

Client Service and Complaints Handling

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UNITS REQUIRED TO PREPARE A CLIENT SERVICE STATEMENT AND A COMPLAINTS HANDLING PROCEDURE

1 Introduction

1.1 The University of Wollongong is committed to the provision of quality services to all its clients.

1.2 The University should deliver a consistent level of client service which is subject to continual assessment, review and on-going improvement.

1.3 A consistent approach to the handling of complaints is integral to effective client service. (See Attachment A)

1.4 The University is committed to the development of innovative methods and practices which enhance quality of service.

1.5 This document outlines the University's commitment and expectations relating to the provision of client service.

2 Rationale

2.1 Client service is defined as the activity of assessing, anticipating, and fully meeting client needs and expectations.

2.2 Clients are defined as stakeholders in any activity in which the University is engaged. This may include students, staff, members of the community, and government agencies.

2.3 Each staff member has many different categories of clients. Clients are not simply those external to the Unit, but include colleagues and supervisors within the Unit. The priority and importance of individual client needs must be carefully assessed and balanced.

2.4 The delivery of a quality service applies not only at the personal interface. It is also the provision of quality processes which in effect increase the level and efficiency of the full range of services which the relevant Unit(s) provide.

2.5 A quality service is more than the prompt supply of information or assistance. It must focus on information which is timely, relevant and accurate. Quality client service adds value to the provision of all basic services.

3 Objectives of this policy

3.1 Increase the level of satisfaction among clients through the delivery of effective and consistent client services.

3.2 Enhance the University's image and reputation, particularly its reputation for client service.

3.3 Develop and maintain good relations with all clients and thus facilitate future collaboration and the joint solution of problems.

3.4 Reduce the volume of complaints and consequently reduce any associated element of job dissatisfaction. Assessing complaints and rectifying errors are time consuming and frustrating activities. They also create an expectation of dissatisfaction in the client which may increase with each client interaction.

4 Client Service Responsibilities

4.1 Management and supervisors should be committed to the provision of quality client services and support their staffs client service efforts. Where possible staff should be authorised and trained to make decisions there and then in a manner which enhances the level and quality of service and staff fulfillment.

4.2 Employees should seek to provide the highest level of service to their clients as is possible within the resources and knowledge available to them. The University understands that striving to improve client service is a continual process.

4.3 Quality service is expected from all levels of staff, the requirement does not apply only to front-line enquiry staff. All staff, regardless of level or role, should provide a high quality service to clients.

4.4 Monitoring the implementation of this policy and its subsequent operation will be the responsibility of the Vice-Principal (Administration) or his/her nominee.

5 Client Service Behaviours

5.1 All clients are important and will be treated as such. The level and type of client service must be consistent.

5.2 Staff will listen to and respect the complaints of clients. They will attempt to allay concerns by acknowledging a problem rather than disputing its existence.

5.3 If an error is made, this fact will be openly acknowledged and the mistake rectified as soon as possible.

6 Client Service Processes

6.1 Consistent with this policy, each unit (scheduled in Attachment B) will develop and maintain a Unit specific client service policy statement. The statement will be tailored to the Unit's specific objectives and will embody the unit's critical values, goals and expectations regarding the provision of client service. Each statement should include:

- A summary of client service aims and expectations
- A process for identifying client needs
- A process for devising improvements in client service practices
- A localised complaints procedure

- A method for ensuring all staff are trained in client service and knowledgeable of relevant work practices.
- Advice given to all staff on client service requirements

All client service objectives, goals and expectations prepared by Units should be realistic and achievable. Details of the requirements for components of the statements are set out below.

6.2 Each Unit is responsible for developing methods for assessing client needs. Units may use a variety of techniques to assess client needs, expectations, and experiences to date. These techniques could include:

- Surveys
- Focus groups
- Electronic measurement
- One to one client feedback interviews

6.3 Each statement should include the targeted level of service, and the skills and competencies which clients can expect from staff delivering the service. The statement should include:

- Target time spans for the critical work processes eg. student enrolment, or application to acknowledgement to interview/no interview in the recruitment process, or payment of suppliers etc.
- Common nomenclature for telephone responses, title of department, etc.
- Standard formats for all correspondence
- Contingency plans for meeting critical client needs at times of crisis; staff shortage or computer break down for example
- 'Service Hours' that put the needs of the client ahead of staff convenience consistent with those of other related Branches
- Defined procedure for titling all new files and destroying old ones

6.4 Units will establish mechanisms which provide staff with opportunities to suggest and develop improved methods or systems of client service.

6.5 The University will provide client service and awareness training so as to provide staff with the necessary skills and knowledge to provide the highest level of service possible.

6.6 Each unit should also encourage and support training of staff in all relevant work activities.

6.7 Each unit should provide staff with clear and concise guidelines on service goals particularly those most relevant to the needs of their primary groupings of clients.

Attachment A

PROCEDURES FOR THE HANDLING OF COMPLAINTS

1 Definition

1.1 A complaint is defined as a formal expression of client dissatisfaction with some aspect of a Unit's services, policies and procedures.

1.2 Only complaints where the complainant has identified him/herself are covered by this policy. Anonymous complaints are not within the terms of this policy although it is expected that Unit heads will assess the validity of such complaints and, where appropriate, take corrective action.

2 Complaints Handling

2.1 A complaint will generally be lodged directly by the complainant, either in writing or verbally in the manner prescribed by the Unit in question. See 2.5 below.

2.2 Any complaint received will receive a response in as speedy a manner as possible. The response should address the complainant's concerns in a detailed and complete manner.

2.3 Responses to complaints should always be in positive terms. Staff should not dispute or seek to trivialise the complainant's criticisms. The nature of the response should be one of understanding. If the client has quoted incorrect facts or has presented a misunderstanding of events, then the response should be amicable and placatory in tone, not retaliatory.

2.4 All responses to written complaints will be in writing.

2.5 All Units will devise precise ways for complaints to be registered and will clearly publicise the chosen procedure. Some may place receiving boxes on an enquiry desk to encourage written statements, others will opt for certain named individuals to handle complaints and some a mixture of the above.

3 Periodic review

3.1 The volume and type of complaints should be reviewed by the Unit Head on a regular basis. This review will be used as a basis for assessing client needs and attitudes towards that Unit's services and activities. On a periodic basis all complaints received by all administrative units will be collated and analysed to detect trends and establish benchmarks for improvement.

Attachment B

UNITS REQUIRED TO PREPARE A CLIENT SERVICE STATEMENT AND A COMPLAINTS HANDLING PROCEDURE

Academic Registrar's Division
Administrative Information Services
Buildings and Grounds Division
Educational Services Development
External Relation Division
Financial Services Division
Information Technology Services
Library
Management Information Planning
Office of Research
Personnel Services Division

Faculty of Arts
Faculty of Commerce
Faculty of Creative Arts
Faculty of Education
Faculty of Engineering
Faculty of Health & Behavioural Sciences

Faculty of Informatics
Faculty of Law
Faculty of Science

IMPLEMENTATION

1.1 The University will provide training courses on Client Service which will be attended by all staff covered by this policy.

1.2 Each Unit will develop methods to ensure their client service statement, objectives and expectations will be implemented, assessed and adhered to.

1.3 Each Unit will develop methods to implement and review the selected complaint handling procedures.

1.4 Each Unit will develop methods for assessing client needs and expectations, these may include surveys, focus groups, a client comments or suggestions scheme or individual questionnaires.

1.5 Clear and concise instructions on client service, outlining standardised and specific guidelines for interacting with clients will be developed by the Continuous Improvement Unit

1.6 These directives will also be supported by supervisors, in terms of human and physical resources.

1.7 The University will provide resources and support all activities related to these issues.

1.8 ITS will provide telephone training to all staff in the Administration. index Revised: 1/4/96
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