Complaints Policy and Procedures (including the COVID – 19 Addendum)

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1. Introduction

1.1. Purpose

In keeping with its core values, VTCT is committed to providing an excellent service to its approved centres offering ITEC and VTCT qualifications. From time to time we may fall short of our high standards and it is important that those affected have an effective means of bringing this to our attention with an expectation of resolution.

The complaints policy:

- defines what constitutes a relevant complaint;
- indicates which other policies and procedures might be more appropriate;
- sets out the process for making a complaint to VTCT;
- explains the steps taken to resolve complaints;
- gives the timescale for each part of the process;
- aims to ensure that complaints are handled within a reasonable timescale and in a consistent manner;
- explains how to escalate a complaint to the relevant regulator.

A complaint is an expression of dissatisfaction with an aspect of the service provided by your centre or awarding organisation, which is deemed to have fallen below your expectations and our own standards.

Customers who wish to complain should make sure they follow the relevant policy and procedures. Issues relating to assessment decisions should be addressed using the Enquiries and Appeals Policy and Procedure, and others may be covered by the Malpractice and Maladministration Policy and Procedure. Reference to the following policies may also be useful:

- the Centre Agreement;
- the Whistle-blower Policy;
- the Sanctions Policy.

All policies are available on the VTCT and ITEC websites. Complainants who are unsure of the correct policy and procedure to follow should contact the awarding organisation at our head office for advice.

Where an associated investigation identifies a rectifiable problem, VTCT takes all reasonable steps to:

- identify any other learner who has been affected by the issue;
- correct, or where it cannot be corrected, mitigate its effect as far as possible;
- take steps to ensure that the issue does not recur in the future.

Complaints should be made by the centre/person(s) directly affected by the matter, or a person acting on their behalf, with their written permission.

VTCT aims to deal with complaints reasonably, to the customer's satisfaction and as quickly as possible. Complaints can normally be resolved informally. If this is not achieved, a formal complaint must be raised without delay and by no later than 20 days after the occurrence of the issue which gave rise to the complaint.

1.2. Scope of the policy

This policy is provided for the use of:

- learners who are or have been registered for VTCT or ITEC qualifications;
- personnel with responsibilities for managing, delivering, assessing and quality assuring qualifications in approved centres offering VTCT or ITEC qualifications;
- members of the public accessing our services; who wish to make a complaint in relation to the qualifications and associated services offered by VTCT or one of its approved centres offering ITEC or VTCT qualifications.

1.3. The regulators

1.3.1. Regulatory requirements

This policy addresses the requirements of the relevant regulatory authorities' criteria.

1.3.2. Situations brought to our attention by the regulators

Where the regulators notify us about failures that have been discovered in the assessment process or other activities of another awarding organisation, we will review whether or not a similar failure could affect our own processes and arrangements.

1.4. Responsibilities

VTCT personnel are required to follow the related procedures in order to deal with complaints as transparently, consistently and effectively as possible.

Centres are responsible for ensuring that all personnel involved in the management, delivery, assessment and quality assurance of VTCT and ITEC qualifications are fully aware of the policy and conversant with the related procedures.

Centres must have their own internal complaints policy and procedures in place to deal with complaints from learners and members of the public, and must provide easy access to them. The centre's own complaints procedures must be exhausted before a complaint about a centre is raised with VTCT. Failure to have its own complaints policy and procedures or to make them available to learners constitutes a breach of the centre agreement.

1.5. Confidentiality and data protection

In following this process an individual might provide us with confidential information, and during our investigation we may need to request information of a confidential nature. Complainants are assured that VTCT complies fully with data protection legislation at all stages. We ensure that confidential information is kept securely and used only for the purposes for which it is intended.

1.6. Anonymous complaints

Anonymous complaints cannot be considered. VTCT will note their contents and may seek to verify them if this is possible and appropriate. We may include related information in our review activities.

1.7. Review arrangements

This policy is reviewed annually as part of VTCT's self-evaluation activity, which includes consideration of customer and regulatory feedback and good practice guidance. A policy review may also be triggered as an action resulting from the outcome of the investigation of a complaint.

2. Making a complaint about a VTCT/iTEC centre

The following pages set out the process for making a complaint about a VTCT/iTEC centre.

A complainant will follow either stage 1 or 2 dependent on their complaint.

- Stage 1 – following the centre's complaints procedures
- Stage 2 – making a formal complaint to VTCT

Complainants should normally have exhausted the centre's own complaints procedures before referring a matter to VTCT. Exceptionally, learners may make the complaint direct to VTCT if they consider it is not appropriate to raise it with the centre. VTCT will refer the complainant back to the centre in the first instance if it deems this is appropriate.

Formal complaints should be submitted using the form provided at the end of this document, and should include the information listed below. If any of the information below is not available a statement to that effect should be made so that the form is not returned as incomplete.

- The centre's complaints policy and procedures.
- The outcome of the centre's investigation of the complaint.
- A statement of the circumstances and facts surrounding the complaint.
- Copies of any correspondence regarding the complaint.
- Written statements from all parties concerned.
- Any material relevant to the complaint.
- Any other supporting documents relevant to the complaint.
- Outline of the reason for dissatisfaction with the centre's decision.
- Outline of the reason for dissatisfaction with the outcome of the informal stage of the complaint to VTCT.

VTCT reserves the right not to accept or process complaints which are deemed to be frivolous, vexatious or malicious. If we consider that a complaint falls into this category, we will let the complainant know that this is our judgement, setting out the reasons and making it clear that we will no longer communicate on the matter.

Stage 1 – The centre's complaints policy and procedure

- The complainant raises their complaint at the centre which delivers the qualification.
- The complaint is handled in line with the centre's policy and procedure.
- The complainant may proceed to stage 2 if a satisfactory outcome is not reached.

Stage 2 – Formal complaint

- If the matter has not been resolved to the complainant's satisfaction, or the complainant does not consider it appropriate to raise their complaint with the centre directly, VTCT's formal complaints policy may be triggered by completing and submitting the complaint submission form provided at the end of this document; if the formal complaint is being submitted following the centre's decision, it must be submitted to VTCT within 7 days of the centre's decision. Additional information is not normally accepted after submission unless it was not originally available and is considered to be highly relevant to the complaint. If at any point the complainant or others involved in the complaint wish to be legally represented in relation to any aspect of the complaint, VTCT must be informed. VTCT reserves the right to be legally represented and to act upon legal advice.
- Upon receipt of the completed complaint documentation, VTCT will:
  - acknowledge receipt and log the complaint within 10 days;
  - allocate the complaint to a member of the team who has no involvement in the related issue;
  - investigate the complaint. We will contact you if we wish to seek further information or a meeting at this stage;
  - provide a decision to the complainant within 30 days of acknowledgement, outlining proposed remedial action. If this involves the imposition of a centre sanction, the centre will be notified at the same time. In complex cases the timescales may be extended beyond 30 days. We will let the complainant know if this is the case.
- If you remain dissatisfied with the decision at this stage you may ask for it to be reviewed by a senior manager. This request must be submitted within 7 days of VTCT's decision; VTCT reserves the right not to accept senior manager reviews after this timeline.
- A VTCT senior manager will review the complaint and report their decision to the complainant within 30 days of referral. If this involves the imposition of a centre sanction, the centre will be notified at the same time. This decision is final and the complaints procedure has been exhausted.
- If any part of the complaint is upheld VTCT will:
  - consider the implications for the improvement of services and procedures and agree actions;
  - advise the complainant, and centre if relevant, of proposed remedial actions.
- Remedial actions will be proportional to the matter under consideration, and may include:
  - an apology, e.g. for poor service;
  - an explanation of how the matter will be improved;
  - review of and improvements to policies and procedures;
  - imposition of centre sanction(s);
  - staff training and development.

Step-by-step process - Complaint about VTCT/iTEC centre

1. Complainant submits complaint direct to centre
2. Centre complaints process followed
3. Complaint resolved?
    a. Yes – end; any remedial action taken
    b. No – go to point 4
4. Complainant submits formal complaint to VTCT within 7 days of centre's decision
5. VTCT logs and acknowledges complaint within 10 days of submission
6. Complaint assigned to case manager
7. Complaint investigated and decision communicated to complainant within 30 days of VTCT acknowledgement
    a. In complex cases the 30 days may be extended; VTCT will inform the complainant if this happens
8. Complaint resolved?
    a. Yes – end; any remedial action taken
    b. No – go to point 9
9. Complainant requests review of VTCT's decision by a senior manager; request must be submitted within 7 days of VTCT's decision
10. VTCT logs and acknowledges request for review within 10 days of submission
11. Complaint reviewed and final decision communicated to complainant within 30 days of review request submission
    a. VTCT's complaint process has not been exhausted
12. Any remedial action taken

3. Making a complaint about VTCT

The following pages set out the process for making a complaint about a VTCT.

A complainant will follow either stage 1 or 2 dependent on their complaint.

- Stage 1 – making an informal complaint to VTCT
- Stage 2 – making a formal complaint to VTCT

VTCT reserves the right not to accept or process complaints which are deemed to be frivolous, vexatious or malicious. If we consider that a complaint falls into this category, we will let the complainant know that this is our judgement, setting out the reasons and making it clear that we will no longer communicate on the matter.

Stage 1 – Informal complaint about VTCT

- The complainant raises their complaint by email or telephone with the member of staff responsible for the related issue. The member of staff will aim to resolve the matter to the complainant's satisfaction.
- If the complainant is not satisfied, they may ask for the complaint to be referred to a manager from the relevant department. The manager will aim to resolve the matter to the complainant's satisfaction.
- If the complainant is not satisfied, they may proceed to stage 2.

Stage 2 – Formal complaint

- If the matter has not been resolved to the complainant's satisfaction following stage 1, VTCT's formal complaints policy may be triggered by completing and submitting the complaint submission form provided at the end of this document within 7 days of the departmental manager's decision. Additional information is not normally accepted after submission unless it was not originally available and is considered to be highly relevant to the complaint. If at any point the complainant or others involved in the complaint wish to be legally represented in relation to any aspect of the complaint, VTCT must be informed. VTCT reserves the right to be legally represented and to act upon legal advice.
- Upon receipt of the completed complaint documentation, VTCT will:
  - acknowledge receipt and log the complaint within 10 days;
  - allocate the complaint to a member of the team who has no involvement in the related issue;
  - investigate the complaint. We will contact you if we wish to seek further information or a meeting at this stage;
  - provide a decision to the complainant within 30 days of acknowledgement, outlining proposed remedial action. In complex cases the timescales may be extended beyond 30 days. We will let the complainant know if this is the case.
- If you remain dissatisfied with the decision at this stage you may ask for it to be reviewed by a senior manager. This request must be submitted within 7 days of VTCT's decision; VTCT reserves the right not to accept senior manager reviews after this timeline.
- A VTCT senior manager will review the complaint and report their decision to the complainant within 30 days of referral. This decision is final and the complaints procedure has been exhausted.
- If any part of the complaint is upheld VTCT will:
  - consider the implications for the improvement of services and procedures and agree actions;
  - advise the complainant of proposed remedial actions.
- Remedial actions will be proportional to the matter under consideration, and may include:
  - an apology, e.g. for poor service;
  - an explanation of how the matter will be improved;
  - review of and improvements to policies and procedures;
  - staff training and development.

Step-by-step process - Complaint about VTCT

1. Complainant submits informal complaint to VTCT
2. Complaint resolved?
    a. Yes – end; any remedial action taken
    b. No – go to point 3
3. Complainant requests referral of complaint to manager of relevant department
4. Complaint resolved?
    a. Yes – end; any remedial action taken
    b. No – go to point 5
5. Complainant submits formal complaint to VTCT within 7 days of department manager's decision
6. VTCT logs and acknowledges complaint within 10 days of submission
7. Complaint assigned to case manager
8. Complaint investigated and decision communicated to complainant within 30 days of VTCT acknowledgement
    a. In complex cases the 30 days may be extended; VTCT will inform the complainant if this happens
9. Complaint resolved?
    a. Yes – end; any remedial action taken
    b. No – go to point 10
10. Complainant requests review of VTCT's decision by a senior manager; request must be submitted within 7 days of VTCT's decision
11. VTCT logs and acknowledges request for review within 10 days of submission
12. Complaint reviewed and final decision communicated to complainant within 30 days of review request submission
    a. VTCT's complaint process has not been exhausted
13. Any remedial action taken

4. COVID 19 Addendum

4.1. Scope

This addendum is required to ensure that VTCT maintains clear and concise guidance in relation to dealing with Complaints, in accordance with the Vocational Contingency Regulatory Framework (VCRF) during the Covid-19 Pandemic.

The Covid-19 Complaints Policy and Process will remain in place until the cessation of the VCRF.

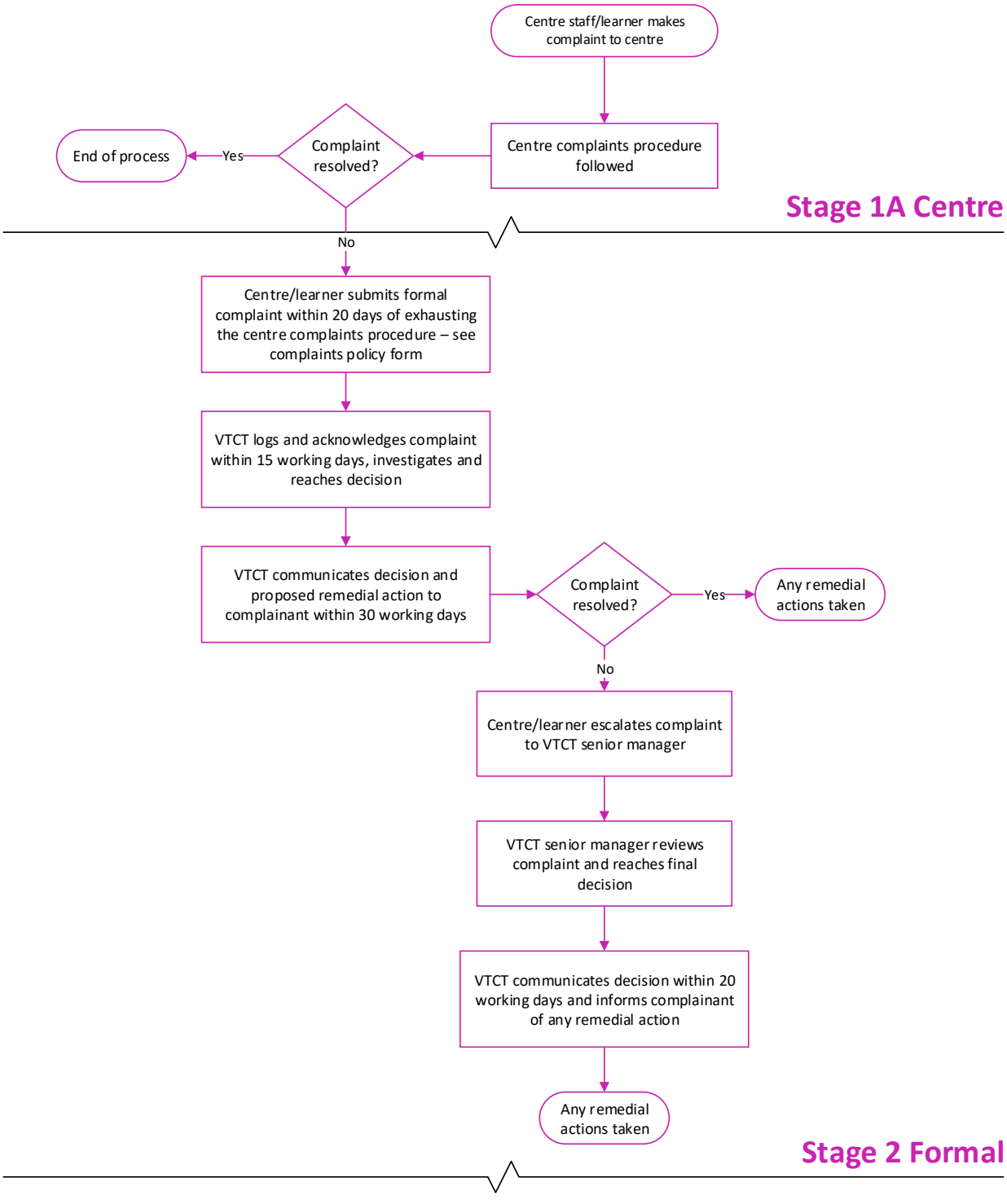
4.2. Arrangements

VTCT reserves the right to investigate a potential complaint or actual complaint and to treat any such notifications as potential malpractice.

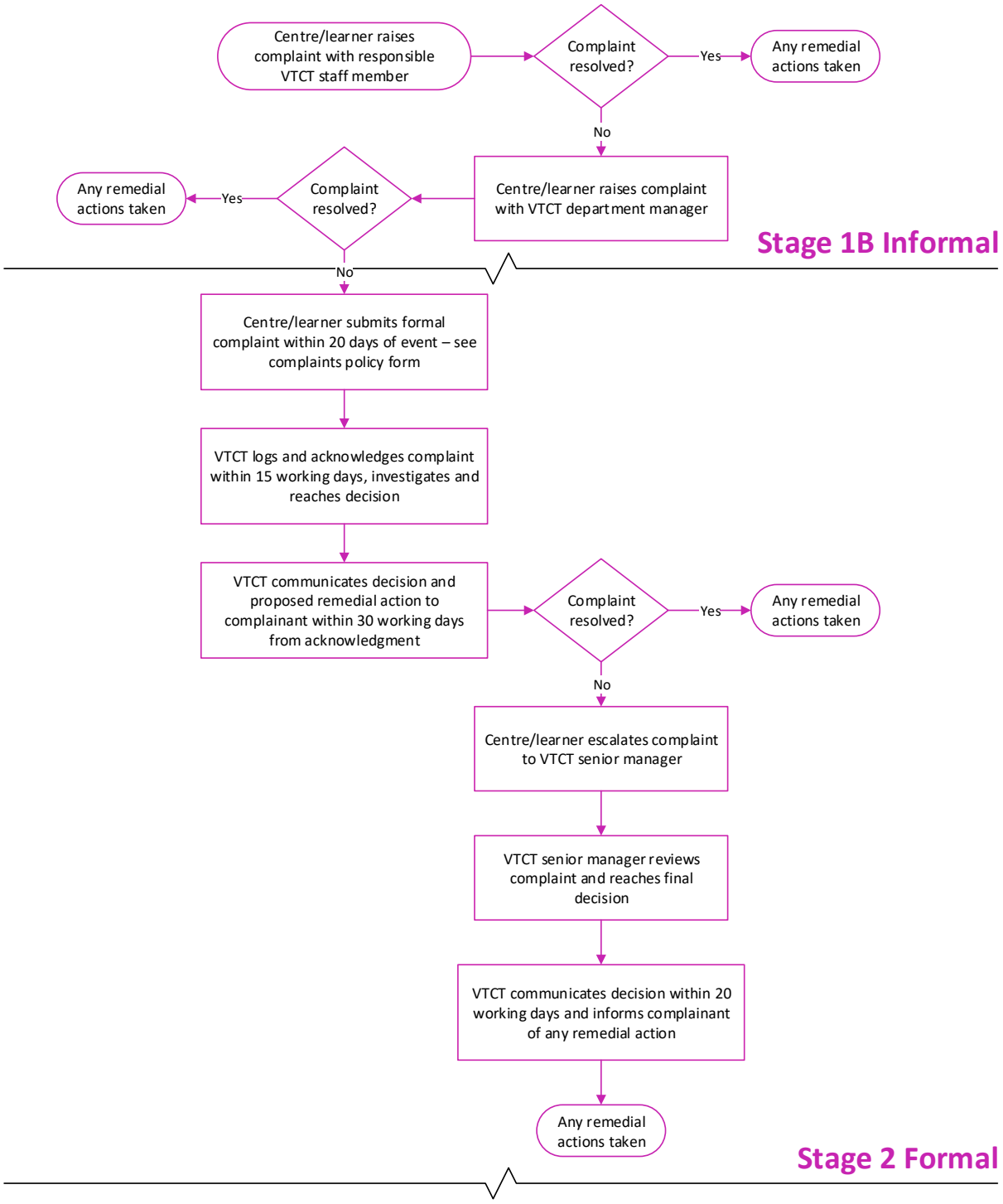
VTCT will investigate all complaints in the normal manner, subject to review by the Complaints Review Panel, although timelines indicated for dealing with individual cases will be extended (see COVID-19 Complaint against centre – flowchart and COVID-19 Complaint against VTCT – flowchart below) to ensure a balance is maintained between timeliness and anticipated volume.

In line with guidance from our regulators, complaints relating to grades awarded by centres and teachers will not in themselves be reviewed. Complaints arising from grades awards can only be investigated in respect of the process that was followed in relation to the awarding of a grade.

4.3. COVID-19 Complaint against centre – flowchart



4.4. COVID-19 Complaint against VTCT – flowchart



5. Appendix: Complaints submission form

All formal complaints must be submitted using the following complaints submission form:

http://contact.vtct.org.uk/form-21722/Complaints-Submision-Form

Document amendment history page

Version	Document Owner	Issue Date	Changes	Role
v1	Quality and processing Manager	25/02/2013	Added information on data collection	Quality and Processing Supervisor
v2	Quality and processing Manager	23/12/2013	Information about complaints in Scotland added	Quality and Processing Supervisor
v2.1	Quality and processing Manager	01/04/2014	Brand changes	Qualifications Administrator
v3	Quality and processing Manager	24/11/2014	Updated document formatting	Qualifications Administrator
v4	Quality and processing Manager	01/07/2016	Revised guidance for learners, added Regulator complaints, clarified SPSO information and added information on what complaints VTCT can deal with.	Quality and Processing Supervisor
v5	Quality and processing Manager	10/02/2018	Updated to new branding guidelines	Qualifications Manager
v6	Quality and processing Manager	01/03/2018	Reviewed based on feedback from SQA Accreditation and edited to cover requirements of all relevant regulators, not just Ofqual.	Executive Director of Awarding
V7	Quality and processing Manager	23/07/2018	Added new form and amended timeframes	Quality and Processing Supervisor
V8	Quality and processing Manager	13/08/2018	Split flowchart for complaints against centre and complaints against VTCT.	Quality and Processing Supervisor
V9	Quality and processing Manager	22/01/2019	Updated format onto new Branding. Removed reference to the London office	Compliance Manager
V10	Head of Quality	22/07/2020	COVID-19 Addendum	Compliance Manager

V11	Customer Support Manager	23/02/2021	Following trial of new internal complaints process, process and SLAs for sections 2 and 3 updated	Customer Support Manager
V12	Chief Academic Officer	18/03/21	Review and minor edits to COVID-19 provisions.	Chief Academic Officer

Document Review

Role	Review Status
Quality and Processing Manager	Reviewed
Chief Academic Officer	Reviewed and amended

Document Owner

Document Owner	Document shared with
Quality and processing Manager	Assessment, Qualifications, Whole organisation
Customer Support Manager	Whole organisation

Document Sign-off

Role	Sign-off Date
Executive Director of Awarding	13/02/2018
Executive Director of Awarding	01/03/2018
Chief Academic Officer	31/01/2019
Chief Academic Officer	18/03/2021