Assessor and Technical Expert Qualifications, Training and Performance Monitoring

Preamble

A. Introduction and Purpose of the Policy

This document describes the qualifications, training and performance monitoring requirements of assessors and technical experts and the record keeping systems that support these processes.

B. Scope

This policy refers to the recruitment, approval, training and performance monitoring of assessors and technical experts in line with international norms. The policy applies to contracted and staff assessors. Record keeping requirements are described.

C. Definitions

Reference is made to the IOAS General Operating Manual for definitions.
Reference is made to the IOAS website for all related schemes.

D. Distribution

This document is distributed to the IOAS Board and AC annually. Staff are informed of changes as soon as they have been finalized. Interested parties may obtain a copy on request.

E. Authority and Revision

This policy is approved by the IOAS Executive Director. It is the responsibility of the IOAS Executive Director to review the appropriateness of the policy from time to time. It may be revised when the need arises. Revisions must be approved by the IOAS Executive Director. Its effectiveness in meeting the quality policy of the IOAS will be assessed during internal audit and management review and any measures for improvement are communicated to the Executive Director.

F. Policy

General

F.1 IOAS works with full-time staff and part-time external assessors and technical experts. External assessors and technical experts may be freelance or may be provided through an agreement reached with other accreditation bodies or other entities. Qualification, recruitment, initial training, and on-going competence requirements are essentially the same regardless of contractual arrangements whilst allowing for the fact that external contractors gain experience and training from sources other than IOAS.

F.2 Assessors may be assigned to conduct or participate in document review, assessment, surveillance, non-conformity review or CB client (operator) visits (all covered in this document by the term "assessment") of IOAS client certification bodies. Technical expert assignments have reduced responsibilities than what is described above; however, assessors may serve as technical experts, and technical experts may train to become assessors.

Application as Assessor/Technical Expert

F.3 Individuals desiring to become an approved IOAS assessor or technical expert must apply in writing including a curriculum vitae (resume), a letter expressing their interest in, and suitability for, the position and contact details of three referees. Applicants may be asked to attend an interview at their own expense, or this may be performed remotely.

F.4 Prior to any assessment work being undertaken, external assessors and technical experts are required to sign a contract which details their obligations, and the financial arrangements between IOAS and the assessor/technical expert (FR0401).

F.5 Assessors shall abide by "Management of Conflict of Interest Policy" (PL0210) and "Confidentiality Policy" (PL0203) and all other policies relating to their activities.

Assessors (Lead Assessors, Technical Assessors (Level 1 and 2))

F.6 IOAS recognises 3 levels of assessor as follows (see Annex 1):

Lead Assessor (LA): LA assessors may perform all tasks of assessment (system and technical) including managing a team and taking overall responsibility for reporting. Competence to fulfil the role of Technical Assessor (Level 1 or 2) or Technical Expert may be restricted to certain schemes and scopes and shall be identified.

Technical Assessor (Level 1) – TA1: TA1 assessors are qualified to perform all assessment tasks for schemes for which they are qualified. This includes operator file review and operator visits. TA1 assessors shall determine appropriate non-conformities but will work with a lead assessor who will perform the system assessment and manage the overall assessment.

Technical Assessor (Level 2) – TA2: TA2 assessors are qualified to perform CB client site (operator) visits (witness and review audits) only. TA2 assessors shall determine appropriate non-conformities but will work with a lead assessor who will perform the system assessment and manage the overall assessment. The schemes for which TA2 assessors are qualified shall be specified.

F.7 All assessors shall have knowledge of and experience in assessment or inspection and certification in a field relevant to the schemes for which they are qualified. Given the emphasis of the IOAS on organic and sustainable agriculture and food safety, a core competence in these fields is desirable.

F.8 Prior to providing any services on behalf of IOAS, assessors shall be formally approved by IOAS based on the competence and induction training requirements outlined in Annex A of this procedure.

Technical Experts

F.9 A technical expert is a person with specialist knowledge assigned by IOAS to support assessors in the assessment of a certification body (CB) in circumstances when the detailed technical aspects of the scheme under review is not within the capabilities of the assessor. Given the limited field of activity of the IOAS, most staff and external assessors will have sufficient knowledge to perform such technical work. However, technical experts may be required for specific tasks and in special areas and when scheme owners demand it.

F.10 Duties of technical experts shall typically include assessment of competence of CB staff through interview, review of CB work documents and technical decisions. Technical experts may work alone (for example conducting remote or on-site file review) but are also supported by a Technical or Lead assessor. Technical experts highlight issues for assessors to consider and confirm as non-conformities.

F.11 Technical experts shall abide by "Management of Conflict of Interest Policy" (PL0210) and "Confidentiality Policy" (PL0203) and all other policies relating to their activities.

F.12 Technical experts are required to meet the competence requirements and complete the induction training outlined in Annex A of this policy.

Initial Training (see Annex B)

F.13 All new assessors and technical experts receive initial training on IOAS policies and procedures relevant to their work.

F.14 In line with ISO 19011, trainee assessors (candidates in training to become an assessor) shall undergo an apprenticeship period that includes participating in the assessment of certification bodies (CBs) while under supervision of experienced IOAS assessor(s). Where trainee assessors have previous experience of auditing against ISO/IEC 17065 or similar norms this period may be reduced or eliminated according to the degree of experience.

F.15 During the apprenticeship period the training activities may include but are not limited to:
- documentation review (screening) that is peer reviewed.
- observation of physical audit activities as described below.
- peer review of the first 4 audit reports with feedback and suggestions for improvement.

Document Review

F.16 Upon completion of the initial orientation training, any assessor may be assigned document reviews based on their qualifications and experience.

F.17 At minimum, the first 3 screenings assigned will require a peer review by another assessor. Additional peer review may be conducted depending on the assessor's performance.

Assessors

F.18 For general qualification as an IOAS assessor for each group of related schemes the apprenticeship period will include attendance at least one on-site or remote assessment/surveillance (CB offices,

operator visits) as a trainee, accompanying an experienced assessor. As part of the training the trainee could be asked to participate although a qualified IOAS assessor will always be leading and will present the results to the CB at the exit meeting.

F.19 To complete the apprenticeship period, the trainee will be observed by an experienced IOAS assessor (trainer) for at least one assessment. The trainer could give some support to the trainee in case he/she runs out of time and a proper assessment of the CB is in risk or if he/she misses some critical point, but the trainee will present the results to the CB in any case, as he/she will be still under observation. The assessor trainer will complete a report on the trainee using form FR0308.

F.20 To be initially approved as an assessor for any particular scheme the trainee assessor must attend a scheme specific training (which may be remote or face to face), demonstrate proficiency in document screening for that scheme, and observe the conduct of an assessment relevant to that scheme.

F.21 Within the first three years of work for the IOAS, assessors performing more than one assessment per year shall attend a recognised lead auditor course which may qualify them as a lead assessor.

F.22 IOAS may qualify and contract assessors who have been working with other ABs if they are able to meet the following requirements:

- Having conducted at least 10 assignments as an assessor in the last 3 years in fields related to the scope of IOAS work.
- Having attended a recognised lead auditor course.
- To qualify for specific schemes in which they have had no previous direct experience having attended a scheme specific training (which may be remote or face to face), or demonstrate proficiency in document screening for that scheme, or observe the conduct of an assessment relevant to that scheme.

Technical Experts

F.23 Before contributing to an assessment, technical experts must have completed a training on the IOAS assessment procedures and be briefed by the Client Service Manager or Lead Assessor on the CB that is the subject of the assessment.

F.24 The qualifications and experience of technical assessors provided by other ABs shall be reviewed and confirmed as equivalent to IOAS requirements.

Maintaining, Extending and Reducing Competence

F.25 Approved assessors and technical experts must attend any applicable training courses provided by IOAS to maintain their approval status. IOAS may also require assessors to attend specific courses organized by third parties. The assessors shall keep IOAS updated on any external training they attend which is relevant to their approval status.

F.26 Once qualified for a scheme, competence is maintained by performing at least one assessment per year or attending relevant training.

F.27 Assessors or technical experts can be upgraded as they gain experience or choose to extend their competence level to other schemes by attending required training.

F.28 IOAS approval of an assessor or technical expert may be downgraded or removed as a result of poor performance.

Performance Monitoring

F.27 Assessor/Technical Expert performance is assessed in the following ways:

- Staff peer review of all visit reports (Form FR0591).
- Accreditation Committee feedback on visit reports.
- Feedback from CBs requested at the time of the exit meeting at each office visit using form FR0408 Assessor's assessment.
  Complaints regarding assessor performance.
- Observation by another IOAS assessor (Form FR0308)

F.28 Each assessor and technical expert shall be observed on-site by another assessor (IOAS Observer) at least once every 3 years. Such observation events can take place at remote assessments or by remote observation of on-site assessments (i.e., with the assessor on site and the observer remote, where technology and circumstances allow). These shall form part of the schedule planning performed by the Operations Director. More frequent observations of assessors/technical experts may be done if concerns are raised over the continued competent performance of any individual. Less frequent observations may be conducted if there is sufficient supporting evidence that the assessor/technical expert continues to perform competently. Both scenarios may be informed by feedback from clients or through external audits and peer review. The IOAS Observer will evaluate the assessor but will not participate in the assessment.

F.29 Any individual can be observed and/or assessed by a supervisory authority of IOAS or other applicable authority such as scheme owners. These observations may replace IOAS observations when the performance of the assessor was considered satisfactory, but they may also prompt additional on-site observations if performance was not satisfactory.

F.30 The result of any other observation of the individual (not included above) may also be considered in the assessor's performance review.

F.31 IOAS staff who conduct assessment visits shall be subject to all the above provisions. The performance of staff assessors will, additionally, be assessed at annual performance reviews in line with document PL0302.

F.32 A formal performance review of external assessors/technical experts is done annually by the Technical Director (TD) utilizing FR0407. Once completed, the FR0407 form is made available to the external assessor/technical expert. Criteria taken into consideration during the performance review include outcomes from F.8.1-F.8.7 above. If warranted, the TD may schedule an interview if there are items or issues to discuss in more detail. Outcomes (including actions and targets) from any such interview are to be added to the FR0407 document.

Records

F.33 The Records Administrator is responsible for maintaining all records relevant to competence management.

F.34 All personnel involved in assessment activities shall be identified as assessor and/or technical expert for relevant schemes in IOAS records including the O-SYS database to assist in appropriate assignment and in visit plans and assessment reports to provide clarity on roles.

F.35 Full records shall be kept of all training, approval, review and monitoring processes to demonstrate conformance with this policy.

F.36 The necessary qualifications, experience and training of each assessor shall be documented for each scheme in the 'Assessor competence' spreadsheet.

F.37 All assessors and technical experts shall remain updated on any external training or professional development relevant to their competence record held by IOAS.

Annex A: IOAS COMPETENCE REQUIREMENTS FOR PERSONNEL INVOLVED IN ASSESSMENT

Positions[1]	IOAS ASSESSOR ROLES, TASKS & COMPETENCE REQUIREMENTS			
	Lead Assessor (LA)	**Technical Assessor (Level 1)**	**Technical Assessor (Level 2)**	**Technical Expert (TE)**
Role	All tasks of assessment	All tasks of technical assessment but not including system assessment	Operator visits	Specific technical assistance
Tasks	Document review, planning and managing assessment, system assessment, reporting, corrective action review.	Technical assessment including document review, operator files and visits, reporting, corrective action review.	Witness audit and review audits only including reporting, corrective action review.	Technical support to assessors
Notes	LA can conduct all tasks above for the specific schemes they are approved for. For an LA to conduct a full assessment alone they will need to be qualified as a TA for the relevant schemes.	TA1 assists a LA in specified technical areas and will be restricted to certain schemes depending on technical competence. The TA1 does not perform system assessment.	TA2 will be restricted to certain schemes depending on technical competence.	TE conducts specific interviews and file reviews, responds to technical questions from assessors and highlights issues for assessors to consider as NCs but do not set NCs themselves.
Basic recruitment requirements				
Education	Tertiary education in a relevant discipline (Experience in the field of expertise may be substituted as judged on a case-by-case basis)	Same as LA	Same as LA	Tertiary education in a relevant discipline
Work experience	3 years of relevant professional experience	3 years of relevant professional experience	3 years of relevant professional experience	5 years relevant professional experience.
Additional work experience	At least 3 years of experience related to quality management, quality assurance or quality system auditing	At least 2 year of experience related to quality management, quality assurance or quality system auditing	-	-
Assessment experience	At least 1 year of assessment experience or performing at least 3 assessments as TA	-	-	-
Analytical skills	X	X	X	X
Communication & interpersonal skills	X	X	X	X
Time management skills	X	X	X	X
English language	Spoken and written	Spoken and written	Spoken and written	Spoken and written
Personal attributes: Ethical, open-minded, diplomatic, observant, perceptive, versatile, tenacious, decisive, self-reliant.	X	X	X	X
Interviewing skills	X	X	X	X
Lead assessor qualification	X (within 3 years of being appointed LA)	-	-	-

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[1] See detailed descriptions of the roles and tasks that each position plays and where restrictions apply.

Annex B: IOAS INDUCTION TRAINING FOR PERSONNEL INVOLVED IN ASSESSMENT

	Induction training[2]			
IOAS and role as AB	IOAS background, mission, values and general orientation IOAS structures, personnel, roles and responsibilities Impartiality, confidentiality, security and conduct Contract terms, fees and expenses Other work, conflicts of interest, gifts IOAS assessment system & workflow			
ISO/IEC 17011	Section 7 Process requirements (detail in different areas will vary depending on role)			-
IOAS working environment	IOAS working tools and documents Conducting CB & operator site visits Findings and categorisation of nonconformities Working in O-SYS	IOAS working tools and documents Conducting CB & operator site visits Findings and categorisation of nonconformities Working in O-SYS	IOAS working tools and documents Conducting operator site visits Findings and categorisation of nonconformities Working in O-SYS	IOAS working tools and documents
Assessment principles, practices and techniques	X	X	X	X
Accreditation requirements	X	X	X	-
Knowledge of scheme requirements	Detailed familiarity with relevant scheme documents including specific training on certain scopes or subject areas as necessary.	Same as LA excluding non-technical system elements	Same as LA but limited to the scheme inspection requirements	Same as LA but limited to the specific focus of the work being done
Knowledge of risk-based assessment principles	X	X	X	-
Document review	Peer reviewed document review	Peer reviewed document review	-	-
Observing an assessment	Observing 1 assessment	Observing 1 assessment	Observing 1 assessment	-
Observed assessment	1 assessment observed by LA	1 assessment observed by LA	1 assessment observed by LA	1 assessment observed by LA/TA1 or other TE but limited to the work being done

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[2] See IOAS document PL 0306 for details on induction and on-going training.

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