



# INTERNATIONAL SEED TESTING ASSOCIATION (ISTA)

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## Procedure Appeals and Complaints Procedure

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## **SCOPE**

The scope of this document is to describe the process for handling complaints submitted to the ISTA Secretariat; to ensure that complaints and appeals are followed-up in a systematic way in order to enhance customer satisfaction and enable continuous improvement.

## **RELATED DOCUMENTS**

Admin-F-27-Complaints and Appeals

Admin-F-28 CAPA general

Admin-P-07 NCW and CAPA Procedure

Admin-P-03 Management Review Procedure

Acc-D-01-Procedures for Termination, Suspension and Withdrawal of ISTA Accreditation

Acc-F-29-CAPA Acc

## **RESPONSIBILITY**

ISTA Secretariat staff: for notifying Quality Manager on received complaints; for acting on complaints and appeals

Secretary General: for deciding whether the appeals and complaints are valid; for monitoring and approving the actions on appeals and complaints; for contacting AWG and ECOM if required; for discussing the appeals and complaints with concerned sides; for communicating with concerned sides the possible corrective actions

Quality Manger: for coordinating the corrective actions and tracing the actions progress; for compiling the action report and submitting it to the SG for the approval

ECOM: to consider the appeals against suspension and/or withdrawal of the accreditation

## **ABBREVIATIONS**

HoAT: Head of Accreditation and Technical Department

AWG: Accreditation Working Group

SG: Secretary General

QM: Quality Manager

ECOM: ISTA Executive Committee

NCW: Non-conforming Work

CAPA: corrective and preventive actions

## **DEFINITIONS**

Corrections: immediate actions taken to correct a non-conformity without removing the root cause

Corrective actions: actions taken to eliminate the root cause of an identified non-conformity and to prevent the recurrence

Preventive actions: actions taken to eliminate or reduce the possibility for a non-conformity to appear

## PROCESS DESCRIPTION

### General complaints

If an interested party considers action taken by staff of the ISTA in general or of the ISTA Secretariat as inappropriate, this party may file a complaint with ISTA:

1. A complaint must be submitted in written, by post or by e-mail.
2. It is evaluated whether the complaint is valid or not. This is done by the Quality Manager, in discussion with SG, HoAT and other process owners, responsible persons and/or staff members, whenever necessary. Where there is no basis for further action, the complainant is notified. In case of a justified complaint, relevant corrections are taken in order to remedy the problem which occurred.
3. The responsible persons for the corrective actions are assigned and the deadline for completing them is defined. A period of **30 days** from the complaint recording to defining appropriate action shall not be exceeded. The feedback to the complainant is provided regarding the progress in addressing the complaint.
4. Actions on complaints are handled by the assigned staff of the ISTA Secretariat with the Quality Manager guidance. Regarding the confidentiality requirements, certain complaint will be handled by the Secretary General in consultation with competent collaborators (HoAT, ECOM, AWG or external experts).
5. When addressing the complaint, the procedure for non-conforming work and corrective and preventive actions is followed. All steps are recorded in the form 'Admin-F-28 CAPA general' and 'Acc-F-29-CAPA Acc', as appropriate. For the official reporting to the complainant the form Admin-F-27-Complaints and Appeals may be used. This report has to be verified by the Secretary General.
6. Periodically, the complaints are evaluated and the analyses on how severe they were, is presented in the Management review report of the ISTA Secretariat.

### Appeals against suspension and/or withdrawal of accreditation

1. An organisation has the right to appeal decisions related to the accreditation process within **30 days** of receiving the notice if it feels the assessment process was not carried out fairly and properly in accordance with the published criteria in operation at the time of the original application.
2. Appeals against accreditation related decisions shall be submitted in writing giving arguments and evidence.
3. The appeal must be submitted either to the Secretary General or to the ISTA Accreditation and Technical Department by post or by e-mail. The appeal is handed over to the HoAT or his/her deputy who will file the appeal and forward it together with all relevant records and documents (e.g. audit report, reports of the proficiency test performance, etc.) to the Secretary General, AWG and the ECOM. The ECOM must be provided with the appeal and the necessary information within **30 days** of receipt of the written appeal.
4. Appeals are handled by the ECOM or by a panel appointed by the ECOM to deal with specific issues. The appeal must be dealt with within a period of **60 days**, starting from the date of submission of related documents to the ECOM.
5. Any appeals panel shall consist of at least the following members:
  - The ISTA Secretary General or his/her deputy

- A member of the Accreditation Working Group of the ECOM
  - A member from an ISTA accredited laboratory who is not currently serving on the ISTA ECOM
  - Any further member as appointed by the ECOM
  - No member of the audit team concerned shall be a member of this panel. However, the HoAT or his/her deputy may be required to join the panel as observer to advise on details of the case.
6. All correspondence shall be addressed to the Secretary General.
  7. In case that a panel was appointed it will make a recommendation to the ECOM within **30 days**.
  8. The ECOM shall reach a decision based on the panel's recommendation respectively based on the discussion of the ECOM.
  9. The Secretary General will notify the appealing organisation in writing within **30 days** of receiving the decision of the ISTA ECOM.
  10. The decision of the ECOM is final and the panel shall be disbanded.
  11. The terms of suspension or withdrawal remain in effect until a decision on the appeal is reached.
  12. The accredited organisation acknowledges and agrees that ISTA or any of ISTA's employees shall not be liable among others to an accredited organisation for any claims, damages, expenses, demands or losses. This includes lost revenue or profits, or any special, consequential or indirect damages whatsoever, arising from or incidental to the suspension or withdrawal of accreditation by ISTA. This also includes the event where, following an appeal instituted by an applicant's organisation, the accreditation status of the organisation is reinstated by ISTA at a later point.
  13. When an appeal is not upheld, the organisation which made the appeal is liable for any costs incurred by the ECOM or appeals panel, based on an hourly rate determined by the Secretary General. The Secretary General shall inform the organisation making the appeal of the hourly rate to be applied; this information will be supplied once the appeal has been received at the Secretariat, and before the ECOM or appeals panel begin their consideration of the appeal.
  14. All relevant information is recorded in the complaint form (Admin-F-27-Complaints and Appeals). All relevant files and communication in this matter is filed in the 'complaint' folder.

## ANNEX

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## DISTRIBUTION LIST

ISTA website  
 ISTA ECOM  
 ISTA Secretariat

## REVISION HISTORY

Version #	Changes
1.1	Specification of activities deleted Specification of responsibilities revised Distribution list optimised
1.2	Removing reference to the old Acc-D-03 Defining SG, HoAT and QM positions better