

Information note

The LRQA complaint and appeals process

Complaints and disputes

Overview

At various stages during assessment, validation, or verification activities, disputes over findings occasionally arise. These processes require the assessor, validator, or verifier to clearly define the documentary evidence on which findings are made. The assessor, validator, or verifier presents this evidence to the client both during and at the close of the assessment, validation, or verification. For visits undertaken at the client's premises, the assessor (or validator, or verifier) will do this while on site. Disputes that may arise during the assessment / validation / verification should be resolved at that time.

Other complaints, disputes, and feedback of dissatisfaction raised outside the assessment, validation, or verification process either by an LRQA client or a third party should be made as identified in the below section 'Contacting LRQA'.

Office review

However, if it proves impossible to resolve a matter during a visit, the client or the assessor (or validator, or verifier) can take the issue to the appropriate technical manager in the office that holds the assessment contract. This may result in discussions between the client and the staff of the office.

On receipt of a complaint, the appropriate technical manager will contact the third party to request more information and will start the investigation and resolution of the complaint in line with process described below.

Corporate technical review

In the unlikely event that such discussions fail to reach a satisfactory conclusion, the Area Operations Manager may call on additional advice from the Service Innovations and Governance Director. If so, the local office conveys the views of the Service Innovations and Governance Director back to the client. Most cases escalated to this level are resolved at this stage. However, if the case cannot be resolved at this level, the client has a right to an independent appeal.

Independent panel

If so, the manager of the office holding the assessment contract presents the matter to the Management Systems Business Director. The Management Systems Business Director contacts the LRQA Technical and Advisory Committee. This is a group of independent industry experts, drawn from interested parties across the world, with responsibility for monitoring the quality of service delivered by LRQA.

The Chairman of the Technical and Advisory Committee nominates three impartial members to act as an appeals panel with one member as chairperson. The panel decides the date of a meeting to consider the issue and directly informs the appellant to ensure that they have an opportunity to attend and present their case. The panel may also call any other witness and consult with experts they deem appropriate to reach a final judgement.

Final decision

The manager of the office holding the assessment contract communicates the written findings of the appeals panel to the appellant. LRQA considers the judgement of the appeals panel to be the final decision.

Contacting LRQA

To formally initiate the complaints process, use the online Feedback form at www.lrqa.com/feedback, alternatively, write to the office manager at your local LRQA office.

When LRQA receives a complaint relating to one of our approved clients, this will be investigated by LRQA at the next visit to the client.

As a result of the visit and complaint investigation, one of the following is possible:

- a) if their management system is found to be ineffective in dealing with the complaint, LRQA will raise this issue with the company and will instigate a process that may result in suspension and even the eventual withdrawal of their certificate.

- b) if the complaint is found not to be justified, or acceptable corrective action has been taken, no further action will be taken.

We regret that we will not be able to tell you of the details of the investigation without our client's full consent as we have a confidentiality agreement in place with them.

Third party complaints

These fall into two categories:

- complaints received by LRQA against one of its clients
- complaints against LRQA.

If LRQA receives a complaint against a client, one of two courses of action may be adopted depending on the seriousness of the complaint.

If a minor concern, your assessor will raise it at your next visit. However, if the time to your next visit is considered too long taking into account the seriousness of the complaint, you will be contacted by LRQA with the details of the complaint and requested to provide an appropriate response.

It may be necessary for LRQA to undertake a short notice visit as part of the investigation of the complaint. This will be discussed with you to ensure clarity on the scope of the visit and those who need to be involved, both from LRQA and your organisation.

Appeals

If LRQA receives a written appeal for the reconsideration of a decision made by Corporate, an LRQA office, the Accreditation Manager immediately tells the Management Systems Business Director and collates the appeal, relevant documentation and findings of earlier investigations.

As soon as practical, the Management Systems Business Director contacts the Chairperson of the Technical and Advisory Committee (T&AC), who nominates three impartial members of the T&AC to act as the appeals panel. The T&AC Chairperson appoints one of the panel members as the chairperson for the panel.

The panel agree the location, date and time to hear the appeal. They communicate this information to the appellant and advise the appellant that they have the right to attend and formally present their case. The appeals panel have the right to hear witnesses and consult with experts they deem appropriate to reach a final judgement.

Final decision

The manager of the office holding the assessment contract communicates the written findings of the appeals panel to the appellant. LRQA considers the judgement of the appeals panel to be the final decision.

Accreditation Bodies

An individual or organization that has raised a complaint against either LRQA or one of LRQA's clients has the right to communicate their complaint to the appropriate accreditation body at any point in the complaints and appeals process. As an accredited certification body LRQA will co-operate with such bodies with regards to the investigation of the complaint or appeal in accordance with the terms of our accreditation.