Client information note

Assessment process – Management systems service outline

Overview

For the all assessment undertaken by LRQA the objectives of these audits are:

- the determination of the conformity of the client's management system, or parts of it, with audit criteria;
- the determination of the ability of the management system to ensure the client meets applicable statutory, regulatory and contractual requirements; *NOTE: management system certification audit is not a legal compliance audit.*
- the determination of the effectiveness of the management system to ensure the client can reasonably expect to achieve its specified objectives;
- as applicable, identification of areas for potential improvement of the management system.

The details of the objectives for each type of visit are contained in the section related to the visit types below.

Where applicable to an assessment visit, the roles of the personnel involved will be as follows:

- the Team Leader is responsible for the whole assessment process and the production of the visit plan. They are responsible for managing of the team, including allocating activities to the team members to ensure that the visit be completed, the compilation of the visit report and visit findings and making the recommendations in relation to your certification
- the Team members undertake the assessment process under the direction of the Team Leader; they undertake the detailed assessment work in accordance with the visits plan producing a report of the work they have undertaken, including any findings, for inclusion within the overall visit report.
- a Technical Expert will be used on an assessment where the specialist knowledge is required to supplement that of the assessment team. Whilst they will act as advisors to the assessment team they will not undertake any assessment work.
- an Assessor under training (AUT) may be included within the audit team, they will perform the duties of either a team member or team leader under the direction of the Team leader.
- the Team Leader will ask that you appoint personnel from your organization who will act as guides for the assessment team during each of the visits and who will assist the audit team.
- from time to time the audit Team may be accompanied by an observer. An observer is not a part of the audit team and will not influence or interfere with the conduct of the audit. An observer can be from LRQA, an accreditation body or regulator, or from another interested party who wishes to witnesses the audit.

The planning department of your LRQA office will inform you of the makeup of any assessment team in advance of the visit, including where applicable any Technical experts, and if they will be accompanied by any observers.

The accreditation requirements define that there are four elements to the assessment process:

- assessment of the system design and definition
- assessment of the client's system self-governance
- planning of the implementation visit
- assessment of system implementation.

We combine these elements to meet market requirements. However, any combination of visits must allow you, the client, time to correct any major non-conformity before the next visit.

We normally conduct the initial certification assessment of a management system in two stages - Stage 1 and Stage 2.

Visit structure

In a Stage 1 visit we address the following elements:

- an assessment of the design and definition of the system to confirm conformity with certification requirements such as the assessment standard(s) and
- an assessment of the self-governance undertaken by you, the essential indicators, including internal audits and management review and, for EMS and OHS, the process for the assessment of risk
- a confirmation of the contractual arrangements, including definition of approval scope, and identifying the planning, logistics, sampling etc. that will be used during the Stage 2 visit.

A Stage 2 visit consists of:

- an assessment of the implementation of the management system to confirm conformity with certification requirements such as the assessment standard(s) and certification scope.

Client information note

Assessment process – Management systems service outline

Interval between Stage1 and Stage 2 visits

We recommend that the interval between Stage 1 and Stage 2 visits is a minimum of six weeks and no longer than three months. In planning the two visits for the assessment, we will consider:

- your needs to resolve, before the Stage 2 visit, any areas of concern that may be identified during the Stage visit, and
- the continued relevance of our work undertaken at the Stage 1 visit.

If an interval longer than three months is planned, we may need to revisit some of the areas assessed at the Stage 1 visit. An interval less than six weeks may not provide you with adequate time to address any concerns from the Stage 1 visit.

Stage 1 visits

Normally our assessment team perform the Stage 1 visit of a client's management system on-site. Please note that performing the Stage 1 visit off-site creates additional risk for the Stage 2 visit.

Note: For most management systems, it is recommended that at least part of the Stage 1 is carried out at your premises to achieve the objectives.

The Objective of the Stage 1 Visit

This will be communicated to you within the Client Information Note (CIN) sent to you in advance of Stage 1 visit
The assessor shall review the system to determine that it fulfils the requirements of the assessment criteria and covers the activities detailed within the assessment scope.
The assessor shall then interview the senior management of the company to determine that they have undertaken the following:

- determined the context of their organization including the identification of any interested parties
- strategic analysis
- identified the risks that could impact upon their business and the ability of the management system to deliver on their strategic goals
- that they have determined the scope of the management system based upon the context in which the system will operate
- that they have identified any applicable legal, statutory or regulatory requirements that the system has to address

The assessor will then use the information gathered as a result of these interviews to review the design of the system, to determine if the client has addressed the potential risk within the system and to determine if the needs of their stakeholders have been addressed.

In addition, the assessor shall review and confirm the contractual arrangements. This includes any changes required as a result of the outcome of the Stage 1 visit (including changes to the scope of assessment, duration of the Stage 2 visit, and duration of subsequent surveillance visits). The assessor shall also determine the planning, logistics, sampling, etc. that will be used during the Stage 2 visit.

During the stage 1 visit

For all assessments

Our assessor will undertake the following:

a) evaluate your location and site-specific conditions and carry out discussions with your personnel to determine your preparedness for the Stage 2 visit
b) review your status and understanding regarding requirements of the standard, in particular with respect to the identification of key performance indicators or significant aspects, processes, objectives and operation of the management system
c) collect the information we need regarding the scope of your management system, processes and location(s) of your organization, and related statutory, regulatory aspects and compliance, for example, quality, environmental, legal aspects of your operation, associated risks, etc.
d) confirm that you have procedures in place to identify legal requirements and to ensure that you comply with your commitment to legal compliance through monitoring of legal and regulatory compliance
e) review the allocation of resources for Stage 2 and agree with you the details of the Stage 2 visit
f) provide a focus for planning the Stage 2 visit by gaining sufficient understanding of your management system and site operations in the context of possible significant aspects
g) confirm that your management system documentation is in place with clear links to any related management systems in operation.
h) evaluate your planning of internal audits and management reviews and how you perform them - and that the level of implementation of the management system substantiates that your organization is ready for the Stage 2 visit.

The assessor will also address the following product specific items:

For EMS assessments

Our assessor will identify your:

- continual improvement process to enhance your system and thus improve your performance, and
- process to ensure your commitment to prevention of pollution.

Our assessor will either report key elements of the continual improvement and prevention of pollution processes in our visit report, or provide a reference to specific procedure(s) or document(s) from your system. This is to enable us to assess the ISO 14001 requirement for continual improvement and prevention of pollution at each surveillance visit.

For ISMS assessments

Our assessor will confirm that:

- the physical and logical boundaries of the scope are defined in your system, and
- that a risk assessment has been conducted, identifying:
- the threats to assets
- vulnerabilities and impacts on the client,
- the degree of risk has been determined.

Our assessor will agree the justification for any exclusion of ISO/IEC 27001 Annex A controls with you. You should document the justification in your Statement of Applicability.

For OHS assessments

Our assessor will confirm that:

- there is an effective internal audit process in place which takes into account the OHS risks associated with the various components of your activities
- you are consistent in establishing and maintaining procedures for hazard identification, risk assessment and risk control.

Closing the visit - all sectors

Our assessor will:

- document and communicate the Stage 1 visit results to you, including identifying any areas of concern that would result in nonconformity if not corrected before the end of the Stage 2 visit
- consider the interval between Stage 1 and Stage 2 visits including:
- your needs and ability to resolve areas of concern identified during the Stage 1 visit, and
- whether our work completed during the Stage 1 visit will still be relevant at the time of the Stage 2 visit.

If you determine that you can take any required corrective action within the planned interval, the assessor will consider whether extra duration is required at the Stage 2 visit to verify the corrective action taken.

If the interval between visits is extended to:

- between three and six months, we will need to:
- identify the changes that you need to make to your system, including the need for records
- review the changes to determine the need for a further visit, or to extend the Stage 2 visit, to verify that the design, definition and operation of the system now conforms with certification requirements such as the assessment standard(s) and certification scope
- greater than six months, a second Stage 1 visit is normally required. We may also need to revise our arrangements, duration and / or timing, for the Stage 2 visit.

The Objective of the Stage 2 Visit

The objective of this visit is to confirm conformity of your management system with certification requirements, such as the assessment criteria and certification scope, any applicable statutory, regulatory and contractual requirements and to ensure that the system is meeting its specified objectives. The assessor will also address all issues outstanding from previous visits and any changes to your organisation or system that impacts on the potential approval.
The assessor will use the LRQA Assessment methodology to help you manage your systems and risks to improve and protect the current and future performance of your organisation.

Stage 2 visit

Parts of the management system that were assessed during the Stage 1 visit and were determined to be fully implemented, effective, and in conformity with requirements, may not need to be re-assessed during the Stage 2 visit. However, our assessor must confirm that those parts of the management system already assessed continue to conform to certification requirements. If so, our assessor will include a statement to this effect in the Stage 2 visit report. Our assessor will state that conformity was established during the Stage 1 visit.

Stage 2 visits must have a visit plan. The plan follows the requirements in ISO/IEC 17021 and takes into account the information obtained during the Stage 1 visit.

The Stage 2 visit:

- takes place at the site(s) of your organization
- evaluates the implementation and effectiveness of your management system.

Our assessment team:

- conducts the Stage 2 visit to gather objective evidence that your management system conforms to the assessment standard and other certification requirements
- assesses a sufficient number of examples of your activities in relation to the management system to get a sound appraisal of the implementation, including effectiveness, of the management system

- addresses a sufficient number of your staff, including senior management and operational personnel, of the assessed facility, to provide assurance of the implementation and understanding of the system throughout your organization
- analyses all information and objective evidence gathered during the Stage 1 and Stage 2 visits to determine the extent of fulfilment with all certification requirements and decide on any nonconformity
- may propose opportunities for improvement but shall not recommend specific solutions.

The Stage 2 visit includes an examination of your management system including at least the following:

a) information and evidence about conformity to all requirements of the applicable normative document
b) performance monitoring, measuring, reporting and reviewing against key performance objectives and targets
c) your management system and performance as regards legal compliance
d) operational control
e) internal auditing and management review
f) management responsibility for your policies
g) links between the normative requirements, policy, performance objectives and targets, any applicable legal requirements, responsibilities, personnel competence, operations, procedures, performance data, and internal audit results.

Action undertaken after the completion of a Stage 2 visit includes at least the following:

- leave a record of any identified and agreed nonconformities with you before leaving
- establish the assessment report.

Surveillance

The objective of surveillance is to determine:

- if the client's management system meets the assessment criteria and certification
- and that any applicable statutory regulatory and contractual requirements are being achieved
- and to ensure that the system is meeting its specified objectives.

To address all issues outstanding from previous visits and any changes to your organisation or system that impact on the approval.
The assessor will use the LRQA Assessment methodology to help you to manage your systems and risks to improve and protect the current and future performance of your organisation.

Activities

Selecting the theme

Our assessor selects the theme for the visit based on information gained from the initial conversation with your senior management. The information gained during this conversation will determine the focus for the visit, which our assessor then addresses in the processes selected for the visit.

In the initial discussions with you, our assessor will also identify the theme for the next visit and the processes to be covered. We will confirm this at the next visit.

Review of essential indicators

During the annual visit cycle, the essential indicators of the effectiveness of system implementation will be reviewed as part of the opening conversation with your senior management and during the assessment of the processes targeted for the visit.

These indicators include:

For all product types:

- internal audits and management review
- progress of planned activities aimed at continual improvement
- effectiveness of the management system with regard to achieving your objectives
- review of any changes
- treatment of complaints
- a review of actions taken on nonconformities identified during the previous visit.

For OHS, ISO 14001 and other EMS assessments:

- the process to ensure your EMS policy commitment to prevention of pollution
- the system for monitoring legal compliance
- the process for reviewing and updating OHS risk assessments to reflect changing operations, hazards and controls
- OHS "plant shutdown" or "turnaround" activities to ensure that they have been addressed within the lifecycle of the approval.

For ISMS assessments:

Confirmation that:

- you have updated your Risk Assessment and your Statement of Applicability to reflect any changing threats, vulnerabilities and impacts
- the risk treatment plan is reviewed for progress with actions, and that security incidents are managed effectively
- management review includes consideration of effectiveness measurements.
  also
- if there are any change to your ISMS infrastructure, organisation structure or activities which impact on the Risk Assessment or Statement of Applicability, then we must make an agreement with you to review the

changes before they are incorporated into the scope of approval. Our assessor will arrange for a review, either by a special surveillance visit or by adding additional time to the next surveillance visit.
- if changes are identified which significantly affect your information security management system and an acceptable risk assessment has not been conducted, our assessor must consider suspending the approval.

Review of logos

During the visit, our assessor will review your use of the permitted LRQA and accreditation logos against the relevant LRQA and accreditation rules. Failure to comply constitutes a breach of the approval contract.

Certificate renewal

The Objective of the Certificate renewal planning visit

To review the system and the performance of your company during the previous certification cycle, to see how the you plan to move forward in the future and to plan the Certificate renewal visit while confirming continued compliance with the assessment criteria and certification scope, any applicable statutory, regulatory and contractual requirements and to ensure that the system is meeting its specified objectives. To address all issues outstanding from previous visits and any changes to your organisation or system that impact on the approval.
The assessor will use the LRQA Assessment methodology to help you manage your systems and risks to improve and protect the current and future performance of your organisation.

Planning for the Certificate renewal

We conduct Certificate renewals on a three-yearly basis, planned at the previous surveillance visit and agreed with you.

The Certificate renewal planning process contains three steps: Review, Preview, and Planning.

Review

This step includes the review of past performance such as:
- trend information on complaints and other performance indicators
- system documentation improvements
- Improvement Log projects
- lessons learned from audits
- trends in our findings.

Based on this review of past performance, our assessor will identify any potential risks in the present management system regarding successful implementation of the strategies and objectives.

Preview

The aim of the preview is to align our assessment activities with your strategy and objectives. The assessor will use the conversation with senior management to understand your longer term expectations, for example, strategy issues such as business and operational risks, competitive issues, changes to internal and external environment, etc. Our assessor will establish, through the interview, whether these expectations, objectives, and strategies will impact your management system or the stakeholders of your organisation.

We will use the preview stage to identify further themes that can be used in the coming Certificate renewal visit and next three-year cycle.

Planning

The next step in the visit is planning the Certificate renewal. In this part of the visit, our assessor will:

- identify any aspects of the system that have not been appropriately addressed during the surveillance cycle, and plan how to review these
- use the information gained during the review and preview stages to support the planning process
- if appropriate, consider how best to give attention to any themes identified (including the improvement tracking log)
- identify the areas, departments, processes and activities to be assessed
- agree with you sensible durations for each of these, commensurate with risk
- try to identify the best use of resources, and avoid duplication
- add appropriate time for reporting, consolidating and presenting reports
- consolidate the information into a sensible visit plan.

Our assessor will allow time for discussion with all relevant managers and for a review of records for all relevant departments.

The Objective of the Certificate renewal visit

This visit is used as the re-assessment of the implementation of the management system based on the results of the Certificate renewal planning visit. This is to re-confirm conformity with certification requirements such as the assessment criteria and certification scope, any applicable statutory, regulatory and contractual requirements and to ensure that the system is meeting its specified objectives. To address all issues outstanding from previous visits and any changes to your organisation or system that impact on the approval.
The assessor will use the LRQA Assessment methodology to help you manage your systems and risks to improve and protect the current and future performance of your organisation.

Conducting Certificate renewal visits

We conduct the Certificate renewal visit similarly to a Stage 2 assessment. In addition, we include a review of your system documentation to ensure that it:
- continues to suit your company, and

- complies with the certification requirements and the scope of certification, including continual improvement.

Changes to your approval

For any increase or decrease in your certificate of approval, please submit a formal request for the change. LRQA will review the request to consider:

- additions or changes to competency requirements for the visit team(s)
- additions or reductions in visit duration requirements

You will be notified of any changes by an amended contract.

We will undertake a separate document review visit (Stage 1) if the change requested has meant a major change or addition to your documented system.

The change to approval visit will be performed in line with our process for Stage 2 assessment visits, although a formal visit plan is not normally produced. If no document review (Stage 1) has been undertaken, time will be allowed during the visit for the team leader to review relevant documentation and to agree a plan for any additional visit activities.

Such visits may be carried out as separate visits or may be combined with a scheduled (Surveillance or Certificate renewal) visit.

LRQA will issue an amended certificate(s), using the same expiry date as on the current certificate.

The objective of this visit is the assessment of the implementation of the management system for an additional site or activity, which expands the existing scope of approval. To address all issues outstanding from previous visits and any changes to your organisation or system that impact on the potential approval.

Reporting

The reporting process for all our visits is similar. We fill in visit reports to record assessment findings, progress against plan, positive comments, and also points of clarification or interpretation. We record assessment findings in a Findings Log, and identify them as Major Nonconformity or Minor Nonconformity. We define these findings as follows:

Major Nonconformity: The absence of, or the failure to implement and maintain, one or more management system elements, or a situation which would, on the basis of the available objective evidence, raise significant doubt of the management to achieve:

- the policy, objectives or public commitments of the organisation
- compliance with the applicable regulatory requirements
- conformance to applicable customer requirements
- conformance with the audit criteria deliverables.

Generally, a major nonconformity will be a system failure that:

- is already affecting system effectiveness or deliverables
- puts at risk the capability of the management system
- requires immediate containment
- requires immediate root cause analysis and corrective action.

Our team leader will make arrangements with you for follow up.

Minor Nonconformity: A finding indicative of a weakness in the implemented and maintained system, which has not significantly impacted on the capability of the management system or put at risk the system deliverables, but needs to be addressed to assure the future capability of the system.

Generally, a minor nonconformity will be a weakness in an internal facing process or procedure; or a finding where any further deterioration of control could reasonably be considered likely to result in the system becoming ineffective. Requires root cause investigation and corrective action.

If raised at a visit which results in a certificate being issued, then the assessor will ask you to indicate the corrective action that you will take. This corrective action plan will form part of the independent review by our office before is issued. If raised at a surveillance visit, although you need to take corrective action within an appropriate time after the visit, you do not normally need to provide us with details of the action until we next visit you.

In both cases, at the next visit the assessor will review the action you have taken and fill in the corrective action review section in the findings log.

Please keep copies of all our visit reports for three years. In exceptional circumstances, we may ask you to provide copies of previous reports.

If we identify any isolated issues that you should address to avoid us raising a nonconformity at a subsequent visit, we will record them in the relevant part of the report.

Follow up of Major non-conformities

If the time required to address the major exceed 6 months from the end of the Stage 2 visit, then we must re-assess the entire system. We call this form of corrective action verification visit a 'Complete re-assessment'.

If a Major Nonconformity(s) raised at the recertification visit cannot be addressed by the organization within 6 months of the end of the visit, the client shall be informed that a full Stage 2 visit will be required to be conducted in-order that the recertification can be granted

Follow up and Special Surveillance visits

The objective of a follow up visit is to review the effectiveness of the correction and corrective action taken after the raising of a Major Nonconformity at a Stage 2 or Certificate renewal. The objective of a special surveillance visit is to review the effectiveness of the correction and corrective action taken after the raising of a Major Nonconformity at a Stage 2 or Certificate renewal.

In the event of complaints against the you that is within the scope of this approval, or in the event that the you [illegible] of significant changes which are likely to affect the management system's compliance with the criteria referred to and the approvals issued under your approval, LRQA will carry out either an unannounced or short notice visit to the you for the purposes of investigating the complaint or reviewing the changes made.

Sampling

It is important to remember that even though a problem may not have been identified in an area of activity, it does not necessarily mean that there are no problems. As assessment work is based on sampling techniques, statistically there is always a possibility that issues will not be identified during an assessment. You should always remember this when you audit your own management system.

Certification decision

Following an assessment visit where an assessor makes a recommendation in relation to your certification, accreditation rules require that this recommendation will be subject to an independent review or certification decision, only following this decision will certification be either granted, renewed, extended, reduced, suspended or withdrawn.

Confidentiality

We will not pass on any of the information we gather about your organisation (including the contents of reports) to any other person or organisation without your permission (except as required by the accreditation body).

Further information

To find out more about how LRQA can help you to increase performance and reduce risk, please visit our website www.lrqa.com. From here you can also visit one of our country specific websites to find out about LRQA in your country.