

Complaints

A laboratory will sooner or later have to deal with customers that are complaining on the laboratory and its activities.

According to ISO 17025 a complaint is an expression of dissatisfaction by any person or organization to a laboratory, relating to the activities or results of that laboratory, where a response is expected.

The following process may be used (see also figure 1). The order between the different steps may vary especially step 2,3 and 4.

- 1) The laboratory receives a complaint. It is not necessary that the complaint is written.
- 2) The incoming complaint is recorded in the laboratories system for handling of complaints. There are commercial systems available, but a spread-sheet can function as well. All relevant information regarding the complaint shall be recorded in the system.
- 3) If possible, the complainant is informed that the laboratory has received the complaint and if it is related to the laboratory's activities. Preferably the complainant is informed about a planned deadline for the decision.
- 4) The laboratory appoints a person responsible for investigating the complaint. The investigator should if possible not have been involved in the laboratory activities related to the complaint. The person who shall make the decision should preferable be appointed at the same time if this not done by another process e.g. by letting the laboratory manager make all decisions regarding complaints.
- 5) The investigator is to start investigating the complaint. If possible, the complainant is to receive progress reports.
- 6) The investigator reports the outcome of the investigation and recommendations to the person responsible for the decision
- 7) A decision is taken by the person responsible for this.
- 8) The complainant is informed about the decision
- 9) The decided actions are performed by the laboratory
- 10) The complaint is, together with other complaints, discussed at the management review, e.g. to follow trends and to make decisions on specific actions.

In most cases it is clear who the complainant is. But if the complainant is anonymous the complaint should be handled according to the above process as far as possible but 3) parts of 5) and 8) are omitted.

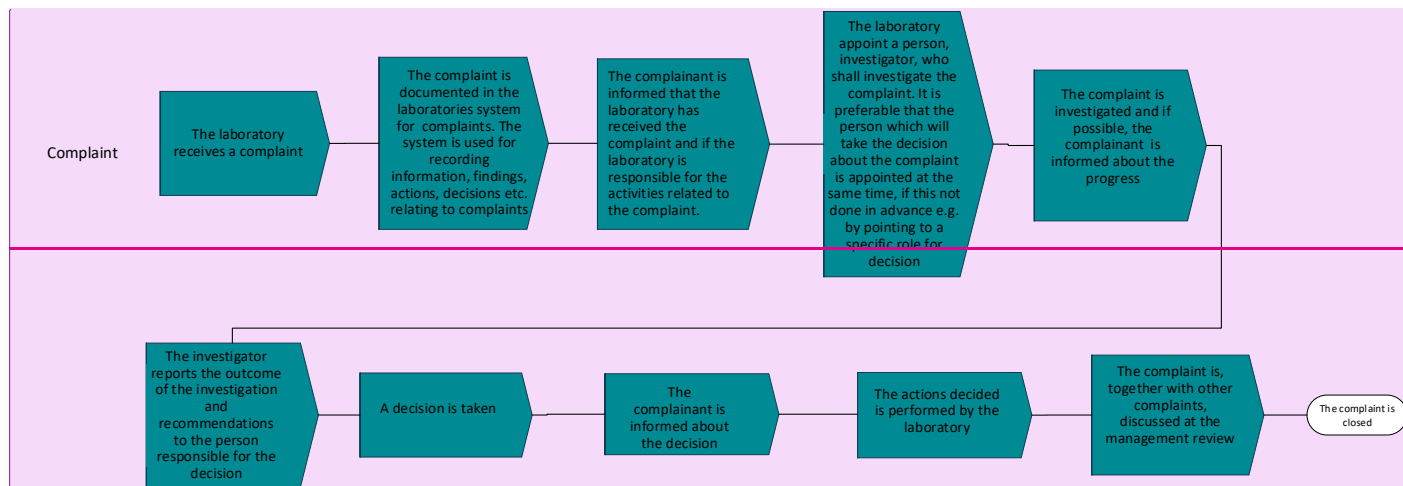
The process for handling of complaints shall, according to ISO 17025, be available to any interested party on request. Therefore, it is a good idea to have the process on the laboratory's web page.

The decision about the complaint should preferable be taken by a person not involved in the original laboratory activities in question. If this is not possible it should at least be reviewed and approved by an independent person. This can be performed by external personnel.

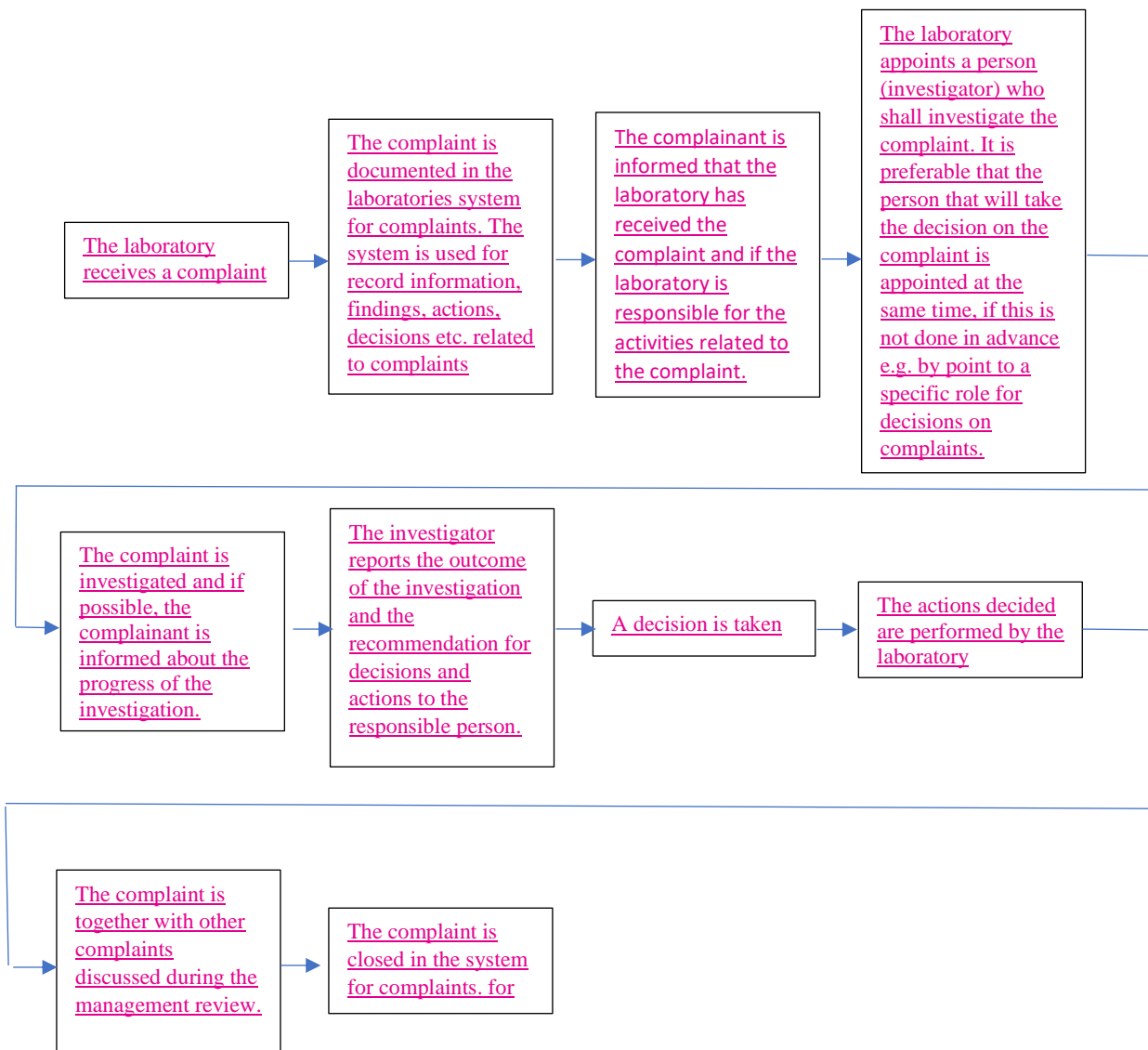
Normally if the complaint is valid or partly valid the investigation shall lead to actions to resolve the problems. The actions shall be followed up to ensure that they have been successful.

There are other processes that resemble the complaint process e.g. appeals. It may be a good idea to combine such processes.

Complaint process



[JW1]



What is considered a complaint?

Even though the 17025 definition is reasonably clear it might be difficult to decide whether feedback from a customer is a complaint or just feedback. Discussions between the laboratory and the customer during an assignment is normally not considered as complaint. Another example of feedback that is not considered complaint is when the customer requires a new version of the test report due to some spelling mistakes.

To avoid discussions about whether a customer's feedback should be regarded as a complaint or just as feedback, the laboratory should have decided about its definition of complaints, preferably before the complaints handling starts.

References:

[1] ISO 1 General requirements for the competence of testing and calibration laboratories (ISO/IEC 17025:2017)

