

Appeals policy

Introduction

This policy is aimed at our customers, including learners, who are delivering, enrolled on, or have taken, a VetSkill approved qualification or unit. It sets out the process you should follow when submitting appeals to us and the process we will follow when responding to enquiries and appeals.

It is also for use by our staff to ensure they deal with all appeals in a consistent manner.

Your responsibility as a centre

It's important that staff involved in the management, assessment and quality assurance of our qualifications and your learners are aware of the contents of the policy.

In addition, you must have internal appeal arrangements, which learners can access if they wish to appeal against a decision taken by your centre. If an individual wishes to appeal against a decision taken by a centre it must first of all go through the centre's appeals process before bringing the matter to VetSkill.

Review arrangements

We'll review this policy annually as part of our self-evaluation arrangements and revise it as and when necessary in response to feedback and/or indications from the regulatory authorities.

If you would like to comment on our policy or processes, please contact us (details provided at the end of this policy).

Fees

VetSkill makes an administrative charge for assessment enquiries and appeals; the current fee is listed in our fees schedule. Fees are reimbursed in full in the event of a successful appeal.

Scope of this policy

This policy covers:

- Appeals from learners in relation to an assessment decision on the basis that we did not apply procedures consistently or that procedures were not followed properly and fairly
- Appeals from centres and/or learners relating to a VetSkill decision to decline a centre's request to make reasonable adjustments or give special consideration in relation to an assessment
- Appeals from centres in relation to the application by VetSkill of a sanction/action on a centre resulting from a verification visit or an investigation into malpractice or maladministration, or a decision to amend assessment results following such an investigation
- Appeals from learners in relation to a decision to amend assessment results following an investigation into malpractice or cheating
- Appeals from centres relating to a decision made by VetSkill following an investigation into a complaint about a centre.

Limitations

No appeal will be considered in the following circumstances:

- In relation to any marks or grades awarded, or other academic judgment made, by assessors in the course of correctly following VetSkill assessment policy and procedures.
- In relation to any medical or compassionate factor said to have affected candidate performance during assessment, and which should reasonably have been notified to VetSkill at the time of assessment in accordance with procedure for requesting Special Consideration.

1. Assessment enquiries

In cases where a candidate achieves unexpectedly disappointing assessment results following a VetSkill controlled examination, they may request more detailed feedback about their assessment. This might, for example, include the content of invigilators' reports or examiner comments relating to factors not directly concerned with performance, such as the environment or equipment, or a candidate's demeanor. An assessment enquiry does not constitute an appeal, however it may help a candidate to better understand their result and inform their decision whether or not to lodge an appeal.

Learners should submit their enquiry using VetSkill's Enquiry form which can be found on our website <http://www.vetskill.com>

VetSkill will acknowledge your enquiry within 2 working days.

Your enquiry will be investigated and we will respond to you setting out our findings within 10 working days

2. Raising an appeal

Appeals must be received by us within 28 days of the date we notified you of an enquiry decision or the results of assessments or examinations conducted by VetSkill.

Learners must normally appeal on their own behalf in relation to any assessment conducted by VetSkill.

Learners who wish to appeal about the results of assessment conducted by a centre, or about a related decision, should have exhausted their centre's own appeals process before appealing to us. Learners must provide us with evidence that they have first appealed to their centre. It's expected that learners will only appeal directly to us in exceptional circumstances.

Appellant centres or learners should complete an Appeals Form, available from us, and in doing so supply supporting information: as relevant:

- learner's name and VetSkill registration number
- centre name
- date(s) you or the learner received notification of VetSkill's decision
- title and number of the VetSkill qualification affected or nature of service affected (as appropriate)
- full nature of the appeal
- contents and outcome of any investigation carried out by the centre relating to the issue

Situations brought to our attention by other means

Where the regulators notify us of failures that have been discovered in the assessment process of another awarding organisation we will review whether or not a similar failure could affect our own assessment processes and arrangements.

3. Initial review of the appeal details

We will acknowledge receipt of appeals within 2 working days and aim to respond fully to the initial review of the potential appeal within 28 days. Please note that in some cases the review processes may take longer, for example, if a centre visit is required. In such instances, we'll contact all parties concerned to inform them of the likely revised timescale.

At all times we will ensure that VetSkill personnel assigned to the appeal investigation have the appropriate level of training and competence and they have had no previous involvement or personal interest in the matter. If the Standards Manager has an involvement in the appeal matter they will not be responsible for allocating a member of staff to carry out the investigation or for overseeing and managing the investigation.

The first stage will be for us to undertake an initial, informal assessment of all potential appeals to ensure the application is complete and to ascertain whether the issue can be resolved before it goes to a formal appeal. In all instances we will ensure that the individual(s) carrying out this initial check will not have a personal interest in the decision being appealed.

Following the initial review of the potential appeal we will write to the appellant with details of our decision to either:

1. amend our original decision in light of the new rationale/evidence being put forward and which has now been reviewed
- or

2. require that a further visit of the centre take place in order to provide further/better evidence of the disputed issue
- or
3. to confirm we stand by our original decision. We will provide the rationale for this position and request that you confirm, within 15 working days, whether you now accept this decision or you wish to proceed to our formal appeals process.

4. The Appeals Panel

An Appeals Panel is appointed by the Board of VetSkill. Members of the Appeals Panel must hold qualifications and expertise relevant to the scope of qualifications delivered by VetSkill. The Chairman of the Appeals Panel is appointed by the Board and holds office for a period of three years.

Appeals are considered by a tribunal of no fewer than three panel members appointed by the Chairman. Panel members considering an appeal must have no conflict of interest in relation to either the assessment that is the subject of appeal or the centre at which the appellant is registered, neither must they have any relationship with the appellant candidate or his/her family.

At least one member of an appeals tribunal must hold a qualification and/or professional status directly relevant to the subject area of the assessment subject to appeal. At least one member must be independent of any relationship with VetSkill or of any centre approved by VetSkill.

No member of an appeals tribunal may have had any involvement with the assessment enquiry process or the initial assessment of an application to appeal.

An appellant may make representations to the appointed panel and has the right to attend a review in person.

The Appeals Panel is not a court of law and appellants do not require legal representation. If either party wishes to be accompanied by a lawyer, the other party and the Appeals Panel should be informed at least one week prior so that they too may have the opportunity to seek legal advice or representation. A hearing will then be arranged at the earliest convenient date.

The deliberations of an appeals panel take place in private and remain confidential after the conclusion of proceedings.

Powers of appeals tribunals – the decisions they may make

An appeals tribunal, acting of behalf of the Board, is empowered to:

In the case of a disputed assessment result:

- direct that the appellant may re-sit the whole, or part of, the relevant assessment, regardless of any restriction in the qualification regulations concerning the number of permitted attempts
- direct that an assessment re-sit not be counted as an attempt in relation to any restriction on the number of permitted assessment attempts

- direct that the fee for the assessment that is being appealed be refunded or that the fee for a re-sit permitted as a result of successful appeal be waived
- in exceptional circumstances, refer the case back to the examiner(s) concerned for re-evaluation
- dismiss the appeal

In the case of a disputed sanction or other action applied to centre:

- Direct that VetSkill reviews its decision in the light of the evidence provided
- Dismiss the appeal

VetSkill will write to you to confirm the outcome of the Appeals Panel within 20 days of the date of the review.

5. Seeking an independent review

Where an appellant remains unsatisfied having exhausted the VetSkill formal appeals procedure, they may ask for an independent review. This will be carried out by someone, appointed by VetSkill, who is not an employee of ours, an assessor working for us, or otherwise connected to our organisation. The reviewer will also be someone with the relevant competence to make a decision in relation to the appeal and will not have a personal interest in the decision being appealed.

The Independent Reviewer will review all the evidence which took place in the above stages and determine whether we've applied our procedures fairly, appropriately and consistently in line with our policy.

The independent review process may involve:

- a discussion with the appellant and VetSkill personnel
- a request for further information from the appellant or VetSkill personnel
- a centre visit by authorized VetSkill personnel.

The Independent Reviewer's decision is final in relation to how VetSkill will consider such appeals and we'll let you know the outcome of the review within 20 days of receipt of the independent review. If the centre/learner is still unhappy with the outcome at this stage they are entitled to raise the matter with the relevant qualification regulator (e.g. Ofqual in England).

Successful appeals and/or issues brought to our attention by Regulatory Bodies

In situations where an appeal has been successful, or where an investigation following notification from a Regulatory Body indicates a failure in our processes, VetSkill will give due consideration to the outcome and will as appropriate take actions such as:

- amend the profile of the centre concerned

- identify any other learners who have been affected and correct or, where it cannot be corrected, mitigate as far as possible the effect of the failure
- review our associated processes and policies to ensure that the issue is unlikely to recur

We will also cooperate with any follow-up investigations required by the qualifications regulators and if appropriate agree any remedial action with them.

Contact us

If you've any queries about the contents of the policy, please contact the Standards Manager at info@vetskill.com