

STANDARD OPERATING PROCEDURE FOR COMPLAINTS AND APPEALS

1. Purpose

1.1 This Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) defines the documented process by which BQC receives, validates, investigates, decides upon and closes complaints and appeals relating to its inspection activities, ensuring that decisions are taken impartially by persons not involved in the matter complained of or appealed against, in fulfilment of Clauses 7.5 and 7.6 of ISO/IEC 17020:2012.

2. Scope

2.1 This SOP applies to all complaints and appeals received by BQC from clients or other interested parties, in respect of any inspection activity or the conduct of BQC across all accredited sectors.

3. References

- ISO/IEC 17020:2012 — Clause 7.5 (Complaints and appeals) and Clause 7.6 (Handling of complaints and appeals), incl. 7.5.1–7.5.5 and 7.6.1–7.6.5
- ILAC P15:05/2020 — application notes to Clauses 7.5 and 7.6
- NABCB BCB110(IB) and BCB201(IB)
- BQC/MS/01 Quality Manual — Clauses 7.5, 7.6; BQC/MS/04 Policy & Objectives
- BQC/SOP/15 Corrective and Preventive Action; BQC/PER/13 Impartiality Risk Assessment Matrix; Impartiality Committee Terms of Reference
- Format/record: BQC/INS/07 Complaint & Appeal Register

4. Definitions

4.1 **Complaint:** An expression of dissatisfaction, other than an appeal, by any person or organisation to BQC relating to its activities, for which a response is expected.

4.2 **Appeal:** A request by a client of BQC for reconsideration of a **decision** made by BQC in relation to an inspection (for example, a conformity/nonconformity decision or the withholding of an Inspection Release Note).

4.3 The distinction is material: a complaint concerns dissatisfaction with conduct or service; an appeal specifically challenges an inspection decision and follows the reconsideration path in 6.4.

5. Responsibilities

Role	Responsibility
Quality Manager (QM)	Owens this procedure; receives and logs complaints/appeals in BQC/INS/07; acknowledges receipt; coordinates validation, investigation and communication; assigns an independent decision-maker; issues closure.
Technical Manager (TM)	Provides technical investigation of the matter, provided the TM was not involved in the original inspection decision under appeal.
Independent decision-maker(s)	Person(s) not involved in the original inspection who review the investigation and decide the outcome of the complaint/appeal.

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Impartiality Committee	Consulted where impartiality is implicated; may oversee escalated matters.
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6. Procedure

6.1 Availability of the Process

6.1.1 A description of the complaints- and appeals-handling process is publicly available on the BQC website, www.bqcindia.org, and is provided on request. It sets out how to lodge a complaint or appeal and the stages that follow. The exact text published on the website is controlled as Annexure II — Public Process Description to this procedure; the website content is not to be amended other than through an update to Annexure II under BQC/SOP/12 (Control of Documents).

6.2 Receipt, Acknowledgement and Logging

6.2.1 A complaint or appeal may be lodged in writing (letter or e-mail), through the website, or using the Complaint / Appeal Lodgement Form (Annexure I), which is made available to complainants/appellants and is also used by BQC staff to record a complaint/appeal received verbally or by phone. On receipt, the QM records it in the Complaint & Appeal Register (BQC/INS/07) with a unique reference, classifies it as a **complaint** or an **appeal**, and issues a written **acknowledgement** to the complainant/appellant, normally within **three (3) working days** of receipt.

6.3 Validation

6.3.1 The QM gathers and verifies the information necessary to **validate** the complaint/appeal, and confirms whether it relates to an inspection activity for which BQC is responsible. If it does not relate to BQC's activities, the complainant is informed accordingly and the matter is closed with reasons recorded. If it does, the matter proceeds to investigation.

6.4 Investigation and Decision

6.4.1 The matter is investigated by gathering objective evidence (records, the inspection file, statements). The **decision** on the complaint/appeal shall be made, reviewed and approved by **person(s) not involved** in the original inspection activity that is the subject of the complaint or appeal. For an **appeal**, this means the original inspection decision is reconsidered independently of the inspector(s) and reviewer who made it.

6.4.2 Where the matter implicates the impartiality of BQC, it is escalated to the **Impartiality Committee**, whose members are independent, for oversight of the handling and decision.

6.5 Progress Communication and Closure

6.5.1 BQC keeps the complainant/appellant informed of progress and, on conclusion, communicates the outcome. A **formal notice of the end of the complaints/appeals-handling process** (closure notice) is issued to the complainant/appellant, and the closure is recorded in BQC/INS/07.

6.5.2 Handling a complaint or appeal shall not result in any discriminatory action against the complainant/appellant. Where the investigation reveals a nonconformity or a systemic cause, corrective/preventive action is initiated under BQC/SOP/15, and the matter is reported to management review (BQC/SOP/14).

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ANNEXURE I — COMPLAINT / APPEAL LODGEMENT FORM

BQC/SOP/16 Annexure I. May be completed by the complainant/appellant, or by BQC staff on their behalf where lodged verbally/by phone. Retained for 5 years per BQC/SOP/11.

Type: ☐ **Complaint** ☐ **Appeal** (tick one — see definitions 4.1/4.2 of this procedure)

Field	Entry
Complainant / Appellant — name	
Organisation (if applicable)	
Address	
Phone / e-mail	
Subject — job / report reference	
Description of complaint / appeal	
Desired outcome	
Date / Signature (complainant / appellant)	

For BQC use — Acknowledgement Section

Field	Entry
Register reference (BQC/INS/07)	
Received by / date	
Classification confirmed — Complaint / Appeal	
Acknowledgement issued — date (within 3 working days)	
Assigned to (QM / independent decision-maker)	

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ANNEXURE II — PUBLIC PROCESS DESCRIPTION

BQC/SOP/16 Annexure II. This is the controlled source text for the complaints- and appeals-handling process description published on www.bqcindia.org, per Clause 7.5.2 of ISO/IEC 17020:2012. No person may amend the published website text except by first amending this Annexure through BQC/SOP/12 (Control of Documents); the website is then updated to match. Current version permanent; superseded versions retained 5 years.

Complaints and Appeals — How to Raise a Concern with BQC

Bureau of Quality Certification (BQC) is committed to the fair, impartial and timely handling of any complaint or appeal relating to its inspection activities.

A **complaint** is an expression of dissatisfaction with BQC's conduct or service. An **appeal** is a request to reconsider a specific inspection decision made by BQC (for example, a conformity/nonconformity finding).

How to lodge a complaint or appeal

A complaint or appeal may be lodged, free of charge, by any of the following means:

- In writing by post or e-mail to info@bqcindia.com, addressed to the Quality Manager;
- By completing the Complaint / Appeal Lodgement Form available on request from BQC's office;
- By telephone or in person, which BQC will record in writing on the complainant's/appellant's behalf.

Please provide your contact details, the job/report reference concerned (if known), a description of the matter, and the outcome you are seeking.

What happens next

- **Acknowledgement:** BQC will acknowledge receipt in writing, normally within **three (3) working days**.
- **Independent investigation and decision:** The matter will be investigated and decided by person(s) who were not involved in the original inspection activity or decision concerned, so that the outcome is impartial. Where impartiality is at stake, the matter is referred to BQC's independent Impartiality Committee.
- **Progress and closure:** BQC will keep you informed of progress. On conclusion, BQC will issue a formal closure notice communicating the outcome and the reasons for it.
- **No discrimination:** Raising a complaint or appeal will never result in adverse treatment towards you or your organisation.

If you remain unsatisfied — escalation to NABCB

If, after BQC's process is complete, you remain unsatisfied with the outcome, you may refer the matter to the National Accreditation Board for Certification Bodies (NABCB), the accreditation body for BQC, at the address published on NABCB's website (www.nabcb.qci.org.in).

For further information, contact BQC at info@bqcindia.com or through www.bqcindia.org.

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