



COMPLAINTS POLICY

September 2018

1. INTRODUCTION

The IFA and its Centres are committed to providing the highest quality service to all customers. However, from time to time things can go wrong and may fall short of those standards. If something does go wrong, we need you to tell us about it to enable us to address the issue as a priority and, where appropriate, offer a suitable remedy. It will also help us to make any improvements that are highlighted by the complaint and ensure other learners or Centres are not affected.

This policy will be reviewed on an annual basis as part of our self-evaluation.

2. SCOPE

This policy applies to any and all participants in IFA Qualification(s); Learners, Centres, their staff and any additional site personnel who wish to raise a complaint in connection with the service they have been provided at an IFA Approved Centre or by their awarding organisation, the IFA.

Please note however, the IFA will not investigate a complaint where other policies exist for dealing with the subject of the complaint. This includes the following:

- [Malpractice and Maladministration Policy](#)
- [Appeals Policy](#)

all of which are available on the IFA's website.

3. COMPLAINTS WE CANNOT DEAL WITH

- Anonymous complaints
- Complaints regarding Centres that are not currently IFA approved
- Complaints by those not registered with the IFA
- Claims for course compensation, due to the financial implications to which the IFA is third party
- Employment disputes and/or contracts
- Complaints which come under Malpractice and Maladministration Policy or Appeals Policy
- Complaints on a third party's behalf – complaints must come from the person directly affected
- Complaints made later than 30 days of the issue having arisen

4. IFA RESPONSIBILITIES

The IFA has a responsibility to investigate complaints to protect the integrity of IFA Qualifications and ensure all those involved in delivering our Qualification(s) and customer service conform to our standards. The IFA takes complaints very seriously and if a complaint is upheld, the relevant Centre will be subject to the Sanctions Policy or the person will be subject to the Disciplinary Procedure.

Except for minor issues, the IFA will open a separate file for each complaint and record this on the specific person's/Centre's record.

5. CENTRE RESPONSIBILITIES

Centres are responsible for ensuring that all staff and learners are informed of the contents of this document and other related policies. The IFA requires Centres to have their own written complaints procedure, which will be made easily available to learners should they wish to raise concerns. Complaints must be addressed promptly and professionally by the Centre.

6. COMPLAINANT RESPONSIBILITIES

Complainants are reminded to take note of the stipulated timescales and respond to requests for information promptly; providing as much information as possible to inform the decision-making process.

7. COMPLAINT PROCEDURE

The IFA aims to resolve grievances as quickly as possible following the procedure described below. All complaints must be received in writing and will not be dealt with by telephone.

There are three stages to making a complaint:

STAGE 1: Contact the Centre/person handling the matter

Firstly, raise your complaint with the Centre and follow the Centre's complaints procedure or contact the person who is/was handling the matter in the first instance and allow reasonable opportunity for them to address the complaint.

For learners the Centre is responsible for the management of your training. Typically, you will have a contract or agreement between yourself and the Centre which will have been agreed when enrolling on the course. If something does go wrong you must remember that your contract is with the Centre and therefore you must in all cases take this up with the Centre first e.g. if it is in relation to how you are trained or the support you receive.

If a grievance is raised regarding the service provided by the IFA, the person who was originally handling the matter will acknowledge your email and respond within five (5) working days. The IFA will require to see evidence of this internal procedure having been exhausted as many minor issues can usually be resolved at this early stage.

If the complainant is not satisfied with the outcome of stage 1 they may proceed to stage 2.

STAGE 2: Make an informal complaint

All complaints must initially be raised as informal and sent to the IFA's Operations Manager who will ascertain the nature of the complaint. It may be that the matter can be resolved by directing the complainant to the relevant clauses in the IFA policies and

procedures, or may advise if it falls outside of the IFA's regulatory function, or refer the complainant back to the Centre if more appropriate.

The IFA Operations Manager will aim to resolve the complaint to the complainant's satisfaction within seven (7) working days or will refer the complainant to submit a formal complaint.

Please note - at this stage the IFA will not yet have undertaken an investigation into the allegation or formed an opinion on the matter but implements these 2 stages to reduce the amount of invalid complaints before proceeding to a formal level.

At any stage of the complaint being made, the IFA Operations Manager may offer informal advice to the Centre or staff member about their future conduct.

STAGE 3: Lodge a formal complaint

The Operations Manager will invite all valid complainants to submit a formal complaint by completing the enclosed form. The IFA Operations Manager will set this out in an acknowledgement letter and provide a copy of this Complaints Policy. Once the complainant has received acknowledgment that their complaint has been referred to formal complaint level the complainant has 30 days to complete the complaints form and supply the following information:

- The Centre's Complaints Policy (if appropriate)
- Outcome of the Centre's internal investigation (if appropriate)
- Reasons why the complainant is dissatisfied with the response at stage 1
- A statement including a time-line of events and surrounding circumstances and name the person(s) deemed responsible
- Copies of all relevant correspondence or screen shots as evidence
- Witness statements (if appropriate)
- How the complainant would like the IFA to resolve the complaint.

If, due to the nature of the complaint, the complainant is unable to provide evidence, a statement to that effect will need to be made so that the form is not returned as incomplete.

Statements that rely on documentary evidence will be attached as appendices, for example "I wrote to the Centre with the attached letter see appendix 1".

For complainants whose first language is not English we require that you have your statement translated into English for expediency. If there is any ambiguity as to the interpretation of a word or phrase, the IFA will, in the first instance, confirm this with the complainant.

Please note: Although we understand it may be a stressful experience for you, please keep statements factual rather than emotional, and allocate the necessary time needed to respond in full, including all the points you wish to make and referring to the relevant clauses in our policies where applicable. Additional information is not generally accepted after a complaint has been submitted and the complainant will need to demonstrate why it was not available at the time of submission.

If at any stage during the complaint procedure the complainant wishes to be legally represented, they must inform the IFA of this. The IFA reserves the right to be legally represented and to act upon legal advice.

8. INVESTIGATION

Once the IFA has received the completed complaint form, the IFA will acknowledge receipt within three (3) working days and the Disciplinary and Complaints Committee will instigate an investigation.

The IFA will ensure that all investigations are undertaken:

- Without bias or prejudice.
- by at least three appointed persons neither of whom is directly involved in the issue

Investigations will be conducted in a fair and reasonable manner ensuring that all evidence is considered. In broad terms the IFA will:

- i. Establish the facts and identify irregularities.
- ii. Identify the risk to learners.
- iii. Consider any surrounding circumstances.
- iv. Organise a visit to the Centre (if the allegation necessitates)
- v. Establish if the Centre has tried to resolve the problem and/or taken any remedial action.
- vi. Identify the person or persons responsible.
- vii. Obtain clear evidence to support any sanctions which may be applied to the Centre.
- viii. Request additional evidence from the complainant if necessary

NB. The IFA may decide upon evidence or lack thereof to dismiss the allegation at any stage. The complainant and Centre/persons involved will be informed if this occurs. The emphasis of supplying evidence rests on the complainant.

The IFA reserves the right to reject complaints which are considered frivolous, vexatious or malicious. If this is deemed to be the case, the complainant will be informed of such judgement setting out the reasons for coming to that conclusion, and will cease communication on the matter.

9. DATA PROTECTION

During the investigation process we may need the complainant to provide confidential information or we may request it. All information will be treated in accordance with the IFA's [Data Protection Policy](#). All information will be treated as confidential and will only be used for the sole purpose for which it was obtained.

Please note whilst every reasonable precaution is taken by the IFA to ensure security and safety of information, the IFA shall not in any way be liable for any loss or damage suffered whatsoever in relation to informing the relevant parties about the outcome of an investigation as part of our regulatory role.

10. OUTCOME

- a) The IFA will provide the complainant with a report of its findings when the investigation is completed. The report will include:
 - i. Drawn conclusions with clear reference to IFA rules and evidence that support them
 - ii. Recommendations for action and a resolution
- b) The IFA will fully document the outcome of the investigation and the IFA's judgement and retain the records on its system as per the IFA's Record Retention & Disposal Policy. The Centre/persons involved will also be informed of the IFA's judgement at the same time.
- c) The IFA will aim to inform the complainant of the outcome of its investigation within sixty (60) days of receiving the fully completed complaint form and supporting evidence, or inform the complainant that due to the complexity of the case a revised timescale is needed.
- d) Actions taken will be proportionate to the nature of the complaint:

For valid complaints raised against a Centre, the Centre may be sanctioned.

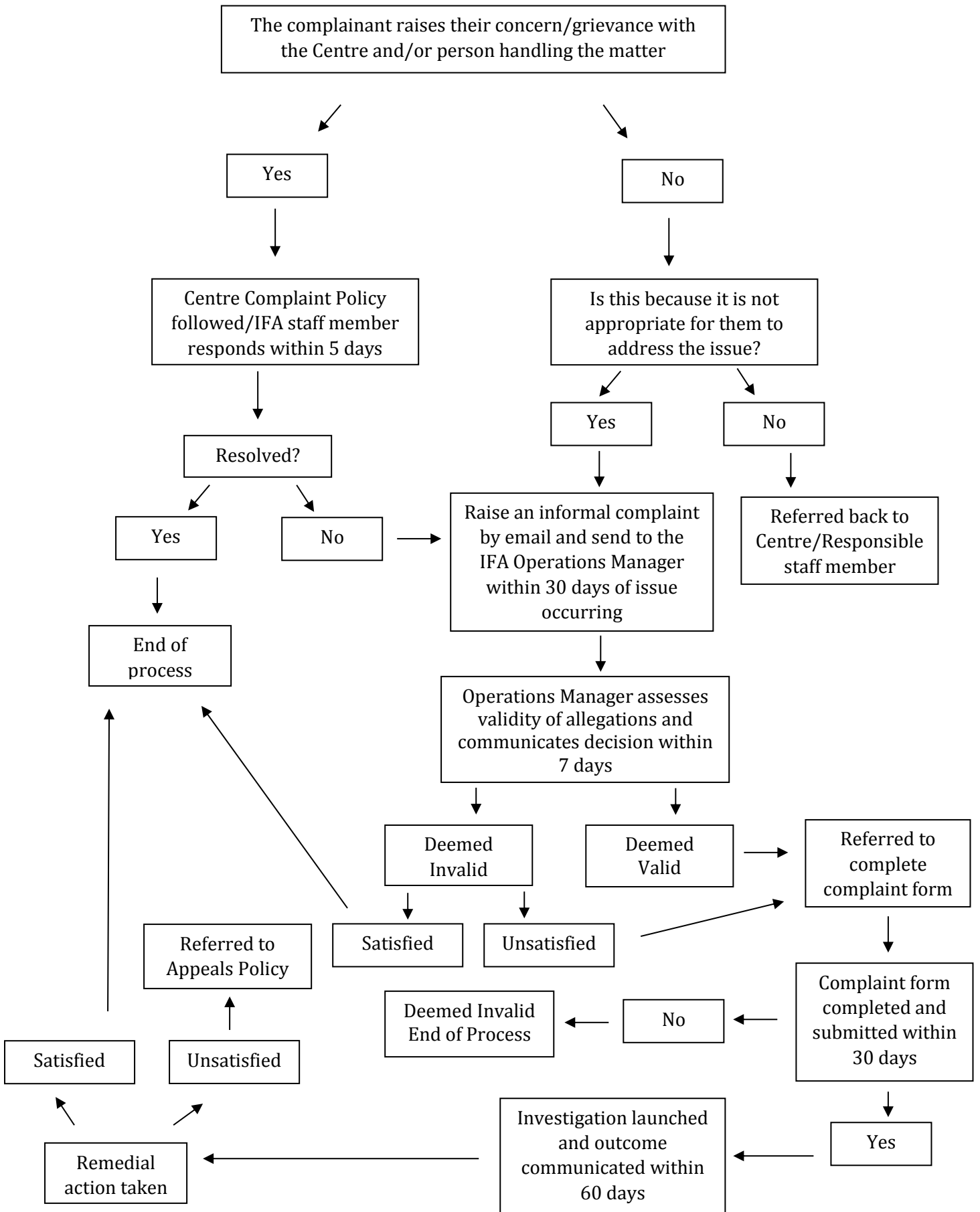
For valid complaints raised against the IFA and/or an IFA staff member, the IFA will:

- Provide an apology
- Implement remedial actions
- Review staff training and continual development programmes
- Review and improve services and procedures
- Take all reasonable steps to identify any other learner or Centre who may have been affected by the failure, and correct, or if it cannot be corrected, mitigate as far as possible, the effect of the failure and ensure it does not happen again.

11. APPEALS

If the complainant remains dissatisfied with the outcome of their complaint, they may appeal the decision. Please see Appeals Policy for details.

COMPLAINT FLOW CHART



COMPLAINTS SUBMISSION FORM

Full Name		Membership No	
Address (for Correspondence)			
Role at the Centre	e.g. learner		
Email		Telephone	
Centre Name			
Please provide the following information accompanied by the relevant evidence			
Date of incident			
Name those who you feel were responsible			
Statement Describe the incident including a time line of events and surrounding circumstances			
Checklist Ensure you have enclosed		The Centre's Complaints Policy	
		Outcome of the Centre's internal investigation/staff member response	
		Copies of all relevant correspondence as evidence	
		Any relevant witness statements	
Explain why you are dissatisfied with the outcome at informal complaint stage			
Explain how you wish to the matter to be resolved			
Signature		Dated	

Once completed please send to office@ifaroma.org