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General Principles for the Assessment of Certification Bodies for Management System Certification

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CHANGES SINCE LAST EDITION

The document has undergone minor revision and update to reflect current practice.

1 INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 One of the functions of UKAS is to assess and accredit the competence of certification bodies to carry out certification of management systems in specified areas and subsequently to ensure by monitoring that the required standards are maintained.
- 1.2 Each applicant certification body provides information to UKAS on its activities, organisation and staff.
- 1.3 Assessment of the competence of a certification body is carried out using document review, assessment of the certification body's management control centre and other locations, witnessed audits and/or post assessment reviews of certificated organisations.
- 1.4 The purpose of the assessment is to determine whether a certification body complies with the requirements of *ISO/IEC 17021 Conformity Assessment - Requirements for bodies providing audit and certification of management systems* (hereafter referred to as 'the Standard') and applicable guidance documents.
- 1.5 All information obtained before, during or after assessment, including the fact that a particular certification body has applied for accreditation, or that an application has been deferred or rejected, will be treated as strictly confidential by UKAS staff and assessors.
- 1.6 This document outlines how UKAS plans and conducts assessment, surveillance and reassessment visits to certification bodies working to the Standard on a four year cycle. It also refers to the assessment techniques normally used.
 - 1.6.1 Every organisation is unique and the assessment plan must recognise this. However, a structure is needed within which judgements are made. By outlining the minimum requirements this document provides such a structure.
 - 1.6.2 All circumstances cannot be anticipated and it may necessary to deviate from these requirements, in order to conduct an effective assessment. UKAS will provide the reason for the use of any alternative approach.

2 DEFINITIONS

- 2.1 Assessors - UKAS uses technical assessors with relevant specialist knowledge to assess and evaluate the competence of the certification body to perform the certifications for which accreditation is sought. Their activities are confined to assessing the certification body's activities for compliance with the requirements and reporting their findings to the certification body and to UKAS.
- 2.2 Technical Experts - UKAS may also use technical experts to work alongside Assessors to assist in the assessment process. This will normally be to assess the technical content of certification schemes, e.g., the criteria of technical competence for assessors, the suitability of training programmes, the adequacy of the competencies needs analysis etc.

- 2.3 Assessment Managers - UKAS employs Assessment Managers who are responsible for the management of the accreditation process, surveillance and reassessment cycle. Assessment Managers normally act as Lead Assessors and are responsible for identifying a suitably competent assessment team and for the planning and conduct of assessments.
- 2.4 Multi-location certification body - A certification body with a central office in which certain activities are performed or managed with one or more locations at which such activities are fully or partially carried out. All locations have a direct legal or contractual link with the central office of the certification body and are subject to the certification body's management system.

3 APPLICATION

- 3.1 On receipt of an application for assessment for accreditation from a certification body UKAS will appoint an Assessment Manager to be responsible for the accreditation process. The assessment manager will contact the certification body to:
- 3.1.1 confirm the standards and scope of certification for which the certification body is seeking accreditation;
 - 3.1.2 confirm the different locations from which the certification service is managed and/or delivered and whether key activities that are carried out at each of these;
- Note: Key activities include: policy formulation, process and/or procedure development and, as appropriate, contract review, planning conformity assessments, review, approval and decision on the results of conformity assessments.*
- 3.1.3 UKAS will provide an estimate of the effort (in man-days) that will be required to proceed to the next stage of the assessment process. The charges for the UKAS assessment activity are calculated by multiplying this effort by the daily rate in force at the time. Prior to any work being carried out, a quotation will be provided.

4 DOCUMENTATION REVIEW

- 4.1 The certification body's management system documentation will be examined for compliance with the Standard and relevant guidance documents.
- 4.2 The purpose of the documentation review is for UKAS to gain an understanding of the applicant body's legal constitution, governance, organisation structure, scope and location of activities, the management system and controls and the extent to which the accreditation requirements appear to have been addressed.

5 PRE-ASSESSMENT

- 5.1 A pre-assessment is normally carried out by the Assessment Manager at the central office of the certification body to:
- 5.1.1 discuss any findings related to the documentation review;
 - 5.1.2 seek further information on the management system;
 - 5.1.3 discuss the management controls covering the certification activities, including multiple locations, overseas and subcontracted activities etc;
 - 5.1.4 obtain any additional information necessary to develop the assessment plan and to produce the assessment quotation;
 - 5.1.5 agree the proposed scope of accreditation;
 - 5.1.6 determine the team requirements.
- 5.2 A report is prepared which includes observations raised and agreements made during the pre-assessment. The report recommends whether or not the certification body is sufficiently prepared to proceed with the assessment. If the recommendation is to proceed the Assessment Manager makes arrangements to plan the assessment.
- 5.3 The certification body may need to make changes to its policies, processes, procedures and practices prior to UKAS undertaking the assessment.

6 PLANNING THE ASSESSMENT

- 6.1 The Assessment Manager will determine the overall programme for the assessment including the activities that will be subject to witnessed audits.
- 6.2 Prior to assessment, the certification body will provide UKAS with a list of all forthcoming certification activities, the fields and types of activity, the assigned auditors and client details, from which the Assessment Manager selects the witnessed audits.
- 6.3 An assessment plan and a quotation will be forwarded to the certification body, normally 4 weeks in advance of the assessment.
- 6.4 The time required for assessment will be dependent on the complexity of the organisation, the geographical spread of its activities, the structure of the management system and the proposed scope of accreditation.
- 6.5 The following elements will need to be covered:
- 6.5.1 central office assessment.
 - 6.5.2 assessment of all locations where key activities take place.
 - 6.5.3 witnessed audits for different scopes and types [high/low risk activities] of certification.

- 6.6 The team for initial assessments will comprise a minimum of two persons, one of whom will be a permanent UKAS staff member, normally the Assessment Manager.
- 6.7 UKAS will inform the certification body of the names of the members of the assessment team in advance of the assessment. Certification Bodies have the right to object to the appointment of a nominated assessor(s) and in such cases UKAS will endeavour to offer an alternative. In the event that a suitable alternative cannot be identified, or the grounds for the objection are considered to be unreasonable, UKAS reserves the right to appoint the assessor(s) originally selected.

7 THE ASSESSMENT

- 7.1 The UKAS assessment team will seek to establish by using various techniques that:
- 7.1.1 the management system is appropriate to the certification body's needs, organisational arrangements, processes, scope and scale of its operations including multiple locations, overseas activities and client base;
 - 7.1.2 all of the requirements of the Standard have been satisfactorily addressed;
 - 7.1.3 the certification body has implemented all the requirements of its management system effectively;
 - 7.1.4 that UKAS can have confidence in the validity of the certification decisions made by the certification body.
- 7.2 Assessments will be reported in accordance with UKAS Publication GEN 3 *Reporting UKAS Assessments*. A UKAS Assessment Report will be issued on completion of the assessment, before leaving the assessment location or soon after, as agreed with the certification body. If the Assessment Report is not issued on the day of the assessment the UKAS Lead Assessor will provide an oral report to the certification body before leaving the assessment location. Alternatively, the Lead Assessor may agree with the certification body to issue an Executive Summary on the day and an Assessment Report on completion of all the assessment activities.
- 7.3 Where improvement action by the certification body is required following an initial assessment, normally a maximum of 3 months will be allowed for provision of evidence that the action has been carried out. It may be possible for the evidence to be provided by post although there will be situations where additional visits to the certification body are required to verify the effectiveness of the improvement actions. UKAS will review the evidence provided and decide upon its acceptability.

8 MULTI LOCATION CERTIFICATION BODIES

- 8.1 An applicant that operates from a central office and through a number of locations may seek a single accreditation.
- 8.2 On application, the certification body must indicate the number of locations where key activities take place. Information about any other locations and their range of activities shall also be provided.

- 8.3 At initial assessment UKAS will visit all locations where key activities are conducted or controlled that determine or demonstrate the effectiveness of the certification body's performance of the accredited certification. Any other locations may also be visited as necessary.
- 8.4 In accordance with EA and IAF Cross Frontier requirements UKAS may subcontract the assessment of a location outside the UK to another National Accreditation Body (NAB) that is a member of a relevant Multilateral Agreement (MLA) and with which UKAS has a specific agreement for this purpose.
- 8.5 UKAS will seek to establish using various techniques that:
- 8.5.1 all locations are operating under the same management system;
 - 8.5.2 all locations are included in the internal audit programme and central review process.
- 8.6 It will be necessary to assess the full range of accreditation scopes applied for. However, it will not normally be necessary to repeat the full range at each selected location.
- 8.7 Normally, each location as described in 8.3 will be visited at the same frequency as for a single site certification body. In certain circumstances a reduced frequency may be justified based using a risk based approach.
- 8.8 UKAS must be advised of any changes to location addresses, activities and countries in which they have certificated organisations.
- 8.9 The establishment of any new locations from which the certification body proposes to undertake any part of the certification process must be notified to UKAS before these can be included in the scope of accreditation; the need for assessment will be reviewed and, following the completion of any necessary assessment activities, the location will be added to the published details of the accreditation and included in the programme of surveillance and reassessment.
- 8.10 If UKAS raises findings that require improvement action at the central office or at any one of the locations, the improvement action shall apply to all relevant locations.
- 8.11 Failure by one location to comply with UKAS requirements may lead to removal of the location from the published details of the accreditation. If the cause of the nonconformity is lack of central control then the entire accreditation will be subject to review by UKAS and may lead to sanctions across all locations.

9 ACTIVITIES OUTSIDE THE UK

- 9.1 Certification bodies that have clients outside the UK to whom they intend offering UKAS accredited certification are required to provide UKAS with a list of the countries concerned, to enable UKAS to assess the controls necessary to manage an overseas client base.
- 9.2 Certification body locations [eg, branch offices, agencies, joint ventures etc] outside the UK will be subject to the same requirements as those located in the UK. Notwithstanding 8.4 above, UKAS will always conduct the assessment of the central office of a certification body at initial and reassessments, wherever it is located.

- 9.3 UKAS assessments are conducted and reported in English. Where a certification body's audits are to be conducted in a language other than English, an independent interpreter will be required; normally this would be from a National Accreditation Body [NAB] of the country concerned.

10 WITNESSED AUDITS

- 10.1 Witnessed audits are an essential part of the UKAS assessment of certification bodies and when deciding on the number and type needed to be undertaken the following aspects will be considered:
- 10.1.1 variety and risk associated with the products, services, processes, plant and countries involved;
 - 10.1.2 the certification body's procedures for selecting, training, authorising and monitoring auditors, having regard to the qualifications and experience required for different fields and types of certification;
 - 10.1.3 the internal auditing arrangements of the certification body;
 - 10.1.4 the locations from which auditors operate;
 - 10.1.5 any statutory requirements.
- 10.2 The minimum number of witnessed audits at initial assessment will normally be two. To ensure that a representative sample of the activities of the certification body is witnessed, as a guide UKAS aims to cover approximately one quarter of the scopes applied for through witnessed audits but may increase or decrease the number of witnessed where it can be justified.

11 SECTOR SCHEMES

- 11.1 A sector scheme may require a particular witnessed audit regime. Where this is the case UKAS will endeavour to select witnessed assessments that meet the scheme and UKAS standard requirements.
- 11.2 Sector schemes may also require specific actions to be undertaken as part of the office assessment. UKAS will make every effort to integrate the work into the "normal" assessment programme.
- 11.3 Where the use of specific experts is a scheme requirement, this may affect the time and costs to certification bodies.
- 11.4 UKAS has a nominated Assessment Manager to act as a focal point for each sector scheme.

12 SURVEILLANCE

- 12.1 Following accreditation, UKAS will check for continuing compliance with UKAS requirements by carrying out surveillance visits to certification bodies, initially six months after initial accreditation and then annually, with a reassessment in the fourth year.
- 12.2 It is essential that the assessment be contained within a practical timeframe to enable a judgement to be made on the effectiveness of the certification body at a particular point in time. Consequently for large certification bodies it may be necessary to conduct two, six-monthly surveillances rather than a single extensive annual surveillance.
- 12.3 The level of sampling of witnessed audits will depend on performance over the four-year cycle, the extent of any changes that have taken place, and the level of confidence that can be placed in the performance measures and control systems of the certification body. Quotations will be provided prior to any work being undertaken by UKAS.
- 12.4 Surveillance visits will be planned to cover the whole of the schedule of accreditation over the four-year cycle. Any revisions to the management system will be reviewed during these visits; extensive changes may require additional assessment time and a quotation will be provided for this additional work.
- 12.5 For multi-location organisations, each location will normally be visited at the same frequency as for a single site certification body but the frequency may differ depending on, for example, the extent of the activities at that location and the management controls demonstrated by the main office of the certification body.
- 12.6 Witnessed audits will be carried out at each surveillance visit. The same criteria used for assessment will be considered when determining the number and type of audits and the auditors to be witnessed. The minimum number of witnessed audits at surveillance is one per year.
- 12.7 Over the **first** four-year cycle a minimum of one assessment per scope will be normally witnessed. Where possible the assessment will be selected from the high technology end of the scope's range e.g., pressure vessels rather than door hinges. The number will be extended only if concerns are raised at an office assessment, from witnessing an audit or in connection with a complaint about the certification body's performance.
- 12.8 Where improvement action by the certification body is required the certification body must complete the improvement actions and provide evidence to UKAS normally within one month of the surveillance visit. When UKAS does not require evidence of clearance to be submitted the verification of the effectiveness of the actions taken will normally be carried out at the next visit to the certification body, but UKAS reserves the right to carry out this verification at any time after the agreed completion date.

13 REASSESSMENT

- 13.1 Reassessment visits will involve a comprehensive re-examination of the certification body's management system and certification activities and will be similar in approach and content to the initial assessment although the emphasis may be different dependent upon performance and changes over the past four year cycle.

- 13.2 The requirements for completion of close out of findings that require improvement action and submission of evidence to UKAS are as for surveillance (see 12.8).

14 EXTENSIONS TO SCOPE

- 14.1 Quality management system accredited scopes are described in terms of the 39 listed scopes set out in Annex 1 of IAF GD 2, either for the whole of a scope (full scope) or for defined limited activity within a scope (limited scope).
- 14.2 If a certification body has an existing limited scope within one of the 39 scope descriptions and wishes to do work in another area covered by the same scope heading, it must notify UKAS by an application made on UKAS form AC1. UKAS will determine what form of assessment may be necessary (see 14.3 below). Where frequent requests for extensions to scope are likely, the certification body should consider the benefits of seeking accreditation for a full scope.
- 14.3 Following receipt of an application for an extension to scope UKAS will determine whether or not there is a need for a central office and/or location assessment and/or witnessed audits to take place. Factors which will be taken into consideration will be the:
- 15.3.1 range of existing scope of accreditation;
 - 15.3.2 volume of business in the new scope area;
 - 15.3.3 the locations at which the extension to scope is sought;
 - 15.3.4 the risk (high/low) of the extension to scope.
- 14.4 Where possible and desirable, any additional work will be carried out at the next surveillance or reassessment visit. A quotation will be provided for the extra work associated with extension to scope. The estimated effort required for subsequent surveillance and reassessment will be reviewed and may be revised.

15 ACCREDITATION DECISIONS

- 15.1 A report will be issued to the certification body on completion of the assessment. It will include a recommendation regarding accreditation. The report and recommendation is also subject to review by independent UKAS staff for a decision following initial assessments, reassessments and any extension to scope. If the review identifies the need for any further information of action to be taken by the certification body, this will be requested by the Assessment Manager.
- 15.2 Following an initial assessment where the recommendation to accredit (in full or for a reduced scope) has been agreed by UKAS, the decision will be confirmed in writing with the Proposed Accreditation Details. A copy of the draft schedule and 4 year assessment effort estimate will also be provided to the certification body. The certification body shall agree these details before accreditation can be granted.

- 15.3 Once the assessment team is satisfied that all findings have been satisfactorily addressed, accreditation is granted. The grant letter is sent to the certification body with an Accreditation Certificate and a schedule detailing the agreed certification activities.
- 15.4 Where the assessment team is unable to recommend accreditation for the full scope of the application, UKAS will confirm the decision in writing within one month of the assessment visit.
- 15.5 If the certification body disagrees with the accreditation decision taken by UKAS, it may appeal. The appeal must be in writing and must be received by UKAS within one month of the decision letter. The UKAS Appeals Process is published on the UKAS website, www.ukas.com.