

Enquiries and Appeals Policy

1. Introduction

This policy is aimed at VetSkill customers, including learners and apprentices who are delivering, enrolled on, or have taken a VetSkill approved qualification, unit or End-point Assessment (EPA). It sets out the process that should be followed when submitting enquiries or appeals to VetSkill and the process VetSkill will follow when responding to these.

This policy is also for use by VetSkill staff to ensure enquiries and appeals are dealt with in a consistent manner.

2. Centre or Training Provider Responsibility

2.1 It is important that staff involved in the management, assessment and quality assurance of VetSkill qualifications and assessments, and centre/training provider learners and apprentices, are made aware of the contents of this policy.

2.2 Centres and training providers must have an internal appeal policy and procedure, which learners/apprentices can access if they wish to appeal against a decision taken by the centre or training provider. If an individual wishes to appeal against a decision taken by their centre or training provider, they must first of all go through this establishment's appeals process before bringing the matter to VetSkill.

3. Review Arrangements

3.1 VetSkill will review this policy annually as part of self-evaluation arrangements and revise it as and when necessary, and in response to feedback and/or indications from the regulatory authorities.

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3.2 If you would like to comment on VetSkill policy or processes, please contact us using the details provided at the end of this document.

4. Fees

4.1 VetSkill makes an administrative charge for assessment enquiries and appeals; the current fees are listed in VetSkill's *Fees Schedule*. Fees are reimbursed in full in the event of a successful appeal.

5. Scope of this Policy

5.1 This policy covers:

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

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5.2 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’s assessment policies 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 VetSkill’s *Special Considerations Policy*.

6. Assessment Enquiries

6.1 In cases where a candidate achieves unexpectedly disappointing assessment results following a VetSkill-controlled assessment, they may request more detailed feedback about their assessment. This might, for example, include the content of invigilator reports or assessor comments relating to factors not directly concerned with performance, such as the environment or equipment, or a candidate’s demeanour. 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.

6.2 Learners and apprentices should submit their enquiry using VetSkill’s *Enquiry Form* which can be found on the VetSkill website: <http://www.vetskill.com>.

6.3 VetSkill will acknowledge enquiries within two (2) working days.

6.4 Enquires will be investigated and responded to, setting out VetSkill’s findings, within ten (10) working days.

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7. Raising an Appeal

- 7.1 Appeals must be received by VetSkill within twenty-eight (28) days of the date of notification of an enquiry decision, or the results of assessments or examinations conducted by VetSkill.
- 7.2 Learners and apprentices must normally appeal on their own behalf in relation to any assessment conducted by VetSkill.
- 7.3 Learners and apprentices who wish to appeal about the results of an assessment conducted by a centre or training provider, or about a related decision, should have exhausted their establishment’s own appeals process before appealing to VetSkill. Evidence must be provided to demonstrate that they have first appealed internally. It is expected that learners and apprentices will only appeal directly to VetSkill regarding their establishment in exceptional circumstances.
- 7.4 Appellant centres/training providers or learners/apprentices should complete an *Appeals Form*, available from the VetSkill Hub or priority@vetskill.com and, in doing so, supply supporting information as relevant:
- Learner/apprentice’s name and VetSkill registration number
 - Centre/training provider’s name
 - Date(s) you or the learner/apprentice 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 or training provider relating to the issue.

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8. Situations Brought to VetSkill’s Attention by Other Means

- 8.1 Where the regulators notify us of failures that have been discovered in the assessment process of another awarding organisation, VetSkill will review whether or not a similar failure could affect its assessment processes and arrangements.
- 8.2 Where, following a review, VetSkill identify such a potential failure, it will take the same action as if a failure had been discovered in relation to it by virtue of the application of the relevant regulators appeals and complaints process.

9. Initial Review of the Appeal Details

- 9.1 VetSkill will acknowledge receipt of appeals within two (2) working days and aim to respond fully to the initial review of the potential appeal within twenty-eight (28) days. Please note that in some cases the review processes may take longer, for example, if a centre or training provider visit is required. In such instances, VetSkill will contact all parties concerned to inform them of the likely revised timescale.
- 9.2 At all times VetSkill will ensure that 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 VetSkill 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, VetSkill will ensure that the individual(s) carrying out this initial check will not have a personal interest in the decision being appealed.

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9.4 Following the initial review of the potential appeal, VetSkill will write to the appellant with details of the decision to either:

- amend the original decision in light of the new rationale/evidence being put forward and which has now been reviewed, or
- require that a further visit of the centre or training provider takes place in order to provide further/better evidence of the disputed issue, or
- to confirm VetSkill stands by the original decision. VetSkill will provide the rationale for this position and request that the appellant confirm, within fifteen (15) working days, whether they now accept this decision or whether they wish to proceed to VetSkill’s formal appeals process.

10. The Appeals Panel

10.1 The 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 or assessments delivered by VetSkill. The chair of the appeals panel is appointed by the board and holds office for a period of three (3) years.

10.2 Appeals are considered by a tribunal of no fewer than three (3) panel members appointed by the chair. 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 or training provider at which the appellant is registered; neither must they have any relationship with the appellant candidate or their family.

10.3 At least one member of the 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 or training provider approved by VetSkill. No member of an appeals tribunal may have had

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any involvement with the assessment enquiry process or the initial assessment of an application to appeal.

- 10.4 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 (1) week ahead of the tribunal, so that they too may have the opportunity to seek legal advice or representation. A hearing will then be (re)arranged for the earliest convenient date.

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

11. Powers of Appeals Tribunals – The Decisions They May Make

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

In the case of a disputed assessment result

- direct that the appellant may re-sit the whole of, or part of, the relevant assessment, regardless of any restriction in the qualification or assessment 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 a successful appeal be waived
- in exceptional circumstances, refer the case back to the assessor(s) concerned, for re-evaluation
- dismiss the appeal.

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

- direct that VetSkill reviews its decision in the light of the evidence provided
- dismiss the appeal.

VetSkill will write to the appellant to confirm the outcome of the appeals panel within twenty (20) working days of the date of the review.

12. Seeking an Independent Review

12.1 Where an appellant remains unsatisfied, having exhausted VetSkill’s formal *Appeals Procedure*, they may ask for an independent review. This will be carried out by someone appointed by VetSkill, who is not a VetSkill employee, an assessor working for VetSkill, or not otherwise connected to the 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.

12.2 The independent reviewer will review all the evidence documented in the above stages and determine whether VetSkill have applied procedures fairly, appropriately, in a timely manner, and consistently in line with VetSkill policy.

12.3 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 or training provider visit by authorised VetSkill personnel.

12.4 The independent reviewer’s decision is final in relation to how VetSkill will consider such appeals and VetSkill will communicate the outcome of the review to the appellant within twenty (20) working days of receipt of the independent review. If the centre or training provider, or learner/apprentice is still unhappy with the outcome at this stage they are

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entitled to raise the matter with the relevant qualification regulator (for example, Ofqual in England, CCEA in Northern Ireland).

13. Successful Appeals and/or Issues Brought to VetSkill’s Attention by Regulatory Bodies

13.1 In situations where an appeal has been successful, or where an investigation following notification from a regulatory body indicates a failure in VetSkill’s assessment processes, VetSkill will give due consideration to the outcome and will, as appropriate, take actions such as:

- amending the profile of the centre/training provider concerned
- identifying any other learners or apprentices who have been affected, and correcting or, where it cannot be corrected, mitigating as far as possible the effect of the failure
- reviewing VetSkill associated processes and policies to ensure that the issue is unlikely to reoccur
- complying with the requirements of any appeals and complaints process established by the qualifications and/or EPA regulators
- giving due regard to the outcome of any such appeals or complaints process in relation to a qualification or end-point assessment which it makes available.

VetSkill will cooperate with any follow-up investigations required by the qualifications or EPA regulators and, if appropriate, agree any remedial action with them.

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14. Contact Us

Please contact us if you have any queries about any aspect of this policy or process:



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Review Arrangements and Version Control:

This version of VetSkill’s *Complaints Policy* replaces all previous versions. This document is subject to regular revision and is maintained electronically by its owner. Electronic copies are version controlled. Printed copies are not subject to this control. VetSkill will review this policy regularly as part of internal continuous improvement processes and will revise it as and when necessary in response to customer and learner/apprentice feedback, changes in our practices, actions from the regulatory authorities or external agencies, changes in legislation, or trends identified from previous situations.

Documented changes from previous version	
Section	Change
Throughout	Terminology changed to incorporate AO and EPAO staff and stakeholders.
Footer Table	Enhancement to policy document format – version control