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INSURANCE SECTOR EDUCATION
AND TRAINING AUTHORITY

LEARNER GUIDE

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Apply the skills of customer care in a specific work environment

Introduction

It is imperative that you ensure compliance with both the customers' needs and the regulations of your own organisation. Although slogans such as "the customer is king", "the customer is always right" and "the customer pays your salary" are true in many respects, your first duty is to your employer. Never offer a solution to a customer's problem that may conflict with the objectives of your organisation or the law.

Customer service starts the first time you meet a customer, whether this is in person or over the telephone. All the customers, whether they are new, potential or long established with your company, must be afforded every respect and courtesy at all times. Customers deal with their own perceptions of the level of service they receive. These perceptions may not be true but will influence the nature of the interaction with the customer.

Module 1

Impressive Customer Service

This Module deals with:

- Current theories of customer service are researched in order to identify trends.
- Case studies are analysed to identify instances of impressive customer service.
- Case studies are analysed to identify instances of unacceptable customer service and suggestions are made as to how each situation could be handled differently.
- The implications of poor customer service are explained from the point of view of the individual, the customer and the organisation.
- The consequences of non-compliance with an organisation's policies and procedures in dealing with customers are explained with examples.

1.1 Guidelines for impressive customer service / -care

Impressive customer service is an important ingredient that differentiates you from your competitors and is a good method to gain and maintain the competitive edge on the competitors. Here are some guidelines and suggestions for impressive customer service:

Work in a Team

Take into consideration the expectations and needs of your colleagues. Never do or say anything, which may break down team spirit. Remember you need each other.

Maintain Image and Branding

Adhere to your insurance company's corporate image and be aware of your written and spoken language. Project a confident and assertive attitude at all times.

Cultural Differences

Learn the cultural differences of your various customers. This way you will avoid unintentional insensitive mistakes.

Understand that you are dealing with the person – not the culture. Each person is unique and ignorance leads to prejudice and intolerance.

Deliver on your promises

Don't make any promises you cannot keep. It reflects badly on you and your organisation.

Reliability

Unreliability can impact negatively on the company's profitability – If a customer requests a certain product or service and you don't make the effort to fulfil the request they will take their business elsewhere.

Be sensitive to your customer's needs

They will give you free and valuable information about you, your company, your products and services.

1.2 What is needed for Impressive Customer Service?

The more effort that is made to satisfy customers, the higher the degree of customer loyalty will be. Always ensure that all your customers are treated with the utmost respect and courtesy.

Below are some characteristics to pursue in your daily dealings with your customers:

Reliability

- Ensure that your customers can depend on you every time to do what has been promised;

Knowledge

- Know your services/products offered;

Empathy

- Do customers receive individual attention, or at least, not like a number but a human being when they communicate with you?

Responsiveness

- Give your customers prompt service every time;

Receptiveness

- Be willing to accept new ideas and to learn.

1.2.1 The implications of poor customer service

Poor customer service evokes certain negative reactions and perceptions from customers and as a result you need to be sensitive to the most common causes for negative customer reaction, as identified below:

- Customers that call in get extremely frustrated being kept on hold without checking if they are willing to wait and may become aggressive and abusive. Go back to them regularly to see if they are still prepared to hold.
- A customer will feel ignored when not being asked whether he or she has been

attended to. Attend to customers promptly.

- Customer callers could be feel disrespected if their conversation is ended abruptly and may result in the customer not calling back and or going elsewhere. A sincere *“Is there anything else that I can assist you with? Thank you for calling. Goodbye”* will make the caller feel appreciated – and secure his/her loyalty. Let the client hang up first.

1.2.2 Annoying habits

Annoying habits that irritate customers include the following:

- Being false and smiling insincerely;
- Not calling a customer by name;
- To be yelled at;
- Advisors that make no effort whatsoever;
- Not paying attention to what the customer is saying;
- Keeping customers waiting;
- Customers that have to wait for service while you chat on the phone;
- Talking to a colleague when dealing with a customer;
- Unhelpful monosyllabic answers, especially “NO”;
- Any negative body language;
- Advisors that don’t reply to e-mails/letters or return phone calls.

1.2.3 Consistency

Always strive to be consistent in your interactions with your customers and ensure and maintain good customer care by considering the following guidelines:

- Never show that you are angry or upset when dealing with an angry customer, it will make matters worse and you will lose their business;
- Your customers expect reliable and prompt service. If they do not get it from you they will take their business elsewhere. This could jeopardise your job in the organisation;
- Tardiness is not tolerated well by most customers; show your respect for them and for their time by always being punctual;

- Demonstrate high moral values – Don't tell lies, you will lose your integrity and possibly your job by doing so;
- Send out warm and positive signals to each customer prior to the start of the interaction;
- Be as sensitive as possible to the customer's emotional state;
- Listen with genuine interest and feeling to what your customers have to say;
- If you don't know the answer to a question, assure the customer that you will find out and let them know as soon as possible;
- Try to find something you like in each customer and let it show;
- Never make customers feel bad for expressing their feelings, but always try to make them feel good for talking honestly about how they feel.

1.2.4 First impressions

Have you ever heard the expression "First impressions last"?

Customers will judge you and your organisation by the way you look and conduct yourself. It is your responsibility to maintain a high standard of personal hygiene and grooming to present the professional image required of staff working in your department.

- Your organisation has specific presentation requirements for staff in particular job roles and should you have to wear a uniform always ensure that you look neat and presentable at all times;
- A high standard of personal presentation is important when greeting customers because customers are more likely to respond well to you and feel welcome if your appearance is clean and tidy;
- Not only is personal appearance important, but also is the presentation of your work location. It is your responsibility to keep your immediate work area and/or the equipment you work with neat and tidy. A cluttered and untidy work location creates an impression in the customer's mind that the company is not well run and organised. It may also put the health and safety of guests, co-workers and yourself at risk.

Module 2

Personality styles

This Module deals with:

- Different personality styles are investigated in order to understand interpersonal behaviour.
- Anticipated behaviour is explained for selected personality styles and scenarios and an indication is given of how to respond appropriately in each situation.

2.1 Different Personality Styles

Different personality styles influence the way in which you behave towards a customer. It is important that a broker adapts to the personality style of a customer when dealing with that specific customer. That is why it is important to know your customer. Below are some personality styles with a description of each one:

Personality Style	Description	How to handle customer
Autocratic	This type of person always knows better and is always right	Never say: "You are wrong". Be assertive and sensitive toward this customer's needs.
Introvert	An introvert is very quiet and seldom asks questions. He/she might be more of a listener than a speaker	You have to do the talking with this type of customer. Make sure that you explain everything in detail.
Extrovert	An extrovert is usually very talkative and get along with all sorts of people. He/she will ask questions and give comments.	This type of person will feel comfortable to ask questions and query your presentation.
Compliant	This type of person is usually satisfied with whatever is offered to him/her. They seldom question the advisor and rely on their recommendation.	This type of person seldom questions your product or process and relies on what you propose to him/her

Aggressive	This type of person is difficult, persistent and rude. They also get easily provoked.	<p>Never say, “It’s not my problem”: If you cannot provide a solution, you need to find the person who can, rather than dismissing the customer.</p> <p>Always be assertive: When people are persistent or difficult and attempt to force you into a position of doing something inappropriate, be repetitive in telling the person what must be said. For example you could say to someone wanting to make an appointment with your manager, “I cannot make an appointment on your behalf. I will pass the message on to my manager and she will call you to set up an appointment”.</p>
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2.2 Interpersonal versatility

Interpersonal versatility refers to the willingness to consider different people, personalities, their alternative viewpoints, as well as new sources of information.

The following skills enable you to display interpersonal versatility:

- The ability to ask questions, even if you disagree with another person’s viewpoints;
- The ability to utilise restatement techniques, i.e. to summarise content of a person’s communication, and pass the message back to the person in your own words;
- The ability to utilise reflection techniques, i.e. to summarise the feelings of what the person has communicated to you, and communicate these back to the person;

- The ability to utilise active listening skills. In order to appear flexible when interacting with others, you need to hear the other person out without interrupting. You also need to display the important criteria discussed under Active Listening;
- Use silences to come across as more versatile. If you disagree with somebody's point of view, it may benefit you to keep quiet for a short while, and think carefully before responding.

2.3 Interpersonal sensitivity

Interpersonal Sensitivity is the extent to which a person is able to react to a situation in a diplomatic and tactful manner. This includes a person's ability to "read and understand" the situation in which he/she finds him/herself, and to be adequately sensitive to the needs and feelings of others and/or the situation.

Sensitivity is not about being subservient, displaying a "Yes Sir, No Sir" attitude, nor is it about giving in to the opinions of others or behaving in ways that are unacceptable to you. It is not about feeling inferior, nor is about 'selling out' or saying and doings to please others. It is about communicating your thoughts, ideas, and beliefs without being insensitive to the environment in which you are communicating.

When people are adequately sensitive to one another and respect one another as fellow human beings, despite obvious differences, they are able to work effectively together to achieve these goals.

As an individual, interpersonal sensitivity means the ability to:

- Speak in a warm, friendly tone of voice;
- Use reflection to empathise with others;
- Listen actively and acknowledge the other person's point of view;
- React tactfully and diplomatically;
- Build rapport and be supportive of others.

As an organisational, Interpersonal Sensitivity means the ability to:

- Show respect to all, be polite and devoid of any prejudice;

- Act in a manner that does not deliberately embarrass the organisation, or its employees.
- Characteristics that are typical of people who display Interpersonal Sensitivity:
 - Apologise when wrong;
 - Avoid sarcasm and putting others down;
 - Avoid racial, religious, or sexual comments;
 - Listen to others;
 - Recognise the needs, wishes and wants, or feelings of others;
 - Avoid calling others names, e.g. idiot, fool;
 - Allow others to speak, without interruption;
 - Praise colleagues for work well done;
 - Able to put themselves in others' shoes.

Module 3

Working with Information

This Module deals with:

- Information that is needed to address a query is gathered and analysed to determine an appropriate response.
- Background, industry, organisation and product knowledge are applied to a situation to ensure a comprehensive response.
- The information is presented to the customer in the appropriate language, format and style.
- The consequences of providing inadequate or incomplete responses to queries are explained with examples.

3.1 How to identify a customer's need

- Separate any other problems you may have from your dealings with the customer. The customer has had no input into your personal problems;
- Do not allow previous areas of conflict with a customer, especially where they have been resolved, to influence your attitude towards her/him. If a customer

has a reputation for being difficult, do not deal with her/him in a manner that displays aggression;

- Arrange to be undisturbed for the duration of the customer's visit with you. While a customer is with you, s/he must have your full attention;
- Divert telephone calls to a colleague or superior who can attend to other customers or queries, or have someone take a message. If you are on duty, advise the customer of this fact;
- Advise any waiting customers that you will attend to their queries as soon as you are able;
- Listen carefully to what the customer is requesting. Do not make assumptions about what s/he is asking; always paraphrase to ensure that your interpretation of her/his need is correct. Be aware of potential language barriers that may cause miscommunication.
- If you are able to assist the customer immediately and provide a solution to her/his query, do so within the parameters of the company's standing procedures and then confirm that s/he is satisfied that her/his query is completely resolved;
- Offer written evidence of your agreement with the customer immediately if possible;
- If you are only able to solve a portion of the query, do so and confirm that the customer is satisfied with that portion. Make written notes of what remains to be done and ensure that the customer agrees on this. If it is not possible to assist the customer immediately, make notes of all the actions to be taken to ensure that the query is satisfactorily dealt with;
- Do not try to remember everything as this may result in certain items of the query not being attended to;
- Always confirm with the customer that the information is correct and complete;
- As soon as a query falls outside of your area of responsibility, tell the customer that you will direct him to the appropriate person. Make sure that the customer's needs are fully conveyed to, and understood by the responsible person. Do not make it necessary for the customer to have to repeat her/his query;
- When the customer is satisfied and ready to leave, stand to allow the customer to leave with the perception of respect.

3.2 The consequences of providing inadequate or incomplete responses to queries

A lot of damage can be done to customer relationship by either innocent or unwittingly incorrect efforts by staff to assist, resulting from:

- Lack of knowledge;
- Lack of training;
- Low confidence;
- Unclear objectives;
- Muddled procedures;
- Poor delegation;
- Bad management;
- Poor levels of motivation; and
- Laziness.

The possible consequences (for the organisation as well as the individual) of providing inadequate or incomplete responses to queries of customers are:

- Decreased profitability;
- Bad company image;
- Decreased/Low productivity and performance;
- Low staff morale;
- Bad management of business based on customer needs;
- Non-responsiveness to customers (no understanding and meeting of customer needs);
- Unsafe future for business and employees.

Module 4

Innovative Solutions

This Module deals with:

- The conventional responses to frequently asked questions and suggestions are made as to how the responses could be improved to enhance customer satisfaction.
- The concept of ownership in customer care is explained with reference to the benefits of ownership to the individual, customer and organisation.
- An organisation's customer service related policies and procedures are analysed and suggestions are made for possible adjustments or improvements.

4.1 Customer Care Ownership

Service levels in our country are often referred to as shocking or non-existent. Too often we hear the phrase, "We can't complain about the service, because there is none". One of the prominent reasons for the situation is that team members do not take ownership and responsibility for their customers and for service levels. In other words, team members do not make the query/problem their own but prefer to "Pass the Buck" and let someone else deal with the customer's query/problem.

The customer wants someone to take personal responsibility for resolving their problem. If you have the authority and responsibility, then take personal ownership. If not, then quickly identify and secure someone, for instance a manager, who can.

4.2 How can customer service be improved?

Always strive to improve on the customer service you give your clients/customers by considering the following:

- Understand what the customers like about what you do and plan to do more of it;
- Understand what the customers are less happy about in how you are delivering your service and agree on plans to improve this;

- Be open to the cultural differences of your customers and try to familiarise yourself with information regarding the various cultures of your customers;
- Be tolerant of the different values, attitudes and beliefs, as well as the different ways of behaving of your customers;
- Be responsive to your customers' needs.

4.3 Steps to take to Improve Client Service

Overall, it is about identifying clear objectives – WHAT YOU NEED TO ACHIEVE in each area to improve client satisfaction. With continuous feedback, these objectives are changed to continuously deliver improved client service.

Developing a client service improvement framework involves:

- Defining an objective or “what” you would like to achieve in each client service improvement area that you have identified;
- Each objective helps us to reach the end goal.

Example:

Client Service Improvement Area: Client Walk-in

Objective: To make clients feel welcome and to provide quick assistance and service to all clients

In order to achieve these objectives or outcomes, we need to identify what action needs to be performed – i.e. how we will achieve the objective. Two action areas should be reviewed for each objective, namely:

- People needs

What information, skills or knowledge do people need?

- Process needs

What processes do I need to put in place, change or improve to ensure we meet and sustain each objective?

Example:

Objective: To make clients feel welcome and to provide quick assistance and service to all clients

- People Needs

Provide all front office staff with basic interaction and client relationship skills. Set client service greeting standards and communicate these to front office staff

- Process Needs

Ensure that there are sufficient staff on the front desk to provide assistance at all times, especially at peak hours. Ensure that the front desk is always neat, clean and welcoming

Example:

CLIENT SERVICE IMPROVEMENT AREA: Client Reception and Assistance

OBJECTIVE: (What to achieve)	To make clients feel welcome and to provide quick assistance and service to all clients
ACTIONS: (How to achieve the objective)	
People Needs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> i) Provide all front office staff with basic interaction and client relationship skills ii) Identify and agree on client service greeting standards iii) Communicate client service greeting standards to all front office staff iv) Set and agree on client waiting times
Process Needs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> v) Ensure that there are sufficient front office staff to provide assistance at all times, especially during peak hours vi) Ensure that the reception and front desk is always neat, clean and welcoming

Module 5

Client Relationships

This Module deals with:

- Reasons why an organisation would actively attempt to retain customers
- The concept of customer loyalty
- Ways in which an organisation actively attempts to retain customers
- The cost implications of customer management are explained with examples

5.1 Retaining Customers

No business today can afford to ignore two very important people – the client and the competitor. Until recently, companies operated in a very stable world where organisations determined their own notions of excellence, and clients accepted this judgment as they accepted the products and services offered to them – simply because they had no other choice.

Today, because of the power of information and technology and the removal of barriers to entry and competition, consumer choice has increased dramatically, changing the face of industry. These greater opportunities for clients are having a dramatic effect on the management of organisations. Decisions previously taken at the top and cascaded down to staff now tend to be distributed among those closest to the market place, empowering them to anticipate market forces and client expectations.

5.1.1 Facts of Business Life

- Clients matter to everyone;
- The most successful organisations increase their bottom lines when they learn to profit from complaints;
- Client service is increasingly becoming the differentiating factor that creates competitive edge in the market place.

5.1.2 The benefits of applying good and effective client service are enormous, and not only to clients

The company can expect

- Improved profitability;
- Good company image;
- Improved productivity and performance;
- Improved staff morale;
- Improved management of business based on client needs;
- Responsiveness to clients (understand and meet client needs);
- Safer future for business and employees.

5.1.3 These gains are achieved when the application of client service translates into an increase of revenue from

- Repeated sales to existing clients, i.e. clients keep coming back;
- More products per client;
- New clients.

5.1.4 As well as a decrease in the costs of

- Prevention of complaints, i.e. fewer complaints occur;
- Rectification of complaints;
- Replacement of clients.

5.2 Loyalty of Customers

Customer loyalty can be defined as the customer's loyalty towards a business or persons for which he/she has a responsibility towards.

5.2.1 How can customers be retained?

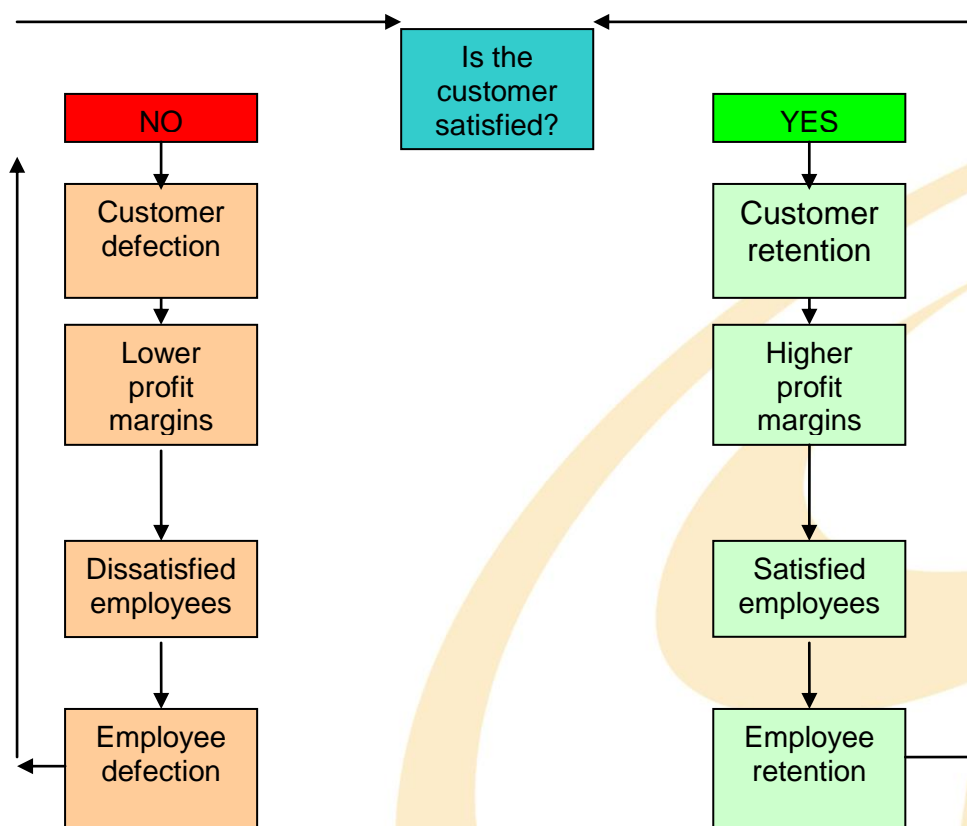
Organisations usually use some of the following ways to not only attract new customers to their business, but also to retain their existing customers:

1. New improved products;
2. Impressive customer service;

3. Extra services e.g. roadside assistance, 911 emergency assistance;
4. Lower premiums;
5. Hassle free claims processing.

5.2.2 The cost implications of customer management

The illustration below indicates how customer satisfaction impacts on the company's profitability:



5.3 Challenging interpersonal interactions

The following can be very useful when dealing with difficult clients or situations. It is called “Taking the **“HEAT”**”

Hear them out

Listen actively. Identify what the client is feeling and the problem that led to this situation. This step allows the client to vent the frustration, anger, irritation or whatever emotion he/she is feeling. It also allows you to focus on the client and his/her needs but also gives you time to acknowledge your emotions and prepare an assertive response, not an aggressive one.

Empathise

Make an empathetic statement, e.g. “I can understand your frustration...” or even “I can hear that you are angry”.

Merely understanding the client’s frustration without expressing your understanding is not good enough.

By expressing your understanding you are acknowledging what the client has said (and feels) and you display good listening skills. He/she is going to feel that you have listened and understood. “At last, here is someone that understands!”

It is also important to note that expressing empathy does not mean that you necessarily agree with what the client is saying, or feeling. What you are doing is looking at it from his point of view or “standing in his shoes”

Apologise

An apologetic statement goes a long way towards paving the way to a constructive conversation. Rightly or wrongly, the client feels aggrieved and he/she wants someone to apologise.

Possible statements here are, “I apologise for the inconvenience this has caused you” Note that this is a general statement of apology. It is not laying (or accepting) blame. You don’t want to run the company or your colleagues down in this process. That is not going to make you (or the company) look good.

Take responsibility for Action

All of the above will not achieve anything if the client does not feel that you will take responsibility for solving the problem.

Listening actively to the client would have allowed you to identify the problem correctly. You can always at this point summarise to check your understanding of the problem. An appropriate statement here might be, “I will personally give the message to ...” or “I will personally come back to you.” If you are not able to solve the problem at that point, provide your name and telephone number to the client at this point.

The FAIS perspective

This learner guide focuses mainly on the complaints handling mechanisms within a financial services provider. Although not prescribed in this unit standard as it was designed prior to the implementation thereof, it is however important to note that the FAIS Act makes provision for an internal complaints handling process.

All financial services providers must implement and maintain a complaints handling process which must be reduced to writing and be available to all staff, and all staff need to be trained on it.

A client must know how to complain, and there are requirements in terms of the Act how the client must do so (in writing) and what needs to be in place at the FSP, and how they should deal with complaints.

For that reason, the following is included in order for you to be aware of this, and understand it better.

Complaints handling as per the General Code of Conduct – FAIS Act (simplified)

A provider must				
Request Client to lodge complaint in writing	Maintain records of complaints (minimum 5 years)	Handle complaints in a timely and fair manner	Investigate and respond promptly	Not resolved: advise Client of further steps available

When a client wants to complain, the provider must

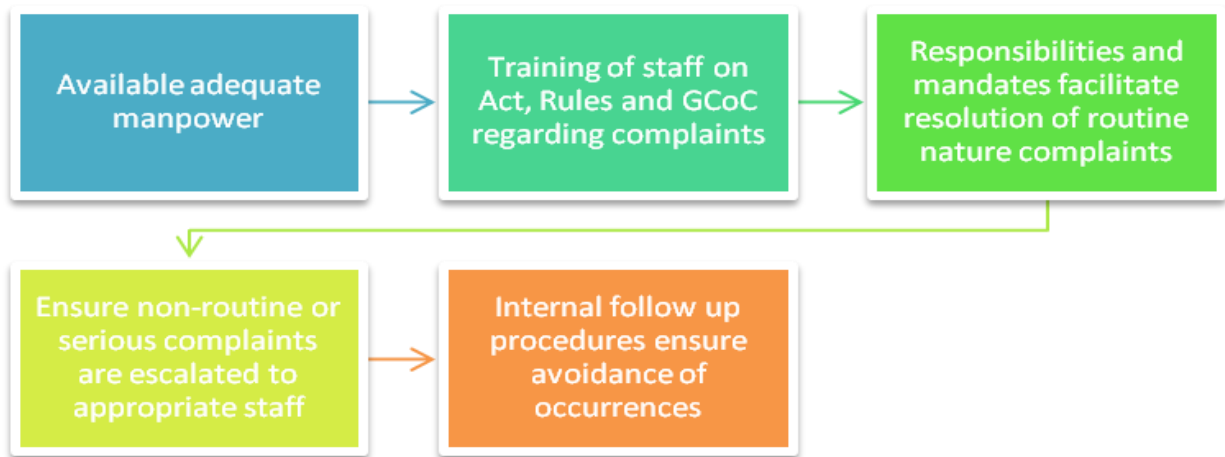
- request the client to lodge the complaint in writing
- maintain a record of complaints for a period of 5 years
- handle complaints in a timely and fair manner (a period of 6 weeks is prescribed)
- takes steps to investigate and respond promptly to complaints
- when the complaint is not resolved to the satisfaction of the client, advise the client of any further steps which may be available to the client in terms of the Act or any other law

Internal Complaints resolution system

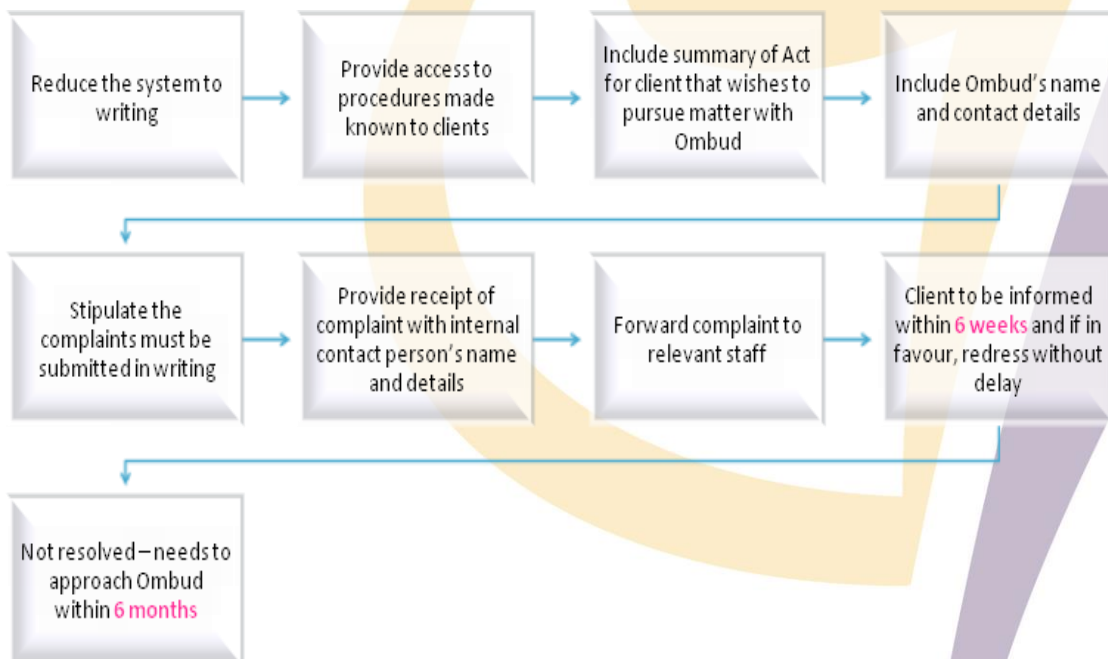
A provider must maintain an internal complaint resolution system based on the following

- Maintenance of a policy outlining the provider's commitment, system and procedures for the internal resolution of complaints
- Transparency and visibility – ensuring that clients have full knowledge of the procedures for resolution of their complaints
- Accessibility – easy access to procedures at any office or branch of the provider open to clients, or through post, fax, telephone or electronic helpdesk support
- Fairness – ensuring the resolution of a complaint can be effected which is fair to the client, the provider and its staff

The internal complaint resolution system and procedures of the provider must be designed to ensure the existence and maintenance of at least the following for purposes of effective and fair resolution of complaints.



- Available adequate manpower
- Training of staff relating to the Act, the Rules and the General Code of Conduct regarding resolution of complaints
- Ensure that responsibilities and mandates are delegated to facilitate resolution of complaints of a routine nature
- Ensure that non-routine or serious complaints are escalated to staff with adequate expertise
- Internal follow-up procedures to ensure avoidance of occurrences giving rise to complaints, or to improve services and complaint systems



The system and procedures must contain arrangements which –

Must

- Reduce the system to writing
- Provide access to the procedures are available to clients at any branch of office, or electronic medium, and that the availability is made known to clients
- Include a clear summary of the Act which will apply when the client, after the dismissal of a complaint, wishes to pursue further proceedings before the Ombud
- And include the Ombudsman's name, address and other contact particulars
- Stipulate that complaints be submitted in writing
- Provide that the receipt of the complaint is acknowledged in writing to the client with details of contact staff and must be recorded internally by the relevant staff
- The complaint to be forwarded to the relevant staff appointed to consider its resolution and that –
 - Complaint receives proper consideration
 - Appropriate management controls are in place to exercise effective control and supervision of the process
 - The client is informed of the result within 6 weeks
 - If the outcome is not favourable to the client
 - Full written reasons must be furnished
 - Advise the client that the complaint can be pursued within 6 months with the Ombud and provide the client with the Ombud's name, address and other contact particulars
 - If the outcome is resolved in favour of the client, ensure that full and appropriate redress is offered without delay

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Simplified extract from the General Code of Conduct part of the FAIS Act regarding the internal complaints handling regulations.