

ASI Quality Manual

ASI-QMS-20-100 (Version 4.0)

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Approved 26 February 2009
ASI Director

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ASI - Accreditation Services International GmbH is a legal entity established in Germany in 2006 as an independent organisation to deliver accreditation services to voluntary certification schemes promoting sustainable development.

ASI's long-term objective is to provide accreditation services compliant with international norms and procedures and to be recognized as the pre-eminent international accreditation body in the field of natural resource certification.

1 SCOPE AND FIELD OF APPLICATION

This Quality System Manual applies to ASI - Accreditation Services International GmbH ("ASI"), established in 2006 as an independent organisation to deliver accreditation services to voluntary certification schemes promoting sustainable development.

This document provides information to ASI staff, contractors, customers and all other stakeholders on ASI quality policy, and explains how quality of ASI services is achieved and improved.

2 INTRODUCTION

ASI purpose

ASI is an independent organization which delivers accreditation services to voluntary certification schemes promoting sustainable development.

ASI vision

ASI's vision is to be the first choice independent ISO 17011:2004 compliant accreditation body for those operating natural resource, environmental and social certification schemes.

ASI mission

ASI mission is to provide independent, credible, efficient, effective and equitable accreditation and monitoring services in conformity with ISO 17011:2004

- to voluntary certification schemes;
- to conformity assessment bodies (called CABs in ASI documents) and market partners, in the North as well as in the South;

ASI core values

ASI has four core values:

Professionalism	ASI maintains a high level of professionalism in conducting its business. This is best described by words such as <u>experience, competence, consistency and objectivity</u>
Accountability	ASI takes full responsibility for its activities and can demonstrate that they are effective and in conformity with ASI procedures and ISO 17011:2004.
Credibility	ASI operates its systems consistently, with vigilance, impartiality, independence and transparency allowing stakeholders to trust ASI's assurance that CABs are competent and certificates can be relied on.
Effectiveness and Efficiency	ASI will maximize the effectiveness, quality and value of its service delivery.

3 ASI QUALITY POLICY

ASI is committed to providing services which meet or exceed our stakeholders' expectations through:

1. Operating in an environment where stakeholders can comment and participate in processes, and where there are high levels of transparency, fairness and impartiality;
2. Complying with ISO/IEC 17011:2004 to ensure that ASI accreditation and monitoring activities are performed in accordance with best practice standards;
3. Investing in staff through education and training, providing them with satisfying work conditions in a secure environment;
4. Encouraging team work and recognizing effort and performance, to continuously improve the quality of the services delivered;
5. Issuing accreditations only where conformity assessment body (CAB) activity contributes to the credibility, integrity and value of the certifications that they deliver, thereby allowing all stakeholders to have confidence in certificates issued;
6. Contributing to the development and mutual recognition of social and environmental conformity assessment structures worldwide.

ASI Quality Guiding Principles:

1. Maintain stakeholder confidence in the competence of CABs and conformity of certificates issued.
2. Assurance that all ASI staff and lead assessors are qualified, take full responsibility for the implementation of their work and deliver quality services.
3. Guarantee that all work will be performed in line with ASI procedures.
4. Conscious effort to take corrective action, if deviations from set procedures occur. However, ASI considers that prevention shall take precedence over correction.
5. Commitment to motivate ASI staff and lead assessors. ASI will provide appropriate working conditions in a secure environment that encourages team work and rewards effort and performance.
6. Quality awareness is a priority that will be continuously promoted by all in ASI.

4 ASI ORGANISATION

4.1 ASI legal status, ownership and authority

ASI is a for-profit limited liability company (GmbH) registered according to German law. Sole shareholder of ASI is the Forest Stewardship Council AC, registered as an Association Civil in Mexico. ASI has the legal mandate to operate as an accreditation body.

Each year ASI accounts are audited, and consolidated with those of its owner, the Forest Stewardship Council AC. The ASI Advisory Committee has an overview of ASI finances, and will inform CABs should these be at risk.

4.2 Accreditation Services International GmbH

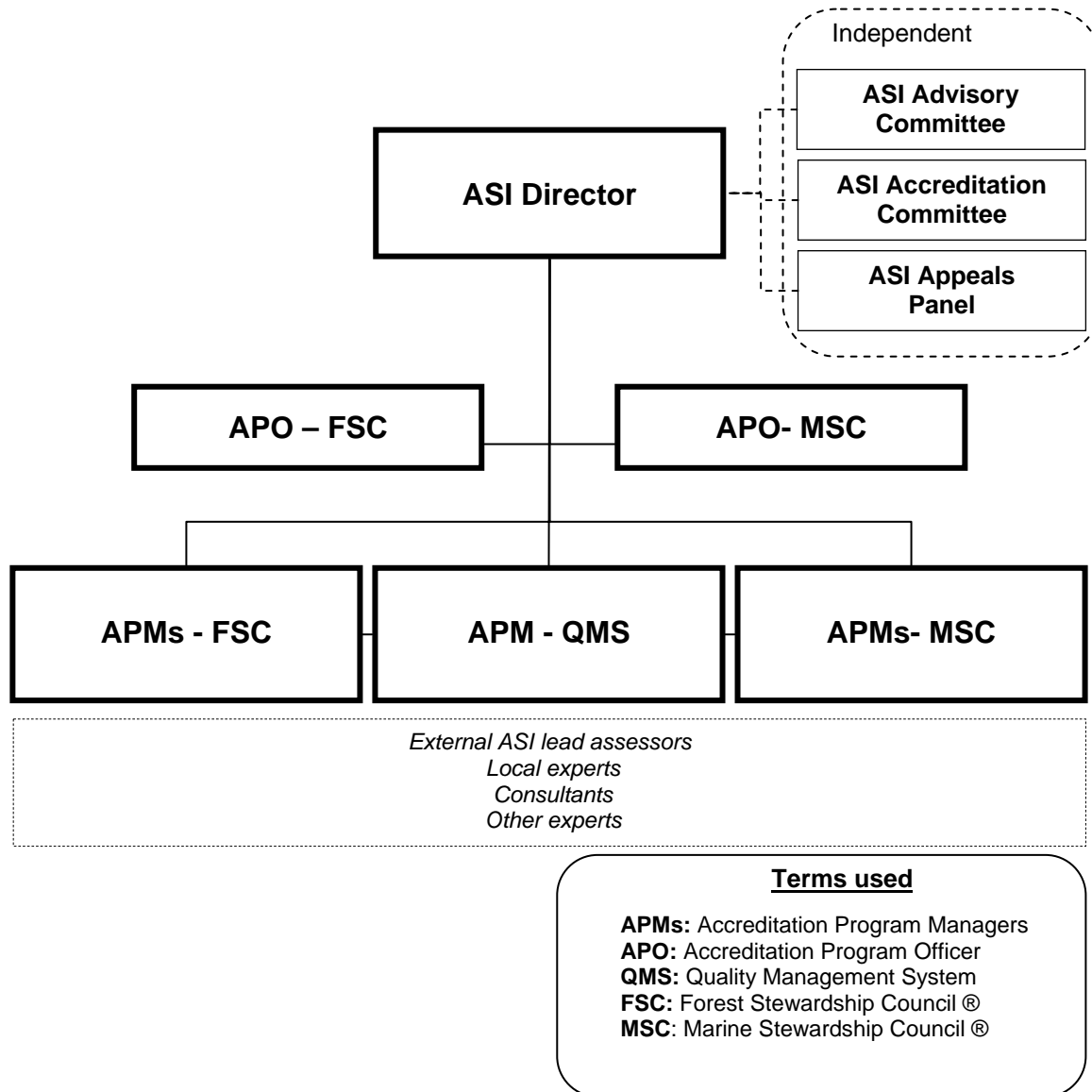
ASI is non-discriminatory; and will accept applications from CABs operating anywhere in the world¹. Accreditation is accessible to all CABs whose operations include activities for which ASI accreditation is offered, irrespective of size, location or affiliations.

Applicant CAB must only be able to demonstrate that they have the resources to develop, implement and comply with the relevant accreditation requirements. Accreditation application and evaluation procedures are documented and available on request at info@accreditation-services.com.

ASI does not perform any activities that accredited CABs perform, and does not perform any consultancy activities.

¹ Note that ASI's policy is not to ask staff to travel to locations where the EU has issued travel advisories strongly advising its citizens not to travel to that area. Applicants who have offices in these areas may need to make arrangements to allow assessment activities take place outside of the area.

4.3 ASI structure



4.4 Responsibilities and authorities

The main responsibilities and authorities for each position are:

- a. The ASI Director holds a position required under German law to have one individual legally responsible for the operations of a GmbH company. He/She enters into contracts on behalf of ASI, and ultimately responsible for its financial operations. He/She manages all ASI activities. He/She has the authority to manage the activities of ASI, review reports, and make accreditation decisions and review staff and organisational performance. They are authorized to change the quality manual and to approve changes.
- b. The Advisory Committee provides an oversight of ASI operations, with their focus on ensuring the competency, independence and impartiality of the organisation. It is

comprised of a number of individuals who represent the interests served by ASI, with no single interest predominating.

- c. The Accreditation Committee reviews the assessment work of ASI, ensuring that the assessment process provides enough information of sufficiently standards to base their accreditation decisions and those recommendations of ASI assessors regarding award of accreditation are justified. It does not make accreditation decisions; these are made by the ASI Director.
- d. The Appeals Panel investigates and reviews appeals made by an applicant or accredited CAB against an ASI accreditation decision.
- e. An Accreditation Program Manager is responsible for accreditation and monitoring activities. They have the authority to report on the performance of certification bodies and to write corrective action requests.
- f. In addition to his responsibilities as accreditation program manager, the Accreditation Program Manager (QMS) is responsible for developing and maintaining the ASI quality management system and reports to the ASI Director on the performance of the quality management system and proposing required improvements.
- g. An Accreditation Program Officer is responsible for supporting ASI accreditation and monitoring activities and the activities of accreditation program managers.

4.5 Personnel Code of Conduct

ASI personnel are committed to honorable behavior and competently working at high levels of professionalism, guided by the following principles:

- a. **Equal rights:** In our work with other people we make no differentiation in respect of gender, skin color, religion, culture, education, social status, disability or nationality.
- b. **Respect of contractual and legal obligations:** We fulfill our contractual commitments. We respect the laws in all the countries in which we operate.
- c. **Transparency:** We make sure that our actions are transparent and that our motives are understandable and comprehensible.
- d. **Loyalty:** We are loyal to ASI. This also means providing constructive criticism, which we express at appropriate times and in an appropriate manner.
- e. **Confidentiality:** We handle all information confidentially whenever its nature necessitates discretion or if this is expressly required.
- f. **Partnership-based Cooperation:** We work together with our business partners, our customers and stakeholders in a fair and reliable manner based on mutual trust. This also applies to our behavior with colleagues.

4.6 Confidentiality

ASI ensures that all reasonable measures are taken to protect the confidentiality of information. These include ensuring that a confidentiality agreement is obtained from all of the following, prior to allowing them access to confidential information:

- a. ASI staff (Usually part of contract of employment);
- b. Sub-Contracted assessors and experts (Usually part of the sub-contract agreement);
- c. Advisory Committee and Accreditation Committee members, or members of any other committee or panel;
- d. Members of other accreditation bodies who may perform peer reviews on the FSC/MSC accreditation function from time to time, including auditors; and
- e. Any person who may have access to confidential information through their association with ASI.

All care is taken with mail, email and fax communication to ensure that it is correctly addressed, and marked as confidential. Documents are not worked on in places where they can be read by others, and care is taken to ensure that documents are secure at all times.

Visitors to ASI are only allowed in public reception or meeting areas or in the ASI Director's office.

4.6 Conflicts of interest

ASI takes conflict of interests seriously, and does not allow its personnel to perform professional activities where an actual or potential conflict of interest exists. ASI personnel and associated individuals, including:

- a) ASI staff (Usually part of contract of employment);
- b) Sub-Contracted assessors and experts (Usually part of the sub-contract agreement);
- c) Advisory Committee, Accreditation Committee and Appeals Committee or members of any other committee or panel;
- d) Members of other accreditation bodies who may perform peer reviews on the MSC accreditation function from time to time, including auditors; and
- e) Any person who may have access to confidential information through their association with ASI.

All such persons must declare any interest in or connection with an applicant or accredited body or other organisation involved in or subject to the accreditation process, before taking on the work, or before the situation arises. Such interests or connections apply to past, present and future involvement and may include (but are not limited to):

- a) Being employed by an organisation or individual that is subject to assessment (the "organisation") , or is affiliated to an organisation subject to assessment;
- b) Having worked with, or consulted to an organisation in the past two years; or having reasonable future prospect of such work;
- c) Any immediate family member working with or consulting to the organisation in the past two years; or having reasonable future prospect of such work;
- d) Owning shares or any immediate family member owning shares in the organisation or parent organisation (more than 2%);
- e) Having, or any immediate family member having, any other commercial or voluntary involvement with any accredited or applicant CAB;
- f) Arrangement or directorship with the organisation;
- g) Having a relationship with either an applicant CAB or another accredited body; or
- h) Is in direct competition with an applicant or accredited CAB.

Terms of reference and rules of procedure for each committee or panels require members to declare any potential or actual conflict of interest regarding any agenda item. If in the unlikely situation a conflict exists, this shall be declared in writing and the course of action taken recorded.

The situation may arise (e.g. at meetings) where a verbal declaration is necessary. Such declarations and the outcomes are recorded in the minutes of the relevant meeting.

Any person in doubt about whether a potential conflict of interest exists shall immediately place the facts before the ASI Director for their determination

In addition to the above provisions, subcontract auditors and experts, and committee members are formally asked whether they consider a conflict of interest may arise, or be seen to arise, before becoming involved in the accreditation process for each new applicant CAB or other organisation. Contracts for experts or auditors include a requirement to declare potential or actual conflicts prior to conducting any work.

A declared interest does not necessarily prevent or bar that individual from undertaking the work. Where an interest is declared the ASI Director shall be consulted to determine if the declared interest causes an actual conflict. Any outcome, applicable conditions or decision shall be recorded and individual advised. The decision of the ASI Director, following if necessary advice from members of the Advisory Committee shall be final.

4.7 Active and passive bribery

It is not permitted for personnel to request, accept, offer or give, directly or indirectly, bribe money or gifts or advantages. Small or token gifts or other advantages (such as dinner invitations) of a low value may be accepted as an act of politeness.

Recognizing that ASI personnel operate in a wide range of countries with differing customs, "facilitation payments" (for example to police or customs staff) are allowed to be made by ASI personnel only where they are deemed absolutely necessary and are openly declared in expense statements.

Donations to ASI (e.g. furniture, equipment) of up to 5,000 Euros may be accepted with the approval of the ASI Director, and over this sum with the approval of the ASI Board.

5 ASI MANAGEMENT SYSTEM

5.1 Overview

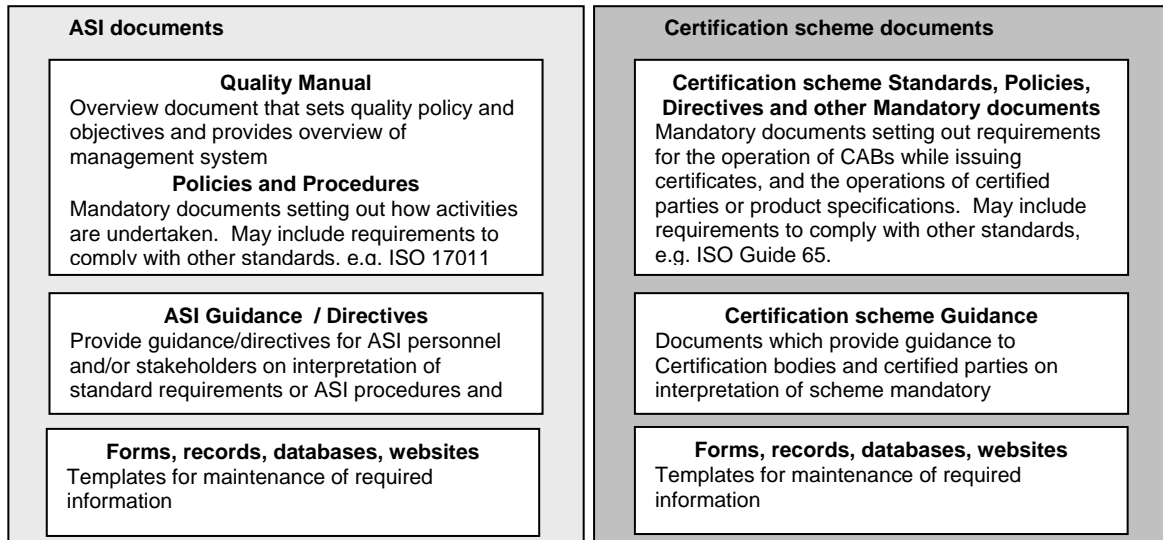
The ASI management system complies with ISO/IEC 17011:2004. The purpose of the ASI management system is to ensure:

- a) A consistent and systematic implementation of procedures by ASI personnel;
- b) That ASI operations are conducted in accordance with national and international accreditation requirements;
- c) That best practice is disseminated throughout ASI;
- d) The continuous improvement of ASI services;
- e) The involvement of all ASI staff in quality issues;
- f) That ASI is provided with appropriate information for accreditation decision making.
- g) The management system applies to all assessment activities of ASI in relation to CABs.

5.2 Structure of system and related documentation

Documentation should be considered in two parts: those documents which relate to accreditation processes, and those documents from each certification scheme relating to accreditation and certification standards, as in Figure 1. CABs are required to comply with of both ASI requirements with respect to audit process, and the relevant certification scheme requirements. At times these may appear to overlap – in the event of confusion the certification scheme requirements take precedence.

Figure 1: Documentation



A number of ASI procedures, guidance documents and forms are publicly available. These are either available from the ASI website, will be supplied to stakeholders upon request (a charge may be levied), or are sent to applicant certification bodies as controlled documents.

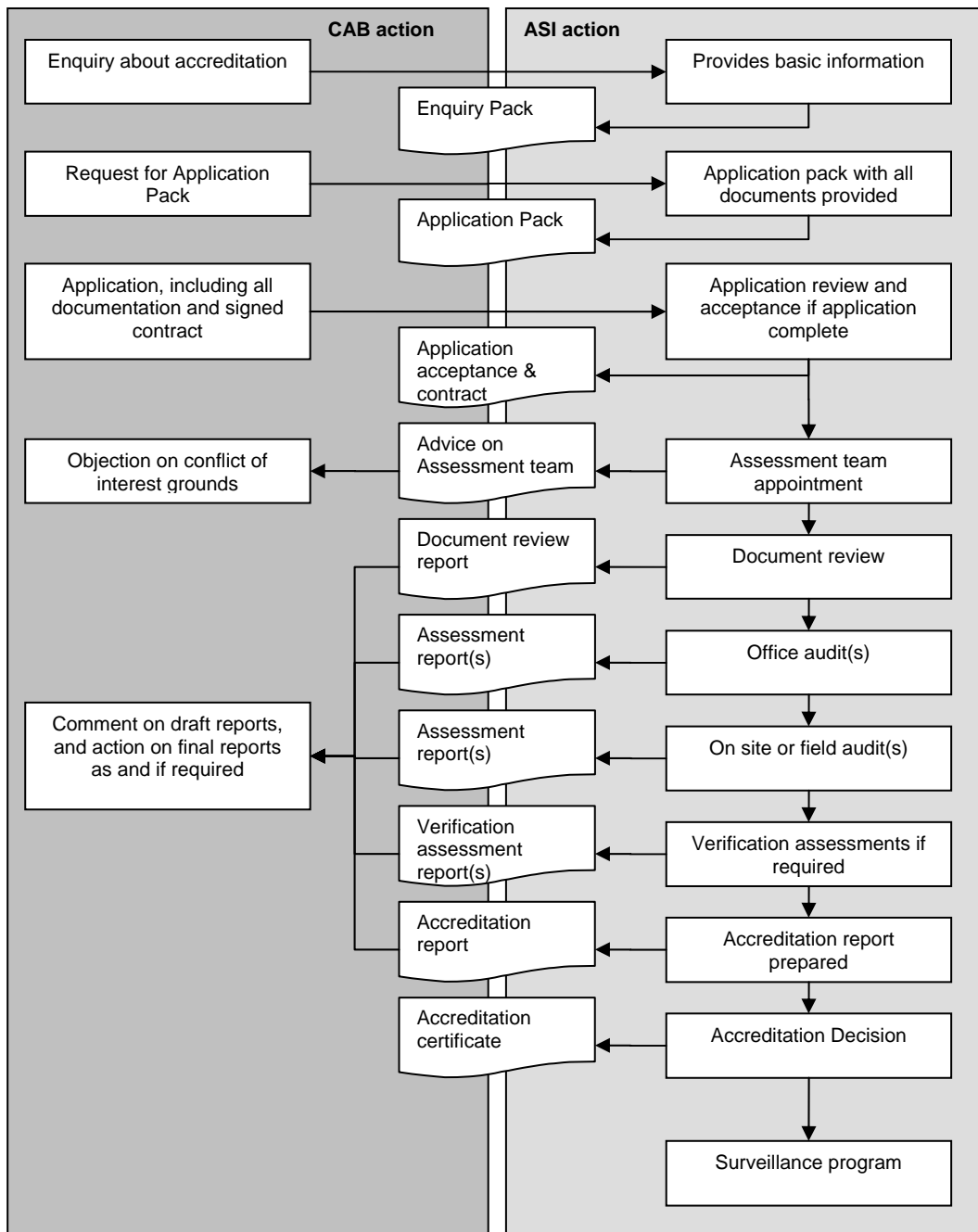
All ASI controlled-copy documents and certification scheme documentation are available to ASI personnel on the ASI server.

6 OUTLINE OF ACCREDITATION PROCESSES

6.1 Accreditation outline

Each certification scheme has slightly differing requirements and therefore differing ASI accreditation processes. Guidance to the accreditation process for each scheme is provided in specific certification scheme documents available on the ASI web site. The generic accreditation process is set out in Figure 2.

Figure 2: Simplified Accreditation Process



It should be noted that accreditation may be a lengthy process, and that the total process from enquiry to accreditation is likely to take eight to 15 months.

6.2 Non accredited certificates

Prior to becoming accredited, applicant CABs are required to have one or more clients for each certification scheme and scope so that they may demonstrate that their processes for certification comply with accreditation requirements. Each certification scheme and scope has differing requirements that apply to acceptance of clients for

certification prior to accreditation being issued, and details of this can be found in scheme accreditation process guidance documents on the ASI website.

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