IAF Policy Document

IAF Quality Manual

Issue 2, Version 5

(IAF PL 7:2024)

The International Accreditation Forum, Inc. (IAF) facilitates trade and supports industry and regulators by operating a worldwide mutual recognition arrangement among Accreditation Bodies (ABs) in order that the results issued by Conformity Assessment Bodies (CABs) accredited by IAF members can be accepted globally.

Accreditation reduces risk for business and its customers by assuring them that accredited CABs are competent to carry out the work they undertake within their scope of accreditation. ABs that are members of IAF and their accredited CABs are required to comply with appropriate international standards and IAF mandatory documents for the consistent application of those standards.

ABs that are signatories to the IAF Multilateral Recognition Arrangement (MLA) are evaluated regularly by an appointed team of peers to provide confidence in the operation of their accreditation programs. The structure of the IAF MLA is detailed in IAF PL 3 - Policies and Procedures on the IAF MLA Structure and for Expansion of the Scope of the IAF MLA. The scope of the IAF MLA is detailed in the IAF MLA Status document.

The IAF MLA is structured in five levels: Level 1 specifies mandatory criteria that apply to all ABs, ISO/IEC 17011. The combination of a Level 2 activity(ies) and the corresponding Level 3 normative document(s) is called the main scope of the MLA, and the combination of Level 4 (if applicable) and Level 5 relevant normative documents is called a sub-scope of the MLA.

- The main scope of the MLA includes activities e.g. product certification and associated mandated standards e.g. ISO/IEC 17065. The attestations made by CABs at the main scope level are considered to be equally reliable.

- The sub scope of the MLA includes conformity assessment requirements e.g. ISO 9001 and scheme specific requirements, where applicable, e.g. ISO 22003-1. The attestations made by CABs at the sub scope level are considered to be equivalent.

The IAF MLA delivers the confidence needed for market acceptance of conformity assessment outcomes. An attestation issued, within the scope of the IAF MLA, by a body that is accredited by an IAF MLA signatory AB can be recognized worldwide, thereby facilitating international trade.

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AUTHORSHIP

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1.   SCOPE

This document, the "IAF Quality Manual", describes the management system established to ensure the effective implementation of the Mission, policies and objectives of the International Accreditation Forum.

2.   BACKGROUND AND HISTORY OF IAF

The International Accreditation Forum, Inc. (IAF) is an international association of Accreditation Bodies and other organizations interested in conformity assessment. IAF is a not-for-profit organization, incorporated and registered in the United States but comprised of Members from economies throughout the globe. IAF's financial resources come from membership fees. Members include Accreditation Bodies, Association Members (including Conformity Assessment Body Associations and Industry Associations), and Regional Accreditation Groups of Accreditation Bodies and Observers. Members sign the IAF Memorandum of Understanding and a Code of Conduct (available on the Policy Documents page of the IAF website) upon becoming a Member of IAF. These two policy documents govern IAF members' performance.

IAF was founded as an outcome of a meeting on 28 January 1993 in Houston, Texas, USA. There were representatives from five different Accreditation Bodies, as well as representatives of industry and Certification Bodies that met to discuss the accredited certification to ISO 9001. As was stated in the Meeting Summary and Communiqué, the purpose of IAF is to provide for cooperation among Accreditation Bodies to operate accreditation systems that provide confidence and therefore lead to mutual recognition of accredited conformity assessment results in order to facilitate international trade. The following key concepts from that initial meeting, as documented in the Communiqué, still apply today:

- Consensus
- Cooperation
- Confidence
- Equivalence of conformity assessment
- Equivalence of accreditation
- Certification in one country accepted in another country
- In the interest of international trade

In 1998, the Bylaws of the International Accreditation Forum (available on the Policy Documents page of the IAF website) were adopted, and IAF was legally incorporated and registered. Both the Bylaws and the Certificate of Incorporation provide for a Board of Directors elected by Members at an annual meeting of the Members. It is the Bylaws that establish the two classifications of voting members: Accreditation Body members and Association Members, and the two categories of Special Recognition Organizations: Regional Accreditation Groups, which consist of regional co-operations of Accreditation Bodies, and Observers. The Bylaws also provide for the appointment by the Board of Directors of the officers of IAF: the President, Treasurer and Secretary. Within IAF, the elected Chair serves as the President and the elected Vice-Chair serves as the Vice-President.

In 1998, the first MLA, for the accreditation of Certification Bodies for ISO 9001 quality management systems, the MLA for QMS, was established. The MLA is the acronym for the Multilateral Recognition Arrangement. Accreditation Bodies that had undergone a peer evaluation (by qualified personnel of other Accreditation Body members of IAF) to confirm conformance to applicable, internationally accepted standards and criteria for accreditation and conformity assessment, are allowed to sign the IAF MLA. As it has been demonstrated, by peer evaluation, that IAF MLA signatory Accreditation Bodies and the Conformity Assessment Bodies they accredit conform to internationally accepted standards and criteria, stakeholders and interested parties can have confidence in the conformity assessment results *(in this case, the ISO 9001 certifications)*. The peer evaluation process and MLA is how IAF fulfills the key concepts, since embodied in its purpose and objectives, of providing confidence in accredited conformity assessment results so that certification in one economy can be accepted in another economy, and therefore facilitate international trade.

3.   MISSION AND VISION

The mission of IAF is to facilitate trade and support regulators by operating a worldwide mutual recognition arrangement among Accreditation Bodies in order that the results issued by Conformity Assessment Bodies accredited by IAF Members are accepted globally.

The vision of IAF is for IAF, along with ILAC, to be preferred partners for worldwide recognition of accredited conformity assessment results that meet the market, regulatory, and public needs.

4.   QUALITY POLICY

IAF members are committed to:

(i)   Providing stakeholders and other interested parties the confidence needed for them to accept accredited conformity assessment results without the need to repeat those conformity assessment activities, through the operation of a peer evaluation process and mutual recognition arrangement among Accreditation Bodies.

(ii)   Continually improving and harmonizing accreditation and conformity assessment practices.

(iii)   Promoting accredited conformity assessment and the IAF MLA to stakeholders and other interested parties.

(iv)   Providing support to the development of the accreditation and conformity assessment infrastructure throughout the world.

5.   OBJECTIVES

The objectives of IAF, as specified in the IAF MOU, are summarized as follows:

(i)   Ensure that accredited conformity assessment activities are effective.

(ii)   Facilitate trade by promoting common application of requirements, promoting equivalence of accreditations, and assisting emerging economies.

(iii)   Establish and maintain confidence in accreditation and accredited conformity assessment results by participation in the MLA and other activities of IAF and the regions.

(iv)   Support accreditation and conformity assessment to international standards and guides, and contribute to their development as necessary.

(v)   Harmonize the application of accreditation and conformity assessment based on international standards and guides.

(vi)   Maintain an MLA based on equivalence of accreditation verified by peer evaluation.

(vii)   Promote acceptance of accredited conformity assessment results on the basis of the MLA.

(viii)   Exchange information between members and other relevant bodies.

6. STRUCTURE

6.1 General

The formal structure of IAF was revised in 2001 with evolutionary changes since. The current IAF organizational structure is documented in *IAF PL 5: Structure of the International Accreditation Forum Inc.*, which is available on the Policy Documents page of the IAF website. IAF PL 5 includes the Terms of Reference for the Members, the Board of Directors, the Executive Committee, the IAF Secretary, and the Permanent Committees, as well as for some of the permanent subordinate groups.

6.2 Decision-Making

Within the IAF organizational structure, the IAF General Assembly is the highest level of decision-making. General Assembly meetings are held once a year but the Bylaws also allow decisions to be taken by ballot between meetings. Several of the Permanent Committees also make decisions as delegated to them by the General Assembly or as recommendations to the General Assembly that are subsequently affirmed by General Assembly Resolutions. The decision-making permanent committees are the Executive Committee, the MLA Committee, the Technical Committee, the Development Support Committee and the Communications and Marketing Committee. Note: There are also some Permanent Committees that are advisory only.

6.3. Leadership

The IAF Executive Committee (IAF EC) is the top management of IAF with regard to the management system. As documented in IAF PL 5, the IAF EC is comprised of the elected members of the Board of Directors, the elected Chairs of the Permanent Committees, and the Chairs of the Regional Accreditation Groups *(or their designees)*. So even though some responsibilities, authorities and tasks are distributed throughout the organization, to the Permanent Committees and Regions, the IAF EC is able to function as top management because the leadership of each of these groups is represented on the IAF EC.

6.4 Secretariat

The IAF Secretariat provides the interface between IAF and the wider community. The Secretariat is managed by the IAF Secretary and provides secretarial and administrative support to the IAF Chair, Vice Chair and each of the Permanent Committees.

7. OPERATIONS

IAF accomplishes its work through its Permanent Committees and recognized Regional Accreditation Groups, and in conjunction with a number of Partner Organizations.

7.1 Permanent Decision-Making Committees

7.1.1 The IAF Executive Committee

The Executive Committee is responsible for the day-to-day operational work of IAF in accordance with the policies defined by the Members at an Annual Meeting, subject to the directions of the Board, as necessary to meet the needs of Members in the operation of their programs.

7.1.2 The IAF MLA Committee

The IAF MLA Committee has responsibility for the operation of the IAF MLA and peer evaluation process, and it is also responsible for overseeing use of the IAF MLA Mark. Guidelines for use of the IAF MLA Mark are outlined in *IAF ML 2: General Principles on the Use of the IAF MLA Mark*, which is available on the MLA Documents page of the IAF website.

7.1.1.1 The IAF MLA

The MLA for the accreditation of Quality Management Systems (QMS) Certification Bodies was signed in 1998. In 2004, the MLA for the accreditation of Certification Bodies for ISO 14001 environmental management systems, the EMS MLA, was established. In this same year, the MLA for the accreditation of Product Certification Bodies to ISO/IEC Guide 65, the Product MLA, was established. In 2009, in cooperation with ILAC, the "arrangements" *(the ILAC MRA and IAF MLA)* were each transformed into a single "arrangement" with main scopes and sub-scopes.

A subordinate group to the MLA Committee, the MLA Management Committee (MLA MC) directly manages the peer evaluation process, in accordance with the joint IAF-ILAC A-Series documents, and additional IAF MLA documents, primarily *IAF ML4: MLA Policies and Procedures for a Multilateral Recognition Arrangement (MLA) on the Level of Single Accreditation Bodies and on the Level of Regional Groups.*

Based upon the results of the peer evaluation process and recommendation of the MLA MC, the IAF MLA signatories make the decisions on acceptance, withdrawal, retention or suspension of Accreditation Body members as signatories to the IAF MLA. For joint evaluations with ILAC, the MLA MC works with the ILAC Arrangements Committee, through the Joint Management Committee. The MLA MC is also responsible for maintaining the list of IAF MLA Signatories (ABs, Regional Accreditation Groups).

7.1.1.2   The IAF MLA Mark

IAF has established and legally registered the IAF MLA Mark. IAF licenses the IAF MLA Mark to be used by Accreditation Bodies that are signatories of the IAF, which in turn may sub-license accredited Conformity Assessment Bodies to use the IAF MLA Mark. IAF has undertaken to systematically register the IAF MLA Mark throughout the world. The IAF Executive Committee has responsibility to oversee the registration of the IAF MLA mark.

7.1.2   The IAF Technical Committee

The IAF Technical Committee has responsibility for the development of IAF documents or decisions as is needed for harmonized, consistent and effective application of accreditation and conformity assessment to international standards, guides and conformity assessment schemes. In addition to developing and maintaining Mandatory and Informative application documents, the IAF TC also maintains a Decision Log, on the Documents for General Information page of the IAF website, that documents decisions made in response to specific issues discussed and agreed by IAF TC members.

7.1.3   The Development Support Committee

The Development Support Committee (IAF DSC) is responsible for coordinating IAF funding and technical support and training activities for the development of the accreditation and conformity assessment infrastructure throughout the world.

7.1.4   The Communications and Marketing Committee

The Communications and Marketing Committee is responsible for coordinating the promotional activities, including assisting the IAF Secretary with the IAF website.

7.2   Regional Accreditation Groups

IAF and ILAC have a special relationship with the Regional Accreditation Groups: it is the Regions that manage the majority of peer evaluations upon which both arrangements, the IAF MLA and ILAC MRA, are based.

7.3   Partner Organizations

7.3.1   ILAC

ILAC is the international organisation of accreditation bodies that assess & accredit laboratories & inspection bodies. Many Accreditation Bodies are members of both ILAC and IAF. ILAC Accreditation Body members accredit testing, medical and calibration laboratories, inspection bodies, proficiency testing providers, and reference material producers. IAF Accreditation Body Members accredit bodies that certify management systems, products, and persons as well as bodies that undertake verification and validation conformity assessment activities.

ILAC and IAF have held Joint Annual Meetings, and a Joint General Assembly, since 2001 and have a number of other joint Committees and Working Groups:

- Joint Executive Committee (JEC)
- Joint Working Group on the A-Series (JWGA)
- Joint ILAC AMC & IAF MLA MC (JMC)
- Joint ILAC MCC & IAF CMC (JWGC)
- Joint Development Support Committee (JDSC)

Consistent with the close working relationship between IAF and ILAC, the Chair of ILAC is an observer member of the IAF Executive Committee, and the Chair of IAF is an observer member of the ILAC Executive Committee; and the two Chairs alternate chairing the Joint Executive Committee (JEC).

Other joint Committees are the Joint Management Committee (JMC), for the management of joint peer evaluations, the Joint Working Group on Communications (JWGC) and the Joint Development Support Committee (JDSC). These committees oversee overlapping activities between the two organizations.

The Joint Working Group on the A-series develops documents used by IAF and ILAC in the peer evaluation process.

7.3.2   ISO

IAF and ILAC have a special relationship with the ISO/CASCO *(the conformity assessment committee of ISO)* that develops international standards for conformity assessment, i.e. the ISO/IEC standards for Accreditation Bodies and Conformity Assessment Bodies, which are also referred to as the CASCO Toolbox.

The "Arrangements" [the IAF MLA and the ILAC Mutual Recognition Arrangement (MRA)] utilize standards developed by ISO/CASCO. *ISO/IEC 17011: Conformity assessment -- General requirements for accreditation bodies accrediting conformity assessment bodies* is the international standard for the operation of Accreditation Bodies.

The main scopes of the IAF MLA correspond to specific standards in the CASCO toolbox. Current main and sub-scopes of the IAF MLA can be viewed on the Scopes page of the IAF website.

8. DOCUMENTED INFORMATION

IAF has a documented process for the creation of IAF documents, *IAF PR 2 General Procedures for the Development of IAF Documents* (available on the Procedure Documents page of the IAF website). Most IAF documents are publicly accessible and can be downloaded from the IAF website (https://iaf.nu/) free of charge. IAF also maintains a list of public documents on the General Information page of the IAF website which identifies the specific IAF committee responsible for the development and maintenance of each document on the list.

The IAF website is the main means of providing access to Members and others to IAF documents and other information. The website includes a public section and a Members-Only section. Members are provided with access to the Members-Only section when they're added to a committee, working group or task force. The IAF Secretariat grants the IAF Member access to the appropriate parts of the website (for example, only Board members are granted access to the Board section of the website).

Users are responsible for the use and control of passwords and the confidential nature of the information they access. IAF has a contract with a website provider in accordance with the required safety, privacy and confidentiality policies and rules established by IAF that guarantees its proper and continuous operation.

9. RESOURCES

IAF's financial resources come from membership fees. Each year the Executive Committee develops a proposed budget for the following year and submits it to Members 30 days in advance of the General Assembly. The budget is approved by all IAF Members at the General Assembly, or in exceptional circumstances by ballot. Once the budget is approved, the fees for each Member are calculated in accordance with *IAF PL 4: Rules for IAF Membership Fees* (available on the Policy Documents page of the IAF website) at the level necessary to achieve revenue in accordance with the approved budget.

IAF has no employees. IAF's personnel resources are provided by volunteers, from Members and other interested parties, with the exception of limited personnel who are paid for services. IAF contracts and pays for secretariat, accounting, and information technology support.

IAF has relationships with a wide variety of other organizations that are involved with international standards, conformity assessment, and trade. To this end, IAF maintains liaisons, and has a procedure for managing these relationships. This procedure is outlined in *IAF PR 6: Assignment of IAF Liaisons*, which is available on the Procedure Documents page of the IAF website.

10. INTERNAL AUDITS AND MANAGEMENT REVIEW

The IAF Quality Manager, under the direction of the IAF Executive Committee, is responsible for ensuring that internal audits and management reviews of the management system and operations are conducted at planned intervals and reported. For any identified nonconformities, the IAF Quality Manager is also responsible for working with the appropriate individuals to determine the root cause and to take corrective action. Internal audits and management reviews are conducted in accordance with *IAF QMS-002 IAF Internal Audit Procedure* and *IAF QMS-001 Management Review Procedure*, respectively.

11. COMPLAINTS AND APPEALS

Complaints are actioned in accordance with IAF PR1 (available on the Procedure Documents page of the IAF website).

An Accreditation Body Member may appeal an adverse decision of the MLA Committee in accordance with IAF/ILAC A2 (available on the IAF-ILAC Joint Publications (A Series) page of the IAF website).

A Regional Accreditation Group may appeal an adverse decision of the MLA Committee in accordance with IAF/ILAC A1 (available on the IAF-ILAC Joint Publications (A Series) page of the IAF website).

End of IAF Quality Manual

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 the IAF website: https://iaf.nu/.

Secretariat:

IAF Corporate Secretary
Telephone: +1 (571) 569-1242
Email: secretary@iaf.nu