



International Organization for Standardization



International Accreditation Forum

Date: 20 June 2014

Accreditation Auditing Practices Group **Guidance on:**

The conduct of integrated assessments of a CAB operating more than one MS certification scheme

1. Scope

This paper addresses accreditation assessments against ISO/IEC 17021 which are carried out by a team of AB assessors on a CAB operating more than one management system certification scheme (e.g. for both ISO 9001 and ISO 14001).

2. Benefits of an integrated approach to accreditation assessments

The benefits to an AB of utilizing an integrated approach to accreditation assessments may include:

- Minimizing the cost of assessments
- Optimizing the use of resources and reducing the duplication in assessments
- Ensuring the integrity of a CAB's system
- Adding value to a CAB

3. Assessment Process

3.1 Planning

3.1.1 To be able to apply an integrated approach, an AB first needs to collect relevant information on the processes of its client CAB, in order to determine the level of integration of the CAB's system. Such information may include:

- Details of the MS schemes operated by the CAB, including locations, number of auditors and their competencies;
- The application of the ISO/IEC 17021 requirements across the CAB's different MS schemes, and the degree of commonality in their application;

- The degree of common documentation across the CAB's schemes;
- The degree of common use of instruments/tools by the CAB across its schemes (including information systems, software, model of competence analysis and evaluation);
- The degree of common or shared responsibilities across the CAB's schemes;
- The availability (physically and/or remotely) of certification personnel (refer to 17021 Annex 1, Table A.1)

3.1.2 Once an AB has determined the level of integration of a CAB's schemes and their related processes, it can then develop an integrated assessment plan.

3.1.3 The development of the assessment plan will enable the AB to determine which of the CAB's processes require the AB's assessors to have specific technical expertise (e.g. application review, allocation of audit teams, certification decision), and those which do not.

3.1.4 The ability of an AB to conduct an integrated assessment will be dependent on the level of multi-competence of its own assessment team, including any specialist technical expertise (if required). This will also need to be taken into consideration by the AB when developing an integrated assessment plan.

3.1.5 It is possible to envisage that a number of the requirements of ISO/IEC 17021 can be treated in a common manner across a CAB's schemes; consequently there may not be a need for AB assessors to have specific technical expertise for each scheme individually on these matters, and an AB could assign one assessor to review and assess the ISO/IEC 17021 requirements that have been addressed in a common manner. Examples of ISO/IEC 17021 requirements that could be treated in a common manner include: legal and contractual matters; management of impartiality; liability and financing; structural requirements; information requirements; appeals and complaints; records of applicants and clients; and management system requirements.

Note: Reviews of complaints and appeals may require specific technical expertise.

3.2 Conducting assessments

3.2.1 Assessments should be based on the process approach (refer to the AAPG Paper "Process Approach Based Accreditation Audits").

3.2.2 The AB's assessors need to concentrate on the outputs from a CAB's processes. Relevant risks should also be considered.

3.2.3 The AB's assessors should initially verify the level of integration of the CAB's schemes, as mentioned in 3.1.1, and establish confidence in the CAB's ability to manage:

a) the application of the "common" ISO/IEC 17021 requirements across all of

its schemes,

b) the differences related to the application of relevant parts of ISO/IEC 17021 and the relevant management system standards.

Only once such confidence is established can the implementation of an integrated approach to assessment be possible. If it is not, then the AB will need to revise its plan for the assessment, to avoid using an integrated approach.

3.2.4 The assessors who are reviewing and assessing the common elements need to coordinate their activities with those assessors who are reviewing the elements that are specific to the CAB's individual schemes.

3.2.5 An AB's assessors with appropriate technical expertise should be assigned to examine the competency requirements of the CAB's certification personnel (including its auditors). Such personnel should only be performing certification activities in their own areas of technical expertise.

3.2.6 If the results of an assessment demonstrate compliance of the common elements with the requirements of 17021, but the application of some of the specific requirements related to the CAB's schemes are not in compliance, a non-conformity should be raised against the scheme concerned. However, this should not prevent accreditation to acceptable schemes. It should be noted that such an approach may not be possible in some economies, due to local regulations.

3.2.7 An AB's assessors have to ensure that appropriate technical expertise is being applied by a CAB when it is conducting application reviews, allocating audit teams and calculating of audit durations. The assessment of these processes requires an AB's assessors to have relevant technical expertise.

3.2.8 Witnessing

If a CAB's client implements more than one management system (where the client's level of integration may vary from 0 to 100%), and the CAB requests the AB to conduct a witnessing assessment of its audit of such client against more than one MS standard, the AB should ensure that appropriate technical expertise is applied to each individual scheme by its witnessing assessment team. It may be unlikely to have just one AB assessor cover all the schemes during one witnessing assessment.

3.2.9 Assessing the certification decision process

An AB's assessors have to ensure that appropriate technical expertise is applied when they evaluate how a CAB conducts reviews of audit reports and makes certification decisions. This assessment of such processes requires relevant technical expertise.

For further information on the Accreditation Auditing Practices Group, please refer to the paper: *Introduction to the Accreditation Auditing Practices Group*

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