Questions from “The Science behind an Accredited Certificate” Webinar presented jointly with the USTAG TC 176”

Question: Multilateral recognition agreement- Is this for mutual recognition between ABs?

Yes. MLA is an agreement among Accreditation Bodies for recognition of accreditations and certificates issued by CBs accredited by the signatories.

More information on the IAF MLA is available in the following IAF brochure http://www.iaf.nu/upFiles/IAF_MLA_0112.pdf?pdf=PD-IAF-MLA-brochure

Question: I have seen government contracts from Europe insisting on EU ABs only.

It is not uncommon for a specifier to request a specific type of a supplier. Selection criteria could be geographical location, ability for example, to operate in a specific language and any other aspects desirable to the specifier.

Question: Where does the "accreditation" definition come from? I'd like to know for future reference.

According to ISO/IEC 17011, 3.1.

“Accreditation is third-party attestation related to a conformity assessment body conveying formal demonstration of its competence to carry out specific conformity assessment tasks.”

Question: How many calendar days are allowed to make the accreditation decision?

This is dependent on the decision making process within an AB. The requirements of ISO/IEC 17011 Conformity assessment -- Requirements for accreditation bodies accrediting conformity assessment bodies, do not specify a timeframe but it does state that decision must be made without undue delay. Some decisions are made within few days and other within few weeks.

Question: Do accreditation body interview a sample list of CAB customers to understand their performance and opportunities for improvements including complaints? There are obviously many customer organizations not happy with their CAB yet, CABs get reaccredited.

Accreditation bodies do not typically interview CAB’s customers. However, accreditation body will review complaints that are submitted by their accredited CAB’s customers. It is important to note that the complainant will be instructed to first submit their complaint to the CAB and if the CAB does not address the issue, the submitter does have the option to submit a complaint to the CAB’s accrediting AB.

Question: Can you cover the difference between the stage 1 & 2 audits of the CB? Maybe it was covered, but I missed it.
Stage 1 has several objectives focused around the readiness of the organization. It includes a review of the client’s documentation as well as information on any site specific conditions, scope, identification of processes, resources etc., and the results are used to plan for the stage 2.

Stage 2 is focused on evaluation of implementation of client’s management system and is conducted at a client’s site(s). Stage 2 is the full system initial audit as use to be described in previous standards (before ISO/IEC 17021).

Detailed information on Stage 1 and stage 2 could be found in ISO/IEC 17021-1 sections 9.3.1.2.2 and 9.3.1.3

**Question: In a related topic, are competing ABs allowed to observe during the witness audit?**

Witness activities are sometime conducted by two ABs at the same time. Many CBs hold more than one accreditation and the two ABs may witness same audit to satisfy own requirements. This type of assessment is referred to as a joint AB assessment. Within the industry, joint AB office assessments at CBs offices are more common than joint witnessed audits. In many cases, witnessed audits would be conducted by one AB and the results shared with the other AB.

**Question: Can there be a CB without Accreditation?**

Yes. For many standards accreditation is not required. Unaccredited CBs can operate and issue unaccredited certificates or CBs could be accredited by an AB that is not an IAF MLA signatory and they could be issuing “accredited” certificates, but those would not be equivalent to an IAF MLA AB signatory accredited certificate. Either case would question the value of the certificate.

**Question: Unaccredited CB - This is an important point! Many average customer organizations have no idea about this and become easily deceived by low cost 5 year, 10 years valid certifications!**

Yes, this is true. ANAB continually educates organizations, purchasing agents, government, etc. on IAF MLA AB signatory accreditation v. unrecognized accreditation v. unaccredited.

Unaccredited CBs may not operate in accordance with international requirements, there is no assurance that CB oversight is conducted or understanding of a CB's processes and competence and as a result certifications issued have questionable value to the industry.

Many industries do not accept unaccredited certificates, for example Quality Excellence for Suppliers of Telecommunications Leadership (QuEST) Forum.

**Question: If a CB loses accreditation, how would the certified organizations by that CB be made aware?**

It is up to a CB to inform its customer, however in a case of withdrawal if CB does not inform its customers, the AB will.

**Question: Is it implied that certifications through different CBs are equivalent? Or it shouldn't be assume that way?**
Certification issued by CBs accredited by the IAF MLA signatories are considered equivalent.

**Question:** When will the IAF MD5 (DETERMINATION OF AUDIT TIME OF QUALITY AND ENVIRONMENTAL MANAGEMENT SYSTEMS) be revised from headcount based audit person days calculation to a more meaningful approach? e.g. IATF is working on a RBT approach to audit duration.

*There are currently not action to revise MD 5.*

*Other approaches have been discussed by IAF and various industry groups; however, no one approach seems to be manageable for various standards. An industry group may be able to accomplish this for a specific program more successfully than IAF overseeing various programs.*

**Question:** Some industry sectors limit using the same auditors to 2 audit cycles. Are there any guidance from IAF MD that require this?

*No, there are not time specific requirements in either IAF MDs or ISO/IEC 17021-1. However, it is a generally accepted practice in the industry that auditors are regularly rotated. Rotation of auditors is mandated by some schemes such as Aerospace for recognition by International Aerospace Quality Group (IAQG) or the Americas Aerospace Quality Group (AAQG).*

**Question:** Is it the norm/OK for CB’s to offer a complete PRE-assessment audit, prior to Stage 1 & Stage 2 Audits as this prevents conflict of providing consulting services & to provide at least a guideline for areas which need to addressed before the official audit?

*Yes. A CB is in position to educate the client and it is up to a CB whether to provide this type of service. A CB may identify gaps however may not provide any type of solutions on how to address these gaps. The CB shall not provide any type of management systems consulting.*