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Q&A
Demystifying accreditation webinar series: 'The purpose of accreditation'

Q: Is the assessment process the same for all accreditations?

A: It sometimes depends on the area - but almost all standards and schemes follow these steps, unless there is a regulatory requirement that means the process should vary (e.g. Covid-19 providers), or if the area is new in accreditation.

Q: For ongoing assessments i.e. starting a 4-year cycle again of an accredited service - would a 6/12 visit still occur as 1st visit in the cycle?

A: It only affects the first accreditation cycle. That's just to address the timings of the accreditation cycle and to fulfil your accreditation cycle before its expiry. During the next cycle, your surveillance visit will be "profiled" for that. So, if your grant of accreditation was in January, and your first assessment for the first cycle was proposed for June/July, in the next cycle your profile month will be June/July moving forward from then onwards; they will be mirrored in every accreditation cycle after that.

Q: How long for a decision? We have been waiting longer than usual and wondered what the average length of time is? Would any deviations be reported back to us?

A: Generally, for completion of all decisions (including clearance of evidence) for an initial assessment, the timeframe could be anywhere between 3 – 6 months. The majority of this time is dictated by the CAB, as they will be taking appropriate action to address any findings raised and prepare evidence of the effectiveness of those actions for submission to UKAS.

For further information on the decision making process, please see UKAS' Gen 1 publication for the General Principles for the Assessment of Conformity Assessment Bodies. If you require an update on progress, please don't hesitate to reach out to your Assessment Manager.

Q: Can you advise where we can go to specific accreditation seminars, i.e. SARC, Sexual Assault Referrals?

A: All upcoming seminars, webinars and training courses are listed on the UKAS website: www.ukas.com/training ¦ www.ukas.com/resources/events/.

For SARCs, to assist bodies in achieving accreditation in this area, the UKAS Assisted Application Scheme (UAAS) was established in June 2020. A number of applications have now been received and these applicant organisations are now working their way through the UAAS and the accreditation process. We are still able to accept applications for this project and more information is available on the UKAS website.

Q: Can you explain a flexible scope?

A: Flexible scopes of accreditation can be applicable to a wide range of different conformity assessment activities. UKAS will give consideration to applications from CABs to operate under a flexible scope that allows them to make changes to accredited activities and/or commissioning accredited activities at a new location undertaken by contracted staff of the accredited entity. Definitions, UKAS policy and application for flexible scopes can be found in UKAS' GEN 4 publication; "general guidance for the implementation and management of flexible scopes of accreditation".

Q: Is there an opportunity to buy a standard for an organisation to share or do we have to buy one for each site e.g. a network of labs

A: For information on purchasing of standards, including copyright requirements, please contact the appropriate standards body. In the UK the National Standards Body is BSI (BSI Shop) or alternatively, standards can be obtained through the International Organization for Standardization (ISO.org).

Q: Is an existing accreditation by an EA member good enough to get accredited directly also by UKAS?

A: Under the European Accreditation (EA) MLA, accreditation is considered as technically equivalent to that of UKAS and therefore accepted around the world, so providing your accreditation has been granted by an accreditation body (AB) who is an EA signatory, this would be recognised. If your organisation wishes to gain UKAS accreditation as well as accreditation from your national AB then this may be possible. Following application, UKAS would still need to conduct an assessment of your organisation, although assessment activities relating to your existing accreditation will be taken fully into account. In these circumstances, UKAS would work with your local accreditation body. More information on our overseas process can be found here.

Q: If you are looking to change documentation and you're already accredited, could you work with your AM prior to accreditation? Do you have an idea of timescale for feedback?

A: We recognise if you are a dynamic, flexible organisation, you have to work in line with your customer requirements and sector requirements. Changing documentation, if undertaken in a controlled manner, is acceptable.

What we're looking for is your ability to manage the integrity of your quality management systems and activities. UKAS recommends that you inform your AM of any changes at the earliest opportunity, as changes to methodologies will require verification/validation.

In terms of timescales for feedback, changes would either be assessed at your next assessment, or if the change is significant then UKAS may schedule an additional visit in-between cycles so that we can assure this hasn't impacted the outputs or validity of reports.

Q: I am located in Anguilla; I am the Quality Officer and we are pursuing accreditation through Accreditation Canada, will UKAS be able to assist with our implementation based on ISO 15189?

A: UKAS are not able to provide any consultancy services so could not support any conformity assessment body in the implementation of standards.

For accreditation, if you are already working with the Canadian Accreditation Body, then we would certainly recommend pursuing that route. We do have an overseas application page on our website here which explains the overseas process and what to consider if you are looking for UKAS accreditation alongside the accreditation offered by another body. Under the ILAC MRA and the IAF MLA, accreditation is considered as technically equivalent to that of UKAS and therefore accepted around the world. Accreditation provided by your local accreditation body could also be more economical and could better take account of local factors and conditions.

Q: I already work in a UKAS accredited laboratory under ISO 17025. Will this webinar discuss the process for an extension to that scope, rather than 'new applicants'?

A: We have a planned webinar to follow up around extension for scope, new areas of development and flexible scopes.

Q: Our Chinese supplier would like to use some China-based and Chinese accredited inspection companies for the UKCA mark. how do I know that an inspection company is acceptable?

A: The UKCA mark must be used for placing goods on the GB market from 1 January 2023. There is a great deal of useful information on the UK government website here regarding placing the UKCA mark on goods. Where mandatory third-party conformity assessment was required for CE marked goods, it is also required for UKCA marked goods. This conformity assessment needs to be carried out by a UK-Approved Body in order to be marked with the UKCA marking. The type of conformity assessment procedures are the same as those required for the CE marking.

The UK Market Conformity Assessment Bodies (UKMCAB) database lists all bodies which can provide conformity assessment for the UK market.

Q: Can you tell me the difference between UCAS and UKAS

A: The Universities and Colleges Admissions Service is a UK-based organisation whose main role is to operate the application process for British universities. UKAS is the National Accreditation Body for the United Kingdom. We are appointed by government, to assess and accredit organisations that provide services including certification, testing, inspection and calibration.