

Introduction to Customer care

Customer care

Learner and continuing professional development resources

Teaching and Learning

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Introduction to Customer care for teachers, managers, Subject Learning Coaches (SLCs) and Advanced Learning Coaches (ALCs)

As a teacher* or manager in the learning and skills sector, you may be aware of certain recent developments in our sector. The Government is committed to improving the nation's skills and competitiveness and has taken into account recent research that outlines areas we need to improve. One of these identified areas is customer care.

Customer care has a particular and distinct relevance in all vocational areas and so must be embedded effectively. In all vocational areas:

- learners need knowledge and understanding of customer care topics and issues as they prepare for the workplace;
- successful learning in customer care involves developing positive attitudes, approaches and behaviours underpinned by personal, learning and thinking skills;
- learners need to develop their skills both in and out of the classroom in real-world, applied situations;
- learners need to be aware of the issues identified in these topics within the context of a changing society and in terms of:
 - increased ethnic diversity;
 - an ageing population and;
 - the diversity and increasing complexity of partnerships, relationships and transactions.

* We use the term 'teaching and learning' and 'teacher' as generic terms to include:

- teaching, training and learning;
- teachers, tutors, trainers, lecturers and instructors in the learning and skills sector.

These Customer care resources will support you in meeting these requirements. They have been designed to be used by non-specialist teachers and therefore an in-depth knowledge of customer care is not necessary in order to use them effectively with learners. Teachers are encouraged to:

- incorporate customer care into teaching that has relevance to their subject or vocational area;
- plan sessions that engage learners by exploring the themes in both a generic and subject-specific way;
- explore the personal values, skills, attitudes and behaviours that underpin success in each of these topics;
- support learners to develop a range of transferable skills, including personal, learning and thinking skills;
- provide a high quality, personalised, learning experience.

Managers are encouraged to co-ordinate and support members of their teams in providing the above opportunities for the learners in their vocational areas.

The Teaching and Learning Programme has been through a number of important cycles in order to keep up to date with the changes in the sector and to ensure that the programme continues to provide the best possible support for all teachers in the learning and skills sector.

SLCs have been important since the beginning of the programme and their role of supporting colleagues through

coaching approaches has been recognised as an important and influential professional development process that has improved teaching and learning within the learning and skills sector. An important development in the programme has been the recent creation of the role of the ALC. ALCs provide a focal point within their organisation by training, mentoring and supporting established and new SLCs and promoting the development of a whole organisation approach to improve the quality of teaching and learning. They also work beyond their own organisation with other ALCs, to establish cross-organisation teaching and learning networks and communities of learning by sharing best practice.

The 'Getting familiar with Customer care' section of the website contains a number of continuing professional development (CPD) activities that SLCs and ALCs can use to support the CPD of colleagues across the learning and skills sector. SLCs or ALCs may find it useful to try one of the CPD activities to support colleagues. For example, you might select the coaching or mentoring approaches to use and match them carefully to your colleagues' needs. Additionally, a group of teachers may raise concerns about their understanding of customer care and you could select an appropriate active learning approach rather than individual peer coaching as the most appropriate method for these circumstances.

Customer care is an important element in all teaching and learning programmes and you will want to use these resources as a focus for helping your colleagues to embed good customer care within the programmes that they teach. You may wish to use the cross-curricular resource as a main focus within one of the CPD events you plan with other colleagues, within your own organisation or across other organisations, or as a continuing theme across a number of networks.

When planning CPD sessions, SLCs and ALCs are encouraged to:

- work with other SLCs in your subject coaching network to share and develop best practice;
- consider how you will work with teachers who may be initially reluctant to work on an unfamiliar theme, or who may not think that the resources are relevant to their work with their learners;
- consider how you might work with colleagues on a one-to-one basis, or in larger groups;
- consider how you can share these resources across your organisation and how to demonstrate their relevance to other subject or vocational areas.

Colleagues may find it useful to discuss the outcomes of the CPD activities or self-study activity with you on an individual basis. You may wish to agree a dedicated time when you can review the outcomes and agree any forward action.

A group of colleagues may wish to adapt the resources to meet their needs. As a SLC or ALC, you may be able to support them in this activity.

You may also wish to discuss these resources with managers to agree how to embed customer care within the organisation, as part of your quality improvement activities.

Leading and developing the process of change within organisations and across networks and learning communities requires good relationship management, and good customer care is an intrinsic element within these developing relationships. You will want to consider the learning points in customer care and apply them in your relationships with individuals in your own organisation and the networks and communities of practice that exist geographically or through electronic networking activities.

Customer care

How do you recognise good customer care?

What does it look like in your subject or vocational area?

Customer care skills are highly valued by employers, and relevant in all subject or vocational contexts. Customer care isn't just about understanding and meeting the needs of customers outside an organisation – it also covers effective relationships with internal customers.

Why does Customer care matter to teachers and learners?

Employers can find it hard to fill job vacancies due to a lack of suitably skilled applicants, and customer handling is cited as one area where skills are lacking. Other generic soft skills such as oral communication, problem-solving and written communication skills were the next most commonly reported gaps. These skills are embedded throughout Customer care so it is an important theme for learners to study in the learning and skills sector.

Our challenge as teachers is to support learners to develop these skills alongside subject or vocational content so they may enhance their employability prospects.

Our challenge as SLCs and ALCs is to support colleagues in their understanding of the pedagogies that will enable effective and inspiring teaching and learning of the customer care skills. The use of active learning approaches helps colleagues motivate and engage learners.

The resources focus on the skills, attitudes and behaviours that feature in good customer care, including communication skills such as active listening, effective questioning, adopting appropriate body language and negotiation skills.

What are the key learning points for Customer care?

Through extensive consultation, these learning points have been developed to address the learning ‘hot spots’ in Customer care. They provide a guide to topics or areas where learners can develop skills, attitudes and behaviours in order to improve their employability.

- Describe what it means to be a customer and why customers are important.
- Identify the features and understand the implications of good and poor customer care.
- Identify the skills, knowledge and attitudes needed to provide good customer care.
- Explore communication in the context of customer care.
- Identify the importance of effective questioning and active listening in the role of customer care.
- Highlight the importance of taking responsibility for meeting customers’ needs.



- Demonstrate how to deal with customers who have concerns.
- Recognise the role of customer care in your occupational area and how good customer care can benefit organisations.

For more information about these learning points, see the DVD-ROM and <http://excellence.qia.org.uk/teachingandlearning>.

Customer care resources: the approach

The Customer care resources use active learning approaches that develop the characteristics of the expert learner by:

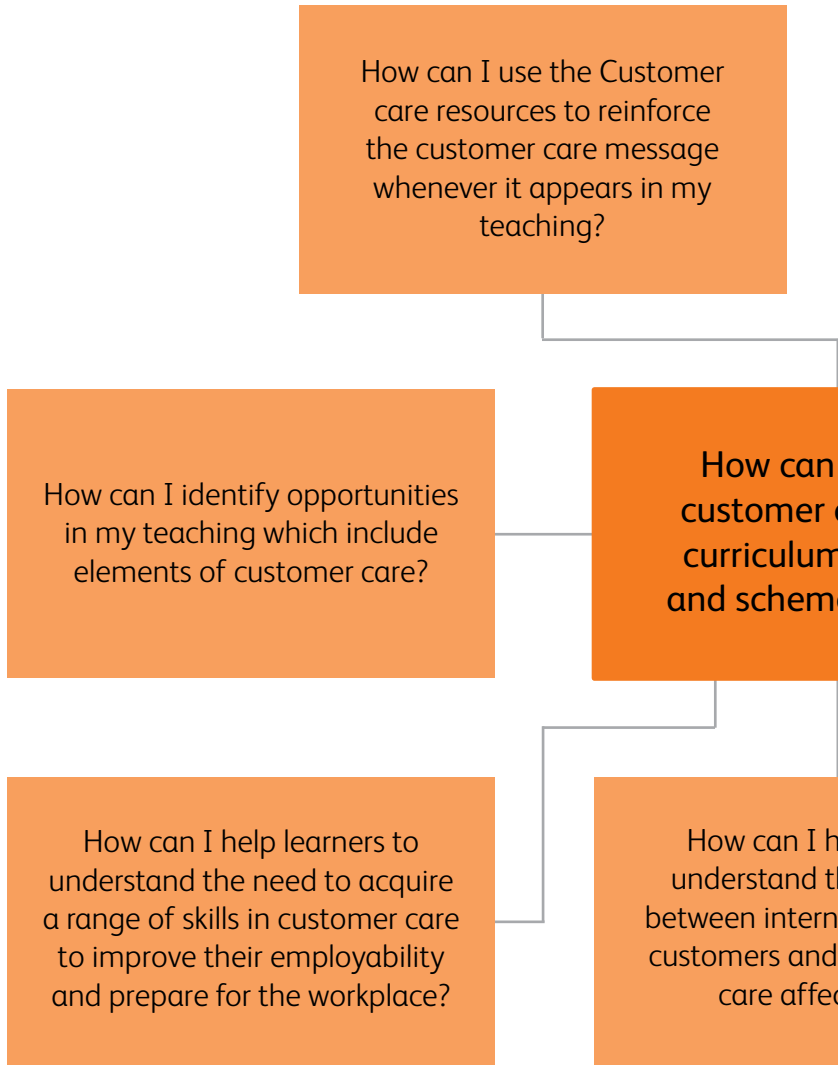
- placing the learner at the centre of the learning process as a partner in learning, rather than as a passive recipient;
- focusing on developing the learners' understanding of the themes by exploring examples drawn from their own experience, interests and aspirations, so learners are supported in contributing to and shaping their own learning; and
- encouraging learners to reflect on their learning and develop an understanding of how they learn best, which informs subsequent learning.

In particular, the activities use four active teaching and learning approaches.

- Assessment for learning – checking learning and generating feedback that informs subsequent learning.
- Co-operative learning – a structured form of group learning that ensures individual learners understand their contribution is vital to the team.

- Experiential learning – engaging learners in an authentic, first-hand experience, allowing them to make discoveries and experiment, construct meaning and develop understanding.
- Embedding literacy, language and numeracy (LLN) – combining the development of literacy, language and numeracy with vocational and other skills.





Please visit the website for an interactive version of this activity which contains links to specific activities and resources to help you embed Customer care in your teaching.

<http://teachingandlearning.qia.org.uk/tlp/xcurricula/cc/abouttheseresou/unlockingtheres/index.html>

Which generic customer care activities will help develop learners' understanding of customer care in my subject or vocational area?

I embed customer care in my planning of work?

Which contextualised customer care activities will help strengthen learners' understanding of customer care in my subject or vocational area?

How can I help learners understand the difference between internal and external customer care and how customer care affects them?

How can I work with colleagues to identify whole organisation approaches to the delivery of the Customer care theme?

Getting started with Customer care: how these resources can help you

These resources contain storyboards, videos and activities to support your work with learners and colleagues to explore the Customer care theme and link the theme to your subject or vocational teaching. There is also a range of CPD resources to help you develop your understanding of the themes and provide suggestions on incorporating them into your teaching.

The following are suggestions of action you may want to take and how the resources can help you.

A teacher from the City of Sunderland College who took part in the pilot said,
“I found it really easy to put together a CPD session from the resources. The CPD activity instructions took you through the session step-by-step and gave you some suggested responses so that I could be fully prepared for the session. From the notes I was able to put together a short PowerPoint to use in the session but other than that I needed to do very little extra preparation.”

Develop your understanding of the customer care theme

Why is Customer care important?

Consider existing subject-specific sessions and identify the links to customer care.

Linking the cross-curricular themes to your subject

This document describes the importance of customer care in your subject or vocational area.

Customer care: the learning points

This document provides additional details behind each of the learning points.

Storyboards, videos and activities

These will help you create your own links between what you already know about your subject or vocational area and the theme of customer care.

Discuss and share the Customer care resources with colleagues and take part in **CPD activities** found in the cross-curricular resource to help you further develop your understanding of the theme.

Use the Customer care resources with your learners.

You could do this by:

using one of the generic **storyboards or videos** to open up the discussion about the theme.

using **key questions** to help learners consider what customer care means to them.

asking learners to provide their own examples demonstrating customer care in:

- a general context; and
- a subject or vocational context details behind each of the learning points.

using one of the dedicated **customer care activities** to explore the theme in more detail.

using one of the **specific activities** to deepen the learners' understanding of the theme in the subject context.

A teacher at Guildford College made use of graphic organisers as well as the Customer care storyboards to engage his mechanical engineering and plumbing learners during the pilot phase.

On being encouraged to review how customer care relates to Construction and the built environment and how they perceive this theme in the context of their subject area, learners enjoyed the opportunity to discuss different viewpoints. One of the learners commented, “It made a nice change because it made me really think about things.” And “I hadn’t thought of a customer being my colleagues and boss before!”



Incorporate customer care into your curriculum planning.

The Customer care theme will be most useful to learners as a thread which runs through your subject. You may already include elements of customer care in your subject or vocational teaching and could develop this further by:

looking for examples of customer care in the subject sessions you already teach.

working with colleagues to identify opportunities to accentuate customer care learning throughout the curriculum.

considering opportunities to explore the theme in more detail in these sessions using the dedicated **customer care activities** in this resource.

working with colleagues to develop customer care projects which are contextualised to your subject or vocational area.

considering opportunities for employers to support the development of learners' customer care skills in their workplace.

Customer care is one of three cross-curricular themes within the Teaching and Learning Programme. The cross-curricular themes are an important aspect of an employability skills profile and they are relevant in most vocational contexts. Enterprise and Health, safety and well-being are also explored and you can find resources for these themes in this pack and on the website:
<http://excellence.qia.org.uk/teachingandlearning>



The contents of this pack can be downloaded from the Excellence Gateway at www.excellencegateway.org.uk

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Resource code: LSIS-TLP-CUS-CAR-09



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