Background

Understanding and responding to customers is an important part of ensuring businesses meet expectations. Giving and receiving feedback can be a little uncomfortable but helps in sustaining and developing a business.

It may be something that your organisation is not used to doing, or has not been built into your existing business processes. Understanding what is working, and what is not, is crucial in allowing your business to respond and grow, and customer opinions form a crucial part of this.

At The University of Manchester we rely on a variety of feedback from students, funders and other stakeholders to shape what we do and how we do it. We have been gathering feedback from our suppliers over the past two years as part of this process – you can find out more about this through our web pages:

www.procurement.manchester.ac.uk

From this feedback we know that 76% of SMEs agree that customer feedback is important to them. However, whilst many tell us they are committed to a range of actions to improve communications with customers, there is still a gap between this commitment and putting action into practice.

This guidance document is designed to help our suppliers think about the need to gather customer views and how this can be used to help improve and develop their businesses.

Taking time to understand and act on customer feedback makes business sense:

Taking customer views and opinions seriously can bring a number of business benefits, including:

- Helping to improve your product or service
- Helping to improve customer retention
- Delivering tangible data that can be used to make better business decisions
- Offering the best way to measure customer satisfaction
- Helping to gather market information/trends

Getting Started:

You need to be comfortable that receiving feedback is a positive action, and that you will be able to deal with it in a beneficial way. If you do this pro-actively then the chances are that you will receive constructive responses. There are several simple things that you can do that will give confidence to your customers that you are addressing this important issue:

1

Have a meaningful process for dealing with customer feedback

Consider how and when you want your customers to provide feedback to you. Customers need to clearly understand the process of how you will engage with them and the indicative timescales involved. This might be something you do informally, or face-to-face depending on the size of your business. If you have the resources you may want to consider a more formal approach such as publishing the feedback process on your website; this could include a flow chart of how you deal with customer feedback.

2

Understand what you are trying to measure and what you will do with the responses you receive

There is no point in simply gathering data if it does not help you improve what you do. Thought needs to be given to the right metrics for your business; some of the more commonly used measures include:

- Expectation v Perception: did your customer get what they thought they would - or was it better?

- Likelihood to recommend to others: was your customer really happy with what you provided?

- Customer Experience v Ideal Experience: how did your business compare to the ideal or other suppliers?

- Overall Satisfaction: how happy was your customer with what you provided?

- Specific Satisfaction: how happy was your customer with your approach and the individual aspects of your actual delivery?

- Future Customer: will you get repeat or on going business?

3

Carry out a customer survey and publish the findings

You may want to undertake a formal customer survey to find out what your customers think. Both positive and critical feedback can be of use especially if it is linked to key areas of your business that you think may need to be improved or changed. Keeping your request simple will encourage customers to participate and there are a number of on-line, and visually pleasing, tools that can make this relatively straightforward. Publishing results will give customers confidence and positive feedback can be used in marketing and communications.

4

Taking action

There is no point gathering feedback if nothing changes as a result.

Resources to Help:

There are a wide variety of on-line resources to help with customer feedback.

We support our suppliers and welcome feedback from them; you can find more details on our webpages (see link in the background section). Here are some good practice ideas that they have told us about how customer feedback is sought and dealt with:

- "Customer satisfaction measurement is critical to whether we have met our delivery, and responses from the end user are fed back into the review process for analysis and consideration. This will also give feedback into our staff training programme, particularly in respect of our customer service training module which is targeted at ensuring more empathy with the end users of the building on which we are working."

- "We are not a big company so all our customers have direct access to customer feedback if they require it, from to our MD and supervisory staff. We encourage and develop relationships with our customers that extend beyond the simple logging of calls and supply of services."

- "Because of the size of our company, two people, we deal with customer feedback on a personal basis."