

## Key criteria for assessing the competency of Certification/Registration Bodies and their ability to deliver credible results

This paper provides guidance on the key issues that Accreditation Bodies (ABs) need to examine during accreditation assessments of management system certification/registration bodies (CRBs), in order to deploy effective, output focused, accreditation approaches.

These key issues concern:

- the processes that CRBs use to manage their technical activities (particularly those processes that are used to ensure that competent auditors will undertake audits competently, within the scope covered by accreditation); and,
- the level of detail that CRBs require for audit reporting.

### 1. The competency management system of a CRB

The combination of processes and resources that a CRB uses to ensure that competent auditors will undertake audits competently represents its "competency management system".

Such a system will consist of elements for the management of resources in general, and elements for the deployment of resources for a given audit activity.

#### a) Management of resources

For the management of resources, a CRB's competency management system needs to address:

- how it conducts reviews of its technical activities to:
  - determine the competency needs for its auditors;
  - identify independent reviewers of audit reports;
  - identify evaluators of auditors' competency;
- the specification of competency criteria;
- the recruitment and training of auditors and technical experts;
- evaluations of demonstrated auditor performance against the specified competency criteria;
- the maintenance of auditor competence (including processes to monitor this on an on-going basis that also take into account relevant feedback from the independent reviewers/evaluators);
- professional development (improvement of competence).

## b) Deployment of resources for a given audit activity

For the deployment of resources for a given audit activity, a CRB's competency management system needs to address:

- how it reviews client applications and determines the associated competency needs for the audit team;
- the selection and appointment of appropriate audit team members and technical experts (where required);
- the selection and appointment of appropriate independent reviewers/ evaluators.

The above processes should cover all the activities falling within the scope of accreditation, namely the different types of management systems (QMS, EMS, OHSAS, ISMS, FSMS, etc..) and, within them, the applicable technical activities. The level of requirements that a CRB will need to specify in its competency management system will be influenced by the complexity and risks of the products and processes involved in such technical activities.

Demonstration by a CRB that the above processes are in place and are suitably managed should give the AB confidence in the ability of the CRB to conduct rigorous audits.

Consequently, a CRB's competency management system will need to be thoroughly assessed by the AB, using personnel with specific technical knowledge of the activities to which the system is applied.

The AB assessments should:

- evaluate the competency management system for completeness against the criteria given above
- check the compliance of the CRB to the requirements of its competency management system, through an examination of relevant documents
- include interviews with the CRB's managers who are responsible for the different technical activities, as well as interviews of a sample of auditors assigned to such activities.

## 2. **Audit reports**

In order for a CRB to make appropriate, informed, decisions on certification, it is necessary that the results of audits are presented in audit reports to an adequate level of detail. Therefore, the quality of audit reports needs to be evaluated by the AB.

An audit report should include:

- a clear statement on whether or not the audited management system has the capability to consistently meet the objectives of the relevant standard(s).
- details of objective evidence to support its statement

Audit reports that consist merely of check-lists of the clauses of the standard(s) and minimal objective evidence of compliance, plus a few short audit notes, are not considered to be sufficient.

A CRB's requirements for audit reporting will need to be carefully assessed by the AB, to confirm the adequacy of its reports and also of the adequacy of its independent reviews. This may require the use of technical experts.

- If the AB challenges the adequacy of an audit report and/or feels there is a need to seek further clarification, and there is evidence of the CRB's independent review having arrived at a similar conclusion, this should be taken as a positive indication of the effectiveness of the CRB's certification process.

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