# Multi-site assessments

CLIENT INFORMATION NOTE

## Overview

**Management systems certification and subsequent surveillance assessment audits would take place which cover all sites of an organisation which are to be included in the certification, the audits are undertaken either remotely (off-site) or on-site depending upon the relevant scheme requirements. However, where an organisation's activities are carried out in a similar manner at different sites, all under the organisation's control, LRQA may sample the sites both at the initial assessment and surveillance stages. This Client Information Note addresses when this is acceptable and is in line with the 'IAF Mandatory Document MD 1'.**

The sampling approach described is not applicable to assessments of all multi-site organisations, for example for those on which essentially dissimilar activities take place or where scheme specific requirements prohibit such sampling.

## What do we mean by a multi-site organisation?

A multi-site organisation is defined as an organisation having:

- an identified central function (normally referred to as a central office) at which activities relating to the maintenance of the Management System are planned, controlled or managed, and
- a network of local offices or branches (sites) at which such activities are fully or partially carried out.

Such an organisation need not be a unique legal entity, but all sites must have a legal or contractual link with the central office of the organisation, and be subject to a common quality system which is laid down, established and subject to continuous surveillance by the central office. This means that the central office has rights to implement corrective actions when needed in any site. If applicable, this should be laid down in the contract between the central office and the sites.

Examples of possible multi-site organisations are:

- organisations operating with franchises, (for example, car dealerships)
- manufacturing companies with a network of manufacturing sites and sales offices
- service companies with multiple sites offering a similar service
- companies with multiple branches.

## Eligibility criteria for assessment under multi-site sampling

The processes at all the sites must be substantially of the same kind and must be operated to similar methods and procedures. If some of the sites under consideration conduct similar, but fewer processes than others, they may be eligible for inclusion under multi-site certification as long as the sites(s) which conduct the most processes, or critical processes, are subject to assessment of those processes.

Clients who conduct their business through linked processes in different locations are also eligible for sampling if all the other requirements of this procedure are met. If processes in each location are not similar, but are clearly linked, the LRQA sampling plan will include at least one example of each process conducted by the organization (for example, fabrication of electronic components in one location, assembly of the same components – by the same company - in several other locations).

The central function shall be responsible for ensuring that data is collected and analysed from all sites and shall be able to demonstrate its authority and ability to initiate organizational change as required in regard, but not limited, to:

- system documentation and system changes;
- management review;

- complaints;
- evaluation of corrective actions;
- internal audit planning and evaluation of the results; and
- statutory and regulatory requirements pertaining to the applicable standard(s).

The central function is where operational control and authority from the top management of the organization is exerted over every site. There is no requirement for the central function to be located in a single site.

The client shall demonstrate that its central office has established a management system in line with the relevant management system standard(s) under assessment, and that the whole organization meets the requirements of the standard(s). This shall include consideration of relevant regulations.

Not all organizations fulfilling the definition of "multi-site client" will be eligible for sampling.

Not all management systems standards are suitable for consideration for multi-site certification. For example, multi-site sampling would not be suitable if the assessment of variable local factors is required by the standard. Specific rules also apply for some schemes, for example, automotive (IATF 16949) and aerospace (AS 9100 series). The requirements of such schemes shall take precedence.

LRQA is required to restrict such sampling where site sampling is not appropriate to gain sufficient confidence in the effectiveness of the management system under assessment. Such considerations include:

- scope sectors or activities (that is, based on the assessment of risks or complexity associated with that sector or activity)
- size of sites eligible for multi-site assessment LRQA the larger the size of individual sites, the greater the inherent tendency for system implementation to vary from site to site; consequently the greater the need to have a higher sampling frequency.

Similarly, extreme differences in the size or complexity of individual sites within the population increases the tendency for variations in the way in which the system is implemented. If significant variation exists in operational equipment or site size, such that it would be reasonable to expect some variations in consistency of operations, assessments undertaken must ensure sufficient sampling of each sub-category of site type.

- variations in the local implementation of the management system such as the need for frequent recourse to the use of plans within the management system to address different activities or different contractual or regulatory systems
- use of temporary sites that operate under the management system of the organization.

## Information required

Not all organisations fulfilling the definition of a "multi-site organisation" will be eligible for site sampling. Site sampling will be limited to types of organisation where it will provide sufficient confidence in the effectiveness of the quality system under assessment. Such restrictions may relate to scope sectors, activities, size of sites, variations in the local implementation of the quality system, etc.

During our contract preparation process, we will therefore need to obtain information from you to identify the complexity and scale of the activities in your quality system subject to certification, and also any differences between sites. This will form the basis for determining the level of sampling.

We will also need to check to what extent your sites produce or provide substantially the same kind of products or services according to the same processes, procedures and methods. Only after a positive examination by LRQA that all the sites proposed for inclusion in the multi-site exercise meet the criteria are we allowed to apply the sampling procedure to the individual sites.

If not all your sites in which the activity subject to certification is performed will be ready for certification at the same time, please tell us, in advance, the sites that you want to include in the approval. For the certificate, we will need to be able to describe, as a group, the sites that are included, for example, all sites in a specific area.

## Dealing with nonconformities

If a nonconformity is identified at an individual site, either through your internal auditing or from a LRQA assessment, an investigation should take place to determine if other sites could be affected. We therefore require you to review any nonconformity to determine whether it indicates an overall system deficiency applicable to any other site. If it does, corrective action should be performed both at the central office and the relevant sites. LRQA will need to monitor your review and corrective action process and may need to increase our sampling frequency until it is clear that control is re-established.

When carrying out the assessment process, if any site has a Major nonconformity, we are not allowed to issue a certificate to any of the network until satisfactory corrective action is completed; nor are we allowed to exclude a particular site because of a Major nonconformity at that site. This is because, due to the sampling process, we will not have sufficient evidence to establish the extent of the deficiency.

## Certificates

We will normally issue a single certificate identifying the name and address of the central office of your organisation and with a schedule listing all the sites to which the certificate relates. If the certification scope of any site(s) is only part of your general scope, this will be clearly shown in the schedule.

The list of sites must be kept updated. We thus ask you to tell us about the closure of any of the sites. We are required to regard failure to provide such information as a misuse of the certificate, and to take appropriate action.

Additional sites can be added to an existing certificate as part of surveillance or certificate renewal assessment. When adding a new group of sites to join an already certified multi-site network, we consider the new sites as an independent set for the determination of the sample size. After adding the new group into the certificate, we will add the new sites to the previous total to work out the sample size for future surveillance or certificate renewal assessment. LRQA is required to withdraw the certificate in its entirety if the central office or any of the sites does not / do not fulfil the necessary criteria for maintaining the certificate.

## Sampling

The sample of sites chosen will be partly selective based on factors such as internal audit results and corrective actions, significant variations in site size or activities; and partly non-selective. This should result in a range of different sites being selected, without excluding the random element - at least 25% of the sample should be selected at random.

If your organisation has a hierarchical system of branches (for example, head (central) office / national offices / regional offices / local branches), the sampling model will be applied to each level.

We will complete this selection after the assessment at the central office, which will then be informed of the selected sites. While this may be at relatively short notice, LRQA will allow adequate time for preparation for the audit.

## Confidentiality

We will not pass on any of the information we gather about your organisation (including the contents of reports) to any other person or organisation without your permission (except as required by the accreditation body).

## Further information

To find out more about how LRQA can help you to increase performance and reduce risk, please visit our website www.lrqa.com. From here you can also visit one of our country specific websites to find out about LRQA in your country.

Please see related Client Information Notes in this series for details about the full Assessment process, such as CIN Remote Assessment (Non Food), Stage 1 Assessments, Stage 2 assessments etc.

## Get in touch

Visit **www.lrqa.com** for more information

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