Global Specification Protocol for Organisations Certifying to an ISO Standard related to Market, Opinion and Social Research

Developed by the International Certification Forum

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CONTENTS

i. INTRODUCTION

The market, social and opinion research industry worldwide recognises the value of ISO standards that enable a level of industry due diligence that is measured, monitored and independently audited for compliance.

Certification bodies that provide certification services to the industry standards would benefit from a global protocol supporting the auditing and certification functions. To this end, the International Certification Forum has developed a guidance document to meet the following objectives:

1. Establishment and standardisation of audit rules
2. Determine minimum requirements for industry knowledge and auditing competencies
3. Provide an agreed due diligence in planning and managing the auditing and certification process

Although this specification document is a guidance document only, countries are encouraged to invite certification bodies to embrace the voluntary standards as outlined in this document.

The role of the International Certification Forum (in the development of this guidance document):

The International Certification Forum members are representatives of national market research organisations of countries which either already have in place ISO 20252 (and possibly ISO 26362) certification schemes or have definite plans to implement such schemes within a defined timeline.

The primary objective of the International Certification Forum (ICF) has been to agree an international certification specification and each member will ensure that, as far as possible, certification in their own countries meet the requirements of this specification. Now that a specification has been agreed and used, its effectiveness would be considered, reviewed and revised periodically.

A secondary objective of the forum is to share knowledge and experience of implementation, assessment and certification of ISO standards in the market, opinion and social research industry and make this available to all members.

The International Certification Forum is made up of representatives from the following associations and countries:

- AMSRS, Australia
- ANEIMO, Spain
- CASRO, USA
- ESOMAR, Netherlands
- MOA, Netherlands
- MRIA, Canada
- MRS, United Kingdom
- WAPOR, USA

This document will be subject to review by the International Certification Forum at a date to be determined within 12 – 24 months, commencing November 2011.

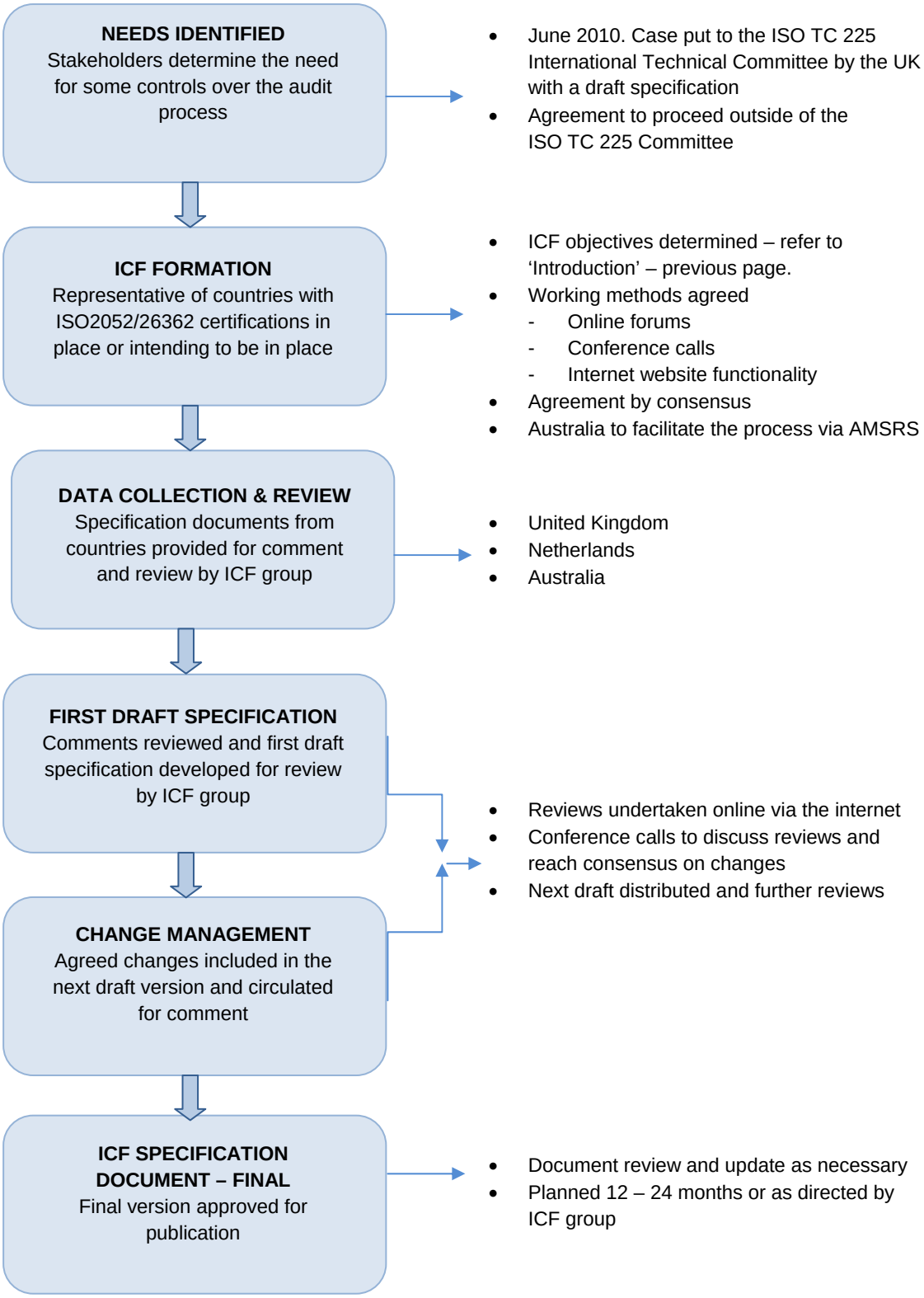
ii. OVERVIEW - SPECIFICATIONS DOCUMENT DEVELOPMENT PROCESS

The following flowchart represents the stages in the:

a) Identification of the need for a specification document,

b) formation of the International Certification Forum, and subsequent

c) development of the specifications document.



1.0 SCOPE

This document provides a specification for organisations providing certification services to ISO Standards relevant to market, opinion and social research.

2.0 DEFINITIONS

Approved Certification Body
The assessing organisation that has been approved to conduct certification assessments to an ISO Standard relevant to market, opinion and social research.
Compliance
The assurance that specified requirements of a standard are met.
Major Nonconformity
Where requirements of a standard have not been addressed, implemented or generally met by the organisation. This is typical terminology used where a failure to meet a specification within a standard has been identified. Other similar terminology may be used as an equivalent interpretation of a major nonconformity.
Minor Nonconformity
Whilst the organisation generally meets specific requirements of a standard, identified but limited cases of these requirements (e.g. in projects) are not fully met and need to be corrected. This is typical terminology used where some specification within a standard may not be fully compliant. Other similar terminology may be used as an equivalent interpretation of a minor nonconformity.
Organisation
A market, opinion and social research supplier seeking to or holding certification to an ISO Standard relevant to market, opinion and social research.
Standard
Any ISO Standard relevant to market, opinion and social research.
Projects
A definable part of work carried out for a client (or group of clients) including all work carried out as once-off and ad hoc, or a 'wave' of tracking or continuous work.
Independent Assessment
Where an organisation undergoes an independent conformity assessment, the assessment must be carried out by an authoritative body that provides evidence of conformity independent of the organisation.
Scope Statement
A scope statement refers to the documented scope of the intended certification and includes as a minimum:

- Market, opinion and social research services to be included in the audit program and described in the ISO certificate issued on certification
- Geographic locations to be included in the certification's three year program
- Technologies as applicable to the services provided

Note that all market, opinion and social research services offered by the organisation are required to be certified and therefore included in the scope (also refer to clause 4.2.2 (a) All Activities. However, where an organisation provides additional services other than market, opinion and social research the scope statement should identify and exclude these services from certification.
Remote or Off-site Assessment
An assessment of an organisation's market, opinion and social research documented system implemented at multiple sites may be undertaken without the need to visit all of the multiple sites covered by the documented system. This is referred to as remote or off-site assessment. The information validated is accessed remotely from a site covered in the assessment.

3.0 REFERENCES

ISO/IEC DIS 17065 Conformity assessment -- Requirements for bodies certifying products, processes and services. This Standard replaces **Guide 65** – Requirements for product certification

ISO/IEC 17021:2011 Conformity assessment – Requirements for bodies providing audit and certification of management systems

4.0 MANAGEMENT STANDARDS FOR APPROVED CERTIFICATION BODIES

4.1. MINIMUM REQUIREMENTS

4.1.1 Criteria for Approved Certification Bodies

Approved certification bodies are required to meet the following requirements in order to provide certification services to market, opinion and social research standards:

a) Approved certification bodies shall meet or operate equivalent to the following requirements:
   i. Product / Service Standard such as ISO/IEC DIS 17065 Conformity assessment.
   AND/OR
   ii. Management System Standard such as ISO 17021 Conformity assessment.

b) Approved certification bodies shall be committed to:
   i. Accreditation by a national accreditation body through independent assessment.
   OR, alternatively
   ii. Approval / endorsement by a national market, opinion and social research association after an independent assessment against criteria 4.1.1 a).

c) Assessor competencies shall meet the following criteria:
   i. Assessor skills reviewed and approved through the conformity assessment as per the requirements as set out in 4.1.1 a).
   ii. Working knowledge of market, opinion and social research processes, ethical codes and ISO market, opinion and social research standards.

Relevant qualifications and experience of the certification body's assessment and management personnel shall be recorded.

4.2 ASSESSMENT PLANNING REQUIREMENTS

4.2.1 Eligibility of Applications for Certification

a) Organisational Structure
Organisations to be assessed shall be clearly identifiable and distinct units separate from other organisations or operations not included in the assessment, but which may be in common ownership or otherwise linked to the assessed organisation.
Where the matter is uncertain, a decision on whether the organisation is identifiable and distinct may take account whether the organisation is a separate trading entity, a separate legal entity, a separate accounting unit and its physical location.

b) Non Research Activities
The organisation may carry out other non-research activities and processes, which are outside the scope of the Standard and there is no requirement to assess such activities or processes.

4.2.2 Scope of Certification

a) All Activities
The organisation shall be required to implement the Standard for all activities and processes carried out by the organisation which are within the scope of the Standard and certification documentation shall specify the activities and processes carried out.
Also refer Clause 4.3 a) Additional Standards.

b) All Sites
The organisation shall be required to implement the Standard at all sites that fall within the scope of the certification and within a specified country. The organisation may also implement the Standard at multi-country sites and seek assessment for certification for these sites.
Also refer Clause 4.3 b) Multiple Sites.

c) Articulation of Scope
A scope statement shall clearly define the products and services included in the scope of certification whether or not they are managed in house or outsourced. Equally the scope statement shall define those sections of the Standard applicable to the scope of certification.

4.2.3 Planning and management of the certification cycle

a) Documented Plan
The approved certification body shall plan and document the assessment input for initial assessment and surveillance, taking account of the size, structure (including number of sites) and the processes carried out by the organisation. This shall be communicated in writing to the organisation prior to commencement of the certification assessment.
Where remote assessment is planned, this shall be made transparent in the planning process.
Also refer Clauses 4.3 b) Multiple Sites and c) Remote Assessments.

b) Implementation Period

Before the initial assessment is started the organisation shall have effectively implemented the Standard across all relevant activities and in all parts of the organisation. Evidence shall reflect a period of not less than three months or until it can show evidence that all research steps have been carried out in accordance with the scope statement. Effective assessment requires examining project records including completed projects.

c) Initial Assessment

Initial assessment shall cover all activities and processes carried out by the organisation, within the scope of the Standard, and shall establish whether all applicable requirements of the Standard are met.

d) Surveillance

Surveillance assessments shall be carried out within a period not greater than twelve months after the date of the previous assessment and thereafter at intervals of not more than twelve months. The twelve month period shall be flexible within two months of the due date where circumstances require this.

Each surveillance assessment shall cover a sample of the activities and processes carried out by the organisation, which are within the scope of the Standard.

Surveillances shall include an assessment of all changes made to the organisation's procedures and any additional requirements required to be met following any revision to the Standard, or changes in the processes or range of services offered by the organisation since the initial assessment or last surveillance.

e) Three Year Certification Program

Over a period of not more than three years, the surveillance program shall cover all activities and processes carried out by the organisation which are within the scope of the Standard and certification.

f) Re-assessment

After a period of not more than three years from the expiry date of the current certificate, re-assessment shall be undertaken and shall cover all activities and processes carried out by the organisation which are within the Standard and scope of certification. The extent and scope of the re-assessment shall be based on compliance risks related to the company's performance over the three year program. A risk review shall be undertaken, based on the findings of previous surveillance assessments, and the re-assessment program developed accordingly.

g) Changes of Approved Certification Bodies

Where an organisation changes its approved certification body, surveillances and re-assessment shall be carried out within the time intervals that were previously required by the original Certification Body. At the time of change of the certification body, an assessment of the organisation's documented system shall be undertaken along with a review of assessment reports relating to the three year program to ensure there are no outstanding matters such as a nonconformity. Where nonconformities are outstanding they shall be required by the new certification body to be corrected (as per 4.3 (d).

4.3 ASSESSMENT AND CERTIFICATION PROCESSES

a) Additional Standards
Certifications to ISO Standards additional to standards related to market, opinion and social research may be carried out at the same time.
In the case of multiple certifications, the minimum assessment inputs required for such joint (or multiple) assessment/s may vary from the normal prescribed assessment program for each individual assessment program.

b) Multiple Sites
For organisations operating from multiple sites, the initial assessment and subsequent assessments shall cover the headquarters and additional sufficient sites to ensure all activities and processes within the scope of certification are assessed.
Over a program of surveillance, the aim should be to cover all sites either directly or remotely.

c) Remote Assessments – off-site assessments
Assessment may be carried out on or off the organisation's site. When an assessment is conducted by means other than physically attending the site where the work was undertaken, the assessment is considered to be an off-site or remote assessment.
Off-site or remote assessment cannot be used for an organisations headquarters other than a review to establish the organisation's documented system compliance to the ISO Standard. Headquarters shall always be audited on-site for assessment and compliance to activities related to their documented system service delivery.
All other sites may be assessed off-site according to the planned three year program and after consideration of risk associated with remote audits e.g. data security.
A limit of 30% remote assessment is considered acceptable within a scheduled assessment period. The remote assessment percentage shall be calculated as a percentage of the annual assessment input by man-hours. Where circumstances allow, such as electronic data sources being the primary source of data collection, remote assessment may extend beyond this figure, however remote assessment shall never form the primary assessment methodology.
Due consideration shall be taken to ensure data security and privacy protocols are met according to industry standards and local regulatory requirements. Remote assessment shall be conducted from an organisation's own site into other of its sites and generally not from the Certification Body's site unless the Certification Body has taken sufficient action to protect data and documents. This is to ensure that sensitive information (e.g. confidential documents or personal data) is protected.
The technical resources of remote assessment shall allow the review of records or processes (e.g. video-streaming of a focus group) with a similar effect as if carried out on-site.
Remote assessment should allow two-way communication between the assessor and the person responsible for the work/process being assessed to allow questions to be answered or issues clarified.
Examples of remote assessments include access to data via intranets, other internal transmission, face to face via video-conferencing etc.

d) Nonconformity and Corrective Action
Where major nonconformities are raised during a certification assessment, the approved certification body shall require the organisation to take effective action to deal with the major nonconformity and shall not issue certification until it has established, through appropriate, additional assessment as considered necessary, that effective corrective action has been taken.
Where major nonconformities are raised during surveillance or re-certification, the approved certification body shall require the organisation to prepare within one month an effective plan of corrective action, including a timescale and deadlines to deal with the major nonconformities. Successful implementation of the corrective action shall be established by the approved certification body through appropriate, additional

assessment as considered necessary and within the defined timescale of the organisation's plan of corrective action. Where it is established (including through additional assessment) that the organisation has failed to implement corrective action effectively, the approved certification body shall withdraw the organisation's certification. Where certification is withdrawn and the organisation wishes to seek re-instatement, the assessment process shall be as an initial assessment.

Where minor nonconformities are raised during a certification assessment, surveillance or re-certification, the approved certification body shall require the organisation to take corrective action to deal with the minor nonconformities as soon as is practical but not more than within one year. That this has been done will be established during the next certification assessment, re-certification or surveillance.

Persistent failure by an organisation to implement effective corrective action for minor nonconformities shall be regarded as a major nonconformity.

e) Issuing a Report

On completion of an assessment, the approved certification body shall prepare a report which shall include:

i. Date of assessment, type of assessment (certification, surveillance etc.) and personnel involved, both from the approved certification body and the organisation.
ii. An overall statement of findings.
iii. Descriptions of each nonconformity identified separately, with minor or major nonconformities described]
iv. Relevant observations.
v. The assessor's recommendations on certification of the organisation including granting of certification, continuation of certification or withdrawal of certification. In the cases of a recommendation for withdrawal of certification, reasons shall be given together with a description of the action and timing of such action required by the organisation for certification to continue.
vi. Any observations which might lead to improvements even though no nonconformity was identified in the particular case or area.

f) Issuance of Certification

The approved certification body carrying out assessment for an organisation shall issue, subject to the requirements of this specification being met, certification to the organisation. The certification shall have a validity period of not more than three years, after which certification shall be re-assessed.

g) Appeals

The approved certification body shall have in place an appeals process to enable an organisation to request a review of decisions taken by the certification body in relation to any issues arising from assessment and issue or withdrawal of certification.

The appeals process shall meet the requirements of the ISO Standard and/or Guide as prescribed in 4.1.1 (a) (i) or (ii).