



Complaint Management Procedure

PRO048 - Complaint management procedure -
2020-09-03

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PRO048 - Complaint management procedure - 2020-09-03		
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Complaint management procedure

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'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
- well management of staff, including non discrimination
- responsible use of resources

II Scope

This procedure applies to all complaints brought forward to HQAI. This procedure 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 POL048 - Complaint management policy

HQAI POL049 - Appeal policy

HQAI PRO049 - Appeals procedure

HQAI GOV001 - Articles of association

HQAI POL114 - Third party quality assurance policy

HQAI PRO050 - Advisory and complaint board

IV Definitions

For the purposes of this document, terms and definition provided in POL114 - Third-party quality assurance policy and POL048 - Complaints handling policy apply.

Process flow chart

In development

1. Public accessibility of the complaint mechanism

- 1.1 HQAI shall maintain a dedicated web-page for informing the public about complaints. This page shall include at a minimum:
 - i. a plain language summary of the complaint handling process
 - ii. contact information to file a complaint to the Executive Director or directly to the Advisory and Complaint Board
 - iii. a link to download the complaint handling policy and procedure (POL048 and PRO048)
- 1.2 Upon request or if informal complaints are expressed, HQAI's Secretariat shall assist potential complainants on how to file a complaint.

2. Filing a complaint

- 2.1 Complaints regarding
 - i. Complaints received from stakeholders against an audited organisation regarding the conformity with the standard(s) against which it is audited; and
 - ii. Complaints received from stakeholders against HQAI as an organisation, its processes, including this procedure or pertaining to the performance/conduct of a member of the staff, including auditors, interns and the governing bodies, at the exclusion of HQAI's Executive Director (ED);

shall be filed in writing to HQAI's Executive Director using the dedicated email address: complaints@hqai.org.

- 2.2 Complaints regarding:
 - i. HQAI's Executive Director; or
 - ii. any issue for which the complainant is concerned the ED may have a conflict of interest in the issue in question;

shall be filed in writing to the Chair of the independent Advisory and Complaint Board using the dedicated address ACB_chair@hqai.org

- 2.3 When filing a complaint, the complainant shall at a minimum:
 - i. state the date of the complaint;
 - ii. indicate the name and contact details of the complainant;
 - iii. disclose any possible connection with interests related to the complaint;
 - iv. indicate against who the complaint is filed;
 - v. describe the reasons of the complaint;
 - vi. describe the expected outcome(s) of the complaint (e.g. an apology, a change of policy)
 - vii. provide objective evidence sustaining the complaint.
 - viii. demonstrate that the complaint was voiced first directly with the people or organisations involved, or justify why s/he had fear of doing so.
 - ix. if s/he opts to use the option provided in 2.3.ii., explain why this option is chosen.

Note: The note supporting a complaint may be short and simple, but shall include sufficient documented objective evidence to substantiate the complaint and identify the basis for the complaint. Dissatisfaction without any justified reason or based on hearsay will not be considered as a complaint and should be rejected.

3. Communication between the parties and confidentiality

3.1 Once a complaint has been formally filed, all communication between HQAI and the parties shall be managed by the ED when the complaint is in the conciliation phase (see 4.3, below) or by the Chair of the ACB when the complaint is at the level of the ACB (see 4.4 & 4.5 below).

Note: In the absence of the ED, his/her role shall be taken over by the Deputy ED in resolving complaints.

3.2 Communication between the parties and HQAI Quality Assurance Team and/or auditors may happen if it is strictly limited to technical matters related to the investigation related to the complaint, e.g. setting up appointments for interviews.

3.3 The information pertaining to the complaint shall be accessible only to the people directly involved in the complaint; the ED, the Deputy ED, the members of the ACB and as necessary for fact findings, members of the Quality Assurance Team.

3.4 When a complaint concerns an audited organisation that is a member of the CHS Alliance, the ED shall inform the ED of the CHS Alliance of the existence of the complaint, without divulging any details regarding the complaint.

4. Process for handling a complaint

4.1 Consistently with the subsidiarity principle complaints shall be addressed at the most immediate level that is consistent with their resolution. To this effect complainants are required first to voice their complaint or concern directly with the people or organisations involved, unless the complainant has a well-justified fear of doing so, in which case the complaint can be raised directly with HQAI.

4.2 If this approach is not successful, or not feasible due to the nature of the complaint, the complaint shall be formally filed following the process described below.

4.3 For complaints addressed to the ED, the following process applies:

4.3.1 When receiving a complaint, the ED shall acknowledge immediately its receipt without any discrimination against the appellant and inform the concerned parties of the process;

4.3.2 Within 10 days of receipt of the complaint, the ED shall:

- i. examine if the complaint falls within the scope of HQAI complaint handling mechanism and responds to the conditions set under clause 2. above;
- ii. if the complaint does not fall within HQAI's complaint handling mechanism, assess if and to what organisation it should be referred to;
- iii. create a log and file it in a secured folder on HQAI's server where all documents pertaining to the complaint shall be kept;
- iv. assess risks associated with the complaint in terms of 1) people involved, 2) organisation concerned and 3) for HQAI's reputation, and identify whether the complaint is urgent;

Note: Complaints dealing with alleged on-going SEAH or involving children shall be in all circumstances considered urgent.

- v. inform the ACB of the complaint and the risk analysis s/he has undertaken;

- vi. possibly revert to the complainant requesting additional information;
 - vii. 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);
 - viii. invite the party against which the complaint is raised to respond to the affirmations made in the complaint within 14 days after notification the complaint was received.
- 4.3.3 The Chair of the ACB shall appoint a panel of at least two ACB members to review the risk analysis conducted by the ED on a filed complaint and revert back to the ED immediately in case of disagreement with the risk assessment.
- 4.3.4 The ED shall attempt a conciliation with the parties, proposing a way forward that minimises the burdens for all parties.
- 4.3.5. If a conciliation is not reached within 30 days after the process was confirmed to the parties, the ED shall transfer the file to the ACB and inform the parties of the fact.
- Note: if it is the impression of the ED that an amicable solution can be reached shortly after this deadline, it can be prolonged, but the conciliation period shall not go over a period of 45 days in total.*
- 4.3.6 From this point onwards, the Chair of the ACB shall be the sole contact between the ACB and the parties to the complaint.
- 4.4 Once a complaint has been transmitted by the ED to the Chair of the ACB, the following process applies:
- 4.4.1 Based on the information in the file, the Chair of the ACB shall determine whether the complaint is high-risk and/or urgent.
- Note: the Chair of the ACB may request additional information from the parties or the ED to form his/her opinion.*
- 4.4.2 If the matter is high-risk and/or urgent, the Chair of the ACB shall appoint a panel of at least two ACB members to review the complaint and then present their findings to the ACB for a final decision and recommendation, where applicable.
- Note: this can take the form of an email exchange between the members of the panel and/or the ACB.*
- 4.4.3 If the matter does not present urgency, the ACB may decide to discuss and resolve the issue at its following ordinary meeting.
- 4.4.4 The ACB shall assess whether further investigation is needed in order to address the complaint and identify the most efficient way to gather this information.
- Note: For complaints regarding audited organisations, HQAI's privileged mechanism to collect evidence is its audit process. As such HQAI independent auditors should in priority be used in the collection of data. If the complaint is not urgent, this should be combined as far as possible with a regular audit of the organisation to minimise costs*
- 4.4.5 The ACB shall assess costs (if any) associated with the collection of additional information and revert back to the complainant:
- i. explaining how costs are distributed (see 5. below), and that depending on the outcome of the complaint, the cost may be borne by the complainant;
 - ii. requesting the complainant 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 5. below.

Note: upon reception of confirmation of the complaint, the ACB shall inform all parties about potential costs.

- 4.4.6 For urgent and/or high-risk complaints, the ACB shall strive, under the responsibility of its Chair to present a resolution to the parties as soon as possible after having received confirmation of the complaint by the complainant.

Note: Normally the ACB shall strive to provide the resolution with 30 days after confirmation, but this timeframe may not be achievable if the resolution requires several rounds of negotiations between the parties or if it implies a fact finding audit.

- 4.4.7 For non urgent/high risk complaints, a resolution shall be presented to the parties within 10 days after the ACB meeting at which it was dealt with.
- 4.5 Complaints brought forward directly to the the Chair of the ACB, as per 2.3 above shall follow the process described in 4.2 and 4.3, the role of the ED being replaced by the Chair of the ACB.

5. Costs

- 5.1 Unless specific expenses are necessary for investigating a complaint, complaints shall not be invoiced to the parties.
- 5.2 If expenses are necessary, 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, as relevant for the specific case:
- 5.2.1 all costs borne by the audited organisation if it appears that the complaint is substantiated;
 - 5.2.2 all costs borne by HQAI if the complaint is substantiated and is the result of HQAI's poor performance;
 - 5.2.3 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;
 - 5.2.4 all cost borne by the complainant if it appears the complaint is abusive.

6. Decision

- 6.1 Any decision rendered on a complaint shall be communicated immediately to the parties
- 6.2 The decision shall include:
- 6.2.1 a summary of the events regarding the complaint;
 - 6.2.2 a justified reply to each allegation brought forward by the parties;
 - 6.2.3 a clear decision on the complaint, based on the reply to each individual argument;
 - 6.2.4 a clear statement on the steps to be taken by each parties as a result of the decision;
 - 6.2.5 as relevant. the distribution of costs between the parties;
 - 6.2.6 how and when to appeal against the decision.
- 6.3 The parties shall determine unanimously whether and, if so to what extent, the subject of the complaint and its resolution shall be made public.

7. Appeal

7.1 If the proposed resolution is not acceptable by one of the parties, it may appeal to HQAI's President of the Board of Directors in writing within 14 days of being informed of the decision, stating the reasons for continuing the process.

Note: Failure to do so on time will automatically leave the proposed resolution operational and close the complaint.

7.2 In case of appeal, HQAI's appeal procedure (PRO049) applies, the role of the Chair of the ACB being replaced by the President of the Board of Directors.

8. Documentation and reporting

8.1 Upon closure of a complaint, the body responsible for addressing it (ACB or Appeal Panel) shall transmit all the files to HQAI's secretariat.

8.2 HQAI secretariat shall archive the whole file in a folder which access is restricted to authorised people.

8.3 Once a year at a minimum, HQAI shall report to the Board of Directors of all complaints received during the year, their status and outcome.

9. Learning and continuous improvement

9.1 Upon closure of a complaint, the ACB, respectively the Appeal Panel as relevant shall report back to the ED with possible improvements identified during the complaint handling process to HQAI's system, including the complaint and appeal management processes.

9.2 The secretariat shall act upon these recommendations and report back to the ACB at its following meeting.

9.3 Actions taken shall be also reported to the BoD at least once a year.