COMPLAINTS AND COMPLIMENTS PROCEDURE 2026/27

Owner	Director of Business Training	**Approved by**	Board of Directors
Effective	1 August 2026	**Review due**	31 July 2027
Version	7.0	**Approval date**	30 July 2026

1. Purpose and principles

Central Training Academy (CTA) welcomes complaints, concerns and compliments as evidence for service improvement. Complaints will be handled fairly, promptly, impartially and without victimisation. CTA will make reasonable adjustments, communicate in plain language, protect confidentiality where possible and distinguish complaints from safeguarding, whistleblowing, appeals, grievances and data-rights requests.

2. Scope and exclusions

This procedure is available to learners and apprentices, applicants, employers, parents or carers, representatives, members of the public and organisations affected by CTA services. A representative may act with appropriate authority. Anonymous complaints will be considered where sufficient information is available.

The following use separate routes: staff employment grievances; assessment or awarding-organisation appeals; requests for personal data or correction; safeguarding allegations; disclosures under the whistleblowing policy; funding decisions made by a public body; and complaints about an employer contract or employment terms. CTA will explain the correct route and avoid requiring a complainant to restart unnecessarily.

3. Regulatory framework

- DfE complaints process for further education colleges, apprenticeship and adult learning organisations;
- Department for Work and Pensions Apprenticeship Funding Rules 2026/27 for apprentices starting from 1 August 2026;
- DfE funding agreements and rules for other CTA-funded provision;
- Ofsted Further Education and Skills Inspection Toolkit and operating guidance updated for September 2026;
- Equality Act 2010, including reasonable adjustments and protection from victimisation;
- Consumer Rights Act 2015 where services are supplied to consumers;
- Data Protection Act 2018 and UK GDPR;
- Children Acts, Care Act 2014 and CTA safeguarding duties where a complaint raises welfare concerns.

4. How to complain or provide a compliment

Feedback may be given verbally, by email, by letter, through CTA's feedback form or with support from another person. Use of the form is optional. A complaint should explain what happened, when and where it happened, who was involved, any action already taken and the outcome sought. CTA will record verbal complaints and confirm the record with the complainant where practicable.

Complaints should normally be made within three months of the matter or of the complainant becoming aware of it. CTA may accept a later complaint where there is good reason, including disability, ill health, safeguarding concerns, delayed awareness or an ongoing connected issue. This internal period does not remove any external right or deadline.

5. Accessibility, advocacy and fair treatment

- alternative formats, interpretation, communication support or help completing a complaint;
- a representative, advocate, parent or carer where appropriate;
- adjusted meeting arrangements and additional time where reasonable;
- trauma-informed communication and a single point of contact for complex cases;
- protection from disadvantage for raising a complaint in good faith.

CTA will ask what support is required and will record agreed adjustments. A complaint involving discriminatory treatment will be assessed under the Equality Act 2010 as well as this procedure.

6. Safeguarding, immediate risk and parallel processes

Where information indicates a child or adult may be at risk, CTA will act under its safeguarding policy immediately and will not wait for the complaints stages to finish. Allegations about a person working with children will be referred to the appropriate safeguarding lead and, where required, the Local Authority Designated Officer. CTA may pause all or part of a complaint during police, safeguarding, awarding-body or legal action, but will explain the reason, maintain contact and progress any issues that can be considered safely.

7. Informal resolution

Where suitable, CTA will try to resolve matters promptly with the staff member or manager closest to the issue. Informal resolution is optional and will not be required where the concern is serious, sensitive, involves a conflict of interest or has already been raised without resolution. The outcome will be recorded and confirmed.

8. Stage 1: Formal investigation

- CTA will acknowledge the complaint within 3 working days and identify the investigator.
- The investigator must be suitably senior, impartial and not directly involved. Conflicts of interest must be declared.
- The complainant and relevant staff will have a fair opportunity to provide evidence.
- A written outcome will normally be issued within 15 working days of acknowledgement.
- If more time is needed, CTA will explain why, provide a revised date and update the complainant at least every 10 working days.
- The outcome will state the issues considered, evidence reviewed, findings, reasons, remedy or action, and Stage 2 rights.

9. Stage 2: Internal review

A review request should normally be made within 10 working days of the Stage 1 outcome and explain the grounds, such as procedural error, unreasonable findings, relevant new evidence or an inadequate remedy. The Director of Quality will appoint a reviewer with no previous involvement. CTA will acknowledge within 3 working days and normally issue the review outcome within 15 working days. The review may uphold, partly uphold or reject the complaint, require further investigation, or vary the remedy. This is CTA's final internal outcome.

10. Remedies and learning

- an explanation, apology or correction;
- restoration of a service where practicable;
- a fresh decision or reassessment by an appropriate independent person;

- staff guidance, training, supervision or process improvement;
- correction of records where factually inaccurate;
- financial redress only where authorised, evidenced and proportionate;
- referral to safeguarding, awarding, contractual or disciplinary processes where necessary.

The outcome will separate the complainant's personal remedy from wider confidential action. CTA cannot normally disclose employee disciplinary information or another person's personal data.

11. External escalation

Once CTA's internal process is complete, a complainant may ask the Department for Education to consider how CTA handled the complaint where CTA is a qualifying further education, apprenticeship or adult learning organisation. The complainant should use the DfE Customer Help Portal and normally contact DfE within 12 months of the issue occurring. DfE does not determine employment disputes between an apprentice and employer. Complaints about apprenticeship funding rules or services must follow the route current for the funding authority and issue concerned; responsibility for apprenticeship funding guidance moved to the Department for Work and Pensions on 1 April 2026.

Awarding-organisation or qualification complaints may be escalated through that organisation's published procedure and, where applicable, its regulator. Data protection concerns may be raised with CTA's data protection contact and then the Information Commissioner's Office. Ofsted does not normally resolve individual disputes or overturn CTA decisions, although information may inform regulatory activity.

12. Compliments

Compliments will be acknowledged, logged and shared with the relevant team. Personal information will be shared only where appropriate. Themes will inform recognition, quality improvement and Board reporting.

13. Unreasonable behaviour and persistent contact

CTA will not label a complaint unreasonable simply because it is persistent, strongly expressed or upheld only in part. Restrictions may be applied only where behaviour is abusive, threatening, discriminatory, repetitive without material new information, or places a disproportionate burden on services. A senior manager will give reasons, define proportionate contact arrangements, set a review date and explain how urgent safeguarding or genuinely new matters can still be raised. Reasonable adjustments will be considered before restrictions are imposed.

14. Confidentiality, data and records

Complaints records will be secure, accurate, access-controlled and retained under CTA's retention schedule. Information will be shared on a need-to-know basis, but confidentiality cannot be guaranteed where safeguarding, crime, litigation, insurance or legal duties require disclosure. Outcome reports will avoid unnecessary personal data. Complainants may exercise data protection rights, subject to lawful exemptions and the rights of others.

15. Monitoring and governance

- volume, type, programme, centre and stage;
- response times, extensions and overdue cases;
- outcomes, remedies and repeat themes;
- equality, accessibility and potential disproportionality;

- safeguarding or employer/subcontractor interfaces;
- learner and complainant experience;
- completion and impact of improvement actions.

The Director of Quality will report anonymised themes and actions to senior leaders termly and the Board at least annually. CTA will use routine complaints evidence within self-assessment and improvement activity. The policy will be reviewed annually and sooner after regulatory change, serious complaint, inspection finding or evidence that the procedure is ineffective.

16. Contact and submission details

Complaints and compliments may be sent to: Director of Quality, Central Training Academy, 44 Alexandra Street, Southend-on-Sea, SS1 1BJ; email: sarahludlow@centraltraininggroup.com ; or handed to a CTA reception. CTA should confirm its current website form and published contact route before issue.

Appendix 1: Feedback and complaint form

You do not need to use this form if you prefer to provide feedback by email, letter, or verbally.

A. Type of feedback

☐ Compliment ☐ Complaint ☐ Concern

B. About you

Name (optional):

Relationship to CTA: ☐ Learner/apprentice ☐ Applicant ☐ Employer ☐ Parent/carer ☐ Public ☐ Other

Preferred contact: ☐ Email ☐ Telephone ☐ Post

Contact details:

C. Accessibility

Do you require an adjustment, interpreter, advocate or communication support? ☐ No ☐ Yes
Please describe:

D. Details

What happened? Include dates, location, programme and people involved where known.

What steps have already been taken?

What outcome would help resolve the matter?

E. Evidence

List or attach relevant documents, messages or reference numbers. Do not send original documents unless requested.

F. Declaration

I believe the information provided is accurate to the best of my knowledge.

Signature optional: _____ Date: _____

Privacy statement

CTA will use the information to assess, investigate and respond to feedback, make improvements and meet legal or funding duties. Information may be shared with relevant staff, representatives, safeguarding partners, funding bodies, awarding organisations, insurers or regulators where lawful and necessary. Records will be retained in line with CTA's retention schedule. See CTA's privacy notice for rights and contact information.