



## Compliments, complaints and whistleblowing policy and procedure

### Who is this policy for

This policy is for centres and/or learners who wish to submit a compliment, complaint or whistleblowing report in relation to a qualification and/or unit/component offered by AIM or its representatives.

Owner	Customer Experience Director
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## Version history

Version number	Date	Description
1	July 2022	Document created
1.1	April 2023	<p>Section 1.1 – ‘This policy is not intended for’ list updated to include</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ refusal to grant centre recognition</li> <li>▪ refusal to grant qualification approval</li> </ul> <p>Appendix 1 – AIM Qualifications and Assessment Group telephone number updated to 0844 2253377</p>
1.2	September 2023	<p>Section 2.3.2 - Making a formal complaint updated</p> <p>Section 2.3.3 – timeline updated to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ acknowledge receipt of the allegation within two working days</li> <li>▪ respond to the allegation within 30 working days</li> </ul> <p>Section 2.3.3 clarification on updates available to the whistleblower</p> <p>Appendix 1 – AIM Qualifications and Assessment Group telephone number updated to 0333 034 8833</p>

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## Section 1 – Scope

### 1.1 Scope

This Policy and procedure applies to AIM Qualifications and Assessment Group provision delivered either within or outside the UK.

#### This policy is intended for

- centres and its staff delivering AIM Qualifications and Assessment Group approved qualifications or units who wish to submit a complaint, compliment, or whistleblowing report in relation to a qualification and/or unit offered by AIM Qualifications and Assessment Group or its representatives
- learners registered on AIM Qualifications and Assessment Group approved qualifications or units, who wish to submit a complaint, compliment, or whistleblowing report about a qualification and/or unit
- members of the public accessing AIM Qualifications and Assessment Group services who wish to submit a complaint, compliment or whistleblowing report about a qualification, unit and/or associated services offered by AIM Qualifications and Assessment Group or one of its approved centres offering AIM Qualifications and Assessment Group qualifications or units
- AIM Qualifications and Assessment Group staff to ensure that all complaints and whistleblowing reports are dealt with and applied in a consistent and fair manner and to meet the requirements of qualifications regulations

#### This policy is not intended for

##### Complaints about:

- independent assessment decisions
- external moderation decisions
- assessment results
- reasonable adjustment decisions
- refusal to grant special considerations
- refusal to grant centre recognition
- refusal to grant qualification approval
- actions taken because of confirmed malpractice/maladministration

**These are dealt with in accordance with AIM Qualifications and Assessment Group's enquiries and appeals policy**

### **Complaints about:**

- the way an assessment or examination was delivered and conducted
- the service provided by an approved centre which alleges malpractice or maladministration

**This These are dealt with in accordance with AIM Qualifications and Assessment Group's malpractice and maladministration policy**

- Complaints relating to decisions taken by a centre, where these have not been raised with the centre and their complaints procedure followed through in its entirety to its conclusion. Only where the outcome of the centre's complaint investigation is deemed unsatisfactory by the complainant, can the matter be raised with AIM Qualifications and Assessment Group
- Complaints which seek arbitration from AIM Qualifications and Assessment Group relating to disputes between learners and centres
- Anonymous complaints, where the complainant cannot be contacted for further information. AIM Qualifications and Assessment Group will note the contents of the complaint and may investigate it if there is sufficient evidence to warrant this
- Malicious or vexatious complaints. AIM Qualifications and Assessment Group will reject such complaints 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 for it to be investigated further by AIM Qualifications and Assessment Group

**Should a complaint be submitted which falls outside the scope of this policy, AIM Qualifications and Assessment Group will confirm the basis on which the issue will or will not be addressed.**

### **The purpose of this policy is to**

- identify who the policy is intended for and what falls outside its scope
- define complaint, complainant and adverse effect
- provide examples of eligible reasons for a complaint
- detail the responsibilities AIM Qualifications and Assessment Group, centres, centre staff and learners have
- detail the complaints process
- detail follow-up actions after a centre has made a decision following receipt of a complaint
- provide the regulatory references which apply

## 1.2 About us

AIM Qualifications and Assessment Group is a leading **Awarding Organisation** and one of the UK's largest **Access Validating Agencies (AVA)**. We work in partnership with colleges, independent training providers, universities, employers, and voluntary organisations to develop accredited and regulated vocational qualifications. Our qualifications cover a range of academic levels from Entry Level to Level 6 across a wide range of subject areas. As an AVA we are licensed by the Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) to develop and award nationally recognised Access to Higher Education Diplomas. AIM Qualifications and Assessment Group is also an independent, government recognised, **End-Point Assessment Organisation (EPAO)** responsible for an apprentice's final assessment to ensure they can do the job for which they've trained.

## Section 2 – Compliments, complaints, and whistleblowing

### 2.1 Definition

#### 2.1.1 Compliment

A compliment is an expression of praise or admiration. This might be related to a member of AIM Qualifications and Assessment Group staff that has gone above and beyond, made your day easier or simply made you smile.

AIM Qualifications and Assessment Group endeavours to provide the best possible service to all AIM Qualifications and Assessment Group customers and whilst AIM Qualifications and Assessment Group receive and investigate complaints, it is also useful and encouraging to receive compliments and to know when AIM Qualifications and Assessment Group are doing things right. AIM Qualifications and Assessment Group would be grateful to receive details from any AIM Qualifications and Assessment Group customers who have experienced outstanding AIM Qualifications and Assessment Group service or provision in any way.

#### 2.1.2 Complaint

**A Complaint is an expression or dissatisfaction about:**

- an AIM Qualifications and Assessment Group product or service, including lack of service
- an AIM Qualifications and Assessment Group process or system
- the conduct of AIM Qualifications and Assessment Group
- AIM Qualifications and Assessment Group actions or lack of actions
- a particular situation
- the delivery of an AIM Qualifications and Assessment Group product by one of its approved centres

Where it is deemed to have fallen below the standards of AIM Qualifications and Assessment Group and what is expected. Where it is anticipated that AIM Qualifications and Assessment Group will identify the cause of the problem and take some kind of remedial action about it.

A Complainant is the person submitting the complaint.

**An adverse effect is any act, omission, event, incident, or circumstance where it gives rise to prejudice to learners or potential learners or adversely affects:**

- the ability of the awarding organisation to undertake the development, delivery, or award of qualifications in a way that complies with its Conditions of Recognition

- the standards of qualifications which the awarding organisation makes available or proposes to make available
- public confidence in qualifications

### ***Complaint examples***

The items listed below are eligible reasons that would constitute a complaint that AIM Qualifications and Assessment Group will accept. **These are not exhaustive, and the examples are only intended as indicative guidance.**

- Customer service
- Systems and/or processes relating to:
  - approval
  - re-approval
  - registration
  - assessment
  - moderation
  - verification
  - certification
- Service level agreements
- Incorrect invoicing
- Misleading marketing information
- Incorrect information
- Assessment and examinations, including access
- Equal opportunities
- Registration
- Certification
- The application of an approved centre's appeals or complaints procedure
- Certificate spelling errors
- Lack of response to queries
- Unable to unsubscribe to emails
- Incorrect products received
- Delay with receipt of certificates
- Non-compliance with a stated AIM Qualifications and Assessment Group process eg not adhering to published timescales or processes



- Behaviours of AIM Qualifications and Assessment Group staff
- The quality and availability of facilities and learning resources

### 2.1.3 Whistleblowing

Whistleblowing is a term used when an individual discloses information on another individual or organisation relating to malpractice or wrongdoing and/or the covering up of malpractice or wrongdoing, bad practice, corruption and/or the covering up of any of these.

- Malpractice is any deliberate activity or practice which contravenes regulations. Compromises the integrity of the internal or external assessment process and/or the validity of results or certificates. Damages the authority, reputation or credibility of AIM Qualifications and Assessment Group, the centre, or the wider education sector.
- Maladministration is any activity or practice which results in non-compliance with management and administrative regulations and requirements.

**An adverse effect is any act, omission, event, incident, or circumstance where it gives rise to prejudice to learners or potential learners or adversely affects:**

- the ability of the awarding organisation to undertake the development, delivery, or award of qualifications in a way that complies with its Conditions of Recognition
- the standards of qualifications which the awarding organisation makes available or proposes to make available
- public confidence in qualifications

#### *Disclosure examples*

**The items listed below are examples of allegations that an individual may wish to raise. These are not exhaustive, and the examples are only intended as indicative guidance.**

- Suspected or actual non-compliance by a centre with the approval criteria of AIM Qualifications and Assessment Group
- Suspected or actual malpractice/wrongdoing at a centre
- Suspected or actual malpractice/wrongdoing being carried out by an employee or worker of AIM Qualifications and Assessment Group
- A centre, centre staff member and/or learner suspected to be or involved in fraud or other illegal activity regarding AIM Qualifications and Assessment Group qualifications or units
- An individual who is suspected to or has been asked or forced to perform an activity that they believe constitutes malpractice
- Suspected or actual action leading to illegal financial gain

- Observation of a suspected or actual irregularity in assessment not reported through the normal channels
- Suspected or actual failure to address health and safety issues
- Suspected or actual miscarriage of justice has occurred, is occurring, or is likely to occur
- Suspected or actual potentially fraudulent claims for qualifications

### 2.2 Responsibilities

The following represent the key responsibilities of AIM Qualifications and Assessment Group, centres, centre staff and learners.

#### 2.2.1 AIM responsibilities

**Overseen by the Customer Experience Director, AIM Qualifications and Assessment Group will:**

In relation to complaints:

- ensure that all complaints are dealt with in a consistent manner in accordance with this policy
- ensure that the integrity of its qualifications and assessments are always maintained
- protect the identity of the complainant, where the complainant requests this and it is possible, particularly if to do so would breach a duty of confidentiality or any other legal duty of AIM Qualifications and Assessment Group

In relation to whistleblowing:

- promptly investigate all allegations
- ensure that AIM Qualifications and Assessment Group staff members assigned to an investigation of an allegation have the appropriate level of training and competence and that they have had no previous involvement or personal interest in the matter
- thoroughly investigate each allegation to establish if the situation reported has occurred
- notify the Head of the Centre and/or Quality Manager involved in any reported allegation
- withhold from the centre details of the person making the allegation
- protect the identity of the individual making the allegation, in accordance with the duty of confidentiality and/or any other legal duty of AIM Qualifications and Assessment Group
- **inform the appropriate regulatory authorities if it is believed that the allegation could:**
  - invalidate the award of a qualification
  - affect another awarding organisation
  - have an adverse effect
  - take all reasonable steps to prevent any adverse effects from occurring due to an allegation

- inform the police if a criminal act was involved in a proven allegation
- inform another awarding organisation where the allegation may affect that other awarding organisation and their provision
- withhold issuing results until the conclusion of an investigation, or permanently, where the outcome of the investigation warrants it
- apply the appropriate sanctions, penalties, and special conditions in cases of a proven allegation in accordance with the **AIM sanctions policy**

### 2.2.2 Centre responsibilities

#### All centres delivering AIM Qualifications and Assessment Group Qualifications must:

- have a complaints policy in place with procedures that deal with complaints from learners and members of the public about the services the centre provides and that these arrangements are accessible to all
- have an appeals policy and process in place to deal with complaints from learners or others about the services provided by the centre
- have a whistleblowing policy in place with procedures that deal with allegations from staff, learners, and members of the public about assessment and quality assurance of AIM Qualifications and Assessment Group qualifications or units
- ensure that all staff involved in the management, assessment and quality assurance of AIM Qualifications and Assessment Group qualifications and any learners undertaking one are fully aware of:
  - this compliments, complaints, and whistleblowing policy
  - AIM's Enquiries and appeals policy
  - AIM's Malpractice and maladministration policy and procedures
  - the centre's own complaints policy
  - the centre's own appeals policy
  - the centre's own whistleblowing policy
- ensure that all concerned are aware of the time limits for submitting a complaint and of the need to retain assessment evidence where necessary
- make staff and learners aware of the exclusions to this policy
- ensure that all complaints are handled consistently and in accordance with the centre's own complaints policy
- fully co-operate with any investigation
- comply with all requests for information in the timescales specified by AIM Qualifications and Assessment Group
- ensure that personnel dealing with and involved in a whistleblowing case comply with the relevant legislation at all stages

- ensure that the whistleblower is not subject to any prejudice as a result of making the disclosure
- Notify AIM Qualifications and Assessment Group if any personnel involved, in the allegation, leaves the centre
- Inform centre staff and learners affected by any allegation of the implications of any actions or sanctions
- implement required actions as a result of the investigation

### Centre staff responsibilities

**All centre staff involved in the management, assessment and quality assurance of AIM Qualifications and Assessment Group qualifications or units must be fully aware of:**

- this compliments, complaints and whistleblowing policy
- AIM's malpractice and maladministration policy and procedures
- AIM's enquiries and appeals policy
- AIM's sanctions policy
- the centre's own complaints policy
- the centre's own appeals policy
- the centre's own whistleblowing policy

### Learner responsibilities

**Any learner undertaking an AIM Qualifications and Assessment Group Qualifications must:**

- Be aware of:
  - this complaints policy
  - AIM's enquiries and appeals policy
  - AIM's malpractice and maladministration policy and procedures
  - the centre's own complaints policy
  - the centre's own appeals policy
  - the centre's own whistleblowing policy
- make any complaint or allegation to AIM Qualifications and Assessment Group in a timely manner
- only make a complaint to AIM Qualifications and Assessment Group relating to decisions taken by the centre, where the issue has been raised with the centre first and their complaints procedure exhausted

## 2.3 Process

### 2.3.1 The compliments process

Compliments about AIM Qualifications and Assessment Group or any of its staff can be emailed to [feedback@aim-group.org.uk](mailto:feedback@aim-group.org.uk).

Alternatively AIM would be pleased to receive feedback through [Google Review](#)

### 2.3.2 The complaints process

The following sets out the AIM Qualifications and Assessment Group complaints process.

#### ***Complaints about AIM Qualifications and Assessment Group***

There are two stages to the complaints process where the complaint is about the services of AIM Qualifications and Assessment Group.

#### **Informal stage**

- In the first instance it is recommended that problems are addressed at the earliest opportunity by speaking to the person who was originally dealt with or who is usually dealt with at AIM Qualifications and Assessment Group
- If that individual cannot help or if it is preferred that someone else is spoken to, the manager in charge can be contacted

#### **Formal stage**

- If the complaint cannot be resolved informally, a formal written complaint should be made

#### ***Complaints about a centre***

All complaints about centres are dealt with formally.

- Complaints about a centre will only be considered once the centre's own complaints procedures have been exhausted, with evidence of this required at the point the complaint is made.
- Only in exceptional circumstances where the learner can evidence that there was a significant breach by the centre of AIM Qualifications and Assessment Group's policies and/or procedures, will AIM Qualifications and Assessment Group consider the complaint against the centre without the complainant having firstly exhausted the centre's complaints procedures.

### *Making a formal complaint*

- All formal complaints must be made in writing to AIM Qualifications and Assessment Group via [feedback@aim-group.org.uk](mailto:feedback@aim-group.org.uk) and submitted within one month of the event being complained about
- **The complaint must contain:**
  - the complainant's full name, contact details including a daytime telephone number
  - a full description of the complaint, including the subject matter, dates and times if known
  - names of any people dealt with
  - copies of any evidence, documents, papers or letters related to the complaint, in the case of complaints against centres this must include evidence the centre's own complaints and appeals procedures have been exhausted
- Acknowledgement of the complaint and confirmation it meets the requirements of this policy will be provided by the Head/Manager of Customer Experience within **two working days**
- The Head/Manager of Customer Experience will transfer the complaint to the Compliance Director who will assign the complaint to the most appropriate member of staff for investigation, ensuring that the appointed individual has no personal interest in the outcome of the complaint
- The investigating officer will make contact to confirm the details of the complaint to ensure we have an accurate understanding. Once this has been confirmed by the complainant we will aim to respond to the complaint within 10 working days. Please note that in some cases the complaint response may take longer, for example if a centre visit is required. In such instances AIM Qualifications and Assessment Group will keep all parties fully informed of revised timescales and progress
- The claimant may be contacted within this period to seek further information or clarification. In some instances, AIM Qualifications and Assessment Group may recommend that a meeting is held to gather this further information or clarification
- Where a regulator notifies AIM Qualifications and Assessment Group of failures that have been discovered in the process of another awarding organisation which have possible implications for AIM Qualifications and Assessment Group, that notification will be treated as if it was a complaint
- AIM Qualifications and Assessment Group will notify other awarding organisations/stakeholders as required, where cases are likely to impact on them
- If a received complaint has the potential to lead to an adverse effect, AIM Qualifications and Assessment Group will immediately notify the relevant regulator(s) and keep them fully informed

### **Complaint outcome**

- If any part of a complaint is upheld, AIM Qualifications and Assessment Group will advise the complainant accordingly
- In situations where a complaint is justified and indicates a failure in the assessment processes of AIM Qualifications and Assessment Group, the relevant regulator(s) will be informed with details provided of the steps AIM Qualifications and Assessment Group will take to correct or mitigate any adverse effects
- **The actions AIM Qualifications and Assessment Group may take where an investigation finds that there has been a failure in its assessment processes may include:**
  - identifying any other learner who has been affected by that failure
  - correcting, or where it cannot be corrected, mitigating as far as possible the effect of the failure
  - ensuring that the failure does not reoccur in the future
- Where the outcome of a complaint questions the validity of results at a centre, AIM Qualifications and Assessment Group will take action to protect the interests of other learners and the integrity of the award of qualifications and/or units. This may involve a further/independent review of learner work. Where an independent review is necessary, this may be at the centre's expense.
- Where AIM Qualifications and Assessment Group has investigated the complaint 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, AIM Qualifications and Assessment Group will promptly notify the relevant regulator(s).

### **2.3.3 Whistleblowing disclosure process**

The following sets out the AIM Qualifications and Assessment Group's whistleblowing disclosure process.

#### ***Making an allegation***

- Where appropriate, concerns must be raised with the centre in the first instance, with a view to seeking its resolution through their own internal policies
- Where it is not appropriate to raise concerns with a centre or where these have not been addressed by the centre, a disclosure must be made to AIM Qualifications and Assessment Group by either letter or email
- **The disclosure must contain as much information as possible, including:**
  - the whistleblower's full name, contact details
  - a daytime telephone number
  - a full description of the allegation, including the subject matter, dates and times if known
  - names of any people involved in the allegation
  - full details of the allegation and those considered to be affected by it

- copies of any evidence, documents or correspondence related to the allegation

Whistleblowers are expected to outline why they are particularly concerned about the situation and declare any personal interest that they may have. Receipt of the allegation will be acknowledged by AIM Qualifications and Assessment Group's Head/Manager of Customer Experience **within two working days**.

### ***Investigation***

- The Head/Manager of Customer Experience will transfer the allegation to the Compliance Director who will assign the allegation to the most appropriate member of staff for investigation, ensuring that the appointed individual has no personal interest in the outcome of the complaint
- AIM Qualifications and Assessment Group will aim to respond to the allegation **within 30 working days**. Please note that in some cases the investigation may take longer, for example if a centre visit is required. In such instances, AIM Qualifications and Assessment Group will keep all parties fully informed of revised timescales and progress
- The whistleblower may be contacted within this period to seek further information or clarification. In some instances, AIM Qualifications and Assessment Group may recommend that a meeting is held to gather this further information or clarification
- Anonymous allegations, where the whistleblower cannot be contacted for further information, may be investigated by AIM Qualifications and Assessment Group if there is sufficient evidence to warrant this

### ***Communication of decisions***

Upon conclusion of any disclosure investigation, AIM Qualifications and Assessment Group will:

- provide the regulators with full details of the investigation/evaluation. Where any serious issues are proven, other awarding organisations offering the same or similar qualifications will also be informed.

Due to the confidential nature of our investigations, it will not be possible to provide the whistleblower with updates or details on the findings or outcome of any investigation.

### ***Rights of the centre or individual***

Where an allegation is made against a centre or individual (*centre staff or learner*), the centre or individual must:

- be informed of the allegation and the evidence there is to support it
- be told of the possible consequences should the allegation be proven
- be given appropriate time to consider, seek advice about, respond to and submit a written statement about the allegation
- be informed about the **AIM enquiries and appeals policy** and the contents of it, should a decision be made against them



### 2.3.4 Appeal against the decision or action

Any relevant party(ies) can appeal the decision taken by AIM Qualifications and Assessment Group if they are dissatisfied with the outcome of an allegation, by referring to the **AIM enquiries and appeals policy**.

#### *Regulator appeal*

The regulators are not appeal bodies and will only arbitrate if evidence is provided. Anyone approaching the regulators for this purpose must provide written copies of all relevant communications.

## Section 3 – Regulatory references

### 3.1 Conditions and licencing criteria

This policy is intended to meet the regulatory requirements of Ofqual, Qualifications Wales, CCEA and QAA. In particular:

Section	Condition/Licensing criteria
Conflicts of interest	Condition A4
Identification and management of risks	Condition A6
Management of incidents	Condition A7
Malpractice and maladministration	Condition A8
Notification of certain events	Condition B3
Arrangements with centres	Condition C2
Reviewing approach	Condition D3
Responding to complaints procedures	Condition D4
Centre assessment standards scrutiny where an assessment is marked by a centre	Condition H2
Appeals process	Condition I1
Compliance with appeals and complaints process	Condition I2
Documented accessible procedures for appeals and complaints	Licensing Criteria 30
Procedures for complaints and appeals	Licensing Criteria 31
Action to record and remedy errors relating to the award or certification	Licensing Criteria 47
Informing QAA of major errors relating to certificates and actions to be taken	Licensing Criteria 48
Procedures and criteria to ensure that a provider has quality assurance procedures relating to the delivery of provision, including processes for handling appeals and complaints	Licensing Criteria 50n
Monitor provider performance and compliance through the analysis of the nature and incidence of any appeals and complaints received	Licensing Criteria 54e
Action to amend, suspend or withdraw approval from a provider	Licensing Criteria 57

## Section 4 – Appendices and links

**Appendix 1 - Useful contacts**

**Link 1 - AIM website**

