



Complaints and appeals procedure

PRO049– Complaints and appeals procedure 2016-07-29

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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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Introduction

I. The Humanitarian Quality Assurance Initiative

HQAI's objective is to help organisations progress and show their effectiveness in delivering to recognised humanitarian standards. Its quality assurance 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 populations affected by crises.

HQAI upholds the humanitarian principles of humanity, impartiality, neutrality and independence.

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 procedures follow the ISO 17021 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.

II Scope

This procedure applies to all complaints and appeals brought forward to HQAI, unless otherwise described in a specific procedure duly approved by the Board or its Executive Committee.

The purpose of this document is to identify a structured process for the management of complaints and appeals received by HQAI about its quality assurance activities. This procedure shall be communicated to all certified or verified organisations and be posted on HQAI web-site to ensure a maximum visibility.

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 ADM104 - CHS Certification Application Form

HQAI ADM 105 - CHS Verification Application Form

HQAI PRO114 - Certification and independent verification procedure

IV Definitions

Appeal: formal contestation by a client of a decision made by HQAI.

Appellant: individual or organisation filing in an appeal.

Complaints: formal contestation by any stakeholder of an independent verification or certification decision by HQAI.

Complainant: person or organisation filing a complaint.



1. Key principles

Any complaint or appeal shall be treated according to the following principles:

- a. Transparency: parties to a complaint or appeal 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 or appeal;
- c. Objectivity: addressing complaints and appeal 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 or appeal. In particular, cost considerations shall not be a deterrent for founded complaints.
- e. Safety: the security of complainants and appellant shall be an absolute priority at all times and the confidentiality of the persons involved guaranteed;
- f. Timeliness: HQAI will endeavour to resolve complaints and appeal 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 (Verification Officer) 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 The process for considering a complaint shall be as follows:

- a. HQAI shall acknowledge immediately the receipt of a complaint and inform the concerned organisation of the process;
- b. Within ten (10) days of receipt of the complaint, the secretariat shall:
 - i) examine if the conditions for receiving it are fulfilled;
 - ii) make a first evaluation of possible costs;

- iii) revert to the complainant with a request to confirm the complaint and sign an agreement to pay the costs up to and including the full costs of the complaint process, as indicated under point 4, below and possibly a request for additional information; and
 - iv) revert to the parties with a detail of the steps that will be followed (which may include not to address the complaint if it falls outside the scope of this procedure).
- a. Within 30 days of having confirmed the process to both the complainant and the concerned organisation, the secretariat will present a proposed resolution. This may involve several rounds of consultation with the parties.
 - b. If the proposed resolution is not acceptable for the complainant or the concerned organisation, they shall inform HQAI in writing within 14 days of being informed of the decision, stating the reasons for continuing the process. Failure to do so in time will automatically leave the proposed resolution operational and close the complaint.
 - c. The secretariat will then transmit the file to the Advisory and Complaints Board that will address the issue at its next meeting, with the objective to finalise any and all complaints within a period of 1 year.
 - d. If the matter is urgent the secretariat (at its discretion) may organise an extraordinary meeting of the Advisory and Complaints Board.
 - e. Unless otherwise specified in the Swiss legislation that rules HQAI, decisions made by the Advisory and Complaints Board are final.
 - f. The secretariat shall inform the parties of the decision and take the necessary measures, depending on the outcomes.
 - g. HQAI shall determine, together with the client and the complainant, whether and, if so to what extent, the subject of the complaint and its resolution shall be made public.
 - h. As appropriate, the client shall report back to HQAI on the timely implementation of corrective actions resulting from the complaint, which shall be checked at the next subsequent audit.

3. Appeals

3.1 Organisations that do not agree with a certification or verification decision may file an appeal against same within 14 days after being informed of the decision. A certification or verification decision refers to one or more of the following:

- v) refusal to accept an application;
- vi) refusal to proceed with an assessment;
- vii) corrective action requests;
- viii) changes in certification scope;
- ix) decisions to deny, suspend or withdraw certification; and
- x) any other action that impedes the attainment of certification or independent verification.

3.2 Appeals shall be filed in writing to HQAI secretariat (Verification Officer) and shall, at a minimum:

- a. state the date of the appeal;
- b. indicate the name and contact details of the appellant;
- c. disclose any possible connection with interests related to the appeal;
- d. describe the reasons of the appeal;
- e. provide sufficient documented objective evidence to substantiate the appeal and identifying the basis for same;
- f. contain an agreement to pay the costs up to and including the full costs of the appeal process, as determined and allocated by the Appeals Panel.

3.3 The process for considering an appeal shall be as follows:

HQAI shall acknowledge immediately the reception of an appeal;

- a. Within ten (10) days of receipt of the appeal, the secretariat shall examine if the conditions for receiving it are fulfilled and come back to the appellant with, either a request for additional information or a detail of the steps that will be followed.
- b. Within 30 days of having confirmed the process to the appellant the secretariat will come with a proposed resolution to the appeal. This may involve several rounds of consultation with the parties.
- c. If the proposed resolution is not acceptable for the appellant it shall inform HQAI in writing within 14 days of being informed of the proposed resolution, stating the reasons for continuing the process. Failure to do so in time will automatically leave the proposed resolution operational and close the appeal.
- d. The secretariat will then arrange for an Appeals Panel composed of two Board members. These shall be void of conflict of interest regarding the case in question.
- e. The Appeals Panel shall come to a decision within 30 days of the continuation of the appeal process (point d., above).

- f. Unless otherwise specified in the Swiss legislation that rules HQAI, decisions made by the Appeals Panel are final.
 - g. The secretariat shall inform the parties of the decision and take the necessary measures, depending on the outcomes.
 - h. As appropriate, the client shall report back to HQAI on the timely implementation of corrective actions resulting from the appeal, which shall be checked at the next subsequent audit.
- 3.4 The appeal shall not suspend the validity of the decision which is being appealed, unless otherwise decided by the duly convened Appeals Panel.

4. Costs

The allocation of costs for the further investigation of complaints or appeals shall be determined by the Advisory and Complaints Board or Appeals Panel, respectively. 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 or abusive;

It is expected that, in most cases, appeals will be avoided through the consultation that happens in establishing the audit report and solutions will be found without further expenses through the first layer of the complaint mechanism.

5. Contact

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