

CASE STUDY

MULTIPLE BENEFITS FOR STUDENTS AND STAFF FOLLOWING CUSTOMER SERVICE EXCELLENCE CERTIFICATION

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The University of London International Programmes is a unique organisation working in the field of distance and flexible learning. It can trace its history back to 1858, making it the first to recognise the need for, and deliver, distance and flexible learning across the world. From its origins, the student experience has, and continues to remain, at the heart of all its operations.

Today, the University of London International Programmes, an academic body of the University of London, offers over 100 undergraduate and postgraduate distance and flexible learning study programmes for 51,000 students in 180 countries. These programmes are developed in collaboration with the University of London's prestigious Member Institutions, including University College London (UCL), King's College London (KCL) and the London School of Economics and Political Science (LSE).

Students are enabled by the International Programmes to study at their own pace, in their own time, and to take examinations through a worldwide independent network of authorised examination centres. Some programmes enable students to sit examinations at various times throughout the academic year. More recently, unique partnerships have been established with other, third-party bodies, including the Association of Certified Chartered Accountants (ACCA), to deliver a Masters in Professional Accountancy.

This flexibility, which firmly prioritises the wide-ranging needs of its students, is facilitated by a strong, student-first culture and a robust IT provision – enabling worldwide, 24/7 access to services and learning resources. Because of its global reach, staff work hard to overcome unique issues and barriers of distance in order to meet the needs of students and ensure they feel supported in their studies.



The University of London International Programmes has always eagerly adopted new technologies to ensure continuity and continuous improvement in delivery, communication and the whole user experience. Specific examples include the provision of online enquiry management, live chat services and the facility for student feedback – including star ratings – reported as part of the quality assurance process and continuous improvement workshops.

WHY UNIVERSITY OF LONDON INTERNATIONAL PROGRAMMES SOUGHT CUSTOMER SERVICE EXCELLENCE CERTIFICATION

With greater competition in the marketplace, the University of London International Programmes wanted to reinforce its position as a world leader in its field, and felt that Customer Service Excellence certification would help support this objective.

Additionally, the Competition and Markets Authority guidance, published in 2015, laid out how higher education institutions needed to comply with consumer law to ensure students' rights. The University of London International Programmes recognises the benefits of this guidance as complementing one of its key missions, which is to ensure that customer satisfaction remains a core part of its offering.



The University of London International Programmes has always focused on the student experience. The process of Customer Service Excellence certification enabled the University to look at its delivery from an external perspective. This proved very helpful in providing a benchmark for further improvements and engaging staff in delivering and celebrating the quality of our student services.

The certification award is also a tangible outcome, testifying to our commitment in providing the best possible experience for our 51,000 students in more than 180 countries worldwide. Having got this far, all staff members across the University of London International Programmes are excited and committed to continuing the journey for further excellence.

CRAIG O'CALLAGHAN

Deputy Chief Executive and Chief Operating Officer, University of London International Programmes



SGS

WHY SGS?

The University of London International Programmes chose SGS for its international profile, and felt that the SGS approach matched its own organisational focus.

IMPLEMENTING CUSTOMER SERVICE EXCELLENCE: THE PROCESS

Although the University of London International Programmes journey to gaining certification was complex, due primarily to the international nature of the organisation, the audit process went smoothly.

SGS provided quality information that was well articulated by its auditors, and the University was therefore able to provide the necessary information in a timely manner, despite the complexity of its worldwide operation involving large volumes of data across many departments.

In providing the required information, staff overcame any barriers with enthusiasm, positivity and thorough, timely responses; valuing their contribution to the process. Alongside the information gathering, they worked creatively to prepare tailored documentation, taking pride in their completion. This enthusiasm extended to the day of the audit itself.

The certification process was also aided by universal stakeholder buy-in, with everyone understanding that working towards certification acted as a clear focal point for driving improvements

For the University of London International Programmes, the Customer Service Excellence standard applies to every aspect of delivering services throughout the entire student lifecycle, including:

- Enquiries from prospective, current and previous students
- Admissions, registration and examinations
- Student engagement and administrative support
- Creation, improvement and maintenance of technology required to deliver services



- Marketing and related communications across all administrative student lifecycle areas.

HOW THE CERTIFICATION HAS BENEFITTED THE ORGANISATION

Following certification, there has been a focus on embedding the customer excellence message within the University of London International Programmes, with a view to examining further data and feedback over the coming months, which will be evaluated to identify areas requiring further improvements.

In a short space of time, multiple improvements have already resulted across all aspects of the student lifecycle, also impacting on other stakeholders, such as Member Institutions with whom the programmes are delivered worldwide, and its international network of independent Teaching Institutions that teach programmes preparing students for a University of London award.

Certification has reinforced and acknowledged the quality commitment of all staff and created a clear focus for future priorities, as well as considerably boosting morale.

A mandatory in-house Customer Service Excellence programme is supported by a Customer Service Excellence Champion Group, responsible for assisting with training and day-to-day implementation.

Three internal assessors have also been appointed to prepare for the annual assessment by SGS. At the time of writing, consideration is also being given to introducing a Customer Service Excellence team award to recognise commitment. Training tailored to the specific needs of departments is also being developed to complement more general training.

The University of London International Programmes would also like to see the Customer Service Excellence agenda expanded to incorporate its international network of independent Teaching Institutions.

ABOUT SGS

SGS is the world's leading inspection, verification, testing and certification company. SGS is recognised as the global benchmark for quality and integrity. With more than 90,000 employees, SGS operates a network of over 2,000 offices and laboratories around the world.

We provide competitive advantage, drive sustainability and deliver trust. At SGS, we are continually pushing ourselves to deliver innovative services and solutions that help our customers move their businesses forward.

For more information, call the Business Enhancement team on 0800 900 094, visit www.sgs.co.uk/cse or email uk.nowisthetime@sgs.com