



Complaints Policy



Revisions and Amendment Register

Date of Issue	Page No	Revision	Version
May 2024		New updated issue following policy review	24/1
November 2025		Updated throughout document to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Make clear the differentiation between and enquiry/appeal and a complaint (summarised in section 3 'Scope'). • Make clear the process for escalating a complaint, removing the previous process that allowed an appeal against the outcome of a complaint (see sections 5.5 'Complaint Escalation' and 5.6 'Closing the Complaint'). 	25/1

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1. Purpose

All SFJ Awards approved centres must have appropriate policies in place for approval to be granted. By accepting SFJ Awards' Approved Centre Contract, the centre confirms they will adhere to the policies they have in place.

It is expected that a centre's own policies and procedures have been followed before referring a complaint to SFJ Awards.

In addition, this policy outlines how SFJ Awards will respond to complaints received from Qualifications and End-Point Assessment Users and follow up with corrective action, where appropriate.

2. Definitions

A complaint is a statement that something is unsatisfactory or unacceptable.

Complaints are defined as any issue raised by Qualification and End-Point Assessment Users or the Qualifications Regulators with regard to an actual or potential failure in SFJ Awards' qualifications or associated services which is not covered by other policies in place.

Qualification and End-Point Assessment Users are defined as persons who have a legitimate interest in the qualification or type of qualification made available by SFJ Awards and may include:

- Learners and learners' representatives
- SFJ Awards approved centres
- Employers and employer's representatives
- Further and Higher Education Establishments
- Government departments and agencies
- Professional Bodies.

3. Scope

SFJ Awards accept complaints regarding any service that we provide to customers. This may include, but is not limited to:

- The behaviours of SFJ Awards staff, or representatives acting on behalf of SFJ Awards.
- SFJ Awards products and services.
- Any unreasonable delay resulting from failures or inaction on the part of SFJ Awards.

SFJ Awards will not accept complaints regarding:

- The result of an assessment, where the assessment is marked by SFJ Awards;
- The decisions made by SFJ Awards External Quality Assurance Associates ('EQAs');
- Decisions relating to any action to be taken against a learner or a Centre following an investigation into malpractice or maladministration.
- Decisions regarding Reasonable Adjustments or Special Considerations.

The above are dealt with under SFJ Awards Appeals policy.

Please Note: SFJ Awards will not arbitrate in cases of dispute between learners and Centres. All Centres are required to have complaints and appeals policies and procedures in place. SFJ Awards expect that all learners are informed of the relevant policies by the Centre as part of their induction. Where complaints between learners and Centres are not satisfactorily resolved, learners may complain to SFJ Awards only once the Centre's complaints process has been exhausted.

4. Making a complaint

In dealing with our customers, staff at SFJ Awards endeavour to provide a service which is, courteous and quick to respond to customer needs. Nevertheless, at times, there may be situations where a customer is dissatisfied with the service they have received and wish to make a complaint.

Complaints received by SFJ Awards will be dealt with openly, fairly and efficiently. Qualification and End-Point Assessment users can submit complaints in writing to SFJ Awards by email to complaints@sfjawards.com. SFJ Awards may publish a complaints form, however use of the complaints form is not mandatory.

In the event that a person is unable to complain in writing, SFJ Awards may allow the complaint to be outlined over the phone. In such cases, SFJ Awards will put the complaint in writing and send this to the complainant, so they may confirm whether SFJ Awards understanding of the complaint is correct. SFJ Awards will usually not investigate the complaint until confirmation has been received to the effect that SFJ Awards' summary of the verbal complaint is correct.

5. Responding to complaints

5.1 Complaints from a Centre, Training provider or Employer

If a Centre, Training Provider or Employer has a complaint, SFJ Awards will usually aim to resolve it informally. An informal complaint can frequently be put right immediately and therefore in the first instance the complainant should contact SFJ Awards who will seek to rectify the matter as soon as possible.

Should the complaint remain unresolved then formal procedures may be followed. SFJ Awards will acknowledge receipt of a formal complaint within 2 working days. SFJ Awards will then appoint an Investigating Officer.

5.2 Complaints from a Learner or Apprentice

Learners or apprentices must follow and exhaust their Centre's / Training Provider's complaints procedure **fully** before making a direct formal complaint to SFJ Awards.

Should the complaint remain unresolved, the learner may make a formal complaint to SFJ Awards.

SFJ Awards will acknowledge receipt of a formal complaint within 2 working days. SFJ Awards will then appoint an Investigating Officer.

As part of their investigation, SFJ Awards will examine whether the Centre / Training Provider has acted in line with their Complaints policy.

5.3 Complaints from a Third Party

A formal complaint may be made by someone other than those listed above. SFJ Awards will consider complaints received by a third party within their scope.

SFJ Awards will acknowledge receipt of a formal complaint within 2 working days. SFJ Awards will then appoint an Investigating Officer.

Should a complaint fall outside the scope of SFJ Awards, the complainant will be informed of this in writing within 2 working days of receiving the complaint.

5.4 General

Once we are satisfied that all information and documentation is available to us, the complaint will be considered, and a conclusion will be reached. A response will normally be issued in writing to the complainant within 10 working days of receiving the initial complaint. If the process is expected to take longer, you will be advised of this, and informed of the likely amended timescale.

If the Investigating Officer is unclear on any detail within a complaint or is unclear on what the Complainant is seeking in terms of a resolution to the complaint, they may contact the Complainant to seek further information.

5.5 Complaint Escalation

If a Complainant is not satisfied with the response to the complaint, the Complainant may request for their complaint to be escalated. Such requests must be made within 10 working days of the written complaint outcome.

Where a complaint is escalated, another member of staff (usually a member of the SFJ Awards Senior Leadership Team) will investigate:

- Whether the complaint was dealt with in line with SFJ Awards published Complaints policy.
- Whether any critical evidence was missed in the consideration of the complaint.

Where a complaint is escalated, the member of staff overseeing the escalation will not usually seek to reinvestigate the complaint. A reinvestigation will only take place where it is determined that SFJ Awards failed to follow its Complaints policy or where critical evidence was not considered.

The response to a request to escalate a complaint will usually be provided in writing within 10 working days. Where the response is likely to take longer than 10 working days, for instance if there is a significant amount of evidence to consider, the Complainant will be contacted to make them aware of the delay and issued an updated timeframe for response.

The written decision at this stage will final.

5.6 Closing the Complaint

A complaint will be closed:

- 10 working days after SFJ Awards has issued a written response to the complaint, provided no request to escalate the complaint has been received, or;
- Once a response has been issued to a request to escalate a complaint.

Where a complaint has been closed in line with the above bullets, SFJ Awards will not consider any further correspondence regarding the issue. Complainants may complain directly to relevant regulators should they remain dissatisfied.

6. Mitigation and corrective action

6.1 For Qualifications

Following the investigation and resolution of any complaint (or potential failure identified by a Qualification User, the Qualifications Regulators or any another Awarding Organisation/Stakeholder), SFJ Awards will take all practicable steps to mitigate the effect of the complaint and prevent any recurrence of the failure.

Where a complaint leads to the discovery of a failure in the assessment process, SFJ Awards will take all reasonable steps to:

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

Where the outcome of a complaint questions the validity of results at a centre, SFJ Awards will take action to protect the interests of other learners and the integrity of the award of units/qualifications. This may involve a further/independent review of learner work. Where an independent review is necessary, this may be at the centre's expense.

This may include, as appropriate (*the list is not exhaustive and is intended for guidance only*):

- A further review of learners' work by an External Quality Assurer not involved in the final verification of the awards (up to a 100% sample may be requested for verification purposes);
- A review of the unit(s) of assessment through its review process;
- A review of the rules of combination for the qualification(s).
- The Quality Assurance and Compliance Manager will take responsibility for initiating the most appropriate course of action.

If a complaint received has the potential to lead to an Adverse Effect, SFJ Awards' Quality Assurance and Compliance Manager will notify the Qualifications Regulators and keep them fully informed.

SFJ Awards are required to notify other awarding organisations/stakeholders where cases are likely to impact on them.

Where the Qualifications Regulators notifies SFJ Awards of failures that have been discovered in the process of another awarding organisation, SFJ Awards will review whether or not a similar failure could affect its own assessment process and take action to mitigate the failure and prevent an occurrence.

6.2 For End-Point Assessments

Following the investigation and resolution of a complaint SFJ Awards will take all practicable steps to mitigate the effect of the complaint and prevent any recurrence.

Where a complaint leads to the discovery of a failure in the assessment process, SFJ Awards will take all reasonable steps to:

- Identify any other apprentice(s) who has been affected by the failure.
- Correct or, where it cannot be corrected, mitigate as far as possible the effect of the failure.
- Ensure that the failure does not recur.
- Where the outcome of a complaint questions the validity of results, SFJ Awards will act to protect the Interests of other apprentices and the integrity of the assessment results.

This may involve, as appropriate (*the list is not exhaustive and is intended for guidance only*):

- A further/independent review of apprenticeship assessments by someone not involved in the original End-Point Assessment.
- A review of the assessment documentation.
- A review of the assessment process.
- The Head of Assessment will take responsibility for initiating the most appropriate course of action.

If a complaint received has the potential to lead to an Adverse Effect, SFJ Awards' Senior Management Team will notify the apprenticeship regulators and keep them fully informed.

SFJ Awards are required to notify other End-Point Assessment Organisations/stakeholders where cases are likely to impact on them.

Where the apprenticeship regulators notify SFJ Awards of failures that have been discovered in the process of another End-Point Assessment Organisation/Awarding Organisation, SFJ Awards will review whether or not a similar failure could affect its own assessment process and take action to mitigate the failure and prevent an occurrence.

7. Monitoring

Investigated complaints will be monitored by SFJ Awards. A summary report of all complaints will be reported to the SFJ Awards Quality & Standards Committee so that the Committee may monitor complaint investigations and outcomes over time.

8. Abusive Behaviours and Vexatious Complainants

SFJ Awards staff will not engage with abusive, persistent, or repetitive contact from complainants.

Ongoing contact that lacks new evidence and/or includes abusive language will be treated as vexatious.

If a complainant's behaviour or correspondence is deemed vexatious, we will refer them to this policy and make it clear that, should such communication continue, we will cease all further correspondence.

9. Review of the Policy

This policy will be reviewed on a regular basis as part of SFJ Awards' self-evaluation arrangements and revised as necessary in response to lessons learnt, customer feedback, changes in legislation and guidance from the Qualifications Regulators.

If you have any queries about the content of the policy or you wish to give feedback then please contact SFJ Awards Tel: 01142 841970 or email info@sfjawards.com.

10. Location of the Policy

A copy of this policy can be downloaded from Odyssey, ACE360 or from the SFJ Awards website: www.sfjawards.com/policies.

11. Copyright

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