



Centre and Qualification Approval Procedure

Document Specification:	
Purpose:	To set out the process followed in order to approve an organisation to offer Gatehouse Awards qualifications
Accountability:	Gatehouse Awards Governing Body
Responsibility:	Quality Assurance Manager
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Other relevant documents:	Gatehouse Awards Terms and Conditions of Business Gatehouse Awards Centre Handbook

Gatehouse Awards Limited

3rd Floor
Oaktree House
408 Oakwood Lane
Leeds
LS8 3LG
UNITED KINGDOM

Tel: 0113 249 1000

www.gatehouseawards.org



1. Purpose and Scope

This procedure outlines all processes related to Centre and qualification approval.

2. Responsibility and Authority

The overall responsibility for this procedure is held by the Gatehouse Awards Ltd Governing Body. The authority to design and implement this procedure is delegated to the Quality Assurance Manager. The procedure is relevant to all staff at Gatehouse Awards as well as all staff at applicant and approved Gatehouse Awards Centres.

3. Definitions

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

- **Centre Approval:** If an organisation is not already approved by Gatehouse Awards, it must apply for Centre approval. This will enable the organisation to offer Gatehouse Awards qualifications and / or assessments of such. Centre approval will be granted on the basis of the Centre meeting approval criteria in four main areas of operation: management and administrative systems, physical and staff resources, delivery and assessment, and quality assurance.
- **Qualification Approval:** Approval for a specified qualification or different level qualifications within the same group for which approval takes place at the same time. A Centre Approval application must be supported by at least one Qualification Approval application.
- **Main Centre:** The main part of the organisation which holds the Centre Approval, and 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.
- **Satellite Centre:** a part of the organisation based in different locality which acts on behalf of the main organisation and operates in line with their management, administrative and quality assurance systems. It may or may not share the main Centre's staff resources and physical resources. **Please note – a Satellite Centre is deemed an extension of the Main Centre and the Main Centre remains responsible for all activities undertaken at or by the Satellite in respect of Gatehouse Awards qualifications and examinations. For audit purposes, all Candidate records must be held at the Main Centre and not at the Satellite Centre.**
- **Associate:** an organisation with limited approval to refer and enrol Candidates for Gatehouse Awards qualifications, but is not approved to take any part in the delivery of qualifications.

4. Approval Procedure

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 the 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 Gatehouse Awards to verify the information provided.

If a Centre holds approval with another Ofqual-recognised Awarding Organisations and/or external quality assurance marks (e.g. ISO, Matrix) this will be taken into consideration; however, Gatehouse Awards may conduct independent checks which may overlap with these to assure itself that the full requirements for holding approval are 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, and any such measures may be subject to additional fees.

Should any Centre be found to have provided deliberately misleading or false information, the Centre's Approval will 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 Gatehouse Awards' published Fees List for details.

4.1 Initial Desk-Based Approval

The Centre will:

- Complete and submit an *Online Application for Centre Approval Form*.
- Complete and submit at least one *Online Application for Qualification Approval Form*.
- Complete and submit an *Online Satellite Centre Form* for any additional, proposed sites.
- Provide any and all supporting evidence or documentation relating to the Centre's ability to meet requirements of management and administrative systems, physical and staff resources, delivery and assessment and quality assurance. Details of the evidence required will be given in the *Application for Centre Approval*, the relevant *Application for Qualification Approval Form* and *Qualification Specification*.
- Pay the appropriate fees relating to the application or applications made.

As part of the initial Centre approval process Gatehouse Awards undertake 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 sanctions.
- Whether the Centre is a valid, operating and recognised entity in its country of operation.
- The credit score of the applicant Centre*
- Other appropriate due diligence such as performing internet searches and checks on social media for any adverse publicity, etc. regarding the Centre which could compromise the integrity of that Centre or its Directors.

*If a Centre is found to have a low credit score, this may be mitigated by the Centre paying an escrow amount of £200 which will be kept by Gatehouse Awards in a separate account to offset against any future outstanding invoices. This amount will be refundable if the application fails. Full details of this activity can be found in the published *Invoicing & Fees Policy*.

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 Gatehouse Awards would reasonably have expected to be informed of by the Centre during the application process; Gatehouse Awards reserve the right to immediately cancel that approval under a Level 5 Sanction.

Gatehouse Awards aims to 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. Gatehouse Awards will not be held responsible for Centres failing to provide such documentation and no Centre can arrange or commence delivery of Gatehouse Awards qualifications until they have received official notification of their Centre's approval.

4.2 Centre Visits

It may be deemed appropriate for Gatehouse Awards 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 Gatehouse Awards and the Centre and conducted by a Gatehouse Awards External Quality Assurer who will:

- Plan the visit and discuss with the Centre any specific requirements or needs to be addressed.
- Ensure that the details provided by the Centre as part of their approval submission are accurate and current.
- Provide any feedback or advice required.
- Issue an action plan or make recommendations to the Centre where appropriate.
- Provide a report to Gatehouse Awards.

There is provision for Centre Visits to take place remotely with the aid of video conferencing facilities (i.e. Skype). 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 Gatehouse Awards on a case-by-case basis, taking into account all relevant factors.

4.3 Notification of Approval Decision

Gatehouse Awards 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, Gatehouse Awards logos for use on their website and marketing material and any other documentation, policies or guidance they may need for their Centre and qualifications and log-on details to access the Ark, Gatehouse Awards' online learner management system.
- **Approval Withheld:** Where the Centre has been asked to take action in order to correct or improve practices, policies or facilities prior to full approval being granted. Once the action has been implemented, the Centre should contact Gatehouse Awards Head Office with evidence to confirm that the Centre approval criteria have been satisfied. If necessary, a separate visit may be made before full approval is granted. This second visit is subject to an additional charge.
- **Approval Denied:** In some instances, a Centre may not be able to meet the standards required by Gatehouse Awards, 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.

5. Satellite Centre Approval

If an Approved Centre wishes to also be approved to operate at a second, or subsequent, address, it can apply for Satellite Centre Approval. 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 regardless of where assessments take place.

The Main Centre must complete and submit the *Satellite Centre Application* together with the required supporting evidence and the relevant fee. Satellite Centre approval will normally be a desk-based procedure (including reviewing photographic evidence of the venue) and the Centre will be notified of its outcome 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, this will require a new Satellite Centre application and the full fee will be payable.

As part of the application, Centres are required to give details of any business arrangements with the Satellite Centre and, where applicable, provide a copy of any business agreement between the two companies. Any such agreement must make it clear what Internal Quality Assurance, training and record keeping arrangements have been implemented.

All Satellite Centres will be issued with a Centre number, together with a Satellite Centre Approval Certificate.

Please note that if a Main Centre is subject to a suspension or withdrawal of approval, the approval status of all its Satellite Centres will also be affected. Similarly, if a malpractice occurs at one Satellite Centre, any Sanction applied as a result may also apply to the Main Centre and all other Satellite Centres approved under that Centre.

Any Centres wishing to set up satellite centre arrangements falling outside of that described above should contact their Centre Administrator with their business plan. All such submissions will be considered on a case-by-case basis, taking all risks into account.

6. Additional Qualification Approvals

Approved Centres may apply for approval to deliver additional qualifications at any time by completing and submitting the appropriate *Online Qualification Approval Form*. Requests for subsequent qualification approval will follow the approval procedure outlined above, including timescales and published fees.

7. Period of Approval

Once granted, Centre approval for both Main and Satellite Centres continues for a period of one year unless withdrawn by either party earlier. Any qualification approvals granted will run concurrently with Centre approval.

Please note that all Centres are subject to unannounced inspection visits at any time Gatehouse Awards deems appropriate, including during examinations regardless of whether these are being held within normal office hours, to ensure compliance with approval criteria. Gatehouse Awards has the right to visit Centres without prior notice.

7.1 Re-Approval Process

It is the Centre's responsibility to provide Gatehouse Awards with details of any changes at any point during the period of approval which may affect the Centre's ability to maintain compliance with Gatehouse Awards' criteria. This needs to be undertaken by submitting a completed *Online Centre Approval Update Form*.

Centres are responsible for ensuring that they maintain their approval. Gatehouse Awards operates an annual Re-Approval process for all Centres, regardless of when they initially gained approval. Gatehouse Awards will contact Centres before the date of Re-Approval and issue appropriate documents for Re-Approval of both Main and Satellite Centres. 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 Gatehouse Awards approval criteria.

The Re-Approval procedure will ordinarily be a desk-based procedure unless the Centre:

- has undergone significant changes in the operation and staffing.
- has not had a full external quality assurance audit in the previous 36 months.
- has not entered a viable number of Candidates for assessment / examinations 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.

7.2 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 Gatehouse Awards Terms and Conditions of Business, with the approval criteria or any of Gatehouse Awards policies, regulations, requirements, procedures and guidelines
- there are major deficiencies in the assessment / examination process leading to an actual or potential malpractice
- the Centre has not entered a viable number of Candidates/has been inactive within the previous six months
- payment for Gatehouse Awards 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 to the ongoing reputation of the Centre and of Gatehouse Awards by association
- Gatehouse Awards is in receipt of information regarding the Centre 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 Gatehouse Awards, its Candidates or the Regulators.
- Failure to provide Gatehouse Awards with details of any changes which may affect the Centre's ability to maintain compliance with Gatehouse Awards criteria.

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