



THE SUSTAINABLE  
FIBRE ALLIANCE

## Appeals Procedure

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## Approvals

The signatures below certify that this Scheme Certification Manual has been reviewed, approved and demonstrates that the signatories are aware of all the requirements contained herein and are committed to upholding them.

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## Amendment Record

This Scheme Certification Manual is reviewed annually to ensure its continuing relevance to the systems and processes that it describes. A record of contextual additions or omissions is given below:

Page No.	Context	Revision	Date

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# 1. INTRODUCTION AND OBJECTIVE

The SFA defines an appeal as an application for a case to be reviewed by a higher authority to request a formal change to an official decision.

An appeal can be made by a Conformity Assessment Body client that disagrees with the outcome of an assessment decision and wishes to appeal against it.

It should be kept in mind that, whilst this policy provides guidance, it is not meant to supplement good judgment.

## 1.1 Purpose

All those who work for and represent the SFA in any capacity must adhere to the SFA's Code of Conduct and Good Practice and we are committed to providing an honest and quality service.

The SFA works in an open and accountable way that builds the trust and respect of all of our stakeholders.

In the unfortunate situation that an individual or organisation feels that the SFA or any of its partners has made a formal decision that you do not agree with, this policy is publicly in place to help guide in making an appeal and outlines how the SFA will handle this and respond.

This policy also intends to ensure that any appeals made are handled fairly, consistently, in a timely manner and, where possible, resolved to the satisfaction of the appellant, with good relationships being maintained and/or repaired.

The SFA values and takes all appeals seriously.

## 2. THE APPEALS PROCEDURE

### 2.1 The Appeal stages

If a client is dissatisfied with an assessment outcome they have the right of appeal. Where the assessment is awarded through a partner organisation e.g. a Conformity Assessment Body, the partner organisation's assessment appeals procedure should be followed.

#### Stage 1:

If clients are not satisfied with the assessor's decision and feedback, they have a right to appeal directly to the assessor who carried out the assessment within 5 working days. By exception, in extenuating circumstances, the SFA may allow appeals of assessment outcomes outside of this timeframe.

This appeal must be recorded by the assessor for sharing at standardisation meetings and for sharing with EQAs and SVs,. (an appeals form is provided with this policy) and clearly indicate:

- The points of disagreement and reasons.
- The evidence in the assessment report which the client believes meets the requirements of the performance criteria.
- The appeal must be submitted within five working days of receipt of the assessment outcome.
- The appeal response must be provided within 5 working days of receipt of the appeal.

The main reasons for an appeal are likely to be:

- The client does not understand why they are not yet compliant due to lack of, or unclear, feedback from the assessor.
- The client believes they are compliant and that the assessor has misjudged them or missed/misinterpreted some vital evidence.

In most cases it is hoped that this stage of the process will terminate the appeals procedure.

Clients are advised to keep their own copies of all documents used in the appeals procedure.

#### Stage 2:

Clients who are not satisfied with the outcome of their Stage 1 appeal can further appeal to the Lead Assessor or Internal Verifier (IV) within 5 working days. This appeal must be in writing, but need not repeat the detail provided at Stage 1 as all the documentation used at Stage 1 will be passed on to the Lead Assessor or IV. The Lead Assessor or IV will report back to the client in five working days.

### Stage 3: Appeals to the Scheme Holder:

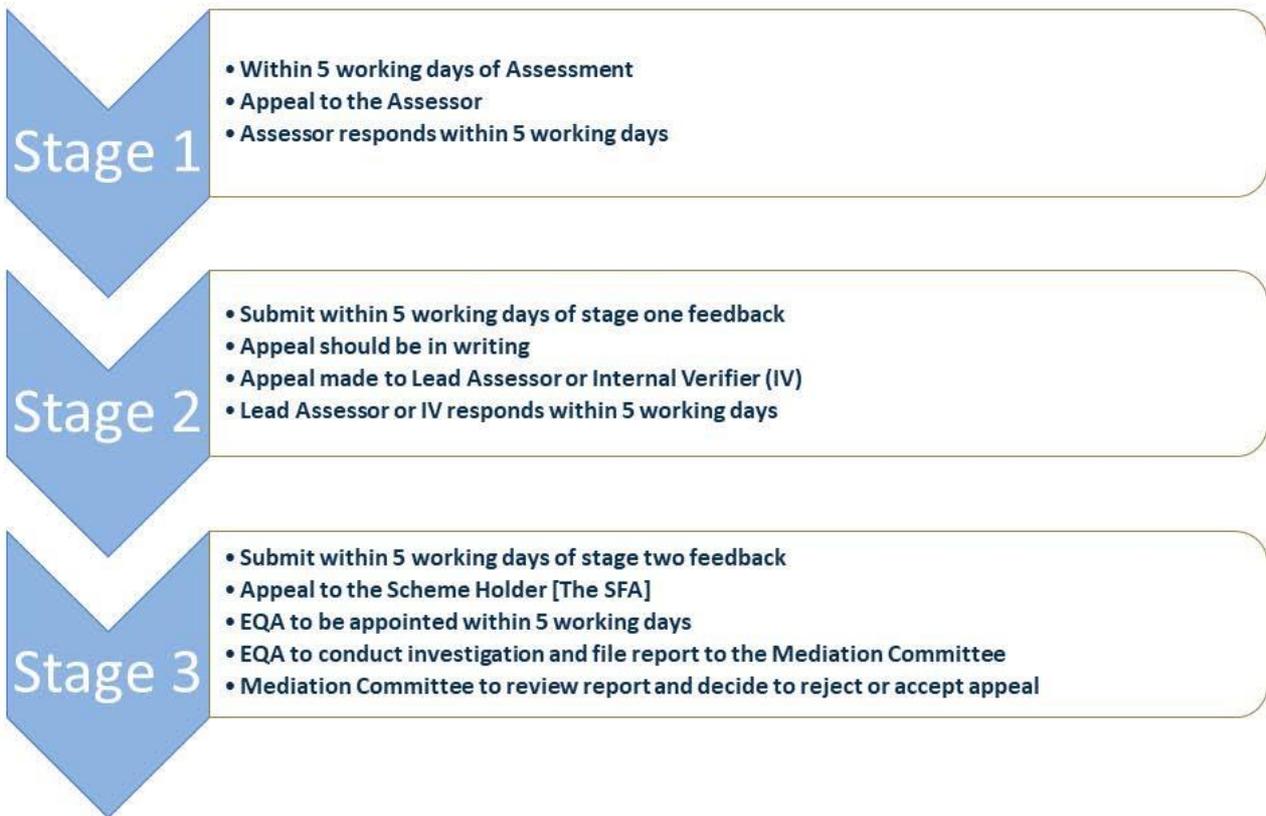
Clients who are not satisfied with the outcomes of Stage 1 and 2 of the Appeals Procedure may then appeal to the Scheme Holder, in this case the Sustainable Fibre Alliance (SFA).

This appeal must be in writing to the Chief Executive of the SFA (or person advised by the SFA), and be accompanied by copies of all the documentation used in Stages 1 and 2. The Conformity Assessment Body will provide the information of the appeal and will facilitate arrangements where required. There must also be evidence that clients have exhausted all the relevant stages of appeals procedures.

An investigation will be undertaken by an External Quality Assurer appointed by the SFA. On receipt of a report, the application will be considered by the SFA's 'Mediation Committee'. This consideration will lead to one of two decisions:

1. The Mediation Committee supports the decision of the External Quality Assurer
2. The appeal may be rejected or upheld.

### The Appeal structure



## 3. DATA PROTECTION AND PROVISIONS

All appeals information will be handed sensitively, and confidentially where required, and will be processed in accordance with data protection principles as set out in the Data Protection Act 2018.

### 3.1 Responsibility

Overall responsibility for this policy and its implementation lies with the SFA's trustees, who empower and expect the Senior Management Team (SMT) internally and in working with those externally to implement the policy and report back to the SFA's trustees on any emerging issues.

### 3.2 Confidentiality

Where appellants raising a confidential concern, their identity will not be further disclosed to persons not involved in the assessment or certification process without the appellant's consent.

### 3.3 Timings

The SFA aim to resolve all appeals as quickly as possible. However, inevitably some issues will be more complex and therefore may require longer to be fully and properly investigated. Consequently, all timescales outlined in this document regarding handling and responding to appeals are indicative. If a matter requires a more detailed investigation, an interim response will be sent to the appellant, describing what is being done to deal with the appeal and when a full response can be expected.

### 3.4 Review and availability

The SFA will ensure that this Appeals Procedure is made publicly available and the SFA will regularly review the Appeals Procedure. Additionally, this procedure may be updated to reflect any identified need for change that arises through its operation.