

GA Comments, Compliments and Complaints Policy & Procedure

1. Purpose

It is the policy of Gatehouse Awards (GA) to acknowledge and, if appropriate, respond to comments and compliments in a timely manner, as well as to resolve any complaints as quickly as possible. The organisation carefully considers all types of feedback received, and endeavours to learn from it so that service can be continually improved.

The purpose of this procedure is to set out the steps which must be followed when anyone submits a comment, a compliment or a complaint to GA about any of its services and the steps GA will take when responding to such feedback.

2. Scope

This procedure applies to all Approved Centres, Representatives, Partners, Customers, Clients and Learners who use the services of GA or its centres.

If a complaint is received regarding the service provided by a centre of GA, this will only be considered after that centre's complaints procedure has been exhausted and then only in relation to complaints directly related to GA qualifications.

3. Definitions

A comment is defined as an idea, suggestion or opinion on how GA could improve its services.

A compliment is defined as positive feedback about a service provided by GA or a member of its staff.

A complaint is defined as an expression of dissatisfaction made by anyone who has reason to raise a complaint regarding the service received from, or conduct of, GA as an Awarding Organisation, its Representatives outside the UK, or one of its Approved Centres.

It is not possible to provide a definitive list of examples of complaints, but the following are examples of situations that would constitute a complaint:

- Poor customer service
- Inappropriate behaviour or conduct of GA, its Representatives or Approved Centres
- Non-compliance with stated GA process e.g. not adhering to published timescales or processes

Please Note: If an individual is raising an issue with an assessment decision, or in relation to a sanction imposed on an individual or centre, this must be dealt with under our Appeals Policy. It cannot be dealt with as a complaint.

4. Exceptions

This policy does not cover any **anonymous complaints** received where the complainant cannot be contacted for further information.

GA will respect requests for confidentiality wherever possible, but cannot guarantee anonymity in cases where:

- disclosure is necessary to investigate the complaint fairly
- regulatory bodies (e.g. Ofqual) require full disclosure
- law or safeguarding duties require disclosure

Any complaints or notifications of suspected malpractice received anonymously may be investigated at the discretion of GA, if there is sufficient evidence to warrant this.

A separate 'Whistleblowing Policy and Procedure' is in force and sets out the parameters of investigation and treatment of any allegations made under it. Please note that Whistleblowing only relates to employees of the organisation against which the allegations are being made.

If GA have reason to believe that a complaint received is **malicious or vexatious** in nature it may be rejected on that basis without further investigation and the complainant informed of that decision. The complainant would then need to provide sufficient evidence to prove that the complaint has been made in good faith.

If a complaint is received in respect of the conduct of an Approved Centre, this may trigger an investigation in line with our Maladministration and Malpractice Policy.

5. Procedure

5.1. Making a Comment

If an individual wants to make a comment about a GA service, this can be provided either verbally or in writing (including email or direct message via social media pages). If they want a verbal comment to be dealt with in accordance with this procedure, this must be clearly indicated at the time the comment is made. Written comments will be recorded and acknowledged within 3 working days, and if a response is required, it will be provided within 10 working days.

5.2. Offering a Compliment

If an individual wants to offer a compliment about a GA service, this can be done either verbally or in writing (including email or direct message via social media pages).

. If they want a verbal compliment to be dealt with in accordance with this procedure, this must be clearly indicated at the time the compliment is made. Written will be recorded and acknowledged within 3 working days, and if a response is required, it will be provided within 10 working days.

5.3. Making a Complaint

5.3.1. Informal Complaint

Sometimes an individual may have an informal complaint that could be resolved quickly. These can be made verbally or in writing (including email or direct message via social media

pages). Where a complaint is fully resolved within two business days of it being received, such a complaint will not be recorded by GA on the complaints log.

Informal complaints must be made within 10 working days of the incident being complained about.

If a complaint cannot be resolved as above, it will move to being treated as a 'formal' complaint.

5.3.2. Formal Complaint

A formal complaint can be made verbally or in writing (including email or message via social media pages) Any written complaint must clearly state the nature of the complaint.. All complaints must be made within 10 working days of the incident taking place (or of the exhaustion of the centre's complaints process, where applicable).

If a complaint is made about the service provided in a territory where GA operates via a Country Representative, it should be addressed to the Representative who will forward it to GA on behalf of the complainant. Where deemed appropriate, the investigation of the complaint may be delegated to the local GA Representative in the first instance.

If the complaint is in respect of the GA Representative, then the complainant should send their complaint directly to the GA head office in the UK.

All complaints, regardless of where received, will be recorded at GA head office in the UK.

An acknowledgement of receipt of the complaint will be sent to the complainant by GA within 3 working days. This response will include a summary of GA's understanding of the reason(s) for the complaint. Should the complainant consider that GA's understanding is incomplete or incorrect, they should contact GA within 3 working days with a clear explanation of the corrections required.

The complaint will be assigned to the most appropriate member of staff for investigation, ensuring that the appointed individual has no personal interest in the outcome of the process.

Stage 1 – GA Internal Review

The appointed member of staff will carry out an investigation and review all the documentation, before reaching a decision. If a decision cannot be reached based on the information available, the member of staff investigating the complaint will arrange for the complainant and / or any other person to be contacted to obtain further information if required.

An investigation into a complaint should normally be completed within 20 working days. If an investigation will take longer than this, the complainant will be informed in writing of the explanation and revised timetable for the response.

The possible outcomes of a complaint are:

- Complaint upheld (either in full or partially) and appropriate action will be taken to remedy the situation
- Rejection of the grounds of complaint with clearly stated reasons

If the complainant is not satisfied with the outcome of the complaint, they can request that their complaint is escalated to Stage 2 of the Complaints Process.

Stage 2 – Governance Committee

When a complaint has been requested to be escalated to Stage 2, the complainant will be informed of the date of the next Governance Committee meeting. A special meeting of the Governance Committee will not normally be convened in order to deal with escalated complaints unless there is a specific time-sensitivity issue which needs to be addressed.

The Governance Committee will be provided with all relevant information and documentation in respect of the complaint being escalated and will table this for discussion at the next meeting. Meetings are held on a quarterly basis.

The Governance Committee will consider whether the GA policy and procedures for complaints handling have been adhered to in a compliant manner. It will also consider whether the outcome of Stage 1 of the complaint was appropriate, given all the evidence available to them.

The potential outcomes of the Stage 2 Complaints Process are:

Complaint Upheld – the Governance Committee finds that the complaint raised has merit and that the outcome of Stage 1 of the complaints process was not appropriate. They will provide the complainant with the details of what actions may be taken to resolve this issue.

Complaint Rejected – The Governance Committee finds that the complaint raised has no grounds and that the outcome of Stage 1 of the complaints process was appropriate. They will provide the complainant with an explanation of how this decision has been reached.

If the complainant is not satisfied with the outcome of the complaint, they can request that their complaint is escalated to Stage 3 of the Complaints Process.

Stage 3 – Escalation to Ofqual

If the complainant remains unsatisfied with the outcome after escalating their complaint, they can contact Ofqual. The details of how to raise a complaint with Ofqual can be found here: <https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/ofqual/about/complaints-procedure>.

6. Monitoring

All comments, compliments and formal complaints will be monitored on an ongoing basis, with any relevant issues being escalated to the Governance Committee, including any trends that become visible due to the comments, compliments and complaints received.

Records of comments, compliments and complaints made are used for the following purposes:

- To review the approach GA takes to the development, delivery and awarding of our qualifications
- To inform improvements to the service within development, delivery and awarding of qualifications

- To enable changes to be made where elements of the service have been identified as non-compliant, not fit for purpose or providing poor customer satisfaction
- To inform GA' self-assessment process and contribute to a quality improvement plan
- To enable GA to gather evidence which may be required when informing Ofqual of events or incidents which may have had adverse effects or could potentially lead to adverse effects.

In accordance with Ofqual's General Conditions of Recognition, Condition I2.3, where the application of the complaints process leads GA to discover a failure in its processes, GA will take all reasonable steps to:

- Identify any other learner who has been affected by that failure,
- Correct or, where it cannot be corrected, mitigate as far as possible the effect of the failure, and
- Ensure that the failure does not recur in the future.

7. Confidentiality

Ofqual General Conditions of Recognition specifically states the importance of maintaining confidentiality during the complaints process, as follows:

Condition D4.2

"Nothing in this condition obliges an awarding organisation to disclose information if to do so would breach a duty of confidentiality or any other legal duty."

8. Notifications to Ofqual

Where GA has administered the Complaints process and has identified any adverse effect or incident which could lead to further adverse effects such as sanctions, criminal or disciplinary proceedings or evidence of malpractice or maladministration, GA will promptly notify Ofqual.

GA will not delay in informing Ofqual and will ensure that all information is provided and details of the steps GA will take in order to correct or mitigate any adverse effects.

9. Policy Review

GA will carry out a review of the policy at least every two years, and revise it, if necessary, in response to feedback or good practice.

Document Specification:	
Purpose:	To set out the way in which GA handles any comments, compliments and complaints received in respect of the service it offers
Accountability:	GA Governing Body
Responsibility:	Responsible Officer
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Links to Ofqual GCR	D4, I2
Other relevant documents:	GA Terms and Conditions of Business GA Whistleblowing Policy GA Centre Handbook