

1. Purpose and Scope:

This document aims to describe the process adopted by GCIQCS globally for:

- A. Complaints Handling.
- B. Handling of appeal against a certification decision.
- C. Handling of request of review an evaluation decision.

This document applies to all parties that are involved in the complaints, appeals and review request procedure, including the concerned GCIQCS customer, GCIQCS Unit, the concerned staff members of the Operations Department and the Appeals and Review Committee members.

All GCIQCS clients have the right to make a complaint, appeal against any certification decision or request a review of any evaluation decision GCIQCS may take if they can bring forward good arguments. This standard operating procedure outlines the principles and responsibilities with regards to complaints, appeals and review requests.

2. Responsibilities:

It's the responsibility of CEO, Quality Assurance Manager, to ensure the proper setting, implementation and communication of this document.

3. Definitions:

Complaint: A "Complaint" means expression of dissatisfaction by individual(s) or organization(s) (including certified organization(s)) with an issue related to GCIQCS or organizations certified by GCIQCS in writing. Specifically, the following are the issues that could be handled under this process:

- Certification services of GCIQCS;
- Organizations (Product) certified by GCIQCS.

Certification Decision: A decision taken by designated staff to grant or deny initial certification, confirm certification after surveillance audit, renew certification, extend a certificate, suspend a certificate, lift the suspension or to decertify. A Certification Decision becomes effective with immediate effect.

Evaluation Decision: A decision taken by designated staff to confirm non-conformities identified during an audit, confirm corrective measure proposals or objective evidence, verify objective evidence during a follow-up audit without suspension, not to suspend for a major non-conformity. An Evaluation Decision becomes effective with immediate effect.

Appeal: A request to review and reverse a Certification Decision. Appeals against Certification Decisions are decided on by the Appeal/Review Committee

Requests for Review: These are requests to review an Evaluation Decision.

Appeal/Review Committee: The Appeal/Review Committee is an internal quality control body that objectively supervises the decision-making process within GCIQCS considering any raised argument and objection by the involved parties. Thus, it ensures that operations are exercised with due diligence and uniformity in interpreting the Standards. As a company-internal body its role is not that of an external and/or official arbitration body nor a court-like institution Process.

QAM: Quality Assurance Manager

QP: Quality Procedures

MR: Management Representative

QM: Quality Manual

QMS: Quality Management System

SOP: Standard Operating Procedure

QML: Quality Master List

QF: Quality Form

C.A.: Corrective Actions

P.A.: Preventive Actions

4. Procedure:

4.1 Complaints-handling process

4.1.1 Acknowledgement of Complaint/Appeal/Review request receipt by GCIQCS

- Complaints must be submitted through written texts which can **be submitted after a reason for complaint has arisen, or after receipt of the Certification Decision or Evaluation Decision.**
- If no Complaint, Appeal or Review request is received within this timeframe the decision becomes final and may not be appealed against, and the complaint become declined.
- GCIQCS will not respond to anonymous requests/forms without clear contact information.
- After receipt of the request in writing, GCIQCS shall investigate whether it relates to the certification activities and scopes for which GCIQCS is responsible and decide the acceptance of it.
- Where the request is identified and accepted to be investigated, GCIQCS shall acknowledge the same to the complainant/appellant or the concerned person submitted the request.
- In case the request is not accepted, GCIQCS shall give notice to the complainant of it with the reason(s), and guidance on how to proceed further with this request.
- In order to file either a complaint or appeal or review to GCIQCS, the affected customer/organization has to submit a completed form (**GCIQCS-REC-17** GCIQCS Complaints FORM & **GCIQCS-REC-18** Appeals & Review Form) to the Quality Assurance Manager at GCIQCS via email to gciqc@gccertifications.com; the form can either be downloaded from GCIQCS's website (www.gccertifications.com), or to be requested through the above email or immediately handed by GCIQCS QAM.
- If request is received by any staff member, he will be forwarded to the Quality Assurance Manager for his review and action, and then related records will be updated by QAM.
- QAM who will conduct an initial evaluation of the request and decide if the submission is accepted or denied **within 7 working days**, based on whether the request contains a valid reason to file the complaint /appeal /review request.
- Once receiving a form, the QAM will assure whether the request contains an actionable Review or Appeal (either against an Evaluation or a Certification decision) or if the request should be dealt with as complaint.
- An Appeal or Review request does not alter the effectiveness of the Certification or Evaluation decision, unless the Appeal/Review has been granted by the Complaint/Appeal/Review Committee in its final decision. All restrictions applicable to a customer as a consequence of a Certification Decision of suspension remain in effect during the period of suspension, regardless of the outcome of an Appeal.
- The QAM maintains a log of all Complaints, Appeals and requests for Reviews and informs the Appeal or Review Committee in order to move the process forward.

4.2 Reasons of Complaint/Appeal/Review Request: All requests must state the reason(s) for complaints in the Complaints form (GCIQCS-REC-17), and appeals/review requests in the appeal/review handling form (GCIQCS-REC-18) and need to be supported by information and evidence.

IMPOTANT: Please note that a Complaint, Appeal or request for Review will only be accepted if it is accompanied by or based on clear and credible information in accordance with below reasons.

In case request does not contain a convincing reason, QAM will contact the concerned appellant for more clarification on convincing reason for complaining or appealing.

Reasons may include, but are not limited to:

- A complaint is about conformity assessment and/or appeals and the way that the conformity assessment system functions.
- A complaint about GCIQCS Client, GCIQCS Certified product, etc.....
- Level of service quality or delivery.
- Details about the complaints about the conformity assessment activities
- Dissatisfaction, whether it is from person in the certification body, or the certification activities of the certification body, or administrative processes, finances processes, etc.....
- Decisions made based on immaterial grounds;
- Decisions based on immaterial information, or information for which there is no credible basis. In
- general, hearsay is treated as information for which there is no credible basis;
- Failure to consider presented, relevant information in reaching a decision;
- Reasonable perception of bias against the appellant;
- Unreasonable delay in the decision-making process;
- Prejudicial procedural irregularities in reaching the decision;
- Disputes about facts relevant to the decision;
- Disputes about interpretations relevant to the decision.
- Appeal for certification decision to a specific application
- Request for review for a specific evaluation decision for a specific application
- Other specific reasons.
- An allegation against GCIQCS policy or GCIQCS Compliance with standards.

NOTES:

- For complaint (s) related to certified organization(s) (Product), a direct approach to the organization(s) in question is recommended.
- A confidentiality agreement with the organization(s) may not allow GCIQCS to reveal documents or sensitive information to the complainant, however clear information and response should be provided to complainant.
- GCIQCS does not disclose any personal information without consent of the person(s) in question but may refer the matter to the organization concerned at an appropriate time to proceed with the complains-handling process further. Any specific person of the organization concerned may be identified during the process.

4.2.1 Investigation and preparation of actions to be taken and response

After accepting the complaint/appeal/review request, QAM shall nominate the individual(s) previously not involved in the subject of the request complaint and instruct him/her (them) to investigate and validate the subject of the complaint.

In case where the complaint is related to an organization (product) certified by GCIQCS, GCIQCS shall refer the matter to the organization at an appropriate time in order to collect and verify all the necessary information.

The nominated individual (s) shall investigate the matter and decide actions to be taken by GCIQCS and a response to the complainant/Appellant/ or person requesting the review. If applicable and found obligatory, Quality Form will be filled by Q.A.M. in case of any detected departure, to evaluate the situation, analyze the cause and proposing C.A. and P.A. will be handed over to the concern person/department responsible on causing the Complaint/ Appeal.

4.2.2 Communication of decision

GCIQCS shall communicate the decision on the response to the complainant.

Where the complainant agrees with the decision, GCIQCS shall give notice to the complainant/Appellant of the end of the Complaints handling process.

4.2.3 Request of re-examination

In case where the complainant/appellant/person requesting review disagrees with the decision, he may request GCIQCS to re-open the investigation of the matter within 30 days after the receipt of the decision. Such a request can only be accepted if the request is accompanied with additional information, such as new findings of the fact.

After receipt of such a request, GCIQCS shall re-open the investigation of the matter and give notice to the complainant/appellant/person requesting review of further decision(s) in accordance with the above-mentioned process.

4.2.4 Convocation and deliberation in Complaints Committee

If the complainant disagrees with further decision(s) based on the first investigation or after investigation is re-opened, and requests further investigation, GCIQCS shall convoke the **Complaints Committee**.

The Committee consists of the neutral outside members previously not involved in the subject of the complainant. At the Committee, deliberation shall be made on the results of the investigation/re-investigation and on actions to be taken, and response based on the decision of the Committee shall be communicated to the complainant/appellant/person requesting review. This is the end of the process.

IMPORTANT: Complaints Committee will make a decision within 30 working days after receiving the disagreement of the last decision communicated by GCIQCS QAM to the concerned person

4.2.5 Complaints Committee:

A. The composition of the Complaints Committee is the following:

- CEO.
- Quality Assurance Manager (or his/her delegate).
- Conformity Manager (or his/her delegate if he is involved in the certification process).

B. In all cases:

- Head of Sales and Marketing Department attends in order to document the process and moderate the 4.2.5 Complaints Committee meeting.

Doc. No.	GCIQCS-SOP-07
Rev. No.	01
Rev. Date	17 July 2023
Page No.	Page 5 of 10

- GCIQCS staff member(s) who have the information about the details of the specific case under complaint will be present to demonstrate the case details in front of Complaints Committee.
- A representative of the organization/person who raised the Complaints request should be present as well during the Complaints Committee gathering.
- The Complaints Committee may invite other involved staff members to get background information to the case or external consultants to make submissions to the Complaints Committee if they deem it necessary (case by case).

C. Terms and Conditions of Complaints Committee:

- Every member should be present in the committee gathering. This will constitute the quorum for Complaints Committee meetings (e.g. 3 personnel out of 3 (For all scopes including HALAL)).
- Certification knowledge is defined as 1 year of experience in Certification.
- Any member involved in the certification decision will be excluded from the Complaints Committee in order to avoid any conflict of interest. His delegate will be replacing him in attending the committee and participating in the decision.
- At the discretion of the staff member responsible for certification decision or evaluation decision in front of the Complaints committee, the case should be presented to the Complaints Committee either by the responsible certification analyst of the case or the certifier him/herself (e.g. The staff members directly involved in the certification or evaluation process).
- In case a Complaints Committee member opts to resign from the Complaints Committee or otherwise ceases to be a member, the QAM will nominate a replacement according to the above listed criteria to the CEO, who decides on the assignment of the new committee member.
- During a Complaint, only information which existed and was presented at the time the decision was made will be considered.
- Additional credible information presented and accepted during a Complaint, which was not present at the time the original decision was taken and could have led to a different outcome in the original decision, will result in a recommendation to the Operations Department to re-open the case and take into consideration the new information for a decision (within the time frame mentioned above for accepting a Complaint/appeal).
- In Case of HALAL Scope, Islamic affairs expert involved in the Complaint should not be in any way involved in the audit process, evaluation or certification decision

D. Voting:

- Complaints Committee decides on the presented cases by simple majority vote.
- The committee makes decisions according to the procedure outlined in this document and all its proceedings are documented by the QAM in the **GCIQCS-REC-17** Complaints handling form.
- Staff members related to certification decision and evaluation decision, Head of Sales and Marketing Department, representative of the organization, external consultants and any other attendees rather than the committee members have no votes when deciding if the appeal/review will be granted.

E. Outcome of committee decisions: A decision can have the following outcomes:

- Original decision overturned: This means that the decision taken against a complaint will be changed, Head of Sales and Marketing Department will act as indicated by the decision. The effect of this changed decision is explained to the complainant with the communication of the decision.
- Original decision confirmed: This means that the decision taken against a compliant or decision being complaint against is confirmed and will not be changed. The Complaints Committee will recommend to the Head of Sales and Marketing Department if any deadlines of the consecutive certification workflow need to be extended due to the proceedings of the appeal/review.

4.2.6 Appeals/Review against Decisions of the Complaints Committee

Appeals against decisions made by the Complaints Committee, and review request against GCIQCS decisions will be heard by the Appeal/Review Committee only if the appellant can demonstrate a significant factor affecting the final certification decision that has been made, and Indicate reasonable grounds highlighting why the Appeal/Review Committee could come to a different conclusion on the same facts the Complaints Committee was confronted with.

A. The composition of the Appeal/Review Committee is the following:

- CEO.
- Member of impartiality committee which is the one representing the client's side.
- Member of impartiality committee which is the one representing Government authority.

B. Terms and Conditions of Appeals/Review Committee:

- Appeals against decisions made by the Complaints Committee are not automatic and all requests for such appeals are evaluated according to the criteria mentioned above. Only when the Appeal/Review Committee is convinced that one or more of these criteria apply the appeal will be heard.
- Please note also that a decision taken by the Appeal/Review Committee is final and that no Appeal will be accepted to this decision.
- After the appeal outcome is issued and appellant is notified, appellant is informed that he can address related accreditation bodies in case of dissatisfaction.

C. Voting:

- Complaints Committee decides on the presented cases by simple majority vote.

4.2.7 Publication of Complaints/Appeals/Review Requests

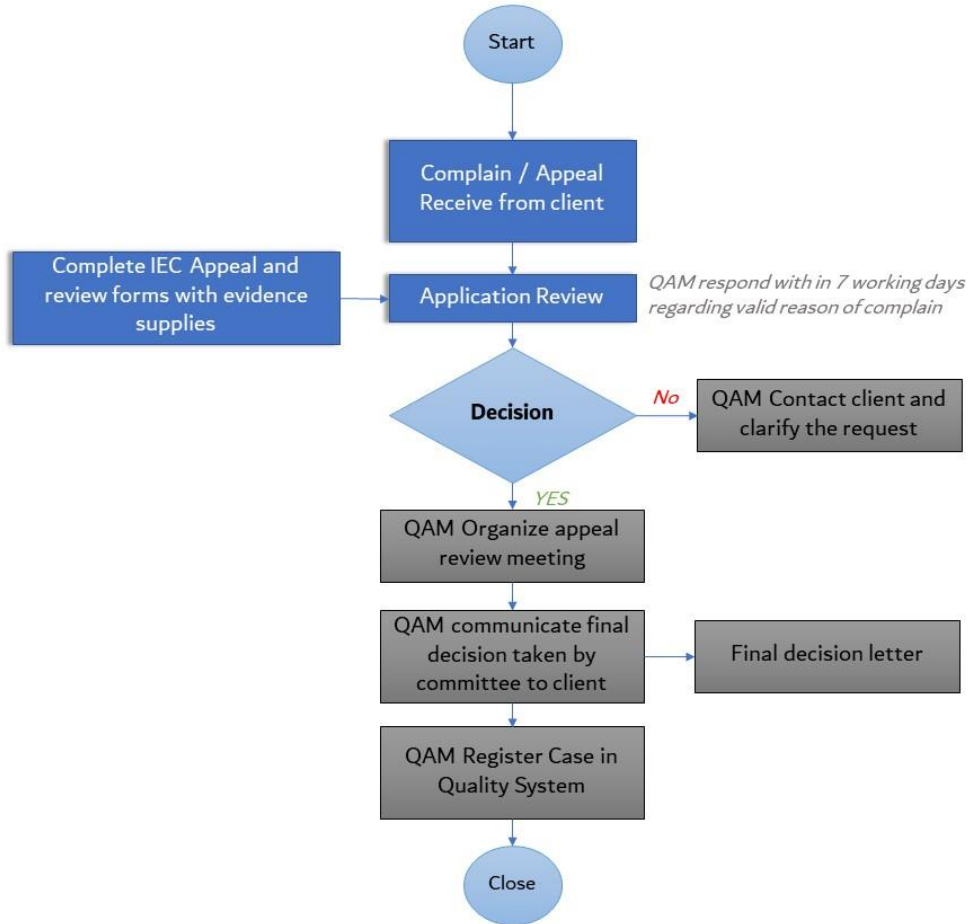
GCIQCS shall determine, by mutual consent between the concerned person (complainant/appellant or requesting review) and GCIQCS, whether and, if so to what extent, the subject of the complaint/appeal and its decision(s) shall be made public. Where the complaint is for an organization (product) certified by GCIQCS, such decision shall be made also in consultation with the organization.

4.2.8 Correction and corrective action

GCIQCS shall take appropriate corrections and corrective actions regarding the complaints accepted in accordance with the actions determined by GCIQCS to be taken. All these actions shall be documented by the QAM in the **GCIQCS-REC-17** Complaints handling form and **GCIQCS-REC-18** Appeal/Review handling form.

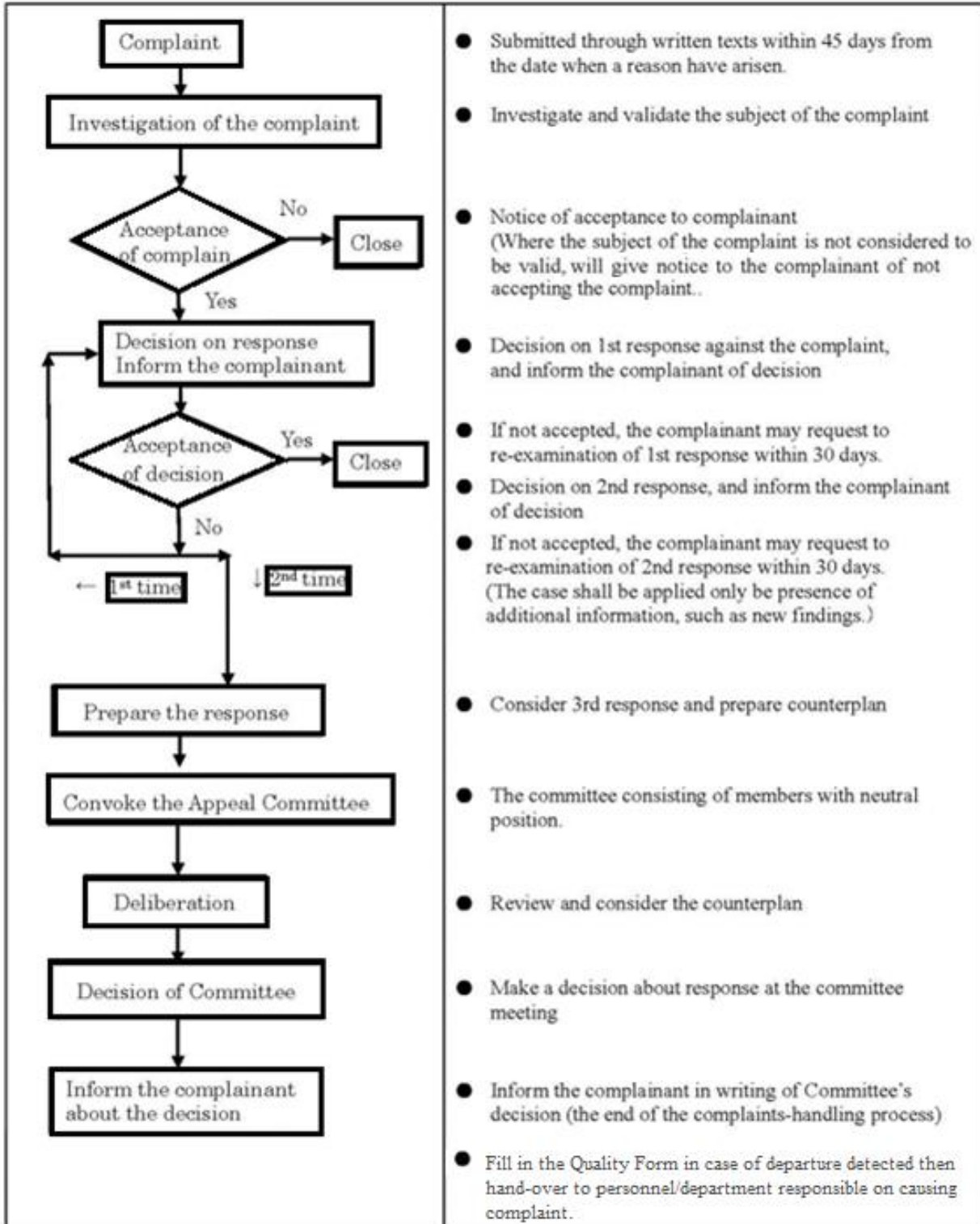
5. Process Flow Chart:

Complain Handling Procedures for SOP



6. Process Map:

Flowchart of Complaints-handling processes



7. Related Forms:

Listed Agreements, SOPs, Records related are as follows:

Quality Manual	<u>GCIQCS-QM-01</u>
Quality Master List	<u>GCIQCS-REC-01</u>
Complains Handling form	<u>GCIQCS-REC-17</u>
Appeals & Review Handling Form	<u>GCIQCS-REC-18</u>

8. References:

- ISO/IEC 17065, Conformity Assessment - Requirements for bodies certifying Products, Processes, and services.
- ISO/IEC 17021-1, Conformity assessment -- Requirements for bodies providing audit and certification of management systems.
- ISO/IEC 17000, Conformity Assessment — Vocabulary and general principles.
- ISO/IEC 17020, Conformity Assessment— Requirements for the operation of various types of bodies performing inspection.
- ISO/IEC 17025, General requirements for the competence of testing and calibration laboratories.
- ISO/IEC 17067, Conformity assessment - Fundamentals of product certification and guidelines for product certification schemes
- ISO/IEC 17030, Conformity Assessment — General requirements for third-party marks of conformity.
- ISO/IEC 17026, Conformity Assessment - Example of a certification scheme for tangible products (Type 5 Product Certification Scheme).
- ISO 19011, Guidelines for Auditing Management Systems
- ISO/IEC 17011, Conformity assessment -- Requirements for accreditation bodies accrediting conformity assessment bodies.
- All controlled QMS records and forms listed in GCIQCS-REC-01: Quality Master List



COMPLAINTS AND APPEAL HANDLING

Doc. No.	GCIQCS-SOP-07
Rev. No.	01
Rev. Date	17 July 2023
Page No.	Page 10 of 10

Revision History:

Date	Revision #	Description of Changes
02 Feb 2022	00	Initial
17 July 2023	01	Reference of obsolete standards or revised documents have been deleted and or corrected. Title of document changed. Procedure aligned to make applicable on all offices of Geo Chem (e.g. UAE, CHN etc.)