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## 1.0 Purpose

The purpose of this procedure is to define the Complaints Handling Process and to ensure that complaints and appeals are handled expeditiously and when necessary, the underlying issues are resolved.

## 2.0 Scope

This procedure deals with Appeals/Disputes against the decisions made as part of the certification process and Complaints, either against INSPIRE CERT or its customers.

## 3.0 Objectives

To ensure that:

- All Appeals/Disputes are heard impartially.
- All Complaints are dealt with fairly and expeditiously.
- All Appeals/Disputes and Complaints are resolved politely whenever possible.
- All Appeals/Disputes and Complaints are handled in a non-discriminatory fashion.
- The integrity of all the INSPIRE CERT certification processes is upheld.
- Confidentiality is upheld.

## 4.0 Procedure

### 4.1 Appeals and Disputes

4.1.1 All appeals/disputes are taken seriously and given a high priority for action. Formal proceedings will be initiated if:

- The appeal/dispute is made in writing.
- INSPIRE CERT receives the appeal/disputes within 21 days of a decision being given to the customer by an auditor, member of management or the Appeal and Complaints Committee (ACC).
- The customer is an applicant or registered organization

4.1.2 The Office first hearing of the Appeal/Dispute shall advise the customer in writing, of the contents of this procedure and draw their attention to the Certification Regulations (A copy of both should be supplied to the customer). The letter must state that the actions shown will be followed. The details of the Appeal/Dispute, including correspondence and any other relevant information must be passed to office as quickly as possible. In the case of a protracted Appeal/Dispute process the office will keep the appellant informed of progress at regular intervals.

4.1.3 Copies of all correspondence will be held on by the Certification Team.

4.1.4 When the Appeal/Dispute reaches office, the Managing Director or Certification Manager inform the ACC Chairman, in writing, within 3 working days. The Chairman must convene an Appeals Complaints Committee, which will consist of not less than 3 ACC members and must exclude INSPIRE CERT officers. The committee members must not have any involvement with the appellant and any interest must be declared. Any member with an interest cannot sit on the committee.

4.1.5 The committee must meet within 30 days of receipt of the appeal by INSPIRE CERT. The date and location of the meeting will be sent to the appellant in writing, at least 7 days before the meeting. The appeals committee shall hear the appellant and the Certification Manager (or Managing Director) separately. Minutes of the meeting shall be made with a copy held in the appeals file.

4.1.6 Appellant should be informed about ongoing progress for the same.

4.1.7 The decision of the Appeals Complaints Committee shall be final and shall be recorded in writing, with copies to the appellant and the Certification Manager. The result of an Appeal may result in Corrective or Preventive Actions being taken, these are to be recorded in accordance with Non-Compliance, Corrective and Preventive Actions.

## 4.2 Complaints

4.2.1 Complaints may concern a certified customer of INSPIRE CERT or they may be about INSPIRE CERT and its representatives. A Complaint may be from a customer or a third party e.g. from a customer of the registered customer, their competitor or other sources. All Complaints will be treated seriously, irrespective of the nature of the complaint. They include any matter that is not the subject of an Appeal e.g.

- Fee structure.
- Lateness in responding to customer queries.
- Poor attitude by INSPIRE CERT staff towards customers.
- Dissatisfaction with a certified customer of INSPIRE CERT.

4.2.2 When an office receives a complaint, by whatever means (phone, email etc.) it must handle in accordance with procedure Non-Conformities, Corrective and Preventive Action. If the customer complains to an auditor/evaluator directly, e.g. while he/she is on site, the auditor/evaluator must notify the office of the nature of the complaint as soon as possible. An NC report must be raised and handled in accordance with procedure of Non-Conformities, Corrective and Preventive Action. All Complaints must be recorded even if, after investigation, they prove to be unfounded.

4.2.3 All Complaints and the NC Report must be sent to office after the matter has been closed. The office handling the complaint will appoint an Investigating Officer who is independent of all parties involved in the complaint. When INSPIRE CERT is the subject of the complaint the Investigating Officer will be found from a department or office not directly involved with the problem (eg. The Member of ACC). After investigating the cause of the complaint and taking any necessary corrective action, the Investigating Officer must write to the person who made the

complaint advising them of the action taken and closing the matter. All complaint letters being filed and preserved.

4.2.4 The result of a complaint may result in corrective or preventive actions being taken, these are to be recorded in accordance with non-compliance, corrective and preventive actions.

4.2.5 Complaints about organizations certified by INSPIRE CERT are to be passed to the customer for them to resolve in the first instance. The individual receiving the complaint will consider the management system of the subject of the complaint, and particularly the effectiveness of its complaint-handling processes. The complaint will be examined in detail at the next scheduled audit to ensure that it has been handled correctly. If it has not, non-conformity is to be raised.

4.2.6 All Complaints and actions taken will be discussed at the impartiality meeting. Any trends identified after analysis of complaints will be discussed at impartiality meetings.

4.2.7 When a complaint is received it must be forwarded to the Managing Director for logging into Management reviews and setting appropriate tasks.

## 5.0 Reference Documents

ICQ-FOR-57 Appeal Notice Form
ICQ-FOR-56 Appeals and Complaints Form
ICQ-FOR-64 NC Closure Form
ICQ-FOR-65 Corrective and Preventive Action Form

## 6.0 Revision History

| REVISION NUMBER | SECTION | CHANGE MADE | DATE OF REVISION | PREPARED BY | REVIEWED BY | APPROVED BY |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 00 | - | Initial Release | 15/01/2025 | Compliance Officer | Certification Manager | Managing Director |
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