



Procedure for complaints and appeals

SBS - QAP - 06

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1- Purpose, scope and users:

The purpose of this procedure is to describe handling of incident, complaint and appeals received from the client, in house and from other parties.

This procedure is applied to all complaints and appeals received by any means, like written, verbal, e-mail etc. It also includes adverse findings during audits.

Users of this document are General Manager, Quality and Sales managers of **SBS for Certifications**

2- Reference documents:

- ✓ ISO 17021-1:2015, clause 9.7
- ✓ ISO 17021-1:2015, clause 9.8
- ✓ Management System Manual
- ✓ Procedure for document and data control
- ✓ Procedure for Corrective actions

3- Description of Activity:**3.1 Management System Incidents:**

For the purposes of this document “Management System Incidents” are defined as complaints, suggestions, observations and opportunities for improvement. Management System Incident data is entered into the Corrective Action System for proper treatment (SBS - QAP - 04). This procedure describes the methodology by which **SBS for Certifications** collects and procedures incident reports; and communicates the impact to staff members.

SBS for Certifications recognizes that incidents occur in daily operation that collectively have an impact on the Management System. In order to properly analyze and address system issues a consistent and thorough procedure for collection of information is vital.

3.2 Complaints:

Complaints are incidents of grievance or dissatisfaction. Complaints may be:

- ✓ Internal in nature - raised by a **SBS for Certifications** staff member with regard to internal service, operations or employee performance.
- ✓ External in nature- raised by **SBS for Certifications** clients, suppliers or other affiliated organizations
- ✓ Written
- ✓ Verbal
- ✓ Complaints raised by client's customers or stake holders

3.3 Terminology used in this procedure for incidents:

The incidents and complaints are considered as any of the below 4 things and procedure describes the system for handling them.

3.3.1 Suggestions:

SBS for Certifications 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.

3.3.2 Appeals:

SBS for Certifications recognizes that the client may have some reservations or may not agree with the conduct of auditor, audit findings, certification committee decision and / or overall interaction with **SBS for Certifications** staff. Client is free to communicate the same to **SBS for Certifications** Appeal committee and this is treated as an appeal from the client.

3.3.3 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 important role in identification of preventive action and system improvement.

3.3.4 Opportunities for Improvement:

Opportunities for Improvement are incidents where the system has not failed, yet greater operational efficiency may be obtained in analyzing current practice. Opportunities for Improvement are often collected internally, but input from external sources is also beneficial.

3.4 Receipt of Incidents:

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

Quality Manager shall contact (telephone, email, letter) the external source to acknowledge the receipt of information within 5 working days of receipt. He shall understand the issue in details from the source (to avoid any error in writing the report). He may decide to personally meet the initiator, depending on the gravity and seriousness of issue.

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

All such incidents received by any means or by any one is first of all recorded in the Incident report (SBS – QAF – 06 – 01) with the details of:

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

Client/ other parties' complaint and appeal incident report are issued to the Quality Manager for analyzing the root cause.

Quality manager validates the complaint after checking necessary back-up records or personal interview of auditors/ staff members (who were involved into job).

3.5 Handling of Client Complaints and Observations:

In case of a complaint/ observation against **SBS for Certifications** , Quality manager analyses the issue to determine if there is system error or person error. He shall determine the root cause and determine correction, corrective action. The possible complaints are:

- ✓ Administration problems with appointments, certification files, certificates issued or issued late,
- ✓ Auditor/ contractor problems with incomplete audit or surveillance documentation
- ✓ Agents problems with general compliance with **SBS for Certifications** administration or audit procedures

The correction is effected immediately to satisfy the complainant. This may include training/ counselling the person involved. The corrective action is discussed with management during next Management Review. Appropriate action is taken based on discussions (change in procedure/ formats, training to all personnel etc.). An email is sent out to all relevant staff detailing the issue and remedial action (for information). A copy of the complaint and investigation details is maintained in the respective individual's personnel file for reference at the performance appraisals.

In case of a complaint/ observation against a certified client, the Quality Manager studies the complaint and discusses with the auditor (last audit). If the complaint is found genuine and valid i.e. 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. Adequate time is given to the client for response. If required, Quality Manager follows up with the client for the response. Depending on the response, Quality manager may decide to:

- ✓ Write to the complainant about the response and asks for his response.
- ✓ Ask further clarification from the client
- ✓ Depute an auditor to personally visit the client and investigate for system failure. Such visit shall be considered as special visit and charged to client.
- ✓ Request a joint meeting with client, complainant and **SBS for Certifications**

Quality manager shall communicate with the complainant at the end of the procedure detailing the findings and to formally close the complaint. A copy of the correspondence is kept in the client file for records and the same is passed to the auditor during next audit. The details of all complaints and action taken (Correction, corrective action) are discussed in the Management Review and Impartiality Committee meeting.

3.6 Handling of Appeals:

Any organization who fails to satisfy an audit or surveillance may appeal against the decision. Where an appeal is received the following procedure will be followed.

The General Manager will appoint the members of the appeals committee under the leadership of General Manager, who will hear the appeal and determine the outcome. In case, General Manager is part of the audit/ certification team, General Manager decides the investigating officer (Quality Manager) for the appeals procedure. In such a scenario General Manager approaches Impartiality Committee and/ or **SBS for Certifications** team to provide decision on the appeal. The decision on the appeal shall be taken based on the decision by **SBS for Certifications** committee and the Impartiality committee.

- ✓ All appeals shall be received by the Quality Manager and details of appeals shall be recorded and maintained by the Quality Manager.
- ✓ Quality Manager shall investigate the appeal and inform the client about its plan of action for investigation and action there upon.



- ✓ An investigation report (Incident Report SBS – QAF – 06 – 01) for each individual appeal shall be maintained by the Quality Manager. In case, any further corrective action is required post actions identified and taken based on Incident report, Corrective action procedure (SBS - QAP - 04) is implemented.
- ✓ A copy of the investigation report shall be sent to the client.
- ✓ In case of any further ambiguity, the same shall be reviewed by the board of directors and appropriate decision arrived at.
- ✓ In case the issue still remains open; the same shall be intimated to the accreditation board for its valuable comments.
- ✓ All appeals made are collated and analyzed on a yearly basis.
- ✓ Necessary corrective actions shall be taken based on the appeal trend.
- ✓ Appeal trends and corrective action taken shall also be reviewed as part of the Management committee meeting and Impartiality committee meeting.
- ✓ Quality Manager shall ensure that details with respect to the appellant and actions there upon is not shared with the audit team members.
- ✓ Quality Manager shall ensure that no discriminatory action is taken against the appellant.
- ✓ The client is made aware of the appeals procedure and is available to him on request.

In case of an appeal made by a client against a decision made by auditor, Lead auditor or certification committee, the appeal shall be recorded by Quality Manager and forwarded to Appeal committee. Appeal committee shall review the appeal, investigate (which may include discussion with concerned client, respective auditor/ lead auditor and review of audit report). Appeal committee may also direct any other lead auditor to visit the site and determine the validity of the appeal. The decision taken by Appeal committee shall be communicated to the client and to Quality Manager for necessary action.

SBS for Certifications body shall be responsible for all decisions at all levels of the appeals-handling process. **SBS for Certifications** shall ensure that the persons engaged in the appeals-handling process (QA Manager/ Appeal Committee) are different from those who carried out the audits and made the certification decisions.

Submission, investigation and decision on appeals shall not result in any discriminatory actions against the appellant.

The case is also discussed during the next Management Review Meeting and Impartiality Committee meeting. In special cases, the case may be discussed with Impartiality Committee members on one-to-one basis.

3.7 Handling of Suggestions/ Opportunity for improvement:

- ✓ In case of suggestion/ opportunity for improvement, the source is predominantly internal and the concerned staff member fills the incident report and submits to Quality Manager. The other source may be internal/ external audit.
- ✓ Quality Manager studies the suggestion to determine any conflict with ISO 17021 standard, **SBS for Certifications** policy. In case the suggestion is in conflict, the same is communicated to the initiator. However, the suggestion is also discussed in Management review. In case the suggestion is found not in conflict, the suggestion is studied for benefits and the impact on other procedures.
- ✓ The suggestion is accepted if found beneficial and does not adversely impact any other procedure. Quality Manager determines the changes in existing documentation and implements through Document Change note (SBS - QAF – 01 - 02).
- ✓ If any certified client or interested party asks for the appeal/ complaint handling procedure then it is forwarded to Quality manager. He will inform a certified client/ any other interested party the appeals and complaint handling procedure of **SBS for Certifications** if any complaints/ appeals are received by certified clients / interested party.

3.8 Closing of complaint and appeal:

Depending on the nature of the non-conformity, the Quality Manager may follow up with requests for corrective actions. When the investigation of client complaint and appeal determines that remote operation or other external organizations contributed to the complaint and appeal, the Quality Manager or his delegate contacts these organizations and provides them with all relevant information.

Every client complaint and appeal is recorded. The records are maintained by the Quality 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 also having records of the corresponding corrective actions. The records of investigations that concern product Quality or other test characteristics are maintained by Quality Manager. Based on analysis of Client / Other Parties complaint and appeal, necessary actions are taken and client is replied for closing the complaint and appeal. Quality Manager identifies need for taking corrective action to prevent such complaint and appeal in future and accordingly concerned person is informed.

All the complaint and appeal received by **SBS for Certifications** will be closed within 21 working days after receipt of the complaint and appeal. Quality Manager is authorized for closing of complaint and appeal.

4- List of forms used on the basis of this procedure:

No.	Form	Code
1	Incident report	SBS – QAF – 06 – 01
2	Incident Log	SBS – QAF – 06 – 02