

Complaints and Appeals Procedure

Document Owner: Director of Development

Approved By: Director of Development

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1. Purpose

The Vegetarian Society aims to operate its certification schemes fairly, consistently and transparently.

This procedure describes how complaints and appeals relating to the Vegetarian Society's certification schemes are received, investigated and resolved.

2. Scope

This procedure applies to:

- applicants seeking certification;
- certified businesses;
- complaints relating to the operation of the certification schemes;
- appeals against certification decisions.

It does not apply to general customer service enquiries or complaints unrelated to certification.

3. Definitions

Complaint

A complaint is an expression of dissatisfaction regarding the operation or administration of the certification scheme.

Examples include:

- delays in processing;
- communication issues;
- concerns about the conduct of staff;
- concerns regarding the operation of the certification process.

Appeal

An appeal is a request for a certification decision to be reconsidered.

Examples include:

- refusal of certification;
- withdrawal of certification;
- disagreement with an ingredient assessment;
- disagreement with the interpretation of certification criteria.

4. Complaints

Complaints should be submitted to the Vegetarian Society as soon as reasonably practicable.

Where possible, complaints should include:

- applicant details;
- product(s) concerned;
- description of the issue;
- supporting information.

Complaints will normally be acknowledged within five working days.

The Head of Sales will normally investigate complaints in the first instance.

Where appropriate, complaints may be escalated to the Director of Development.

The outcome of the investigation will be communicated to the complainant together with any actions to be taken.

5. Appeals

Applicants who disagree with a certification decision may submit an appeal.

Appeals should explain:

- the decision being challenged;
- why the applicant believes the decision should be reconsidered;
- any additional evidence supporting the appeal.

Appeals will normally be reviewed by a manager who was not directly responsible for the original assessment wherever practicable.

Where specialist technical advice is required, the Director of Development may consult an independent technical expert.

The outcome of the appeal will be communicated to the applicant together with the reasons for the decision.

The decision following appeal shall normally be final.

6. Records

The Vegetarian Society will retain records of:

- complaints;
- appeals;
- investigations;
- decisions;
- actions taken.

These records may be reviewed periodically to identify opportunities for continual improvement.

7. Continuous Improvement

Complaints and appeals provide valuable feedback on the operation of the certification schemes.

Where recurring issues are identified, the Vegetarian Society will review its procedures, guidance or certification standards to reduce the likelihood of similar issues occurring in future.