



Customer Service and Complaints Policy

Equality Impact Assessment: Askham Bryan College recognises the importance of the Equality Act 2010 and its duties under the Act. This document has been assessed to ensure that it does not adversely affect staff, students or stakeholders on the grounds of any protected characteristics.

1. POLICY STATEMENT

Askham Bryan College is committed to providing excellent customer service and we continually seek ways to improve quality and the student experience, as defined in the College Strategy 2018-2021. Askham Bryan College defines its customers as any person who comes into contact with the organisation, either as an internal or external service user.

2. DEFINITIONS

This policy and procedure refers, for the most part, to students enrolled on any programme of study at the College.

However, where appropriate and relevant, this policy extends to all stakeholders and includes parents/guardians, actual or potential sponsoring employers, the Corporation, Education and Skills Funding Agency, the Office for Students, awarding bodies, validating universities, Professional Statutory Regulatory Bodies, the local community and College employees.

3. PRINCIPLES

Askham Bryan College is committed to thoroughly investigating any customer complaints, provide a response and ensure that any outcomes are used to inform quality improvements.

3.1. The College aims to:

3.1.1 Set clear standards of service and promote continuous improvement

- Achieve and maintain excellence in customer service and encourages all staff, throughout the organisation, to make a positive contribution to achieving this;

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- 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;
- Encourage 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;
- Resolve a complaint informally at the lowest possible level and put the matter right as soon as possible. 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;
- Set challenging and realistic service standards (targets) for all cross-college service areas and curriculum activities;
- 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;
- 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.

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

- 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;
- Present information in plain language that avoids unnecessary jargon and meets the needs of customers;
- Monitor partnership arrangements to ensure that service quality standards are maintained.

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

- Endeavour to respond quickly and courteously when customers make contact;
- Treat customers sensitively, offering privacy and dignity;

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- Encourage staff to provide a friendly and helpful service;
- Support staff by providing customer service training as identified through the staff appraisal process;
- Promote widening participation by ensuring that Policies & Procedures facilitate equality of opportunity;
- Provide support mechanisms, where practicable, for customers with disabilities and special needs. This includes asking them for their opinions/suggestions.

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

- Investigate any complaint and endeavour to put things right quickly and effectively;
- Implement the College's 'comments and complaints procedure' to improve issues that have been identified as needing improvement;
- Monitor issues raised and actions taken, by presenting reports to the CEO, Senior Leadership Team and College Management Team with an annual report being presented to Corporation;
- Keep the CEO apprised of all complaints that are received.

3.1.5 Identify ways to improve our services and facilities offered

- Prioritise improvements to its services for customers, in accordance with its strategic aims, annual plans and budgets;
- Continue to look for value for money improvements to customer services;
- 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;
- 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;

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- Utilise its Information Technology (IT) Strategy, Quality of Teaching, Training and Assessment Strategy, and associated resources, to make the most of new technology to deliver improved services;
- Make staff aware of the need for efficiency and value for money, including identifying any savings made;
- 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;
- This policy is supported by the College Corporation and is reviewed annually;
- The College regards the reports resulting from the inspection and review processes to be useful in providing valuable feedback and informing improvements.

4. SCOPE AND LIMITATIONS

Complaints should be raised within 3 months of leaving a course or 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. Any appeal should wherever possible be actioned within 10 working days of being lodged;

- The College is aware that occasionally vexatious or habitual complaints are made against staff or students. In this policy the term habitual means 'done repeatedly or as a habit'. The term vexatious is recognised in law and means 'denoting an action or the bringer of an action that is brought without sufficient grounds for winning, purely to cause annoyance to the defendant'. This policy is intended to assist in identifying and managing persons who seek to be disruptive to the College through pursuing an unreasonable course of conduct. In such a situation, the College may take appropriate disciplinary action against the complainant or contact the Police; For the purpose of this policy the following definition of habitual or vexatious complainants will be used:

The repeated and/or obsessive pursuit of:

- (i) unreasonable complaints and/or unrealistic outcomes;
and/or
- (ii) reasonable complaints in an unreasonable manner.

- The College will not investigate complaints of parents/guardians of students aged 18 or over without the written permission of the student;

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- Students studying on **Higher Education programmes** may be subject to regulations and policies belonging to the validating university, in relation to academic and quality assurance matters, available from:
- <https://www.harper-adams.ac.uk/apply/applicants/key-info.cfm> (Harper Adams University)
- <https://www.rau.ac.uk/about/organisation/public-information/academicinformation/academic-policies-and-procedures> (Royal Agricultural University)
- http://www.leedstrinity.ac.uk/Key%20Documents/Taught_Programme_Academic_Regulations_New_Students.pdf (Leeds Trinity University)
- Students studying on **Higher Education programmes** have the right to escalate their complaint to the Office of the Independent Adjudicator (OIA), only once all internal procedures have been exhausted (and where, applicable procedures associated with the affiliated university). Students are only eligible to escalate a complaint to the OIA once they have received a Completion of Procedures (COP) letter from the College. Information on progressing complaints to the OIA can be accessed at:

<http://www.oiahe.org.uk/>

5. RESPONSIBILITIES

5.1. The Chief Executive Officer and the Senior Leadership Team will:

- Approve these standards on an annual basis, using the appropriate Quality Assurance procedures;
- Monitor performance against targets through the College Self-Assessment Reports (SARs) and/or annual quality reports;
- Provide appropriate training and development for staff to enable them to fulfil the College Vision and respond to customer expectation.

5.2 All College staff will:

- Conduct themselves appropriately and professionally when dealing with our customers;
- Undertake regular training and development;
- Report any issue relating to customer service to appropriate management.

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6. MONITORING AND REVIEW

The Senior Leadership Team will maintain oversight of the effectiveness of these arrangements. This policy and the implementation arrangements which underpin it will be reviewed annually by the Assistant Principal Quality and Performance.

7. SUPPORTING/RELATED DOCUMENTS

- Complaints Procedure
- Validating Partner University Regulations (For Higher Education students studying on validated programmes only) - see Section 4 of this policy.

Complaints may be dealt with under other College policies including, but not limited to:

- Staff Disciplinary
- Policy on Sexual/Personal Harassment
- Disciplinary Procedure for holders of Senior Posts
- Student Disciplinary
- Harassment Policy and Procedure for Students

8. REGULATIONS

In all aspects of this process the College will comply with the following regulations:

- The Data Protection Act 2018
- General Data Protection Regulations (GDPR)
- Equality Act 2010
- Safeguarding Vulnerable Groups Act 2006

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