



Compliments, complaints and whistleblowing policy

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/Diploma offered by AIM or its representatives within or outside of the UK.

Owner	Responsible Officer
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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"> ▪ refusal to grant centre recognition ▪ refusal to grant qualification approval <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"> ▪ acknowledge receipt of the allegation within two working days ▪ respond to the allegation within 30 working days <p>Section 2.3.3 clarification on updates available to the whistleblower</p>
2	October 2024	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Scope – Information added regarding complaints that have been subject to legal proceedings ▪ Section 1.1 clarity provided on what is in scope for this policy ▪ Section 1.1 further clarity on what is not covered by the policy ▪ Section 2.2.1 amendments to oversight responsibilities ▪ Section 2.3.2 added acknowledgement and understanding of complaint will be sent to complainant in one communication and investigation of complaint changed from 10 working days to 30 working days. ▪ Added requirement for complainant to confirm AIM have a correct understanding of complaint within 5 working days. ▪ SQA Accreditation requirements added throughout the policy ▪ Policy reviewed and section 4 – Useful Contacts added ▪ Section 2.3.4 amended to include further detail regarding complaints to SQA Accreditation.

Contents

Section 1 – Scope	3
1.1 Scope	3
1.2 About us	4
Section 2 – Compliments, complaints, and whistleblowing	5
2.1 Definition	5
2.2 Responsibilities	8
2.3 Process	10
Section 3 – Regulatory references	15
Conditions, licencing criteria and principles	15
Section 4 – Useful Contacts	16
4.1 Useful contacts	16

Section 1 – Scope

1.1 Scope

This policy and procedure apply 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
- 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 assessment decisions
- assessment results
- reasonable adjustment decisions
- refusal to grant special considerations
- centre recognition or qualification approval being declined
- actions taken because of confirmed malpractice/maladministration
- 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
- complaints with regards financial disputes between learners and centres.

- If the complainant does not agree with AIM Qualification and Assessment Group policies and procedures.
- 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

Please note that any complaint which is currently subject to legal proceedings, or has previously been addressed through legal action, will not be considered under this complaints policy. We advise complainants to pursue the appropriate legal channels if their grievance falls within this category.

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 of dissatisfaction about:

- an AIM Qualifications and Assessment Group product or service, including lack of service
- application of an AIM Qualifications and Assessment Group process or system
- AIM Qualifications and Assessment Group actions or lack of actions
- 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. If a learner wishes to submit a complaint they must be registered on an AIM qualification.

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

Please note AIM will not investigate complaints where existing legal action is underway or has taken place.

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
- Application of a systems and/or processes relating to:
 - approval
 - re-approval
 - registration
 - assessment
 - moderation
 - verification
 - certification
- Service level agreements
- Incorrect invoicing
- Misleading marketing information
- Incorrect information
- 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
- 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 about 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.

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 Director of Compliance, 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

Learner responsibilities

Any learner undertaking an AIM Qualifications and Assessment Group qualification 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@aimgroup.org.uk.

2.3.2 The complaints process

The following outlines the AIM Qualifications and Assessment Group complaints process.

Please note we will endeavour to keep your complaint confidential, but in some cases the circumstances giving rise to the complaint may make it impossible to maintain confidentiality. In these situations, we will discuss this with you before proceeding with the complaint.

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 by completing the complaints form and submitted to compliance@aimgroup.org.uk. Complaints must be submitted within one month of the event that is being complained about taking place.
- Acknowledgement of the complaint and confirmation it meets the requirements of this policy will be provided within **two working days**. If the complaint is in scope, we will ask the complainant to confirm the details of the complaint to ensure we have an accurate understanding.
- The complainant will be required to confirm with accuracy of the complaint within **five working days**. The complaint will only be investigated once this confirmation has been received.
- Once this has been confirmed the complaint will be reviewed and assigned to the most appropriate member of staff for investigation, ensuring that the appointed individual has no personal interest in the outcome of the complaint.
- We will aim to respond to the complaint within **30 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 outlines 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.

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

If you remain unsatisfied with the outcome after escalating your complaint you may contact the appropriate regulator for the qualification.

SQA Accreditation's Regulated Qualifications

It should be noted Learners registered on SQA Accreditation's Accredited Qualifications have the right to complain to SQA Accreditation. Normally SQA Accreditation would expect the regulatory complainant to have exhausted AIM Groups complaints process before complaining to them. It is also important to note that SQA Accreditation cannot overturn an academic decision. Centres should ensure their Learners induction materials include reference to further complaints to the awarding organisation and the regulator SQA Accreditation.

Scottish Public Service Ombudsman (SPSO) Users of public bodies in Scotland have the right to complain to the SPSO as the final arbiter. Users must exhaust the public body's own complaints procedure before the SPSO will consider their complaint, and it must usually have been raised within the previous 12 months.

The complaint cannot be under consideration in a court of law. The SPSO defines a complaint as "an expression of dissatisfaction by one or more customers about [the college's] action or lack of action, or about the standard of service provided by [the college] or on its behalf". The SPSO will not consider complaints about academic decisions, such as the outcome of an assessment. These types of complaints should be treated as an appeal and should follow AIM appeals processes.

Section 3 – Regulatory references

Conditions, licencing criteria and principles

This policy is intended to meet our regulatory requirements. In particular:

Section	Condition/ Licensing criteria/Principle
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
The awarding body and its providers must have open and transparent systems, policies and procedures to manage complaints	Regulatory Principle 16

Section 4 – Useful Contacts

4.1 Useful contacts

The following provides the contact details for AIM Qualifications and Assessment Group and its regulators.

AIM Qualifications and Assessment Group Contact details

If you have any queries about the contents of the policy, please contact us.

Telephone: [0333 034 8833](tel:03330348833)

Email: enquiries@aimgroup.org.uk

The Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA)

Telephone: [01452 557 000](tel:01452557000)

Email: enquiries@qaa.ac.uk

CCEA

Telephone: [02890 261 200](tel:02890261200)

Email: info@ccea.org.uk

Ofqual

Telephone: [0300 303 3344](tel:03003033344)

Email: public.enquiries@ofqual.gov.uk

Qualifications Wales

Telephone: [0333 077 2701](tel:03330772701)

Email: enquiries@qualificationswales.org.uk

SQA Accreditation

Telephone: [0345 279 1000](tel:03452791000)

Email: accreditation@sqa.org.uk

Disclaimer: Please note that any downloaded version of our policies may not be the most current iteration. For the latest updates and accurate information, kindly refer to the version available on our official website.