

Askham Bryan College

Last Review: Sept 2015	Reviewed by: HED/SMT	Next Review: Sept 2017
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Customer Service Policy & Complaints Procedure QA7

1. Policy Statement

Askham Bryan College defines its customers as any person who comes into contact with the organisation, either as an internal or external service user.

The College regards the actual or potential learner as the most important customer, and for the most part this policy refers to learners. However, where appropriate and relevant, this policy extends to all stakeholders and includes; parents/guardians, actual or potential sponsoring employers, the Corporation, the Skills Funding Agency, Education Funding Agency, other funding bodies such as the Higher Education Funding Council (HEFCE), awarding bodies including but not limited to City & Guilds, Harper Adams University, Royal Agricultural University, Huddersfield University, Professional Statutory Regulatory Bodies, the local community and College employees.

The Vision and strategic priorities set the tone and direction of the College and focus on learner success. The Deputy Principal Quality and Standards (DPQS) will be proactive in seeking ways to continuously improve quality and achieve the College Vision.

The College acknowledges that customer expectations are continuously increasing and therefore targets set each year must meet these expectations.

Any customer complaints will be investigated thoroughly, a response made and any outcomes used to inform quality improvements.

2. General Principles

- 2.1 The College aims to achieve, and maintain, excellence in customer service and encourages all staff, throughout the organisation, to make a positive contribution to achieving this.
- 2.2 The College aims to consult with its customers about the quality of its services and thus provide opportunities for them to give feedback on their experiences, for example, through questionnaires and focus groups.
- 2.3 The College encourages staff to have an open and positive attitude towards any comments, suggestions and complaints made and to regard these as a valuable means of improving services to customers.
- 2.4 The College will endeavour to resolve a complaint informally at the lowest possible level and put the matter right as soon as possible.
- 2.5 Where it is not possible to resolve a complaint informally, then the matter should be put in writing so that it can be investigated by a more senior member of staff.
- 2.6 Complaints relating to incidents which occurred some time ago are difficult to investigate. Therefore, complaints should be raised within 3 months of leaving a course or the

Askham Bryan College

incident/issue of complaint emerging. Current students or customers are normally expected to make a complaint within 1 month of the incident/action leading to the complaint.

- 2.7 The College is aware that occasionally vexatious complaints are made against staff or students. In such a situation, the College may take appropriate disciplinary action against the complainant or contact the Police.
- 2.8 The College will provide appropriate resources and support, including training and development, to enable both curriculum and cross College staff to provide a high quality service.
- 2.9 The College will not investigate complaints of parents/guardians of students aged 18 or over without the written permission of the student.

3. Continuously Improving Customer Service

To fulfil these principles, the College will:-

3.1 Set clear standards of service and promote continuous improvement

- 3.1.1 Set challenging and realistic service standards (targets) for all cross-college service areas and curriculum activities. These standards will take due account of historic performance, national benchmarks (where applicable) and customer opinions (including independent validation where available).
- 3.1.2 The Senior Management Team approve these standards on an annual basis, using the appropriate Quality Assurance procedures.
- 3.1.3 Inform customers about the standards of service in writing, for example the College vision, values and strategic objectives are displayed on College notice boards (at all sites). The College website and Intranet play an important role in enabling customers to access College information.
- 3.1.4 Monitor performance against targets through the Section Self-Assessment Reports (SAR's). The College SAR summarises these targets and sets actions for improvements against them.
- 3.1.5 Respond to external priorities through the College Strategic Development Plan. This outlines how the College plans to continuously improve quality and learner success.
- 3.1.6 Provide appropriate training and development for staff to enable them to fulfil the College Vision and respond to customer expectation.

3.2 Communicate clearly, effectively and in plain language, information about our services

- 3.2.1 Inform customers and prospective customers about the range and cost of services available, through advertisements, attendance at shows/events, specific information leaflets, College website and Intranet and general College publications.
- 3.2.2 Communicate with customers and prospective customers through a variety of means, including notice boards, College web-site and Intranet, College Charter, Single Equality Scheme, Policies and Procedures.

Askham Bryan College

3.2.3 The College will make every effort to make key documentation available in alternative formats, such as large print and audio for customers and potential customers with disabilities.

3.2.4 Present information in plain language that avoids unnecessary jargon and meets the needs of customers.

3.2.5 Monitor partnership arrangements to ensure that service quality standards are maintained.

3.3 Treat all customers fairly, respecting their privacy and dignity and be helpful and courteous at all times

3.3.1 Endeavour to respond quickly and courteously when customers make contact.

3.3.2 Treat customers sensitively, offering privacy and dignity.

3.3.3 Encourage staff to provide a friendly and helpful service by giving their full name and whenever appropriate their job title.

3.3.4 Staff are required to wear their name badge when in College and on College business.

3.3.5 Promote widening participation by ensuring that Policies & Procedures facilitate equality of opportunity.

3.3.6 Provide support mechanisms, where practicable, for customers with disabilities and special needs. This includes asking them for their opinions/suggestions.

3.3.7 Support staff by providing customer service training as identified through the staff appraisal process.

3.4 Monitor and review College performance by consulting with customers and publish the reports annually

3.4.1 Obtain feedback on the achievement of standards from customers through Staff Questionnaires, Student Questionnaires, Student Focus Groups, Student Council, Employer Advisory Groups, Centre Advisory Groups, Parents/Guardians Consultation Events, Employer Engagement Questionnaire, Taster Days, Open Events, Evaluations, External Examiner/Moderator reports, formal complaints and from ongoing informal feedback from stakeholder groups.

3.4.2 Publish the results of consultation exercises and tell customers how their views have made a difference. The annual SAR process will report on the achievement of targets and make specific reference to feedback from students, employers and External Examiners/Moderators/Verifiers. The College Vision and Strategy will be updated annually and thus respond to issues raised by customers.

3.4.3 Produce an Annual Report which will include information on strategic direction and the financial position of the College.

3.5 Put things right, quickly and effectively, when things go wrong and act on helpful and constructive comments made by our customers to improve services

3.5.1 Investigate any complaint and endeavour to put things right quickly and effectively.

Askham Bryan College

- 3.5.2 Implement the College's 'comments and complaints procedure' to improve issues that have been identified as needing improvement.
- 3.5.3 Monitor issues raised and actions taken, by presenting reports to the Senior Management Team and College Management Team with an annual report being presented to Corporation.
- 3.5.4 Keep the Principal apprised of all complaints that are received.

3.6 Identify ways to improve our services and facilities offered

- 3.6.1 Prioritise improvements to its services for customers, in accordance with its strategic aims, annual plans and budgets.
- 3.6.2 Continue to look for value for money improvements to customer services.
- 3.6.3 Network with other Colleges to benchmark Askham Bryan College against best practice in education and, where appropriate, incorporate best practice from industry and other providers.
- 3.6.4 Continue to invest in new/improved facilities for customers, according to their needs and in accordance with the College's strategic aims, annual plans and budgets.
- 3.6.5 Utilise its Information and Learning Technology (ILT) Strategy, and associated resources, to make the most of new technology to deliver improved services.
- 3.6.6 Make staff aware of the need for efficiency and value for money, including identifying any savings made.
- 3.6.7 Publicise improvements made to services through a range of methods including; College web-site, Intranet, noticeboards, annual report, other general College documentation and College staff meetings. This will be available in alternative formats where required.
- 3.6.8 This policy is supported by the College Corporation and is reviewed by the DPQS every 2 years.
- 3.6.9 The College regards the reports resulting from the inspection and review processes to be useful in providing valuable feedback and informing improvements.

4. Procedure for making and responding to a complaint

All customers should be able to access the procedure for making a complaint, be it verbally, in writing or by using a Feedback Card (available in Reception, the LRC and through Student Services). This will be made available through the website and all Centres.

The procedure for investigating and responding to complaints is as follows:

Stage 1

- a) A complaint may be made verbally, in writing, by email or by using a Feedback Card and should be initially recorded and acknowledged within 2 working days of receipt by PA to the Campus Principal before being forwarded to the Campus Principal and copied to the Section Leader or

Askham Bryan College

appropriate manager for investigation. An investigation should be conducted and responded to within the given timescale of 10 working days wherever possible.

- b) Where a complaint is made and resolved immediately, a note of the complaint and the solution should still be forwarded to the PA to the Campus Principal, for record purposes.
- c) For every complaint, the following should be recorded:
 - Date of the complaint
 - Nature of the complaint
 - Contact details of the person complaining
 - The action taken and by whom
 - Outcome
 - The date the complainant was informed of the outcome
 - Impact on quality/improvement processes
 - Any reference to Safeguarding (including Radicalisation), Equality & Diversity and/or Health & Safety
- d) If at any stage the member of staff receiving the complaint feels that other College procedures should be invoked, they should resolve the matter as far as they are able and then refer the matter. For example, if it appeared likely that one of the Student Disciplinary procedures applied, they should contact either the relevant Course Manager, DPQS, Campus Principal or the Head of Student Support Services as appropriate. If a member of staff is involved in an alleged incident of misconduct, then the Director of Human Resources should be contacted.
- e) Once the complaint has been investigated, the resulting decision/action and draft letter of response should be forwarded to the PA to the Campus Principal for processing and recording. All responses should be agreed and approved by the Campus Principal. The feedback from the manager should also show actions to be taken to prevent future complaints of this nature.
- f) The process will be carried out in the same manner at both York and Newton Rigg Colleges with the appropriate Campus Principal approving responses to complainants. All documentation should be copied to the PA to the Campus Principal in York and will be monitored through the DPQS.
- g) All complaints should be dealt with in a timely manner with the aim that resolutions should be within 10 working days of receipt of the complaint wherever possible. If this is not possible, then the complainant should be updated with progress after 10 working days.

Stage 2

- a) Appeal against the decision made in Stage 1.
- b) The complainant can appeal directly to the Executive Principal for a resolution to their satisfaction, where they are dissatisfied with the outcome of a Stage 1 investigation. The Executive Principal will recall all evidence and previous communications pertaining to the investigation into the original complaint. Where **new evidence or complaints are forthcoming**, then it is acceptable for the Executive Principal to charge the respective Campus Principal to pursue an additional investigation into such matters. If the Principal upholds the decision of the Campus Principal (or other Director), the complainant will be advised that any future recourse should be directed to the Skills Funding Agency, Education Funding Agency, Ofsted or the Chair of the Corporation as appropriate (addresses will be supplied). In the circumstances where the Principal over- turns the decision of the Campus Principal (or other Director), an attempt is made to extend a

Askham Bryan College

resolution to the satisfaction of the complainant.

Any appeal should be actioned within 10 working days of being lodged.

- c) A record of the outcome of the complaint showing any previous attempt to resolve the problem will be entered in the Central Register, held by the PA to the Principal. All correspondence relating to the matter will be filed. Complaint files will be kept for 6 years.
- d) Without prejudice to the learner's legal and/or statutory rights, the decision of the Principal will be final.

5. **Serious Complaints**

- a) Where a complaint is made which is of a very serious nature, for example, where a student accuses a member of staff of abuse or serious professional misconduct, the matter should be dealt with under the Staff Disciplinary procedure. All such complaints should be referred immediately to the Campus Principal.
- b) In the first instance, the Campus Principal would investigate the matter to ensure as far as is possible, that the complaint has some basis and is not obviously vexatious.

6. **Complaints may be dealt with under other College procedures**, for example:

HR2 Staff Disciplinary
HR5 Policy on Sexual/Personal Harassment
HR19 Disciplinary Procedure for holders of Senior Posts
SCA2 Student Disciplinary
SCA9 Harassment Policy and Procedure for Students

- 7. Regular checks of the Complaints Register will be carried out by the DPQS and Principalship office in order to ensure progress is being made with responses in a timely fashion.
- 8. The DPQS will review complaints three times a year and prepare an annual report for the Management Team and SMT.

9. **Complaints that go straight to the Principalship, Corporation, SFA, EFA or QAA**

On occasions, complainants choose not to raise the matter at the most appropriate level within the College in the belief that the matter will be resolved more swiftly by 'going straight to the top'. In this situation, the case will normally be directed to and investigated by the appropriate Director under Stage 1 of this procedure. Where relevant, the outcome of the investigation will be reported to the Principalship/SFA/Corporation as a matter of courtesy.

- 10. **If a complaint** has been processed through all stages, including being taken to the Appeal Stage if appropriate, the case is considered closed and there can be no further recourse to any aspect.

11. **Complaints from students studying on Higher Education (HE) programmes**

Complaints, in the first instance, will be dealt with by the College, as described in this policy. When the case reaches the end of the College-based procedure, and the complainant remains dissatisfied with the response, the complainant may have the right to bring the case to the validating University. Further details may be found within the University's Academic Regulations.

Feedback Card



Please use this card to tell us about any aspect of the College's services you are not happy with. We welcome your views as positive and helpful feedback about the quality of our services.

What is the nature of your feedback? (including any complaints)

What can we do to resolve any complaint?

Name

Course

Centre

Address

Tel:

Postcode

Signed: _____ Date: _____

Please return this card to either College Reception, PA to the Campus Principal, Student Support Services Centre, Learning Resources Centre or Centre Administration Office (who will forward it to the PA to the Campus Principal)

Askham Bryan College

Askham Bryan College

Flowchart to Illustrate the Complaints Procedure

