

Complaints Handling Procedure

Final Draft Version - Printed version is not valid. Latest version can be found in Z drive.

Procedure owner: Nikolaos Koufos

Version	Date	Description of Version	Author
1	October 2006	Implementation	QA Officer
2	October 2007	Follow-up internal audit	Advisor to the Directors
3	October 2009	Follow-up internal audit; change of complaint definition	QA Officer – Dusica Naumovska
4	November 2010	Follow-up internal audit; possibility to transfer a complaint to Crisis Communication procedure	QA Officer – Karen Blanken
5	November 2012	Implementation of independent committee	QA Officer – Karen Blanken
6	July 2014	Implementation of Whistle-blower Policy	QA Officer – Karen Blanken
7	December 2015	Changing recipient for emails sent to the complaints mailbox	Advisor to the Directors – Kaan Ozdurak
8	May 2019	Incorporation of flowchart, separation between complaints handling procedure and whistle-blower policy, new tools and guidelines on how to respond to complaints	Nikolaos Koufos

Abbreviations

- SIS** Student Information System
- PO** Programme/project Officer
- CO** Communications Officer
- PM** Programme/project Manager
- CM** Country Manager
- CC** Communications Coordinator
- QC** Quality Coordinator

Purpose

The purpose of this procedure is to ensure that SPARK continuously improves the services it provides to its customers and maintains a good reputation among its stakeholders.

Definitions

A SPARK customer is defined as a person that has been in actively contact with SPARK (i.e. beneficiary, donor staff member or local partner organisation staff member).

A complaint is defined as the dissatisfaction expressed by the customer relevant to SPARK's services or staff.

Scope

This procedure is applicable to SPARK staff members responsible to handle complaints received by SPARK's customers.

Local partner organisations' staff members and external contractors of SPARK are expected to cooperate in the implementation of this procedure, as per their relevant contracts (including memorandums of understanding) established with SPARK.

Complaints Submission Channel

A complaint is handled through this procedure, when submitted to SPARK through the [Complaint Form](#) in SPARK's website.

Complaints that are expressed to SPARK staff members in person, through phone calls, through emails sent to SPARK country-offices' inboxes, through emails sent to SPARK staff members inboxes, through student cases in SPARK's SIS, through SPARK's social media accounts, through a letter, etc. the relevant SPARK staff member who receive these complaints has to fill out the Complaint Form in SPARK's website with information relevant to the complaint, on behalf of the customer.

Possibility for Appeal

In case a customer is unsatisfied with the way that his/her complaint has been handled, then he/she can submit a written appeal to SPARK by sending an email to the organisation's Director of Programmes Michel Richter at m.r.richter@spark-online.org.

Risks in Handling Complaints

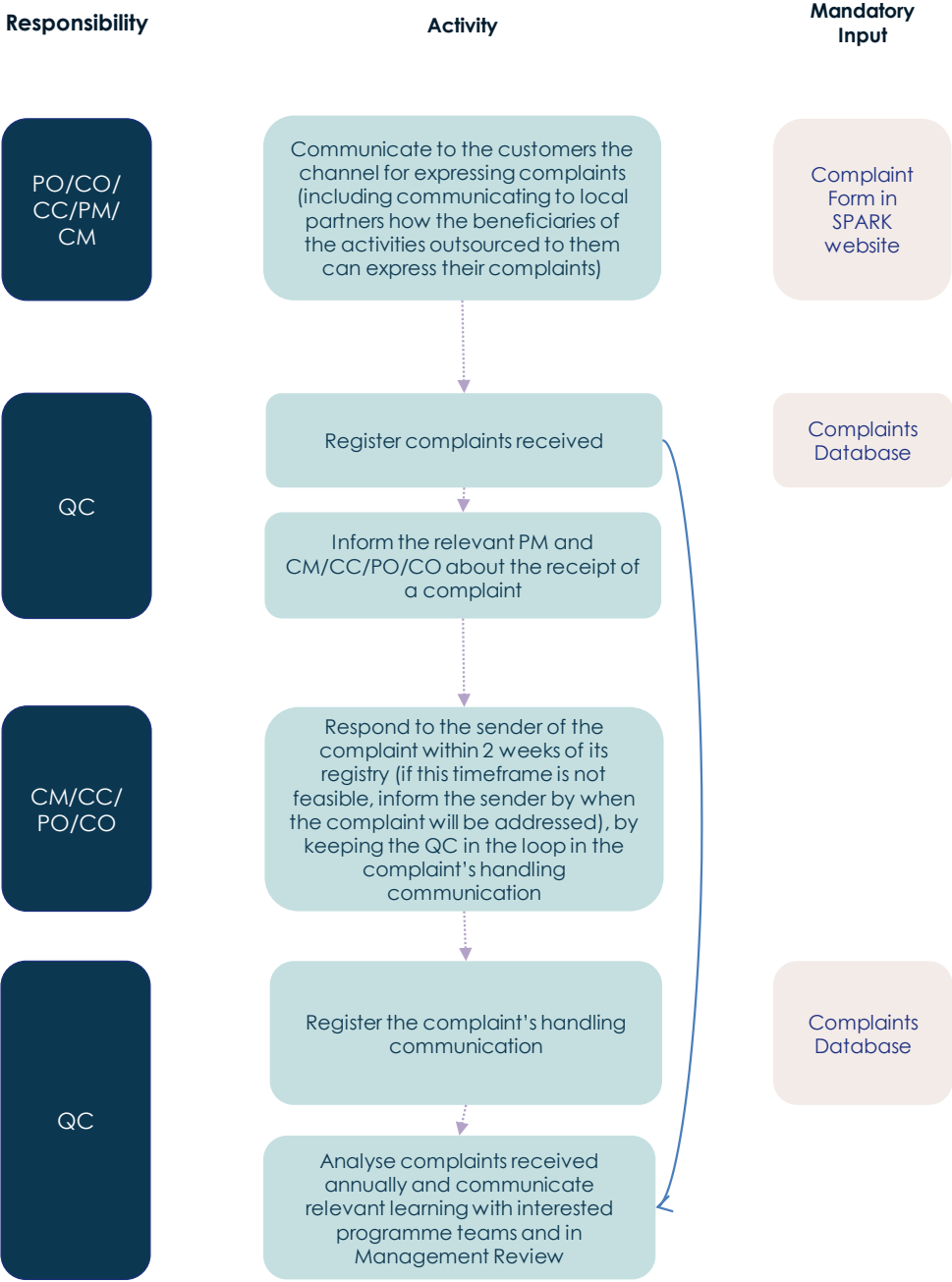
In receiving and addressing complaints, the following risks have been identified:

- Complaints do not reach SPARK, due to insufficient awareness of the procedure among SPARK's customers;
- Damaged reputation and/or financial loss for SPARK, due to ineffective handling of complaints;
- No improvement for SPARK, due to not learning from received complaints.

Exceptions to the Procedure

Complaints submitted through the mentioned above channels that refer to cases of suspected or observed misconduct conducted by SPARK staff will not be handled according to this Complaints Handlings Procedure, but through the [Whistleblower Procedure](#).

Procedure



Guidelines for Responding to Complaints

In responding complaints received, it is recommended to take into account the following:

- The communication for addressing complaints has to start by thanking the customer for submitting his/her complaint;
- The tone of the response to the sender of the complaint is personalised, friendly and positive;
- Complaints received have to be addressed by acknowledging that their senders know something that SPARK does not know; something has gone wrong and the complaint provide us with the opportunity to correct it and improve in general;
- It can be difficult to remain impassive in the face of criticism, but an emotional response will only serve to irritate the sender of the complaint further;
- When a customer submits a complaint, he/she wants to:
 - be patiently/actively listened to
 - be heard but not judged
 - have their point of view understood
 - be given an explanation
 - be ensured that SPARK will address the complaint appropriately and that measures will be taken in order to improve its services
 - have corrective action taken as soon as possible
 - be given an apology, if appropriate
 - never be blamed
 - be assured the problem won't happen again
 - be assured that he/she will not suffer any adverse consequences from submitting the complain