

Accommodation Essex Communications Policy

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Accommodation Essex Communications Policy January 2019

Introduction

Effective communication is an essential tool for ensuring that staff within Accommodation Essex, are fully informed about the performance of the accommodation business, understand what is required of them, and have the opportunity to contribute to business developments.

Excellent customer service is also dependant on effective communication; how we respond to our customers, forms the first and often lasting impression on how we deliver services. It is, therefore, essential that we create a positive first impression. Communication is a collective responsibility of all members of staff through their everyday tasks and interactions.

Scope of the Policy

This policy aims to outline the structures for communication, the standards that are expected in relation to communication, the related University policies, and legal issues. It will cover both internal communications within Accommodation Essex and external communication with customers, University departments, sections, and the general public.

Aims and Objectives

Effective communication is essential so that we can:

- Ensure staff are fully informed about the performance of Accommodation Essex
- Ensure staff can contribute fully to business developments
- Ensure staff understand the underlying reasons for business decisions
- Ensure staff are empowered to make appropriate decisions when responding to customers
- Create a great first impression
- Offer customers a high standard of service in an appropriate manner
- Ensure feedback from customers can be received and responded to in the appropriate manner
- Add value to the customer experience by knowing our customers history with us
- View every interaction as an opportunity to exceed expectation

Effective communication is achieved when:

- The structures for communications with staff and customers are in place and published
- The expected standards for the delivery of communications are in place and being implemented
- Methods of communication being used are effective and appropriate for the purpose of the communication
- Feedback from customers obtained formally and informally confirms that effective communication is being achieved
- Feedback from staff obtained by survey and through performance and development reviews confirms that effective communication is being achieved and that ideas are shared
- Staff are sufficiently informed to enable them to contribute to the business performance of Accommodation Essex

Communication Channels

These are the principal channels of communication for both internal and external purposes:

Meetings/briefings/face-to-face
Consultative groups
Policy and procedure documents
Staff conference
Focus groups
Noticeboards

Email
Telephone
Letters
Website
Newsletters
Electronic / Social media

Communicating with Operational Staff

Many members of staff do not have regular access to a computer and, therefore, are unable to check the latest information on our website, or their University email accounts. It is the responsibility of line managers to ensure that information is passed to such staff in a timely manner, either verbally, or in print.

Information Exchange

Communication flow is essential to make sure that we keep our staff fully informed with regard to Accommodation Essex, ECS, and University developments. Wherever possible, communication is open and transparent; occasionally there is a need to convey confidential information and it is essential that confidentiality is maintained.

Line managers have a responsibility to cascade information and policy communications to their staff and teams.

Line managers also have a responsibility to take forward issues raised by their staff where this is appropriate. This could be when staff have a concern that cannot be addressed by the line manager, has a detrimental effect on working methods or service delivery. Staff may also have constructive suggestions to make and these should be taken forward to the appropriate forum.

Staff that represents Accommodation Essex in meetings and groups must feedback key information to the appropriate forum.

General Conduct in Communication

Communication has a significant influence on the quality of service offered by Accommodation Essex staff. It is, therefore, expected that staff will adopt a constructive attitude at all times.

Negative comments made about other individuals or groups lowers morale generally and damages the reputation of the service and/or University. Such comments can be overheard or communicated to the wrong personnel leading to a perception of poor or unprofessional service in the wider community. It can also be damaging to working relationships.

Where criticism has to be levied this should be carried out in a constructive manner; communicated only to those to whom it applies and should never be communicated anonymously.

Staff that conduct extensive face to face communication will receive training on the relevant skills essential to handling queries effectively, including active listening, resolving conflict, and assertiveness.

It is the responsibility of all staff to follow this code of conduct and to encourage/correct colleagues who are not doing so.

Electronic Communication

The University uses email as the primary means of communication with students and has its own network to support this service. The University website is used to communicate with and provide an information resource for current and prospective students.

All communications by email must be written professionally with correct spelling and grammatical construction i.e. this is not the same as texting. Staff should be aware that email is not absolutely confidential and personal names should not be used on the subject line.

Where staff have an email account to use as part of their duties they should access their email on a regular basis and at least once per day whilst at work. When staff are not in the office, the Out of Office facility should be used.

“All staff “email is not to be used unless authorised by a member of the Senior Management Team.

All student email and bulk student emails (e.g. emails to all residents of a particular accommodation area) are possible through the Kinetics software. Staff must not use this facility unless authorised by a member of the Senior Management Team.

Email is governed by the Data Protection Act (GDPR from May 2018) and staff should make sure that they abide by the University’s policy on data protection. This can be viewed at:

http://www.essex.ac.uk/records_management/policies/data_protection_policy.aspx

The University of Essex also provides a good practice data protection guide for staff, which can be found at:

http://www.essex.ac.uk/records_management/help/dpa_guidance.aspx

Social Networking Sites

Students use social networking extensively and Accommodation Essex uses these sites to facilitate communication between students and to students, where this is appropriate and authorised.

Social media comes in an increasing number of forms, Accommodation Essex, particularly uses Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram, which can be used to engage with users and provide time-sensitive messaging.

The University of Essex social media policy can be found on the University’s website; <https://www.essex.ac.uk/staff/marketing-and-communications-support/social-media-support>

Freedom of Information Act

The University has a policy to deal with requests for information made under the Freedom of Information Act. The policy can be found at:

https://www1.essex.ac.uk/records_management/laws/freedom_of_information_act.aspx

Contact with Third Parties

The University has a policy to deal with contact with third parties such as parents. This contact may be face to face, by telephone, email, or in writing. This policy can be found at:

http://www.essex.ac.uk/records_management/policies/third_party_contact.aspx

Media Contact

Any approach/request made from media representatives, including television, radio, press or internet, for comment/interview should be forwarded to the Communications Office who will be able to assist you. Please contact them on the following email comms@essex.ac.uk or by calling 01206 872400.

Equality and Diversity

The University has an [Equality and Diversity policy and strategy](#) which provides a holistic framework to help us fulfil both our legal obligations and the core values set out in our Vision 2015-18.

Each member of staff has a responsibility to follow University guidelines in relation to equality and diversity in all communication with customers and colleagues. Our vision is to support everyone as an individual and to support individual values by embracing equality and diversity. Staff must make sure that no individual will be discriminated against on the grounds of race, gender, disability, religion or belief system, their sexuality, or age. Every effort will be made to make sure equality, dignity, and respect when communicating both internally and externally.

Review

The Communication Policy will be reviewed every year by the Senior Management team of Accommodation Essex to make sure it continues to meet the business needs.

Deputy Director ECS (Services), Accommodation Essex

Appendix A

Service Standard

We strive to offer the highest standard of communication to all our customers. When you contact us you can expect our staff to be courteous and helpful. You can also expect the information we provide you with to be accurate and comprehensive.

So you know what you can expect when you contact us, we have developed a set of **Service Standards**. These are the minimum levels of service you can expect Accommodation Essex staff to abide by.

If you write to us:

- We will respond to your letter within **Five working days** from the date we receive it
- If we cannot answer your enquiry during this time we will let you know who is dealing with your enquiry and when you can expect a full response

If you email us:

- We will respond to your email within **Five working days** from the date we receive it
- If we cannot answer your enquiry during this time we will let you know who is dealing with your enquiry and when you can expect a full response

If you telephone us:

- During office hours, we aim to answer all calls within 4 rings
- Upon answering, we will tell you which department you have reached and the name of the person that you are speaking to.

If you visit us:

- If you have made an appointment, we will endeavor to see you on time

If we visit you:

- Our staff will be wearing photo identification or will have it available to show you
- If making a scheduled visit to you, e.g. termly inspections, we will give you prior notice by email. If the visit is in response to an urgent matter such as a notified maintenance issue it is not always possible to give advance notice of a visit.

These service standards may change during particularly busy periods, however, we will endeavor to deal with your query as soon as possible.

Your Views on Accommodation Essex

Feedback about the service you have received from Accommodation Essex is very important to us. Using your feedback is the way we review and improve our service, so if you have either received excellent customer service from us or are dissatisfied with any aspect of your contact with us, we want to hear from you.

If you wish to make a comment on the service that you have received you can do this at http://www.essex.ac.uk/accommodation/contact_us/default.aspx

If you want to make a complaint:

If you have any concerns or complaints about the service you have received from us, you should raise them with a member of staff in the Student Services Hub or in the Area Office at University Quays, The Meadows, The Copse or University Square (Southend) at your earliest opportunity. We will always try to resolve your complaint quickly and informally. However, if your complaint remains unresolved, the link below provides more information about our complaints policy.

http://www.essex.ac.uk/accommodation/contact_us/complaints.aspx

Alternatively, you can write to us at:

**Accommodation Essex
University of Essex
First Floor, Silberrad Student Centre
Wivenhoe Park
Colchester CO4 3SQ**

The University also has a separate complaints procedure for complaints that remain unresolved. Further information regarding the university complaints procedure can be found at:

<http://www.essex.ac.uk/about/governance/policies/complaints.aspx>

The Students' Union offers an independent advice service and you may consult

with them if you wish to discuss any problem or complaint which you feel is not being resolved. Further information is available from their website at:

<https://www.essexstudent.com/advice/>

Acceptable Behaviour

We aim to treat all customers with respect and courtesy and we expect a similar consideration to be shown to our staff.

VC January 2019