

Guidance for Assessing Bodies 037

Dealing with Consultants

Introduction

The ACS standard has been designed so that an organisation does not need expert help to become an SIA approved contractor. The ACS application process is designed to be manageable for any company, regardless of size.

It starts with an organisation's own self-assessment of their business, which is then verified by an independent assessor. Experience shows that organisations and their staff are best placed to carry out their self-assessment. They know how their business operates, and the *ACS Self-Assessment Workbook* will enable them to quickly and easily identify their organisation's strengths and weaknesses.

It is however recognised that an organisation may choose to use a consultant when implementing arrangements to meet the ACS standard. It is also recognised that consultants are likely to be present during verification visits, and that they may get involved to different extents in the assessment process.

In some cases, the organisation may request their consultant to be present during verification visits by the ACS assessing body. Depending on the way in which this is managed by the assessor, the involvement of a consultant can be beneficial or detrimental to achieving the assessment objectives.

This document provides some practical guidance to assessors on how to deal with some of the situations that might arise.

Note: ISO 10019 "*Guidelines for the selection of quality management system consultants and use of their services*" provides useful guidance about the ways in which a quality management system consultant might best be used in order to help an organization to achieve its objectives.

When an assessor identifies that a consultant performs any relevant roles, or holds responsibilities and authorities within the organisation management system, then the assessor should obtain appropriate objective evidence:

- that the ACS applicant company has formally assigned these functions to the consultant,
- it is communicated within the organisation, and
- of the fulfilment of his/her duties.

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Guidance for assessors

It is important to recognise that the contractual relationship for the verification visit is between the ACS assessment body and its client (“ACS Applicant Company”), with no direct involvement of the consultant.

Remember that it is the implementation of the *organisation’s self-assessment* that is being verified, *not the consultant!*

In all cases the assessor should ascertain if a consultant is likely to have any involvement in the assessment, and if so, an agreement must be reached regarding the role of that consultant prior to the assessment, and ideally during the planning period. If there are restrictions or reservations about the use of a specific consultant, this should also be communicated and agreed with the organisation prior to the start of the assessment.

It should be made clear by the assessor during the opening meeting that the role of the consultant is similar to that of an observer and that the consultant should not try to influence or interfere in the assessment process or in the outcome of the assessment.

The assessor is responsible for ensuring the assessment is conducted and managed to achieve the assessment objectives within the agreed timeframe. As appropriate, using a business-like demeanour the assessor should assert their role and responsibilities to the consultant.

The assessment activity could be adversely affected should those involved in the assessment deviate from their agreed role.

In some cases, where the assessor perceives the consultant to be interfering with the assessment, or compromising the integrity of the assessment in any way, the assessor may require that the consultant is not present during some or all of the assessment. The assessor may also refuse to share any findings, or discuss next steps with the consultant except with the express permission of the business.

The assessor should also refer to Indicator 3.1.1 in relation to consultants to ensure that SAW requirements are met in relation to their engagement

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Where the assessor identifies deviation in the role of the consultant the assessor should immediately make this known to the client and/or consultant highlighting, as appropriate, this is one of the conditions under which the assessment may be prematurely terminated.