



Unreasonable Behaviour Policy External

Abstract:

This policy establishes guidelines for identifying and managing unreasonable behaviour from service users while protecting colleagues' wellbeing and safety

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Table of Contents

1. Policy principles	4
2. Introduction.....	4
2.1. Purpose.....	4
2.2. Scope.....	5
2.3. Responsibilities/duties (NCFE).....	5
2.4. Definitions	6
2.5. Location.....	6
3. What we define as unreasonable behaviour	7
4. Guidance: our expectations and your rights	7
5. Managing unreasonable behaviour	8
5.1. Early intervention and informal resolution	8
5.2. Managing unreasonable communication and restrictions	8
5.3 Communication restrictions	9
5.4. Written formal warning.....	9
5.5 Restrictions on service	9
5.6 Escalation and further action	10
6. Initial Equality Impact Assessment	10
7. References to associated documents	10
8. Implementation and dissemination	10
9. Monitoring arrangements.....	11
10. Data retention.....	11
11. Contact information.....	11
12. Appendices	12
Appendix A – Independent review panel representation	12

1. Policy principles

We are committed to treating all our customers and stakeholders with dignity and respect, and we expect the same in return. All NCFE colleagues have the right to work in an environment free from abuse, aggression, harassment, and unreasonable behaviour.

The safety and wellbeing of our colleagues is paramount. We will not tolerate behaviour that threatens, intimidates or creates a hostile environment for our colleagues or other stakeholders.

External Stakeholders

This policy will be applied fairly, consistently and objectively to all individuals, regardless of their background or circumstance. Decisions will be based on behaviour, not personal characteristics.

Any actions taken under this policy will be proportionate to the behaviour exhibited. We will use the least restrictive approach necessary to protect colleagues.

We will communicate clearly when behaviour becomes problematic, what changes are needed and when restrictions are applied and why. We recognise that some individuals may have disabilities, mental health conditions or other circumstances that affect their behaviour, and we will always consider reasonable adjustments individual circumstances before decision on any restrictions.

2. Introduction

We are committed to providing high quality, professional service for all centres, learners, employers and stakeholders. We value open communication and aim to respond to enquiries, concerns, and feedback with empathy, professionalism, and timeliness.

We understand that issues relating to qualifications and learner outcomes can be emotive, and that customers may sometimes feel frustrated or dissatisfied. NCFE are committed to listening carefully and supporting the resolution of concerns. However, we also have a duty of care to our colleagues. On rare occasions, an individual's behaviour may hinder our ability to provide our usual level of service safely and effectively. Behaviour that is abusive, threatening, manipulative or otherwise unreasonable can prevent colleagues from carrying out their duties effectively, compromise regulatory compliance, and may negatively affect other centres, learners, and stakeholders

Unreasonable behaviour relates to conduct towards colleagues and service delivery. It is distinct from malpractice, which concerns breaches of assessment or regulatory requirements. Cases involving potential malpractice will be managed in line with our Malpractice Policy.

2.1. Purpose

External Stakeholders:

The purpose of this policy is to outline the standards of behaviour from centres, learners and external stakeholders. It defines what we consider to be unreasonable behaviour and explains the actions we may take to protect colleagues while continuing to deliver our services.

2.2. Scope

This policy applies to all forms of contact with NCFE, including:

- face to face interactions at centre visits or events
- telephone calls
- written correspondence and emails
- online portals and messaging systems
- social media interactions, Live Chat or virtual meetings
- any other communication channels.

2.3. Responsibilities/duties (NCFE)

- **Head of Customer Service** is the policy owner and is responsible for maintaining and periodically reviewing this policy.
- **Regulations team** are responsible for ensuring compliance with regulatory requirements.
- **People Services** are responsible for colleagues' welfare and employment law considerations
- **Policy Responsible manager** is responsible for oversight, monitoring trends, and ensuring consistency in the application of this policy across the organisation.
- **Independent review panel** are responsible for reviewing instances of unreasonable behaviour that have not been able to be resolved informally, for consideration of the application of any sanctions and/or formal warnings.
- **Executive and legal teams** are responsible for supporting this process where unreasonable behaviour continues following applied sanctions and/or formal warnings.
- **QA Managers** are responsible for applying the policy during centre visits.
- **EQA reviewers** are responsible for reporting unreasonable behaviour encountered during centre visits.
- **Data Protection team** are responsible for reporting on excessive and inappropriate requests for subject access requests
- **Line managers** are responsible for reviewing incidents raised by their teams and determining appropriate next steps in line with this policy.
- **All colleagues who deal with customers** are responsible for reporting and recording incidents of unreasonable behaviour from an external source, including logging incidents in CRM and notifying their line manager.

Should any unreasonable behaviour result in a centre closure, then the unplanned centre closure process will come into effect

2.4. Definitions

Word/Acronym	Definition
CST	Customer Service Team
QA	Quality Assurance
PA	Provider Assurance

2.5. Location

This policy is available on the NCFE website under mandatory policies.

3. What we define as unreasonable behaviour

Unreasonable behaviour includes any action, communication or demand that goes beyond acceptable conduct and causes distress, intimidation or harm to a colleague.

Examples include, but are not limited to, the following:

Verbal abuse

- Shouting, swearing, using offensive, derogatory or demeaning language.
- Making personal insults, threats or slurs.
- Using an aggressive tone to belittle or humiliate colleagues.

Threatening, intimidating and physical behaviour

- Threats or acts of violence or intimidation.
- Aggressive gestures or physical contact.
- Damage to property.
- Invasion of a colleague's personal space.

Harassment or bullying

- Repeated targeting of a specific colleague.
- Inappropriate comments or behaviour.
- Any comment that has the purpose or effect of violating a colleague's dignity.
- Any behaviour that is intimidating, hostile, degrading, humiliating or offensive'
- Harassment via emails, phone, social media, or messaging platforms.

Unreasonable demands

- Expected immediate or preferential service outside normal procedures.
- Refusing to accept policy decisions or repeatedly challenging legitimate outcomes.
- Applying pressure to colleagues to make exceptions that breach organisational policy or regulatory requirements.

Unreasonable persistence

- Excessive or repeated Subject Access Requests.
- Repeatedly contacting colleagues after a matter has been addressed.
- Making excessive, overlapping, or vexatious complaints.
- Refusing to use reasonable or designated communication channels.

4. Guidance: our expectations and your rights

We value respectful and constructive communication with all our customers and stakeholders. This helps us deliver the best possible service.

What we ask of you:

- treat all NCFE colleagues with dignity and respect.
- communicate concerns or complaints calmly and clearly.
- avoid any behaviour that is abusive, threatening, intimidating, or otherwise unreasonable.

Unreasonable behaviour can affect our ability to deliver services and may impact other customers. Our colleagues have the right to work in a safe, respectful environment.

If behaviour becomes problematic:

- we will explain why the behaviour is unacceptable and what needs to change.
- you will be given an opportunity to adjust your behaviour.
- if the behaviour continues or is serious (such as threatening or intimidating), we may issue a formal warning in extreme cases, we may restrict or suspend services and/or support to protect our colleagues and maintain service quality.

Your rights:

- you will always be informed if restrictions are applied, including the reasons for this.
- you will have the opportunity to respond and share your perspective.
- we will consider individual circumstances and make reasonable adjustments where appropriate.

5. Managing unreasonable behaviour

5.1. Early intervention and informal resolution

If behaviour raises concern but is considered minor, NCFE will aim to resolve the matter informally. The relevant colleague or line manager will:

- contact you and your centre to explain why the behaviour is inappropriate
- clarify expectations for future communication
- provide an opportunity for behaviour to change.,

All incidents will be recorded appropriately within CRM by the colleague with the support of their line manager if required.

5.2. Managing unreasonable communication and restrictions

Where behaviour during a telephone call, online meeting, email, letter, social media interaction, or other communication becomes unreasonable, abusive, threatening, intimidating, or prevents the matter from being dealt with constructively, NCFE colleagues may take appropriate action to manage the interaction and protect colleagues from unacceptable behaviour.

Immediate actions

Where appropriate, a colleague may:

- advise the individual that the communication will be ended if the behaviour continues.
- end a telephone call or online meeting where the behaviour continues or is particularly serious.
- cease responding to communications that are abusive, repetitive, or unreasonable where the substantive issue has already been addressed.
- direct the individual to an appropriate alternative contact, communication channel, or process.

- record the behaviour and any action taken.

Where behaviour is particularly serious, including threats, abuse, intimidation, harassment, or discriminatory conduct, communication may be ended immediately without prior informal intervention.

5.3 Communication restrictions

Where unreasonable behaviour continues despite informal intervention, NCFE may refer the issue to an independent panel of colleagues, who may apply formal restrictions to future communications. Any restriction will be proportionate, reasonable, and based on the nature and frequency of the behaviour.

Restrictions may include:

- requiring communication through a specified channel.
- limiting the frequency of contact.
- requiring communication through a single nominated contact.
- restricting communication to written correspondence only.
- specifying agreed contact times or communication arrangements.

Any restrictions will be communicated in writing and reviewed periodically where appropriate. Restrictions will not prevent an individual from raising a legitimate complaint, appeal, safeguarding concern, whistleblowing concern, or other matter through the appropriate process.

5.4. Written formal warning

A warning issued under this policy is intended to address unreasonable behaviour, clarify expected standards of communication and explain the potential measures that may be applied if the behaviour continues. A warning does not constitute a formal sanction

Where appropriate, a formal warning may be issued by an independent panel of colleagues.

The warning letter will include:

- specific examples of the behaviour of concern.
- the impact on colleagues, services, or operations.
- the expected standards of behaviour moving forward.
- the consequences should the behaviour continue.
- information about the individual's right to respond.

A copy of any communication will be retained within CRM.

5.5 Restrictions on service

Where behaviour remains unreasonable despite previous interventions, or poses a significant risk to colleagues, operations, resources, or the effective delivery of services, NCFE, through referral to an independent panel of colleagues, may restrict or suspend access to certain services.

Restrictions may include:

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- suspension of non-essential services or interactions.
- restricting access to specific services where this is necessary and proportionate.
- requiring interactions to take place through agreed arrangements or appointment-based contact.
- any other reasonable and proportionate measures necessary to protect colleagues and ensure the effective delivery of services.

The individual will be informed in writing of:

- the restrictions being applied.
- the reasons for the restrictions.
- the duration of the restrictions or the review arrangements.
- how they may respond or appeal.

All actions taken under this section will be proportionate, fair, reasonable, and considerate of individual circumstances.

5.6 Escalation and further action

Where the colleague or manager dealing with the matter has a conflict of interest, is personally involved, or is the subject of the behaviour, the matter should be transferred to an appropriate independent manager or colleague.

Serious incidents

Threatening, abusive, discriminatory, harassing or potentially criminal behaviour should be escalated promptly to the appropriate internal function and where necessary external authorities

If, following sanctions being applied and/or a formal warning being issued the unreasonable behaviour continues, NCFE may refer the issue to our Executive and/or Legal team for further advice and action.

6. Initial Equality Impact Assessment

An Initial Equality Impact Assessment has been completed for this policy, and no concerns were raised.

7. References to associated documents

- Complaints and Feedback Policy

8. Implementation and dissemination

This policy will be available on the NCFE website for centres and customers. Following approval this policy will be communicated via internal communication and disseminated by the responsible manager.

9. Monitoring arrangements

This policy will be reviewed annually for the first year and thereafter on a biennial basis, where consideration will be made for any ad hoc reviews due to legislative changes or regulatory requirements.

All incidents will be recorded in CRM with standardised categorisation. Trends will be reviewed to ensure consistency and to identify emerging risks.

10. Data retention

Any data that is gathered, processed, or deleted due to this policy will follow NCFE Data Retention Policy and associated procedures

11. Contact information

If you have any queries about the contents of the policy, please contact:

Email: customersupport@ncfe.org.uk

Post: NCFE

Q6, Quorum Park

Benton Lane

Newcastle upon Tyne

12. Appendices

Appendix A – Independent review panel representation

Area of the business to be represented at the panel
Customer Support team
Provider Assurance team
Group Sales team
People Services
Delivery team (EQA/Provider Development/Assessment Delivery as appropriate)
Finance team
Data protection team