

Complaints Policy

V2.1

Introduction

This is version 2.1 of the Complaints Policy and replaces all previous versions. This document is subject to regular revision and maintained electronically by its owner. Electronic copies are version controlled. Printed copies are not subject to this control.

Change history to V2.1

Date	Section	Change	Reviewed by	Signed off By
January 2023	All	Multiple changes due to annual review	N Preston	R Lowbridge

Change history to V1.0

Section	Change
All	Structural and formatting changes
Scope	Differentiation between Complaints and Appeals
Stages	Further clarification
Process	Further clarification
Regulatory reference	Updated to reflect latest General Conditions of Recognition criteria

Scope

This policy covers complaints from learners, centres, or stakeholders in relation to the qualifications and associated services offered by SFEDI Awards. It is not to be used to cover appeals in relation to decisions made by SFEDI Awards. These areas are covered by our Appeals Policy. Should a complaint be submitted which is in fact an appeal, we will inform the relevant party that the issue is being considered, where appropriate, in accordance with the approach outlined in our Appeals policy.

Definition

SFEDI Awards strives to operate in a supportive and open manner and as such wants to hear if there are concerns or issues that have arisen in the delivery or provision of SFEDI Awards products and/or services. Complaints may come from sources including learners, approved centres, and external agencies.

A complaint is where there is an expression of dissatisfaction by one or more customers about a delivery organisation's action or lack of action, or about the standard of service provided by them or on its behalf.

Centre Responsibilities

As a SFEDI Awards centre, you should take all responsible steps to ensure that staff involved in the management, assessment and quality assurance of our qualifications, and learners, are aware of the contents of this policy. Your centre must have a complaint handling policy, procedure, and process in place to deal with complaints from learners about the services they receive from your centre.

Process

Most complaints arise from simple misunderstandings. All SFEDI Awards staff have been trained to help our customers, so you should first try to sort out any problem at the earliest opportunity by speaking to the person who dealt with you. If they cannot help or you wish to speak to someone else, you should contact our customer service team. If this is not possible, or if you are not satisfied with the help provided by them, please send a written complaint, normally within 28 working days of the event you are complaining about. A form to submit your complaint can be found on our website in the Centre Hub. Alternatively, you can write directly to our Customer Services Team at our Head Office.

Learners and/or other stakeholders who wish to complain about a level of service provided by a centre should have exhausted that centre's own complaints process before bringing the complaint to us. However, in exceptional circumstances, individuals can make the complaint directly to us. This should only occur where an individual feels there was a significant breach by the centre of our various procedures.

SFEDI Awards treat all complaints sensitively, however if you are concerned about possible adverse consequences, please inform us that you do not wish for us to divulge your identity during our investigations. You must, however, give us your name and contact details; we cannot investigate anonymous complaints.

Stage 1

If you feel that you have grounds to make a complaint you may submit your complaint in writing to SFEDI Awards Head Office care of the Customer Services Team.

SFEDI Awards will forward a Complaint Acknowledgement letter to the complainant within 5 working days.

At all times we will ensure that SFEDI Awards personnel assigned to the investigation have the appropriate level of training and competence and that they have had no previous involvement or personal interest in the matter. If the person receiving the complaint has any involvement in the complaint matter, they will not be responsible for allocating a member of staff to carry out the investigation or for conducting, overseeing, or managing the investigation.

Stage 2

SFEDI Awards will review the instance reported and gather initial information to ascertain the details of the complainant, an overview of the instance reported and where the instance took place.

We will complete an investigation into the instance reported which will take no longer than 10 working days and a report will be finalised within 5 working days of the investigation being completed. If further time is required due to the nature of the instance reported then we will notify all parties of the new timescales for completion.

If the complaint regards the External Quality Assurance practice in relation to the monitoring of assessments, SFEDI Awards reserves the right to forward the assessment documentation to a second External Quality Assurer, who has no contact with that centre, for re-assessment to enable a thorough investigation. Consideration will be made as to whether any such scenario would be better dealt with through our Appeals Policy.

SFEDI Awards will use the details gathered during the investigation to form the basis for the final report. This report will detail:

- the initial reporting of the instance
- the plan for investigation
- roles and responsibilities of SFEDI staff involved in carrying out the investigation
- the investigation process followed and reference to any further documentation
- a conclusion of findings
- a recommendation of actions to be taken

The final report and recommendation of actions to be taken will be presented to the SFEDI Awards Senior Management Team to allow for final approval prior to notification of findings to the parties concerned.

Any recommended actions to be taken will be discussed with the parties concerned and timescales set as to when they must be completed by. This process will also allocate nominated persons responsible for each of the actions to be completed.

We will not be able to provide a detailed update on the status of the complaint until the investigation has been concluded and the report compiled and agreed by SFEDI Awards Senior Management Team. SFEDI Awards reserves the right not to disclose information if to do so would breach a duty of confidentiality or any other legal duty.

If we do not hear from the complainant within 5 working days of receipt of the report, we will close Stage 2 of the complaint and assume their acceptance of the outcome.

Stage 3 – Internal Escalation

On receipt of the final report, if the centre or individual is not satisfied with the outcome, they can challenge the decision if they have grounds to do so. Individuals have 5 working days in which to progress to Stage 3 to challenge the outcome of the complaint. If you wish to do this, you should submit the following information:

- Reason why you wish to challenge the decision
- Additional evidence to support your reasoning

Please note that without these pieces of information we will be unable to accept the submission of a challenge for Stage 3 of the process. The complaint challenge must be submitted, in writing, to the Quality Director of SFEDI Awards directly and a Challenge Acknowledgement letter will be forwarded within 5 working days.

The Quality Director will appoint an independent person to carry out the investigation and all prior documentation will be provided by SFEDI Awards from the first investigation plus additional documentation and communication to support the complainant's grounds to challenge.

The independent person will complete an investigation into the challenge which will take no longer than 10 working days and a report will be finalised within 5 working days of the investigation being completed. If further time is required due to the nature of the instance reported then the independent person will notify all parties of the new timescales for completion.

The independent person will use the details gathered during the investigation to form the basis for the final report as described earlier within this policy.

The final report and recommendation of actions to be taken will be presented to the SFEDI Awards Board to allow for final approval prior to notification of findings to the centre or individual.

Any recommended actions to be taken by the complainant will be discussed and timescales set as to when they must be completed by. This process will also allocate nominated persons responsible for each of the actions to be completed.

We will not be able to provide a detailed update on the status of the challenge until the investigation has been concluded and the report compiled and agreed by SFEDI Awards Board. SFEDI reserves the right not to disclose information if to do so would breach a duty of confidentiality or any other legal duty.

The report will make recommendations to SFEDI Awards if they are to be found at fault during the challenge process. Any recommendations regarding SFEDI Awards will be presented at the subsequent Senior Management Team meeting for discussion and resolution.

Stage 4 – External Escalation

Only once Stage 3 has been completed, can the complainant challenge the decision to the Regulator. This will follow the published complaints procedure for each relevant Regulator. SFEDI Awards staff will provide details of the relevant Regulator(s) to the complainant at this point.

SFEDI Awards will ensure all paperwork relating to the complaint is available to the Regulator(s) to allow them to complete their duties fully.

Regulation

If any part of your complaint is upheld, we will respond accordingly and give due consideration to how we can improve our service and arrangements. For example, by reviewing our procedures to assess the impact on our qualification development, delivery or awarding arrangements and assessment process (if relevant) or arranging for training.

In situations where a complaint has been successful, or where an investigation following notification from the Regulators indicates a failure in our processes, we will give due consideration to the outcome and will take appropriate actions such as:

- identify any other learner and/or centre 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
- review and amend our arrangements, where appropriate, to reduce the likelihood that a similar failure will reoccur in the future
- start internal disciplinary procedures against a member of our staff if we found their behaviour was seriously at variance with our internal procedures and arrangements

Where Regulators notify us about failures that have been discovered in the assessment process or other activities of another awarding organisation, these will be reviewed in the same manner as other external complaints in accordance with the procedures detailed within this policy, to ascertain if the same issue could affect SFEDI qualifications.

Review Arrangements

We will review this policy as part of our annual self-evaluation arrangements and revise it as and when necessary in response to customer and learner feedback, changes in our practices, actions from the regulatory authorities or external agencies, changes in legislation, or trends identified from previous allegations.

In addition, this policy may be updated considering operational feedback to ensure our arrangements for dealing with Complaints remain effective.

If you would like to feedback any views, please contact us via the details provided at the end of this policy.

Other Related SFEDI Policies and Documents

- Complaints Form
- Appeals Policy

Contact Us

If you have any queries about the content of this policy, please contact our customer service department.

SFEDI Awards, 19 Victoria Road, Darlington, County Durham, DL1 5SF

customerservices@sfediawards.com

0845 224 5928

@sfediawards