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**Academic Policies**

**for**

**Staff and Learners**

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**Board Approved: April 2019**

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**1. Purpose**

V Learning Network is committed to ensuring that all learners are treated fairly and are given all the support that they are entitled to when studying. Additionally V Learning Network meets all the requirements of Awarding Bodies in relation to the delivery of training to learner’s and the assessment of their skills and the examination of their knowledge. In order to achieve this the policies listed below have been written, approved and implemented.

They have been put in this format for ease of access for the learner’s themselves, delivery staff, interested parties and Awarding Bodies.

**2. Policies for Delivery Staff:**

**Access to Fair Assessment Policy**

**Purpose:**

*‘When working with young people and vulnerable adults, we at V Learning Network do so in a position of trust. All staff are likely to be seen as role models by our clients, and must therefore act in an appropriate manner; this is why V LEARNING NETWORK takes its responsibilities for* ***Safeguarding*** *very seriously to ensure that the guidance is followed at all times’.*

**Policy Statement:**

Every learner taking a course funded and delivered by tutors employed by V LEARNING NETWORK will be assessed fairly as follows:

* Assessment will be a test of what the learner knows, what they understand, and what they are able to do.
* For any particular course, every learner will be assessed using the same overall set of exercises and criteria.
* Assessments will be standardised across different tutors and groups to ensure that all learners have been judged against the same standards.

**Procedure/s:**

V LEARNING NETWORK is committed to providing ongoing support to all learners. We also aim to ensure that our provision is accessible and eliminates discrimination. Where a particular support requirement is identified, we will work with the relevant awarding organisation to make appropriate adjustments to the provision, to ensure that all learners are able to complete a programme as independently as possible.

Our staff are committed to assisting the learners in managing their individual situation, working towards a more accessible learning environment for all.

In order to achieve the above all learners will be initially assessed, recording that information on an Individual Learning Plan. V LEARNING NETWORK will continue to work with each individual to determine their particular requirements and access arrangements. Regular reviews will also be implemented providing an opportunity to identify and act upon any emerging needs that present during a programme.

**Process:**

To ensure that access to fair assessment is implemented effectively and that all learners are treated fairly, V LEARNING NETWORK will:

* Make sure that all staff involved in the delivery are aware of this Access to Fair Assessment Policy, and ensure that it is understood and complied with by all staff and learners.
* Promote equality with regards to the provision of learning programmes.
* Adhere to related procedures and regulations regarding reasonable adjustments to assessment as issued by the awarding organisations.
* Ensure (as far as is practicable), that buildings and assessment sites used for delivery are accessible to all candidates.
* Request permission from the awarding organisations regarding the implementation of specific adjustments as required.
* Make available appropriate equipment/ staff resource to meet the needs of the learners, ensuring that the use of such support is in line with awarding body guidelines, and doesn’t disadvantage others who are not affected by the particular requirements.

**Procedure for Appeals by learners:**

If a learner feels that they have not been assessed fairly, they should use V LEARNING NETWORK’s Appeals Procedure to appeal the assessment decision. ***However, the first step for the learner is always to discuss the situation with the tutor concerned before filing an appeal.***

**Learners can also expect:**

* To be fully inducted onto a new course and given information that can be shared with those people that need to know.
* Learning outcomes, performance criteria and other significant elements of learning and assessment, will be made clear at the outset of the course and when assignments are set.
* To be given appropriate assessment opportunities during the course, with appropriate feedback provided on the quality of their work.

**Cheating and Plagiarism:**

A fair assessment of learner’s work can only be made if that work is entirely the persons own, therefore learners can expect an awarding organisation to be informed if:

* they are found guilty of copying, giving or sharing information or answers, unless part of a joint exercise.
* they use an unauthorised aid during a test or examination.
* they copy another student’s answers during a test or examination.
* they talk when undergoing strict examination assessment.
* a learner feels that he/ she has been wrongly accused of cheating or plagiarism, in which case they will be referred to the Complaints Policy.

This policy links to the Learner Malpractice and Staff Malpractice / Maladministration Policies.

Irrespective of the underlying cause or the people involved, all allegations of malpractice or maladministration in relation to qualifications and assessment, will be investigated in order to protect the integrity of the qualifications and to be fair to V LEARNING NETWORK and its learners.

**Staff Malpractice/Maladministration Policy**

**Purpose:**

To identify and minimise the risk of malpractice, to protect the integrity of the centre and qualifications by responding to any allegations promptly and effectively.

Malpractice is deemed to be any deliberate activity, neglect, default or other practice that compromises the assessment process, and / or the validity of certificate/s and the integrity of the qualification.

**Examples of Malpractice**

The following are examples of malpractice by Centre staff. The list is not exhaustive and other instances of malpractice may be considered and acted upon.

* Alteration of assessment and grading criteria.
* Assisting learners in the production of work for assessment, where support influences the outcomes of assessment.
* Falsifying entries.
* Allowing evidence which is known not to be the learner’s own, to be included in a learner’s assignment / portfolio.
* Failing to keep learner computer files secure.
* Failing to keep examination papers secure prior to the examination.
* Obtaining unauthorised access to examination material prior to an examination.
* Allowing candidates unsupervised access to coursework exemplar material, whether this is the work of former students or that provided by the Awarding Organisation.

**Procedures:**

* All staff are responsible for reporting any action which they think is malpractice.
* Allegations of malpractice should be reported to the Partner’s IQA Manager and also the Head of Teaching, Learning & Assessment Quality at V Learning Network.
* Investigations into any case of malpractice or irregularities against a member of staff must be conducted in the first instance by the Head of Teaching, Learning & Assessment Quality in conjunction with the Awarding Organisation. Investigations into alleged malpractice or irregularities against the Head of Teaching, Learning & Assessment Quality must be carried out by the CEO and reported to the Awarding Organisation when completed.
* Any member of staff accused of malpractice or irregularities will be informed in writing within 5 working days of the nature of the alleged malpractice, the process, the possible consequences and the right of appeal.
* Any member of staff will have the right to respond to the allegations made during the investigation.
* The Head of Teaching, Learning & Assessment Quality will liaise with the Awarding Organisation.
* In accordance with the requirements of the Code of Practice and the Arrangements for the Statutory Regulation of External Qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland, a report on cases where members of staff are found to have committed malpractice, together with details of the action/s taken by the Head of Teaching, Learning & Assessment Quality and/or the Trustees must be forwarded to the regulatory authorities and may be made available to other Awarding Organisations if the Awarding Organisation decides that the circumstances of the case are sufficiently serious to warrant such reports being made.

**Reports:**

It is the responsibility of the Head of Teaching, Learning & Assessment Quality, acting on behalf of the Awarding Organisation, to submit a full written report of an investigation and to provide the following where appropriate:

1. A statement of the facts, a detailed account of the circumstances and details of any investigations carried out by the Centre.
2. Written statement(s) from other staff concerned.
3. Written statements from the learner(s) concerned.
4. Any mitigating factors (e.g. relevant medical reports).
5. Information about the Centre’s procedures for advising candidates of the Awarding Organisation’s regulations.
6. Seating plans.
7. Unauthorised material found in the examination room.
8. Any work of the candidate and any associated material (e.g. source material for coursework) which is relevant to the investigation.

**Examinations Policy**

**Purpose:**

• To ensure the planning and management of exams is conducted efficiently and in the best interests of candidates.

• To ensure the operation of an efficient exams system with clear guidelines for all relevant staff. It is the responsibility of everyone involved in the centre’s exam process to read, understand and implement this policy. Where references are made to JCQ and/or CAIE regulations/guidelines, further details can be found on their websites.

**EXAM RESPONSIBILITIES**

**The Head of Teaching, Learning and Assessment Quality**

• Has overall responsibility for V Learning Network Sub-contractors and Step into Learning, as an examination centre and advises on appeals and re-marks.

• Is responsible for reporting all suspected or actual incidents of malpractice – refer to the JCQ document – Suspected malpractice in examination and assessments.

**The Exams Officer**

• Manages the administration of external sub-contractor exams.

• Advises the SMT, tutors, and other relevant support staff on annual exams timetables and procedures as set by the various awarding organisations.

• Ensures that candidates are informed of and understand those aspects of the exams timetable that will affect them.

• Checks with teaching staff that the necessary coursework and/or controlled assessments are completed on time and in accordance with exam board guidelines.

• Provides and confirms detailed data on estimated entries.

• Maintains systems and processes to support the timely entry of candidates for their exams.

• Receives, checks and stores securely all exam papers and completed scripts and ensures that scripts are dispatched as per the guidelines.

• Administers access arrangements as determined by tutors.

• Submits applications for special consideration following exam board guidelines and regulations.

• Identifies and manages exam timetable clashes.

• Organises the recruitment, training and monitoring of exam invigilators responsible for the conduct of exams.

• Ensures candidates’ coursework/controlled assessment marks are submitted, and any other material required by the appropriate awarding bodies, correctly and on schedule.

• Manages the tracking, dispatches and stores returned coursework/controlled assessments.

• Manages the arranges for dissemination of exam results and certificates to candidates and forwards, in consultation with the SMT, any post results service requests.

• Ensure accurate completion of coursework/controlled assessment mark sheets and declaration sheets in conjunction with the submission of material to exam boards and moderators.

• Collates on-going evidence that the arrangement is appropriate and receives feed-back on any issues arising.

**EQUALITY LEGISLATION**

All exam staff must ensure that they meet the requirements of any equality legislation. The centre will comply with the legislation, including making reasonable adjustments to the service that they provide candidates, in accordance with requirements defined by the legislation and awarding organisations.

**MANAGING INVIGILATORS**

The use of external staff to invigilate examinations is at the discretion of the CEO. The employment of external staff will follow recommended safer recruitment guidelines, including Disclosure and Barring Service checks.

**MALPRACTICE**

The Head of Teaching, Learning and Assessment Quality in consultation with the CEO, is responsible for investigating suspected malpractice.

**SPECIAL CONSIDERATION**

* Should a candidate be unable to sit an exam because of illness, bereavement or other trauma, or be otherwise disadvantaged or disturbed during an exam, it is the candidate’s responsibility to alert their providing centre to that effect.
* Notification must also be sent to the Head of Teaching, Learning and Assessment Quality as soon as possible. In the event of illness preventing a candidate from sitting their exam with other candidates, VLN will find alternative venue will be considered at the discretion of the Head of Teaching, Learning and Assessment Quality.
* The candidate must support any special consideration claim with appropriate evidence within 3 days of the exam.
* The Head of Teaching, Learning and Assessment Quality will make a special consideration application to the relevant awarding body within 7 days of the exam.

**Guidance on Reasonable Adjustments to the Assessment of Disabled Students**

**Purpose:**

* Disabled students are an integral part of the V Learning Network (VLN) community. As such, they have a general entitlement to the provision of education in a manner that meets their individual requirements. This entitlement extends to provision for disabled students at assessment.
* The various parts of the equality legislation relating to disabled students in Further Education require providers not to discriminate against disabled students.

Discrimination includes:

(1) treating a disabled student less favourably than other students and

(2) failing to make ‘reasonable adjustments’ to both course delivery and assessment.

**Requirements:**

* As a consequence, the VLN must provide reasonable adjustments to the assessment of disabled students to ensure that they are not placed at a ‘substantial disadvantage’ in relation to their non-disabled peers. Although this obligation covers many aspects of further education, this annex deals only with adjustments at assessment.
* VLN are not required to make adjustments to assessment which will compromise the academic, medical or other ‘competence standards’ of the qualification in question.
* This annex describes the types of adjustments which may be required and gives examples of good practice (with regard to reasonable adjustments) and of what would and would not be likely to be considered competence standards (in relation to assessment).
* It should be noted that VLN are subject to the public sector equality duty, the effect of which is to require providers to promote and embed disability equality proactively across institutional structures, hierarchies, policies, procedures and practice.

**Definitions:**

* Disability
* Reasonable adjustments
* Competence standards

**Disability**:

“Section 6 of the Equality Act 2010 specifies that: **a person has a disability if they have a physical or mental impairment which has a long term and substantial adverse effect on their ability to carry out normal day-to-day activities”**.

* Physical or mental impairment’ includes sensory impairments such as those affecting sight or hearing. ‘Long term’ means that the impairment has lasted or is likely to last (may well last) for 12 months or more.
* ‘Substantial’ means more than minor or trivial. Case law has established that ‘day-to-day’ includes sitting examinations, which are not regarded as a specialised activity.
* Unseen impairments are also covered (such as mental ill health and conditions such as diabetes and epilepsy). Cancer, HIV infection and multiple sclerosis are considered disabilities under the Act from the point of diagnosis.
* Progressive conditions (such as lupus, multiple sclerosis) and fluctuating conditions (such as CFS/ ME, chronic pain) and conditions which may reoccur (such as depression) will amount to disabilities in most circumstances.

Disabled students at VLN may include those with:

* Specific learning difficulties, such as dyslexia, dyspraxia, attention deficit (hyperactivity) disorder (AD(H)D)
* Mental health difficulties, such as depression, anxiety, eating disorders, obsessive compulsive disorder (OCD), bipolar affective disorder, psychosis
* Autistic spectrum conditions, such as Asperger syndrome, high functioning or atypical autism
* Sensory impairments, such as a visual or hearing impairment, blindness, deafness (with or without British Sign Language as a first or preferred language)
* Mobility difficulties, such as para- and quadriplegia, scoliosis, chronic pain affecting mobility
* Long term health conditions, such as arthritis, cystic fibrosis, narcolepsy, repetitive strain injury (RSI), cancer, HIV, hepatitis, multiple sclerosis, Crohn’s disease, chronic pain, lupus, chronic fatigue syndrome/ myalgia encephalopathy (CFS/ ME)

Students with any of the conditions listed above are regarded as disabled because they meet the definition of disability under the Act. This list is not exhaustive. A person with a long-term health condition or mental health difficulty continues to be regarded as disabled despite fluctuations in the severity of their condition or, in the case or cancer, after recovery.

**Reasonable adjustments:**

Section 20 of the Act imposes a duty on Further Education providers to make reasonable adjustments for students in relation to:

* A provision, criterion or practice – including assessment practices
* Physical features – including access to assessment venues
* Auxiliary aids – including exam support such as hearing loops, exam scripts in large print or Braille, and human support such as readers, scribes and sign language interpreters

1. Where the VLN’s assessment practices put a disabled student at a substantial disadvantage in comparison with students who are not disabled, the VLN must take reasonable steps to avoid the disadvantage.
2. Consequently, the purpose of the duty is not to confer an unfair advantage on disabled students but to remove barriers where it is reasonable to do so, such that disabled students have the opportunity to demonstrate their learning. The duty to make reasonable adjustments to assessment is anticipatory.
3. The VLN should not wait until an individual student discloses a disability or until adjustments are requested. Instead, likely solutions to predictable difficulties should be prepared in advance such that disabled students are not substantially disadvantaged. There is no legal defence for the failure of an institution to make a reasonable adjustment. This would be interpreted as discrimination under Section 21 of the Act.

**Examples of reasonable adjustments to the assessment of disabled students:**

* It is important that adjustments meet the needs of the individual disabled student rather than providing a generic response to a class or type of disability. It cannot be assumed that what works for student A on course X will work for student B on course Y.
* Once implemented, adjustments do not provide automatic precedents for other students, but may be taken into account when considering what would be appropriate in a different case. The following list is not exhaustive – neither in terms of the kinds of adjustments that may be required nor the types of students who may require them.

**Extra Time:**

 Is often recommended for students with some kind of processing difficulty. This can be the result of a specific learning difficulty (such as dyslexia), a mental health difficulty (such as depression), or an autism spectrum condition (such as Asperger syndrome). It is also recommended for students with fatigue conditions (such as CFS/ ME) and for students who are prescribed medication which may slow cognitive processing (such as some medications for hyperthyroid conditions, depression or chronic pain). Extra time is often recommended at 25% of the prescribed examination time but may range up to 100% – for example, to allow a blind student to complete an exam using technological aids.

**Stop-the-clock rest breaks:**

 Are often recommended for students with fatigue conditions, mental health conditions (such as anxiety disorders), conditions which require the student to mobilise to relieve discomfort or pain (such as hypermobility), conditions which necessitate frequent visits to the toilet (such as irritable bowel syndrome or any condition which gives rise to bladder urgency), and to students who require further percentages (more than 25%) extra time, since students whose exams last longer will need break time in response to additional working time.

**A** **Scribe:**

Is recommended when a student can neither write nor type at a rate which would not significantly disadvantage them in relation to their peers.

**An exam paper in an alternative format**:

May be recommended for a student with a visual impairment, for example, an exam paper in large print or in Braille. A student with a particular dyslexic profile may be recommended an exam paper on a particular colour of paper or a reader to read exam questions to them aloud.

**Additionally:**

1. A student with anxiety might be recommended a **smaller venue**. This might also be recommended for a student with an attention deficit disorder. A sole venue may be recommended for a student who needs to mobilise (e.g., because of chronic pain) or read exam questions aloud or ‘think aloud’ (due to their particular dyslexic profile).
2. A student may be recommended a **scheduling adjustment**. This might include a recommendation not to have more than one exam per day and/ or to have a least a one-day break between exams, and/ or not to be scheduled for early AM or late PM exams. This may be recommended for students with fatigue conditions, long-term illnesses (such as cancer or the after-effects of cancer) or mental health difficulties -- or for students who require further percentages of extra time (more than 25%) and/ or larger allowances for stop-the-clock rest breaks.
3. An **alternative form or time-course of examination** may be recommended where a student cannot display their learning in a traditional, speeded, timed assessment. Alternative forms may include:

* submitted (take home) work, a viva or a submitted portfolio in place of speeded, timed assessments
* a series of shorter unseen papers in place of one longer paper, thus allowing a student to be assessed in the traditional way but over a longer time period

Where an alternative way of demonstrating learning is permitted, the expectation is that it will be equally rigorous in comparison to the assessment undertaken by a student’s non-disabled peers. It must be as capable of demonstrating that the student has met the requisite learning outcomes as the original form of assessment.

**Examples of anticipatory adjustments to the assessment of disabled students**

* Scheduling exams in venues with level/ lift access and easy access to accessible toilets
* Scheduling exams such that students do not have more than one exam per day and have a one day break between exams
* Where possible, offering a range of assessment options in addition to speeded, timed exams

The QAA Code of Practice for the Assurance of Academic Quality and Standards in Further Education9highlights:

“There may be more than one way of demonstrating the attainment of a learning outcome, and the various possibilities should have been considered in the process of programme design. Institutions should use a range of assessment methods as a matter of good practice to provide opportunities for disabled learners to show that they have attained the required standard.”

**Competence Standards**:

Reasonable adjustments are implemented to prevent disabled students from experiencing substantial disadvantage and hence to support such students to achieve their potential. However, in defining reasonableness, institutions are not required to compromise competence standards.

Within the Act, competence standards are defined as: **the academic, medical or other standard(s) applied for the purpose of determining whether or not a person has a particular level of competence or ability**. Not all competences, assessment criteria or learning objectives which students might be expected to fulfil on a particular course are genuine competence standards as defined by the Act. These are the characteristics of a genuine competence standard:

1. Its primary purpose is to determine whether or not a student has achieved a particular level of competence or ability
2. It must be specific to an individual course (not applied VLN-wide)
3. It must be relevant to the course
4. It applies equally to all students, not just to disabled students
5. It must not directly discriminate against disabled students
6. It must be a proportionate means of achieving a legitimate aim

The ‘proportionate’ and ‘legitimate’ elements of this guidance refer to such considerations as:

* There must be a pressing need that supports the aim
* The application of the competence standard must be causally related to achieving the aim
* There is no other way to achieve the aim that has a less detrimental effect on the rights of disabled people

While genuine competence standards are exempt from the obligation to make reasonable adjustments, the method by which students demonstrate their attainment of a learning outcome is not itself a competence standard (although there are occasions where the competence standard and the method of assessment are inextricably linked, such as in the case of a musical performance). Thus, requiring all candidates to complete a written exam within three hours would lead to indirect discrimination12and discrimination arising from disability13 against people with fatigue conditions, physical impairments, or specific learning disabilities unless it could be shown that the three-hour time limit meets all the characteristics of a genuine competence standard (see 1.-6., above). This would be unlikely in most cases given the variety of methods of assessment already accepted within the VLN. It will generally be difficult to demonstrate that the ability to make a written, time-constrained response is an integral and irreplaceable component of any standards applied in order to determine whether a student has achieved the required level of competence or ability. Failure to make adjustments to the mode of assessment for disabled students could therefore give rise to claims of discrimination, including a failure to make reasonable adjustments. In contrast, a method of assessment which required candidates to demonstrate synoptic knowledge of material studied over the course of one or two years is likely to be regarded as an acceptable competence standard. However, a method of assessing this knowledge which requires high levels of stamina in order to complete a number of papers within a limited time scale would not be justifiable.

**How can the VLN avoid discrimination in relation to competence standards?**

All students should be given the opportunity to demonstrate their competence in the most appropriate way for them. VLN can benefit from taking an anticipatory approach and reviewing course standards to determine whether they are genuine competence standards. This can be accomplished by:

* Identifying the specific purpose of each competence standard and examining how each standard achieves that purpose
* Considering the possible impact of each competence standard on disabled students and if there are any which have a negative impact, asking whether the application of the standard is absolutely necessary
* Reviewing the purpose and effect of each competence standard in the light of changing circumstances, such as developments in technology
* Examining whether the purpose for which the competence standard is applied could be achieved without adverse impact on disabled people
* Documenting the manner in which these issues have been addressed, the conclusions that have been reached and the reasons for those conclusions
* Publishing course competence standards in marketing materials and course handbooks so that applicants and students are aware of what is required and can make informed choices.

**Further advice and support:**

**Disability Services** provides recommendations for reasonable adjustments via students’ Disability Support Summaries. These recommendations are based on the contents of students’ externally-conducted assessments (such as GP/ Consultant reports, Educational Psychologist and Specialist Teacher reports), on the summary recommendations contained in externally conducted, quality-assured Needs Assessments, on discussion with the student, the involvement of the Faculty/ School in more complex cases, and on the professional judgement of the VLN’s Disability Advisers.

**Policies for Learners:**

**Learner Malpractice Policy**

Purpose:

Under the VLN Learner agreement signed at enrolment all learners agree to abide by VLN’s policies regarding not attempting to cheat or mislead assessors/ examiners with regard to their work which is deemed to be ‘malpractice’. This policy clarifies what constitutes malpractice.

Unacceptable Practices:

The following are examples of malpractice by learners. The list is not exhaustive and other instances of malpractice may be considered and acted upon.

* 1. Misuse of examination material.
  2. Behaviour that undermines the integrity of the examination.
  3. Failure to abide by the instructions of an invigilator, supervisor or the Awarding Organisation in relation to the examination rules and regulations.
  4. Failure to abide by the conditions of supervision designed to maintain the security of the examinations.
  5. Disruptive behaviour in the examination room (including the use of offensive language).
  6. Introduction of unauthorised material into the examination room e.g. notes, study guides and personal organisers, own blank paper, calculators, dictionaries (when prohibited), personal stereos, mobile phones or other similar devices.
  7. Obtaining, receiving, exchanging or passing on information which could be examination related (or the attempt to) by means of talking or written paper/notes.
  8. Impersonation: pretending to be someone else, arranging for another to take one’s place in an examination.
  9. The inclusion of inappropriate, offensive or obscene material in scripts or coursework.
  10. Copying from another candidate (including the misuse of ICT to do so).
  11. Collusion: working collaboratively with other learners.
  12. Plagiarism: the failure to acknowledge sources properly and/or the submission of another person’s work as if it were the candidate’s own.
  13. Theft of another’s work.
  14. The deliberate destruction of another’s work.
  15. The alteration of any results documents, including certificates.

**Procedures for investigating alleged malpractice:**

All cases of malpractice are to be reported to the Head of Teaching, Learning & Assessment Quality who will obtain written statements from those concerned, whether the malpractice is by staff or learners.

**Investigation into alleged malpractice by learners:**

* The Head of Teaching, Learning & Assessment Quality will conduct a full enquiry into the malpractice.
* If malpractice is deemed to have taken place then a full written report is submitted to the Awarding Organisation with supporting evidence.
* Learners accused of malpractice are made fully aware at the earliest opportunity of the nature of the alleged malpractice, and of the possible consequences should malpractice be proven.
* The learners or if appropriate the parents/guardians of the learners are also notified in writing of the alleged malpractice and of the possible consequences.
* Learners accused of malpractice must be given the opportunity to respond (preferably in writing) to allegations made.
* Learners accused of malpractice should be made aware of the avenues for appealing should a judgement be made against him or her.
* Full details of an Awarding Organisation’s appeals procedure will be sent to the candidate and parents/guardians if the judgement goes against the candidate.
* The learners will be informed in writing of the outcome of the Awarding Organisation’s decision.

**Appeals Policy**

Purpose:

‘V LEARNING NETWORK has an obligation to advise you about the procedure and grounds on which you can make an appeal, and to allow all relevant records of appeals to be inspected by its management and by the external verifier of the awarding organisations.’

Procedures:

* If you are unhappy with any aspect of your assessment, you should discuss this initially with your assessor.
* We aim to solve all problems at this level. If not, you should contact the Head of Teaching, Learning & Assessment Quality and advise them that you wish to make an appeal which you must submit in writing.
* Appeals should be made within six weeks of the date that you first raised the issue with the Head of Teaching, Learning & Assessment Quality.
* The grounds on which you can appeal are based on the contravention of any of the criteria for the assessment centre’s approval where this has resulted in you being treated unfairly.

Possible grounds for an appeal:

* Administrative shortcomings - for example, inaccuracy in recording your progress or unreasonable delays
* Inadequate resources - for example, inappropriate or insufficient physical resources, or inexperienced and unqualified staff
* Shortcomings in the conduct of assessment - for example, non-availability of alternative assessment methods or the use of extraneous criteria by your assessor
* Barriers to access - for example, the imposition of unreasonable requirements as a precondition to assessment
* Lack of equal opportunities - for example, discrimination against your age, gender, race or creed, or other contraventions of V Learning Network’s equal opportunities policy
* If you feel that your assessor has made an unfair judgment or decision about your competence or evidence, you must give clear information about this and relate it to the published standards or the assessment process.

If your appeal is forwarded to the panel of the awarding organisation, their decision will be final. You will receive notification of any decisions from V LEARNING NETWORK.

Appeal outcomes:

**Appeal upheld**

1. If your appeal is upheld at any stage during its hearing, you will receive a written apology from the centre and, if appropriate, your assessment record will be amended. You may be given opportunities for further assessment at no additional cost. Lessons learnt from the decisions will be immediately notified to other assessors and verifiers of the centre to prevent similar errors from occurring.
2. If your appeal was on the grounds of discrimination, you will receive a written apology and the situation will be rectified at the earliest possible date to ensure that you have fair access to your chosen vocational qualification. As appropriate, staff will receive a full briefing on the issues, and receive any additional training required to ensure they are fully conversant and supportive of the equal opportunities policy.

**Appeal not upheld:**

1. If your appeal is not upheld, you will receive written notice of this with the reason for the decision.
2. The external quality assurer will be provided with all the relevant documentation on your appeal and may review the case as part of his/her monitoring procedures on the centre. This will not normally involve conducting re-assessments or speaking with you.

**Young People and Vulnerable Adults Protection Procedures**

These procedures are a subset of V Learning Network’s Safeguarding Policy which should be read in conjunction with them. It is available on [www.steplearning.org.uk](http://www.steplearning.org.uk/) .

Purpose:

To ensure that whilst attending any V Learning Network training all young and vulnerable individuals are subject to the appropriate level of Safeguarding support and protection

Scope:

1. Abuse and neglect are forms of maltreatment of a young person or vulnerable adult. Somebody may abuse or neglect a young person or vulnerable adult by inflicting harm but abuse can also take the form of failing to act to prevent harm. Young people or vulnerable adults may be abused in the family or in an institutional or community setting by those known to them or, increasingly frequently, by others (most commonly via the internet). They may be abused by an adult or adults or by another young person.
2. Any young person or vulnerable adult in a family in any setting can become a victim of abuse. Staff should always maintain an attitude of “It could happen here” when keeping a look out for signs of abuse.

There are also a number of specific activities which will raise safeguarding alarm concerns that for our learners:

* Young person or vulnerable adult missing from education
* Young person or vulnerable adult missing from home or care
* Young person or vulnerable adult sexual exploitation.
* Radicalisation
* Producing sexual imagery (Sexting)
* Teenage relationship abuse
* Peer on peer abuse

Safeguarding issues which much be watched for include:

* Bullying including cyberbullying
* Domestic abuse
* Drugs
* Fabricated or induced illness
* Faith abuse
* Female genital mutilation (FGM)
* Forced marriage
* Gangs and youth violence
* Gender-based violence/violence against women and girls (VAWG)
* Mental health
* Private care
* Trafficking

V Learning Network’s Position:

1. All staff and staff within V Learning Network (VLN) sub-contractors have been trained and are aware that behaviours linked to drug taking, alcohol abuse, truanting and sexting put young people or vulnerable adults in danger and that safeguarding issues can manifest themselves via peer on peer abuse.
2. VLN also recognises that abuse, neglect and safeguarding issues are complex and are rarely standalone events that can be covered by one definition or label. Staff need to be aware that in most cases multiple issues will overlap one another.

Staff (internal or sub-contracted):

Should be concerned about a young person or vulnerable adults’ welfare:

* If any indicators of abuse/neglect or signs that a young person or vulnerable adult may be experiencing a safeguarding issue the member of staff should record these concerns on an Expression of Concern Form and pass it to the Safeguarding Lead for their organisation. They may also discuss their concerns in person with the Safeguarding Lead but always having recorded the details of the concern in writing first.
* There will be occasions when staff may suspect that a student may be at risk, but have no ‘real’ evidence. The student’s behaviour may have changed, their artwork could be bizarre, they may write stories or poetry that reveal confusion or distress, or physical or inconclusive signs may have been noticed.
* VLN recognises that the signs may be due to a variety of factors, for example, a parent has moved out, a pet has died, a grandparent is very ill or an accident has occurred. However, they may also indicate a young person or vulnerable adult is being abused or is in need of safeguarding.
* In these circumstances staff will try to give the young person or vulnerable adult the opportunity to talk. It is fine for staff to ask the student if they are OK or if they can help in any way.
* Following an initial conversation with the student, if the member of staff remains concerned, they should discuss their concerns with the Safeguarding Lead and put them in writing.
* If the student does begin to reveal that they are being harmed, staff should follow the advice below regarding a student making a disclosure.

**If a student discloses to a member of staff:**

• We recognise that it takes a lot of courage for a young person or vulnerable adult to disclose they are being abused. They may feel ashamed, guilty or scared, their abuser may have threatened that something will happen if they tell, they may have lost all trust in adults or believe that was has happened is their fault. Sometimes they may not be aware that what is happening is abuse.

• A young person or vulnerable adult who makes a disclosure may have to tell their story on a number of subsequent occasions to the police and/or social workers. Therefore, it is vital that their first experience of talking to a trusted adult is a positive one.

**During their conversation with the learner staff will:**

• Listen to what the young person or vulnerable adult has to say and allow them to speak freely

• Remain calm and not overact or act shocked or disgusted – the student may stop talking if they feel they are upsetting the listener

• Reassure the young person or vulnerable adult that it is not their fault and that they have done the right thing in telling someone

• Not be afraid of silences – staff must remember how difficult it is for the student and allow them time to talk

• Take what the young person or vulnerable adult is disclosing seriously

• Ask open questions and avoid asking leading questions

• Avoid jumping to conclusions, speculation or make accusations

• *Not automatically offer any physical touch as comfort. It may be anything but comforting to a young person or vulnerable adult who is being abused.*

• Avoid admonishing the young person or vulnerable adult for not disclosing sooner. Saying things such as ‘I do wish you had told me about it when it started’ may be the staff member’s way of being supportive but may be interpreted by the young person or vulnerable adult to mean they have done something wrong.

• Tell the young person or vulnerable adult what will happen next.

Subsequent Actions:

1. If a learner talks to any member of staff about any risks to their safety or wellbeing the staff member will let the young person or vulnerable adult know that they *will have to pass the information on – staff are not allowed to keep secrets.*
2. The member of staff must formally write up the details of the conversation as soon as possible on the Expression of Concern form in the young person or vulnerable adult own words. Staff should make this a matter of priority. The record should be signed and dated, the member of staff’s name should be printed and it should also detail where the disclosure was made and who else was present. The record should be handed to the Safeguarding Lead.

**Notifying Parents and Carers**

1. The VLN will normally seek to discuss any concerns about a student with their parents, carers or appropriate responsible adult linked to student. This must be handled sensitively and normally the Safeguarding Lead will make initial contact with the parent, carer or appropriate responsible adult, in the event of a concern, suspicion or disclosure.
2. However, if VLN believes that notifying parents, carers or appropriate responsible adults could increase the risk to the student or exacerbate the problem, advice will first be sought from Local Authority Safeguarding teams.
3. Where there are concerns about forced marriage or honour-based violence parents, carers or appropriate responsible adults should not be informed a referral is being made as to do so may place the student at a significantly increased risk.

**Making a referral**

* Concerns about a young person or vulnerable adults’ disclosure should be immediately raised with the Safeguarding Lead who will in conjunction with VLN CEO, decide whether a referral or other support is appropriate in accordance with the Local Authority Guidance.
* If a referral is needed, then the Safeguarding Lead should make this rapidly while insuring that the VLN CEO is fully aware of the concern. However, anyone can make a referral and if for any reason a staff member thinks a referral is appropriate and one hasn’t been made, they can and should consider making a referral themselves.
* The young person or vulnerable adults (subject to their age and understanding) parents/carer or appropriate responsible adult, will be told that a referral is being made, unless to do so would increase the risk to the young person or vulnerable adult.
* If after a referral the young person or vulnerable adults’ situation does not appear to be improving the designated safeguarding lead (or the person that made the referral) should press for re-consideration to ensure their concerns have been addressed, and most importantly the young person or vulnerable adult’s situation improves.
* If a young person or vulnerable adult is in immediate danger or is at risk of harm a referral should be made to the Local Authority and/or the police immediately. Anybody can make a referral.

**Supporting Staff**

* We recognise that staff working in the institution who have become involved with a young person or vulnerable adult who has suffered harm, or appears to be likely to suffer harm, may find the situation stressful and upsetting.
* We will support such staff by providing an opportunity to talk through their anxieties and to seek further support as appropriate.

**4. Scope**

These policies and procedures are applicable to all learners engaged in programmes of study within V Learning Network including all sub-contracted provision across Devon, Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly

**5. Accountability**

1. Centre Office Staff
2. Learners
3. Tutors/ Assessors/ Internal Verifiers
4. **Implementation**

* The responsibility for all academic matter is for the V Learning Network Head of Teaching, Learning & Assessment Quality
* The responsibility for all safeguarding related matters is with the V Learning Safeguarding Lead/s and all members of staff.

1. **Equality Impact Assessment**

V Learning Network strives to ensure that this policy is fair to all. All feedback, unless otherwise specified by the learner, is anonymous.