International Accreditation Forum, Inc.
(IAF)

IAF Guidance Document

IAF Guidance on Cross Frontier Accreditation

Issue 1, Version 3

(IAF GD 3:2003)

Issued: 1 December 2003 Application Date: 1 May 2004 IAF-GD3-2003Cross Frontier Accredn Issue 1v3 Pub Doc

The International Accreditation Forum, Inc. (IAF) operates a programme of conformity assessment which promotes the elimination of non-tariff barriers to trade, removing technical barriers caused by demands for specific certification and/or registration requirements. The IAF programme of conformity assessment delivers the confidence needed for market acceptance of certificates in the fields of management systems, products, services, personnel and other similar programmes of conformity assessment.

The IAF programme allows companies with an accredited conformity assessment certificate in one part of the world to have that certificate recognised everywhere else in the world. IAF promotes the international acceptance of accreditations granted by its signatory accreditation body members of the IAF Multilateral Recognition Arrangement (MLA), based on the equivalence of their accreditation programmes.

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Issue No 1, Version 3
Prepared by: IAF Technical Committee
Approved by: IAF Members Date: 21 September 2003
Issue Date: 1 December 2003 Application Date: 1 May 2004
Name for Enquiries: John Owen, IAF Corporate Secretary
Contact: Phone: +612 9481 7343; FAX: +612 9481 7343
Email: secretary@accreditationforum.com

Cross Frontier Accreditation

1. PRINCIPLE

A. This document provides guidance on Section 3 of ISO/IEC Guide 61 for the accreditation of management system certification/registration bodies.

B. This document is intended to strengthen the international network of accreditation bodies (ABs) for certification/registration bodies (CRBs) provided through IAF. It should assist the World Trade Organization Technical Barriers to Trade agreement (WTO/TBT) (as well as other regional trade agreements) objective of facilitating international trade by removing technical barriers to trade through mutual recognition between the national based conformity assessment systems.

C. For this to be achieved, the ABs operate as a network, each providing an equivalent accreditation service.

D. The signatories to the IAF Multilateral Recognition Arrangement (MLA) normally operate from a national base, providing accreditation of CRBs for their home market. The effect of the IAF MLA, based on IAF peer evaluation, is that the accredited CRBs should receive recognition from the whole global market for the certificates of conformity that they issue under their scopes of accreditation.

E. There are however situations where CRBs will seek more than one accreditation, or a "foreign" accreditation**,** and it is the CRB's right to do so. Nevertheless, IAF strongly encourages CRBs to have local country accreditation whenever it is available. (Only when all countries or economies have ABs that are signatories of the IAF MLA, and when the user market has fully recognized and accepted the mutual recognition behind the IAF MLA, is the market likely to cease its demands for multiple accreditation.) IAF's objective is to offer its mechanism for mutual recognition so that duplicate accreditation will no longer be looked for in the market place.

F. Reasons why a CRB may seek accreditation from bodies outside its own country or economy instead of, or as well as, the local country accreditation include:

- The local AB(s) do(es) not offer the complete required scope of accreditation (including Standards and sector schemes);
- The local AB(s) is/are not a signatory/signatories to the IAF MLA;
- There is no local AB in the country or economy;

- CRBs' preferences based on commercial or other business reasons;
- The CRB's customers demand a specific accreditation and will not be persuaded to accept an equivalent;
- The CRB is part of a chain of CRBs with a single owner who wants all the CRBs to be able to offer the same accredited certification/registration;
- Regulatory requirements within a specific country or economy require accreditation by a specific AB.

G. In the above and similar circumstances, an IAF MLA signatory, if asked to provide accreditation to a CRB outside its country or economy, may respond positively. However the following steps should be considered before accepting the contract:
G.1. If there is an IAF MLA signatory/signatories covering the scope of the required accreditation in the country or economy of the applicant CRB, the foreign IAF MLA signatory AB should:

- enquire whether the applicant is aware of the local IAF MLA signatory AB(s) and whether local accreditation is held;
- suggest that the accreditation could be more economically performed by a local IAF MLA signatory AB; and
- point out the equivalence of the local accreditation demonstrated through the IAF MLA.

G.2. If the applicant CRB chooses a foreign MLA signatory AB instead of a local IAF MLA signatory AB, the foreign AB should:

- inform the local IAF MLA signatory AB(s) that it will be undertaking the work and explain the circumstances after seeking permission for this from the applicant CRB;
- utilize a local IAF MLA signatory AB to provide assessment team personnel wherever possible; and
- propose a joint assessment with a local IAF MLA signatory AB if the applicant CRB is interested in longer term involvement of the local IAF MLA signatory AB and/or local accreditation.

NOTE: If permission sought from the CRB under the first bullet above is not obtained, this does not prevent the foreign MLA signatory approaching local MLA signatories as sources of assessment personnel at the stage when the assessment team is being put together (see 2.4.1 of Implementation).

G.3. If the applicant chooses a foreign MLA signatory AB as well as a local IAF MLA signatory AB, the foreign AB should:

- obtain written permission from the CRB to share information gained through its accreditation activities with the local AB. (See IAF Procedure for Exchange of Documentation among IAF MLA Accreditation Bodies.); and
- take account of the results of the assessments of the local AB when planning its assessment program for the CRB.

H. In all of the above cases, the objective of a potential transfer of the accreditation, within a reasonable timeframe, with the agreement of the CRB, to the relevant local IAF MLA signatory AB, should be borne in mind.

I. One aim of this Guidance is to give confidence to the local national market in the activities of a foreign IAF MLA signatory AB. To achieve this, there is not only need for adequate technical control (with the support of local assessors, knowledgeable in the language, culture, etc.), but also, and more importantly, there is need for assurance that the decisions taken by the foreign AB regarding a local branch of a CRB give due consideration to the fact that the latter is operating de facto as a local CRB in that market. This means that any problem identified should be evaluated from a local as well as a global perspective, so that effective actions can be taken against all non-conforming behaviour (for example, if branch impartiality problems are found in just one country during a worldwide surveillance process, such problems may be minor from the global perspective of the CRB's activities, but critical at the local level).

2. IMPLEMENTATION

2.1. Control of accredited certification/registration in foreign countries

2.1.1. IAF MLA signatory ABs should record the countries in which each CRB accredited by them issues certificates under their accreditation. This includes:

- countries into which accredited certificates are issued directly from the CRB's head or other office; and
- countries in which the CRB operates from local offices, whatever the legal relationship of such offices with the parent CRB.

2.1.2. The recording of these countries is not for the purpose of granting prior permission to the CRBs to issue accredited certificates in these countries, but in order that the IAF MLA signatory AB can plan its assessment programme for each of its accredited CRBs with up-to-date knowledge of the full geographical scope of the CRB's activities.

2.2. Critical locations

2.2.1. IAF MLA signatory ABs should require their accredited CRBs to identify to them those physical locations (see ISO/IEC Guide 61 clause 3.1.2.2 b), whatever the composition (office, person etc) or legal relationship (contractor, franchisee etc) of such location with the CRB, where activities are conducted or controlled that determine or demonstrate the effectiveness of the CRB's performance of the accredited certification/registration, in particular:

- the process for initial qualification, training and ongoing monitoring of auditors and assessment personnel records; or
- the application review, the assignment of assessment personnel, and/or review of the final report; or
- the certification/registration decision based on the final review of the assessment report.

2.2.2. Locations as described under 2.2.1 above are referred to as "critical locations" below.

2.3. Assessment of foreign critical locations

NOTE: This and the subsequent Section of this document address the situation where a foreign AB operates outside its own country. See the preceding Principle section of the document for the reasons why this situation exists and therefore has to be managed.

2.3.1. IAF MLA signatory ABs should have an assessment programme that covers all the critical locations of its applicant and accredited CRBs that are identified to them under 2.2 above, wherever in the world they may be. This programme may utilize local country IAF MLA signatory ABs, but should not allow for sampling of the initial assessment of critical locations.

2.3.2. IAF MLA signatory ABs should require CRBs to have documented procedures that demonstrate to the AB that any new foreign critical location active in the provision of its accredited service is set up in such a way as to meet its accreditation requirements before the AB authorizes the issue of its accredited certificates, either directly from the foreign critical location or resulting from certification/registration work performed under the control of the foreign critical location.

2.3.3. A visit by the foreign AB prior to authorization is not always required, but all critical locations should be assessed on site, either directly by the foreign AB or under appropriate arrangements (e.g. with a local IAF MLA signatory) to confirm that its accredited service may be offered resulting from the work of the critical location.

2.3.4. As well as direct assessment of the critical locations in foreign countries, IAF MLA signatory ABs should assess the effectiveness of the management control, by the head office of the CRB, over the activities of its foreign critical locations.

2.3.5. Follow-up assessment (surveillance and reassessment) visits at the critical location should normally take place at the same frequency as at an equivalent single site CRB. The frequency of surveillance visits may be reduced, subject to absence of justifiable complaints, by taking account of factors such as:

- Low levels of work being undertaken;
- Justifiable confidence, based on access to information demonstrating the work undertaken, in the management control over the operations of the critical location by the head office of the CRB;
- Access, secured by formal agreement, to the assessment results relative to the activities carried out at the critical location by other IAF MLA signatory ABs.

2.4. Assessment of CRBs by foreign IAF MLA signatory ABs where the CRB is not accredited by a local IAF member accreditation body

2.4.1. Where the foreign CRB or its critical location is not accredited, or applying for accreditation, by a local IAF member AB, the foreign AB should either propose use of any local IAF member AB as subcontractor for appropriate parts of the assessment or invite assessment personnel from any local IAF member AB to participate as a member of its team for the assessment of the CRB's local activities.

2.4.2. The participation of such a local assessor as a team member in the foreign AB's team is subject to the normal right to appeal by the CRB (ISO/IEC Guide 61, clause 3.2.4).

2.4.3. For a local assessor to participate as a team member in a foreign AB's assessment team, he/she should receive appropriate training, supervision and monitoring from the foreign AB, and have normal team member duties assigned to him/her so that he/she can play a full part in the assessment team.

2.4.4. In addition to the normal assessment team responsibilities, the local assessor may be assigned special duties with regard to aspects of the assessment that are influenced by local issues and conditions, such as investigation of complaints and conflict of interest issues.

2.4.5. In the event that a local assessor participates as a team member, his/her costs will be covered through the CRB's payment to the foreign AB for the assessment. The foreign AB is responsible for recovering the costs associated with training etc (see 2.4.3 above).

2.5. Assessment of CRBs by foreign IAF MLA signatory ABs where the CRB is accredited by a local IAF member accreditation body

2.5.1. Where the activity of the CRB performed by a local physical location is either accredited by a local IAF member AB or subject to application for such accreditation, the foreign AB should cooperate as far as is practicable with the local IAF member AB, including taking full account of its work whenever this is justifiable, as long as this is acceptable to the CRB. This may be through formal subcontracting arrangements, or through joint assessment activity, or by other means.

2.6. Communication and Arrangements between IAF MLA Signatory ABs

2.6.1. For effective implementation of this Annex, frequent and good communication amongst IAF MLA signatory ABs is critical, e.g. with respect to complaints handling, notification of sanctions, and changes in accreditation scopes.

2.6.2. Defined arrangements between IAF MLA signatory ABs are also necessary to meet the requirements of clause 2.1.3 of ISO/IEC Guide 61, e.g. through subcontracting arrangements and arrangements for joint assessment activity.

End of IAF Guidance Cross Frontier Accreditation

Further Information

For further Information on this document or other IAF documents, contact any member of IAF or the IAF Secretariat.

For contact details of members of IAF see - IAF Web Site - <http://www.iaf.nu>

Secretariat -

John Owen,

IAF Corporate Secretary,

Telephone +612 9481 7343

Facsimile +612 9481 7343

email <secretary@accreditationforum.com>