

Complaints Policy

Our Policy to Managing Complaints

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1. Introduction

Qualifications Network is a responsible Awarding Organisation. We have a responsibility to ensure that learners have appropriate avenues to achieve. We support this through the design, development, deliver and awarding of qualifications.

Our systems and processes are aligned with our aim, however there will, on occasion, be times when we fail or are perceived to have failed in maintaining a consistent service. Because of this we have established and published our Complaints Policy.

2. Document Review

All Qualifications Network policies are reviewed on a regular basis, usually at least bi-annually. This policy will also be reviewed as required due to feedback from stakeholders or in line with changes in legislation, regulation or industry best practice. A full review will also be undertaken should any issue arise, whether internal or external, that Qualifications Network considers could impact on the way in which malpractice and maladministration is managed.

Feedback may also reach us through:

- EQA Activities
- Team Meetings
- Lessons Learnt Documents
- Non-conformance Reports
- Staff Feedback

The next review date for this policy is shown on the cover page.

3. Document Audience

This policy is intended for all individuals, centres or other third parties who use, or seek to use, the services of Qualifications Network. This will include learners of qualifications offered by approved centres of Qualifications Network, however such learners must first exhaust the complaints procedures of the appropriate centre prior to contacting Qualifications Network.

4. Scope of Document

The Policy covers the process for centres to follow when they feel the need to complain to Qualifications Network.

The policy covers both the Formal and Informal Complaints Procedure.

Where failures in assessment have been identified through the Regulator or through a complaint from a centre, our Appeals Policies shall be implemented.

For Qualifications Network staff this policy should be read in conjunction with the appropriate internal procedures and process map(s).

5. Document Availability

A copy of this document is stored on the Compliance Team/Key Policies and Documents folder in the secure Qualifications Network Microsoft Sharepoint system.

Where necessary, for instance for a short-term contract, a single copy of this document may be issued to individual contractors and other non-direct employees. One may also be issued to other relevant third parties, such as a Regulator, on request.

This policy is also available to all Centres via the secure Centre Log-in area accessed via the Qualifications Network website at: <http://MyQNUK.co.uk>.

6. Resource Requirements

Qualification Network is committed to ensuring that it maintains adequate resources to ensure that it is able to meet all of its Conditions of Recognition and other Regulatory Requirements, including when dealing with Complaints. In this context, 'resources' includes staff, equipment and technology, plus ensuring that all staff are trained and competent in their roles. Our CEO is responsible for ensuring that Qualifications Network has sufficient resources to deal with complaints in an efficient and timely manner.

7. Risk Management

Complaints regarding our products and/or services, either provided directly by Qualifications Network or through our approved centres, may identify risks to our business.

All complaints will be reviewed by the Senior Management Team and any risks will be identified and recorded in accordance with our Risk Management Policy.

8. Conflicts of Interest

To ensure complaints are dealt with fairly, all complaints will be dealt with by an independent member of the Qualifications Network Team.

Where a conflict of interest cannot be managed an independent individual will be asked to consult on the complaint and any escalation required.

9. Informing our Approach

To ensure continual improvement we are always looking for ways to improve our products and services. This includes reducing the burden of staff and our resources through efficient working.

When a complaint is made, we take consideration of the factors involved and take the opportunity to identify ways in which our systems and processes can be improved.

A complaint regarding Qualifications Network often indicates a failing in our efforts to maintain our standards and meet our customers' needs and expectations. All complaints are recorded and reviewed by the Compliance Manager who will review where and how the failing has occurred and, where necessary, take the appropriate action to prevent recurrence. Complaints are also reported to the Governance Committee.

10. Responsibilities

The Operations Manager is responsible for:

- Ensuring sufficient time and resources are assigned to investigate complaints
- Ensuring responses are provided within timescales published within this document
- Ensuring non-conformance reports are completed fully and accurately
- Ensuring non-conformance reports are reviewed at senior management meetings

11. Complaints Procedure

Complaints and feedback are important, in order that we can remain informed about others perspectives of how we develop, deliver and award qualifications.

Some stakeholders do not feel the need to make a formal complaint but do want to let us know how they feel we can improve. We classify these as **informal complaints**.

Some stakeholders will feel compelled to provide a **formal complaint**. A complaint that they would like to be dealt with by a Senior Manager. They want to understand why their needs and expectations were not met and what we are planning to do to rectify this.

11.1. Informal Complaints

Having built successful relationships with centres, learners or other stakeholder, there may be occasions where they feel we have not met their level of expectation. Whilst they do not want to invest time into making formal complaints, they do want to let us know that there are opportunities for us to improve.

Any such stakeholders should contact Centre Support to make their complaint, by email to Centres@qnuk.org or by telephone to 020 3795 0559. All informal complaints will be acknowledged within 24 hours.

Where the complainants have provided contact details a response to an informal complaint will be given within 7 days.

We will not force centres to be involved in investigations into minor complaints as this may deter them from providing us with valuable feedback, however, where informal complaints are identifying serious errors, including but not limited to those that may cause an adverse effect, we will need to engage with centres in a more formal capacity.

Qualifications Network will keep a record of informal complaints and the actions we have taken as this will help us to identify trends in poor service or missed opportunities to meet expectations. These details are recorded on the relevant Department Activity Log.

11.2. Formal Complaints

Where a centre or learner wishes to complain about the outcome of an assessment or the outcome of an investigation into suspected malpractice, these shall be dealt with in accordance with our Appeals Policy and any associated procedures.

Where a stakeholder feels the need to complain about other products and services they should do so in writing. Whilst we will accept verbal complaints, without a written confirmation these cannot be considered as 'formal' complaints. Such complaints should be made within 20 days of the event in question in order to allow us to identify and manage any issues within a timely manner.

Complainants should provide as much information and evidence as possible when making their complaint. As a minimum, the complaint should outline:

- An explanation of the nature of the complaint
- Your contact name and address
- Your centre name and number (if you are an approved centre)
- Details of the programme attended or delivered (if applicable)
- Copies of any supporting documentation

Complaints should be emailed to Centres@QNUK.org and all complaints will be acknowledged within 24 hours and forwarded to the appropriate Senior Manager to oversee.

A considered response to a complaint will be made within 14 days unless further investigations are required to be undertaken which may delay this timescale. In such cases, the complainant will be informed of the reason for the delay and provided with an estimated timescale for completion of those investigations. At any point in the proceedings, should a promised or estimated deadline not be feasible to meet, the complainant will be informed at least 2 working days prior to that deadline expiring.

All responses will include:

- Details of the complaint
- A summary of the investigation undertaken
- The outcome of the investigation (i.e. whether or not the complaint has been upheld)
- Any areas for improvement that been identified (if appropriate)
- Details of action to be undertaken (if appropriate)

We reserve the right to use different staff or consultants to investigate and decide the outcome of any complaint where a significant conflict of interest may occur.

12. Independent Review

If a complainant is not satisfied with the outcome of a complaint, they can ask for the outcome to be reviewed by an independent reviewer.

Such contested complaints are reviewed by an independent person who is suitably qualified and/or experienced in the subject under appeal or in the process to which the complaint refers. They will not be an employee of Qualifications Network, though they may undertake other duties such as being a member of the Governance Committee. They will not have been involved in any of the earlier parts of the complaint-handling process.

The independent reviewer will be provided access to all of the paperwork, including all correspondence, both written (e.g. email) and any telephone discussion recordings or notes pertaining to the complaint. They will, should they so request, be provided with access to both the Qualifications Network staff previously involved in both the incident which prompted the complaint and the complaint handling process. Where the complaint originated from a Centre or was escalated by the complainant after they had exhausted the Centre's complaints process, the reviewer may also be provided with the contact details for the head of centre should they wish to question anyone to gain additional information or understanding of the issues. The reviewer will take particular note of the way in which the processes have been carried out and ensuring that all relevant processes have been undertaken consistently, fairly and in line with all laid down policies and procedures up to and including the handling of the initial complaint.

The independent reviewer's decision is final. We will inform the complainant of their outcome of this review within 20 business days of the request for an independent review being received.

13. Escalation of Complaints to the Regulator

Qualifications Network is committed to our conditions of recognition and we strive to identify weaknesses and to improve on these. We keep the Regulators informed through regular contact and contribution.

If a complainant is not satisfied with the outcome of a complaint once they have exhausted our complaints procedures, they have the right to escalate this to the relevant Regulator. The name of the relevant regulator will be provided on any final response letter or is available on request. As there are a number of regulators to whom this section may apply it would not be efficient to provide email links within this document as complainant may not choose the correct regulator to deal with their complaint, causing unnecessary delays.