Accreditation: supporting effective policy delivery

The desire to deliver government policy in innovative and cost-effective ways is leading to the increasing use of accreditation across a wide range of Scottish Government policy areas including better regulation, good governance, fair markets and public confidence. Continuing pressure on public finances means that accreditation is seen as an effective market-led tool for delivering policy more efficiently.

The accreditation process determines, in the public interest, the technical competence and integrity of organisations offering testing, inspection, calibration, verification and certification services (collectively known as conformity assessment).

As the national accreditation body, UKAS is the only body recognised by Government to assess these types of organisations against internationally-recognised standards and it does so across all market sectors by offering a single, transparent and repeatable approach which:

- builds business and consumer confidence;
- is voluntarily embraced by business and other service providers;
- enables innovation in the private and public sectors;
- reduces the need for central and local government to employ its own specialist assessment personnel.

If you are responsible for setting or delivering policies that involve any form of independent evaluation, UKAS can help in a number of ways including defining your needs or designing an assessment or accreditation service to suit your policy requirements.

Accreditation in action: Food from farm to fork

There is a growing demand for quality produce both in Scotland and internationally. The quality of Scottish produce is a key element in ensuring Scotland has a sustainable and competitive agricultural sector. Membership of food quality assurance schemes not only safeguards the quality of Scottish produce but also provides reassurance to consumers that their food is being produced to the highest standards. Farmers and crofters who are members of one or more of the schemes are often also eligible for additional government support.

UKAS accredits a number of certification bodies that certify producers under these farming and food production quality assurance schemes, such as Quality Meat Scotland, the Scottish Organic Producers Certification Scheme and Label Rouge Scottish Salmon.

Accreditation by UKAS means that these certification bodies are competent to carry out their important role in ensuring that businesses, public sector bodies and individual consumers can have the independent assurance they require that their food has been produced to some of the world’s strictest standards.
As society makes greater efforts to reduce the environmental impact of the greenhouse gases it produces, tree planting has become increasingly popular as a means of carbon offsetting. Woodlands have the potential to soak up CO₂ from the atmosphere as well as provide a host of other benefits for society and biodiversity. Whilst there has been an increase in those wishing to invest in tree planting projects, before doing so individuals and businesses want to be assured that the schemes will actually deliver the carbon savings that are claimed.

The Forestry Commission Woodland Carbon Code (FCWCC) was set up to provide that reassurance. The voluntary code gives credibility to woodland planting schemes that have carbon sequestration as their main purpose, and offers clarity and transparency to customers about the carbon savings that their contributions may realistically achieve.

The Code requires a verification process that starts with the validation of the initial project plans and continues at intervals to ensure that the trees remain in situ, are being managed according to the project plans and the Code, and are likely to be capturing the amounts of carbon specified. The role of UKAS is to check that those who verify or validate these tree planting schemes under the FCWCC are themselves competent to do so under ISO 14065, the international standard for greenhouse gas validation and verification bodies.

UKAS accreditation is an on-going business process to establish that:

- the evaluator is impartial;
- the evaluator is technically competent;
- the resources and facilities are appropriate;
- the evaluator’s performance meets the required standard;
- the evaluator’s standard of performance can be sustained.

UKAS carries out this accreditation work to internationally-recognised standards and is itself regularly reviewed by its international peers.

Because UKAS has well-established and transparent assessment procedures applicable to all forms of conformity assessment, its accreditation helps:

- reduce bureaucracy—the use of accredited services in a sector moderates the need for legislation and reduces the risk of unintended consequences;
- enhance efficiency—business innovates to meet standards in efficient and cost-effective ways. Accreditation also allows for a rapid response to new issues and priorities by swiftly adapting existing regimes according to circumstances;
- engender trust—the UKAS symbol is a well-known means of identifying organisations that meet and maintain high standards. The public gain more confidence in services when they know standards are checked, updated and enforced.

Accreditation in action: Woodland for carbon sequestration

As society makes greater efforts to reduce the environmental impact of the greenhouse gases it produces, tree planting has become increasingly popular as a means of carbon offsetting. Woodlands have the potential to soak up CO₂ from the atmosphere as well as provide a host of other benefits for society and biodiversity. Whilst there has been an increase in those wishing to invest in tree planting projects, before doing so individuals and businesses want to be assured that the schemes will actually deliver the carbon savings that are claimed.

The Forestry Commission Woodland Carbon Code (FCWCC) was set up to provide that reassurance. The voluntary code gives credibility to woodland planting schemes that have carbon sequestration as their main purpose, and offers clarity and transparency to customers about the carbon savings that their contributions may realistically achieve.

The Code requires a verification process that starts with the validation of the initial project plans and continues at intervals to ensure that the trees remain in situ, are being managed according to the project plans and the Code, and are likely to be capturing the amounts of carbon specified. The role of UKAS is to check that those who verify or validate these tree planting schemes under the FCWCC are themselves competent to do so under ISO 14065, the international standard for greenhouse gas validation and verification bodies.
Delivering confidence

UKAS accredits:

- 1,500 laboratories
- 170 certification bodies
- 300 inspection bodies

as well as:
- proficiency testing providers
- reference material providers
- medical laboratories and healthcare services

In doing so, it enables these accredited organisations to provide services and products that meet agreed standards, delivering confidence on the part of consumers, government and purchasers alike.

Accreditation in action: Harnessing the sea’s energy

The quest to develop new energy sources has led to the development of numerous types of systems to extract energy from the wind, the sea and other renewable resources.

The first accreditation granted by UKAS for the testing of wave and tidal energy conversion systems was to a company that had developed a purpose-built performance testing facility in Stromness, Orkney.

The accredited company’s role is to show how much power is produced when it tests various wave and tidal energy devices in a wide variety of sea and weather conditions. This information is crucial to developers as they strive to turn prototype devices into income-generating, commercially available technology.

Those working for the company said that the process of gaining UKAS accreditation was extremely useful—helping them to clarify their thinking and examine every aspect of how they run the business.

Look for the Crown

Accredited organisations are entitled to display symbols that incorporate the Royal Crown, signifying Government recognition of the accreditation process.
Providing consumer confidence – UKAS accredits the certification of Green Deal advisors and installers

UKAS Members

Rather than shareholders, UKAS has Members that represent those with an interest in different aspects of accreditation. UKAS Members are drawn from organisations that have a major stakeholder interest in accreditation including those in public office at national and local level, professional and membership bodies, advocacy groups and other agencies, businesses and consumers. Members perform an important role in the corporate governance of UKAS ensuring that, in all its activities, UKAS acts in the public interest.

Who to contact for further information

If you wish to find out more about how accreditation can help you deliver policy more efficiently, please contact:

Malcolm Hynd, External Affairs Manager
Telephone 020 8917 8443
Email malcolm.hynd@ukas.com

Or visit our website at www.ukas.com