

Centre and Qualification Approval Procedure

1. Purpose and Scope

This procedure outlines all processes related to centre and qualification approval for both UK and International Centres (with the exception of those applying via Representative Organisations in countries where arrangements vary).

2. Responsibility and Authority

The overall responsibility for this procedure is held by the Gatehouse Awards Ltd (GA) Governing Body. The authority to design and implement this procedure is delegated to the Assessment Manager. The procedure is relevant to all staff at GA as well as all staff at applicant and approved GA centres.

3. Definitions

The following terms, as defined below, will be used throughout this procedure:

- **UK Centre Approval:** This applies only to centres which are based and incorporated within the UK. If a UK based organisation is not already approved by GA, it must apply for UK centre approval if it wishes to offer GA qualifications.

UK centre approval will be granted on the basis of the centre meeting the approval criteria, particularly the four main areas of operation: management and administrative systems; physical and staff resources; delivery and assessment; and quality assurance systems and arrangements.

- **International* Centre Approval:** This applies only to centres which are based and incorporated/operate outside the UK. If such an organisation is not already approved by GA, it must apply for International centre approval. This will enable the organisation to offer GA qualifications outside the UK.

International centre approval will be granted on the basis of the centre meeting the approval criteria, particularly the four main areas of operation: management and administrative systems; physical and staff resources; delivery and assessment; and quality assurance systems and arrangements.

***Please note: This approval process only applies to International centres who apply directly to GA and does not apply to centres who apply for approval via our Representatives. Please contact GA directly to confirm the arrangements in your specific country and to find out if a Representative is available.**

- **Qualification Approval:** Approval for a specified qualification or different level qualifications within the same group for which approval takes place at the same time. An *Application for Centre Approval* must be supported by at least one *Application for Qualification Approval*, regardless of it being for a UK or International Centre.

- **Main centre:** The main location of the organisation which holds the Approved Centre status, and is responsible for meeting the approval criteria in the following four key areas of operations: management and administrative systems, physical and staff resources, qualification delivery and assessment, and quality assurance.
- **Satellite Centre:** A satellite centre is an additional office to the main centre and may be wholly owned by the same person or parent company as the main centre, or operate on a franchise basis with a written enforceable agreement in place with the main centre, or simply be an assessment site (excluding controlled external examinations – see Examination Venue, below).

A satellite centre must operate in line with the management, administrative and quality assurance systems of the main centre. The main centre retains responsibility for all actions of a designated satellite centre. Should an issue arise at one satellite centre this could affect the approval status of the main centre and any other approved satellite centres. For audit purposes, all candidate records must be held at the main centre or be able to be made available (electronically is acceptable) at the main centre within 24 hours of a request.

- **Examination Venue:** An examination venue is a venue utilised by the main centre and is usually on a part-time and/or ad hoc 'room for hire' basis, or a school or other organisation where the main centre is delivering examinations. The main centre must ensure that they arrange to take any assessment materials with them to the examination venue and that all examinations are delivered by staff employed directly by the main centre. No assessment materials or candidate records must be held at the examination venue, other than for the duration of the examination delivery.
- **Head of Centre:** The person who has overall responsibility for ensuring that the main centre, plus any satellite centres or examination venues, are operated in line with the *GA Centre and Qualification Approval Criteria* and maintain compliance with all rules, regulations or requirements stipulated by GA and/or its Regulators.
- **Examinations Officer:** The person who is the main point of contact at the main centre or satellite centre and who deals with receipt of assessment materials and uploading completed examination records and other evidence. An approved centre (UK or International) may appoint more than one Examinations Officer and may have different Examinations Officers in each approved satellite centre.

4. Approval Procedure

The initial centre and qualification approval procedures may differ dependent on the qualification the centre wishes to be approved to deliver. Please refer to the relevant *Qualification Specification* for the specific requirements.

As a general rule, the centre approval process is based on documentary evidence provided by the centre and on desk-based checks carried out by GA to verify the information provided.

If a centre holds approval with another Ofqual-recognised Awarding Organisations and/or holds external quality assurance marks (e.g. ISO, Matrix) this will be taken into consideration; however, GA may conduct independent checks which may overlap with these to assure itself that the full requirements for holding approval are met. Centres should be aware that any approval is subject to verification of the information provided by them and that additional centre visits and/or remote

checks may be undertaken. When a centre visit is required in order to grant approval, this is included in the centre approval application fee. Where additional visits after the initial approval visit are required, these may incur an additional fee.

Should any centre be found to have provided deliberately misleading or false information, the centre's approval will be immediately revoked.

Unless otherwise advertised (or agreed in writing) fees for centre and qualification approval are payable in advance and are non-refundable. Please refer to GA's published *Services and Qualification Fees Brochure* for details.

4.1 Initial Desk-Based Approval

The centre will:

- complete and submit an *Application for Centre Approval Form*.
- complete and submit at least one *Application for Qualification Approval Form*.
- complete and submit an *Satellite Centre Form* for any additional, proposed satellite sites (if applicable).
- complete and submit an *Approval for an Examination Venue Form* for any additional, proposed examination venue sites (if applicable).
- provide any and all supporting evidence or documentation relating to the centre's ability to meet the approval criteria, their management and administrative systems, physical and staff resources, delivery and assessment and quality assurance arrangements, including internal moderation (where applicable to the qualification). Details of the evidence required will be given in the *Application for Centre Approval*, the relevant *Application for Qualification Approval Form* and the relevant *Qualification Specification*.
- pay the appropriate fees relating to the application or applications made.

As part of the initial centre approval process GA undertakes the following checks:

- Whether any notifications about the centre or its principal officers and staff have been received from other Awarding Organisations or the Regulator regarding actual or potential malpractice which has resulted in sanctions.
- Whether the centre is a valid, operating and recognised entity in its country of operation.
- The credit score of the applicant centre.
- Other appropriate due diligence such as performing internet searches and checks on social media for any adverse publicity, etc. regarding the centre which could compromise the integrity of that centre or its Directors.

If these, or any other checks, highlight issues which the centre has not declared on their application, or that information provided is incorrect, the application may be refused, or additional checks may be undertaken at cost to the centre. Similarly, if additional information comes to light after approval has been granted which GA would reasonably have expected to be informed of by the centre during the application process, GA reserves the right to immediately cancel that approval under a Level 5 Sanction.

GA will provide an initial decision within 20 working days of receipt of all documentation. This timescale is subject to the centre providing all relevant documentation, supporting evidence and any other requested information. GA is not responsible for centres failing to provide such documentation and no centre can arrange or commence delivery of GA qualifications until they have received official notification of their centre's approval.

4.2 Centre Visits

It may be deemed appropriate for GA to conduct a centre visit prior to an approval decision being made. The purpose of the visit is to take account of any additional factors where:

- the centre is newly established.
- the centre is new to delivering regulated qualifications.
- the qualification the centre is applying to deliver is significantly different from other qualifications they hold approval for, e.g. across different industry sectors.
- the centre requests an advisory visit.

Any such visits will be arranged at the mutual convenience of GA and the centre and conducted by a GA External Quality Assurer (EQA) who will:

- plan the visit and discuss with the centre any specific requirements or needs to be addressed relating to their centre approval application, qualification approval or any aspect of the criteria for approval.
- ensure that the details provided by the centre as part of their approval submission are accurate and current.
- provide any feedback or advice required.
- issue an action plan or make recommendations to the centre, where appropriate.
- provide a report to GA.

There is provision for centre visits to take place remotely with the aid of video conferencing facilities (i.e. Zoom/Teams). This method may be deemed appropriate where the burden of undertaking an in-person visit is disproportionate to the additional information that will be gleaned – for instance, if the centre is located internationally. The most appropriate method for conducting a visit will be decided by GA on a case-by-case basis, taking into account all relevant factors.

4.3 Notification of Approval Decision

GA will advise the centre of the outcome of their application in writing within 20 working days of the receipt of the final piece of requested documentation or other evidence (including the report generated as part of a visit), etc. There are three possible outcomes:

- **Full Approval Confirmed:** Successful applicants will be issued a Centre Approval Certificate, GA logos for use on their website and marketing material and any other documentation, policies or guidance they may need for their centre and qualifications and log-on details to access the Ark, GA's online learner management system.

- **Approval Withheld:** Where the centre has been asked to take action in order to correct or improve practices, policies or facilities prior to full approval being granted. Once the action has been implemented, the centre should contact GA with evidence to confirm that the centre approval criteria have been satisfied. If necessary, a separate visit may be made before full approval is granted. This second visit is subject to an additional charge.
- **Approval Denied:** In some instances, a centre may not be able to meet the standards required by GA, such as where additional information has come to light from third parties, e.g. the Regulator or other Awarding Organisations, which a centre did not disclose during the application process, which gives sufficient cause to believe that a centre presents too high a risk to gain approval. In such instances, the centre will be informed of that decision. In some instances, the centre will not be able to make an application for approval again. In some instances, GA may set a minimum time between a denied application and a new application, e.g. 6 months. Where this is possible, the timescale will be communicated to the centre and the decision will be dependant on the basis for which approval was denied. Please note that the centre approval fee will be applied at the time of any subsequent approval application being made and is payable prior to the re-application being considered.

5. Satellite Centre Approval

If an approved centre wishes to also be approved to operate at a second, or subsequent, address, it can apply using an *Application for Satellite Centre Approval form*. The main centre takes full responsibility for the actions of any satellite centre. For audit purposes, all candidate records must be held at the main centre or be able to be made available (electronically is acceptable) at the main centre within 24 hours of a request.

The main centre must complete and submit the *Application for Satellite Centre Approval Form* together with the required supporting evidence and the relevant fee. Satellite centre approval will normally consist of a desk-based procedure (including reviewing photographic evidence of the venue, where it is to be used as a controlled examination venue), with a visit where deemed appropriate by GA. The centre will be notified of the outcome of the application in writing. If the application for a satellite centre is made at the same time as the main centre, the centre and qualification approval process must be completed for the main centre before the satellite centre application is considered.

The approval for any satellite centre is for a specific address. If a centre decides to move the address of a satellite centre, this will require a new satellite centre application and the full fee will be payable.

The Head of Centre of the main centre will also be the Head of Centre for the satellite, although the satellite centre might have different or additional Examinations Officers based on-site. The ownership of the satellite centre and its relationship to the main centre will be considered as part of the approval process. Where the nature of the relationship is not clear, GA will seek clarification from the centre and may ask the centre to put an enforceable agreement in place with the satellite centre.

Upon approval, satellite centres are issued with a centre number, together with a satellite centre approval certificate.

Please note that if a main centre is subject to a suspension or withdrawal of approval, the approval status of all its satellite centres will also be affected. Similarly, if malpractice occurs at one satellite centre, any sanction applied as a result may also apply to the main centre and all other satellite centres approved under that centre.

6. Examination Venue Approvals

Approved centres may apply for permission to use additional venues where their staff will deliver GA qualifications which are assessed via controlled external examinations. Examination venues are generally arranged on a 'room for hire' basis where the approved centre pays only for the time they are using the room. They will not have staff at that venue but would send them from the main centre (or an approved satellite centre if closer) to deliver the qualification. The venue may also be a room within a centre's client's organisation (e.g. employer or school, etc.), however the centre must use staff members who are employed directly by the centre.

Any centre wishing to use an examination venue must gain confirmation of the examination venue approval prior to agreeing to hold an examination session at the venue.

7. Additional Qualification Approvals

Approved centres may apply for approval to deliver additional qualifications at any time by completing and submitting the appropriate *Application for Qualification Approval Form*.

Requests for subsequent qualification approval will follow the approval procedure outlined above, including timescales and published fees.

8. Period of Approval

GA Approved Centres are required to re-approve annually, which usually takes place in the first quarter of each calendar year. Once granted, centre approval for both the main centre and any satellite centres, plus any examination venues continues for a period of one year unless withdrawn by either party earlier.

Qualification approvals granted will run concurrently with centre approval.

Please note that all centres are subject to unannounced inspection visits at any time GA deems appropriate, including during examinations regardless of whether these are being held within normal office hours, to ensure centres continue to maintain compliance with the approval criteria.

8.1 Re-Approval Process

At all times, it is the centre's responsibility to provide GA with details of any changes at any point during the period of approval which may affect the centre's ability to maintain compliance with the GA approval criteria. In order to inform GA of any changes, centres must use the *Centre Approval Update Form*.

Centres are responsible for ensuring that they maintain their approval. GA operates an annual re-approval process for all centres, regardless of when they initially gained approval. GA will contact

centres before the date of re-approval and issue appropriate documents for re-approval of both the main centre and satellite centres/examination venues. The centre should return the completed documents and supporting evidence, together with any applicable fee, to ensure continuity of service. The centre is required to provide details of their own quality assurance processes and indicate how are continuing to satisfy the GA centre approval criteria.

The re-approval procedure will ordinarily be a desk-based procedure unless the centre:

- has undergone significant changes in the operation and staffing.
- has not had a full external quality assurance audit in the previous 36 months.
- has not registered a viable number of candidates in the last approval period.
- has been subject to a sanction due to malpractice or serious maladministration within the last 12 months.
- has had approval withdrawn.

8.2 Withdrawal and Suspension of Approval

The centre may have its approved status withdrawn or suspended in instances where:

- the centre has not complied with the GA Terms and Conditions of Business, with the approval criteria or any of GA policies, regulations, requirements, procedures and guidelines
- there are major deficiencies in the assessment / examination process leading to an actual or potential malpractice
- the centre has not registered a viable number of candidates/has been inactive within the previous six months
- payment for GA services has not been received in accordance with the payment terms
- the centre becomes bankrupt, insolvent, ceases trading or goes into liquidation
- there is a change in control of the centre which gives rise to a significant cause for concern as to the risk to the ongoing reputation of the centre and of GA by association
- GA is in receipt of information regarding the centre from a third party (such as another Awarding Organisation, Regulator or other Government body) which indicates that the centre poses a significant reputational, financial or regulatory risk to GA, its candidates, regulated qualifications or the Regulators.
- Failure to provide GA with details of any changes which may affect the centre's ability to maintain compliance with GA's criteria.

GA may decide not to withdraw the approval immediately but to suspend the centre, or a specific part of its approval, for a period of time needed to investigate and/or resolve the issue.

If GA withdraws approval, the earliest date on which the centre may reapply for approval may be provided, however, in the case of withdrawal due to serious malpractice, the centre will not be allowed to reapply for approval. In such instances it may also be deemed appropriate to preclude its directors or senior management from holding any further approvals with GA. This will be assessed on a case-by-case basis, taking into account any associated risks.

Document Specification:	
Purpose	To set out the process followed in order to approve an organisation to offer GA qualifications for both UK and Internationally based centres, with the exception of those who apply via a Representative organisation in countries where arrangements vary.
Accountability	GA Governing Body
Responsibility	Governing Body
Version	10
Effective from	February 2022
Indicative Review date	February 2024
Links to Ofqual GCR	C2
Other relevant documents	Gatehouse Awards Terms and Conditions of Business Gatehouse Awards Centre Criteria and Handbook Gatehouse Awards Centre Assessment Standards Scrutiny (CASS)