



Quality Assurance for Higher National and Vocational Qualifications 2015–18

Enhanced guidance on meeting quality assurance criterion 3.6

Candidate complaints must be handled in line with a documented complaints procedure which meets SQA requirements.

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Introduction to your procedures

In your procedures, you should explain that your organisation values feedback, including complaints, eg feedback assists with evaluating your organisation's performance and helps to inform quality improvements.

State how you will disseminate this information to candidates (eg through induction, handbooks, student advice centre, administration office).

Types/stages of complaint

Explain that the complaints procedure should not be used for challenging assessment decisions — the centre's appeals procedure should be used for this. There may be other exceptions (eg appeals against admissions decisions, bursary or other financial awards) where alternative processes should be used, and you should state this.

You may wish to have other mechanisms to deal with feedback which does not require a response, eg a suggestion box/e-mail/online form.

It may be appropriate to use your staff grievance procedures as your complaints procedure, where the candidates are employees of your centre, but the escalation stages identified below would still apply.

Stage 1: Informal complaint

Indicate who candidates can complain to in your organisation. There must be at least two people to whom they can complain (not just their assessor, as it may be the assessor they are complaining about).

Include reasonable timescales for:

- ◆ submission of the complaint by the complainant (from the date when the issue arose)
- ◆ dealing with the complaint and responding to the complainant

Explain what will happen with their complaint — eg will it be logged, recorded?

Stage 2: Formal complaint

Explain how candidates should submit formal complaints to your organisation. Formal complaints should be in writing. You may wish to include time limits for submitting complaints.

Candidates should be able to move directly to a formal complaint, if the matter is very serious, or if they feel unable to raise the matter with staff informally.

Identify the person to address the complaint to, including their e-mail and/or postal address.

Do you have a complaint form, or just accept letters/e-mails? If you have a form, where can this be obtained?

Is there anyone who can help with writing a complaint, if necessary?

Include a reasonable timescale for submission of the complaint by the complainant (from the date when the issue arose).

You should state that you will acknowledge every complaint, and give a realistic timescale for this.

You should state that you will investigate every complaint and provide a formal written response, and give a realistic timescale for this.

Who will investigate complaints, eg a senior manager for the relevant area, an independent manager, a dedicated complaints handling manager?

Appeals stage

You may wish to include an appeals stage, for candidates who are not satisfied with the response they receive to a formal complaint, eg to the head of centre, board of management/governors/trustees. It is not a requirement of SQA to include an appeal stage.

You may wish to set a time limit for submitting appeals — eg within one calendar month of receiving a written response to a formal complaint.

Identify to whom the appeal should be submitted, including contact details.

You should state how the appeal will be handled (eg review of documents, meetings to discuss) and that a formal written response will be sent, and give a realistic timescale for this.

What will you do with information from complaints?

State what you will do with information from complaints, eg log all complaints, analyse trends and responses, provide quarterly or annual reports to a relevant committee or board.

Escalation of complaints

You should also provide candidates with information on other bodies which they can complain to, eg local authority for schools. This includes relevant awarding bodies.

Centres which are public services in Scotland must also include in their procedures information for candidates on escalating complaints to the Scottish Public Service Ombudsman, about issues other than assessment-related matters.

Complaints to SQA

You must inform all SQA candidates within your complaints procedures that they have the right to complain to SQA awarding body, if they have exhausted your organisation's complaints procedures.

We recommend the following standard wording:

Candidates of SQA qualifications also have the right to complain to SQA awarding body. SQA will only consider your complaint if you have already gone through all stages of *(insert your organisation's name)* complaints procedure and remain dissatisfied with the outcome, or the way in which we handled your complaint.

SQA will deal with complaints about:

- ◆ **assessment — in the broadest sense, including the conduct of, preparation for, and environment for, assessment**
- ◆ **dissatisfaction with the way in which the centre handled the complaint**

SQA will not deal with complaints about:

- ◆ **assessment decisions (use Appeals or Post-results Services)**
- ◆ **the wider experience of being a candidate (eg support services, funding, facilities — *you may wish to insert your own examples*)**

See [SQA's Customer Complaints and Feedback web page](#)

You must also inform all candidates on regulated qualifications (including all SVQs) within your complaints procedures that they also have the right to complain to SQA Accreditation, Ofqual or Qualifications Wales (as appropriate) once they have exhausted your centre's complaints procedure and the SQA awarding body's complaints procedure. You must make it clear that this does not apply to candidates on non-regulated qualifications. Do not include this if your centre does not deliver regulated qualifications.