



# SCOTTISH QUALITY CROPS

## COMPLAINTS AND APPEALS POLICY AND PROCESS

### 1. Purpose

It is the policy of SQC to ensure that complaints and appeals regarding memberships are managed in an impartial and timely manner.

The purpose of this policy and process document is to define the steps to be taken by SQC if a formal complaint or Appeal is received from an applicant, member or stakeholder in respect of a scheme membership.

This policy and process document is not applicable for complaints in respect of alleged illegal activity, alleged regulatory failings for alleged company financial misconduct - all of which must be handled by appropriate external authorities.

### 2. Scope

This policy and process document is applicable for all complaints and Appeals relating to a scheme membership of a SQC Scheme.

**2.1** Complaints and Appeals from applicants and members (or their representatives) about the process and/or the outcome of a membership decision. N.B. Complaints in relation to certification decisions must be directed to the SQC appointed Certification Body. **Membership Complaint**

**2.2** Complaints from non-certified stakeholders (such as members of the public, government, or other interested parties) about a certified client and their business must be directed to the SQC appointed Certification Body. **Product Complaint**

### 3. Terms and Definitions

Appeal	Formally communicated request by an applicant, member or their representative for SQC to reconsider a decision on the status of a membership.
Appellant	The applicant or member requesting an appeal.
Complainant	Applicant, member, stakeholder, interested party or their representative making a complaint.

Membership Complaint	Formally communicated dissatisfaction by an applicant, member or their representative in relation to the process relating to membership status.
Product Complaint	Formally communicated dissatisfaction by a non-certified stakeholder (i.e. member of the public, government, or other interested party) about a SQC member or applicant and their business activities which may impact on the integrity of the scheme.

#### 4. Process

##### 4.1 Rules and requirements for filing a complaint or Appeal:

- 4.1.1 Applicants, members, stakeholders or their representatives, wishing to make a complaint must firstly consider whether it is a Membership Complaint or Product Complaint (see section 2 above)
- 4.1.2 All Complainants and Appellants agree to providing personal information as detailed in the complaints and/or appeal forms
- 4.1.3 All Complainants and Appellants agree to providing accurate and timely information. Any applicant or member making false statements may have their membership withdrawn pending further investigation
- 4.1.4 All Complainants agree to allow the complaint to be communicated to the individual or business being complained about but no details of the Complainant will be shown
- 4.1.5 The published timelines for SQC to process complaints and appeals cannot be the subject of a complaint
- 4.1.6 Malicious or anonymous complaints will be evaluated where possible
- 4.1.7 This policy and process document does not deal with alleged illegal, financial or regulatory issues but SQC will provide information on appropriate authorities to contact
- 4.1.8 Aggressive behaviour toward SQC personnel on behalf of Complainants and Appellants will result in complaints and appeals not being heard. Aggressive behaviour includes excessive complaints or appeals on the same information.

##### 4.2 Membership Status Complaints – overview of complaints process

- 4.2.1 The SQC Board has been trained in and is competent at managing complaints
- 4.2.2 A member of the SQC Board receives the initial request by Complainants who make contact with SQC via: email, telephone, letter, in-person or through the website

- 4.2.3 Where required, i.e. verbal complaint, a complaints form and a copy of the Complaints and Appeals Policy will be issued by the SQC Managing Director
- 4.2.4 All Complainants must complete, or provide the information detailed on the complaints form
- 4.2.5 The form must be returned within specified timelines. N.B. complaints relating to a certification decision will not be undertaken by SQC but will be referred to the SQC appointed certification body for investigation
- 4.2.6 Any potential conflict of interest within SQC must be declared/identified at the outset and any person(s)/interest associated must not have any involvement in the process
- 4.2.7 Any complaints regarding certification made direct to SQC will be recorded and immediately passed to the SQC appointed certification body
- 4.2.8 Upon receipt of the complaint, the SQC Managing Director will review the information and:
  - (a) Record the information on the complaints record
  - (b) Acknowledge receipt within one working day
  - (c) Provide the Board with details of the complaint
  - (d) The complaint will be reviewed by the Board, who will appoint suitably qualified, experienced and competent personnel to investigate and will also establish whether the complaint is genuine (i.e not malicious or anonymous)
- 4.2.9 Competent personnel must ensure:
  - (a) Investigations are completed within 28 calendar days (4 weeks)
  - (b) Communicate the outcome to the complainant within 7 working days of the outcome decision
- 4.2.10 The complainant may be entitled to compensation and this will be agreed with the SQC Board
- 4.2.11 Should a non-compliance be identified as a result of a complaint, the same procedures should be followed as outlined in the SQC Membership Rules.

### **4.3 Product Complaints**

Non-applicant or certified members may make a complaint about an applicant or member of SQC in relation to that applicant or member's adherence to the scheme requirements. The complaint will be referred to SQC's appointed certification body for investigation.

#### **4.4 Appeals (only available to applicants and members of the SQC Schemes)**

The SQC Board has been trained in and is competent at managing complaints following SQC procedures.

Applicants and members dissatisfied with the outcome of their complaint into membership status, may appeal to the SQC Managing Director within 28 calendar days (4 weeks)

- (a) An Appeals Form is issued to the appellant
- (b) An Appeals Panel is selected following the Appeals Panel Terms of Reference within 28 calendar days (4 weeks)
- (c) Appeals may also be lodged by applicants, members or their representatives, who have not complained about the process but wish to appeal a decision
- (d) SQC personnel will provide all information to the Appeals Panel without prejudice, including chronologies of processes to enable the Appeals Panel to make a transparent and impartial decision.

All appeals are initiated in the first instance through the appeals form.

#### **5.0 Summary – General Requirements of Process**

- (a) The SQC Complaints and Appeals Policy and Process ensures secure, accessible and user friendly internal and external reporting channels;
- (b) Any whistleblowing or confidential complaints will always be managed via the SQC Managing Director or SQC Chairperson;
- (c) SQC will ensure all relevant staff and Directors are fully trained (reviewed on an annual basis) in relation to the SQC Complaints and Appeals Process and relevant documentation