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Conformity assessment — Complaints and appeals — Principles and requirements

Évaluation de la conformité — Plaintes et appels — Principes et exigences

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Foreword

ISO (the International Organization for Standardization) is a worldwide federation of national standards bodies (ISO member bodies). The work of preparing International Standards is normally carried out through ISO technical committees. Each member body interested in a subject for which a technical committee has been established has the right to be represented on that committee. International organizations, governmental and non-governmental, in liaison with ISO, also take part in the work. ISO collaborates closely with the International Electrotechnical Commission (IEC) on all matters of electrotechnical standardization.

International Standards are drafted in accordance with the rules given in the ISO/IEC Directives, Part 2.

The main task of technical committees is to prepare International Standards. Draft International Standards adopted by the technical committees are circulated to the member bodies for voting. Publication as an International Standard requires approval by at least 75 % of the member bodies casting a vote.

In other circumstances, particularly when there is an urgent market requirement for such documents, a technical committee may decide to publish other types of normative document:

— an ISO Publicly Available Specification (ISO/PAS) represents an agreement between technical experts in an ISO working group and is accepted for publication if it is approved by more than 50 % of the members of the parent committee casting a vote;

— an ISO Technical Specification (ISO/TS) represents an agreement between the members of a technical committee and is accepted for publication if it is approved by 2/3 of the members of the committee casting a vote.

An ISO/PAS or ISO/TS is reviewed after three years in order to decide whether it will be confirmed for a further three years, revised to become an International Standard, or withdrawn. If the ISO/PAS or ISO/TS is confirmed, it is reviewed again after a further three years, at which time it must either be transformed into an International Standard or be withdrawn.

ISO/PAS 17003 was prepared by the ISO *Committee on conformity assessment* (CASCO).

Introduction

In 2001 the ISO Council asked its policy committee on conformity assessment (ISO/CASCO) to study and prepare a group of common elements for application in all future ISO documents on conformity assessment. Subsequent to this request ISO/CASCO approved the formation of Working Group 23, *Common elements in ISO/IEC Standards for conformity assessment activities*, to undertake this task.

The working group has identified several common elements, including among others

— impartiality,

— confidentiality,

— complaints and appeals,

— management systems.

This Publicly Available Specification (PAS) addresses the elements of “complaints” and “appeals” that appear in many of the ISO/IEC Guides and International Standards on conformity assessment.

The PAS covers the agreed principles that give substance to the elements of “complaints” and “appeals”, and also provides requirements clauses intended to be included in future ISO/IEC International Standards on conformity assessment.

This PAS is intended to apply to the drafting of documents on conformity assessment by ISO/CASCO.

Clause 4 (Background) contains comments on the importance to conformity assessment of the handling of complaints and appeals.

Clause 5 (Principles) contains statements that are intended to orientate ISO/CASCO working groups in their task of creating requirements to address complaints and appeals in their documents.

The requirements to be inserted into future ISO/CASCO documents that cover the common elements of “complaints” and “appeals” are detailed in Clause 6. ISO/CASCO has adopted a common structure for the presentation of requirements. Requirements should be grouped under one or more of the following headings:

a) General requirements;

b) Structural requirements;

c) Resource requirements;

d) Process requirements;

e) Management system requirements.

As such, each of the common elements will have requirements related to it grouped under one or more of the headings shown above.

This PAS is not intended to become a future International Standard. At the end of three years after the date of publication, it is expected this PAS will be withdrawn and its contents incorporated as appropriate in relevant ISO/CASCO normative and guidance documents.

Conformity assessment — Complaints and appeals — Principles and requirements

1 Scope

This Publicly Available Specification (PAS) contains principles and requirements for the elements of complaints and appeals as they relate to conformity assessment.

It is an internal tool for use in the ISO standards development process by ISO/CASCO working groups when addressing the elements of complaints and appeals in the preparation of their documents.

This Publicly Available Specification is not a stand-alone normative document to be used directly in conformity assessment activities.

2 Normative references

The following referenced documents are indispensable for the application of this document. For dated references, only the edition cited applies. For undated references, the latest edition of the referenced document (including any amendments) applies.

ISO/IEC 17000:2004, *Conformity assessment — Vocabulary and general principles*

3 Terms and definitions

For the purposes of this document, the terms and definitions given in ISO/IEC 17000 apply.

NOTE The use of the term “body” in this PAS means either an accreditation body or a conformity assessment body as defined in ISO/IEC 17000.

4 Background

4.1 The complaints received by bodies fall into one of two categories (see Figure 1). One category of complaints is about conformity assessment and/or appeals and the way that the conformity assessment system functions. This is the type of specific complaint that, if left unresolved, has the potential to bring both the body and the system into disrepute.

4.2 Another category of complaints is about the level of service quality or delivery. Dealing with these complaints is part of the normal business process, and is not the subject of this PAS. ISO 10002 gives guidance on the complaints-handling process that could be used to deal with these types of complaints.

4.3 The term “appeal” in this PAS should not be confused with the use of “appeal” in a legal sense. Appeals and the appeals process in the context of conformity assessment in this PAS is deliberately an internal process of the body whose conformity assessment result is being appealed against. The decision on the appeal remains that of the body that is being appealed against, and does not require a hearing or decision on the appeal by some external agency or court.

4.4 Handling of complaints and appeals may use parts of the same process.

4.5 Decisions on complaints or appeals should be recorded to provide a traceable resource for future complaints and appeal investigations and to ensure consistent decision-making and understanding of complaint or appeal trends.

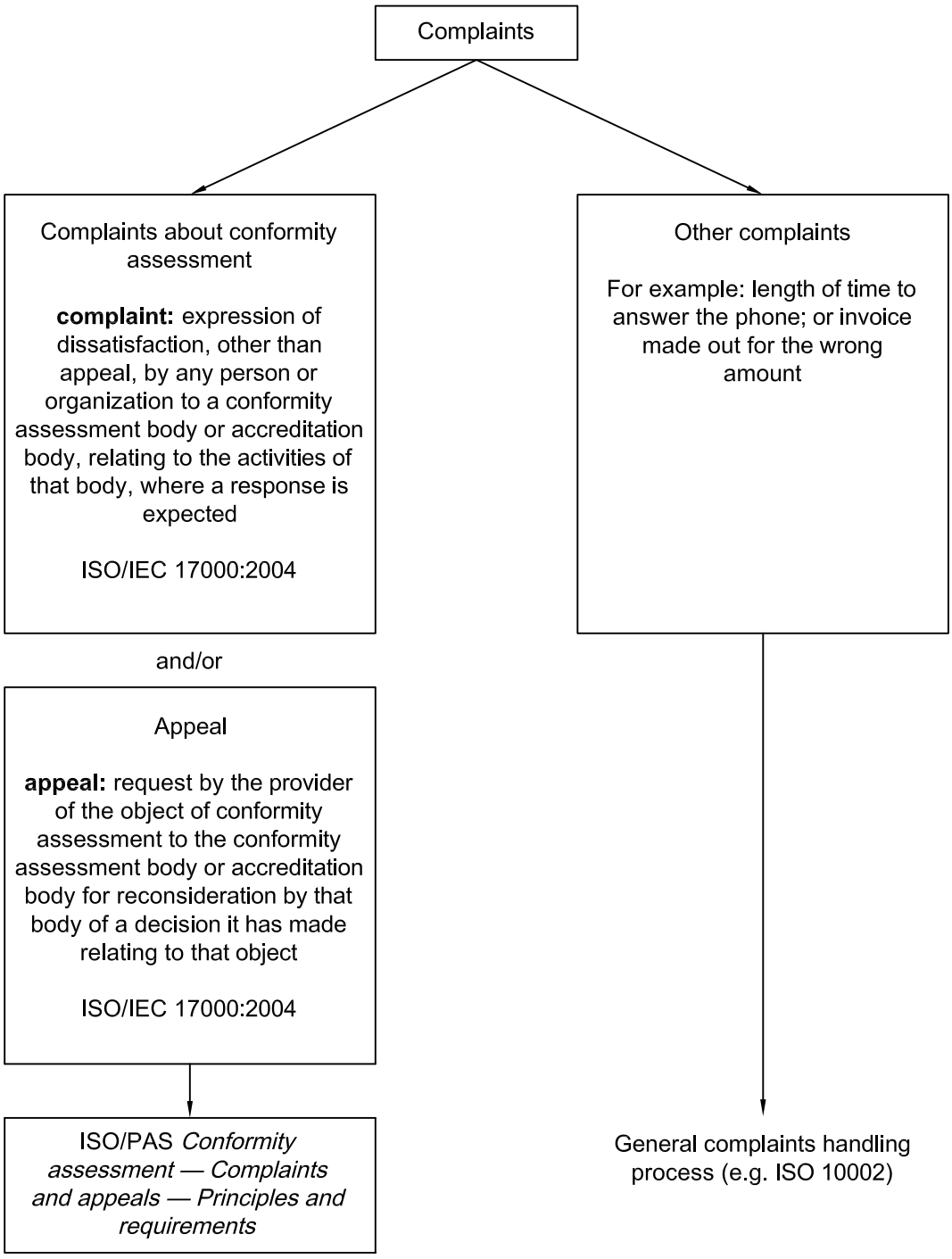

Figure 1 — Two types of complaints faced by accreditation bodies and conformity assessment bodies

5 Principle of handling of complaints and appeals

The effective resolution of complaints and appeals is an important means of protection for the body, its clients and other users of conformity assessment against errors, omissions or unreasonable behaviour. Confidence in conformity assessment activities is safeguarded when complaints and appeals are processed appropriately.

6 Requirements for complaints and appeals handling

6.1 General

In developing this PAS, it was recognised that there are varying degrees of specificity that ISO/CASCO working groups should consider. As a result the requirements in this clause are categorized into three levels of specificity as follows:

a) Obligatory: these are specific drafted requirements that shall be used by ISO/CASCO working groups where the element has to be addressed, without modification, except for substitution of more specific terms. For example, the phrase “Conformity assessment activities shall be undertaken impartially”, may be substituted more specifically with “Management system certification activities shall be undertaken impartially”. Justification is required from ISO/CASCO working groups that do not use these requirements when dealing with the relevant common element.

b) Recommended: these are drafted requirements that working groups should use if they wish to have a greater degree of specification. Modification is permissible.

c) Suggested: these are considerations that could be taken into account in the drafting of requirements by the ISO/CASCO working groups.

By providing for these different levels of specificity, the PAS achieves the ISO/CASCO intent to have an agreed statement on elements that are common to all conformity assessment activities, and at the same time maintains some flexibility for specific wording by individual ISO/CASCO working groups.

6.2 General requirements

The following requirements are obligatory.

a) The conformity assessment body shall have a documented process to receive, evaluate and make decisions on complaints and appeals.

b) A description of the handling process for complaints and appeals shall be available to any interested party on request.

c) Upon receipt of a complaint, the body shall confirm whether the complaint relates to conformity assessment activities that it is responsible for and, if so, shall deal with it.

d) The body shall be responsible for all decisions at all levels of the handling process for complaints and appeals.

e) Investigation and decision on appeals shall not result in any discriminatory actions.

6.3 Process requirements

6.3.1 Obligatory requirements

6.3.1.1 The handling process for complaints and appeals shall include at least the following elements and methods:

a) a description of the process for receiving, validating, investigating the complaint or appeal, and deciding what actions are to be taken in response to it;

b) tracking and recording complaints and appeals, including actions undertaken to resolve them;

c) ensuring that any appropriate action is taken.

6.3.1.2 The body receiving the complaint or appeal shall be responsible for gathering and verifying all necessary information to validate the complaint or appeal.

6.3.1.3 Whenever possible, the body shall acknowledge receipt of the complaint or appeal, and provide the complainant or appellant with progress reports and the outcome.

6.3.1.4 The decision to be communicated to the complainant or appellant shall be made by, or reviewed and approved by, individual(s) not involved in the original conformity assessment activities in question.

6.3.1.5 Whenever possible, the body shall give formal notice of the end of the complaint and appeals handling process to the complainant or appellant.

6.3.2 Explanatory text

A complaint-handling process in conformity with the requirements of ISO 10002 that addresses the specific requirements of a CASCO standard is deemed to meet the requirements of 6.3.1.1.

Bibliography

[1] ISO 10002, *Quality management — Customer satisfaction — Guidelines for complaints handling in organization*s

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