**Quality Assurance Handbook PART A1**

**POLICY No.8: Grievances, complaints and appeals handling policy**

# 8. Purpose of policy

The purpose of this policy is to clearly define and explain an overarching framework for managing grievances, complaints and appeals. In addition, this policy notes the provision of a process for investigation of grievances, complaints and appeals, ensuring a fair, equitable, and confidential means of resolving them through the transparent use of concise, distinct complaints and academic appeals procedures.

## 8.1 Policy scope

This policy applies to all Tech Apprenticeship programmes that lead to overarching QQI Awards, and to 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. Most importantly, FIT aims to ensure that, insofar as 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 regarding the discharge of a process, action or procedure on behalf of varied stakeholders. Few formal complaints are expected through the delivery of Tech Apprenticeship programmes, due in part to their 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 refer the apprentice[1] to the appropriate procedure to resolve the matter. FIT recognises that apprentices have the right of appeal against a decision of a lower-level 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 Development will activate an appeal[2]. The appeal is not a full rehearing of the matter, but a process designed to identify an irregularity in the complaint mechanism. This policy explains the high-level process whereby a complaint is processed and investigated toward a fair and adequate conclusion.

## 8.3 Policy statement

This policy's cornerstones are transparency, natural justice and due recognition of an apprentice's right to question a decision-making authority that operates within the FIT governance and quality structures. FIT notes that minor issues that are suitable to be addressed informally can usually be resolved quickly by discussion with a stakeholder/staff member, to clarify, for example, a misunderstanding. However, 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 in itself a grievance. A grievance progressed through the formal complaint procedure must involve what appears to be an element of

[1] Either apprentice or candidate, based on where they are in their individual apprenticeship journey.
[2] Except where the FIT representative is not named in the formal complaint.

unfairness. FIT believes in the full right of the complainant to a formal response. Accordingly, anonymous complaints received informally or through the complaint procedure will not be considered. Should an item of a criminal nature arise in the investigation of a formal complaint, FIT reserves the right to report it to the Gardaí, or other authorities where it deems appropriate.

### 8.3.1 Making a formal complaint

Before making a formal complaint, apprentices must seek the rectification of the issue by bringing the matter to the attention of those they are regularly interfacing with, such as a tutor, employer or FIT representative. An apprentice should write to or speak with their tutor in the first instance. FIT acknowledges that, in some cases, an apprentice may not feel comfortable discussing the topic/situation with their tutor. However, FIT encourages issues to be made known to the FIT Registrar, who can facilitate a timely discussion about the issue. If this informal approach cannot resolve the problem, the apprentice should lodge a formal complaint as soon as possible after the event that gave rise to the complaint. FIT advises apprentices that, should a complaint arise during their employment, they may also have to process the complaint through the available processes with their employer. Apprentices seeking to make a formal complaint to FIT are expected to have adhered to the Code of Conduct Policy.

FIT may, when necessary, engage in early responses regarding the safety and welfare of the complainant and/or anyone noted in the complaint where an apprentice communicates an item of a serious nature to the Registrar or wider FIT Registry Team.

Apprentices must utilise the relevant 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 ten working days using the email address provided by the complainant in the Complaint Form submitted.

A formal complaint must include all evidence the complainant wishes to be considered unless, for reasons beyond the complainant's control, where some information is unavailable at the time of making the complaint. In such instances, 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 such delays may affect the time the complaint will take to process and conclude. Having concluded a review of the information provided and having consulted with appropriate stakeholders, the Registrar will decide on the matter. The decision will note whether the complaint has been found to be inconclusive, has been upheld, or has been dismissed. The Registrar will notify the outcome in a timely fashion. FIT retains a high-level listing of all formal complaints received and uses this information to inform initiatives for improvement and address areas of common concern; and to ensure appropriate interventions and/or corrective actions at an institutional level to reduce the likelihood of recurrence in the future.

### 8.3.2 Academic appeals

FIT is conscious that apprentices, may, from time to time, 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 element, FIT will manage the issue through an academic appeals procedure. FIT ensures, insofar as it is achievable, an environment of fair and consistent assessment of apprentices through assessment 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, e.g., the noting of an incorrect module or award grade/outcome.

2. The assessment in question has not been conducted following the regulations applied to the programme module(s), i.e., there is a clear irregularity in the assessment process.
3. If the apprentice had been prevented from attending an exam, assessment or submitting coursework by illness or another legitimate reason related to their personal circumstances but could not apply for consideration of extenuating circumstances in time for 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 pre-determined points in a calendar year, FIT processes academic appeals and convenes an Academic Appeals Committee to come to decisions regarding such appeals. If an apprentice is not satisfied 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 that is available on 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 by the complainant on the Academic Appeals Form they have submitted. Apprentices must include all relevant information in their appeal submission and have identified the matter previously with their tutor but 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, although timescales may vary depending on the nature of the issue. Within ten working days of investigating the matter, the Registrar will advise the apprentice of the outcome of their investigation and make a proposal as to how the complaint may be resolved.

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