ISAB Application of ISO/IEC 17020:2012 for the Accreditation of Inspection Bodies

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1. INTRODUCTION

This document provides information for the application of ISO/IEC 17020:2012 Conformity assessment - Requirements for the operation of various types of bodies performing inspection for the accreditation of inspection bodies. It is intended to be used by accreditation bodies assessing inspection bodies for accreditation as well as by inspection bodies seeking to manage their operations in a manner fulfilling the requirements for accreditation.

For ease of reference, each application note is identified by the relevant clause number of ISO/IEC 17020 and an appropriate suffix, e.g. 4.1.4 n1 would be the first application note on the requirements of clause 4.1.4 of the standard.

When using ISO/IEC 17020 and this application document the accreditation bodies should neither add to, nor subtract from, the requirements in ISO/IEC 17020. Note, however, that accreditation bodies must still fulfill the requirements of ISO/IEC 17011.

5. APPLICATIONS OF ISO/IEC 17020:2012

General requirements - Impartiality and independence

ISO/IEC 17020 places the highest importance on preventing the undue influencing of inspection activities. (4.1.2) requires that commercial, financial and other pressures do not compromise impartiality, and recognises that personal and organisational relationships (4.1.3) potentially compromise impartiality and may need controls (4.1.4) to maintain impartiality. Finally, it considers independence and classifies bodies into Independence Types A, B and C to signal the nature of the relationships between inspection body and the items inspected.

- **4.1.3 n1** "on an ongoing basis" means that the inspection body identifies a risk whenever events occur which might have a bearing on the impartiality of the inspection body.
- **4.1.4 n1** Threats and inducements aimed at inspectors or other inspection body personnel may represent serious risks to impartiality. Threats and inducements may originate from inside or outside the inspection body and may happen at any time. The inspection body's analysis of risks to impartiality should include details of the inspection body's responses to such risks.
- **4.1.5 n1** The inspection body should have a documented statement emphasising its commitment to impartiality in carrying out its inspection activities, managing conflicts of interest and ensuring the objectivity of its inspection activities.
- **4.1.6 n1** An inspection body may have different types of independence (Type A, B or C) for different inspection activities listed on the scope of accreditation. However, it is not possible for an inspection body to offer different independence types for the same inspection activity.

Structural requirements - Administrative requirements

- **5.1.3 n1** The inspection body should describe its activities by defining the general field and range of inspection (e.g. categories/sub-categories of products, processes, services or installations) and the stage of inspection, and, where applicable, the regulations, standards or specifications containing the requirements against which the inspection will be performed.
- **5.1.4 n1** The level of provisions should be commensurate with the level and nature of liabilities that may arise from the inspection body's activities.

Structural requirements - Organisation and management

- **5.2.2 n1** The size, structure, composition and management of an inspection body, taken together, shall be suitable for the competent performance of the activities within the scope for which the inspection body is accredited.
- **5.2.3 n1** The inspection body shall maintain an up-to-date organisational chart or documents clearly indicating the functions and lines of authority for staff within the inspection body.
- **5.2.5 n2** In order to ensure that the inspection activities are carried out in accordance with ISO/IEC 17020, the technical manager(s) and any deputy(ies) shall have the technical competence necessary to understand all significant issues and technologies involved in the performance of inspection activities.

- **5.2.7 n1** The position categories involved in inspection activities are inspectors and other positions which could have an effect on the management, performance, recording or reporting of inspections.

Resource requirements - Personnel

- **6.1.1 n1** Where appropriate, inspection bodies shall define and document competence requirements for each inspection activity. Some aspects of competence requirements may already be defined by regulators and scheme owners or specified by clients.
- **6.1.5 n1** The procedure for formally authorising inspectors should specify that the relevant details are documented, e.g. the authorised inspection activity, the beginning of the authorisation, the identity of the person who performed the authorisation.
- **6.1.8 n1** A major aim of the monitoring requirement is to provide the inspection body with a tool to ensure the consistency and reliability of inspection outcomes, including any professional judgments against general criteria.
- **6.1.9 n2** An effective program for the on-site observation of inspectors may contribute to fulfil the requirements in clauses 5.2.2 and 6.1.3. The frequency of on-site observations should be at least once during the accreditation re-assessment cycle.

Resource requirements - Facilities and equipment

- **6.2.3 n1** If controlled environmental conditions are needed, e.g. for the correct performance of the inspection, the inspection body shall monitor these and record the results.
- **6.2.4 n1** Inspection bodies should document and retain the rationale for decisions on the significance of influence of equipment on the inspection results as these decisions are critical foundations for subsequent decisions on calibration and traceability.
- **6.2.7 n1** According to ISAB P10 it is possible to perform in-house calibration of equipment used for measurements. It is a requirement for accreditation bodies to have a policy to ensure that such in-house calibration services are performed in accordance with the relevant criteria for metrological traceability in ISO/IEC 17025.

Process requirements - Inspection methods and procedures

- **7.1.1 n1** If the inspection includes measurements, ISAB G27 provides guidance on how to determine which requirements may be relevant.
- **7.1.1 n3** Many inspection methods use the human eye to perform visual inspections. Increasingly new technology (e.g drones, cameras, special glasses, IT, artificial

intelligence, etc.) is introduced to be used during inspections.

- **7.1.5 n1** Where appropriate the contract or work order control system should also ensure that; contract conditions are agreed, personnel competence is adequate, any statutory requirements are identified, safety requirements are identified, the extent of any subcontracting arrangements required is identified.

Management system requirements - Options

- **8.1.3 n2** Option B does not require that the inspection body's management is certified to ISO 9001. However, when determining the extent of required assessment, the accreditation body should take into consideration whether the inspection body has been certified against ISO 9001 by a certification body accredited by an accreditation body which is a signatory to the ISAB MLA, or to a regional MLA.
- **8.4.1 n2** In cases where electronic seals or authorizations are used for approvals, access to the electronic media or seal should be secure and controlled.
- **8.6.4 n2** The internal audit is an essential tool the inspection body should apply with a frequency short enough to monitor its capacity to consistently fulfil the requirements in ISO/IEC 17020.

Annex 1: Possible format for an impartiality risk analysis

Clause 4.1.3 requires the inspection body to identify risks to impartiality on an ongoing basis and clause 4.1.4 requires the inspection body to demonstrate how it eliminates or minimizes such risks.

Situation	Impartiality risk	Control measure and its monitoring	Where in the management system is control measure embedded?
1. Activities of the inspection body			
2. Relationships of the inspection body			
3. Relationships of personnel			

Annex 2: Relationship between impartiality and Type A independence requirements

- Impartiality (defined as presence of objectivity) is the leading requirement.
- Complying with the Type A independence requirements eliminates the impartiality risks related to engaging in activities that may conflict with the independence of judgment and integrity in relation to inspection activities.
- The term "items inspected" is mentioned in the Type A independence requirements of Annex A.1b/c of ISO/IEC 17020 and is clarified in this document ISAB-P15. The reasoning behind the ISAB-P15 clarification is that possible influence on the market or possible influence from the market should be prevented, thus also preventing

commercial/financial pressures on the inspection body and/or its personnel.