

Complaints and Appeals Policy

Section 5 in the *Quality Enhancement Handbook for Icelandic Higher Education (2nd ed.)* is devoted to complaints and appeals. The Board defines complaints as “any dissatisfaction with the services, actions or behaviour of any individual or group acting in a formal capacity on behalf of the Quality Board”. An appeal is specifically defined in the *Handbook* as “a challenge to a specific judgement in relation to IWR”.

Complaints. The *Handbook* lays out the processes for raising complaints, starting from the relatively informal, direct approach close to the source and time of the occurrence giving rise to the complaint, escalating through to the formal processes involving the Board. Where local resolution of a complaint is not possible, the complainant has ten days within which to raise the matter in writing with the Board Manager who must acknowledge receipt within five days. Normally the Manager will deal personally with the issue and respond in writing within a maximum of four weeks. The Board Manager may consult with a neutral Board member (but not the Chair) in reaching a conclusion. If the resolution offered by the Board Manager is not considered acceptable, within ten days the complainant should state this in writing to the Board Chair who will review all the available evidence. The Chair may involve a neutral Board member in this process who has had no previous involvement in the case. The Chair has ten days to respond in writing to the complainant indicating the Chair’s judgement on the case. This decision is final; no further appeal is possible within the Board processes. If the complaint is about the Manager or involves the Manager in any way, an alternative route is provided through a neutral Board member.

Appeals. The *Handbook* clearly indicates that an appeal can only be made against a “limited confidence” or “no confidence” judgement. It is also clearly stated that “the only grounds for an appeal relate to procedure: Irregularity of such significance that the legitimacy of decisions is called into question”. Any appeal should be made only after the institution has received the final draft Report, that is the version that has been signed off by the Board. All communications related to an appeal should be through the Board Manager. If the Board Manager is implicated, the appeal would be through an identified neutral Board member. Formal written notice of the intention to make an appeal should be received by the Board within 14 days of the institution’s receipt of the final draft Report. If the institution wishes to proceed with its appeal, the formal case should be submitted in writing, normally to the Board Manager, within a further two weeks, that is a total of 28 days from receipt of the final draft Report. Normally the process of resolving an appeal will be completed within a further four working weeks. Initially, the Manager will request a written response to the appeal from the Review Team Chair (in consultation with the Team members). The Chair’s response will be shared for information only with the institution. The Board will then appoint an independent adjudicator drawn from the IWR reviewers experienced in Icelandic IWR but with no connection either to the institution or to any of the original Team members. The adjudicator, supported by the Board Manager if requested and appropriate, will consider the facts carefully and form a view on the appeal. If the independent adjudicator concludes that there are no substantive grounds for the appeal the institution will be informed of this fact, the original judgement will stand, and the Board will proceed to publish the Report complete with the judgements. If, however, the Independent Adjudicator

concludes that there are reasonable grounds for the appeal, a Stage 2 Appeal panel will be set up comprising three independent international experts who have experience of the Icelandic QEF. The Stage 2 Appeal Panel will meet (in person or electronically) to review the appeal and the report of the appeal's consideration at Stage 1. The Stage 2 Appeal Panel must reach a conclusion by the end of this meeting. It may either decide to "uphold the original IWR judgement(s) or remand back to the Board". The ruling of the Stage 2 Appeal Panel is final within the QEF processes. If the original judgements are upheld, the Board will then proceed to publish the Report including its judgements. If the Stage 2 Panel has upheld the appeal, it will also recommend to the Board consequential action. The action can be to: set aside the Report and undertake a fresh IWR in circumstances where the reason for upholding the appeal is so serious as to render the whole process questionable; or, uphold the Report with amendments and/or altered judgements which will then be published in this revised form.