



**CERTIFICATION CRITERIA FOR
CORPORATE RESPONSIBILITY TRAINING**

IRCA/1070/08/02 July

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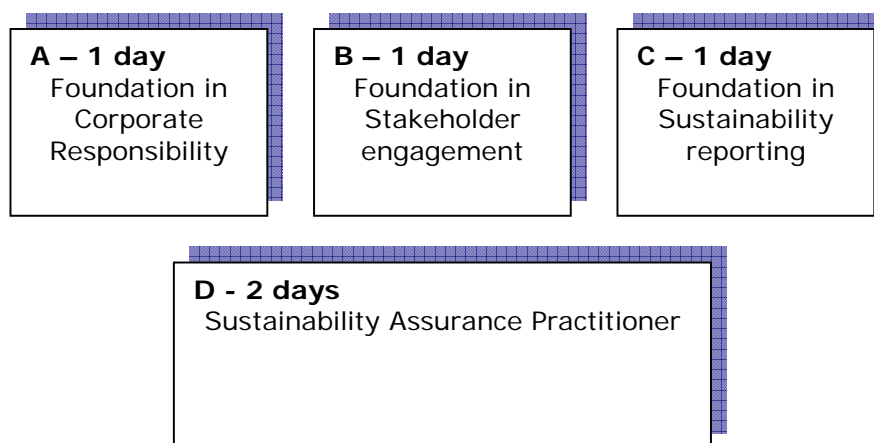
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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 We, AccountAbility and IRCA, recognizing the need for competent sustainability assurance practitioners, have prepared these criteria to help you, the approved training organization, to achieve certification of one or more modules of this training course. Within these criteria AccountAbility provides the technical expertise which makes up the core syllabus for each module (section 3), and IRCA is responsible for operating the global training course certification service.

1.2 Before designing a training course to meet the requirements of this document you should consider the following:

1.2.1 Course Structure: These Course Criteria have been designed as four independent modules. You, the Training Organization, can apply for certification for any number or combination of these Modules.



1.2.2 Aim of this course: The first three Modules provide students with knowledge of corporate responsibility and accountability, stakeholder engagement and sustainability reporting. Module 4 provides students with knowledge of assurance and the opportunity to apply this new knowledge as skills in the context of a practical case study and the assessment of an Assurance Statement.

1.2.3 Certified Practitioner: Students who successfully complete all four modules of this course meet the training requirements for **associate** level of the Certified Sustainability Assurance Practitioner (CSAP) scheme, IRCA/702.

1.2.4 Prior knowledge: Students require no prior knowledge for Module A. However some prior knowledge is required for Modules B, C, and D. This is defined within each of the Modules enabling objectives: 3.1, 3.2, 3.3, and 3.4. Students should be made aware of prior knowledge requirements before accepting a place on the course.

1.2.5 Flexibility in course design: These criteria specify the requirements for training courses including the knowledge and skills to be covered during the course. Your training course must be designed and delivered in accordance with these criteria, although you may exercise flexibility in the inclusion of additional material, and in the structure and selection of specific training methods used during the course. Many of the certification requirements common to the management and control of courses are detailed in IRCA/2000,

Requirements for training organization approval. These requirements are in addition to the requirements of IRCA/1070 and are mandatory. It is essential, therefore, that you are familiar with the requirements of IRCA/2000.

- 1.2.6 **Training vs assessment.** There must be two distinct aspects to courses based on these criteria:
- a) Effective training to help students develop the knowledge and skills defined in this document.
 - b) Effective assessment of each individual student's achievement of the knowledge and skills learning objectives through objective testing based on defined outputs.
- 1.2.7 **Training methods.** The course Modules may be designed to be presented in a variety of ways:
- a) Singularly and independently.
 - b) In combination with other Modules.
 - c) As a 4-Module unit, full time or part time.

2. LEARNING OBJECTIVES

- 2.1** Learning objectives describe in outline what successful students will know and be able to do by the end of the course (attendance to all four Modules). By the end of the course successful students will be able to:

Knowledge:

- 2.1.1 Understand best practice Sustainability and Corporate Responsibility reporting and assurance tools and standards and their links to core business practice.
- 2.1.2 Demonstrate a strong understanding of stakeholder engagement, and sustainability reporting and assurance processes.

Skills:

- 2.1.3 Demonstrate the capacity to apply the AA1000AS and SES principles and standards as well as other relevant standards and reporting guidelines (e.g. GRI G3) to ensure quality and comparable application.
- 2.1.4 Acting as an assurance practitioner, the student will apply the Principles¹ of materiality, completeness and responsiveness to the evaluation of a sustainability report.

¹ See Guidance Note on Principles as they relate to the AA1000 Assurance Standard, sections on evaluating adherence to the principles

3. ENABLING OBJECTIVES – KNOWLEDGE & SKILLS

3.1 Module A – Foundation in Corporate Responsibility

Prior knowledge: No prior knowledge required

On completion of the Module, students will be able to:

Define the terms accountability, sustainability and corporate responsibility and explain how they relate to one another:

- 3.1.1 Explain the relationship between accountability and corporate responsibility.
- 3.1.2 Explain the purpose and benefits of accountability, sustainability and corporate responsibility.
- 3.1.3 Explain the context of laws, regulations and conventions as they relate to corporate responsibility.
- 3.1.4 Explain the purpose of the AA1000AS and SES standards, and the Global Reporting Initiative (GRI) framework and their relationship with other relevant standards.

3.2 Module B – Foundation in Stakeholder Engagement

Prior knowledge: Students must have an understanding of knowledge areas covered in Module A prior to attending this Module. Training organizations need to establish the method of determining students have this.

This module covers Stakeholder Engagement, including the AA1000 Stakeholder Engagement Standard (AA1000SES) and the “Practitioner’s Handbook on Stakeholder Engagement”, the second of two volumes of “The Stakeholder Engagement Manual”, which AccountAbility has developed together with the United Nations Environment Programme and Stakeholder Research Associates.

On completion of the Module, students will be able to:

- 3.2.1 Explain the significance, purpose and benefits of Stakeholder Engagement in relation to business strategy and sustainability and CR.

Conducting effective Stakeholder Engagement:

- 3.2.2 Review the purpose and approaches of the AA1000SES (already defined above) and AA UNEP Stakeholder Engagement workbook.
- 3.2.3 Explain the Stakeholder Engagement process²
 - i. Identifying and considering strategically:
 - Who are the stakeholders?
 - What are the engagement risks?
 - ii. Analysing and planning engagement
 - iii. Strengthening capacities for engagement
 - iv. Designing the process and engaging with stakeholders (including different modes of engagement)
 - v. Acting, reviewing and reporting (meeting targets and reporting back)

² E.g. 5 stage from AA UNEP

3.3 Module C – Foundation in Sustainability Reporting

Prior knowledge: Students must have an understanding of the knowledge areas covered in Module A prior to attending this Module. Training organizations need to establish the method of determining students have this.

On completion of the Module, students will be able to:

- 3.3.1 Describe the purpose and benefits of Sustainability/CR Reporting.
- 3.3.2 Explain what Sustainability/CR Reporting is and the need for transparent disclosure.
- 3.3.3 Explain the different approaches to Sustainability/CR Reporting.
- 3.3.4 Explain the principles, requirements and content of the Global Reporting Initiative G3 Guidelines.
- 3.3.5 Recognise the characteristics of effective Reporting.
- 3.3.6 Understand the concept of materiality in relation to reporting. Identify what issues are material to stakeholders.
- 3.3.7 Review a report's application of GRI G3 to a Sustainability/CR Report, including the reporting principles and the indicators.

3.4 Module D - Sustainability Assurance Practitioner

Prior knowledge: Students must have the knowledge of module A, B and C prior to attending this module. Training organizations need to establish the method of determining students have this.

- 3.4.1 Explain the purpose and benefits of Sustainability Assurance.
- 3.4.2 Compare the content and relationship between AA 1000AS and ISAE 3000 and/or other relevant assurance standards.
- 3.4.3 Explain Assurance related terms such as assurance engagement, assurance statement, assurance practitioner with reference to the AA1000 Assurance Standard.
- 3.4.4 Describe the assurance engagement process and procedures
 - i. Explain and apply the AA1000 principles of materiality, completeness and responsiveness in the context of a public disclosure assurance engagement and from the point of view of an assurance practitioner.
 - ii. Identify the main roles, responsibilities and competencies in sustainability assurance including those of the reporting organisation, the assurance practitioner and the organisational stakeholders.
 - iii. Identify procedures relating to the assurance engagement including:
 - setting the scope and boundary of the engagement;
 - determining the level of assurance;
 - activities or steps undertaken during engagement.
- 3.4.5 Understand the requirements for Certified Sustainability Assurance Practitioner (CSAP) Programme, IRCA/702, including the Code of Practice and the Complaints Procedure.

To pass this Module students must demonstrate practical skills in assessing a sustainability report and writing an assurance statement using the AA1000 principles as a basis for evaluation. Each student will demonstrate the ability to review a case study report and supporting information to:

- 3.4.6 Assess materiality, including:
 - i. how the organization has identified its stakeholders;
 - ii. how the criteria are used for decision making.
- 3.4.7 Assess completeness, including:
 - i. how the organization seeks to understand its performance and impacts relating to material issues;
 - iii. how the organisation has decided on what performance aspects to include in its measurement.
- 3.4.8 Assess responsiveness, including:
 - i. how the organization intends to respond to stakeholder concerns and interests;
 - ii. how the organization has demonstrated that it has allocated adequate resources to enable it to implement associated policies and commitments.
- 3.4.9 How to write an assurance statement based on the criteria in AA1000AS. The student will produce a brief summary of findings and an assurance statement.
- 3.4.10 Understand the future trends of sustainability assurance.

4. TRAINING METHODS

- 4.1 Your course may be presented as a wholly classroom-based course or as a blended course (in other words part self-study and part classroom-based). You may also present the course as a series of separate modules, either as full-time or part-time study.
- 4.2 **Classroom-based training**
 - 4.2.1 You must provide for students **an environment conducive to effective learning**. At the beginning of the course you must provide the students with a description of the learning objectives, course structure, format and programme, student responsibilities and the assessment processes and assessment criteria, and you must deal with any concerns or worries that students may have.
 - 4.2.2 Your course must be based on the **learning cycle** (see guidance in Appendix A) and include opportunities for students to:
 - Experience new ideas and skills. (Note that tutor-led slide presentations as a sole method to help students learn new knowledge is not acceptable).
 - Reflect on their learning and identify strengths and weaknesses. (Note that your course must include methods for monitoring and providing time for tutors and students to review tasks and activities and each student's achievement of the learning objectives).
 - Address and improve on areas of weakness. (Note that your course must include provision for review and remedial work, and individual coaching, where necessary.)

- 4.2.3 Your course must include a **variety of learning methods** to suit the range of learning styles (see guidance in Appendix A).
- 4.2.4 Your course must not rely on tutor presentations and tutor-led discussions to teach **knowledge-based learning objectives**. We expect to see students learning these elements mostly through a process that requires students to complete a task or activities, often in teams, and to produce a defined output.
- 4.2.5 All students must practise the **skill-based learning objectives** of the course (learning objective 3.5) through participation in appropriate tasks and activities (role play, simulation etc).
- 4.2.6 Timekeeping, planning and programme management are essential elements in the performance of an audit and, although we recognise that effective training is responsive to students' needs, deviations from the timetable must be managed so that all learning objectives are adequately covered and students are kept informed of significant changes to the programme.
- 4.2.7 You must submit **session plans** or tutor notes for each individual training session. Session plans must specify:
- learning objectives and duration for the session
 - nature of the activity and training method to be used
 - organizational arrangements, tutor and student briefing details
 - deliverables required from students for practical sessions
 - materials, exercises and equipment required to run the session
 - where training methods or use of exercises etc. are optional, this must be clearly indicated in session plans.

Note that the format of your session plans will depend on your approach to tutor competence and training and the size and complexity of your organization. Medium and high complexity training organizations (see IRCA/3000 appendix) will require more comprehensive tutor notes to ensure that training in new and amended materials is controlled and effective.

5. COURSE CONTENT

- 5.1 At the beginning of each Module you must provide the students with a description of the learning objectives, course format and programme, student responsibilities and student evaluation processes and criteria.
- 5.2 You must ensure students secure a copy of the main standards (and associated publications) referred to in the course (AA1000SES, AA1000AS, GRI G3) and other materials relevant to the topics covered.
- 5.3 The course must cover:
- 5.3.1 All aspects defined for the presented Modules in clause 2 learning objectives and amplified in appropriate clause 3 enabling objectives.
- 5.3.2 Local requirements, culture, and practices as appropriate for each country in which the course is presented.

6. COURSE DURATION

6.1 Classroom-based learning

6.1.1 Each day must be at least 7 hours net, calculated as detailed in IRCA/2000.

6.1.2 This course may be presented over a minimum of 5 consecutive days full-time or on a part-time modular basis.

Note: although not mandatory, we recommend that this course be residential if presented over 5 consecutive days.

6.2 Translators

6.2.1 If the course is given through translators, the time must be increased as necessary to satisfy the learning objectives.

7. TUTORS AND STUDENTS

7.1 Classroom-based learning

7.1.1 The number of students per course shall not exceed 20, or be less than 4.

7.1.2 The course shall be run with two designated tutors, both of whom shall be present for the full duration of the course. At least one tutor shall satisfy the requirements for a lead tutor as stated in IRCA/2000. Additional resources or trainee tutors may be used for specific activities, however the two tutors remain responsible for the entire presentation.

7.1.3 Where the number of students is 4 to 10 inclusive, the course may be run with one designated tutor, who shall be present for the full duration of the course. That tutor shall satisfy the requirements for a lead tutor.

7.2 All courses. Tutors for this course must demonstrate competence in key attributes:

7.2.1 Competence in training; by satisfying the tutor or lead tutor requirements as appropriate (see IRCA/2000).

7.2.2 Each tutor will need to demonstrate sufficient knowledge and experience for each module of the course being presented. This may be demonstrated through meeting the requirements of:

- i. For Modules A: Associate level of the CSAP scheme, or equivalent and
- ii. For Modules B, C, D: Sustainability Assurance Practitioner level of CSAP, or equivalent.

Details on these can be found in IRCA/702/Appendix 3

7.2.3 Competence to deliver training **and** student assessment on your specific course.

8. VARIATIONS

- 8.1 Requests for variations to any of these criteria, or in respect of any special circumstances, will be considered for approval on written submission by the approved training organization to IRCA. Any such request shall be made immediately upon the reason for the variation request becoming apparent.
- 8.2 We will consider the following when evaluating any request for variation:
 - 8.2.1 Reasons for the requested variation.
 - 8.2.2 Proposed modifications to the training.
 - 8.2.3 The impact on the learning and assessment processes and how this will be managed.

9. STUDENT ASSESMENT

We regard the assessment of students to be a very important part of this course.

- 9.1 **Successful completion:** in order to satisfactorily complete the course each student must:
 - 9.1.1 Complete/attend all elements of the course.
 - 9.1.2 Pass the continuous assessment
- 9.2 **Conduct and management of continuous assessment**
 - 9.2.1 Students must demonstrate acceptable levels of performance in all objectives of the modules presented. During the course you must test each student's achievement of the learning objective. These tests must be based on practical tasks and activities with defined outputs that students must produce.
 - 9.2.2 You must provide tutors with model outputs and a marking scheme/guidance to assess each student's performance and outputs.
 - 9.2.3 Tutors must provide students with feedback on their performance.
 - 9.2.4 Tutors must give further help and guidance to students who do not initially achieve elements of the learning objectives. They must provide these students with opportunities to complete further tasks to demonstrate competence.
 - 9.2.5 Each student's achievement of learning objectives must be recorded on his/her continuous assessment record.

10. COURSE PUBLICITY & ADVERTISING

- 10.1 Course advertising and promotional literature shall not state or imply that this course satisfies more than part of the training requirements for certification as an IRCA CSAP (Corporate Social Assurance Practitioner).
- 10.2 Course title: Where more than one module is presented consecutively an alternative course title may be used by the Training Organization however the relevant IRCA course reference must be used. For example if modules A, B and D are presented this would be IRCA/1070/ABD

Appendix A - NOTES FOR GUIDANCE

Helping students learn new knowledge & skills

We promote the use of accelerated learning approaches because they are more efficient, in terms of speed and depth of comprehension, and more effective, in terms of long term retention of new knowledge. Therefore, you should employ practical tasks and activities to help students to understand new concepts and ideas. You should not rely on tutor focused lecture/presentation to transfer new ideas and concepts.

3.1 The Learning cycle

There is a clear link between Deming's familiar Plan-Do-Check-Act and the learning cycle:

- a. ***Students experience something*** (e.g. complete a task to find out about the requirements of AS1000)
- b. ***Students reflect on what they did & identify what they learned and what they still do not fully understand or cannot do*** (e.g. feedback to compare their answers to other students' answers and/or model answers, and identify any problems)
- c. ***Students take action to address weak areas.*** (e.g. ask tutor for help or complete task/activity again or complete another task)

Ensuring that your training sessions follow this simple model will make students' learning more effective. We referenced the learning cycle described by David A Kolb in developing these criteria and you might find it useful to consider this when developing your course.

3.2 Learning styles

We promote a variety of training methods in your course design. Different people learn in different ways so your sessions should follow the learning cycle and your course should include a variety of different learning activities to cater for all needs as far as possible. Honey and Mumford (*Learning Style Questionnaire*, Peter Honey Publications, ISBN 1 902899 07 5) provide one model for describing different learning styles that you may find useful as a basis.

3.4 Session plans

Developing session plans is a natural part of designing learning and training processes. Session plans should be simple and easy to use working documents to help your tutors manage effective learning. For organizations with only a few tutors, outline session plans are acceptable. For larger organizations with a number of branches or subcontractors, and the consequent number and turnover of tutors, we will require more comprehensive session plans.

3.5 Continuous assessment

Continuous assessment should have a clear link between: session plans (for tutors), clear task/activity instructions with defined and measurable outputs (for students and tutors), activity marking schemes/model answers (for tutors), model answers (for students), individual student continuous assessment record (for recording student performance).