

Quality and Accreditation Institute
Centre for International Accreditation



Change Adapt Improve

**PROCEDURE FOR HANDLING OF
COMPLAINTS, GRIEVANCES AND APPEALS**

Issue No.: 02

Issue Date: November 2023

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Centre for International Accreditation		
Doc. No.: QAI CIA 023	Procedure for Handling of Complaints, Grievances and Appeals	
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CHANGE HISTORY

Sl. No.	Doc No.	Current Issue No.	Revised Issue No.	Date of Issue	Reasons
1.	QAI CIA 023	01	02	November 2023 (7 November 2023)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Centre for Laboratory Accreditation (CLA) changed to Centre for International Accreditation (CIA) • Office Address changed from A-34, Sector 48, Noida to 709, Wave Silver Tower, Sector-18, Noida • Mobile and Phone Number, Border and QAI logo added

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1. Definitions

For the purposes of this document, defined terms in the ISO/IEC 17011 shall be used:

- **Complaint:** Expression of dissatisfaction, other than an appeal, by any person or organisation, against QAI-CIA or an accredited or applicant organisation.
- **Complainant:** Any individual/ organisation/ body that is making a complaint.
- **Grievance:** Expression of a real or imagined cause for complaint.
- **Appeal:** A formal written request by an accredited or applicant organisation for reconsideration of any adverse decision made by QAI related to the organisation's accreditation status.
- **Appellant:** An accredited or applicant organisation filing an appeal.
- **Hearing:** The process where the Appeal Panel hears oral arguments on an appeal presented by an appellant.
- **CAB:** Body that performs conformity assessment services and that can be the object of accreditation, e.g. testing and medical laboratory

2. Objectives

The document describes the procedures for dealing with:

- Complaints/ Grievances from various sources
- Appeals from Conformity Assessment Body (CAB) for reversal of decisions taken by QAI-CIA

3. Scope

The procedure described in this document is to be followed in QAI-CIA for dealing with different types of complaints/ grievances and appeals by CAB. Complaints may be related to ethical concerns linked to staff, assessors, committee members and clients. Appeal can be made by CAB against a decision taken by QAI in respect of - refusal to accept an application; refusal to proceed with an assessment; action plan requests; changes in accreditation scope; denial of accreditation; putting in abeyance, suspension, withdrawal of accreditation or any other action that impedes the attainment of accreditation.

4. Responsibility

Responsibility of handling of complaints/ grievances and appeals rests on the Complaints and Appeals officer. However, the CEO is responsible for monitoring of complaints/ grievances and appeals and final decision on closure of the complaint/ grievances and appeals.

5. Procedure for Handling of Complaints and Grievances

- **Receipt of Complaints**
 - QAI is open to receiving complaints/ grievances from any sources. The complaints/ grievances can be against applicant/ accredited CAB for the quality of service provided by them. The complaint/ grievance can be against personnel involved in accreditation process. The complaint/ grievance must be made in writing to CEO with complete details of complainant (name, address, organisation etc.). If the complaint/ grievance has no details of the complainant or the description is not adequate, the QAI-CIA will reserve the right of dealing with the complaint/ grievance as deemed fit. We can investigate the reports appearing in media, if relevant.

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- Once the complaint/ grievance is received at QAI, CEO shall mark the complaint/ grievance to the Complaints and Appeals Officer. Immediately on its receipt the same shall be acknowledged with the assurance of thorough investigation in a time bound period.
 - The Complaints and Appeals officer shall maintain a record for the complaints/ grievance that are received by QAI. He/ she assigns the appropriate registration number to the complaint. The important dates viz. date of receipt of complaint/ grievance, date of acknowledgement and date of disposal including date of final closure shall be recorded in QAI CIA 024 'Complaints Register.'
 - Initial scrutiny of the complaint/ grievance is done by the Complaints and Appeals officer. This is to determine that the complaint/ grievance falls within the ambit of QAI activities and whether the complaint/ grievance prima facie holds ground.
 - If it is found that the complaint/ grievance does not fall within the ambit of QAI, the complaint/ grievance is considered closed and the complainant is informed accordingly.
 - If the complaint/ grievance falls within the ambit of QAI and the initial information provided in the complaint/ grievance is sufficient the complaint/ grievance is investigated further as deemed fit.
 - The entire handling process of the complaint should respect and maintain confidentiality, avoid conflict of interest and maintain complete impartiality.
- **Investigation of Complaints/ Grievances**
The Complaints/ Grievances received by QAI can be classified into three categories:
 - Complaints/ Grievances against Applicant/ Accredited CAB
 - Complaints/ Grievances against Assessors/ Experts/ Committee members.
 - Complaints/ Grievances against QAI officials
 - **Procedure for dealing with each category is given below:**
 - On receipt of complaint/ grievance, Complaints and Appeals officer shall discuss with the concerned officer dealing with that CAB and the case is investigated accordingly.
 - If required, a hearing with the complainant or clarification from the concerned may be taken.
 - The complainant shall be informed about the action taken by QAI.
 - If the complaint/ grievance is found invalid, the complainant as well as the CAB or against whom the complaint is made, is informed accordingly.
 - The complaint is disposed within a one month of its receipt.

6. Procedure for Handling Appeals

Terms of Reference of Appeals Panel:

- **Structure of the Panel:**
 - **Appeal Panel:** A panel composed of three individuals, independent experts not involved in the assessment or activity in question amounting to appeal and preferably knowledgeable in matters of accreditation, appointed by the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) to deal with appeal(s) for a defined tenure as prescribed. One of the members of the appeal panel would be a Board member and shall chair the appeal panel. This panel may be augmented by additional subject matter experts as invitee as deemed appropriate by the CEO.

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- The terms of the panel would be the time till the appeal in question is disposed of.
- **Function of the Panel**
The Appeal Panel will consider appeals against decisions made by the QAI and will deal with them appropriately to recommend decisions to resolve/ close the appeal.
- **Membership**
Appeals Panel members, including the Chair, must wholly satisfy these criteria.
 - They must not have participated in or influenced the original Reviewers panel that took the decision now subject to appeal.
 - They must be free from any conflict of interest concerning the appellant or matter under appeal.
 - They must be conversant with the Accreditation Process and QAI functioning.
 - Before progressing to consider any application for appeal, all members of the Panel must satisfy the above criteria and sign a disclaimer to officially record that they detected no conflict(s) of interest regarding the matters at hand. In the event of not sure of disclaimer such member may reclude himself/ herself from consideration of the particular appeal. Should they be unable to do so, the Board must appoint a substitute member(s) with no such conflict(s) of interest.
 - The appeals panel may co-opt expertise if the need arises. A co-opted person will not have right to vote but will have the prerogative of recording his/ her opinion in light off the reason for invite.
 - Decisions are made on a majority voting basis.
- **Receipt of Appeals**
 - The appeal process is an independent review and evaluation of a decision made by QAI that affects the accreditation status of the Accredited CAB or applicant.
 - The appeals should be addressed to the CEO QAI within 28 days of the decision.
 - Appeals and Complaint Officer/ CEO QAI on reviewing the appeal shall look for completeness of the supporting documents and shall ask the appellant for requisite missing document, if any.
 - When a decision on suspension has been made against which appeal is made by the CAB, the decision shall be put on hold until the Appeal process is completed and a final decision has been rendered.
 - CEO shall acknowledge the receipt of appeals from the CAB. A record pertaining to all appeals including important details like date of receipt, name and address of the CAB, details of appeals and outcome of appeals shall be maintained in the QAI CIA 024 'Appeals Register'.
- **Deliberation of Appeal Panel and Recommendations**
 - Appeal Panel may meet as and when needed.
 - After examination of the appeal, the Panel shall seek clarification/ documents from all appropriate sources. The Panel, if finds necessary, can depute QAI official/ an assessor or an expert to investigate the matter.
 - Appeals Panel may recommend a hearing with the appellant, if required.

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- Any delay or lapse in submission of clarification or relevant documents or hearing process by the appellant, the responsibility/onus of delay will be considered on the appellant himself.
 - The Appeals Panel may recommend an assessment by a new team.
 - The detailed report containing the recommendation by the Panel shall be submitted to the Chairman for his decision within 45 days of having received the appeal.
- **Decision on Appeal**
 - Chairman QAI-CIA shall take a decision based on the recommendations submitted by the Appeal Panel within 15 days of having received the recommendations of the Panel.
 - The decision of the Chairman QAI shall be final and CAB shall be informed accordingly.
- **Costs for the Appeal Process**
 - If the resolution of appeal is done without undertaking any travel or additional assessment, no financing will be needed for such resolutions.
 - If the resolution calls for undertaking travel and assessment, the cost will be borne by the defaulting party.
- **Records**

Complaints and Appeals officer shall maintain Complaints and Appeals Register. The register has the following:

 - The decision of the CEO or Chairman QAI shall be final and CAB shall be informed accordingly.
 - Unique registration number given to each complaint/ appeal.
 - Date of receipt of complaint/ appeal.
 - Name & address of the complainant/ appellant.
 - Date of acknowledging of the complaint/ appeal.
 - Details of action/ investigation.
 - Date of closure.

The complaints & appeals register is maintained by Complaints and Appeals officer. All correspondence in respect to complaints/ appeals, investigation reports and decisions by CEO or Chairman are filed in order.

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