

GENERAL OPERATING PROCEDURE FOR CUSTOMER QUERIES, AND COMPLAINTS PROCEDURE

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1.0 PURPOSE

- 1.1 The purpose of this procedure is to establish a clear, fair, and structured process for managing all customer queries, complaints, and appeals received by SAIW Certification. This includes the handling of general enquiries, informal service-related complaints, formal complaints against certified individuals or organisations, and appeals against certification-related decisions.
- 1.2 The procedure ensures that all matters are addressed objectively, transparently, and within defined timeframes, in compliance with applicable international standards and certification scheme requirements.

2.0 SCOPE

- 2.1 This This procedure applies to all customer queries, complaints, and appeals received by SAIW Certification in connection with its personnel and company certification activities. It includes:
- Informal queries and complaints related to service delivery, communication, or administrative issues
 - Formal complaints involving certified persons, certified organisations, SAIW Certification staff, or procedures
 - Appeals submitted against certification decisions, audit outcomes, or assessment results
- 2.2 The procedure applies across all certification schemes operated by SAIW Certification, and personnel certification programmes. It is applicable to all staff, contractors, committee members, and external parties who are involved in the processing or resolution of these matters.

3.0 REFERENCES

ISO/IEC 17021-1:2015 – Conformity assessment – Requirements for bodies providing audit and certification of management systems
ISO/IEC 17024:2012 – Conformity assessment – General requirements for bodies operating certification of persons
ISO 9001:2015 – Quality management systems – Requirements
IAF MD 4 – Use of Information and Communication Technology (ICT)
IAF MD 5 – Determination of audit time
IAF MD 7 – Harmonisation of competence requirements
IAF MD 13 – Handling of complaints and appeals
IIW MCS – Rules for the International Manufacturer Certification Scheme

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4.0 RESPONSIBILITIES

- 4.1 The Certification Manager is responsible for overseeing the implementation of this procedure, ensuring that all queries, complaints, and appeals are recorded, tracked, and addressed in line with defined timeframes and impartiality requirements. The Certification Manager also ensures appropriate escalation to the Scheme Manager, Governing Board, or Appeals Committee where necessary.
- 4.2 Scheme Managers are responsible for investigating and responding to complaints or appeals within their respective schemes. They must ensure investigations are objective, documented, and supported by evidence. Where an appeal relates to a certification decision, the Scheme Manager must ensure that no individual involved in the original decision participates in the review.
- 4.3 The Appeals Committee is responsible for independently reviewing any formal appeal against certification decisions. The committee must operate free from influence or conflict of interest and must base its decision solely on the evidence provided and scheme requirements.
- 4.4 All SAIW Certification personnel, including auditors, assessors, and technical experts, are responsible for reporting any complaints or appeals they receive and for cooperating fully in any investigation or review process. Personnel must not respond to or resolve complaints independently unless formally assigned to do so.

5.0 TERMS, DEFINITIONS AND ABBREVIATIONS

Term	Definition
SAIW	Southern African Institute of Welding
Appeal	A formal request made by a person or organisation for reconsideration of a decision made by SAIW Certification, particularly in relation to certification outcomes.
Appellant	The individual or organisation submitting an appeal.
Complainant	The individual or organisation who submits a formal complaint.
Complaint	A documented expression of dissatisfaction, other than an appeal, by any person or body regarding SAIW Certification activities, certified persons, or certified organisations.
Inquiry Panel	A panel appointed to formally investigate a complaint if it cannot be resolved by the initial panel review.
Panel Report	The official report completed by either a Complaints or Appeals Panel, recording findings, recommendations, and final decisions.
Register	The official controlled record where complaints and appeals are logged, tracked, and updated throughout their lifecycle.
Respondent	The person or entity against whom a complaint or appeal is made.

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6.0 HANDLING OF QUERIES AND INFORMAL COMPLAINTS

- 6.1 SAIW receives a range of queries and informal complaints, which are typically related to communication delays, unclear feedback, scheduling issues, or general dissatisfaction with service delivery. These may be submitted verbally, by email, phone call, or through any communication channel used by the organisation.

All queries and informal complaints must be acknowledged within five working days of receipt. Staff receiving the query are responsible for referring it to the appropriate Scheme Manager or administrative representative for response. If resolved immediately, no further action is required beyond confirming the resolution with the person who raised the concern.

- 6.2 Where an informal complaint cannot be resolved within five working days or becomes repetitive or sensitive in nature, it must be logged in the GOP04 Att G – Complaints and Appeals Register and escalated for formal handling under section 7.0. This escalation ensures transparency, consistency, and impartiality.
- 6.3 All SAIW Certification staff must report unresolved informal complaints and refrain from making independent commitments that could conflict with formal policies or certification decisions. Informal complaints must not be dismissed based on tone or format; the validity of the concern must be assessed objectively.
- 6.4
- 6.5 6.5 Awareness of this process must be communicated internally across all SAIW offices and externally to clients, including in induction training and through published statements such as GOP04 Att H – Rights of Appeal and Complaint Statement.

7.0 HANDLING OF FORMAL COMPLAINTS

- 7.1 Submission of Complaint
- 7.2 Any person may submit a formal complaint in writing if they are dissatisfied with the conduct, outcome, or performance of SAIW Certification, a certified person, or a certified company. Complaints may also relate to personnel behaviour, impartiality concerns, or procedural violations.
- 7.3 The complaint must be submitted using GOP04 Att A – Complaints Notification Form and addressed to the SAIW Certification Manager. Complaints may be sent by email, post, or hand-delivered to the SAIW Certification Office. Verbal complaints that meet the criteria of a formal complaint must be documented and confirmed in writing.
- 7.4 Logging and Acknowledgement
- 7.5 The Certification Manager must log the complaint in the Complaints and Appeals Register upon receipt. An acknowledgement must be issued to the complainant within 15 calendar days, confirming that the complaint has been received and will be reviewed.

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- 7.6 Complaints must be logged in the Complaints and Appeals Register by the Executive Secretary or the relevant manager responsible for the scheme in question. The Executive Secretary must monitor complaint resolution and escalate any unresolved cases or missed deadlines to the Executive Director.
- 7.7 The register is a controlled, live document accessible to the Executive Director, Executive Secretary, and all scheme managers. It is subdivided into the following categories to ensure proper traceability:
- Finance and Administration
 - Training
 - Consultation and Technical Services (ISO/IEC 17025)
 - Personnel Certification and Examination (IIW ANB / ISO/IEC 17024)
 - Company Certification and Auditing (IIW ANBCC / ISO/IEC 17021-1)
 - Quality and Other General Complaints
- 7.8 Initial Assessment and Referral
- 7.9 The Certification Manager conducts an initial review to determine whether the complaint can be resolved through clarification, corrective action, or communication. If the issue is straightforward and does not involve a certified party, it may be addressed directly by the Certification or Scheme Manager.
- 7.10 If the complaint is valid and relates to a certified person or company, or is complex in nature, it must be referred for further formal investigation through a Complaints Panel. A copy of the complaint must be shared with the respondent, who is given 20 calendar days to respond in writing.
- 7.11 All formal complaints that proceed to investigation must be recorded using GOP04 Att I – Complaint Investigation Form. This form must document the investigation steps taken, evidence reviewed, persons consulted, and the findings and recommendation for resolution or escalation.
- 7.12 Appointment of Complaints Panel
- 7.13 The Certification Manager appoints a Complaints Panel comprising impartial and competent members. Panel members must not have any involvement in the subject of the complaint. The panel must be appointed within 20 calendar days of determining the need for escalation.
- 7.14 Each panel member must be formally appointed using the Appointment to the Complaints Panel form (GOP04 Attachment J), which documents the scope of appointment, confirms absence of conflict of interest, and secures a signed acknowledgement of duties and impartiality obligations.
- 7.15 The Complaints Panel may make a finding that the complaint is:
- Justified and requires corrective action
 - Unjustified and requires no further action

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- Outside the scope of SAIW Certification and should be referred elsewhere
- Partially justified, with some issues resolved and others needing clarification or escalation

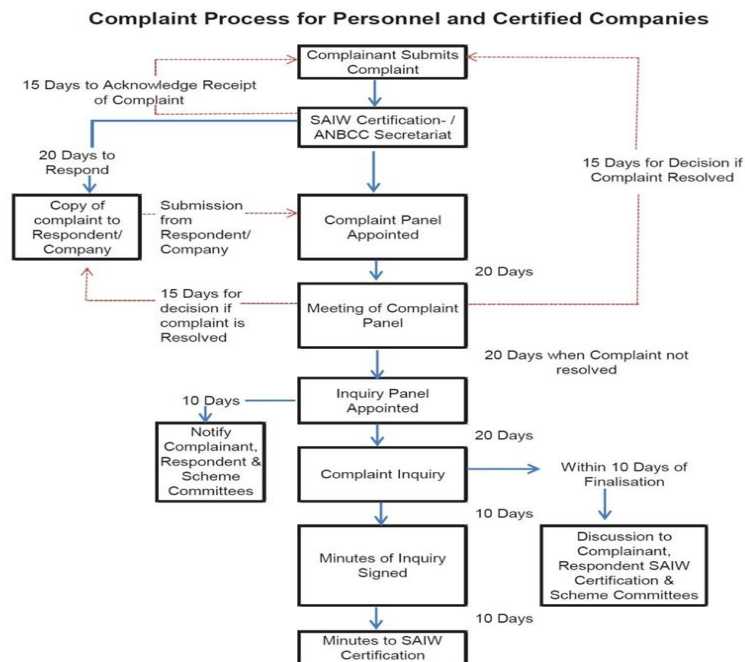
- 7.16 The panel's finding, and rationale must be recorded in GOP04 Att B – Complaints Panel Report.
- 7.17 The panel must meet within a further 20 calendar days to assess the complaint and decide whether the matter can be resolved at panel level. The decision must be made within 15 calendar days of the panel meeting.
- 7.18 All actions, discussions, and outcomes must be recorded in the Complaints Panel Report.
- 7.19 Appointment of Inquiry Panel (If Not Resolved)
- 7.20 If the Complaints Panel cannot resolve the issue, the Certification Manager must appoint an independent Inquiry Panel to conduct a formal investigation. The panel is appointed within 10 calendar days of the decision to escalate. Each member must be formally appointed using the Appointment to the Inquiry Panel form (GOP04 Attachment L), which records their role, impartiality confirmation, and signed acceptance of responsibilities.
- 7.21 The Inquiry Panel is responsible for reviewing all evidence, conducting further fact-finding where necessary, and preparing a written summary of its findings and recommendations. The outcome must be documented using the Inquiry Panel Report (GOP04 Attachment C) or, if technical review is required, the Review Panel Report (GOP04 Attachment D). The panel has 20 calendar days to complete its review from the date of appointment.
- 7.22 Finalisation and Communication of Outcome
- 7.23 The signed minutes of the Inquiry Panel are submitted to SAIW Certification within 10 calendar days of finalisation. Within a further 10 calendar days, the Certification Manager must communicate the outcome in writing to:
- The complainant
 - The respondent
 - The relevant Scheme Manager and Scheme Committee
- 7.24 All complaints must be handled confidentially. The identities of the complainant and respondent must be disclosed only to those directly involved in the handling and investigation of the complaint. All panel members and SAIW Certification personnel must respect the confidentiality of complaint records, discussions, and findings, in accordance with signed declarations and MP13 – Management of Impartiality.
- 7.25 All related documents, forms, and records must be retained for at least five years under MP07 - Document and Record Control.

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7.26 Visual Overview

7.27 The complete complaint handling process and timeframes are illustrated in the flow diagram titled Complaint Process for Personnel and Certified Companies, which forms part of this procedure.



8.0 HANDLING OF APPEALS

8.1 Submission of Appeal

8.2 An appeal is a formal request submitted by an individual or organisation to challenge a decision made by SAIW Certification. Appeals may relate to decisions on certification, suspension, withdrawal, examination outcomes, or any process where the appellant believes the decision was incorrect or unfair.

8.3 The appeal must be submitted in writing using GOP04 Att E – Appeals Notification Form and addressed to the Certification Manager. Appeals must be lodged within 30 calendar days of the date on which the decision was communicated to the appellant.

8.4 A copy of GOP04 Att H – Rights of Appeal and Complaint Statement is made available to all applicants, candidates, certified persons, and clients to ensure awareness of this right.

8.5 Logging and Acknowledgement

8.6 Upon receipt, the Certification Manager logs the appeal in the Appeals Register and

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acknowledges receipt within five working days. The Certification Manager reviews the appeal for eligibility, confirms that it falls within the scope of SAIW Certification decisions, and initiates the next step of the process.

8.7 Appointment of Appeals Panel

8.8 If the appeal is valid, the Certification Manager appoints an independent Appeals Panel within 10 working days of receipt. The panel must consist of impartial members who were not involved in the original decision or related assessment. Panel members must sign the appropriate impartiality and confidentiality declarations before review.

8.9 Each panel member must be formally appointed using the Appointment to the Appeals Panel form (GOP04 Attachment K). This form confirms the scope of the appointment, verifies absence of conflict of interest, and records the panel member's signed acceptance of impartiality and confidentiality obligations.

8.10 Review and Decision

8.11 The Appeals Panel reviews all evidence, documentation, and relevant scheme requirements. It may consult subject matter experts as required. The panel's decision must be documented in the Appeals Panel Report.

8.12 The panel must reach a decision within 20 calendar days of appointment. If more time is required due to complexity, the Certification Manager may extend the timeline by no more than 10 additional working days, with justification recorded.

8.13 Communication and Closure

The decision of the Appeals Panel is final within the SAIW Certification process and must be communicated in writing to the appellant within five working days of finalisation. The outcome must also be recorded in the Appeals Register and shared with the relevant Scheme Manager.

8.14 No person who was directly involved in the subject of the appeal may participate in the review or approval of the appeal outcome. All documents must be retained in accordance with MP07 - Document and Record Control for a minimum of five years.

9.0 ATTACHMENTS

GOP04 Att A – Complaints Notification Form
 GOP04 Att B – Complaints Panel Report
 GOP04 Att C – Inquiry Panel Report
 GOP04 Att D – Review Panel Report
 GOP04 Att E – Appeals Notification Form
 GOP04 Att F – Appeals Panel Report
 GOP04 Att G – Complaints and Appeals Register
 GOP04 Att H – Rights of Appeal and Complaint Statement
 GOP04 Att I – Complaint Investigation Form
 GOP04 Att J - Appointment to the Complaints Panel Form

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GOP04 Att K - Appointment to the Appeals Panel Form
GOP04 Att L - Appointment to the Inquiry Panel Form

10.0 ASSOCIATED RECORDS AND RETENTION INFORMATION

Record	Location	Retention Period
GOP04 Attachments A to L Correspondence and Evidence Files (all cases)	SAIW Software System	5 Years

11.0 DOCUMENT REVISION HISTORY

Date of Change	Rev	Description of Change
April 2023	00	New Procedures GOP 04 -1 Rev 00 Queries and Complaints GOP 04 -2 Rev 00 Formal Complaints GOP 04 -3 Rev 00 Appeals
May 2025	01	- Consolidated GOP 04-1 (Queries and Complaints), GOP 04-2 (Formal Complaints), and GOP 04-3 (Appeals) into a single integrated procedure. - Defined clear process steps, responsibilities, forms, and timelines for handling of customer queries, complaints, and appeals. - Added Complaint Investigation Form (GOP04 Attachment I) to ensure traceability of investigation activities. - Referenced all supporting forms and records with updated attachment numbering.