Complaint management policy

POL048 - Complaint management policy - 2018-06-13
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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.

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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.

Complaints provide an important avenue for the identification of impairments in services and an opportunity for their improvement and a strengthening of relationships with stakeholders. HQAI will receive complaints from its stakeholders in accordance with its Articles of Association and this policy.

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. Complaints may fall in the following categories:

i. Complaints received from stakeholders regarding the performance of an organisation taking part in HQAI’s quality assurance programme;

ii. Complaints received from stakeholders against HQAI as an organisation, its processes, including this policy or pertaining to the performance/conduct of a member of the staff, including auditors, interns and the governing bodies, at the exclusion of the Executive Director;

iii. Complaints from stakeholders/audited organisations against the performance/conduct of HQAI’s Executive Director.

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 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 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.

Appeal
Formal contestation by an audited organisation of a quality assurance decision made by HQAI about this same organisation.

Appellant
Individual or organisation filing in an appeal.

Complaint
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.

Complainant
Person or organisation filing a complaint.
1. **Key principles**

Any complaint 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 HQAI’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 against HQAI or one of its audited organisations, provided this is relevant to an activity for which HQAI is responsible.

2.2 Complaints shall be filed in writing to HQAI’s Executive Director.

2.3 Complainants who, for any reason, are concerned that the Secretariat may have a conflict of interest in the issue in question can address their complaint directly to the Advisory and Complaint Board (ACB).

2.4 Complaints against HQAI’s Executive Director shall be addressed directly to the Advisory and Complaint Board.

2.5 HQAI shall endeavour, notwithstanding art. 2.2 above 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 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. Should this be the case, the distribution of costs shall be done equitably between the parties to the complaint.

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 formally addressed to the Secretariat or directly to the Chair of the Advisory and Complaint Board, according to the nature of the complaint.

4.3 All parties to a complaint shall have the possibility to appeal against the decision.
   i. for complaints brought forward to HQAI’s secretariat, the appellate body is the Advisory and Complaint Board.
   ii. For complaints brought forward directly to the Chair of the Advisory and Complaint Board, the appellate body is an ad hoc panel established by the President of the Board of Directors.

4.4 Unless otherwise specified in the Swiss legislation under which HQAI is incorporated, decisions made by the appellate body are final.

4.3 All steps undertaken and decision made during a complaint resolution process shall be duly recorded, making sure the records are protected against unauthorised access.

5. Accountability and learning

5.1 HQAI shall analyse, evaluate and report complaints regularly to the Board of Director and the Advisory and Complaint Board, 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.

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.