

	<h1>Quality Management System - Manual</h1>	Departments: All departments	Doc No: QP07
		Issue Date: 2022-12-02	Issue No. 1
	CH 7.Procedure: Complaint and Appeal	Effective Date: 2022-12-09	

COMPLAINT AND APPEAL PROCEDURE

1. Purpose

The purpose of this procedure is to describe the handling of incidents, complaints and appeals received from the clients, in-house, and from other parties.

2. Scope

This procedure covers all complaints and appeals received from individuals by any means, like written, verbal, e-mail, etc. It also includes adverse findings during evaluation.

- 2.1 Evaluation Incidents
- 2.2 Complaints
- 2.3 Receipt of Incidents
- 2.4 Handling of Complaints and Observations
- 2.5 Handling of Appeals
- 2.6 Closing of complaint and appeal

3. Definitions & References

3.1 Definition

The incidents and complaints are considered as any of the following:

- 3.1.1 **Complaints** : Complaints are incidents of grievance or dissatisfaction with the conduct of evaluators, evaluation findings, certification committee decision and/or overall interaction with **Partner Africa** staff.
- 3.1.2 **Suggestions** : **Partner Africa** recognizes that positive feedback is as important as negative. Suggestions are vital in identifying preventive action and system improvement. As with complaints, suggestions may be internal or external in nature, written or verbal.
- 3.1.3 **Appeals**: **Partner Africa** recognizes that the client may still have some reservations or may not agree with the decision after the investigation of a complaint by Partner Africa.
- 3.1.4 **Observations** :Observations are witnessed incidents of service / operational deficiency, malfunction and or failure. Observations are often made by individuals independent of the activity witnessed, and therefore, objective in nature. Observations also play an important role in the identification of preventive action and system improvement.
- 3.1.5 **Opportunities for Improvement**: Opportunities for improvement are incidents where the system has not failed, yet greater operational efficiency may be obtained by analyzing current practices. Opportunitites for improvement are often collected internally, but input from external sources is also beneficial

3.2 References

- 3.2.1 QP01 Procedure for control of documents
- 3.2.2 QP04 Procedure for corrective and preventive action
- 5.6.2 Disciplinary, Complaints, and Grievance Procedures (including Bullying and Harassment)

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4. Responsibility

Scheme Manager is responsible for receiving the complaint and appeal from the client / other interested parties. The **Scheme Manager** is responsible for handling, validating and analysis of the complaint to the satisfaction of the clients / other interested parties. The **Head of Audits** is responsible for handling, validating and analysis of appeal to the satisfaction of the clients / other interested parties.

5. Description of Activity

5.1 Evaluation Incidents

- 5.1.1 For the purposes of this document “Evaluation incidents” are defined as complaints, suggestions, observations and opportunities for improvement. Evaluation incident data is entered into the Corrective Action System for proper treatment (QP04). This procedure describes the methodology by which **Partner Africa** collects and processes incident reports, and communicates the impact to the staff members.
- 5.1.2 **Partner Africa** recognizes that incidents occur in daily operation that collectively have an impact on the evaluation process. In order to properly analyze and address system issues, a consistent and thorough process for collection of information is vital.
- 5.1.3 The overall responsibility to execute this procedure is given below

Activity	Responsibility
Completion and submission of incident report/ records for entry into the Corrective Action System	Scheme Manager
Incident investigation and analysis	Scheme Manager
Handling of complaints	Scheme Manager
Review and analysis of the corrective and preventative action	Scheme Manager
Decision for closure and submission to Top management of complaints	Head of Audits
Handling of appeals and submission of the decision result to Board of Directors	Head of Audits
Decision for closure	Head of Audits

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5.2 Complaints

Complaints may be:

- Internal in nature – raised by a staff member of **Partner Africa**, with regard to internal services, operations or employees’ performance.
- External in nature – raised by clients of **Partner Africa**, suppliers or other affiliated organizations.
- Written
- Verbal
- Complaints raised by clients or stakeholders
- Complaints against certified clients

5.3 Receipt of Incidents

5.3.1 The incident may be reported by any means – verbal or written. In the case of an external source, the incident shall be received by the **Scheme Manager**. The **Scheme Manager** shall fill the incident report format, recording all the information and details of the complaint for further action. In the case of an internal source, the incident report format shall be filled by the staff member and submitted to the **Scheme Manager**.

5.3.2 **Scheme Manager** shall contact the external source to acknowledge the receipt of information within 3 working days of receipt. The **Scheme Manager** shall understand the issue in detail from the source (to avoid any error in writing the report). The **Scheme Manager** may decide to personally meet the initiator, depending on the gravity and seriousness of issue.

5.3.3 In the case of Complaints and Observations, it may be against **Partner Africa’s** (a system / procedure or a person) or **Partner Africa’s** certified companies (client). In the case of a suggestion / opportunity for improvement, it is for **Partner Africa** to study the suggestion and decide.

5.3.4 All such incidents received by any means is firstly recorded in the Incident report by the **Scheme Manager** with the following details:

- Complaint and appeal sr. no.,
- Mode of receipt,
- Received by,
- Name of client / other interested party,
- Description of complaint and appeal,
- Reference of services against which complaint and appeal is raised along with the reference, date, and other details.

5.3.5 Clients / other parties’ complaints and appeal incident reports are submitted to the **Scheme Manager** for analyzing the root cause. Appeals are analyzed by the **Head of Audits**.

5.3.6 **Scheme Manager** validates the complaint after checking necessary backup records or personal interview of evaluators / staff members (who were involved in the job). **Head of Audits** validates the complaint after checking necessary backup records or personal interview of evaluators / staff members (who were involved in the job).

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5.4 Handling of Complaints and Observations

5.4.1 In the case of a complaint / observation against **Partner Africa**, the **Scheme Manager** analyzes the issue to determine if there is a system error or any person's error. **Scheme Manager** determines the root cause as well as corrective and preventive action. The possible complaints are –

- Administration related – includes problems with appointments, certification files, certificates issued, or late issue of certificate etc.
- Evaluators / subcontractors related – includes problems with incomplete evaluation or surveillance documentation etc.
- Compliance related – it includes problems with general compliance with **Partner Africa** administration or Evaluation procedures or Certification procedures etc.

5.4.2 Where an auditor's or any other relevant personnel performance or conduct falls below an acceptable standard, management will initiate a counselling session with that auditor / staff member before any formal disciplinary procedure commences in line with **Partner Africa Disciplinary, Complaints, and Grievance Procedures (including Bullying and Harassment)**.

5.4.3 The correction is affected immediately to satisfy the complainant. This may include training / counseling of the person involved. The CAPA is discussed with management during the next Management Review. Appropriate action is taken based on discussions (change in procedure / formats, training to all personnel, etc.). An e-mail is sent out to all staff detailing the issue and remedial action (for information). A copy of the complaint and investigation details is maintained in the respective individual's personal file for reference during the performance appraisal.

5.4.4 In the case of a complaint / observation against a client, the **Scheme Manager** studies the complaint and discusses with the evaluators (last evaluation). If the complaint is found genuine and valid, i.e., it indicates a system failure, the complaint is sent to the client for a response. No confidential reports or information will be sent to complainants without written permission from the client. The client will be reminded of the certification agreement clause addressing release of confidential information to the complaint. Adequate time is given to the client for response. If required, the **Scheme Manager** follows-up with the client for the response. Depending on the response, the **Scheme Manager** may decide to –

- Write to the complainant about the delayed response.
- Ask further clarification from the client.
- Assign evaluators to personally visit the client and investigate for system failure. Such visits shall be considered as a special visit and charged to client if found to be non-complaint.
- Request a joint meeting with the client, complainant, and **Partner Africa**

5.4.5 **Scheme Manager** shall communicate with the complainant, at the end of the process, detailing the findings and to formally close the complaint by signing off the non-conformity form. A copy of the correspondence is kept in the client file for records, and the same is passed to evaluators during the next evaluation. The details of all complaints and action taken (Correction, CAPA) are discussed in the Management Review and IC meeting.

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5.5 Handling of Appeals

Any client who is not satisfied by the decision taken by **Partner Africa** following the complaints process may appeal against the decision. Where an appeal is received, the following procedure will be followed.

5.6.3 **Head of Audits** appoint the members of the **appeals committee**. Under the leadership of the **Head of Audits**, the committee will hear the appeal and determine the outcome. The **Head of Audits** shall approach the Impartiality Committee and / or **Partner Africa's top management member/s (SLT)** to take part in the investigation of the appeal. The decision on the appeal shall be presented to the Impartiality committee. Results of the appeal will be reported to the **Board of Directors**.

- All appeals shall be received by the **Scheme Manager** and details of appeals shall be recorded in the Appeals Register maintained by the **Scheme Manager**.
- The **Head of Audits** shall investigate the appeal made and inform the client about its plan of action for investigation and action thereon.
- An investigation report (Incident Report) for each individual appeal shall be maintained by the **Head of Audits**. In case any further corrective action is required, post actions shall be identified and taken based on the Incident report – Corrective action procedure QP04 is implemented.
- A copy of the investigation report shall be sent to the client.
- In case of any further clarification or contestation by the client, the same shall be reviewed by the **Senior Leader Team (SLT)** and appropriate decision shall be taken.
- All appeals made are collated and analyzed on a yearly basis during the Management Review.
- Necessary corrective and preventive actions shall be taken based on the appeal trend.
- Trends in appeals and corrective and preventive action taken shall also be reviewed as part of the Management Review meeting and Impartiality committee meeting.
- **Head of Audits** shall ensure that details with respect to the appellant and actions thereon are shared with the evaluation team members.
- **Head of Audits** shall ensure that no discriminatory action is taken against the appellant.
- The client is made aware of the appeal process and its details are made available to the client on request.

5.5.1 In case of an appeal made by a client against a decision made by evaluators, lead evaluators or certification committee, the appeal shall be recorded by the **Scheme Manager** and forwarded to the **Head of Audits** for handling through the Appeal committee. The Appeal committee shall review the appeal and investigate (which may include discussion with concerned client, respective evaluators / lead evaluators and review of evaluation report). The Appeal committee may also direct any other lead evaluators to visit the site and determine the validity of the appeal. The decision taken by the Appeal committee shall be communicated to the client and **Scheme Manager** for necessary action. The case is also discussed during the next MRM and Impartiality Committee meeting. In special cases, the case may be discussed with Impartiality Committee members on a one-to-one basis.

5.6.4 Handling of Suggestions / Opportunity for improvement

- In the case of a suggestion / opportunity for improvement, the source is predominantly internal, and the concerned staff member fills the incident report format and submits it to the **Scheme Manager**. The other source may be internal / external evaluation.

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- **Scheme Manager** studies the suggestion to determine any conflict with ISO/IEC 17065 Standard and **Partner Africa** Policy. In case the suggestion is in conflict, the same is communicated to the initiator. However, the suggestion is also discussed in the Management review. In case the suggestion is found not in conflict, the suggestion is studied for benefits and the impact on other processes.
- The suggestion is accepted if found beneficial and does not adversely impact any other process. The **Scheme Manager** determines the changes in existing documentation and implements them through Document Change process (QP01).

5.6 Closing of complaint and appeal

- 5.6.1 Depending on the nature of the nonconformity, the **Scheme Manager** may follow-up with requests for corrective and preventive actions. When the investigation of the client's complaint and appeal determines that remote operation or other external organizations contributed to the complaint and appeal, the **Scheme Manager**, or his delegate contacts these organizations and provides them with all relevant information.
- 5.6.5 Every client's complaint and appeal are recorded. The records are maintained by the **Scheme Manager**. When there are copies of written communication, reports and other documents related to a complaint and appeal, these records are organized into a file and are identified with the complaint and appeal number and having records of the corresponding corrective or preventive actions. The records of investigations concerning product quality or other test characteristics are maintained by the **Scheme Manager**. Based on analysis of client / other party's complaint and appeal, necessary actions are taken, and the client is informed of closing the complaint and appeal. The **Scheme Manager** identifies the need for taking corrective and preventive action to prevent such complaint and appeal in future, and concerned person is informed accordingly.
- 5.6.3 All the complaints and appeals received by **Partner Africa** shall be closed within 30 working days after receipt of the complaint or as determined by the **Head of Audits**. The **Head of Audits** shall decide on the closure period based on the complexity of the appeal. The **Head of Audits** is authorized to close complaints and appeals.

6. Records/Formats

- 6.1 F20 Incident Report
6.2 F21 Incident Log

ADDENDUM 1: Amendment Record

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