



14 April 2026

Tēnā koe James Welsh

### **Official Information Act request**

Thank you for your email of 14 February 2026, requesting information about policies and training regarding disconnecting calls.

I have considered your request under the Official Information Act 1982 (the Act). Please find my decision on each part of your request set out separately below

- *The written policies, guidelines, or operational procedures that outline the circumstances under which a call centre staff member may disconnect a call with a client.*
- *Clarification as to whether a call may be disconnected where a conversation is considered "difficult" but the caller remains civil and does not engage in abusive, threatening, or inappropriate behaviour.*
- *The required procedural steps (e.g., warnings, escalation to a supervisor, documentation requirements) that staff must follow before disconnecting a call.*
- *Could you please provide the contents of the relevant training modules such as questions / answers take in regards to call de-escalation?*
- *Whether call centre staff have discretion to terminate a call in the absence of uncivil or abusive conduct, and if so, the scope and limits of that discretion.*

Please refer to the attached **Appendix** which provides the following guidance from the Ministry's intranet:

- Challenging Callers
- Managing Challenging Callers
  - Dealing with Angry Clients
  - Master Tips
  - Active Listening Tips and Tricks
  - Dealing with Different or Difficult People

As outlined in the **Appendix**, Ministry staff should only terminate a call when there is a valid reason to end a call.

- *Details of any training provided to call centre staff relating to:*

- *De-escalation techniques, and*
- *Call termination protocols.*

The details of our relevant training are detailed as follows:

- Handling Challenging Callers – this programme consists of different modules that covers identifying caller behaviour, demonstrates how to effectively connect to callers, escalating and terminating a call when required and provides techniques for these situations
- Building Rapport – introduction to key aspects of building and maintaining rapport with others. Includes defining, active listening, leading with empathy and respect
- Connecting with Clients – strengths-based conversations, motivation and goal setting, working with obstacles and how to identify and acknowledge barriers
- Safe space: De-escalation in Action – develop the confidence and techniques to manage difficult situations and ensure safety. Provides practical strategies for de-escalation through real-life scenarios
- Handling Challenging Callers – this programme consists of different modules that covers identifying caller behaviour, demonstrates how to effectively connect to callers, escalating and terminating a call when required and provides techniques for these situations
- Challenging Callers guidance in HIYA – outlines ways to help staff deal with some more challenging callers they may come across
- *The official Saturday operating hours for call centre support.*

The Ministry's Call Centre hours are 8am to 1pm each Saturday.

- *Any policies or guidance relating to:*
  - *Placing callers on hold near closing time,*

This part of your request is refused under section 18(e) of the Act as this document does not exist or, despite reasonable efforts to locate it, cannot be found.

- *Managing calls that extend beyond official business hours, and*
- *Whether staff are permitted to disconnect calls at closing time if the call commenced prior to closing.*

Calls that were in the queue prior to closing time will remain in the queue (and be responded to) after closing time.

- *Whether there are policies governing the use of hold and mute functions in situations where a call is approaching the end of business hours.*

This part of your request is refused under section 18(e) of the Act as this document does not exist or, despite reasonable efforts to locate it, cannot be found.

- *What policies govern call disconnection when the call centre is experiencing high call volumes?*

The Ministry aims to answer all calls to our 0800 services as quickly as possible. There is significant demand for our phone-based services, and, at times, our phone lines see such high demand that our technology is not able to keep up. This is

when callers find it difficult to get through and they are played a message advising we are extremely busy but to please try again later, then their call is disconnected.

- *What can a Client expect if they were to raise a investigation about a call being unfairly disconnected prior to closing time? What steps does MSD take to investigate these situations?*

This would be dependent on the circumstances of the individual case. If you believe you have been treated unfairly, you can make a complaint. We are providing you with the relevant page which is publicly available on the Ministry website: [www.workandincome.govt.nz/about-work-and-income/feedback-and-complaints/making-a-complaint.html](http://www.workandincome.govt.nz/about-work-and-income/feedback-and-complaints/making-a-complaint.html).

- *Could you please provide a list of relevant training modules that the Agents have had to take in regards to call de-escalation?*

Service Delivery frontline roles (which include the staff in contact centres, service centres, central processing) go through the Ministry's induction which includes a combination of Ministry employee knowledge, role-specific responsibilities, and technical knowledge. The induction process is complemented by a significant number of resources which support staff in building an understanding of the client and their whānau and then considering what they need and the different techniques to use when working with clients/whānau.

The Ministry's Capability team works from Development Maps. These are Ministry online resources, providing guidance with detail on key practice areas that align to knowledge, skills, and capabilities that Ministry staff are required to learn to work with clients and their whānau and to understand their needs.

As one example, the Development Map for Manaaki Whānau (Working with Whānau) stems from our Client Value Steps:

- Understand me and my whānau.
- Help me in the way that I need it.
- Do it.

To complement our Development Maps, the Ministry uses Learning Pathways (delivered online internally) that provide a range of learning for staff in each key practice area. Some examples of our learning include:

- Unconscious Bias: helps learners understand what it is and the multiple ways we can be affected by it. It also covers how it can show up in work and personal lives and what we can do to mitigate unconscious bias.
- Lives Like Mine: tells the story of our diverse clients and provides an insight into the people we work with and the power of empathy in our work. It is used in various contexts but most crucially during induction to share the Ministry's purpose and values with our new kaimahi.
- Brief Bites: are quick activities for teams that focus on how we can make our clients feel welcome and valued.
- Mental Health Awareness training: gives the confidence to recognise, relate and respond to people experiencing mental illness.

The Ministry provides a range of compulsory introductory learning from within this suite.

The induction process is complemented by a suite of follow up training – delivered internally online - that forms part of ongoing learning for our kaimahi. The Learning Pathways are designed in a way that learners can access as they need to do so, along with recommendations from their Capability Developer and/or Managers.

I will be publishing this decision letter, with your personal details deleted, on the Ministry's website in due course.

If you wish to discuss this response with us, please feel free to contact [OIA\\_Requests@msd.govt.nz](mailto:OIA_Requests@msd.govt.nz).

If you are not satisfied with my decision on your request, you have the right to seek an investigation and review by the Ombudsman. Information about how to make a complaint is available at [www.ombudsman.parliament.nz](http://www.ombudsman.parliament.nz) or 0800 802 602.

Ngā mihi nui

pp.



Anna Graham  
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