



London
Vocational
College

Complaints and Appeals Policy

Lead Responsibility	Centre Manager	Approved by	Board of Directors
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Policy applicable to	All stakeholders	Date of next review	Dec 2023

SUPPORTED BY
MAYOR OF LONDON



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What is a complaint?

“An expression of dissatisfaction, not resolved immediately to the customer’s satisfaction, about the level, quality or nature of a service provided by College when delivering the service.”

When considering complaints, we examine whether they relate to:

- Mistakes or poor service
- Unreasonable delays or failure to take action
- Unprofessional conduct or behaviour
- Bias or unfair treatment
- Failure to follow our published procedures without reasonable explanation.
-

Where complaints are made with regard to the service or delivery of the Awarding Organisation or End-Point Assessment Organisation the complainant will be re-directed accordingly.

Making complaints

This policy sets out the process for all complainants including learners, apprentices, employers or any other service users to raise and issue or concern by way of a complaint.

It is our policy that all complaints raised are dealt with

- Fairly
- Openly and
- As quickly as reasonably possible

There are four stages to the complaints policy, and each complaint should start at the first stage and progress through until it has been resolved.

Complaints Procedure

First Stage – Informal Complaint

An informal complaint can be made to the trainer/assessor or Centre Manager in person, over the telephone or via email. The trainer/assessor or Centre Manager will discuss the complaint with the complainant and attempt to agree a way forward or a solution that suits both parties. Complainants should allow sufficient time for investigation and/or a resolution to be proposed – this may vary according to the nature of the complaint, but a first response will be made within **5 working days**.

Second Stage – Formal Complaint

If the complaint cannot be resolved informally to the satisfaction of the complainant, the complaint should be submitted in writing using the Complaints Form at the end of this document to the Centre Manager.



Actions

1. Complaint Form received
2. Complaint recorded and acknowledged (within 1 working day) – response due within **5 working days**
3. Team Leader assigned to investigate (find out what happened, why it happened. It can involve talking to staff, looking at files and records, checking whether policies and procedures were followed or were inadequate
4. Where the complaint is upheld - Team Leader to make recommendations to Centre Manager on appropriate resolution
5. Team Leader to provide a written response to the complainant within 5 working days of complaint being received. This response should address the points raised by the complaint. It will explain whether College felt the complaint to be justified or not. It will detail what investigation was undertaken and the outcome of this. The complainant will be offered compensation or an apology where appropriate.

Third Stage – Escalation – Centre Manager

If the complainant is not satisfied with the outcome of Stage 2 they should contact the Centre Manager Gertrude Logose - Email: gertrude@londonvocationalcollege.com to escalate the matter.

Actions

1. Escalation of complaint received
2. Complaint recorded and acknowledged (same or first working day) – response due within **10 working days**
3. The Centre Manager will review the investigation, make such further enquiries as appropriate
4. Decide upon appropriate action which if applicable, may take the form of disciplinary action, training or in serious cases dismissal or termination of course
5. Provide a written response to the complainant within 10 working days of complaint being received. This response should address the points raised by the complaint. It will explain whether College felt the complaint to be justified or not. It will detail what further investigation was undertaken and the outcome of this. The complainant will be offered compensation or an apology where appropriate.

Fourth Stage – Escalation - Panel

If following Stage 3 the complainant is still not satisfied with the outcome, they should submit a stage 4 complaint in writing to Director

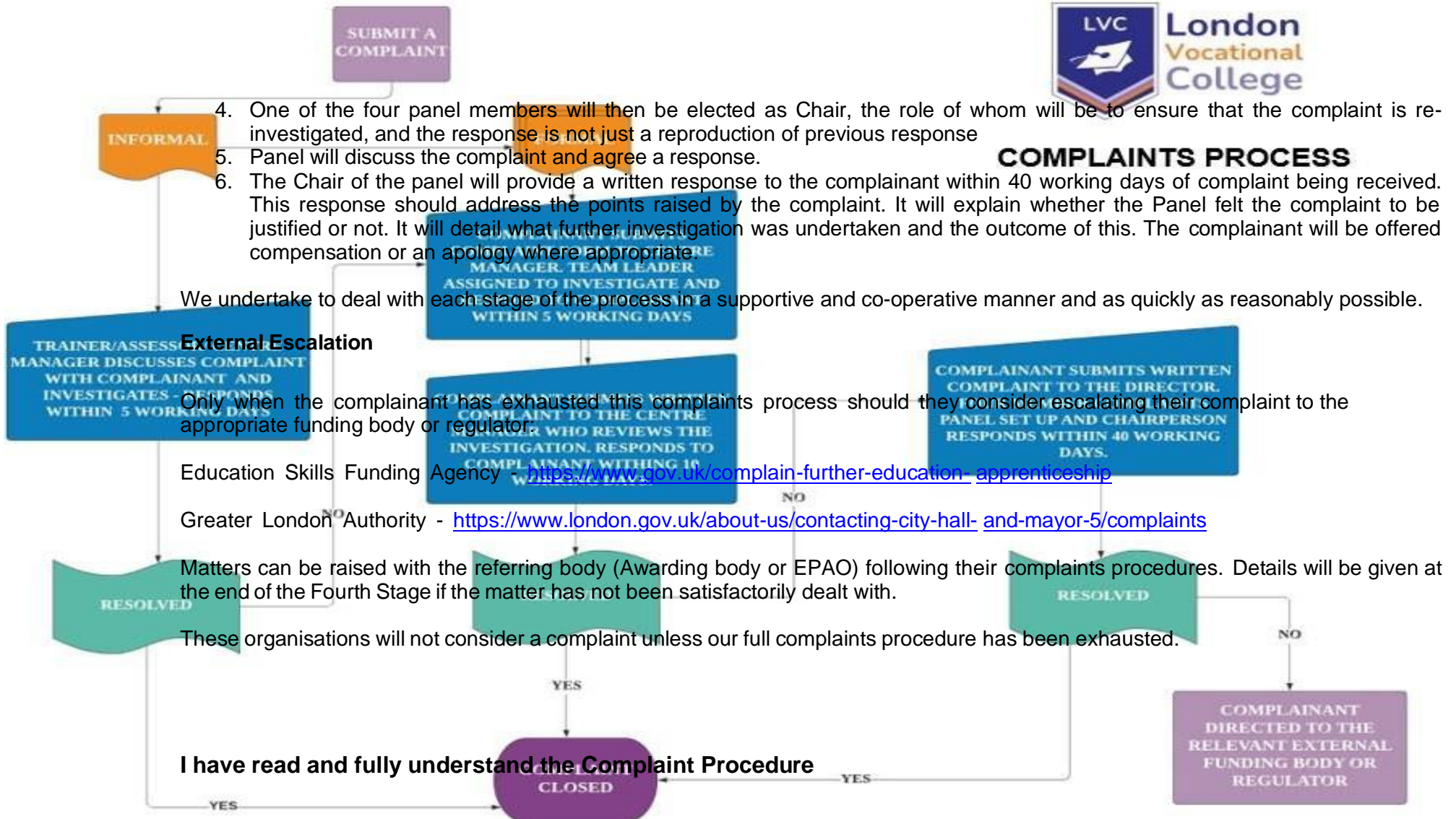
Actions

1. Escalation of complaint received
2. Complaint recorded and acknowledged (same or first working day) – response due within **40 working days**
3. The Centre Manager will ask to establish a complaints panel and invite to meet within 1 month of the complaint being received. The complaints panel will consist of four people: a senior member of staff, a senior member of an external/impartial organisation empathic to the service the Centre provides, a management committee member. If the complainant wishes, they may request that they make their appeal to the Panel in person. They may also bring a representative to help them put their case forward

COMPLAINTS PROCESS

4. One of the four panel members will then be elected as Chair, the role of whom will be to ensure that the complaint is re-investigated, and the response is not just a reproduction of previous response
5. Panel will discuss the complaint and agree a response.
6. The Chair of the panel will provide a written response to the complainant within 40 working days of complaint being received. This response should address the points raised by the complaint. It will explain whether the Panel felt the complaint to be justified or not. It will detail what further investigation was undertaken and the outcome of this. The complainant will be offered compensation or an apology where appropriate.

We undertake to deal with each stage of the process in a supportive and co-operative manner and as quickly as reasonably possible.



External Escalation

Only when the complainant has exhausted this complaints process should they consider escalating their complaint to the appropriate funding body or regulator:

Education Skills Funding Agency - <https://www.gov.uk/complain-further-education-apprenticeship>

Greater London Authority - <https://www.london.gov.uk/about-us/contacting-city-hall-and-mayor-5/complaints>

Matters can be raised with the referring body (Awarding body or EPAO) following their complaints procedures. Details will be given at the end of the Fourth Stage if the matter has not been satisfactorily dealt with.

These organisations will not consider a complaint unless our full complaints procedure has been exhausted.

I have read and fully understand the Complaint Procedure

Candidate Name (print)..... Candidate

Signature..... Date.....

Confidentiality Related to the Complaint Process

Handling learner grievances can be tricky for college management. They inevitably involve matters that are personal to the learner. For this reason, the issue of confidentiality can play a significant role in the complaints process and is an area that can be particularly challenging. The management often find themselves having to juggle completing obligations to the learner who has brought the grievance, any other learner/assessor who is involved in the complaint and of course the organisation itself. The procedure followed when faced with confidentiality issues surrounding a learner complaint is given below:

1. Keeping the pool small

The general rule of thumb is that when handling grievances, it is best to keep the matter as confidential as possible, limiting both the number of people who are aware of the grievance and the information that each of those have access to. This approach will reduce the risk of confidential information being shared and the subsequent negative impact on the parties involved (and staff morale more generally). It will also make it more likely that the situation can be resolved smoothly, and normal working arrangements can be resumed – particularly important where concerns are raised about colleagues with whom an individual will need to continue to work.

2. Work with the aggrieved learner

If confidentiality is going to be an issue, it is important to ensure that the complainant in question fully understands the grievance process, how the college intends to handle confidentiality and that the college is working with the best interest in mind. It is normally a good idea to suggest a list of people that you need to be aware of or involved in the grievance and specifically what details they need to know. The individual's feedback on this can be invited. It's better to tackle this upfront rather than waiting until the complainant raises it as an issue and then having to justify the actions taken.

3. Need to know

If someone needs to know about the grievance, then it should be considered carefully how much detail that individual needs to know in order to fulfil their role in the process (e.g. if they are being interviewed regarding a specific point of the grievance). It will not always be necessary to reveal the name of the complainant being investigated.

An issue that often arises is whether the complainant's supervisor needs to be informed of the grievance. Naturally the answer to this will depend on the exact circumstances of the grievance, including whether the supervisor is implicated or needs to be involved in the investigation or decision-making. The supervisor may also be central to the resolution of the grievance. Each case will be different but thinking early about the role that the supervisor is likely to play is always sensible.

4. Confidentiality for witnesses

It's important to make sure that those being interviewed in the grievance process are made aware of some key details regarding their evidence. This includes: what their evidence might be used for. This is crucial to avoid misunderstandings and can be relevant in the event that a complainant makes a subject access request to see the evidence which was; to what extent they are prepared to allow their evidence to be shared. If they are not willing to allow their evidence to be shared this can present problems in properly resolving the grievance so consideration of the reasons is advisable. It may be that offering safeguards (such as anonymising evidence) may help to resolve any concerns; and that the investigation itself and any information shared with them as part of it is highly confidential and that any breach of confidentiality will be considered a disciplinary matter.



Appeals Procedure

Grounds For Appeal

Assessment decisions for all courses are based on criteria published by the awarding bodies. You should be given a copy of the assessment criteria (standards) at the start of the course as part of your Induction. As a candidate you have the right to appeal against any assessment decision if you believe that the decision is unfair or unreasonable.

Awareness of the Appeals Process

Your assessor will explain the appeals process at the start of your course, and you will be asked to sign this procedure to confirm your understanding.

Stage 1: Informal Appeal

1. If you are unhappy with an assessment decision you should always discuss it first with your assessor. You should be prepared to explain why you think you have met the required assessment criteria, and you should be prepared to listen to your assessor's reasons.
2. In exceptional circumstances, if you feel very unhappy about discussing the issue with your assessor. You should contact the Director of Operations (centre contact) on 0208 617 0065.
3. If you are still unhappy with the assessment decision, you may then proceed to stage 2, the formal written appeal.

Stage 2: Formal Written Appeal

1. If you decide to make a formal appeal, you must fill in an appeal form within 10 working days of getting the original assessment decision. You can get an appeal form from your assessor or by contacting the exams team on 0208 617 0065
2. The written appeal will be sent to the Internal Verifier responsible for the course.
3. The Internal Verifier will discuss the issue with the assessor concerned, evaluate the evidence, where required will discuss the evidence with you and give a judgement.
4. The Internal Verifier will notify you of the decision, and the reasons for the decision, in writing and will give a copy to the Assessor.

Stage 3: Appeals Panel

1. If you are still unhappy after the Internal Verifier's decision, you may make a final appeal to the External Verifier at the Awarding Body the address will be given to you by the exams team on 0208 617 0065



2. The External Verifier will consider the evidence and give a judgement. Their decision will be final and binding. You will be notified in writing of the decision, and the reasons for the decision.

I have read and fully understand the Appeals Procedure

Candidate Name (print).....

Candidate Signature..... Date.....



Appendix 1

Complaint Form

Please use this form if you wish to make a complaint about a service provided by London Vocational College. The form may be returned by email to complaints@londonvocationalcollege.com or by post to Complaints, London Vocational College Ltd, 160-162 Cranbrook Road, 2nd Floor Heraldic House, Ilford, IG1 4PE.

Title: (Mr/Mrs/Miss/Ms) _____

Name: _____

Address: _____

Telephone:

Home: _____ Mobile: _____

Work/Other: _____

What is your complaint about?
Please include any important dates, times, places, and names of staff contacted.

What would you like the College to do to put things right?

Signed: _____ **Date:** _____



Appendix 2

Appeals Stage 2

Candidate Appeal: to be completed by candidate

Candidate Name.....

Assessor Name.....

Qualification Title.....

Unit/Module Title.....

Nature of Appeal

Please use the space below to summarise the grounds on which you are making this appeal (you may attach any relevant documentation).

Candidate's Signature..... Date.....

When completed please post or give this form to the Director of Operations



Candidate Appeal: to be completed by Internal Verifier

Candidate Name:.....

Assessor Name:.....

Qualification Title:.....

Unit/Module Title:.....

Internal Verifier's Report

This appeal is Upheld/Denied* (*please delete as appropriate)

Revised decision (where applicable):

Actions to be taken:

Internal Verifier's signature..... Date:.....

Candidate sent copy of this report on.....

Copy to Director of Operations



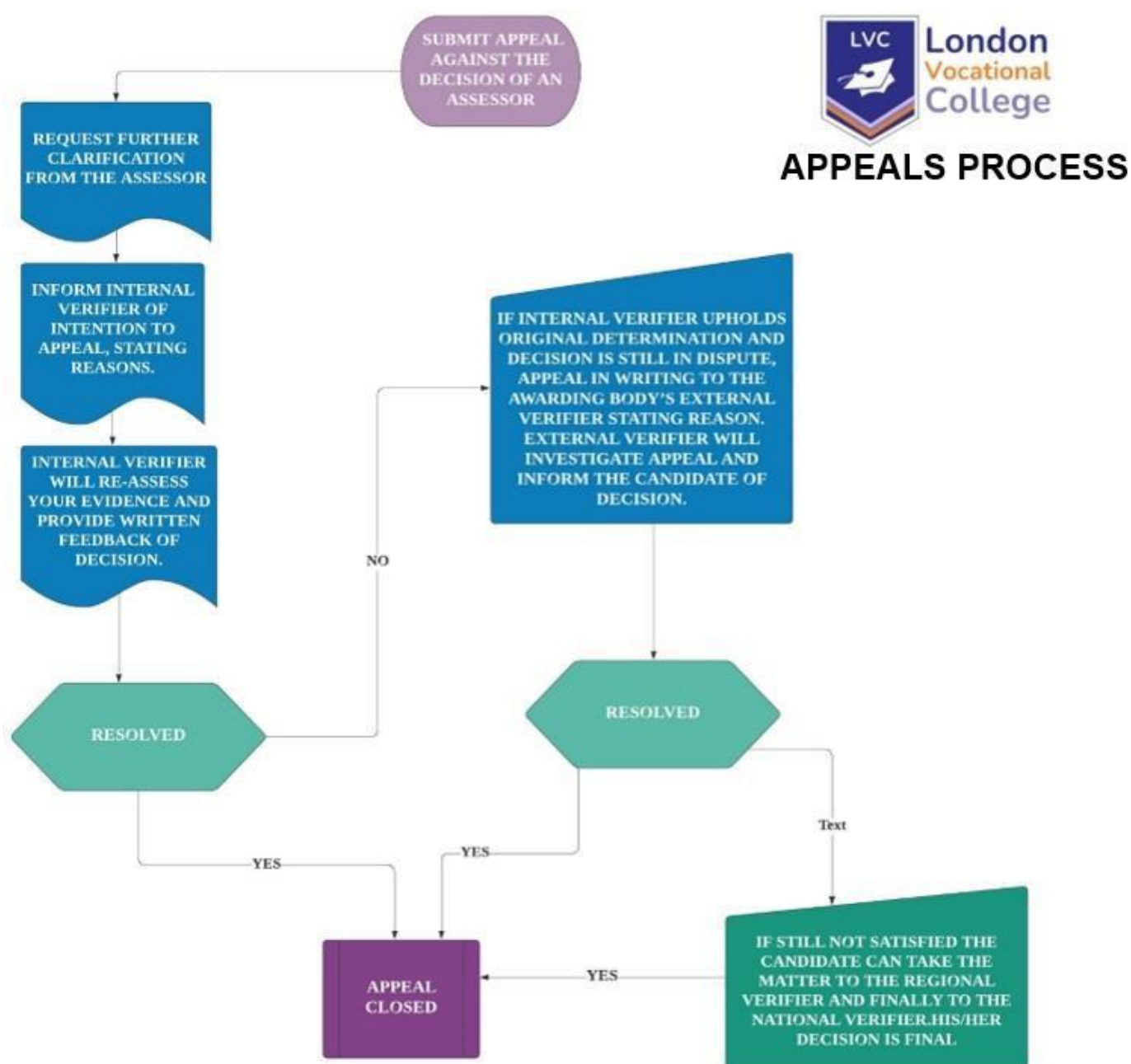
Appendix 3

Appeals Process Relevant to Qcf/Nvq Awards

Any Candidate has the right of appeal if they disagree with any assessment decision at any stage of the process.

The process must be carried out in writing and copies sent to the Director of the Centre.

The NVQ service providers/team will also investigate the matter and advice candidates, assessors, IV and the Director accordingly.



Appendix 4

Advice to staff on common types of complaint

When making a complaint it is important that it is received by the person who can investigate it fully, fairly and take appropriate action. Therefore, the following guidelines should be used.

There can be many different types of complaints. The main categories are:

- Dissatisfaction with replies made to queries.
- Problems with placements in work or voluntary opportunities.
- High level of service charges.
- Problems with trainers, assessors, or other attendees of training sessions.
- Attitude or behaviour of staff in providing a service.

Staff

The attitudes of staff, misinformation or no information, or not following procedures are all incidents where there could be cause for dissatisfaction with the services we provide. Monitoring and acting on complaints such as these are vital to improve the level of service. Managers must ensure that issues such as lack of training or understanding or a bad attitude or behaviour should be addressed immediately. When people complain there may be a variety of issues that they want to address.

Please remember that sometimes people will complain rather than ask for help and there is an underlying second agenda to the complaint. e.g., complaining about the quality of the training in order to hide need for further training, language difficulties, other disruptions to portfolio completion.

Appendix 5

Increasing your confidence with complaints

Do you appreciate the value of complaints? You should. Complaints provide vital information on where things are going wrong, allowing us to improve our service. The 10 points below will help you in effective complaint handling and let you manage customer complaints with confidence and consistency.

Step 1 - Listen without Interrupting

Regardless of how hostile, abusive and upset the customer might be, you must listen fully to the complaint without interrupting. All vital information should be written down. Listening without interrupting will also help diffuse the customer's emotions. Toward the end of the customer's statements, questions to help clarify information, if necessary, are okay. But don't argue or deny anything the customer is saying, just listen.

Step 2 - Don't get Defensive

Candidates may not have all the proper information. They may get abusive. They may exaggerate. They may use a loud, threatening voice. Regardless of this, you must avoid getting defensive and starting an argument. It helps to



remember although you may not be able to do much about your customer's improper behaviour, you can understand that they are upset and control your own behaviour by not fighting back. If the customer's tirade goes on too long, you can ask: "May I summarise what I understand to be the problem, and then we can try to solve it?" The customer may want to continue the tirade. But if they haven't been answered with defensive, aggressive words or phrases, the chances are pretty good that they are ready to settle down and listen.

Step 3 - Respond with positive attitude.

Next, you can use statements like: "I can help you. I'm sure we can work this out to your satisfaction. I am here to help you with any problem". You need to be careful you don't immediately accept liability for the problem and say something like "I'm sorry we have made a mistake". Until all the facts have been gathered, you are better off to express empathy and acknowledge the existence of the problem. Later, if the problem is your mistake, you can make an apology to the customer.

Step 4 - Express Empathy

Next, show you understand the customer's feelings and say something like: "That must have been frustrating for you. I can understand how you might get angry and upset in that kind of situation." This helps to calm the customer further. Once Candidates realise someone can appreciate their problem and their feelings in the matter, they are much more willing to participate calmly at working on a solution to the problem.

Step 5 - Ask Questions to Understand the Problem

Once the customer has calmed down, you may discover the information they now give you may be slightly different from what they gave before. This is because the emotions involved at first may have caused them to distort or exaggerate the facts. So you need to summarise what information you have obtained so far. Then, ask questions to get more information. Then, confirm this information with your customer. Get agreement with them on exactly what the problem is. Once this step is complete, and only then, should you go onto the next step.

Step 6 - Find Out What the Customer Wants

What the customer wants may be obvious. If so, repeat it and ask the customer to confirm your understanding. Go the extra mile and ask, "Is there anything else you would like us to do?"

If the customer's request is not specific, ask the customer what they want you to do, or what they want to have happen regarding their complaint. In some cases, the customer may be satisfied with just "letting the organisation know" what happened. Having someone listen and empathise may be all they wanted. If this is so, simply express your appreciation to your customer for telling you of their complaint. If the customer wants something specific done, find out exactly what it is they want. Confirm this with them to be sure you understand what it is they want.

Step 7 - Explain What you CAN DO

Next, explain to the customer what you can do. If what the customer wants done is something you can do, take action right away. If what the customer wants



done is something you cannot or are unable to do, then you need to go on to the next step.

Step 8 - Discuss Alternatives and Agree on Action

You should fully discuss the alternative courses of action that might be taken over the customer's complaint and request for action. Present this in terms of benefits or drawbacks for the customer for each alternative. For instance, one alternative might be less costly to the customer, but might take more time.

If none of the alternatives are satisfactory to the customer, and if you are really unable to do any more for them, then get a person of higher responsibility and authority involved. There are 5 important steps to take when getting another person involved (refer to end of document).

Once the alternatives have been fully discussed, you and your customer need to agree on a course of action. Be as specific as possible. Be sure the customer knows who will do what and by when, where and how. This helps give the customer confidence that something will really be done, and you are not just giving them the brush-off.

Step 9 - Take Action IMMEDIATELY

Once something has been agreed upon, you must take action immediately and implement the agreed upon solution. If there are any delays or deviations from the course of action agreed on, notify the customer immediately and negotiate a new plan of action. Remember, act immediately and keep your promises to the customer.

Step 10 - Follow Up to Ensure Customer Satisfaction

After the complaint has been resolved, follow up and contact the customer to make sure the solution to the problem was satisfactory to them. You should also take this opportunity to thank the customer for their continued business. Express your appreciation for their complaint and the opportunity it gave your organisation to correct the situation. You can also say something like: "We have identified the cause(s) of the problem and are taking action to correct it. In the future, if you are not completely satisfied with our service, will you please let me know personally?"

Remember, in handling complaints your conversations and how you handled the complaint should be carefully documented. If necessary, report the situation to your manager. You should also record the information in the of customer complaints.



Referring Complaints Upward

Whenever possible try to resolve the complaint yourself. But never refuse to help Candidates take their complaints higher up within the organisation if they wish to do so.

It is important to have a clear understanding of the type of complaint you can handle, and which you are to refer to someone else. You also need to have a clear idea of how much authority you have in resolving complaints. When you are going to refer a complaint your manager, following these 5 steps:

- Have all the facts and information about the problem on hand. All of this data should be confirmed by the customer as being correct.
- Have a clear idea of what the customer wants and what they are asking to be done about the problem.
- Be ready to give an account of your conversation with the customer and tell your manager what you said to the customer. Explain the alternatives you offered and the customer's reactions to them. Be honest and accurate and don't distort the facts of the situation to make yourself look good in the eyes of your manager. If you try to fake it, you may make the situation worse.
- Next, make sure you inform your manager of any promises you made to your customer. Be ready to recommend to your manager what you feel should be done now.
- Lastly, you should come away from your meeting with your manager with a clear idea of what your role is going to be from this point onwards. Are you going to keep working on the problem or turn it over to your manager entirely? If you are to turn it over entirely, agree with your manager as to when and how you will be told about the final outcome.

If the customer asks you to speak to your manager immediately, ask for a chance to help them first. Then promise the customer that if you don't handle the situation to their satisfaction, you personally will make sure they get a chance to talk to your manager.

Review of Policy

This policy was last reviewed in December 2022. The next review date is December 2023, and this will be completed by the Centre Manager supported by the Senior Management team. The policy will then be approved by the Board of Directors and signed by one of the two directors.

Policy Approval

Director's Name: Beatrice Nanteza



Director's Signature

Date: 05/12/2022

