

CITB-CONSTRUCTIONSKILLS NORTHERN IRELAND CUSTOMER

COMPLAINTS POLICY

Introduction

1. The handling of complaints, suggestions and queries has a direct bearing on the public image of the Board.
2. Complainants should therefore be dealt with promptly, sympathetically and constructively.
3. It is important that every complainant should feel that his or her complaint has been dealt with appropriately.
4. As part of the Board's continuous review of its services, the Customer Complaints Policy previously approved in September 1997 has been amended to take into account the recent complaints of an aggressive nature received by staff.

Aim

5. The aim of this paper is to set out the procedure on how complaints relating to services offered by the Board should be dealt with by staff, in order to reflect the Board's objective of improving the services offered to its customers.

Definitions (in the context of these procedures)

6. "A Complaint is an expression of dissatisfaction requiring a response" (Citizen's Charter Complaints Taskforce)
7. "Complaint" unless otherwise specified refers either to an oral or to a written complaint.
8. "Formal Complaint" means a complaint made in writing.
9. "Formal Complainant" means the person from whom the complaint is received, irrespective of whether they are acting on their own behalf or on behalf of another person.
10. "Complaints Procedure" refers to the arrangements made by the Board in response to the requirements of this document.

Customers

11. Customers of CITB-ConstructionSkills Northern Ireland include levy payers, those in receipt of Board services or perceived to be entitled to the Board's services.

Communication

12. The Board Administrator is designated the role of Complaints Officer, who will be responsible for the maintenance of a register of ALL complaints and the provision of a quarterly report to the Board.

Policy Guidelines

13. Provide a simple and effective means of allowing customers, or potential customers, or their representatives, to complain about the quality or nature of the services offered or delivered by CITB-ConstructionSkills Northern Ireland.
14. Ensure that complaints are acted upon in a way which is fair and equitable to staff and complainants.
15. Aim to resolve complaints within the agreed timescale.
16. Provide an acceptable means of further redress if the complainant remains dissatisfied.
17. Ensure that complaints are dealt with constructively in order to improve future services and standards.

Complaints Procedure

18. Staff will respond to complaints received by any means promptly, sympathetically and constructively.
19. These complaints should be reported to the relevant Senior Manager who will then attempt to resolve the matter within five working days.
20. Guidelines for dealing with complaints of an aggressive nature are included as Appendix 1.
21. A note of the complaint and subsequent action taken should be given to the Board's Complaints Officer when the issue is resolved, or when it appears unlikely to be resolved at that level.
22. Complaints, which cannot satisfactorily be resolved, should be referred in writing to the Board's Complaints Officer and be treated as a formal complaint.

23. Formal complaints received by any member of staff should be immediately referred to the Complaints Officer who will acknowledge receipt within five working days. If it is not possible to resolve the complaint within this time, a response will be made within ten working days or such extended time as may be reasonable in the circumstances.
24. In all cases, formal complaints will receive an acknowledgement within five working days and a full investigation and resolution sought within twenty working days. Complainants will be advised of a delay beyond this period.
25. In all cases, written responses to formal complaints will be under the signature of the Chief Executive, who will be kept informed at all stages of the procedure and of the action being taken.

Appeals Procedure

26. If the complainant is dissatisfied with the response made, he/she has the right to appeal in writing to the Chairman of the Board, who will investigate the matter and respond within fifteen working days.

Complaints arising from Levy/Scope Queries

27. Any person with a complaint regarding levy assessment or scope position should be advised of the appeal procedure as prescribed by the Industrial Tribunal Regulations (NI).

Complaints Monitoring

28. The designated Complaints Officer will monitor the operation and effectiveness of the complaints procedure regularly and will provide information to Board members quarterly, detailing the number and type of complaints received, the time taken to acknowledge and resolve them and the final outcome.
29. Copies of all formal letters of complaint, acknowledgements and final replies (and if appropriate interim responses) will be forwarded by the Complaints Officer to the appropriate Head of Division and to the Chief Executive.

Grievance and Disciplinary Procedures

30. The arrangements for dealing with complaints do not impinge in any way upon existing grievance procedures. Staff cannot substitute this complaints procedure for accepted employment procedures.
31. It is possible, however, that in some circumstances, the investigation of a complaint may highlight facts which would make it appropriate to invoke disciplinary procedures.
32. These are clearly defined arrangements which apply to the actions of staff in relation to failures to comply with codes of conduct or procedures or other relevant guidance and these will continue to operate as specified.

Approval

33. The Board approved the Customer Complaints Policy on 28 June 2001. The policy was reviewed and changed in 2005 following staff changes, reviewed again in September 2008 and reviewed again in February 2010.

Appendix One

**PROCEDURE FOR DEALING WITH
COMPLAINTS OF AN AGGRESSIVE NATURE**

1. Allow the person to make the complaint and 'blow off steam' at first. Someone who has been able to vent strong feelings may be more co-operative later on.
2. Gently interrupt after a while. In a calm, sympathetic tone, tell the person that you would like to help solve the problem and that you are glad it has been brought to your attention.
3. Take the details of the person, i.e. their name, company and problem. Read back your notes aloud to the person, explaining that you want to be sure you understand everything. This shows that you have been taking the customer seriously.
4. A few people may be unreasonable or abusive, despite all your efforts to assist them.
5. Gently repeat that you want to help.
6. Explain that you will investigate the complaint and contact them with further information. Arrange a time to call them back – and do so! Alternatively refer the person to your immediate line manager.
7. If the person becomes angry or aggressive and uses abusive, threatening or offensive language, warn them that you cannot deal with them if they continue to use abusive language.
8. If it persists after two verbal warnings, inform them that you are terminating the conversation.
9. If dealing with a telephone complaint, **never** put the call on hold or hang up without informing the customer first.