



IAF Procedures Document

PROCEDURE FOR THE INVESTIGATION AND RESOLUTION OF COMPLAINTS

Issue 3, Version 2

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The International Accreditation Forum, Inc. (IAF) facilitates trade and supports industry and regulators by operating a worldwide mutual recognition arrangement among Accreditation Bodies (ABs) in order that the results issued by Conformity Assessment Bodies (CABs) accredited by IAF members can be accepted globally.

Accreditation reduces risk for business and its customers by assuring them that accredited CABs are competent to carry out the work they undertake within their scope of accreditation. ABs that are members of IAF and their accredited CABs are required to comply with appropriate international standards and IAF mandatory documents for the consistent application of those standards.

ABs that are signatories to the IAF Multilateral Recognition Arrangement (MLA) are evaluated regularly by an appointed team of peers to provide confidence in the operation of their accreditation programs. The structure of the IAF MLA is detailed in IAF PL 3 - Policies and Procedures on the IAF MLA Structure and for Expansion of the Scope of the IAF MLA. The scope of the IAF MLA is detailed in the IAF MLA Status document.

The IAF MLA is structured in five levels: Level 1 specifies mandatory criteria that apply to all ABs, ISO/IEC 17011. The combination of a Level 2 activity(ies) and the corresponding Level 3 normative document(s) is called the main scope of the MLA, and the combination of Level 4 (if applicable) and Level 5 relevant normative documents is called a sub-scope of the MLA.

- The main scope of the MLA includes activities e.g. product certification and associated mandated standards e.g. ISO/IEC 17065. The attestations made by CABs at the main scope level are considered to be equally reliable.
- The sub scope of the MLA includes conformity assessment requirements e.g. ISO 9001 and scheme specific requirements, where applicable, e.g. ISO 22003-1. The attestations made by CABs at the sub scope level are considered to be equivalent.

The IAF MLA delivers the confidence needed for market acceptance of conformity assessment outcomes. An attestation issued, within the scope of the IAF MLA, by a body that is accredited by an IAF MLA signatory AB can be recognized worldwide, thereby facilitating international trade.

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PROCEDURE FOR THE INVESTIGATION AND RESOLUTION OF COMPLAINTS

1. GENERAL

1.1 This procedure describes the responsibilities and actions of IAF Committees, IAF Secretary, the Regional Accreditation Groups, Accreditation Body (AB) Members and Association Body Members of IAF in relation to the investigation and resolution of complaints.

1.2 Complaints received may concern decisions and activities of IAF or IAF Members, or conformity assessment bodies (CABs) accredited by IAF AB Members.

2. REFERENCED DOCUMENTS

The following referenced documents are relevant to the application of this procedure:

ISO/IEC Guide 2 - Standardization and related activities - General vocabulary

ISO/IEC 17000 – Conformity assessment – Vocabulary and general principles

ISO/IEC 17011 – General requirements for accreditation bodies accrediting conformity assessment bodies

IAF PL 2 - Bylaws of the International Accreditation Forum Inc.

IAF PL 6 - IAF Memorandum of Understanding

IAF ML 4 - Policies and Procedures for a Multilateral Recognition Arrangement (MLA) on the Level of Single Accreditation Bodies and on the Level of Regional Groups

IAF PL3 - Policies and Procedures on the IAF MLA Structure and for Expansion of the Scope of the IAF MLA

3. TERMINOLOGY

3.1 The terms and definitions used in this procedure are based on ISO/IEC Guide 2 and ISO/IEC 17000 except as noted below:

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- “Accreditation Body” includes bodies which offer accreditation services in accordance with ISO/IEC 17011 and accredit CABs to issue certificates of conformity with a standard, such as for management systems, products or personnel.
 - “Association Body” includes members of IAF consisting of organisations or associations representing the interests within an economy, region or internationally, of a like group of entities that engage in, are subject to, make use of, accept or rely on, programs accredited by Accreditation Body Members of IAF, and which support the objectives of IAF (refer to www.iaf.nu, IAF PL2).
 - “MoU” means the Memorandum of Understanding signed by all members of IAF (refer to www.iaf.nu, IAF PL6).
 - “MLA” means IAF Multilateral Recognition Arrangement(s) among Accreditation Body Members (refer to www.iaf.nu, IAF ML4).
 - “Regional Accreditation Groups” includes regional groupings of Accreditation Bodies granted IAF membership status in order to promote the effective implementation of the IAF MLA within the recognised regions (refer to www.iaf.nu, IAF PL2).

4. IAF RESPONSIBILITY FOR COMPLAINTS

4.1 Complaints submitted to IAF shall be limited to concerns or issues regarding IAF, IAF Members and/or their accredited CABs.

4.2 Complaints against IAF shall be actioned in accordance with the applicable clauses of Section 5.

4.3 If a complaint is made about the activities of an IAF Member, whether from a third party or another IAF Member, the principal role of IAF in relation to the immediate issue is an indirect one of ensuring that the affected IAF Member itself has first had the opportunity to resolve a particular matter, through its own complaints handling procedure, and through direct discussions between the IAF Member and the complainant.

4.4 Complaints submitted regarding a specific CAB must be referred to the relevant Accreditation Body(ies) for investigation and resolution through the Accreditation Body’s(ies’) own complaints handling procedure(s) and/or the CAB’s complaints handling procedure, as appropriate.

4.5 It is the responsibility of the complainant to provide relevant documentation to IAF to demonstrate that the complaint has been considered and finalised in accordance with the IAF Member's own complaint handling procedure.

4.6 If the IAF Member has not been able to make satisfactory progress in the resolution of a complaint within a reasonable length of time (normally 6 months), the complainant has the right to refer the matter to IAF for resolution using this complaints procedure.

Note: It is expected that validated complaints not requiring an on-site investigation would normally be resolved within 6 months. The IAF Member should keep the complainant informed of progress being made in dealing with the complaint and, if possible, make reasons for delays plausible. (see 5.2 and 5.3)

5. IAF COMPLAINTS INVESTIGATION PROCESS

5.1 All complaints shall be lodged in the first instance with the IAF Secretary. The IAF Secretary shall promptly acknowledge in writing the receipt and subject of the complaint or the rejection of the complaint (with written justification) to the complainant within 10 working days if it is not in accordance with, or has not been dealt with, the requirements of Clause 4.

5.2 Upon receipt of a complaint, the IAF Secretary shall ensure that the substance of the complaint is clearly understood and documented, and that all relevant claims or statements made by the complainant or other interested parties can be properly validated in writing. Such validation is essential before the complaint can be considered as a formal complaint and any investigation initiated.

5.3 Validation means that all information can be confirmed as accurate and correct through an independent source, other than the complainant. It is the responsibility of the complainant to submit information that can be validated.

5.4 When the complaint has been satisfactorily validated the IAF Secretary shall formally bring the issue of the complaint, and any relevant facts, to the notice of the IAF Member, even where these have already been made known to the IAF Member by the complainant, and ask the Member to provide, within 30 working days, a full account as to how the complaint has been dealt with and the outcome.

5.5 If it is found that it has not been possible to resolve the matter satisfactorily or a report is not received from the IAF Member, the IAF Secretary will take the necessary action as set out in Clause 5.6 or 5.7, as appropriate.

5.6 If the complaint has been made against an IAF Member which is a member of a Regional Accreditation Group, the IAF Secretary will refer the complaint and all associated documentation to the relevant Regional Accreditation Group for investigation and resolution in accordance with the Regional Accreditation Group's complaints process. The IAF Secretary shall advise the complainant of the action taken and if the complainant is not satisfied by the action of the Regional Accreditation Group they can complain to the IAF.

5.7 In the case of a complaint that has been made against an IAF Member which is not a member of a Regional Accreditation Group, the IAF Secretary will refer the complaint and all associated documentation to the Chair of the IAF MLA Management Committee or the Vice Chair of IAF, as appropriate (for example if the complaint is against the organization which the Chair of the IAF MLA Management Committee is from). The Chair of the IAF MLA Management Committee (or the Vice Chair of IAF) will acknowledge receipt of the information relating to the complaint and will select a member(s) of the MLA Management Committee as a "designated investigator(s)" to undertake an investigation.

Note: Investigations are to be undertaken in the most efficient and effective manner. It is an expectation that investigations will be undertaken remotely. However if an on-site visit is necessary, the cost of the on-site visit will be borne by the body that is the subject of the complaint.

5.8 The Chair of the MLA Management Committee (or the Vice Chair of IAF) has the discretion to validate any and all information as he/she deems appropriate, at any time during the investigation process. If additional information is needed during this investigation, it is the responsibility of the designated investigator(s) to obtain such information.

5.9 Any individuals named as investigators that have a real or perceived conflict of interest or confidentiality issue with the information included within the complaint shall excuse themselves immediately from any discussions or potential receipt of information regarding the specific complaint.

5.10 All persons involved shall take necessary measures to preserve the confidentiality of information obtained during the investigation of the complaint. A complainant may request to remain anonymous to other parties involved in providing information for the investigation and the designated investigator shall take adequate steps to preserve confidentiality.

5.11 The designated investigator(s) shall proceed with a thorough investigation of the complaint and seek a resolution of the issue(s) involved. It is the responsibility of the designated investigator(s) to ensure that the investigation is performed in a timely manner.

Note: It is expected that validated complaints not requiring an on-site investigation would normally be resolved within 6 months. The designated investigator(s) should keep the Chair of the MLA Management Committee (or the Vice Chair of IAF, as appropriate – see 5.7).

5.12 When the issue has been investigated, the designated investigator(s) shall submit a draft copy of the report to the IAF Member to allow them to comment upon the accuracy of the facts. Once the accuracy has been established then the designated investigator(s) shall submit a detailed written report on the complaint, including a statement indicating whether the complaint has been found to have been substantiated or not, including recommendations on resolving the complaint, to the Chair of the MLA Management Committee (or the Vice Chair of IAF) and the IAF Secretary. The Chair of the MLA Management Committee (or the Vice Chair of IAF) shall decide if the report/recommendations are likely to be satisfactory in terms of resolving the matter. The Chair of the MLA Management Committee (or the Vice Chair of IAF) shall make or request any amendments to the report/recommendations considered necessary and when satisfied shall forward the final outcome to the IAF Secretary. The final outcome shall include a recommendation on action(s) to be taken, if any, in relation to the complaint. If grounds have been found for the IAF Executive Committee to consider taking remedial action, the report shall recommend the specific action to be taken.

5.13 The IAF Secretary shall notify the complainant in writing and the IAF Member of the final outcome of the complaint.

5.14 The IAF Secretary shall maintain a detailed and complete record of the receipt, handling and outcome of every complaint. The Secretary shall submit a summary of all complaints handled since the previous meetings to each meeting of the IAF Executive Committee.

6. TIMING OF COMPLAINTS PROCESS

6.1 If the complainant is unable to submit all necessary information within 30 days of the submission of the original information to enable the IAF Secretary to validate the complaint, the IAF Secretary shall close the complaint and inform the complainant of the closure.

6.2 The IAF Secretary shall refer a validated complaint to the relevant IAF Regional Accreditation Group or Chair of the MLA Management Committee (or the Vice Chair of IAF) within 5 working days of concluding that the information relating to the complaint can be validated.

6.3 For those complaints actioned in accordance with Clause 5.6, the designated investigator(s) shall complete the investigation and provide a written report to the IAF Secretary and the Chair of the MLA Management Committee (or the Vice Chair of IAF) as soon as possible. If the investigation has not been finalized within 6 months of the investigator(s) being appointed a written progress report shall be prepared and forwarded to the IAF Secretary and the Chair of the MLA Management Committee (or the Vice Chair of IAF, as appropriate).

Note: It is expected that both the complainant and IAF Member will assist the investigator complete their work in a timely manner. It is expected that the complainant and IAF Member will provide requested information within 10 working days of the request.

6.4 The IAF Secretary shall forward the final outcome to the complainant within 5 days of receipt from the Chair of the MLA Management Committee (or the Vice Chair of IAF).

7. RECONSIDERATION OF THE COMPLAINT INVESTIGATION OUTCOME

7.1 The complainant may request the IAF to reconsider the outcome of their complaint by sending the request to the IAF Secretary within 30 working days of receiving the final outcome of the complaint.

7.2 Any request to reconsider a final outcome shall be heard by the IAF Executive Committee and shall be conducted to ensure that the investigation was performed in full conformance with this complaints procedure.

7.3 The Executive Committee may request the Chair of the MLA Management Committee (or the Vice Chair of IAF) to reopen or reconsider any aspect of the investigation, with a maximum period for resolution of 30 working days.

7.4 The decision made by the Executive Committee shall be conveyed to the complainant by the IAF Secretary, shall be final and the complaint closed.

End of Procedure for the Investigation and Resolution of Complaints.

Further Information

For further information on this document or other IAF documents, contact any member of IAF or the IAF Secretariat.

For contact details of members of IAF see the IAF website: <http://www.iaf.nu>.

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8. Annex A – Process flow