate (**EA**) systems. The EA Service Level Agreement includes a commitment to inform the OI line of complaints. Country Directors also inform the rest of Partner Affiliates and the Country Governance Group about complaints and reflect them in the Quarterly Risk Register.

There is a specific protocol for humanitarian responses supervised by OI’s Global Humanitarian Team (**GHT)**. In each response, the country team sets up a complaints channel available to communities and partners.

**Progress**

AS indicated above, we have transitioned to recording beneficiary and partner complaints into our programmes through the OI line, so that information on these will be available only later this year – to inform the October OI Executive Board and Board of Supervisor meetings.

Nonetheless, there were a few programme complaints received at OGB HQ level, but there is little evidenced learning for OGB as there is currently no named person to collate the information.

**Actions for 2017-18**

The Complaints Group will consider later this year the complaints information in the OOR and other available information (eg complaints about OGB’s fulfilment of its Executive Affiliate or Partner Affiliate Role or from donors) in order to recommend next steps to Leadership Team and/or Council.

**3. Trading[[3]](#footnote-3)**

**About our Complaints Handling Process**

The Trading Division’s complaints handling process is set out in annexe 2 to the Complaints Policy and can be summarised as follows:

* Trading Division complaints in this context refers to all complaints that are reported to Shop Support and then logged and managed as complaints under the formal process. It is recognised that a significant volume of issues are resolved locally and informally by our shop teams.
* Where the complaint is such that the customer wishes it to be raised formally or the Shop Manager recognises that this is necessary, the customer is provided with Shop Support contact details. They can raise the complaint by telephone, email or letter as appropriate. Contact details are also available on the OGB website should the complainant wish o raise a complaint subsequent to a shop visit or where it may not relate directly to a shop (eg it relates to policy).
* Upon receipt, Shop Support summarise, log and acknowledge within 24 hours, providing details of the complaints process with the acknowledgement. Shop Support as complaint facilitator then refer the complaint to the most appropriate member of staff to investigate and respond.

***A breakdown of complaints made by donors, customers and volunteers about Oxfam’s Trading activity, 2016-2017***

**Actions and Progress**

Complaints about Trading Division activity increased for the first time in a number of years. From April 2016 to March 2017 there were 388 complaints, a small rise on the 365 received in 2015-2016 but this was still less than the number in 2014-2015.

To put this in perspective, OGB had in the region of 640 shops in 2016-17 and there were no centrally–logged complaints in relation to over 400 of those shops.

**Trends and figures**

***Complaints by category from volunteers, donors and supporters about Oxfam’s Trading activity, 2013-17.***

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Trading Complaints**  | **2013-14** | **2014-15** | **2015-16** | **2016-17** |
| Customer Service | 227 | 187 | 223 | 263 |
| Other Complaints | 79 | 67 | 42 | 26 |
| Policy/Quality | 98 | 56 | 32 | 29 |
| Refund/Exchange | 46 | 45 | 28 | 35 |
| Donation | 34 | 26 | 22 | 19 |
| Pricing | 29 | 25 | 18 | 16 |
| **TOTAL** | **513** | **406** | **365** | **388** |

One of our key indicators in 2016-17 was to resolve complaints within 14 days of initially receiving them. On average Trading complaints took 16 days to resolve. This is a significant increase on 2015-2016 when it took an average of 13 days. However the figures have been skewed by 3 complaints that took more than 200 days to resolve. Taking these out the average would have been 14 days.

38% of complaints took longer than the allotted 14 days to resolve. This is up on the 37% reported in 2015-2016 and the 33% in 2014-2015. On the other hand, the number is down significantly from a half year high of 43.

Poor customer service is as in all previous years the primary cause of dissatisfaction. This year it has continued to increase and is now 67% of all complaints, compared to 61% last year which in itself was significantly higher than in any of the past 5 years where it has tended to be nearer 40%.

All other categories of complaints remain very small in number and while movement year on year in some cases looks high in percentage terms, they are numerically in single figures and are not considered statistically significant.

**Learnings 2016-17**

Reassuringly the volume of complaints remains low, representing significantly less than one complaint per shop for the Financial Year.

The percentage taking over 14 days to resolve remains a challenge as it has consistently proved to be in recent years. However it is worth noting that the slight increase in percentage (1%) at the end of the year is actually 5% lower than it was at the half year point. This has been driven by a change in the way that Shop Support manages the process of chasing for replies (started in August) whereby reminders are now sent earlier and before the 14 day deadline is reached.

**Actions for 2017-18**

* Review complaint resolution timescales in Trading’s complaints handling procedures: after discussion, the Group agreed that, although Trading should continue to aim to resolve disputes within 14 days where possible, they should consider whether a more appropriate measure of success would be for a stated percentage of complaints to be resolved within, say, 28 days.
* Key to a reduction in the biggest area of complaints (Shop Team) remains targeting customer service in the shops and retail skills training is now scheduled for the latter part of the 2017-18 financial year as part of the Trading Strategy.
* Alongside this we will be exploring whether Shop Support can manage (rather than facilitate) any specific categories of complaint, such as those relating to matters of policy, to where possible improve speed of resolution.
* We will also explore whether any benchmarking data is available from the Charities Retail Association with a view to comparing our performance with peer charities and, where appropriate, entering into a dialogue with them. This benchmarking, if feasible will then comprise part of Trading’s annual review summary.

# 4. Supporter Relations (including Campaigning and Policy)

In comparison with 2015-16 figures the overall volume of recorded complaints has decreased significantly – down from 2751 to 1534. This continues a downward trend in overall complaints year on year since 2013.

**About our Complaints Handling Process**

The Supporter Relations complaints handling process is set out in annexe 1 to the Complaints Policy and can be summarised as follows:

* Supporter Relations receive all OGB complaints that do not fall within Programme or Trading (other than staff grievances or whistleblowing issues).
* They log, investigate and respond within 14 days of receipt.
* Reporting on learning takes place monthly, and will inform all appropriate stakeholders. For Fundraising complaints, this is also included in a quarterly report to the Fundraising Committee on behalf of Council.

**Actions and Progress**

All complaints were handled within 14 days of receipt, which is in line with the departmental standard. The overall average response time was one working day, with most of the complaints requiring standard or fairly straightforward responses. Just 0.7% of complaints required more than 4 days to deal with, and the longest complaint took 13 days. This was due to us awaiting further information from the supporter to be able to complete out the investigation.

Non-fundraising complaints (website issues, campaigns and policy complaints)”) historically produced quite significant volumes of complaints, but again the number of complaints has reduced in all of these areas: “Oxfam General Policy” reduced from 93 to 50; Campaigns complaints reduced from 165 to 128; Website related complaints overall reduced from 373 to 158.

On Fundraising complaints, whilst we have seen an overall significant reduction from 1714 to 846, we have seen very slight increases in the following fundraising channels: E-marketing, Events & Fundraising, Supporter Mail and SMS.. However in other areas we have seen significant reductions in complaints, with Telemarketing and Street Fundraising both lower than previously. Other areas of success include significant reductions in website issues, and a reduction in admin/donation complaints..

These reductions are particularly notable given that 2016-17 saw considerable media attention on alleged fundraising malpractice, including by Oxfam. We saw a small uplift in complaints rates in August 2015 – when, in light of the media attention, we proactively contacted a significant proportion of our current financial supporters to ask for feedback about our fundraising practices.

In 2016-17, we reviewed all our supplier contracts to include robust processes to protect vulnerable supporters. As telemarketing and street fundraising are particularly reliant on external suppliers, the supplier contract review – and increased scrutiny of these contracts by the Fundraising Committee – may partly account for the reduction in the numbers of complaints in these categories.

**Learnings 2016-17**

Street activities is an area that tends to attract public criticism. Managers from Supporter Relations and Marketing meet monthly, sharing feedback and complaints. As a result, a lot of learning and understanding has taken place. In addition, during 2016-17 we decided that the Oxfam street team should be managed by OGB employees – this change has given us more direct engagement with the activities and ensured more prompt and clear follow-up on any requested changes in activities and behaviours. All this has contributed towards a reduction, year on year in public complaints.

A new feature this year (from January 2017) has seen Supporter Relations logging complaints and adding an upheld/not upheld flag. This recognises the outcome of further investigation to identify those complaints that absolutely required action, or were warranted due to error or similar by Oxfam, rather than those that (for example) were views on our approach or policy.

So far the results have shown that for the months January – March 2017, 499 complaints have been logged, however only 170 of those complaints were “upheld”. This is an area that we will continue to monitor and identify particular insights or learnings.

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **January 2017 - March 2017**  **No. Complaints Upheld/Not Upheld** | **No** | **Yes** | **2016-17 Total** |
| Administration Errors | 47 | 47 | 94 |
| Campaigns & Policy | 32 | 0 | 32 |
| Fundraising | 199 | 62 | 261 |
| Oxfam General Policy | 16 | 3 | 19 |
| Shopping | 27 | 47 | 74 |
| Website | 8 | 11 | 19 |
| Grand Total | 329 | 170 | 499 |

**Overall Trends and Figures**

***Complaints by category received by OGB’s Supporter Relations Team, April 2014 – March 2017.***

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Complaint Category** | **2014-15 Total** | **2015-16 Total** | **2016-17 Total** |
| Administration Errors | 384 | 213 | 130 |
| Campaigns & Policy | 342 | 165 | 128 |
| Fundraising | 1275 | 1714 | 846 |
| Oxfam General Policy | 214 | 93 | 50 |
| Shopping | 308 | 193 | 222 |
| Website | 637 | 373 | 158 |
| Grand Total | 3160 | 2751 | 1534 |

***Complaints received from the Telephone Preference Service (TPS)***

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Calendar Year** | **Number of TPS Complaints** |
| 2014 | 11 |
| 2015 | 8 |
| 2016 | 4 |

Included within the “Fundraising” complaint category, we received a small number of complaints directly from the Telephone Preference Service during 2016. As can be seen from the table above, this has continued to decline significantly over the last three years.

Underlying drivers for the areas of greatest improvement are:

* Door to door: we decided not to conduct any door to door fundraising in 2016-17, focussing our efforts instead on street fundraising and on publicising our new lottery activities.
* There has been continuous improvement to the online shop website, giving us a more stable platform meaning less issues arising.
* We undertook less telemarketing work. As can be seen in the data table above, whilst we carried out significantly less telemarketing activity, we also saw a significant reduction in the actual complaint rate – that being the number of complaints compared to the number of calls made.

***Fundraising Complaint Rates***

Our annual return to the Fundraising Regulator (and previously to the Fundraising Standards Board) enables us to monitor complaint rates for each of the key fundraising methods. As can be seen in the table below, in the two areas most complained about (street fundraising and telemarketing) we have seen drops in both complaint rates.

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Regulator Reported Complaints** | **2015 Complaint Rate** | **2016 Complaint Rate**  |
| Door to Door | 0.0201% | 0 |
| Email Marketing | 0.0007% | 0.0005% |
| Private Site Fundraising | 0.7092% | 0.0000% |
| SMS | 0.0012% | 0.0013% |
| Street Fundraising | 1.0967% | 1.0647% |
| Supporter Mail | 0.0099% | 0.0080% |
| Telemarketing | 0.0663% | 0.0369% |
| TV | 0.0000% | 0.0000% |
| Volunteer Fundraising | 0.0346% | 0.8867% |
| Web Marketing | 0.0000% | 0.0000% |

**Actions for 2017-18**

* Supporter Relations to continue training for all Supporter Relations staff on Complaints and Vulnerable People processes, with training to be run at least twice a year and each staff member to attend at least once.
* Use the training team and the new quality management process to check on a regular basis (at least quarterly) feedback logged and actions taken.
* Continue to produce monthly reports for Fundraising Leadership Team and Compliance, and feed into post fundraising campaign wash up sessions.
* Working closely with Marketing Operations, provide to our Agency Relationship Lead a monthly breakdown of Fundraising Agency complaints, so that this can be used in Supplier reviews and action plans.
* Create a separate category in our system for Legacy and Gift Aid/Tag Your Bag to report on those areas in more detail.
* Continue to monitor complaints upheld & not upheld and report on these trends within the existing reporting.

**Annex 1: Progress Report on Complaints Action Plan 2016-17**

| **Action**  | **Progress** |
| --- | --- |
| **Complaints Group** |
|  | Disseminate Global Complaints Policy, if and when published by OI. (Action in 2015/16 which it was not possible to undertake as the OI Complaints Policy had been stalled due to review and structural changes within OI.)  | None: a cross-federation Policy has not yet been developed. |
|  | To hold 2 meetings and maintain an overview of complaints activity and learning throughout the year. | This was done and will continue in future years.  |
| **Programme** |
|  | Given the myriad of changes occurring and so many competing priorities, the need to record and report complaints has slipped down the priority list during 15/16. IPT recognise this and are fully committed to raising its profile in 16/17. Opportunities to do this will arise as the One Oxfam Report fully “beds in”. (The advent of the One Oxfam report will be used to raise awareness on the need to hear what people are saying about OGB's work, record it, react to it and then pass it on for further learning.) | We have transitioned to recording beneficiary and partner complaints into our programmes through the OI line, so that information on these will be available only later this year – to inform the October OI Executive Board and Board of Supervisor meetings. Nonetheless, there were a few programme complaints received at OGB HQ level, but there is little evidenced learning for OGB as there is currently no named person to collate the information. |
|  | The need to discuss and agree with partners who is responsible for accountability to communities/stakeholders will be written into Oxfam's Partnership Toolkit during 2016-17. This will mean that in countries where Oxfam GB is the Executing Affiliate it will be compulsory for all partners and partnerships to have the capacity to identify, record and report complaints.  | In 2016/17 it was agreed that this would now be monitored through OI processes. Nonetheless, going forward we need a named staff member in the International Programmes Team to be responsible for oversight in this area. Awaiting result of current change process before identifying this person.  |
|  | The need for this capacity to be built/assured will also be part of our Programme Quality 'offer' to the rest of the confederation. | See 4 above.  |
| **Trading** |
|  | Understand the issue that prevents resolution within 14 days and determine what we can do to speed up the process. (c/f from 2015/16 action plan.) | Work has been done to understand the issue. Communication chains between Shop Support, Shop and Area Managers can, with required investigation, quickly exhaust the 14 days. Shop Support have reviewed procedures and since Sept 2016 have ensured that reminders are issued before the 14th day is hit. From a peak at in the first half of 2016-17 this reduced to 38% at the Y/E compared to 37% the previous year. The figures from the first half of 2017-18 will inform whether this trajectory continues. |
|  | Look at shops where there may be particular issues to help improve customer service levels based on issues identified. (c/f from 2015/16 action plan.) | Retail Skills training is now planned for 2017/18 F/Y. With other Trading Strategy related activity and training now in course, it is understood that this will be later in the F/Y possibly Q4. |
|  | To get behind and understand the increase in volume of complaints relating to poor customer service. | This is felt to be at least partly due to the increase in use of more instant communication channels making complaining at the time of (or shortly after) the incident easier. It may also be a factor that there have not been significant changes to policy or procedures for other categories of complaints meaning more issues can be handled locally driving those down rather than resulting in an official complaint. |
|  | Volunteer training in the Shop Network 2016/17 an initial component of which is customer service. | Please see (7) above: c/f to 2017-18 action plan |
|  | Track call volumes as the year progresses to identify any areas for process improvement. | Call volumes have been relatively static overall. 2015-16 v 2016-17. KPI for Trading will monitor this total, targeting a 10% reduction. |
|  | Continued focus on resolutions outside 14 days and, more specifically, whether the customer service training will support a reduction in service complaint volumes and those outside 14 days. | Plans for 2017/18 include a change in the way solely non service related complaints (e.g. policy) are handled with a view to Shop Support trying to resolve most without referral out to Network.Customer service training planned but as yet not delivered: in 2017-18 action plan.  |
|  | Half year sense-check of data to ensure that complaints continue to be properly differentiated from feedback. | This is in place and now forms part of the half yearly review of the data. |
|  | Regular discussions/refreshers at Team Meetings to ensure correct procedures are consistently applied. | This is in place: reminders regularly shared, best practices well embedded in team. Planned change to process (11 above) expected to start end July 2017.  |
| **Supporter Relations** |
|  | Supporter Relations to continue training on Complaints and Vulnerable people processes, at least twice a year. | Yes, this has continued. All staff have received refresher training on these areas, and this is being reviewed again in light of emerging guidance from the new Fundraising Regulator on complaint management. |
|  | Use the training team to quality check feedback logged and to ensure team learn from feedback. | This is in place, and is being enhanced further so that it is included in our monthly quality monitoring reporting. |
|  | Produce monthly reports for Fundraising Leadership Team and compliance manager, keep an eye on trends and raise awareness to any particular peaks. | Yes, this is in place. Each month our Fundraising Leadership team, receive the total for fundraising complaints, with details of any exceptional figures. We have additionally monitored telemarketing complaint levels and complaint rates this year, as the remaining higher risk fundraising method in use. |

**Annex 2: Action Plan 2017-18**

| **Action**  | **Timescale** |
| --- | --- |
| **Complaints Group** |
| 1. | Improve complaints communications by ensuring OGB website and intranet include all annexes to the Complaints Policy, 2015-16 and 2016-17 Annual Learning Reviews and 2014-15 OI Accountability Report.  | July 2017 |
| 2. | Review Complaints Policy and annexes and recommend any changes to Council (unless we are informed that the cross-federation Policy will be developed during the year).  | December 2017 |
| **Programme** |
| 3. | International Progamme Team, at conclusion of current change process, to identify staff member to be responsible for complaints oversight in future. | October 2017 |
| 4. | The Complaints Group to consider later this year the complaints information in the OOR and other available information (eg complaints about OGB’s fulfilment of its Executive Affiliate or Partner Affiliate Role or from donors) and to recommend next steps to Leadership Team and/or Council. | November 2017 |
| **Trading** |
| 5. | Review complaint resolution timescales in Trading’s complaints handling procedures. | September 2017 |
| 6. | Organise and deliver retail skills training (including customer service) for shop teams.  | End of F/Y 2017-18 |
| 7. | Explore whether Shop Support can manage (rather than facilitate) any specific categories of complaint, such as those relating to matters of policy, to where possible improve speed of resolution and implement any recommended changes. | August 2017 |
| 8. | We will also explore whether any benchmarking data is available from the Charities Retail Association with a view to comparing our performance with peer charities and, where appropriate, entering into a dialogue with them. This benchmarking, if feasible will then comprise part of Trading’s annual review summary.  | March 2018 |
| **Supporter Relations** |
| 9. | Supporter Relations to continue training for all Supporter Relations staff on Complaints and Vulnerable People processes, with training to be run at least twice a year and each staff member to attend at least once.  | Ongoing |
| 10. | Use the training team and the new quality management process to check on a regular basis (at least quarterly) feedback logged and actions taken. | Ongoing |
| 11. | Continue to produce monthly reports for Fundraising Leadership Team and Compliance, and feed into post fundraising campaign wash up sessions. | Ongoing monthly |
| 12. | Working closely with Marketing Operations, provide our Agency Relationship Lead a monthly breakdown of Fundraising Agency complaints, so that this can be used in Supplier reviews and action plans. | Ongoing monthly |
| 13. | Create a separate category in our system for Legacy and Gift Aid/Tag Your Bag to report on those areas in more detail. | July 2017 |
| 14. | Continue to monitor complaints upheld & not upheld and report on these trends within the existing reporting. | Quarterly |
| 15. | Review format of complaints responses to include clear link to Complaints Policy and associated appeals process. | July 2017 |
| 16. | Review representative selection of complaints responses to give better understanding of quality of responses. | June 2017 and then quarterly |

**Complaints Group**

(Joss Saunders [Company Secretary & General Counsel], Paul Mullins [Head of Supporter Services & Operations], Joe West [Supporter Relations Team Manager], Roy Seaward [Customer and Shop Support Manager] and Judeth Neville [Head of Governance])

**On behalf of Alison Hopkinson, Director of Finance**

**20 June 2017**

1. https://accountablenow.org/ [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Other than staff and volunteer grievances, which are managed and monitored by the People Team, and safeguarding and other whistleblowing-type complaints. All these are reported separately to OGB’s Leadership Team and Council on an annual basis. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Excluding online shop and website, which are reported within the Supporter Relations category. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)