

Complaints Policy

V25.1

Complaints Policy	
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Contact Email	Support@VQA.org
Contact Phone Number	03333583344
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Policy/Document Relates to	Apprenticeship Assessment Provision, Awarding Provision, Endorsed Provision, Corporate
Policy/Document is for the use of	Learners, Apprentices, Training Providers, Recognised Centres, VQA Employees, Third Parties,
Should be read in conjunction with	Appeals Policy, Malpractice and Maladministration Policy, Sanctions Policy

Introduction

This policy explains how VQA handles feedback, concerns and formal complaints. It applies to recognised centres, training providers, learners, apprentices, employers and others who use our products or services.

We are committed to delivering a high standard of service, addressing concerns promptly and using feedback to drive continuous improvement. If your experience has fallen short of expectations, we encourage you to let us know so that we can fully understand the issue and take appropriate action.

Choosing the right route

VQA will review each submission to determine whether it should be handled as a formal complaint, an Expression of Dissatisfaction (EOD), or through another relevant policy. We will explain the appropriate route and the reasons for our decision.

For routine queries, concerns or service escalations, contacting the relevant team by phone or email will usually provide the quickest route to resolution. This includes requests for information, administrative corrections and clarification of processes.

A formal complaint is appropriate where you believe that your experience has negatively affected a learner, or that the service provided directly by VQA, or by a recognised centre or training provider within our remit, has fallen below the standard reasonably expected. This route should be used where the matter requires formal investigation or remains unresolved through our usual contact channels. Serious concerns may be submitted directly without first seeking informal resolution.

Where a formal complaint has been received, our Customer Service team may offer a meeting, telephone conversation or another approach to resolve the matter. This will not prevent you from continuing through the formal complaints process if the concern remains unresolved.

Where all relevant issues have been fully investigated and the complaints and internal review processes have concluded, VQA may close the matter. We will explain our final position and any external routes available. Further correspondence on the same issues may not receive a response unless significant new evidence is provided.

Concerns relating to assessment appeals, malpractice or maladministration will be directed through the relevant policy.

Responsibility and review

The Customer Service Manager is responsible for maintaining this policy and overseeing the complaints process. In their absence, the Head of Operational Services or another member of the Senior Leadership Team will arrange suitable cover.

We review this policy annually and sooner where feedback, operational changes or regulatory guidance make an update necessary.

Recognised centres and training providers must make relevant staff, learners, apprentices and employers aware of the complaint's arrangements. Recognised centres must have their own complaints procedure.

Feedback and expressions of dissatisfaction

Feedback includes compliments, suggestions and concerns about our products or services. The purpose of the EOD process is to ensure customer concerns are acknowledged promptly, investigated thoroughly and, wherever possible, resolved before progressing to the Formal Complaints Process. We record feedback and EODs and use them to identify improvements.

A formal complaint requires a structured investigation and a written outcome under this policy. We will explain how we have classified a concern and why. ess

Who can complain and what we can investigate

Centres, training providers, learners, apprentices, employers and other service users may complain about matters within VQA's responsibilities. Examples include poor service, unreasonable delays, failure to act, unprofessional conduct, unfair treatment, or failure to follow published policies or procedures without a reasonable explanation.

Complaints about VQA

You may complain about products or services provided directly by VQA, including the delivery, management, assessment and quality assurance of qualifications and end-point assessments. Satellite centres should normally submit complaints through their main recognised centre.

Complaints about a recognised centre or training provider

If your concern relates to a recognised centre's delivery of a VQA qualification or endorsed course, you should complete that centre's complaints process first. Please provide its final response and details of the steps you have taken when contacting VQA.

We will consider matters within our awarding responsibilities, including whether the centre has followed its procedures and whether the concern affects assessment quality or validity. The action available to VQA may depend on your registration status and the nature of the provision.

A learner undertaking a VQA qualification or endorsed course of learning with a recognised centre may make a complaint to VQA. However, a learner may only make a complaint if they have complained directly to the recognised centre, have exhausted the centre's complaints route, and remain unhappy with the response received.

A learner must have fully engaged with a recognised centre's complaints process before contacting VQA and must be able to provide the details of having done so.

Concerns about an apprentice's on-programme training should be raised with the training provider. VQA's role as an end-point assessment organisation does not include delivering that training. Where the apprentice is also taking a VQA qualification, we may consider matters relating to that qualification within our remit.

Matters handled through another route

We will explain if another process is more appropriate and, where possible, direct you to the relevant organisation or policy.

• Assessment decisions: use the Appeals Policy to challenge an assessment result or the procedures used to reach it. A complaint about service or conduct is considered separately from a request to change an assessment decision.

• Malpractice, maladministration: use the Malpractice and Maladministration Policy and reporting form to report suspected malpractice or maladministration. This includes concerns raised by current or former centre employees.

• Matters outside our control: for example, funding decisions or changes to an assessment plan made by another organisation.

• Disagreement with a policy alone: we will record this as feedback. A concern that a policy has been applied incorrectly, unfairly or inconsistently may still be considered as a complaint.

We will not normally reinvestigate a matter that has already completed this complaints process unless significant new evidence is provided. We will explain any decision not to investigate and any remaining review route. A complaint should not be rejected solely because its outcome is unlikely to change VQA's operations.

Where a matter is connected with legal proceedings or regulatory action, we will explain whether we can investigate it and whether any part of the complaint needs to be deferred.

When to submit a complaint

Please raise concerns as soon as possible. We normally consider complaints made within 12 months of the issue arising. We may consider a later complaint where there is a reasonable explanation, such as ill health or a delay caused by VQA. We will consider whether an investigation remains possible and what is fair to everyone involved.

Submitting a formal complaint

Use the official VQA Complaint Form to submit a formal complaint. You may ask someone to complete it on your behalf. If you need help accessing or completing the form, contact Customer Service at support@VQA.org.

Include your contact details, the relevant centre or training provider, qualification or assessment details, what happened and when, the effect on you or any learners, steps already taken, the outcome you are seeking and any supporting evidence. Useful evidence may include email threads, relevant records and a timeline of events.

If you raise a formal complaint by another method, we will explain the form requirement and help you access it. The formal process and its acknowledgement timescale begin when the completed Complaint Form is received.

Concerns submitted through other channels will not be accepted.

Should the complainant be dissatisfied with the conduct of the complaint investigator during the investigation, they may reasonably request that another appropriate member of the team takes over the investigation and/or ongoing communication.

Any change in investigator may affect the original investigation timescale, and this should be clearly explained to the complainant at the point the change is agreed.

Confidentiality

We will handle complaints sensitively and share information only where needed to investigate, respond or meet our responsibilities. To investigate an individual complaint about a centre fairly, we may need to identify the complainant and share relevant details with that centre. When we approach a centre regarding a learner's complaint, we request consent to share information with the relevant parties.

If you wish to report suspected malpractice or maladministration anonymously, refer to the Malpractice and Maladministration Policy. Anonymous concerns may limit the evidence available and our ability to provide an individual outcome.

Acknowledgement and information gathering

We will acknowledge receipt of the completed Complaint Form within 3 working days. The acknowledgement will explain the next steps and identify any further information required.

You will have 3 working days from acknowledgement to provide supporting evidence. Please tell us promptly if you need more time. We will consider whether late evidence can be accepted fairly and whether it affects the investigation timetable.

Where we request further information or clarification before opening the investigation, the 10-working-day investigation period starts once the requested information has been received. We will confirm the investigation start date and expected response date. If requested information is not received within 10 working days, we may close the complaint and explain that a new Complaint Form is needed for further consideration.

Investigation

A suitably competent member of staff who was not involved in the matters complained about will investigate. They will review the complaint, relevant records and supporting evidence, assess whether policies or service standards were met, and identify any action needed.

We aim to complete the investigation within 10 working days of the confirmed start date. If more time is needed, we will explain why and provide an updated response date.

Please note: For VQA Construction, the investigation SLA remains as 28 working days.

Complaint outcomes

We will provide a written response explaining our findings, the reasons for the decision, any action to put matters right, and the available review route. The outcome will be one of the following:

- Upheld: the evidence supports the complaint in full.
- Partially upheld: the evidence supports some parts of the complaint, but not all.
- Not upheld: the evidence does not support the complaint.

The outcome is based on the findings. The remedy requested does not, by itself, determine whether a complaint is upheld.

The complainant is required to tell us within 10 working days of receiving the outcome if you wish to request an internal review. If we receive no response, we will close the complaint. Closure does not remove any external route that may be available.

Complaints alongside another investigation

Where the same issues are being considered through an appeal, malpractice investigation or another process, we may defer the overlapping parts of the complaint to avoid conflicting investigations. We will explain the reason, what happens next and any effect on timescales.

A complaint about the conduct of the investigation, staff behaviour, or the fair and consistent application of procedures may be considered while the other investigation is ongoing. We will explain any effect on that investigation. Once it ends, we will tell you how to request consideration of any outstanding complaint.

Requesting an internal review

An independent internal review is carried out by someone not involved in the original investigation to assess whether the complaint was handled fairly, relevant evidence was considered and the outcome was reasonable.

If you remain dissatisfied, explain why you are requesting a review and identify any relevant evidence or aspect of the investigation you believe has not been properly considered. The Customer Service Manager will review the complaint where they did not conduct the original investigation and will issue VQA's final internal decision. Upon request for further escalation, in their absence, the Head of Operational Services or another member of the Senior Leadership Team will arrange suitable cover.

The secondary review allows 10 working days to conduct further investigations and prepare a written response.

External escalation

If you remain dissatisfied after the internal process, you may contact the appropriate regulator where the awarding organisation, qualification and subject matter fall within its remit. A regulator does not automatically provide a further appeal against every complaint outcome.

For qualifications regulated by Ofqual in England, see the current Complaints to Ofqual guidance: https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/ofqual-complaints-procedure-guidance/complaints-to-ofqual. Ofqual normally expects completion of the awarding organisation's complaints process, but may consider urgent matters or matters in the wider public interest earlier.

For relevant regulated qualifications in Northern Ireland, refer to CCEA Regulation's current complaints guidance at www.ccea.org.uk. VQA will help identify the appropriate regulator and route for your case.

Unreasonable or abusive communications

We are committed to treating everyone with dignity and respect and expect all interactions to be conducted in the same manner. We may restrict contact where abusive, threatening or unreasonably persistent communications prevent staff from handling matters effectively. Disagreeing with a decision or pursuing an available review is not, by itself, unreasonable behaviour.

Any restrictions will be explained in writing. They may include a named contact, written correspondence only, agreed contact times, or responses limited to significant new information after the process has concluded.

Action following a complaint

Where a complaint identifies shortcomings at a recognised centre, we may require corrective action, increase monitoring or offer support. Where the concerns indicate suspected malpractice or maladministration, these will be considered under our Malpractice and Maladministration Policy. Sanctions may be applied in accordance with our Sanctions Policy.

We will explain relevant findings and the outcome of the complaint, but disclosure of information about sanctions, monitoring or other action will be subject to confidentiality and data protection requirements

We maintain records of complaints, feedback, findings and agreed actions. We use this information to identify trends and improve the development, delivery and award of our qualifications and assessments.

Contact details

Awarding services: support@VQA.org
Apprenticeship Assessment (EPA): apprenticeshipsupport@VQA.org
Telephone: 0333 358 3344
Post: VQA, Crossgate House, Cross Street, Sale, Manchester, M33 7FT

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