



Quality Assurance Handbook PART A1

POLICY No.8: Grievances, Complaints, and Appeals Handling Policy

8. Purpose of Policy

The purpose of Policy No.8 is to clearly define and provide an overarching framework for managing grievances, complaints, and appeals. In addition, this policy notes provision for a process for investigation of grievances, complaints, and appeals, ensuring a fair, equitable, and confidential means of resolving grievances, complaints, and appeals through transparent use of concise, distinct complaints and academic appeals procedures.

8.1 Policy Scope

This policy applies to all Tech Apprenticeship programmes leading to overarching QQI Awards, candidates, and enrolled apprentices where FIT CLG is responsible for the national coordination of the programme. Complaints or appeals processes may involve input from broad stakeholders in delivering and providing Tech Apprenticeship programmes. Importantly, FIT aims to ensure that, where possible, issues, complaints/grievances are resolved to the satisfaction of the individuals involved.

8.2 Overarching Considerations

FIT is conscious that delivering Tech Apprenticeships necessitates ongoing input from a broad stakeholder base. Therefore, the emergence of a cause of complaint/grievance may involve multiple individuals relating to the discharge a process, action, or procedure on behalf of varied stakeholders. Very few formal complaints are expected through the delivery of Tech Apprenticeship programmes, due in part to small volume class groups and heavily supported on and off-the-job learning environments. Where possible, FIT takes a timely and common-sense approach to resolving matters notified by an apprentice to the FIT Registry Team. In cases where a resolution on an informal basis cannot be found, FIT will revert the apprentice¹ to the appropriate procedure to progress the matter. FIT recognises that apprentices are entitled to the right of appeal against a decision of lower-level

¹ Apprentice or candidates based upon where they are in their individual apprenticeship journey.

decision-making authority by making a request to a higher one. The Registrar manages complaints and matters of academic appeals in the first instance. If an apprentice appeals a decision/outcome, then the Director of Academic Affairs and Programme Development² will process an appeal. However, the appeal is not a rehearing of the matter, but a process designed to identify an irregularity in the complaint's mechanism. This policy outlines the high-level process whereby a complaint is processed and investigated to a fair and adequate conclusion.

8.3 Policy Statement

This policy's cornerstones are based on transparency and natural justice and duly recognition of an apprentice's right to question a decision-making authority within the FIT governance and quality structures. FIT notes a clear distinction between minor issues that may emerge that are suitable to be addressed informally and usually resolved quickly by discussing with a stakeholder/ staff member to clarify a misunderstanding. Matters involving a formal process for resolution are what FIT term a 'complaint'.

An apprentice failing a particular programme element or not reaching the required standards to achieve their overarching qualification is not itself a grievance. A grievance progressed through the formal complaint's procedure must have a discernible element of unfairness involved. FIT believes in the full right to a response. Accordingly, anonymous complaints received informally or through the complaint's procedure will not be considered. Should an item of a criminal nature arise through the investigation of a formal complaint, FIT reserves the right to report said matter to the Gardaí or other authorities as deemed appropriate.

8.3.1 Making a Formal Complaint

Before making a formal complaint, apprentices must seek rectification of the issue by bringing the matter to the attention of people they are dealing with, such as a tutor, employer, or FIT representative. An apprentice should write to or speak with their tutor in the first instance. FIT appreciates that regarding the emergence of some matters, an apprentice may not feel comfortable discussing the topic/situation in communication with their tutor. However, FIT encourages an issue to be made known to the FIT Registrar, who can facilitate a timely discussion on the issue. If this informal approach cannot resolve a problem, the apprentice should lodge a formal complaint as soon as possible after the event/occurrence that gave rise to the complaint. FIT advises apprentices that concerning a complaint arising during their employment, they may also have to process their complaint through the processes in place with their respective employer. Apprentices' seeking to make a formal complaint to FIT are expected to have adhered to the *Code of Conduct Policy*.

² Provided neither FIT representative is named in formal complaint.

FIT may, where necessary, engage in early actions in instances relating to the safety and welfare of the complainant and/or anyone noted in the complaint where an apprentice communicates an item of a significant nature to the Registrar or wider FIT Registry Team.

Apprentices must utilise the applicable Complaints Form available upon request from the FIT Registrar. In normal circumstances, when a formal complaint is received, the FIT Registrar will acknowledge receipt of the complaint within five working days using the email address provided on the Complaint Form submitted.

A formal complaint must include all evidence the complainant wishes to have considered unless, for reasons out of the complainant's control, some information is unavailable at the time of making the complaint. However, the complainant must specify in the initial complaint that further information will be forthcoming specifying timescales for submitting the additional material. FIT advises apprentices that this timeline may impact the time the complaint will take to process and conclude. Upon concluding a review of the information provided and consultation with appropriate stakeholders, the Registrar will decide on the matter. The decision will note whether the complaint is found to be inconclusive, upheld, or dismissed. The Registrar will notify an outcome in a timely fashion. FIT retains a high-level listing of all formal complaints received and uses this information to inform improvement initiatives and, address areas of common concern; ensure appropriate interventions and/or corrective actions at the institution level to reduce the likelihood of recurrence.

8.3.2 Academic Appeals

FIT is conscious that apprentices from time to time, may have cause to lodge an academic appeal relating to element(s) of their assessments completed as part of their Tech Apprenticeship programme. In cases where an apprentice notes an issue with an assessment process or the conditions associated with an assessed event, FIT will manage the issue through an academic appeals procedure. FIT ensures insofar as achievable an environment of fair and consistent assessment of apprentices through assessment design that is valid, reliable, and authentic. An academic appeal is a mechanism whereby an apprentice can indicate that they feel an occurrence or event negatively impacted their performance in completing an assessed element. The Academic Appeals Procedure should be utilised to progress an appeal. FIT identifies four separate grounds for an academic appeal, including:

1. If there had been a material and significant administrative error in the information received and considered by the Examination Board, i.e., the noting of an incorrect module or award grade/outcome.

2. The assessment in question has not been conducted following the regulations aligned to the programme module(s), i.e., there is a noted irregularity in the assessment process.
3. If the apprentice had been prevented from attending an exam, assessment, or submitting coursework by illness or another good reason related to the apprentice's personal circumstances but could not apply for extenuating circumstances by the deadline.
4. For an apprentice with a hidden or physical disability or additional need, the initial needs assessment was not correctly carried out, the support identified was not provided, or the agreed assessment procedures for that student were not implemented.

At defined points in a calendar year, FIT processes academic appeals and convenes an Academic Appeals Committee necessary to come to a decision. If an apprentice is dissatisfied with the decision of the Academic Appeals Committee, they may appeal the decision to the Director of Academic Affairs and Programme Development. Apprentices must utilise the applicable Academic Appeals Form available upon request from the FIT Registrar. In normal circumstances, when an academic appeal is received, the FIT Registrar will acknowledge receipt within five working days using the email address provided on the Academic Appeals Form submitted. Apprentices must include all relevant information in their appeal submission and have identified the matter previously with their tutor without resolution.

8.3.3 FIT Actions (following receipt of a formal complaint or academic appeal)

On receipt of a formal complaint or academic appeal, FIT will acknowledge the submission in writing via email. In addition, FIT may contact apprentices by email or phone to discuss the matter. Investigation of a complaint will occur in a timely way, but timescales may vary depending on the issue's nature. Within ten working days of investigating the matter, the Registrar will communicate an outcome and advise the apprentice of the outcome of their investigation and proposal for resolution of the complaint.

Document History	
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