

Joint Communication

November 29, 2023

ACT ALLIANCE APPEAL UPHELD

Independent Appeal Panel upholds appeal by ACT Alliance.

Geneva, Switzerland - Following HQAI's decision to suspend ACT Alliance's certification and the subsequent appeal by ACT Alliance against that decision, the Appeal Panel mandated by HQAI's Advisory and Complaint Board (ACB) has stipulated that the audit report does not provide sufficient objective evidence to support the major corrective action request (CAR) M2023-8.4 and requests the HQAI Secretariat to withdraw the major finding and lift the suspension of the certificate with immediate effect. The HQAI Secretariat has also been asked to allocate additional resources and time to the next audit so that there can be a specific focus on issues identified in the now-revoked major corrective action.

What does this decision concretely mean?

- 1) The suspension of ACT Alliance's certificate is lifted with immediate effect. The major CAR M2023-8.4 (*The ACT Alliance Secretariat does not have the management and staff capacity to deliver the effective operation of its humanitarian mechanism - Appeal and RRF - in compliance with the CHS*) has been withdrawn, and the audit report is subsequently being updated.
- 2) It confirms ACT Alliance's unwavering commitment to Quality and Accountability and the CHS, as demonstrated through its longstanding audit journey since its initial CHS Certification in 2017.
- 3) ACT Alliance is committed to addressing all CHS audit findings, and the next certification audit (maintenance audit 2025) will follow its progress on ensuring sufficient management and staff capacity to deliver its humanitarian mechanism in compliance with the CHS. Before finalising and sharing the 2025 public audit report, HQAI will report detailed findings back to the ACB.
- 4) The appeal decision clearly demonstrates the impartiality of the ACB in its decisions and corroborates HQAI's commitment to professionalism, impartiality, and objectivity. The independent accreditation body Accredia annually assesses HQAI's impartiality as one of its audit criteria against ISO/IEC 17065:2015.
- 5) HQAI welcomes and values complaints and appeals and will use every case as an opportunity to learn and continue offering independent, adapted quality assurance services. HQAI will embark on a meaningful reflection and comprehensive analysis of the Appeal Panel's findings to ensure that HQAI's interpretation of audit findings is systematically substantiated by factual and objective evidence and clearly conveyed to our partners.

Background

On August 09, 2023, HQAI's audit report identified a major corrective action request (major CAR M2023-8.4) on ACT Alliance's renewal audit, leading to the suspension of the CHS certificate, which was communicated to ACT Alliance on August 11, 2023. ACT Alliance appealed against the audit decision on August 24, 2023. The subsequent investigation and decision by the Executive Director of HQAI to uphold the audit findings was not accepted by ACT Alliance and motivated ACT's request for the appeal to be escalated to the ACB of HQAI, dated September 22, 2023. An independent Appeal Panel of two ACB members was formed to conduct a review process evaluating all the documents and records submitted by both parties to the appeal. The Appeal Panel decided to uphold the appeal. The decision is binding for both parties.

It should be noted that provisional suspensions are common practice in certification schemes across various sectors and can typically last up to six months. They are used to indicate situations where the management system of a certified organisation has undergone significant changes that impact the organisation's ability to comply with a given standard or when one or more minor CARs could not be addressed within the specified timeframe. Unfortunately, despite being a normal part of the HQAI audit process of CHS, suspensions may still cause reputational damage to audited organisations even if, like ACT Alliance, they have consistently proven their long-standing commitment to Quality and Accountability and the CHS. It is therefore acknowledged that a better sector-wide understanding of the CHS certification process, its transparency and purpose, is necessary to ensure that audited organisations' commitments to quality and accountability are recognised and valued. HQAI is committed to furthering this understanding.

For more information about ACT Alliance and HQAI, please visit our respective websites:

<https://actalliance.org>

<https://www.hqai.org/en/>