



OCN NI Appeals Policy for Vocational and Technical Qualifications including Essential Skills during Summer 2021 Awarding

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Table of Contents

Background	3
Introduction	3
Appeal Principles.....	3
Fees	4
Areas covered by the Policy.....	4
The Centre’s Responsibility.....	4
Possible grounds for an appeal:.....	5
Process for raising an Appeal.....	5
Review of the Appeal	5
Stage 1.....	5
Stage 2.....	5
Outcomes.....	6
Successful Appeals and/or issues brought to our attention by the Qualifications Regulators	6
Contact Us.....	7
Appendix 1	8

Background

On 22nd January 2021, the Northern Ireland Minister for the Economy, Diane Dodds announced the cancellation of Vocational and Essential Skills exams until August 2021. The Minister then made a further announcement on 5th March stating that she had instructed CCEA Regulation “to ensure that awarding organisations put in place suitable alternative awarding arrangements that are reflective of this year’s particular circumstances.”

The regulatory intention was to ensure awarding organisations can put in place appropriate assessment arrangements to suit the specification for their qualifications under a revised framework. This revised framework was to ensure all learner grades awarded would have the same standards and recognition as any other year and will carry the same degree of portability for learners, when considering progression pathways.

The revised framework, the Vocational Contingency Regulatory Framework (VCRF) is based, where possible, on the principle of fairness that all learners taking such qualifications should receive a result that fairly reflects their work and level of attainment which should maintain the same broad levels of comparability with previous years. This framework confirmed that grades would be based on a range of evidence completed as part of the course, demonstrating the learner’s knowledge, and understanding on subject content.

Introduction

The emphasis, for OCN NI, has always been to preserve standards, maintain public confidence in the qualifications, and meet the reasonable needs of all users of these qualifications.

OCN NI recognises that it is important that centres and learners have a process by which to appeal an awarding decision. This policy sets out the process centres should follow when submitting appeals to OCN NI and the process OCN NI will undertake when responding to appeals.

This appeals policy is valid for contested results awarded by OCN NI during the 1st August 2020 – 31st August 2021. Any other appeals should refer to OCN NI’s standard appeals policy which is available at www.ocnni.org.uk.

Appeal Principles

We believe that any appeals process must:

1. be open and transparent and ensure fairness, by ensuring errors in the process of awarding, if identified, are rectified.

2. ensure consistency in awarding and that OCN NI complies with the guidance in relation to its awarding decisions.
3. allow a learner, through their centre, to examine the actions of OCN NI to determine whether decisions are consistent with the regulatory requirements in place (A centre should raise an appeal on behalf of its learner if the centre believes the awarding decision has not been carried out accurately by OCN NI, in accordance with its VCRF guidance and supporting information).

OCN NI is committed to getting things right by being open and accountable so that appeals will be fairly and proportionately treated. OCN NI will take all reasonable steps to ensure confidence in its approach and processes while protecting the integrity of the award.

Fees

OCN NI will not charge fees for appeals during the period 1st August 2020 – 31st August 2021.

Areas covered by the Policy

This policy covers:

- Appeals from a centre where they have identified an error with the grade it submitted to OCN NI
- Appeals from centres in relation to an awarding decision made during summer 2021 awarding on the basis that OCN NI did not apply procedures consistently or that procedures were not followed properly and fairly.
- Appeals from centres in relation to an OCN NI awarding decision which overturned a centre's result.
- Appeals from centres in relation to the application by OCN NI of a sanction/action on a centre resulting from an investigation into malpractice or maladministration arising out of a centre's bias in a TAG submission.

The Centre's Responsibility

It is important that centre staff involved in the management, assessment and quality assurance of our qualifications are aware of the contents of the policy.

If a learner wishes to appeal against an award decision, they must first ask their centre to review whether an administrative or procedural error has been made. If the centre identifies an error with the grade it submitted to OCN NI, it must submit a revised grade with rationale for the grade change to OCN NI. If OCN NI is satisfied with the rationale presented by the centre and it considers it is

appropriate to correct the result, it will issue a revised grade.

Where the centre does not believe that an error has been made but a candidate believes that an error persists, a candidate may ask the centre to submit an appeal to OCN NI on their behalf. Any candidate can submit an appeal, through their centre, after they have received the outcome of their centre review.

Possible grounds for an appeal:

- a procedural error by the centre,
- an administrative error by OCN NI, or
- an unreasonable exercise of academic judgement (either the way the Teacher Assessed Grade (TAG)/Centre Determined Grade (CDG) was determined and/or the selection of evidence).

An appeal can only be made against a result issued. If the candidate requests an appeal, the centre must submit it to OCN NI. OCN NI will not accept appeals directly from candidates.

Process for raising an Appeal

Appeals will be accepted until 17th September. Priority appeals should be submitted to OCN NI by the 23rd August. OCN NI may already have a copy of your required submission documentation (including TAG Decision Making Proformas and CDG forms) however further information may be required, upon request.

Centres can apply by completing the appeals form in Appendix 1 of this document and submitting to compliance@ocnni.org.uk

Review of the Appeal

Stage 1

OCN NI will undertake an initial assessment of all potential appeals to ensure the application is complete and all supporting evidence is provided. In all instances we will ensure that the person carrying out this check will not have a personal interest in the decision being appealed.

Stage 2

As procedures are evaluated at the centre review stage, it is expected that most procedural errors and centre administrative errors will have already been rectified by the centre before an appeal is submitted. These appeals will be completed by a member of OCN NI staff.

Where the appeal concerns a candidate's evidence, OCN NI will appoint a subject expert who is trained to evaluate appeals. The subject expert will have no personal interest in the decision being

appealed and will evaluate any appeal made on the grounds that there was an unreasonable exercise of academic judgement by the centre.

OCN NI will acknowledge receipt of an appeal and aim to respond within 25 working days. In some instances, this process may extend beyond the proposed 25 working days, for instance, if OCN NI are required to conduct a centre visit or further information is required. OCN NI will ensure the appellant is kept informed of the process.

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

1. amend our original awarding decision after considering the rationale/evidence put forward for review
2. confirm we stand by the original decision and to explain the rationale for this. OCN NI will request that you confirm, within 5 working days, whether you now accept this decision or if you wish would proceed to our formal appeals process

Outcomes

As a result of the appeal, the case will either be rejected (disallowed) or upheld (allowed) in whole or in part. The fact that an appeal has been upheld (allowed) will not necessarily result in a grade change for the candidate.

If an error is identified that affects the grade, OCN NI will amend the grade if it is clear what the new grade should be. In some cases, the case may be referred to the centre, to review the evidence and determine if the TAG/CDG should be changed. If it does change the TAG/CDG, this would then be resubmitted to OCN NI, for quality assurance checks and processing.

There are no further stages of appeal for candidates with OCN NI this year. However, the candidate may be able to complain to the relevant regulator, details on how to do this will be provided as part of the outcome letter where this is the case. This information must be shared with the candidate.

Successful Appeals and/or issues brought to our attention by the Qualifications Regulators

In situations where an appeal has been successful, or where an investigation following notification from CCEA Regulation/Ofqual indicates a failure in our processes, OCN NI will give due consideration to the outcome and will take appropriate action such as:

- amend the record of the centre concerned
- identify any other learners who have been affected
- correct or, where it cannot be corrected, mitigate as far as possible the effect of the failure (e.g., amend the results for the learner(s) affected following an appropriate investigation)

- review our associated processes and policies to ensure that the 'failure' does not occur again or mitigate the situation as far as possible if the failure that occurred cannot be corrected.

OCN NI will also co-operate with any follow-up investigations required by the qualifications regulators and if appropriate agree any remedial action with them.

Contact Us

If you have any queries about the contents of the policy, please contact the Compliance and Audit Team on 028 9046 3990 or email them at compliance@ocnni.org.uk

Appendix 1

In line with OCN NI's appeals policy for summer 2021 awarding, centres should raise an appeal on behalf of their learner if they do not agree with OCN NI's grade.

Please **tick** to confirm that your centre has reviewed your own internal processes and results submitted and still wish to appeal the OCN NI awarding decision

Centre Name:	
Centre Address:	
Centre Contact Name:	I am a centre representative: <input type="checkbox"/>
Centre Contact Email Address:	
Centres Contact Telephone:	
Date of Appeal:	

Name of learner(s):	
Learner's OCN NI Registration Number:	
Date the learner received notification of OCN NI's decision:	
Qualification Title:	
Qualification Number:	
Run ID:	

Please tell us the nature of your learner appeal by ticking the appropriate box:

Appeals from centres on behalf of their learner, in relation to an awarding decision made during the summer 2021 awarding period, on the basis that:

A procedural error has been made by the centre	<input type="checkbox"/>
An administrative error has been made by OCN NI	<input type="checkbox"/>
An unreasonable exercise of academic judgement (either the way the Teacher Assessed Grade (TAG)/Centre Determined Grade (CDG) was determined and/or the selection of evidence).	<input type="checkbox"/>

Please explain what the learner believes happened, and what should have happened instead.

Please email the completed form to: compliance@ocni.org.uk