UKAS
A world of confidence

TPS 74

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UKAS guidance on the use of a blended approach to auditing of management systems by certification bodies

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Changes since last edition

The process maps have been updated to show both surveillance steps. Appendix 2 has been added providing an indicative overview of remote auditing coverage in other normative documents.

1. Introduction

The intention of this document is to build upon and adapt the lessons learned during the coronavirus pandemic into a more normal working environment, defining a framework for the provision of a blended approach to auditing that ensures that the end user can have the same level of confidence in accredited management system certification, whilst realising a more sustainable and flexible approach to its delivery.

To ensure the continued integrity of management system certification, the certification process must be completed in a competent, thorough, and transparent manner. Therefore, it is important to ensure that the output of any audit process must be, through evidence, proven as effective as traditional techniques and meets the requirements of the standards /schemes.

UKAS would like to acknowledge the work of the Management System Certification Technical Advisory Committee (MSCTAC) for the development of this publication, together with stakeholders who responded during the public consultation period.

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2. Scope

This document provides guidance and sets out a consistent method for the delivery of a blended approach to certification audits which includes remote audit activity (see IAF MD 4), henceforth referred to as “blended audits”. The scope of this document is for the accreditation of management system certification in accordance with ISO/IEC 17021-1: 2015, although the same overall principles may be applied to the certification of persons and products/processes/services where they are demonstrated as effective. This guidance is applicable to certification bodies (CBs) across all management systems standards but may not always be appropriate for individual schemes, as some standards and schemes may contain specific provisions or restrictions on the use of remote audits. Therefore, when the audit relates to a specific scheme, the use of blended audits must be approved/endorsed by the scheme owner.

Throughout this document the term “audit” is used but it is recognised that the term is not used across all management system standards. For clarity when this document is used to support certification the following applies:

- ISO/IEC17021-1: 2015 and related parts – “blended audit”. Refer to Clause 3.4 for certification assessment

Throughout this document the terms ’standard’ and ‘scheme’ are referenced, typically these terms should apply in the following manner

- Management Systems (ISO/IEC 17021-1: 2015) - standard relates to IAF Level 5 Standards (e.g. ISO 9001) and scheme relates to sector schemes (schemes have scheme owners such as the aerospace sector scheme)

Note: for the classification of the complexity, the parameters indicated in IAF MD 5 may be used in order to define the level of risk.

3. Related Documents

IAF MD 4:2018 IAF Mandatory Document for the Use of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) for Auditing and Assessment Purposes

IAF MD 5:2019 Determination of Audit Time of Quality, Environmental, and Occupational Health & Safety Management Systems

IAF ID 3:2011 Management of Extraordinary Events or Circumstances Affecting ABs, CABs and Certified Organizations

IAF ID 12:2015 Principles on Remote Assessment

ISO/IEC 17011: 2017 Conformity assessment - Requirements for accreditation bodies accrediting conformity assessment bodies

ISO/IEC 17021-1: 2015 Conformity assessment - Requirements for bodies providing audit and certification of management systems 0 Part 1: Requirements

ISO/IEC 27006:2015 Information technology - Security techniques - Requirements for bodies providing audit and certification of information security management systems

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4. Definitions

Blended Audit: A combination of physical on-site auditing and the remote auditing (use of information and communication technology (ICT) techniques).

Remote Audit: The facilitation of an evaluation from a location other than that of the physical location of the auditees.

Permissible Scheme: a scheme that permits blended auditing.

Special Audit: Audits not forming part of the expected certification cycle, including but not limited to, reinstatement after sanctions.

5. Process for Determining the Applicability of a Blended Audit Approach

5.1 The CB shall firstly confirm, using a risk assessment, that a blended approach is permissible for the scheme and acceptable to the client.

5.2 The outcome of the individual risk assessment for a given organisation will determine the applicable route for the progression of a blended audit based on high, medium or low risk, as defined in process maps 1-3.

Note 1: for the determination of risk for quality, environmental, and occupational health and safety management systems see IAF MD 5.

Note 2: for EMS, limited complexity is considered equivalent to low complexity within this document.

5.3 Activities that can typically be considered for the remote activities that form part of the blended approach include, but are not limited to: -

- interviews
- file reviews
- management system document reviews
- witnessing of activities
- client location reviews
- opening and closing meetings
- on-site auditors supported by offsite-team members (e.g., technical experts)

Note: for further information on using ICT for the activities above please see IAF MD4

5.4 While it is accepted that the combination of some audit scopes and ICT capabilities will permit a higher percentage of remote activities than those indicated in the process maps, any blended audit must be, through evidence, demonstrated as effective as traditional techniques.

The CB shall firstly determine the applicability using the blended audit framework in Appendix 1 ensuring that the defined steps can be met.

This document uses process maps to indicate a suitable blend of remote and physical activity that would be typically acceptable. However, the combination of some audit scopes and ICT capabilities may permit a higher percentage of remote activity, depending on the outcome of the individual risk assessment. The process maps provide guidance on the percentage of the overall audit process that could be covered by remote activity. The approach to be defined and justified by the CB based upon the outcome of the individual risk assessment.

Note: the percentages indicated within the flow charts relate to audit duration (on-site time) as defined in IAF MD 5.

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6. Approach to Planning a Blended Audit

6.1 The risk assessment should be conducted by the CB to ascertain the feasibility of applying the blended audit approach to the audit of a given organisation. The risk assessment should be based on knowledge of the client and historic data, although it is accepted that this knowledge base would normally be less for an initial audit. A blended audit shall not be permitted if the risk assessment identifies an unacceptable threat to the effectiveness of the audit process.

6.2 It should be noted that some normative documents also contain requirements that may affect the use of blended audits, and these requirements should be taken into account. Indicative examples of such normative requirements are referenced in Appendix 2. The referenced normative documents are valid at the time of this publication but it is the responsibility of the certification body to ensure that the valid version of any such normative requirements are complied with.

6.3 Records of each individual risk assessment shall be maintained and be reviewed at least once within the certification cycle or where other circumstances dictate.

6.4 For initial audits, the results of the Stage 1 should inform and confirm the ongoing approach.

6.5 The outcome of the risk assessment shall be used as an input to the audit planning process and should be recorded in appropriate audit documentation.

6.6 Audit plans shall make clear that a blended approach is being implemented in respect to a given audit activity and contain concise detail as to the ICT (reference IAF MD 4:2018) or other remote method to be used.

Note: An example of the above would be the use of video conferencing tools to facilitate the opening and closing meeting and audit interviews, whereas mobile communications (or similar) could be used to facilitate an interactive site tour.

6.7 Audit plans and risk assessments shall be retained as client records (see ISO/IEC 17021-1 9.9).

6.8 The blended audit framework in Appendix 1 indicates the considerations for the different stages in the certification process.

6.9 Whether the audit is conducted physically, blended or remotely the certificate content shall comply fully with ISO/IEC 17021-1. There is no requirement to state on the certificate the type of audit undertaken.

6.10 The CB shall have records to demonstrate the effectiveness of any blended approach used.

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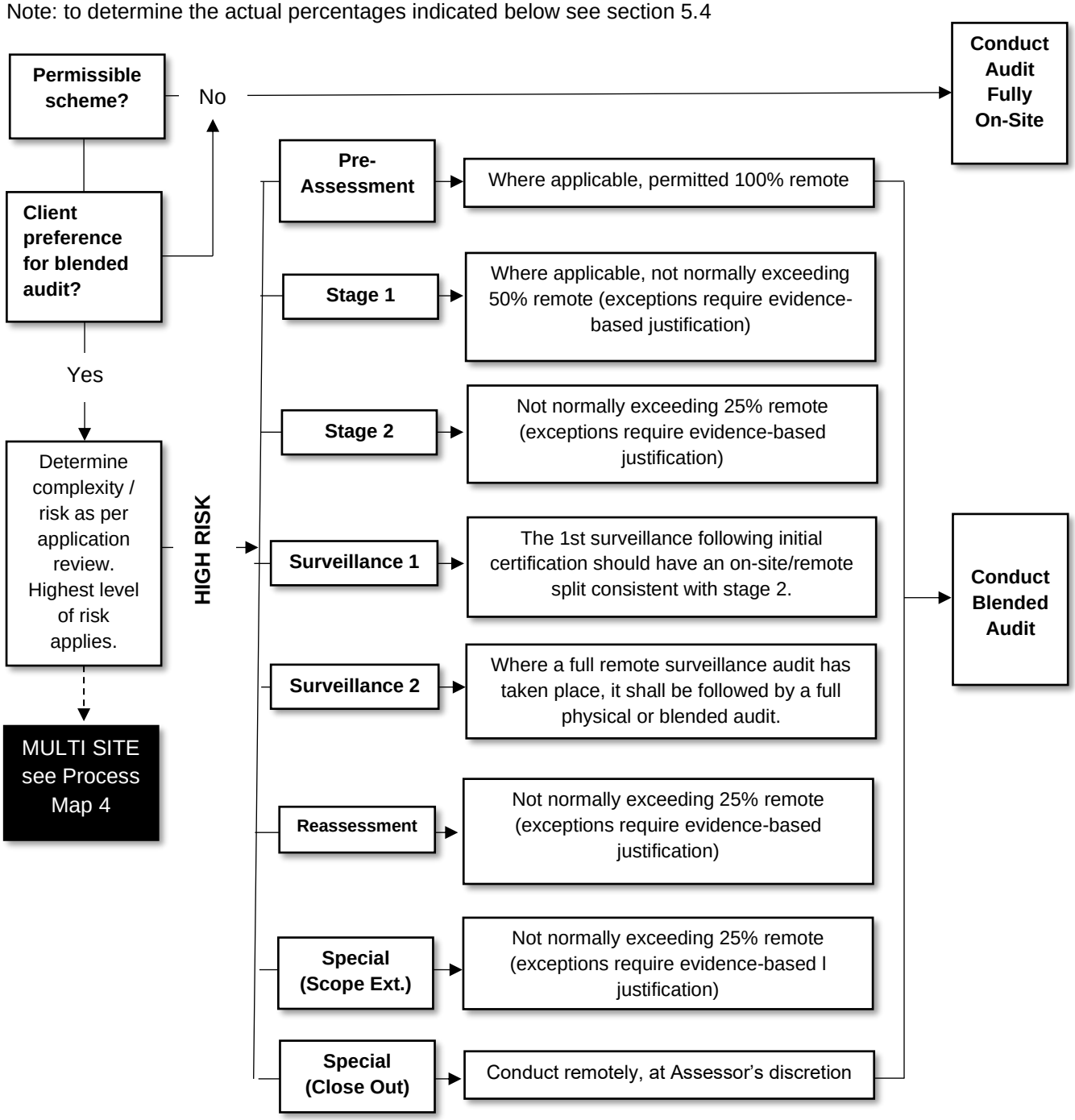
Process Map 1: High Risk

Note: to determine the actual percentages indicated below see section 5.4



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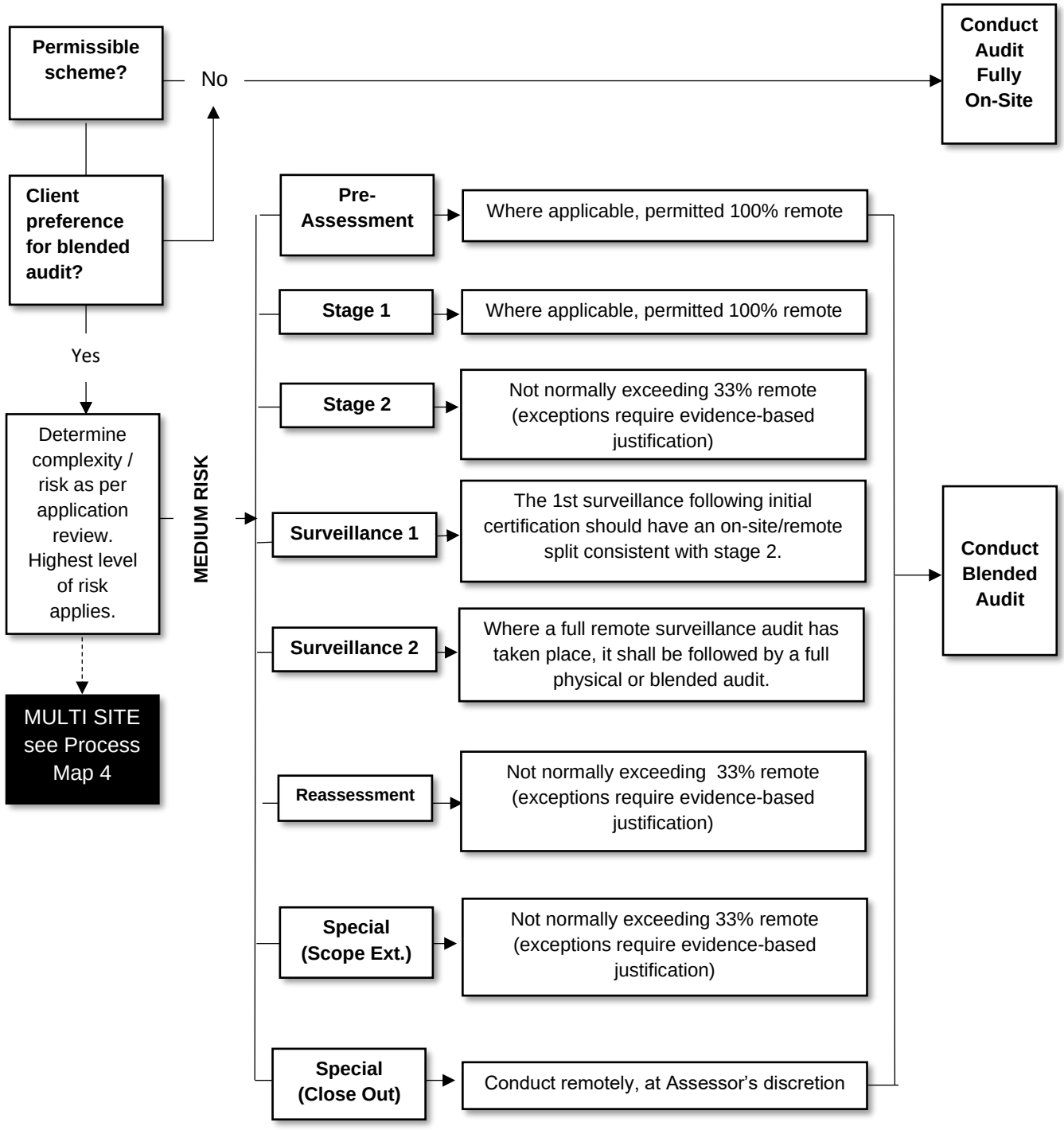
Process Map 2: Medium Risk

Note: to determine the actual percentages indicated below see section 5.4



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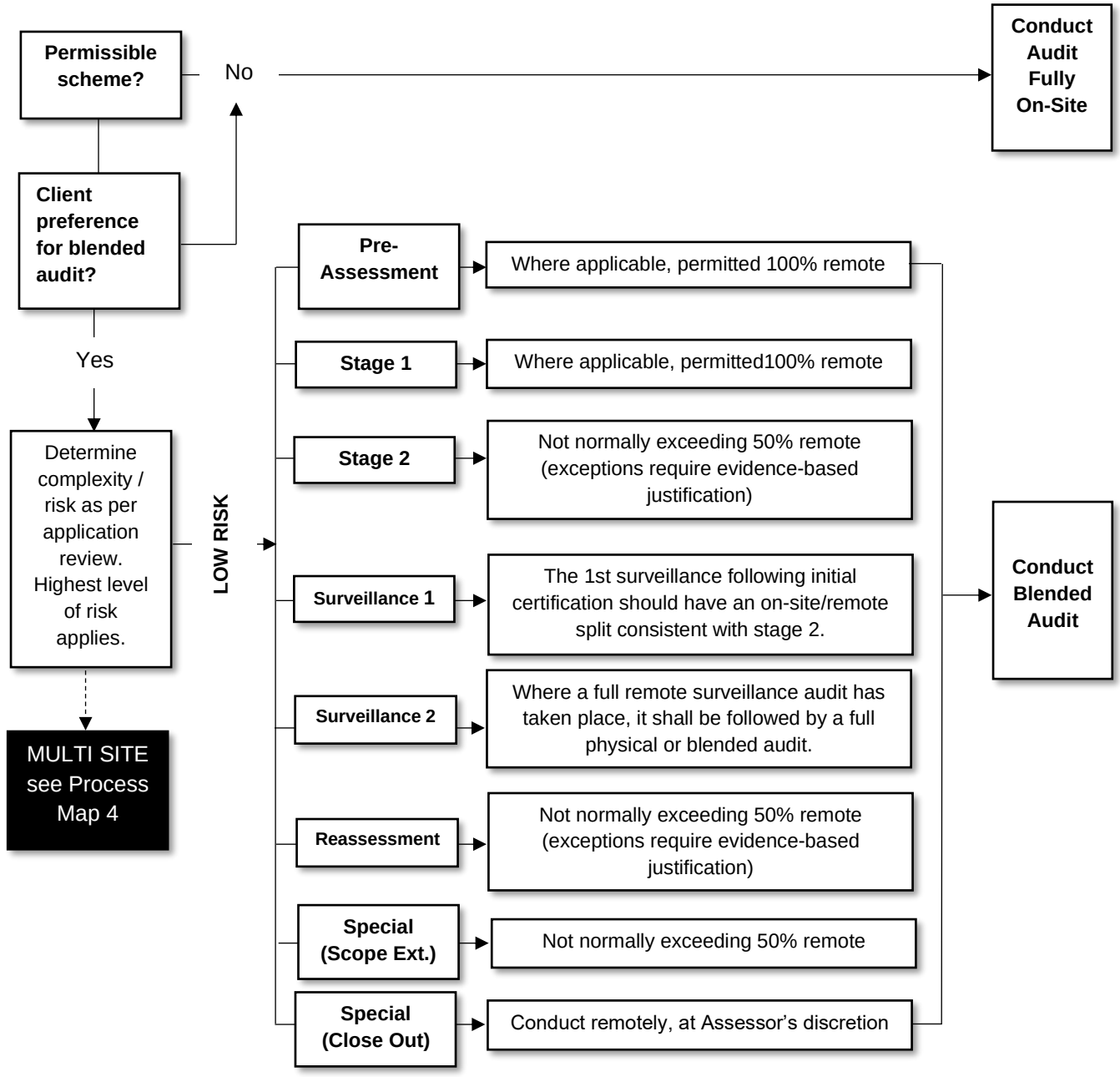
Process Map 3: Low Risk

Note: to determine the actual percentages indicated below see section 5.4



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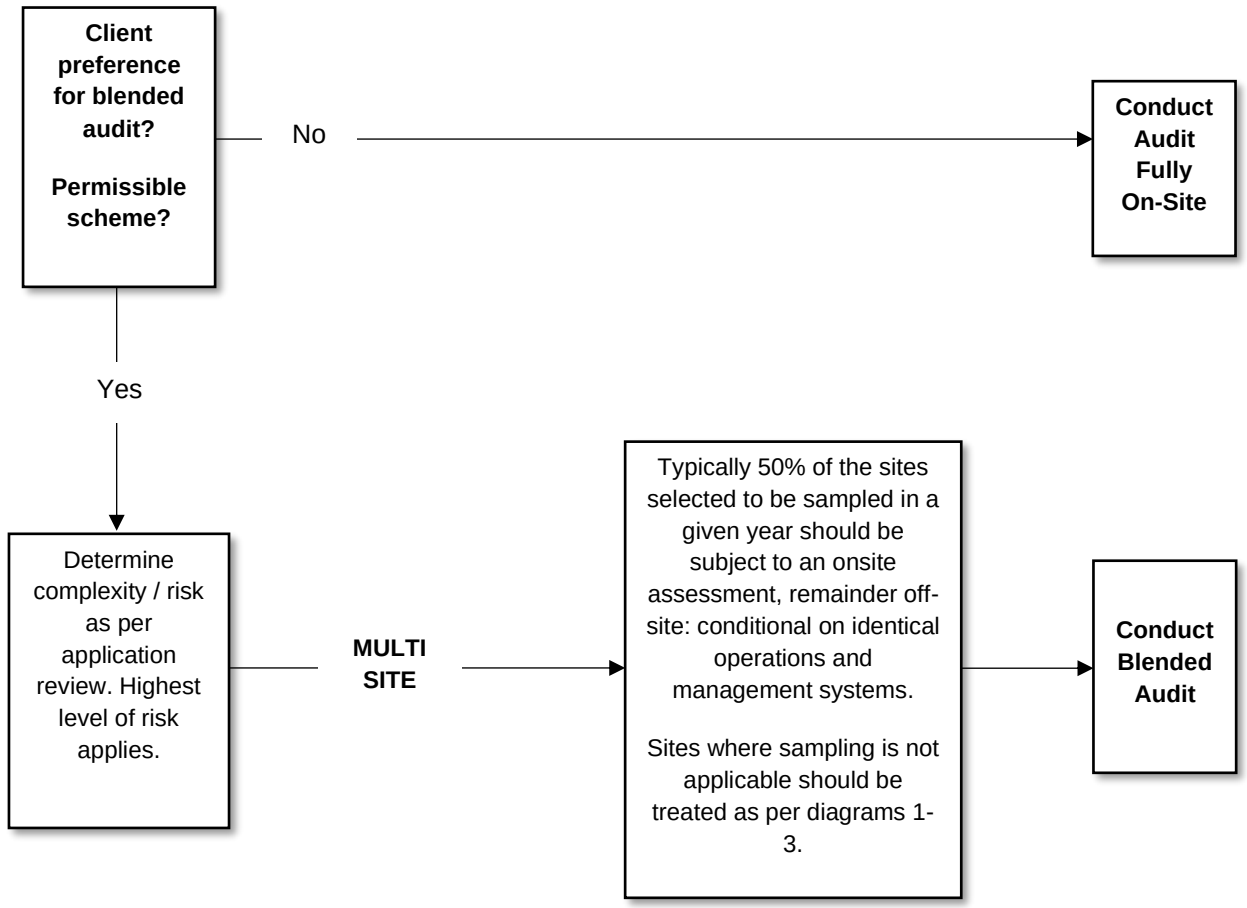
Process Map 4: Multi Sites

Note 1: Multi site means multiple physical locations.

Note 2: to determine the actual percentages indicated below see section 5.4



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Appendix 1: Blended Audit Framework

To determine the steps required for the potential implementation of a blended audit the CB should firstly determine the applicability using this Blended Audit Framework or an equivalent.

Stage in Certification Process	Actions/Inputs	Output/Evidence	Notes
Precertification	Application review		All of 9.1 - ISO/IEC 17021
Planning	Determine audit objective		
	Perform risk assessment	Provisional risk assessment	To be verified from the subsequent activities and updated where necessary
	Produce stage one audit plan	Audit plan	
	Confirm ICT capability	Confirm blend of audit delivery	Can the ICT equipment and methods deliver the required level of detail
Initial certification audit	Carryout stage one initial certification audit	Confirm blend of audit delivery	Initial audit shall include an element of onsite auditing The results of stage 1 shall be documented in a written report. The certification body shall review the stage 1 audit report before deciding on proceeding with stage 2 and shall confirm if the stage 2 audit team members have the necessary competence; this may be done by the auditor leading the team that conducted the stage 1 audit if deemed competent and appropriate.
Conducting audits	Feedback on the effectiveness of ICT shall be an output of each visit	Where required reconfirm the planned audit blend	
Decision	Records of risk assessments shall be available to the decision maker		
Surveillance	Identify with client if any changes have occurred which may impact upon the risk assessment		First surveillance should include an element of onsite auditing consistent with Stage 2
Recertification	Review risk assessment	Confirm blend of audit delivery	Recertification shall include an element of onsite auditing
Transfers	Blended audit programme defined by the issuing CB	Blended audit programme defined by the accepting CB based upon that of the issuing CB	To prevent the potential risk of consecutive remote surveillance audits
Special Audits	Determine audit objective	All of the above	

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Appendix 2: Indicative List of Other Normative Requirements (see 6.2)

Note: The following normative documents are not necessarily an exhaustive list but are included as guidance for some of the more common management systems. The requirements are correct at the time of publication of TPS74, although may change as these documents are revised.

ISO/IEC 20000-6: 2017 9.1.4.5 SM9.1.4.5 Remote auditing – Audits which are not performed face-to-face in the same location but are executed from another location are called remote audits. The audit plan shall identify the remote auditing techniques that will be utilized during the audit. The acceptable and unacceptable use of remote audits is specified in Table 4. The certification body shall not use the unacceptable practices in Table 4 and may use the acceptable practices. Remote audits shall not reduce the audit time below that which is calculated from Table 1, with appropriate adjustments. If the certification body develops an audit plan for which the remote auditing activities represent more than 30 % of the planned on-site audit time, the certification body shall document the justification.

ISO/TS 22003:2013 - No specific requirements for Remote Auditing is included in the standard but Annex B (normative) includes requirements for Minimum audit time for FSMS audits which will need to be demonstrated as effectively implemented if the CB chooses to undertake remote FSMS audits.

ISO/IEC 27006: 2015 Annex B.3.2 Remote audit - If remote auditing techniques such as interactive web-based collaboration, web meetings, teleconferences and/or electronic verification of the organization's processes are utilized to interface with the organization, these activities should be identified in the audit plan (see 9.2.3) and may be considered as partially contributing to the total "on-site audit time".

If the certification body develops an audit plan for which the remote auditing activities represent more than 30 % of the planned on-site audit time, the certification body shall justify the audit plan and obtain specific approval from the accreditation body prior to its implementation.

NOTE On-site audit time refers to the on-site audit time allocated for individual sites. Electronic audits of remote sites are considered to be remote audits, even if the electronic audits are physically carried out on the organization's premises.

ISO 50003:2021 - includes for audits conducted by use of remote audit techniques to be considered as on-site. Remote auditing activities shall be identified in the audit plan, and the time spent on these activities shall be considered as contributing to the duration of the audit. The audit plan shall include or reference the justification for the use of any remote auditing activities. It shall also include the selection of technologies and how they are managed.

Remote auditing is also a consideration for justification to reduce audit time.

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