



# Complaint management policy

POL048-Complaint management  
Policy-2022-11-24

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# Complaint management policy

## Introduction

### I. The Humanitarian Quality Assurance Initiative

HQAI's objective is to improve the Quality and Accountability of organisations working with vulnerable and at-risk population through the provision and promotion of meaningful and adapted independent quality assurance. Its services are intended to build capacity in the sector and provide consistent measurable data in the delivery of quality action, thus improving principled, accountable, efficient provision of aid to vulnerable and at-risk populations.

To all its stakeholders, HQAI is an accountable, open and trustworthy partner, which applies the internationally recognised ground rules of auditing that are impartiality, competence, responsibility, openness, confidentiality and responsiveness to complaints. Our policies, procedures and tools for independent quality assurance follow relevant ISO standards requirements. HQAI's CHS certification scheme is accredited against ISO/IEC 17065:2012.

HQAI has developed robust tools to measure efficiently where an organisation stands in relation to the [Core Humanitarian Standard \(CHS\) on Quality and Accountability](#). Tools related to other standards may be developed in the future.

HQAI is committed to the nine fundamental principles of the CHS and implements them as far as they are applicable to its own activities.

These are:

- delivery of services that respond to the needs of users
- timely delivery of these services
- avoidance of negative effects
- transparency and participation in decision-making
- provision of safe complaint mechanisms
- avoidance of duplication
- responsible management of staff, including non discrimination
- responsible use of resources

## II. Scope

This policy applies to all complaints brought forward to HQAI, unless otherwise described in a specific policy duly approved by the Board of Directors or the Advisory and Complaint Board (ACB). Complaints may fall in the following categories:

- i. Complaints received from stakeholders against an audited organisation regarding the conformity with the standard(s) against which it is audited;
- ii. Complaints received from stakeholders about the behaviour of HQAI staff, including auditors and interns and members of HQAI corporate bodies;
- iii. Complaints received from stakeholders about HQAI's processes, including this policy or its application procedure;
- iv. Complaints from stakeholders/audited organisations against the performance/conduct of the ED.

## III References

The following referenced documents can usefully complement this document. For dated references, only the edition cited applies. For undated references, the latest edition of the referenced document (including any amendments) applies.

ISO/IEC 17065 Conformity Assessment Requirements for bodies certifying products, processes and services (2012)

HQAI GOV001 - Articles of Association

HQAI PRO114 - Certification and independent verification procedure

HQAI PRO048 - Complaint management procedure

HQAI POL049 - Appeal policy

HQAI PRO049 - Appeal procedure

HQAI PRO050 - Advisory and complaint board

## IV Definitions

In general, the definitions provided in POL114 - Third-party quality assurance policy apply. Additionally, for the purposes of this document the following terms and definitions apply.

<b>Appeal</b>	Formal contestation by an audited organisation of a quality assurance decision made by HQAI about this same organisation.
<b>Appellant</b>	individual or organisation filing in an appeal.
<b>Complaint</b>	Formal expression of dissatisfaction made to or about HQAI, related to its audited organisations, services or staff where a response or resolution is explicitly or implicitly expected.
<b>Complainant</b>	Person or organisation filing a complaint.

## 1. Key principles

Any complaint is welcome and shall be treated according to the following principles:

- 1.1 Transparency: parties to a complaint shall have all the relevant information in due time;
- 1.2 Impartiality: any person handling a complaint shall be free of conflict of interest vis-à-vis the parties of a complaint;
- 1.3 Objectivity: addressing complaints shall be based on objective evidence and facts and be free of irrelevant considerations;
- 1.4 Confidentiality: where feasible and appropriate, the identity of people making complaints shall be protected, in particular if risk to security is identified due to the nature of the complaint;
- 1.5 Fairness: proceedings shall be fair to all parties to the complaint. In particular, cost considerations shall not be a deterrent for founded complaints;
- 1.6 Safety: the security of complainants shall be an absolute priority at all times and the confidentiality of the persons involved guaranteed;
- 1.7 Timeliness: HQAI will endeavour to resolve complaints promptly;
- 1.8 Accessibility: information about how and where to file complaints is readily available on HQA's website and easily understandable;
- 1.9 Subsidiarity: complaints should be dealt with at the most immediate level that is consistent with their resolution;
- 1.10 Appeals: it is possible to appeal against decisions made in the course of a complaint procedure.

## 2. Complaints

- 2.1 Any individual or organisation may file a complaint provided this is relevant to an activity for which HQAI is responsible within the scope of this policy.
- 2.2 Complaints shall be filed in writing to the ED, following PRO048 - Complaint handling procedure
- 2.3 HQAI shall establish a focal point for addressing issues related to sexual exploitation, abuse and harassment (SEAH). The focal point is appointed by the ACB. She/he treats SEAH related complaints following PRO048 and may plan and support any investigation of an SEAH incident as necessary and defines subsequent action in close collaboration with the with the the ACB
- 2.4 Complaints against the ED shall be addressed directly to the ACB Chair.
- 2.5 Complaints shall be exclusively handled by the ACB or the Executive Director (or his/her substitute).  
  
Note: Corporate bodies other than the ACB or the Head of the Secretariat that mistakenly receive complaints shall defer them immediately to the appropriate person.
- 2.6 Notwithstanding art. 2.2 above, HQAI shall endeavour to address also informal complaints, explore with the informal complainants whether his/her query should be treated as a formal complaint, and help him/her in the process of filing the complaint.

### 3. Costs

- 3.1 In principle, filing a complaint should not involve cost for the complainant.
- 3.2 It may be that the investigation of a complaint leads to costs, particularly if it contests the conclusions of a quality assurance audit, in which case the distribution of costs shall be done equitably between HQAI, the audited organisation (as relevant) and the complainant.

### 4. Resolution of complaints and records

- 4.1 For complaints addressed to the ED (see 2.2 above), the same shall attempt to reach an amicable resolution between the parties to the complaint. If no amicable solution is found, the ED shall defer the complaint to the ACB
- 4.2 As far as relevant and feasible in regard to the matter or the complaint, the resolution of the issue shall be first attempted by direct contact between the parties.
- 4.3 All parties to a complaint shall have the possibility to appeal against the decision, in which case the appeal policy and procedure apply (POL & PRO049)
- 4.4 Unless otherwise specified in the Swiss legislation under which HQAI is incorporated, decisions made by the Appeal panel are final.
- 4.5 All steps undertaken and decisions made during a complaint resolution process shall be duly recorded, making sure the records are protected against un-authorized access.
- 4.6 Complaints shall be handled timely.

Note: While the timeframe for resolution may be influenced by many factors, HQAI shall endeavour to close any complaint within one year.

### 5. Accountability and learning

- 5.1 HQAI shall analyse, evaluate and report complaints regularly to the Board of Director and the ACB, including:
- i. the number of complaints received;
  - ii. the outcome of complaints, including matters resolved at the frontline;
  - iii. issues arising from complaints;
  - iv. systemic issues identified, including to the complaint management process.
- 5.2 HQAI shall regularly monitor the complaint management system to ensure its effectiveness in responding to and resolving complaints identify and correct deficiencies in its operation and continuously improve it.