



## **CODE OF PRACTICE FOR HANDLING CUSTOMER COMPLAINTS**

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### **INTRODUCTION**

This Code of Practice brings together Drivers Training UK's overall complaints policy, the complaints procedure and guidance on good practice.

#### **General aims of the Company's complaints policy:**

To acknowledge the importance and value of complaints, to learn from our mistakes and use feedback from customers to continuously improve services.

To ensure that complaints are handled in line with the company customer services strategy and any other relevant legal and policy requirements.

To provide a clear route by which customers can raise concerns about the service they have received from the Company.

To ensure that complaints are dealt with fairly, promptly and sensitively.

To enhance the overall image of Drivers Training UK and its employees in the eyes of the service users.

#### **Policy on Dealing with customer complaints:**

Drivers Training UK is committed to providing excellent customer service but on some occasions individual customers may not be satisfied with the decision made by the Company, the provision of a service or an action taken on an individual case. The Company has in place a procedure for handling customer complaints to ensure that they are properly dealt with and that any lessons learnt from the complaint are used to improve services for customers.

Drivers Training UK will welcome and react positively to all feedback from customers whether this is in the form of complaints, comments or suggestions and will use this customer feedback to continuously improve its services.

The provisions of the Company's complaints procedure apply across the Company and all complaints will be dealt with in accordance with this.

Drivers Training UK will aim to address any problems raised by customers at the earliest stage possible and staff will be empowered to try and solve any difficulties reported by a customer.

Drivers Training UK will deal with complaints fairly, thoroughly and sensitively.

Drivers Training UK aims to acknowledge all complaints within 4 working days of receipt and to reply to complaints within 10 working days of receipt.

Confidentiality will be respected with all complaints received by the Company.

Records will be kept of all complaints received by the Company in accordance with the complaints procedure.

## **Definition of a complaint**

A complaint is an expression of dissatisfaction, whether justified or not and however made, about the standard of or the delivery of service, the actions or lack of action by the company, or its staff which affects an individual service user or groups of users.

## **Complaints Procedure**

### **What does the Complaints Procedure cover:**

This procedure covers complaints made by customers about the service provided by the Company including service delivery policy, decisions on service delivery and the way that service was delivered on an individual basis. The Complaints Procedure does not cover complaints from members of staff, trainees, apprentices or persons on work placements, involving working conditions, pay or other internal grievances.

### **Who can make a complaint?**

Any individual or organisation who uses or receives a Company service can make a complaint if they are dissatisfied with the service. This definition includes:-

Statutory or non statutory services provided to individual customers

Services provided on a commercial basis

A complaint can be made on behalf of the customer by a Company or Solicitor or other third party. In some cases (eg where the complaint comes from a private individual, whether a relative of the complainant or not) evidence may be needed that the complainant both knows of and consents to the complaint being made and is happy for information on this matter to be shared with the third party.

Complaints from customers who wish to remain anonymous should still be recorded and investigated but the customer should be informed that a detailed investigation cannot be carried out if the complaint is about the service delivered to that individual or about the attitude of a member of staff.

### **How can customers make a complaint?**

Complaints can be made by post, fax, telephone, email, or by personal visit to a company office. In some cases where the complaint is made via the telephone or during a visit it may be appropriate for the complaint to be recorded and for the customer to sign this off to agree that the complaint statement is correct.

Where a complaint specifically concerns allegations about the actions, personal conduct or attitude of an individual employee this must be in the form of a written statement either provided directly by the customer or signed by the customer.

The Company is committed to Equal Opportunities and will make facilities available to assist customers in making a complaint.

## **Overview of the complaints procedure**

### **Resolution of problems**

All frontline staff should be empowered to resolve customer problems at the point of service delivery.

### **Stage 1 complaints**

Stage one complaints should be dealt with by the Manager of the service which is the subject of the complaint.

Where a customer responds further to a stage 1 complaint reply, the Service involved may look at the case again and, where it is felt appropriate, a more senior manager can review the case. However, this must not prevent the customer exercising their right to proceed to stage 2 of the procedure.

The complainant should be advised of any further steps which they may take if they are not satisfied with the outcome of the stage 1 complaint.

## **Stage 2 complaints**

A customer who remains dissatisfied has the right to have their complaint investigated independently by someone outside the immediate service delivery area and service procedures must facilitate this.

The Managing Director should review both the circumstances surrounding the original problem and the way the complaint was handled at stage one, and should report their findings both to the service and to the complainant.

The complainant should be advised of any further steps which they may take if they are not satisfied with the outcome of the stage 2 complaint.

In exceptional circumstances such as where the issue is urgent, where there has already been considerable prior communication or where there are problems with investigating the case, a complaint can be dealt with at stage 2 without the need for a stage 1 investigation.

## **Standards for responding to customers**

All written complaints must be acknowledged within 4 working days of receipt. The same timeframe should be used in acknowledging complaints received in other forms.

All complaints should be responded to within 10 working days of initial receipt. This can include resolving the problem raised by the customer within this time period.

Where it is not possible to provide a full reply to the complaint within the 10 day period an interim response must be provided and this should indicate when a full reply can be provided.

If it takes more than 20 working days to respond to a complaint the customer must be kept informed of progress.

Responses to further correspondence from the customer should be provided in line with the Company's standard for replying to all letters within 5 working days.

Normally, complaints should be acknowledged and replied to on the basis of the format of the original complaint (ie an email complaint should be responded to by email).

## **Replies to customers**

Complaints must be seen as an opportunity to resolve the customer's problem and to learn from customer feedback and should be responded to in that way.

A reply to a complaint should contain:

- A summary of the complaint
- An explanation
- Reference to whether the Company upholds, partly upholds or does not uphold the customer's complaint
- An apology where appropriate
- Information on any action that is going to be taken to resolve the problem
- Details of any service improvements as a result of the complaint
- Details of further stages of appeal if the customer remains dissatisfied

Where follow up action is promised the person responding to the complaint must ensure that this is carried through.

## **Keeping records**

All complaints at stage 1 and above should be recorded electronically on the Company's complaints system.

Complaints must be recorded in a consistent way across the Company. This includes recording:

- Whether the complaint is stage 1 or 2
- The receipt date
- The category of complaint (eg staff, premises etc)
- The details of the specific complaint
- The outcome. This includes whether the complaint was upheld, partially upheld or not upheld. Company records must include the reasons for any decision taken on a case
- Any corrective action or service improvements resulting from the complaint

Detailed information on individual complaints must be treated confidentially with access limited to investigating employees, employees needing to be interviewed or asked for advice during investigation and to service managers.

Records should be kept on individual complaint files of any meetings, interviews and discussions on complaints.

Records on individual complaints, including copy letters and notes must be stored for six years from the end of their administrative use.

### **Approach to handling complaints**

Complaints should be welcomed. Where a customer is clearly making a complaint it should be recorded as such and dealt with in accordance with this code.

With any complaint received Company employees should seek to resolve the individual complaint and take any learning points for future improvements to service. The investigation of a complaint is also an opportunity to change the customer's poor impression of the Company. Therefore, complaints should be handled in line with the Company's Standards .

### **Resolving matters at the earliest opportunity**

All staff should try to resolve a problem informally by discussion with the customer or by suggesting a course of action to remedy the situation. If having tried this, the customer still wants to proceed with the complaint they should be advised of the procedure and the next steps in the process.

### **What is a complaint**

The key question is does a customer have a concern that they want addressed about the way services are being delivered to him or her including the responses of the service to any requests they have made.

The customer does not have to mention the word complaint in a conversation or letter for the contact to be considered a complaint.

Beyond the interpretation of what is a complaint against a service request it is for customers to decide if they want to make a complaint to the Company and how serious their concerns are.

A customer should never be told that they cannot make a complaint about a specific service or service issue or that the complaint is not justified without the matter being investigated.

### **Means by which complaints are made**

Many complaints can and should be dealt with quickly and easily over the phone.

Employees cannot insist that a complaint has to be made in writing with the exception of a complaint which relates to allegations about a specific member of staff where the customer or their representative will be asked to agree and sign a statement setting out the complaint.

### **Records of customer contact**

Information about contact with the customer must be recorded honestly and accurately. This should not contain irrelevant personal comments about the customer.

## **Putting actions on hold**

If any action against a customer (related to the complaint) is proposed by the Company it is important to consider whether this should be deferred while the complaint is investigated. Where appropriate a hold will be put on any recovery or other action until the complaint has gone through the complaint procedure.

## **INVESTIGATION**

### **Impartiality**

Complaints should be looked at objectively. A Manager who has played a direct part in the service delivery or the decision that is the subject of a complaint should not investigate the complaint.

Consider a complaint as if you were looking at it from outside the Company and consider if there has been any administrative or other error that led to any injustice to the customer.

When a complaint is allocated for investigation it should not be handled by someone who is closely acquainted with the customer or, in the case of a complaint against an employee, with the person that the complaint is about.

### **Thoroughness**

Investigators should ensure that they are in receipt of the full history of the complaint before deciding on a complaint or responding to the customer ie have sight of all correspondence and communication referred to by the complainant, a full history or log of information from the relevant service and comments from the appropriate staff.

Where necessary advice from legal, external or specialist bodies can be obtained.

Try to address all the key issues raised in a complaint. A good technique is to summarise the complaint in the acknowledgement to the customer to clarify what is being investigated.

### **Complaints about staff**

Where a complaint is about a member of staff the person concerned should have details or sight of the complaint and should be offered the chance to comment and provide their own version of events.

It needs to be made clear to the member of staff that the complaint will be dealt with objectively and the existence of a customer complaint by itself, is not the basis for management or disciplinary action.

Where it is necessary to interview a member of staff and the member of staff is concerned about this they should be advised that they can bring a witness or union representative to the meeting.

A member of staff complained of in this way must not use the opportunity to directly contact the customer to respond, deny or ask for a retraction of the complaint.

Where a customer is considered by the employee to have slandered them legal advice should be sought.

Where a Company or requests details of a customer complaint, the employee investigating the case should check what the involvement of the Company or is and whether the customer would want the details sharing with another party. At all times the confidentiality of the customer must be respected.

### **Passing on customer comments and compliments**

Any verbal or written contact from customers containing suggestions or comments on service delivery should be passed on to the appropriate Service Manager.

Any correspondence that contains compliments from the customer should be passed on to the appropriate service or to the member of staff and their line manager where it refers to the actions of an individual employee.

### **Putting things right**

The main criteria that should be used to determine whether any sort of complaint remedy is appropriate is whether any errors were made by the Company and whether these caused any injustice or inconvenience to the customer.

If the Company has been at fault the situation might be remedied through an apology, an action to repair or correct something, an agreement with the customer to do something differently or a rebate or compensation or through a combination of these as appropriate.

If the Company is making a change to services or procedures as a direct result of a complaint it is also important to inform the customer about this.

Any compensation payment has to be agreed with the budget holder for the particular service. Ideally it should also be discussed and agreed (in advance of payment) with the customer. Any compensation payment has to be fully justified.

## **COMPLAINT CORRESPONDENCE**

### **Checking**

A draft complaint reply should be checked with staff involved in assisting in the compilation of information. Check the draft against the customer's original complaint to ensure that the key issues have been covered.

### **Copying**

The final written reply to a complaint should be copied (and thanks given) to staff who assisted by providing information.

If a complaint is sent via a Company or if the complaint letter is copied to a Company or the member concerned should receive a copy of any Company correspondence on this between first receipt and final reply.

## **FOLLOW UP ACTION**

### **Carrying out promised actions**

If action is agreed in the response to the customer it needs to be followed through. Action might include promising that a particular employee will pay a follow up visit, an undertaking to carry out a repair or promising that the issue would be reported elsewhere. The person responsible for the complaint reply needs to ensure that this happens.

### **Learning from complaints**

Issues raised by a complaint or a series of complaints may suggest the need for service improvements. Any improvement made should be recorded against the relevant complaint(s) as a 'corrective action'.

Any improvements should be reported as part of the annual reporting on complaints. This should not be carried out in isolation but should be part of the continuous improvement process.

## **Stage 2 Complaints**

Additional issues should be considered when handling a complaint at stage 2.

Head of Service/Director involvement

Ensure that issues are brought to the attention of senior management preferably prior to a response being issued to the customer.

### **Reporting findings**

Once a complaint has been investigated a draft letter or report should be put together summarising the complaint, the investigation undertaken, the findings and any recommendations following the investigation. This should be circulated to those involved with the investigation as well as relevant heads of service and comments should be received and taken on board before a final reply is sent to the customer.

At all stages of the complaints process complaints should be looked at on the basis of "how would this look to an outside bo

