



Accreditation is gaining increasing recognition as an important and practical tool in the delivery of objectives across an increasing range of policy areas, including maintaining public confidence.

The accreditation process determines, in the public interest, the technical competence and integrity of organisations offering testing, examination, verification, inspection, calibration and certification (often known collectively as evaluation services or conformity assessment services).

Accreditation, which operates across all market sectors, provides an impartial assessment against internationally recognised standards. It offers a single, transparent and repeatable approach which:

- is voluntarily embraced by business;
- reduces the need for central and regional government to employ its own specialist assessment personnel;
- builds business and consumer confidence.

The process of accreditation provides a cost-effective means of delivering public services which:

- are reliable, high quality and safe;
- encourage regulatory compliance;
- involve lower administrative burdens and bureaucracy.

EU Recognition

A new EU Regulation (Regulation (EC) No 765/2008), which for the first time provides a legal framework for the provision of accreditation services across Europe, has been developed against the background of a growing recognition of the importance of accreditation to the EU's economic infrastructure. The Regulation covers the operation of accreditation in support of voluntary conformity assessment as well as conformity assessment required by legislation. Under the Regulation, accreditation, when carried out against the recognised harmonised standards, is regarded as a public authority activity and EU Member States will be required to appoint a single national accreditation body for these activities. The national accreditation body can be a public or private organisation but, regardless of its status, it will be regarded as carrying out a public authority activity.

The main aims of the Regulation are to reinforce the status of accreditation, to improve the consistency of the accreditation services offered and, ultimately, to increase confidence in accreditation as a tool for government.



How can accreditation make a difference to public service delivery?

Accreditation:

- **reduces bureaucracy.** The use of accredited services in a sector moderates the need for legislation and avoids the risk of unintended consequences.
- **enhances efficiency.** Business innovates to meet standards in efficient and cost-effective ways.
- **engenders trust.** Accreditation is a well-established means of identifying organisations that meet and maintain high standards. The public gain more confidence in services when they know standards are constantly checked, updated and enforced.



Accreditation in action: Improving environmental performance

The need for businesses to show that they are implementing an effective environmental management system (EMS), such as to the international standard ISO 14001, is becoming increasingly important. A key question for businesses that

are considering adopting an EMS is how to ensure that it delivers the benefits not only of improved environmental performance but also of better management and improved regulatory compliance.

What is the difference between Accreditation and Certification?

Certification represents a written assurance by a third party of the conformity of a product, process or service to specified requirements. Accreditation, on the other hand, is the formal recognition by an authoritative body of competence to work to specified standards.

The key differences between accreditation and certification are embodied in a new European Regulation (EC) No 765/2008, which provides a legal harmonised framework for the provision of accreditation services across Europe. Under the Regulation, the main differences between accreditation and certification are that:

- **accreditation** will operate within a legal framework.
- **accreditation**, when carried out against the recognised harmonised standards, is regarded as a public authority activity.
- **accreditation** operates on a not-for-profit basis and is completely independent from commercial motivations. It will not compete with either other accreditation bodies nor conformity assessment bodies.
- **accreditation** is independent and impartial.
- **accreditation** Bodies are not involved in conformity assessment activities.

When it comes to testing or measurement services, one of the most important considerations must be that the services in question should give accurate and reliable results. For accreditation against ISO/IEC 17025:2005, the emphasis is to establish the technical competence of a laboratory for a defined set of tests, measurements or calibrations. The standard also covers competence requirements for a laboratory providing opinions and interpretations of its test data where this is required.

Certification against a generic management systems standard such as ISO 9001:2000 is applicable to all organisations irrespective of type, size or product or service provided. The emphasis is to establish an organisation's compliance with requirements for a quality management system, and as such certification should not be interpreted to mean that it demonstrates the technical competence of an organisation to produce valid data or results.

How does accreditation guarantee national and international standards are delivered?

Accreditation is an on-going business process and involves establishing that:

- the evaluator is impartial;
- the evaluator is technically competent;
- the resources and facilities are appropriate;
- the evaluator's performance meets the required standard;
- the evaluator's standard of performance can be sustained.

National Accreditation Bodies with Government recognition operate to internationally recognised standards and are themselves regularly reviewed by their international peers.

An accredited organisation has demonstrated its competence, impartiality and sustainable performance and can ensure that everyone from specifiers, purchasers and suppliers to consumers can have confidence in the safety and quality of certified goods and services throughout the supply chain.

Accreditation means that standards are willingly embraced rather than externally enforced, an approach preferred by business.

International recognition and acceptance

The single European market allows the free movement of goods, services and personnel within the European Union. This free trade presupposes confidence in the product or service being offered and can only be effective upon elimination of technical barriers to trade. Member States of the EU have established a network of national accreditation bodies, the European co-operation for Accreditation (EA), which ensures that the competence of all laboratories, inspection and certification bodies are assessed to the same principles. The European Commission recognises accreditation as the preferred mechanism for the elimination of technical barriers to trade and has stated;

“Accreditation is essential for the correct operation of a transparent and quality-oriented market”.

The multilateral agreement (MLA) between the EA accreditation body members creates mutual confidence in, and acceptance of, accredited certifications, inspections, calibration certificates and test reports. The MLA eliminates the need for suppliers of products or services to be certified in each country where they sell their products or services, and therefore provides a means for goods and services to cross boundaries in Europe and throughout the world.

The EA Multilateral Agreements accepts:

- the equivalence of the operation of the accreditation systems administered by EA Members;
- that the certificates and reports issued by organisations accredited by EA Members are equally reliable.

Accreditation in action: Delivering product safety

Laboratories accredited to ISO/IEC 17025 for EMC testing provide significant value to large customers seeking to sell their products on a global scale. Companies such as mobile handset manufacturers have a high churn rate (Samsung plan to introduce two new handsets per month in 2008/9) and will place their products in anything up to 50 different countries. It is not feasible for them to have their product tested in every single one of those countries. The costs involved would be prohibitive, and the subsequent delay to market would place those products at a severe competitive disadvantage.

The relevant testing of these devices from a laboratory accredited by an MLA signatory ensure that handset manufacturers can have their products tested once, and the results of that test are accepted in every signatory country around the world, effectively giving them an “international trading passport.”



The Peer evaluation process

The strength of the EA MLA is maintained through a robust peer evaluation process. The purpose of these rigorous on-site evaluations is to verify the Accreditation Body signatories' continuing conformity with the internationally accepted criteria.

The Accreditation Body is evaluated against the international standard ISO/IEC 17011, other related criteria such as application documents from EA, ILAC or IAF, and applicable criteria on behalf of European or National Regulators and industrial schemes. The EA Peer Evaluation Team will carry out a full assessment of the Headquarters, and include assessment of Quality Systems,

Processes and Records. It also includes a number of on-site witnessing of Accreditation Body assessment teams during client assessments and surveillance visits for all schemes.

The MLA process is overseen by the European Commission, the EA Advisory Board and the national authorities.

Accreditation in action: Ensuring food safety

In the late 1990s the British Retail Consortium (BRC), responding to industry needs, developed and introduced the BRC Food Technical Standard to be used to evaluate manufacturers of retailers own brand food products. It is designed to be used to help retailers and brand owners with their due diligence defence, should they be subject to a prosecution by the enforcement authorities.

The standard was widely adopted and became invaluable to other organisations across the sector. It is regarded as the benchmark for best practice in the food industry. Its use has extended beyond the UK, as it has evolved into a Global Standard used not just to assess retailer suppliers, but as a framework upon which many companies have based their supplier assessment programmes and manufacture of some branded products.

The majority of European and Global retailers will only consider procuring from suppliers who have gained certification to the appropriate BRC Global Standard.



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