

1. General

The handling of any appeals / complaints against decisions made by Quality Austria related to certification / assessment procedures and the issuance of **qualityaustria** Certificates is documented in a folder (e-mail, memorandum) by the Quality Manager (QM) of Quality Austria and pursues the purpose of settling differences of opinion with the clients (applicants) and complaints from third parties.

The Quality Manager (QM) maintains the necessary documentation on the appeals / complaints handled, which is kept in the customer file and, additionally stored in a separate folder "Appeals / Complaints" at Quality Austria. In this way, it is checked whether there have been similar cases in the past, and it ensures that these cases are taken into account. Note for Automotive: The Sector Manager Automotive keeps a separate list (KPI matrix) containing Feedback from clients, stakeholders and IATF OEMs.

Appeals / complaints will – as far as realistic – always result in the elimination of the causes.

The handling of complaints and appeals must also take into account any additional requirements of specific standards or models. For this purpose, if required, the respective Executive Vice President or product expert (or business development in the automotive sector) must be involved. The responsibility lies with the QM.

When handling appeals / complaints, it is ensured that the persons assigned to do so are independent. This refers to the audit process as well as to the process of taking certification decisions. If top management or the QM were involved in the processes, the respectively other party will assume the tasks for handling appeals / complaints. If necessary, the responsible Executive Vice President can also handle appeals and complaints in close cooperation with the QM, provided that he/she was not involved in the certification process and is therefore impartial.

The QM decides who will generally carry out the communication with the complainant. If necessary, the communication can be carried out by the Chief Executive Officer or by an Executive Vice President.

Appeal

Appeals can only be filed by respective clients about the services provided by Quality Austria, including certification decisions.

Complaint

Complaints can also be submitted by third parties. For example, complaints can refer to the performance of management systems or persons. Furthermore, complaints can also refer to very general areas of Quality Austria.

2. Handling an appeal or complaint

Feedback to the complainant

The receipt of appeals as well as complaints will be confirmed to the appellant / complainant immediately (within two days) by the QM or the responsible Executive Vice President. It must be clarified with the appellant / complainant which language is to be used for subsequent communication.

Preliminary clarification on justification

In case of an appeal / a complaint (written appeal / complaint by the client, customer feedback, written customer survey), the QM shall – if necessary in cooperation with the relevant sector manager or product expert – carry out a preliminary clarification with regard to the basic justification of the appeal / complaint in accordance with the applicable “General Terms and Conditions” or with regard to the **qualityaustria** decision complained about.

If the QM himself/herself was involved in the process, the decision will be taken by top management.

Quality Austria checks to what extent the appeal / complaint refers to its own certification activities or whether it primarily relates to the certified management of the client. The result will be communicated to the appellant / complainant.

If the appeal / complaint dealt with is judged to be unjustified, the appellant / complainant will be informed in writing by the QM or, if applicable, by the responsible Executive Vice president, stating the reasons for the decision. Top management must be informed of this procedure in writing.

Handling of justified appeals / complaints

If the appeal / complaint is classified as justified by the **qualityaustria** top management and as serious for Quality Austria in general, the relevant documents will be forwarded to the Quality Austria Council for processing and the appellant / complainant will be informed about this by the QM.

If it is reasonable from Quality Austria’s point of view to carry out inspections at the client’s site at short notice (in case of a complaint), a corresponding audit will be conducted within 90 days and the results will be documented accordingly. An appropriately qualified and independent auditor will have to be commissioned by the QM.

The appellant / complainant can object to decisions made by the **qualityaustria** top management by contacting the Quality Austria Council, which will then make a binding decision on it. Specifics concerning FSC: the complainant shall also be informed that he/she has the possibility to submit the complaint to ASI and, as a last step, to FSC, if he/she does not agree with the decision made upon the complaint.

Complaints about a certified client will be forwarded to this client by Quality Austria within 14 days.

Appeals / complaints are subject to strictest confidentiality on the part of Quality Austria and do not have any discriminatory effect on the appellant / complainant. Complainants shall remain anonymous to the client, if this is requested by the complainant.

Top management and the QM evaluate together with the appellant / complainant and the client and, if necessary, with the involvement of the responsible Executive Vice President or product expert, to what extent individual contents from the complaint as well as its solution will be made publicly available.

Note for Automotive: Handling off all appeals / complaints from any interested parties shall include the following activities:

- a) receiving, validating, investigating
 - create and send the "Standard letter Initiation of decertification process"
- b) determining the root cause
 - analyse of the situation by WIS order (e.g. Off-site verification-complaint by IATF OEM)
- c) ensuring that any appropriate correction and systemic corrective actions are taken
 - Documentation on Adhoc-NC-report in CARA (if adequate a major NC shall be raised)
 - Documentation in WIS order
- d) Providing progress reports and the outcome
 - within 20 days the veto decision has to be done
- e) Maintaining the records of appeals, claims and actions taken
 - Documentation in WIS order

In addition, entries will be made in a measures database to handle internal corrective and preventive actions, thus initiating the improvement process or preventive action process. This is controlled by the management team.

Special product- and sector specific time requirements

When processing appeals / complaints, it must be ensured that the product- and sector-specific time requirements are met (e.g. IATF Rules: Nonconformity management, section 5.11 and Decertification process, section 8).

This procedure is documented in the Guideline Automotive (RE_27_01_023e_Guideline Automotive).

Example of handling an appeal against a certification decision:

