The value of UKAS accreditation

For organisations with stable scopes in established technical sectors

Survey Report
Contents

1 Foreword by Jeff Ruddle 3
2 About UKAS 4
3 Purpose 5
4 Methodology 5
5 About the Respondents 6
6 The benefits of accreditation 7
7 The drivers for maintaining accreditation 9
8 The Value of Elements of UKAS’ Service Delivery 11
9 Summary 14
10 Acknowledgements 15
UKAS exists to provide accreditation to confirm that UK organisations operate professionally to agreed standards and to ensure the integrity of the technical operations of the accredited bodies. In particular, UKAS accreditation underpins the integrity of the national measurement system that supports all forms of accredited activity. As well as confirming integrity, accreditation provides the basis for the acceptance of products. It provides assurance to the market that UKAS accredited services (calibration, testing, certification, inspection) are worthy of confidence, need not be duplicated, and should be accepted throughout the market. Such accredited technical services support the quality and competitiveness of UK industry.

In early 2016, UKAS carried out a customer survey to capture feedback on the value of accreditation. The survey, which was sent to customers with stable scopes in established sectors, aimed to gain insight into the reasons for maintaining accreditation, to identify the positive outcomes that are realised through accreditation, and to investigate the value of selected elements of the accreditation process.

UKAS is committed to ensuring that service delivery is effective and valued by customers and the wider market. An essential part of understanding the needs of customers is understanding their needs and knowing how they value the existing service. The findings of this report will help inform UKAS to shape the delivery of accreditation to ensure that it provides valued outcomes and greater efficiency for accredited organisations as well as stakeholders and the wider UK economy.
2 About UKAS

UKAS is the sole national accreditation body for the United Kingdom recognised by government, to assess against internationally agreed standards, organisations that provide certification, testing, inspection and calibration services. Accreditation by UKAS demonstrates the competence, impartiality and performance capability of these evaluators. Accreditation underpins practical applications of an increasingly wide range of activities across all sectors of the economy, from fishing to forestry, construction to communications.
3 Purpose

UKAS is committed to providing a world class, value adding accreditation service in accordance with the requirements of ISO/IEC 17011 and those of the European co-operation for Accreditation (EA), the International Laboratory Accreditation Cooperation (ILAC), and the International Accreditation Forum (IAF) for the purpose of the MRA/MLA’s (mutual recognition and multi-lateral arrangements). The purpose of this survey was to provide UKAS with an insight of:

- Customer size and turnover
- The drivers for maintaining accreditation
- The value derived from being accredited
- The value from aspects of UKAS’ service delivery

4 Methodology

A short online survey consisting of eight questions was sent to customers from the newly-created Enterprise section. This section includes UKAS’ customers which generally have stable scopes in well-established technical sectors. It represents 25% of UKAS’ accredited organisations.

The survey was carried out as this group of customers has less general interaction with UKAS, and feedback from stakeholder representatives indicated that there was a lower perceived value from their accreditation.

Responses to the questions were not mandatory, and so the quoted percentages are based on the organisations that provided a response. The survey ran for 3 months and closed in June 2016.
5 About the Respondents

A total of 260 customers responded to the survey, representing a response rate of 33%. The majority of respondents represented small to medium sized businesses (SMEs), with 73% of respondents employing 50 staff or less, and 49% with a turnover less than £1M. Respondents represent many different sectors.

Accreditation is recognition that an organisation is competent to perform specific processes, activities, or tasks which are detailed in a scope of accreditation. It is not provided to organisations as a whole, but for specific activities. Approximately 40% of organisations that responded have the majority or all of their services covered by accreditation. A similar number have ‘some’ activities covered, while 19% have a minor scope of accreditation.
6 The benefits of accreditation

In order to assess the value of being accredited, respondents were asked to state whether they agreed or not to a pre-defined set of benefits-based statements. Respondents could provide a response to each statement.
6 The benefits of accreditation continued

The results indicate that UKAS accreditation provides internal business benefit, with 75% of respondents reporting that improves the quality and validity of work, and 57% confirming that accreditation supports the management of the business.

Respondents also reported that accreditation provides commercial opportunity through differentiation and market access. 93% of respondents reported that accreditation provides confidence to customers and stakeholders. 76% agree that accreditation provides a point of differentiation over competitors, while 70% state that accreditation is a key factor in maintaining and winning contracts.
7 The drivers for maintaining accreditation

In order to identify the reasons for maintaining their UKAS accreditation, respondents were asked to state whether they agreed or not to a pre-defined set of statements. Respondents could provide a response to each statement.

### Government expects/requires us to

- Strongly agree: 26%
- Somewhat agree: 31%
- Neither agree nor disagree: 14%
- Somewhat disagree: 9%
- Strongly disagree: 20%

### Our Customers require/expect us to

- Strongly agree: 48%
- Somewhat agree: 34%
- Neither agree nor disagree: 12%
- Somewhat disagree: 3%
- Strongly disagree: 3%

### The markets we operate in expect it

- Strongly agree: 43%
- Somewhat agree: 37%
- Neither agree nor disagree: 3%
- Somewhat disagree: 3%
- Strongly disagree: 14%

### It gives us a competitive edge

- Strongly agree: 30%
- Somewhat agree: 22%
- Neither agree nor disagree: 6%
- Somewhat disagree: 7%
- Strongly disagree: 35%
Respondents reported that market expectations are primary drivers for maintaining accreditation. 81% reported that their customers expect or require accredited services, 80% stated that the market they operate in expect it, while 45% reported that they provide services where there is a Government or Regulatory requirement for accreditation. 67% of respondents stated that gaining accreditation was the ‘right thing to do’.
8 The Value of Elements of UKAS’ Service Delivery

In order to inform the effectiveness of UKAS service delivery, respondents were asked to rate the value of aspects and deliverables from the service that they receive.

8.1 Pre-assessment visit

Pre-assessment aspects including access to a named case manager and a visit plan in advance of the assessment are reported to be of high value by 84% and 87% of respondents respectively.

In addition, having a good understanding of the cost of the assessment in advance of the visit is rated highly by 81% of respondents, while only 60% reported that a four-year estimate of likely assessment effort is of value.
8.2 The assessment visit

91% valued having a consistent assessment team year on year, while 81% reported that access to an independent technical expert on site was highly rated. 95% of respondents value the time that they spend with the assessment team to discuss any findings. A similar number (93%) value the contextualisation of non-conformities, where the assessment team can explain why the finding is an issue in that particular circumstance.
8.3 Reporting

Full assessment report provided on the day or within 5 working days of completion of the assessment

A detailed assessment report (i.e. more than just the Executive summary and assessment findings)

77% reported that a full detailed report was of value, while 87% confirmed that receiving this report within five days of the assessment was rated as high value.

8.4 Post assessment

Responses to corrective action evidence within 4 weeks of submission

87% rated the four-week response time to corrective action evidence as highly valuable.
8 The Value of Elements of UKAS’ Service Delivery continued

8.5 Accreditation Collaterals

Respondents rated the ‘accreditation collaterals’ as being of moderate to high value, with 71% rating the hard copy certificate as valuable, and 77% the relevant accreditation letters.

9 Summary

The majority of respondents to this survey represent small businesses (SMEs). It is evident that there are clear external factors for this group for maintaining accreditation:

- 67% maintain accreditation as it is perceived as the right thing to do
- 82% maintain accreditation due to customer expectations
- 46% maintain accreditation due to government expectations or requirements
9 Summary 

However, the survey identifies that these businesses derive both internal and external commercial benefit from their accredited status:

- 93% of respondents agree that accreditation provides confidence to their customers and stakeholders
- 76% agree that accreditation differentiates them from their competitors
- 85% agree that accreditation improves the quality and validity of their work
- 71% agree that accreditation helps them to win new or maintain existing business

Respondents rated the majority of the accreditation process as being of value. This includes:

- Access to a dedicated contact point and a visit plan in advance of the assessment
- The appointment of a consistent team, including a technical expert
- Time to discuss non-conformities, with the opportunity to contextualise these findings during the assessment
- Receipt of a full and detailed report within five days of the assessment
- A quick response to corrective actions

10 Acknowledgements

UKAS would like to thank those businesses for taking the time to complete the survey. The insight provided from the responses will assist UKAS in delivering a more efficient service and to focus resource and effort on those elements of service delivery valued by customers.