

Centre and Qualification Approval Policy and Procedure

1. Purpose and Scope

This policy and procedure outlines all processes related to centre and qualification approval for both UK and International Centres (with the exception of those applying via Representative Organisations in countries, where arrangements may vary).

Please note that this policy and procedure is not applicable to learners. Learners who are affected by a withdrawn centre should contact the centre directly to discuss the arrangements that are in place for displaced learners and continuation of study. Alternatively, learners may wish to contact GA for advice via email at info@gatehouseawards.org.

2. Responsibility and Authority

The overall responsibility for this procedure is held by the Gatehouse Awards Ltd (GA) Governance Committee. The authority to design and implement this procedure is delegated to the Assessment Manager. The procedure is relevant to all staff at GA as well as all staff at applicant and approved GA centres.

3. Definitions

The following terms, as defined below, will be used throughout this procedure:

- **Centre Approval:** Any organisation not already approved by GA must apply for centre approval if it wishes to offer GA qualifications.
Centre approval will be granted on the basis of the centre meeting the approval criteria, particularly the four main areas of operation: management and administrative systems; physical and staff resources; delivery and assessment; and quality assurance systems and arrangements, plus external assessment arrangements (where applicable).
- **Qualification Approval:** Approval for a specified qualification or different level qualifications within the same group at the same time. An *Application for Centre Approval* must be supported by at least one *Application for Qualification Approval*. Qualification approval is granted on the basis of the centre meeting the approval criteria for the particular qualification(s). Note that where centres **only** deliver non-regulated or endorsed qualifications, they will be reviewed and monitored against a tailored list of approval criteria which aims to ensure a robust delivery model is in place. Centres should contact GA for further support and guidance.
- **Main centre:** The organisation which holds Approved Centre status, and which is responsible for meeting the approval criteria in the following four key areas of operations: management and administrative systems, physical and staff resources, qualification delivery and assessment, and quality assurance. The main centre is responsible for all centre operations across its linked satellite sites, examination venues and any other additional assessment venues, including any remote learning and assessment which might take place.

- **Satellite Centre:** A satellite centre is an additional site to the main centre and may be wholly owned by the same person or parent company as the main centre, or operate on a franchise basis with a written enforceable agreement in place with the main centre.

A satellite centre must operate in line with the management, administrative and quality assurance systems of the main centre. The main centre retains responsibility for all actions of a designated satellite centre. Should an issue arise at one satellite centre this could affect the approval status of the main centre and any other approved satellite centres. For audit purposes, all candidate records must be held at the main centre or be able to be made available (electronically is acceptable) at the main centre within 24 hours of a request.

- **Examination Venue:** An examination venue is a venue utilised by the main centre and is usually on a part-time and/or ad hoc 'room for hire' basis, or a school or other organisation where the main centre is delivering examinations. The main centre must ensure that they arrange to take any assessment materials with them to the examination venue and that all examinations are delivered by staff employed directly by the main centre. No assessment materials or candidate records must be held at the examination venue, other than for the duration of the examination delivery.
- **Additional Assessment Venue:** An additional assessment venue is a venue used by the main centre where the main centre is delivering assessments to its own learners on a site separate to its main/satellite site (excluding premises where learners are being assessed on their own employer's premises as part of the assessment of a vocational qualification – this does not require an application to GA, however the main centre is responsible for ensuring that such sites meet all relevant health and safety requirements as well as any qualification-specific requirements so as to provide fair assessment opportunities to learners).
- **Head of Centre:** The person who has overall responsibility for ensuring that the main centre, plus any satellite centres, examination venues or additional assessment venues, are operated in line with the *GA Centre and Qualification Approval Criteria* and maintain compliance with all rules, regulations or requirements stipulated by GA and/or its Regulators.
- **Centre Contact / Coordinator:** The person who assumes the overall responsibility for day-to-day centre operations on behalf of the Head of Centre and is the main centre contact for GA administrative staff.
- **Examinations Officer:** The person who is responsible for the overall administration of enrolments and registrations, certifications and examinations. An approved centre may appoint more than one Examinations Officer and may have different Examinations Officers in each approved satellite centre.
- **Remote Delivery:** The process of providing teaching, learning and assessment to learners who are not physically present in a traditional classroom setting. It involves the use of various technologies and online platforms to facilitate learning and assessment remotely.

4. Approval Procedure

GA will not consider an application until the Application for Centre Approval Form has been fully completed, all supporting evidence has been provided and the initial application payment has been made.*

The initial centre and qualification approval procedures may differ dependent on the qualification the centre wishes to be approved to deliver. Please refer to the relevant *Qualification Specification* for specific requirements.

As a general rule, the centre approval process is based on documentary evidence provided by the centre and on desk-based checks carried out by GA to verify the information provided. Centres may be subject to a visit prior to centre approval status being granted. This visit may take place in person, or remotely via the use of remote video conferencing facilities, e.g. Teams or Zoom.

If a centre holds approval with another Ofqual-recognised Awarding Organisations and/or holds external quality assurance marks (e.g. ISO, Matrix) or has been inspected by a national inspectorate organisation, e.g. Ofsted, this can be taken into consideration; however, GA may conduct independent checks which may overlap with these to assure itself that the full requirements for holding approval with GA and for the specific GA qualification(s) the centre wishes to deliver are fully met. Centres should be aware that any approval is subject to verification of the information provided by them and that additional centre visits and/or remote checks may be undertaken. When a centre visit is required in order to grant approval, this is included in the centre approval application fee. Where additional visits after the initial approval visit are required, these may incur an additional fee.

Should any centre be found to have provided deliberately misleading or false information, the centre's approval can be immediately revoked.

*Unless otherwise advertised (or agreed in writing) fees for centre and qualification approval are payable in advance and are non-refundable. Please refer to GA's published *Product Catalogue and Fees List* for details.

4.1 Initial Desk-Based Approval

The centre will:

- complete and submit an *Application for Centre Approval Form*.
- complete and submit at least one *Application for Qualification Approval Form*.
- complete and submit a *Satellite Centre Form* for any additional, proposed satellite sites (if applicable).
- complete and submit an *Approval for an Examination Venue Form* for any additional, proposed examination venue sites (if applicable).
- complete and submit an *Application for Additional Assessment Venue Approval Form* for any additional, proposed assessment venue sites (if applicable).
- provide supporting evidence or documentation relating to the centre's ability to meet the approval criteria, their management and administrative systems, physical and staff resources, delivery and assessment practices and internal quality assurance processes. Details of the evidence required will be given in the *Application for Centre Approval* and the relevant *Application*

for *Qualification Approval Form*. Centres should refer to both the *Centre Approval Criteria and Guidance* and the relevant *Qualification Specification* for further information about GA's requirements.

- ensure they have read, understood and signed the *Centre Declaration and Statement of Commitment*.
- pay the appropriate fees relating to the application or applications made.

As part of the initial centre approval process GA undertakes the following checks:

- Whether any notifications about the centre or its principal officers and staff have been received from other Awarding Organisations or the Regulator regarding actual or potential malpractice which has resulted in investigation or sanctions.
- Whether the centre is a valid, operating and recognised entity in its country of operation.
- Other appropriate due diligence such as performing internet searches and checks on online reviews (e.g. Trustpilot, Google Reviews) and social media for any adverse publicity, etc. regarding the centre which could compromise the integrity of that centre or its Directors.

GA may also undertake additional checks relating to the financial standing of the organisation, such as credit checks.

If these, or any other checks, highlight issues which the centre has not declared on their application, or that information provided is incorrect, the application may be refused, or additional checks may be undertaken at cost to the centre. Similarly, if additional information comes to light after approval has been granted which GA would reasonably have expected to be informed of by the centre during the application process, GA reserves the right to immediately cancel that approval under a Level 5 Sanction.

GA will provide an initial decision within 20 working days of receipt of all documentation. This timescale is subject to the centre providing all relevant documentation, supporting evidence and any other requested information. GA is not responsible for centres failing to provide such documentation and no centre can arrange or commence marketing or the delivery of GA qualifications until they have received official notification of their centre's approval and individual qualification approval(s).

Qualification-specific requirements for delivery, assessment and internal quality assurance arrangements, along with the requirements for staff, equipment and other physical resources are considered as part of the *Application for Qualification Approval*. These will vary across different qualifications. The requirements are outlined in the relevant *Qualification Specification*.

Where GA has designated the marking of assessments to centres, all applicant centres must have a delivery system in place which encompasses effective, successful and consistent training and assessment, which is reviewed and monitored by the centre's own internal quality assurance system.

4.2 Centre Visits

It may be deemed appropriate for GA to conduct a centre visit prior to an approval decision being made. The purpose of the visit is to take account of any additional factors where:

- the centre is newly established.
- the centre is new to delivering regulated qualifications.
- the qualification the centre is applying to deliver is significantly different from other qualifications they hold approval for, e.g. across different industry sectors.
- the centre requests an advisory visit.

Any such visits will be arranged at the mutual convenience of GA and the centre and conducted by a GA External Quality Assurer (EQA) who will:

- plan the visit and discuss with the centre any specific requirements or needs to be addressed relating to their centre approval application, qualification approval or any aspect of the criteria for approval. It is the Centre's responsibility to ensure that everything that is requested by the EQA is made available to them on, or before, the day of the visit.
- ensure that the details provided by the centre as part of their approval submission are accurate and current.
- view additional evidence, gather any required further information, or clarification relating to any aspect of the centre or qualification approval application.
- provide any feedback or advice required.
- issue an action plan or make recommendations to the centre, where appropriate.
- provide a report to GA.

There is provision for centre visits to take place remotely with the aid of video conferencing facilities. This method may be deemed appropriate where the burden of undertaking an in-person visit is disproportionate to the additional information that will be gleaned – for instance, if the centre is located internationally. The most appropriate method for conducting a visit will be decided by GA on a case-by-case basis, taking into account all relevant factors.

A centre visit does not guarantee that the centre will be granted approval.

4.3 Notification of Approval Decision

GA will advise the centre of the outcome of their application in writing within 20 working days of the receipt of the final piece of requested documentation or other evidence (including the report generated as part of a visit), etc. There are three possible outcomes:

- **Full Approval Confirmed:** Successful applicants will be issued a Centre Approval Certificate, GA logos for use on their website and marketing material and any other documentation, policies or guidance they may need for their centre, and log-on details to access the Ark, GA's online

learner management system. The centre is able to commence delivery and register candidates immediately.

- **Full Approval Confirmed with Conditions ('Conditional Approval'):** The centre is granted approval but there are one or two minor issues that need to be addressed before registering candidates. This is a type of provisional approval and the centre will be issued a Centre Approval Certificate, GA logos for use on their website and marketing materials, and log-on details to access the Ark. However, to register candidates, they must address and provide evidence for one or two minor issues identified during the application process. This provisional approval allows centres to prepare for candidate registration while ensuring compliance with GA's requirements before proceeding further.
- **Approval Deferred:** Where the centre has been asked to complete defined actions in order to correct or improve practices, policies or facilities prior to full approval being granted. Where this is the case, the centre's application will be put on hold until all actions have been completed. Once the action has been implemented, the centre should contact GA with evidence to confirm that the centre approval criteria have been satisfied. GA staff will review the additional evidence supplied and continue the application review. If necessary, a separate visit may be required before full approval is granted. This second visit is subject to an additional charge. If the centre has not completed the actions in the timescale stipulated, their application will be denied.
- **Approval Denied:** GA reserves the right to deny centre approval where the centre has failed to comply with the criteria for approval and/or GA does not feel confident that the centre is willing and able to comply with the criteria for approval. In some instances, a centre may not be able to meet the standards required by GA, such as where additional information has come to light from third parties, e.g. the Regulator or other Awarding Organisations, which a centre did not disclose during the application process, which gives sufficient cause to believe that a centre presents too high a risk to gain approval. In such instances, the centre will be informed of that decision. In some instances, the centre will not be able to make an application for approval again. In some instances, GA may set a minimum time between a denied application and a new application, e.g. 6 months. Where this is possible, the timescale will be communicated to the centre and the decision will be dependent on the basis for which approval was denied. Please note that the centre approval fee will be applied at the time of any subsequent approval application being made and is payable prior to the re-application being considered. GA reserves the right to deny approval without providing reasons. Centres denied approval have recourse to appeal, via the *GA Appeals Policy and Procedure*.

5. Satellite Centre Approvals

If an approved centre wishes to also be approved to operate at a second, or subsequent, address, it can apply using an *Application for Satellite Centre Approval Form*. The main centre takes full responsibility for the actions of any satellite centre. For audit purposes, all candidate records must be held at the main centre or be able to be made available electronically by the main centre within 24 hours of a request.

The main centre must complete and submit the *Application for Satellite Centre Approval Form* together with the required supporting evidence and the relevant fee. Satellite centre approval will normally consist of a desk-based procedure (including reviewing photographic evidence of the venue, where it is to be used as a controlled examination venue), with a visit where deemed appropriate by GA, for example if specific premises requirements are in place which cannot be verified via remote video, photographs or similar evidence. The centre will be notified of the outcome of the application in writing. If the application for a satellite centre is made at the same time as the main centre, the centre and qualification approval process must be completed for the main centre before the satellite centre application is considered.

The approval for any satellite centre is for a specific address. If a centre decides to move the address of a satellite centre, this will require a new satellite centre application and the full fee will be payable.

The Head of Centre of the main centre will also be the Head of Centre for the satellite, although the satellite centre might have different or additional Examinations Officers based on-site. The ownership of the satellite centre and its relationship to the main centre will be considered as part of the approval process. Where the nature of the relationship is not clear, GA will seek clarification from the centre and may ask the centre to put an enforceable agreement in place with the satellite centre.

Upon approval, satellite centres are issued with a centre number, together with a satellite centre approval certificate. GA reserves the right to deny an application for a satellite approval without providing reasons. Centres denied approval have recourse to appeal, via the *GA Appeals Policy and Procedure*.

6. Examination Venue Approvals

Approved centres may apply for permission to use additional venues where their staff will deliver GA qualifications which are assessed via controlled external examinations. Examination venues are generally arranged on a 'room for hire' basis where the approved centre pays only for the time they are using the room. They will not typically have staff based at that venue but would send them from the main centre (or an approved satellite centre if closer) to deliver the examination. The venue may also be a room within a centre's client's organisation (e.g. employer or school, etc.), however the centre must use staff members who are employed directly by the centre.

Any centre wishing to use an examination venue must gain confirmation of the examination venue approval prior to agreeing to hold an examination session at the venue. GA reserves the right to deny an application for an examination venue approval without providing reasons. Centres denied approval have recourse to appeal, via the *GA Appeals Policy and Procedure*.

7. Additional Assessment Venue Approvals

Approved centres may apply for permission to use additional venues where their staff will conduct assessments. This does not include premises where learners are assessed on their own employer's premises – this does not require an application to GA, although the centre must ensure that any

qualification-specific requirements such as equipment, products and other resources are available. Additional Assessment Venues must always meet the minimum requirements for health and safety and the safeguarding of learners.

Please note that if a main centre is subject to suspension or withdrawal of approval, the approval status of all its satellite centres, examination venues and additional assessment venues may also be affected. Similarly, if malpractice occurs (or is alleged or suspected to have occurred) at a satellite centre, or examination or additional assessment venue, any sanction applied as a result may also apply to the main centre and all other satellite centres approved under that centre, regardless of the nature of the event. GA reserves the right to deny an application for a additional assessment approval without providing reasons. Centres denied approval have recourse to appeal, via the *GA Appeals Policy and Procedure*.

8. Additional Qualification Approvals

Approved centres may apply for approval to deliver additional qualifications at any time by completing and submitting the appropriate *Application for Qualification Approval Form*.

Centres may also discuss potential additional qualification requests with their EQA during the EQA Review meeting, as the EQA may be able to perform an immediate desktop approval (for example, where the centre wishes to add an approval for a qualification in the same subject area and at a lower level than it already holds approval for).

Centres must not begin delivering or assessing additional qualifications until approval has been confirmed by GA in writing. Delivery of qualifications prior to approval may affect GA's approval decision, as well as leading to the application of sanctions.

Requests for subsequent qualification approval will follow the approval procedure outlined above, including timescales and published fees. GA reserves the right to deny an application for a qualification approval without providing reasons. Centres denied approval have recourse to appeal, via the *GA Appeals Policy and Procedure*.

9. Period of Approval

GA Approved Centres are required to re-approve annually. Once granted, centre approval for both the main centre and any satellite centres, plus any examination and assessment venues continues for a period of one year, typically from the date of the main centre being granted approval, unless withdrawn by either party earlier.

Qualification approvals granted will run concurrently with centre approval.

Please note that all centres are subject to unannounced inspection visits at any time GA deems appropriate, including during examinations regardless of whether these are being held within normal office hours, to ensure centres continue to maintain compliance with the approval criteria.

10. Maintaining Centre Approval

At all times, it is the centre's responsibility to provide GA with details of any changes at any point during the period of approval which may affect the centre's ability to maintain compliance with the GA approval criteria. In order to inform GA of any changes, centres must use the *Centre Approval Update Form*.

Centres are responsible for ensuring that they maintain their approval. GA operates an annual re-approval process for all centres. GA will contact centres before the date of re-approval and issue appropriate documents for re-approval of both the main centre and satellite centres/examination/assessment venues. The centre should return the completed documents and supporting evidence, together with any applicable fee, to ensure continuity of service. The centre is required to provide details of their own quality assurance processes and indicate how are continuing to satisfy the GA centre approval criteria.

The re-approval procedure will ordinarily be a desk-based procedure unless the centre:

- has undergone significant changes in operation and staffing.
- has not had a full external quality assurance audit in the previous 18 months.
- has not registered a viable number of candidates in the last approval period.
- has been subject to a sanction due to malpractice or serious maladministration within the last 12 months.
- has had approval withdrawn.

In addition, should any performance records, reports from EQAs, or any other available information available to GA not listed above raises concern, an on-site inspection may be warranted. Where any significant concerns are raised, GA may make the decision to refuse to re-approve a centre.

11. Withdrawal and Suspension of Approval

The centre may have its approved status withdrawn or suspended in instances where:

- the centre has not complied with the GA Terms and Conditions of Business, with the approval criteria or any of GA policies, regulations, requirements, procedures and guidelines
- there are major deficiencies in the assessment / examination process leading to actual or potential malpractice, or other adverse effects to candidates
- the centre has not registered a viable number of candidates
- payment for GA services has not been received in accordance with the payment terms
- the centre becomes bankrupt, insolvent, ceases trading or goes into liquidation
- there is a change in control of the centre which gives rise to a significant cause for concern as to the risk of adverse effect to candidates, the ongoing reputation of the centre and of GA by association

- GA is in receipt of information regarding the centre, e.g. from a third party (such as another Awarding Organisation, Regulator or other Government body), which indicates that the centre poses a significant reputational, financial or regulatory risk to GA, its candidates, regulated qualifications or the Regulators.
- Failure to provide GA with details of any changes which may affect the centre's ability to maintain compliance with GA's criteria.

GA may decide not to withdraw the approval immediately but to suspend the centre, or a specific part of its approval, for a period of time needed to investigate and/or resolve the issue.

If GA withdraws approval, the earliest date on which the centre may reapply for approval may be provided, however, in the case of withdrawal due to malpractice, GA may not permit the centre to reapply for approval in the future. In such instances it may also be deemed appropriate to preclude its directors or senior management from holding any further approvals with GA. This will be assessed on a case-by-case basis, taking into account any associated risks.

12. Where a Centre Wishes to Withdraw from Approved Centre Status or Qualification Approval

Centres must ensure that they keep under review their GA approvals and notify info@gatehouseawards.org if they wish to surrender approval for individual qualifications which they are no longer delivering and do not have immediate plans to deliver. This allows GA to ensure that the centre has an appropriately allocated EQA and is not subject to any unnecessary EQA visits.

Where a centre wishes to withdraw from centre approval with GA, they must inform their GA Centre Administrator as soon as possible. Centres must ensure that they have settled any unpaid invoices to GA before requesting centre withdrawal.

The Head of Centre will be required to complete the *Centre Exit Agreement* to provide GA with full details of the proposed date the centre will cease operating as an approved GA centre, the reasons for their withdrawal, steps taken to protect current learners (see also below) and confirm the centre's continued compliance with GA's requirements for exiting centres. In the case where there are no registered learners and all payments have been cleared in full, the centre record may be closed immediately. In instances where steps to protect the interests of learners are required, GA will work with the centre to ensure the centre's withdrawal from delivering GA qualifications is completed with all learners having been transferred or certificated.

Upon closure of the centre account, centre staff will no longer have access to the Ark or other GA systems.

13. Where a Centre Has Ceased Trading

Should GA become aware that an approved centre has ceased trading, an investigation will take place to determine whether the centre still has active learners registered and who may be affected. If it is determined that there are no registered learners, the centre record will be immediately closed. GA will attempt to contact staff at the centre to inform them of the withdrawal of centre approval.

Where learners are deemed to be affected, GA will issue a statement and contact details on its website www.gatehouseawards.org to assist any displaced learners. In the cases of a centre ceasing trading, GA reserves the rights to contact affected learners directly where this is possible. GA may also work with any appointed administrators to protect the interests of learners wherever possible.

Where learners are affected by an approved centre ceasing trading, GA will promptly notify our Regulator, Ofqual and provide full details of the steps being taken to mitigate any Adverse Effects.

14. Protection of Learner Interests

In all cases where centre approval is removed, GA is committed to ensuring that all reasonable steps are taken to reduce the risk of an occurrence of an Adverse Effect and to protect the interests of learners registered on GA qualifications. GA will promptly notify our Regulators where it has cause to believe that the withdrawal of the centre could, or is likely to cause, an Adverse Effect. GA will also notify our Regulators of the steps that it has taken or intends to take to prevent, correct or mitigate the Adverse Effect. GA may also be obliged to inform other Awarding Organisations, regulatory bodies and/or other stakeholders, as required.

To support GA in ensuring that the interests of learners are protected at all times, all approved centres are required to have a contingency plan in place, which sets out the actions the centre will take to ensure any displaced learners upon the event of centre withdrawal are provided with reasonable opportunities for continued study. This includes the option for learners to transfer to a new provider.

Whilst GA has a regulatory responsibility to protect the interests of learners, learners are recruited and registered by the centre. Therefore, GA is not liable for refunding any fees paid by a learner to a centre that has had its approval withdrawn. If learners are transferred to another approved GA Centre, GA will not charge a registration fee for the destination centre, as long as the original registration fee was settled.

Where there are no options available for learners to complete their qualification or assessment, GA will produce unit achievement certificates where individual units have been achieved. These will be issued free of charge to enable the learners to apply elsewhere for transfer of achievements, where this is valid and applicable. Contact with other Awarding Organisations may be made where it is identified that they may be able to assist learners to relocate to another centre.

15. Inactive Centres

If a centre does not register any learners with GA for a two-year period, or where they fail to pay their annual re-approval fee, their centre approval may be suspended or withdrawn by GA. The centre will be provided with 30 days written notice of GA's intention.

GA will consider the re-activation of centres who have had approval removed due to inactivity within one year of their removal date. To re-gain approval, an external quality assurance visit may be

required (either face-to-face or remotely) to review the centre's policies, procedures and resources to ensure they still meet GA's requirements.

Centres must pay the relevant fee for centre approval.

Document Specification:	
Purpose	To set out the process followed in order to approve an organisation to offer GA qualifications as well as the process for the withdrawal of an approved centre with regard to the protection of learner interests.
Accountability	GA Governance Committee
Responsibility	Director
Version	12
Effective from	May 2024
Indicative Review date	May 2026
Links to Ofqual GCR	C2
Other relevant documents	GA Terms and Conditions of Business GA Centre & Qualification Approval Criteria and Guidance GA QES Policy and Procedure GA Quality Assurance Policy GA Centre Assessment Standards Scrutiny (CASS) Strategy and General Moderation Policy GA Centre Handbook GA Centre Exit Agreement