
Policy and Procedure

Customer Complaints

DATE: May 2009

Reviewed: June 2013

STATUS: Accepted

Summary

1. All staff should actively encourage learners, clients and other customers to register their feedback or comments formally with HOST by using the feedback form.
2. All Staff should assist learners wherever necessary to complete feedback forms.
3. All staff should regard feedback as an opportunity to improve services
4. All staff should respond to feedback positively, without defensiveness or personal animosity. All feedback is made about the organisation.
5. All complaints will be thoroughly investigated by the relevant manager. All staff must co-operate fully and swiftly with the investigation.
6. The manager will keep the complainant informed throughout the process of investigation
7. A full response to the complaint will be made within ten working days of the complaint being made.

1. Policy: Purpose of the procedure

HOST recognises that its customers have the right to demand the highest possible quality of service. This procedure is designed to ensure that HOST responds positively to complaints to protect and further the interests of the learner and utilises complaints to improve the quality of service.

2. Scope of the procedure

The procedure applies to all customers including service users, funders, external agencies, etc. This is not the procedure by which staff should raise grievances against their employer.

3. Performance Indicators

3.1 To acknowledge complaints within three working days.

3.2 To give a full reply to complaints within 10 working days.

4. Related Procedures and other Documents

This procedure replaces the previous grievance procedure and any other procedures for complaints.

5. Definitions

5.1 A complaint is where a service user or external agency feels that HOST has given them poor service or treated them unfairly. Any customer can use the complaints procedure where they feel they have a grievance against HOST services, standards or staff.

5.2 A compliment is where a service user or external agency wishes to commend an aspect of HOST's activity. Any customer can use the complaints procedure to record and acknowledge this.

6. Responsibility for the Procedure

6.1 All staff have a responsibility for helping clients complete the complaints form.

6.2 The Training Manager has responsibility for receiving complaints and compliments and passing these on to the appropriate manager.

6.3 Managers have responsibility to investigate complaints forwarded to them by the Training Manager, to identify recommended changes in practice and to execute such changes.

6.4 The Training Manager is responsible for compiling complaints reports, monitoring trends and making changes to practice.

7. Requirements of the Procedure

7.1 Principles

- a) HOST welcomes feedback as a useful tool in quality improvement.
- b) In general we will assume that the customer is giving us accurate information unless there is evidence to the contrary. If we disagree with a customer on facts and interpretation we will try to reach an agreement with them, although the final decision must rest with us.
- c) Complaints are made against HOST and the operation of its policies, procedures and instructions, therefore;
 - i) We will always treat complaints professionally without personal recrimination, animosity or defensiveness.
 - ii) We will accept responsibility for complaints to customers as an organisation – we will not attempt to blame or exonerate individuals.

7.2 How customers can complain or detail a compliment

- a) There is a feedback form that provides customers with the opportunity of making complaints against the organisation or to offer compliments. This form will be circulated to learners at induction and is available from reception at both sites.
- b) All customers should be encouraged to use these forms for registering complaints and compliments as they provide the best means of monitoring these issues and using them for service improvements.
- c) Where customers cannot complete these forms for any reason, a member of staff must complete the form on their behalf, ensuring it is signed by the client. Where a client requests help in making a complaint, staff should assist them to complete the relevant forms immediately or at least within one week of the request being made.
- d) When assisting clients in completing these forms staff should give honest feedback if their complaint is outside the boundaries of our policies. Obviously if they still wish to pursue their claim or complaint, they should be assisted to do so.
- e) Clients may not wish to complain to HOST. They may ask to complain direct to a funding agency. Although we would prefer to be given the opportunity to put things right, they have a right to do this. Staff should be clear as to which agency to direct them to, giving a named contact. Please contact the relevant HOST manager to get this if you are unsure. Clients should also be informed that most agencies will not investigate their complaint unless a client has used our internal procedures first.
- f) External agencies should be invited to use the complaints form and these forms should be given to them once contracts are signed, or service level agreements reached. However, external agencies are more likely to telephone staff members with complaints and the staff member can complete the form on their behalf over the telephone. The need for signing it should be waived if the staff member is not face to face with the customer, unless it is a very serious complaint.

7.3 Encouraging complaints:

- a) Complaints and compliments are to be acknowledged as being very useful in improving our services, particularly in improving them as our customers perceive them. Complaints are to be welcomed and used as a genuine tool for service improvement.
- b) Staff should use their discretion in talking to our clients about registering a complaint. Some clients may be reluctant to do so and should not feel pressured into complaining unduly.
- c) Similarly, staff should take not to use customer complaints to promote their own agendas. There are clear mechanisms for staff to register concerns over their work or the service provided to customers.

7.4 What we will do when complaints are received:

- a) All complaint and claim forms should be passed directly to the Training Development Manager who will then log them onto the customer complaints database. The Managing Director will then immediately pass the complaint to the relevant manager to investigate. If it is about a manager the complaint will be investigated by the Training Manager.

- b) The responsible manager will telephone, wherever possible, and write to the customer within 3 working days to acknowledge the complaint or claim and, if necessary clarify the content of the complaint. A copy of any correspondence or notes of telephone calls should be retained and logged on the database.
- c) The responsible manager will then investigate the complaint or claim. The customers' word should be taken at face value unless there is strong evidence to the contrary. While natural justice should be maintained this must be balanced against having a long drawn out investigation process.
- d) The responsible manager must approach the investigation as an opportunity for quality improvement. The responsible manager must act as an representative of the learner, testing actions and decisions to see if HOST held the best interests of the learner uppermost and whether we failed to serve the interests of the learner and meet their reasonable expectations. Nothing should be taken for granted or on faith.
- e) The responsible manager will respond in full in writing within 10 working days.
- f) If there is a delay to this timescale the investigating manager should inform the complainant of the likely timescale and keep them informed.
- g) The full response to the complaint is likely to include some recommendations of changes to practice and policy. The investigating manager must ensure that such recommendations are fully discussed with colleagues required to implement them and reflected in documentation. The customer has a right to expect to see the recommendations implemented smoothly.
- h) Details of the final outcome must be logged. All documentation should be kept and added to the Customer Complaints file.

7.5 How we respond to complaints

- a) In receiving and responding to complaints the following guidelines must be used to influence the nature and tone of replies:
 - i) Clarify the nature of the complaint as we understand it.
 - ii) Apologise for dissatisfaction, even if we are not at fault: we are sorry for their distress.
 - iii) Provide an honest explanation of the events that led to the complaint
 - iv) Avoid excuses or defensiveness.
 - v) If things have gone wrong, attempt to put the matter right including making reference to anything that the learner has requested as ways to address the complaint.
 - vi) If nothing has gone wrong, detail changes to policy and practice that have been agreed to prevent people feeling aggrieved in future.
 - vii) If things have gone wrong and no reasonable changes can be agreed, explain why it is essential that policy and practice are the way they are.
 - viii) Give a name and telephone number for people to call if they want to discuss the matter further, or if they have a similar experience again
 - ix) Give details of further rights of appeal if the customer is still not satisfied
- b) In addition to the above, anyone investigating a complaint is responsible for recommending changes to the appropriate authority where we can avoid such complaints or claims occurring in the future.
- c) The timescales set in this procedure are to be seen as maximum limits. Staff assisting with and responding to complaints should seek to do so in the shortest possible time.

7.6 Appeals against decisions:

- a) All customers have the right of appeal against decisions made under this procedure. They should register their appeal on a complaint form, ensuring that they state their reasons for appealing. Again staff should assist in the completion of these forms within one week of the customer requesting this.
- b) Appeals will only be heard where the customer makes a case for the original investigation being inadequate or unfair. Restatements of the original complaint will not be accepted.
- c) Such appeals will be heard by the next tier of management. All appeals should be acknowledged and clarified if necessary within one week and a full response should be provided within 2 weeks.
- d) All customers will ultimately have the right of appeal to a panel of trustees at the next available trustee meeting. They can make their appeal in person or in writing bringing representation if they wish.
- e) In addition to the above, some of our funding agencies are happy to investigate complaints on behalf of our customers. Learners should be assisted in contacting funding agencies once they have exhausted our complaints procedure. Please contact the relevant manager to ascertain the appropriate funding agency as necessary.
- f) Please note that most funding agencies will expect clients to have made a complaint following the above procedure before resorting to them. Staff should advise learners of this.