
***COUNTY WICKLOW VOCATIONAL
EDUCATION COMMITTEE***

CUSTOMER SERVICE

ACTION PLAN



Coiste Gairmoideachais Cho. Chill Mhantáin

Index

1. *Co. Wicklow VEC*
 - 1.1 *Who we are*
 - 1.2 *Head Office details*
 - 2 *Customer Service*
 - 2.1 *Plan Objective*
 - 2.2 *Customers*
 - 2.3 *Delivery of Customer Service*
 3. *Information to Customers*
 - 3.1 *Commitment*
 - 3.2 *External*
 - 3.3 *Internal*
 - 3.4 *Electronic*
 - 3.5 *Publications*
 - 3.6 *Forms*
 - 3.7 *Information Leaflets*
 - 3.8 *Freedom of Information*
 - 3.9 *Internal Customer*
 - 3.10 *Performance Indicators*
 4. *Internal Customer*
 - 4.1 *Staff*
 - 4.2 *Students*
 5. *Timeliness and Courtesy*
 - 5.1 *Telephone calls*
 - 5.2 *Letters/E-mails*
 - 5.3 *Personal Callers*
 - 5.4 *Customer Assistance in ensuring the delivery of Quality service*
 - 5.5 *Evaluation*
 6. *Dealing with Customers Complaints*
 - 6.1 *Procedure*
 7. *Appeals*
 - 7.1 *Procedure*
 8. *Consultation with Customers*
 - 8.1 *Consultation on Service Provision and Policy Issues*
 - 8.2 *Internal Customers*
 - 8.3 *General Feedback*
 9. *Choice*
 - 9.1 *Payment methods*
 - 9.2 *Location of Contact Points*
 - 9.3 *Opening Hours*
 - 9.4 *Information on Services Provided*
 - 9.5 *Use of New Technologies*
 10. *Obligations under The Language Act 2003*
 11. *Better Co-ordination*
- Appendix 1. Complaint Form and Procedure*
Appendix 2. Comment Card

1. Co. Wicklow Vocational Education Committee

1.1 Who we are

County Wicklow VEC is a Statutory Body set up under the Vocational Education Act 1930 to provide educational services to the community in the County. The Principal Act has been amended in the intervening period up to and including the Vocational Education (Amendment) Act 2001.

The Committee provides a range of educational services through its Second Level Schools, Further Education College, Adult Education Centres and through its Adult and Community Education Programmes. Other services include Grants and Scholarships, School Transport Liaison.

1.2 Head Office details

Address: Administrative Offices, P.O. Box, 15, Church Street, Wicklow

Telephone: 0404/20460

Fax: 0404/62556

E-mail: headoffice@wicklowvec.ie

Website: www.wicklowvec.ie

2. **CUSTOMER SERVICE**

2.1 Objective

Co. Wicklow VEC is committed to providing a quality service to its customers both internal and external. The service will be such as to meet their needs both present and in the future. It is committed to treating all its customers equally irrespective of differences based on gender, marital status, age, disability, race, sexual orientation or religious belief.

2.2 Customers

Our customers are:

- **Internal:** Administrative Staff, Teaching Staff, Cleaning and Maintenance Staff, Childcare Workers, students and all other staff in the employment of the VEC.
- **External:** Members of the General Public, Parents, Students (Grants) Government Departments, other Agencies and Bodies with which the Committee communicates.

It will be the aim to foster a strong ethos of quality customer service in the VEC.

2.3 Delivery of Customer Service.

The Committee will deliver its Quality Customer Service in the following areas:

1. Information to Customers
2. Treatment of Customers
3. Dealing with Complaints of Customers
4. Consultation with Customers - external and internal
5. Choice of Service Delivery
6. Obligations under the Languages Act 2003
7. Staff Training
8. Evaluation/Performance Indicators

3. INFORMATION TO CUSTOMERS

3.1 Commitment

Co. Wicklow VEC is committed to providing information on its services, activities and programmes and this will be achieved through a number of different media – electronic, publications, forms, information leaflets, through Freedom of Information and through direct links to its parent Department (Department of Education and Science) and its representative body, the Irish Vocational Education Association and other appropriate agencies and organisations.

3.2 External Customers

The Committee's Quality Customer Service will take a proactive approach in providing information that is clear, timely and accurate, is available at all points of contact, and meets the requirements of people with specific needs. It will ensure that the potential offered by Information Technology is fully utilised and that information available on public service websites follows the guidelines on web publication. It will continue to develop user-friendly approaches with regard to regulations, forms, processes and procedures.

3.3 Internal Customers

The Committee recognises its own staff as internal customers and will ensure they are properly supported and consulted with regard to service delivery issues.

3.4 Electronic Information

Co. Wicklow VEC's website is an important reference source for information about the organisation and its services. It will be developed to include links to other Department of Education & Science and other appropriate agencies and organisations and to facilitate service users and clients through on-line information on all VEC services and through access to staff vacancies, application forms, etc.

An intranet is being developed across the County to better enable staff share information and have a single corporate-wide system for accessing information of common interest.

3.5 Publications

Co. Wicklow VEC issues a number of publications dealing with its areas of responsibility. These include the Annual Report, Service Plan, Codes of Practice and information brochures, leaflets, press releases and Newsletter. In

addition, Department of Education & Science publications, the *IVEA News* and other internal publications serve as a useful means of updating customers and staff on both formal and informal matters relating to the VEC. It will ensure they are drafted and presented in a customer friendly manner.

3.6. Forms

Co. Wicklow VEC uses a number of forms to gather the information it needs to provide services in an efficient manner. As part of this Plan, a review of all forms will be undertaken to ensure that only necessary questions are asked, that forms use clear language and are clearly laid out, that customers and users of the forms are involved in the review and design process, that the design of the forms meet the requirements of both the customer base and modern IT based systems, and that details of the complaints and appeals procedures are included on all application forms.

Arising from this a review of its procedures will be undertaken; changes will be identified and implemented.

3.7 Information Leaflets

Information Leaflets produced by Co. Wicklow VEC provide customers with details of services offered including programme and course outlines, eligibility criteria, conditions relating to grants, etc.

3.8 Freedom of Information

The Freedom of Information Act, 1997 gives everyone legal rights to seek access to official information. The Act is designed to allow public access to information held by public bodies that is not routinely available through other sources. While the Act has not yet been commenced within the education sector, Co. Wicklow VEC will ensure that Freedom of Information requests are processed within the framework set down in the legislation.

A FOI Officer will be appointed when the FOI Act applies to the VEC.

3.9 Internal Customers

Co. Wicklow VEC is committed to ensuring that staff are also recognised as customers. It appreciates that delivering a quality service to the public is only possible by meeting the needs of our own internal customers with similar standards of timeliness, courtesy, consultation, information, etc.

Training has an important role in recognising and supporting the needs of staff and in equipping them to provide better services to the public.

3.10 Performance Indicators

(See evaluation)

To assess the achievements of these targets we will:

- Use the feedback system on websites to obtain customers' view on the accessibility and standard of information
- Use the feedback system on the Intranet to obtain the view of staff on the information available
- Carry out internal surveys to ascertain progress with reviews of forms and Information Leaflets.
- Seek the views of customers on the accessibility of information in any customer surveys undertaken.

Over the period of the Plan we will;

- Upgrade the main website and ensure that information available is clear, timely and accurate;
- Develop the Intranet to improve the sharing of information within Co. Wicklow VEC;
- Introduce a "Help-Desk" ... This is happening already at a number of levels and need not be a fixed location, however, additional "Information Points" may be required to assist with the development of a more "Customer focused Culture".
- Keep all forms and Information Leaflets under review to ensure relevance etc. Develop a uniform approach to all leaflets produced by different centres/schools etc. over a period of time.
- Develop systems to assist access to information in format appropriate to all staff and all customers, i.e. Braille, text-to-speech, email, paper copy, etc.
- Ensure Freedom of information requests are processed within the statutory deadlines as outlined in the legislation when the Act applies to the VEC.

4 INTERNAL CUSTOMER

Under the terms of the Programme for Prosperity and Fairness (PPF) each Vocational Education Committee was required to adopt a strategic management approach in its planning and development. An important element in that approach is the delivery and active promotion of a quality customer service that is responsive to the needs and requirements of customers. This work continues under the terms of the new National Agreement - Sustaining Progress.

It is important that the needs of internal customers are addressed in a meaningful way. To do this, we must firstly identify **who** our internal customers are...

- (1) *Staff*
- (2) *Students*

4.1 Staff

Co Wicklow VEC is committed to ensuring that staff are also recognised as customers, that delivering a quality service to the public is only possible if we meet the needs of our own internal customers with similar standards of timeliness, courtesy, consultation, information, etc.

One vitally important category of internal customer is the front line staff, who are charged with delivering quality service to the public. The quality of service that can be delivered by these staff is greatly influenced to the extent to which they are given the necessary support e.g. through training, IT, etc.

However, all staff should be made aware of the level of service they can expect from the organisation.

That any queries they may have will be treated with sensitivity and courtesy, in a prompt and timely fashion

That they are made aware of any delays that may occur in dealing with their query.

That all staff be made aware of procedures, rules, regulations, forms and information pertaining to the services provided, and kept up-to-date on any changes instigated.

That all receive the support they need to continue the delivery of a high standard of customer service to meet the expectations of an evermore demanding public.

4.2 Students

Co. Wicklow VEC provides a range of educational and support services to the students in its schools/centres; to persons seeking second chance education opportunities; to community groups and youth organisations. These various groups are also internal customers of the VEC.

The needs of these groups differ somewhat and this should be reflected in the type of Customer Service which is made available to them.

Students should expect that the VEC will provide

- I. Easily accessible and up-to-date accurate information on services available
- II. That Allowances, etc., are paid in a timely fashion, thus avoiding undue hardship
- III. That the organisation provides clean, accessible public areas that comply with occupational and safety standards and facilitates access for persons with specific needs
- IV. Appropriate support for people who wish to improve their employability
- V. Administrative support for groups involved with young people at local community level

If it is to be successful, Quality Customer Service must be responsive to the needs of its customers. The VEC can only be responsive if it can identify the weaknesses of its Customer Service: it can do this by getting 'feed -back' from its customer base by means of questionnaires.

It can also get 'feed-back' through the complaints process. The Vocational Education Committee believes that their customers have a right to complain if the appropriate level and quality of service is not provided. This 'feed-back' can be used to modify the services being offered.

This work continues under the new National Agreement - 'Sustaining Progress' ...

5. TIMELINESS & COURTESY

Co. Wicklow Vocational Education Committee is committed to delivering a quality service to all its customers by ensuring that they are dealt with promptly and with courtesy and sensitivity.

Most customer contact is by way of telephone, some by letter or e-mail, and some by personal visits to the office.

To ensure that all customers are dealt with properly, impartially, and with the minimum of delay it is proposed to foster a climate of mutual respect between Committee's staff and customers.

This aspiration can be best achieved by the implementation of the following practices:-

5.1 Telephone Calls

Provide a courteous, helpful, friendly and prompt answering service.

Staff available to answer telephone calls at all times during office hours.

Staff to give full name when answering.

5.2 Letters/E-mails

Where appropriate, acknowledge correspondence within 5 working days;

Where warranted, issue a definitive reply within 10 working days. If such a reply cannot be issued within this timeframe, then an interim reply will be issued, informing the sender that the matter is continuing to receive attention.

In certain circumstances separate information arrangements to the above may be made at the beginning of application or other processes e.g. grant applications, job applications, admission applications, etc. and these arrangements will be clearly outlined to applicants at the beginning of the application process.

Ensure replies carry details of contact person and contact telephone number.

5.3 Personal Callers

Ensure all personal callers are treated with courtesy and sensitivity;
Provide for comfort (seating, etc.) and privacy as appropriate.

5.4 Customer Assistance in ensuring the delivery of Quality service:

It is important that customers understand their role in the provision of a quality service and facilitate same as follows: -

- On initial contact provide as much information as possible;
- Where appropriate quote reference numbers on all correspondence/communications;
- Complete all forms carefully;
- Provide supporting information as requested;
- Ensure forms/submissions are signed and lodged in good time;
- Keep Co. Wicklow Vocational Education Committee advised of changes in circumstances;
- Respond promptly to requests for further information/clarifications;
- If possible make appointments and be in time.

5.5 Evaluate

To assess the impact of these policy targets the following procedures will be put in place: -

- Carry out a survey which would determine customer's views on timeliness and courtesy;
- Provide for internal surveys on a regular basis on progress in telephone answering, replying to correspondence, etc.;
- Develop a tracking system to assist in providing a timely response to correspondence.
- Update all staff on productive comments made by customers;
- Review procedures at Partnership/Staff meetings at least twice per year.

6. DEALING WITH COMPLAINTS OF CUSTOMERS

Co. Wicklow VEC will maintain a well publicised, assessable, transparent and simple to use system dealing with complaints about the **quality of service** provided and ensure that such complaints are dealt with in a consistent fair and transparent manner.

Customers can direct comments, suggestions and complaints to the Chief Executive Officer who will:

- Have the complaints investigated in a fair and impartial manner.
- Conduct customer surveys.
- Monitor, review and advise on customer services/standards.
- Be responsible for the customer complaints procedure.

6.1 Procedure

- All complaints must be submitted in writing, e-mail as appropriate.
- Forms to facilitate the public when making a complaint are available.
- An acknowledgement letter confirming receipt of a complaint will be issued within 2 working days of its receipt.
- The Chief Executive Officer or Designated Officer will investigate the matter and issue a decision to the complainant within 2 weeks or as soon as practicable thereafter.
- The type, number and nature of the complaints will be collated and analysed.

7 Appeals

Co. Wicklow VEC will maintain a formalised, well publicised, accessible, transparent and simple to use system of appeal/ review for customers who are dissatisfied with decisions in relation to service.

7.1 Procedure:

- All appeals must be submitted in writing, e-mail as appropriate. An acknowledgement confirming receipt of an appeal will issue within 5 working days.
- If a customer remains dissatisfied with the response of the Chief Executive Officer he/she may lodge a complaint with the Committee for resolution.

8. Consultation with Customers - external and internal

Co. Wicklow VEC is committed to providing a structured approach to meaningful consultation with, and participation by, the customer in relation to the development, delivery and review of services, and to ensure meaningful evaluation of service delivery.

The Committee is committed to consulting with its customers and to the evaluation of its services. In its different roles the Committee is sometimes service provider, client, promoter or independent adjudicator and must meet its responsibilities to all its customers across this diverse range. The Committee's approach will be to consult its customers and to continue to build on this over the period of the plan.

8.1 Consultation on Service Provision and Policy Issues

The Committee is committed to creating opportunities to input to the policy formulation and service provision process and the Committee has hosted workshops and consultative for on major policy and legislative issues such the Green Paper on Adult Education, The Education Bill, The Youthwork Act, etc. The Committee will consult with the main stakeholders as required by Vocational Education (Amendment) Act 2001 in relation to the preparation of its Education Plan.

8.2 Internal Customers

The Committee is committed to the further development of consultative process internally.

The Committee's Partnership Working Group plays a significant role in internal consultation. The Partnership Working Group has a central role in

the development of the Human Resource Management Strategy and other aspects of the internal change programme, and provides a channel for widespread consultation with staff. *In addition, during 2002 and 2003, a consultant was engaged by the Partnership Committee to facilitate the preparation of the Strategic Plan.*

8.3 General Feedback

A comment card has been developed to obtain feedback on our level of service. This comment card will be made available at all of the Committee's public offices and on our website.

9. CHOICE

Co. Wicklow VEC is committed to providing choice, where feasible, in service delivery including payment methods, location of contact points, opening hours and delivery times. We will endeavour to utilise available and emerging technologies to ensure maximum access and choice, and quality of delivery.

The Committee's public offices are open Monday to Friday from 9.30am to 5.00 p.m., with a limited service during lunchtime in some areas. We will operate a voicemail service outside of these hours.

The Committee's web address is www.wicklowvec.ie and e-mail address is headoffice@vec.ie. Individual school/centre web addresses and e-mail addresses may also be obtained from our website.

The Committee is adopting a "stepping stone" approach by exploring the following improvements to our services:

9.1 Payment Methods:

Use of Electronic Fund Transmission method of payment to pay both salaries and suppliers where possible

Accept payments from debtors e.g. night class students etc. by a greater variety of methods e.g. credit cards, debit cards etc.

9.2 Location of Contact Points:

Pilot a 'one stop shop' arrangement for a number of services e.g.

dissemination and acceptance of Student Support and Job Application Forms

Establish intranet and internet to make information more accessible

Use of internet to download and accept application forms

9.3 Opening Hours

Use the introduction of family friendly work policies such as flexi-time, annualised hours contracts to enable lunch-time and evening cover at critical times.

9.4 Information on Services Provided

Establish a project working group to compile a list of all services provided, contact names and numbers for the key personnel involved, entries in telephone directories, IPA Diary, website should be examined and improved where necessary. The working group should be representative, conduct annual reviews and ideally be led by head office receptionist/information officer.

9.5 Use of New Technologies

The provision of more services electronically to provide more accessible services, better choice and improved service delivery. Methods which could be utilised as follows:

- Use of databases to store information on student support or job applicants
- Use of Internet to download and accept applications
- Use of intranet as internal information point
- Use of website to inform internal customers (employees) of their entitlements – staff handbook on website.

10. OBLIGATIONS UNDER THE LANGUAGES ACT 2003

County Wicklow VEC will fulfil its obligations under the terms of the Act in a positive and proactive manner. It will encourage and grant-aid its staff in their endeavours to become more fluent in Irish.

The Committee has already implemented or will implement actions in the following areas – the list is not exhaustive.

- Advertisements in Irish as they directly affect Scoil(eanna) Lán Gaeilge.
- Committee Stationery/Signage/Notices
- Application Forms and Staff Contracts where applicable and when requested. (These may be produced in Bilingual Form)
- Interviews as they directly concern Scoil(eanna) Lán Gaeilge.
- Meeting Minutes and Reports.
- The desirability of having Irish as a requirement for appointments to Administration Posts.

11. BETTER CO-ORDINATION

County Wicklow Vocational Education Committee is committed to ensuring a more committed and integrated approach to the delivery of its services

Internal Communications:

Improving internal communications is considered essential to the process. This will be achieved by means of the following:

Regular meetings in the VEC the format of which will be;

Internal management and staff meetings at Head Office

Management meetings for Further Education Centres

Management meeting for the Bray area

Education Council meetings consisting of School Principals and Vice Principals.

Special interest group meetings

Meeting of VEC representatives with other participating agencies, local community group representatives, local representatives, other interest groups, local and national stakeholders and service users and to report back on the outcomes of these meetings in a timely manner.

Initiation of a process that will lead to the implementation of an Intranet service for all staff.

Design, development and production of an internal newsletter for all VEC staff on a quarterly basis.

Involvement of all staff in the development of Education, Business, Service and other plans in an appropriate manner.

The implementation of the recommendations of the Rochford Report and the modernisation of services, revised management structures will involve all staff. Intended changes must be clearly identified and communicated to all staff at a VEC staff forum. This staff forum should allow sufficient time to exchange information, points of view and develop working arrangements.

County Wicklow Vocational Education Committee will also create a notice board where staff can log comments, opinions and recommendations as to how any part of the service can be improved. These will be discussed by the partnership group and where appropriate ensure where actions are agreed that they are implemented in full.

<p style="text-align: center;">COUNTY WICKLOW VOCATIONAL COMMITTEE Coiste Gairm Oideachais Cho. Chill Mhantáin</p>

Help us to provide an even better service

If you have not been satisfied with the quality of service, please read the following:

Procedures for dealing with Complaints

1. The Chief Executive Officer will be responsible in the first instance for the customer complaints procedure and will ensure each complaint is investigated in a fair and impartial manner. This responsibility will be delegated to Senior Officers in the Organisation.
2. All complaints must be submitted in writing or by e-mail. Copies of Complaint Forms are available in the Waiting Area.
3. Receipt of your complaint will be acknowledged within 2 days of receipt.
4. A decision on your complaint will be made within two working weeks, or as soon as is practicable thereafter.

Appeals against a decision regarding a formal Complaint

If you are dissatisfied with the decision of the Senior Officer you may appeal that decision to the Chief Executive Officer of the V.E.C.

1. Appeals must be submitted in writing or by e-mail
2. An acknowledgement of receipt of the appeal will be issued within 5 working days of receipt.
3. The appeal must include the reasons you are dissatisfied with the decision of the Senior Officer.
4. If you remain dissatisfied with the response of the Chief Executive Officer, you may lodge a complaint to County Wicklow Vocational Education Committee, Church Street, Wicklow. The Committee will issue its decision within 6 weeks of the complaint being brought to its attention

COMPLAINT FORM

Details of Complaint

Person or Department dealing with you: _____

NAME (BLOCK CAPITALS) _____

Signature _____

Address _____

Telephone Number _____

Please return to:

*Chief Executive Officer
Co. Wicklow VEC
PO Box 15
Church Street
Wicklow*

Appendix 2

**Co. Wicklow Vocational Education Committee
Coiste Gairm Oideachais Cho. Chill Mantáin**

COMMENT CARD

QUALITY CUSTOMER SERVICE

Co. Wicklow V.E.C. wishes to provide a high quality service to our Customers. In order to enable us to continue to do this we would welcome your comments on how you feel our service can be improved. Please complete the section overleaf and return it to:

*Chief Executive Officer
Church Street
Wicklow*

*or School Principal, Centre,
Programme Manager*

How satisfied were you with the quality of service received?

Section/School/Centre providing the Service _____

Very Satisfied *Satisfied* *Dissatisfied* *Very Dissatisfied*

Please give reason(s) why.

Signature _____ **Tel:** _____

Name (Block Capitals) _____

Address (Block Capitals)
