


Revision	Change	Status (Draft/Approved)
2020-01-20	Revision / Status bar with draft or approval included.	Approved
2020-08-17	Third Paragraph, Removed reference to Office/internal reviewer to ClientCare	Approved
2021-10-28	Administrator changed to Administration & Client Care as back-office function.	Approved
2023-01-10	Procedure section aligned with Website Content	Approved 

**Scope:** This procedure is applied when complaints are received from clients. Complaints can also be received from customers of clients, or other interested parties. Such complaints will also be processed in accordance with this procedure.

**Procedure:** The Complaint Procedure is made available to clients and if requested by interested parties will be forwarded.

When a client complaint is received, it will be recorded using the Incident Register by the Managing Director or Office Administration/ ClientCare. Processing of the complaint will be allocated to an auditor independent of the perceived problem.

Initial enquiries will be made, recording their result, to determine if all relevant information is available. (Please note that the complaint may form part of the suspension and pending withdrawal of certification process.)

The Arbiter (independent auditor) will determine the need for corrective action by AfriCert and/or the sub-contractor’s office. Should it be evident that such action is necessary, then the auditor will complete a Corrective action request form and monitor its progress.

The independent auditor will ensure appropriate corrective action is implemented and will record details progressively, including the update of the Incident Register

Prior to the management review meeting, (or earlier if a trend is apparent) the Managing Director will analyse the client complaints to determine the overall pattern of failures such that effective preventive action can be formulated and implemented. (Please note that analysis will include ‘unjustified’ complaints since these could be indicative of insufficient understanding of client’s needs by AfriCert.) Methods of analysis will generally be by using client and customer grouping, auditor used and procedure/processes as the analysis basis in order to determine a trend.

The analysis will be presented to management for review.

When the complaint is from a client's customer or an interested party, then the independent auditor will review the content to determine the urgency of response that is justified in relation to the next scheduled audit.

If appropriate, the independent auditor will schedule a special audit at the client to determine the true position, with nonconformances prepared as necessary. In other circumstances, and if appropriate, at the next scheduled audit, the scheduled auditor will be asked to perform the investigation as part of the normal audit activities.

Should resolution of a complaint be an extended exercise, then the complainant will be kept informed of the resolution process and progress. The complainant will be advised of the outcome of the AfriCert investigation and the Managing Director will be involved until finalised.

Procedure:

The appeals process after clients receive feedback regarding certification decisions or non-conformances that have been generated during the performance of an audit.

The procedure is available to clients. For appeals from interested parties, formal definition does not permit the flexibility that the interested parties demand. However, such appeals are processed within the spirit of the procedure.

The procedure defines AfriCert as being responsible for all decisions made as a result of the appeal. The reviewing arbiter is always different from the auditor. The procedure does not provide for discrimination against the appellant. These audits are usually not charged to the client in the event that the arbiter determines that AfriCert is at fault. Appeals Audits may be conducted off-site if suitable. Outcomes of these audits is communicated to the Office Administration and reviewed by the Managing Director to implement the necessary actions, corrections, corrective actions and continual improvement.

The procedure includes the following provisions;

- A description of receipt, investigation and deciding future actions necessary with due regard for the recorded history of the similar appeals
- Recording and tracking appeals
- Implementing appropriate corrective and preventive action within AfriCert or AfriCert's client if this is appropriate
- Maintaining contact with the appellant and forwarding details of conclusions reached
- Review of the results of the appeal by persons different from those investigating the appeal
- Forwarding written details of the finality of the appeal to the appellant

Records: The records will be retained electronically within DropBox.