

Customer Service Charter Transcript

Welcome to the Education Authorities Customer Service Charter training. Throughout this short session you will have an opportunity to familiarise yourself with the Education Authorities Customer Service Charter and think about what good customer service looks like. As you are listening to this training, take time to reflect on how the principles of good customer service apply to both you and your team.

The key objectives of this training are:

To help you become better informed about the EA expectations with regards to customer service.

To increase your knowledge of the standards set out within the EA Customer Service Charter.

To help you to identify your individual responsibility for the provision of excellent customer service within your role.

To increase your awareness of EA values and identify how these are reflected in the customer service charter.

To give you food for thought and time to reflect on your own practice to ensure that you're promoting a culture of excellence in customer service.

So what is a customer charter? At its simplest, a customer charter is a set of written promises that an organisation makes to its customers.

A customer charter will tend to outline what an organisation aims to do in terms of its customer interactions, what a customer can expect and when they can expect it.

Let's look at this in the context of EA. An integral part of ensuring that we inspire, support and challenge all our children and young people to be the best that they can be is by providing excellent support services.

We took some time to reflect on our customer service and we asked our customers for some feedback on how they think we've been performing.

We used their feedback to help shape our EA Customer Service Charter.

This charter was developed in 2020 to help all our staff within EA to continue to provide the very best customer service to the people we speak to and serve. It also lets our customers know what level of service they can expect from us and what we ask for them in return. The customer charter is applicable to all staff whether schools based or corporate.

We are committed to providing our customers with a great customer experience, regardless of who they are and all our interactions are based on our values.

On the left hand side of the charter you will see our commitment to our customers in terms of the services that we will provide. Let's now look at these points in more detail.

We will make it easy for our customers to find the information that they need. We will host information so that it is easily accessible. For example on SharePoint or our external website.

We will ensure that we answer all calls. We may do this through staggering lunch and tea breaks so that there is always someone available to take calls.

Where possible, we will make sure that we have a voicemail set up and if our customers do leave a voicemail we're committed to responding in no more than 2 working days.

We will acknowledge our customer emails and provide a written reply within 10 working days, even if it is just to update them that we need a little longer to deal with their query.

We will maintain confidentiality where this is appropriate. We will do this in a number of ways, for example, we will password protect sensitive information. We will shred anything that is no longer required. We will mark emails confidential where necessary and we will lock confidential documents in a secure area.

We will provide our customers with clear, accurate and timely information. So what they need when they need it.

We will get our customers the information they require from the right person. This is why it's important that we all keep our contact details up-to-date and display them on our email signatures.

We will ensure we keep our customers fully and regularly informed throughout their issues so that they don't feel forgotten.

We will deal with the customer requests the first time they contact us or if it is a complicated matter, we will promise to keep them informed.

We will coordinate our approach to meetings and provide timely information to our customers thereafter.

We will tell our customers what will happen next and by when.

We will talk to our customers as we continually improve our services, getting their feedback on how we can make things easier and better for them.

We will tell our customers what to do if they're not satisfied with how they have been treated and we will handle our complaints and criticisms well.

We will protect our customer's personal information in line with GDPR legislation.

Next on the charter you can see a section titled 'Our People'. Let's now look at the promises we are making in terms of how we are going to interact with our customers.

When we speak to our customers, we promise to identify ourselves and what section of EA we work in.

We promise to treat everyone with courtesy and respect.

We will greet our customers in a friendly and polite way, whether verbally or in writing.

We will listen to our customers carefully, often paraphrasing and repeating back to our customer to ensure that we have understood their query or request.

We will deliver the support our customers require to the best of our ability and we will be honest with our customers and do what we say we will do.

On the right hand side of the customer service charter you will see that we ask our customers to also make some commitments to us.

This is so that we can fulfil our customer charter promises. Let's now take a closer look at these.

We ask that our customers tell us if they have any specific or special requirements which may impact their query. For example, do they have a disability that requires a response to be made in a particular format?

We ask that our customers always be polite, friendly and respectful towards us.

We ask our customers to provide us with complete, accurate and up-to-date information with regards to their query.

We ask that they contact us as early as possible about their issue and keep us informed if any of the circumstances change.

We ask that they are open and honest with us.

We ask our customers to work with us when we try to resolve their issue or problem.

We ask that our customers help us by responding to our requests for information as quickly as they can.

And lastly, we ask that our customers provide honest feedback on the level of service that they receive as this helps us to reflect and then improve.

We've talked about our commitments and promises to our customers, but who are our customers?

The EA customer list is extensive and some customers have been included in this slide.

The main thing to note is that our customers are not only external such as parents and children, but our customers are also internal, such as our colleagues in other schools and in other EA departments.

How do our EA values shape our Customer Service?

Our customer service charter has been developed based on our EA organisational values. As a customer of EA, our customers should see our values reflected in the interactions that they have with us. Our values are the heart of everything we do.

Let's look at them in terms of customer service.

We will promote a culture of openness and we will be transparent and honest in our dealings with the public, our partners and colleagues. We're committed to keeping our customers fully and regularly informed.

Respect. We will listen and respect those we serve.

We're committed to treating our customers with courtesy, listening fully to them, being helpful and taking a friendly and polite approach.

Reflection. The customer charter itself was born out of reflection. We will continue to reflect on our processes, making them easier to understand.

We will continue to improve our services based on our customer feedback and we will take onboard lessons learnt from our experiences.

Responsibility. EA made our customer charter public in 2020 so that we can be held accountable and responsible for doing what we said we will do.

Our EA value says that we will act responsibly and acknowledge that our actions will impact on our customers. We will be helpful, conscientious, reliable and accountable for all our actions.

We will take responsibility for customer queries. Ensuring that calls and emails are answered in the timeframes laid out in the charter and ensuring that queries are directed to the right person. If we make a mistake, we will hold our hands up and be responsible for our actions and work towards improving.

Excellence. We will strive for quality in everything we do. We will behave professionally and take pride and ownership for everything we say and do.

The customer service charter was created based on our commitment to provide excellent customer service. We will provide our customers with clear, accurate and timely information, all whilst protecting their personal information and maintaining confidentiality.

Equality. We will promote equality of opportunity through our practices, service delivery and engagement activities with our customers. Good customer service means we may have to adapt our service to recognise the different needs and expectations of diverse groups of EA customers.

Treating people equally is different to treating everyone the same. We need to treat everyone as an individual and tailor our service according to their individual needs.

Sometimes our customers may have additional barriers that may require a different approach. All our information should be accessible and understood by our customers.

This could mean providing resources in an alternative format.

We should always use easy to understand language with no jargon when we are communicating with our customers.

A key skill when dealing with and understanding the needs of our customers is listening. We spend almost half our time listening.

This is a difficult skill and does require practice.

To listen, we need to make a conscious effort to hear not only what our customers are saying, but also to take it in, digest it and really understand it.

Our ears can understand 450 words a minute but will only remember 50% of what is said immediately after and 20% two days later.

Listening is one of the most important soft skills and is key to effective communication.

Here are some tips for active listening when it comes to dealing with customers. Pay attention to the customer. Don't try to multitask as this may appear to devalue their query.

Where the customer interaction is in person, look at the customer when they are talking and be mindful of your body language.

Don't interrupt the customer. Give them time to fully outline their query or situation.

Ask questions when appropriate to do so, but try not to interrupt their flow. Try to fully listen to what the customer is saying without thinking about what your next question or comment will be.

Keep an open mind and try to ascertain all the facts.

Be empathetic in your approach and give feedback. Paraphrase what you have heard to ensure understanding.

Sometimes you may encounter a difficult customer, but remember, no member of staff should have to endure an abusive call or meeting.

As discussed previously, the customer charter sets out our customer expectations whereby we ask our customers to be polite, friendly and respectful towards us.

Here are some tips when dealing with difficult customers.

Try to adjust your mind-set. When you're facing a difficult customer, try to put yourself in their shoes. Imagine you're facing the same problem. You may find that you would have the same response also.

Active listening. Start the dialogue with a neutral statement such as "let's go over what happened" or "please tell me why you're upset".

This subtly creates a partnership between you and your customer and lets them know that you're ready to listen.

Let them speak. Do not try to talk over the customer or argue with them. Let the customer have their say, even if you know what they're going to say next and even if they do not have all the information or you feel that they're mistaken.

Resist the temptation to try to resolve the situation right away, or to jump to conclusions about what happened. Instead let your customer tell you their story. As they're talking, don't plan out what you're going to say next as this isn't active listening.

Lower your voice and remind your customer that you will not tolerate disrespectful or abusive behaviour. If the customer continues to be abusive, you can end the call or meeting however, do give prior warning and explain why you're ending it. Keep a record of any aggressive calls or comments that are made that you find unreasonable. You can include details such as the date, time, and any attendees that witnessed this, where applicable.

And finally, agree the next step with your customer and follow through with it to try to rebuild their trust.

Let's now watch this short video so that we can recap on what we have learnt so far about the customer service charter.

Customer Service Charter.

The Charter is a set of principles and promises that we are making to our customers and is based on our core values as an organisation - openness, respect, reflection, responsibility, excellence, equality.

Our aim. To help our staff continue to provide the very best customer service, regardless of who the customer is and to let our customers know what level of service they can expect from our people.

The Charter is for all our staff, our staff in schools, in our Youth Services and in our corporate support offices.

It is to ensure that all our customers, whether they are internal or external customers, get the very highest level of customer service.

Our customers don't get to choose EA as their service provider but we do get to choose how our customers are treated and how they value our service.

We will always strive for excellent customer service.

As a customer of the Education Authority, you should see our values reflected in the interactions you have with us.

You can expect us to be honest, to be helpful, meet the deadlines we give you and provide a high quality of service.

We will seek to make our processes easier to understand.

We will reflect on and respond to criticism and handle any complaints well.

The Education Authority is a service provider and as such we all deal with customers, whether they be internal or external.

Take some time to think about your area of work. How can you improve the customer service you provide to be in line with our EA values and the customer service charter?

Do you need to make adaptations to materials to make it accessible to all our customers?

Do you need to update your contact information and display on your email signature so that customers can reach out to you easier?

Do you need to set up a voicemail on your phone?

Do you need to reflect and correct the tone of your emails to make them read friendlier?

Are you responding to customer queries in the timeframes laid out in the charter?

Are you keeping your customers fully and regularly informed?

These are just some of the questions you may be asking yourself.

So what next?

When you have reflected on your practices, you may need to adapt your own behaviour in terms of the customer service you provide.

You must be accountable for ensuring that you implement customer charter principles and promises into your daily work activities.

There must be a team approach to the customer charter.

How will you help to embed the customer charter in your team?

And when you're dealing with customers, you must ensure that your behaviours reflect the EA values.

Remember, great customer service doesn't mean the customer is always right, it means the customer is always honoured and people will forget what you said, people will forget what you did but people will never forget how you made them feel.

As we draw this training session to a close, I would encourage you all to access the customer charter pamphlet, read it, print it out and display it. By doing what it says you will embody and reflect our EA values and deliver great customer service.