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HQAI is constantly developing and improving its tools and procedures. Depending on feedback and learning from experience, these may change. Please make sure you’re using the latest version, which can be found in HQAI web-site.

How to give feedback or contribute to the process?

If you would like to provide comments on this, document or any aspect of our work, please send your feedback to: contact@hqai.org.

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Complaints Policy

Introduction

I. The Humanitarian Quality Assurance Initiative

HQAI’s objective is to improve the Quality and Accountability of organisations working with people in need 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 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 welcome complaints as they present organisations with significant opportunities to improve services and strengthen relationships with stakeholders. As per Article 10 of HQAI articles of Association, strengthening the complaint handling mechanisms is the responsibility of the Advisory and Complaint Board, which has the responsibility to approve the policies related to impartiality and complaints, and take decisions about complaints what they cannot be resolved by a direct discussion between the complainant and the Secretariat.

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.

This policy does not apply to appeals.

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 17000:2004, Conformity assessment — Vocabulary and general principles
ISO/IEC 17021-1:2005, Conformity assessment - Requirements for bodies providing audit and certification of management systems Part 1: Requirements
HQAI GOV001 - Articles of Association
IV Definitions

For the purposes of this document, the following terms and definitions apply (based on ISO/IEC 17021-1:2015(E)) and the humanitarian principles.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Term</th>
<th>Definition</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Auditor</td>
<td>Person who conducts an audit.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Certification audit</td>
<td>Audit carried out by an auditing organisation independent of the client organisation and the parties that rely on certification, for the purpose of certifying the client’s management system.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Quality assurance scheme</td>
<td>Conformity assessment system related to management systems and their performance to which the same specified requirements, specific rules and procedures apply.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Partner organisation</td>
<td>Organisation that is being audited for quality assurance purposes (sometimes called the client)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Confidentiality</td>
<td>Strict non-disclosure of any confidential information.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Impartiality</td>
<td>Presence of objectivity, making no distinction on the basis of nationality, race, gender, religious belief, class or political opinions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Independence</td>
<td>Being autonomous from the political, economic, military or other objectives that might put pressure on a decision by the certification or verification body</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nonconformity</td>
<td>Non-fulfilment of a requirement.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Major nonconformity</td>
<td>Nonconformity that affects the capability of the organisation to achieve the intended results.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minor nonconformity</td>
<td>Nonconformity that does not affect the capability of the management system to achieve the intended results.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neutrality</td>
<td>Not taking sides in hostilities or engage in controversies of a political, racial, religious or ideological nature.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Openness</td>
<td>Disclosure of appropriate and timely information about the audit, quality assurance processes and about the verification or certification status (i.e. the granting, maintaining of quality assurance, expanding or reducing the scope of quality assurance, renewing, suspending or restoring, or withdrawing of quality assurance) of any organisation.</td>
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1. Key principles

Any complaint shall be treated according to the following principles:

a. **Transparency**: parties to a complaint shall have all the relevant information in due time;

b. **Impartiality**: any person handling a complaint shall be free of conflict of interest vis-à-vis the parties of a complaint;

c. **Objectivity**: addressing complaints shall be based on objective evidence and facts and be free of irrelevant considerations;

d. **Fairness**: proceedings shall be fair to all parties to the complaint. In particular, cost considerations shall not be a deterrent for founded complaints;

e. **Safety**: the security of complainants shall be an absolute priority at all times and the confidentiality of the persons involved guaranteed;

f. **Timeliness**: HQAI will endeavour to resolve complaints promptly and following the process described in this procedure.

2. Complaints

2.1 Any individual or organisation may file a complaint against HQAI or one of its clients, provided this concerns a situation that is relevant to HQAI activities.

2.2 Complaints shall be filed in writing to HQAI secretariat (Quality Assurance Manager) and shall, at a minimum:

a. state the date of the complaint;

b. indicate the name and contact details of the complainant;

c. disclose any possible connection with interests related to the complaint;

d. indicate the organisation against which the complaint is filed;

e. describe the reasons of the complaint;

f. provide objective evidence sustaining the complaint.

2.3 Complainants who, for any reason, have doubts about the neutrality of the Secretariat in the issue in question can address their complaint directly to the Advisory and Complaint Board (ACB), in which case they shall, in addition to the points in 2.2, add an explanation of why they choose this option. See contact details below.

2.4 HQAI shall endeavour, notwithstanding art. 2.2 above, to address also informal complaints, to explore, with the informal complainants whether his / her query should be treated as a formal complaint, and help him/her in this process.
3. Costs

3.1 Filing a complaint shall not be invoiced to the complainant and all attempts shall be made to resolve the complaint by direct discussions between the parties to the complaint. It is expected that most complaints will be resolved at this level.

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.

Note: a complaint cannot be filed by a client against a quality assurance decision made by HQAI about this same client as this would be an appeal.

3.3 The allocation of costs for the further investigation of complaints shall be determined by the Advisory and Complaints Board. The following options for the allocation of costs may be considered:

a. All costs borne by the client if it appears that the complaint is substantiated;
b. All costs borne by the Humanitarian Quality Assurance Initiative if the complaint is substantiated or the appeal valid, and is the result of HQAI poor performance;
c. By the complainant, taking due consideration of the fairness principle, in proportion to the quality of objective evidence provided, i.e. the more certainty there is of a problem, the less of a cost onus will be on the complainant

d. All cost borne by the complainant if it appears the complaint is abusive.

4. Resolution of complaints and records

4.1 Whenever feasible, complaints should be resolved amiably between the parties involved in the complaint.

4.2 If no amiable solution is found, the complaint shall be brought to HQAI’s Advisory and Complaint Board, which decision regarding the complaint is final.

4.3 All steps undertaken and decision made during a complaint resolution process shall be duly recorded.

5. Contact

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