



QMS Assurance Schemes

How the Schemes Work



Quality Meat Scotland
December 2024

Overview

This document explains the assessment process for Scheme applicants and existing Members of the QMS Assurance Schemes. It provides an overview of assessor training, the frequency and duration of assessments and the post-assessment process. It should be read in conjunction with relevant Assurance Scheme Standards, QMS Member Rules and the Certification Body's Regulations, which can be accessed on the QMS website, www.qmscotland.co.uk/whole-chain-assurance

QMS works with Members of industry to regularly review each of the Scheme Standards, with each Scheme undergoing a full review every two years. This review is undertaken by the Standards Setting Body, a committee chaired by a QMS Board Member, and including representatives from across industry. The final Standards then go to the QMS Board for sign off.

To ensure independence of the audits, Quality Assurance assessments have been contracted by QMS to an independent inspection and certification company, which is accredited by the United Kingdom Accreditation Service (UKAS) to ISO/IEC 17065, the international standard for product conformity certification. QMS has agreed procedures for these assessments with the Certification Body (CB), which is regularly (at least once each year) audited by UKAS to ensure these procedures are maintained.

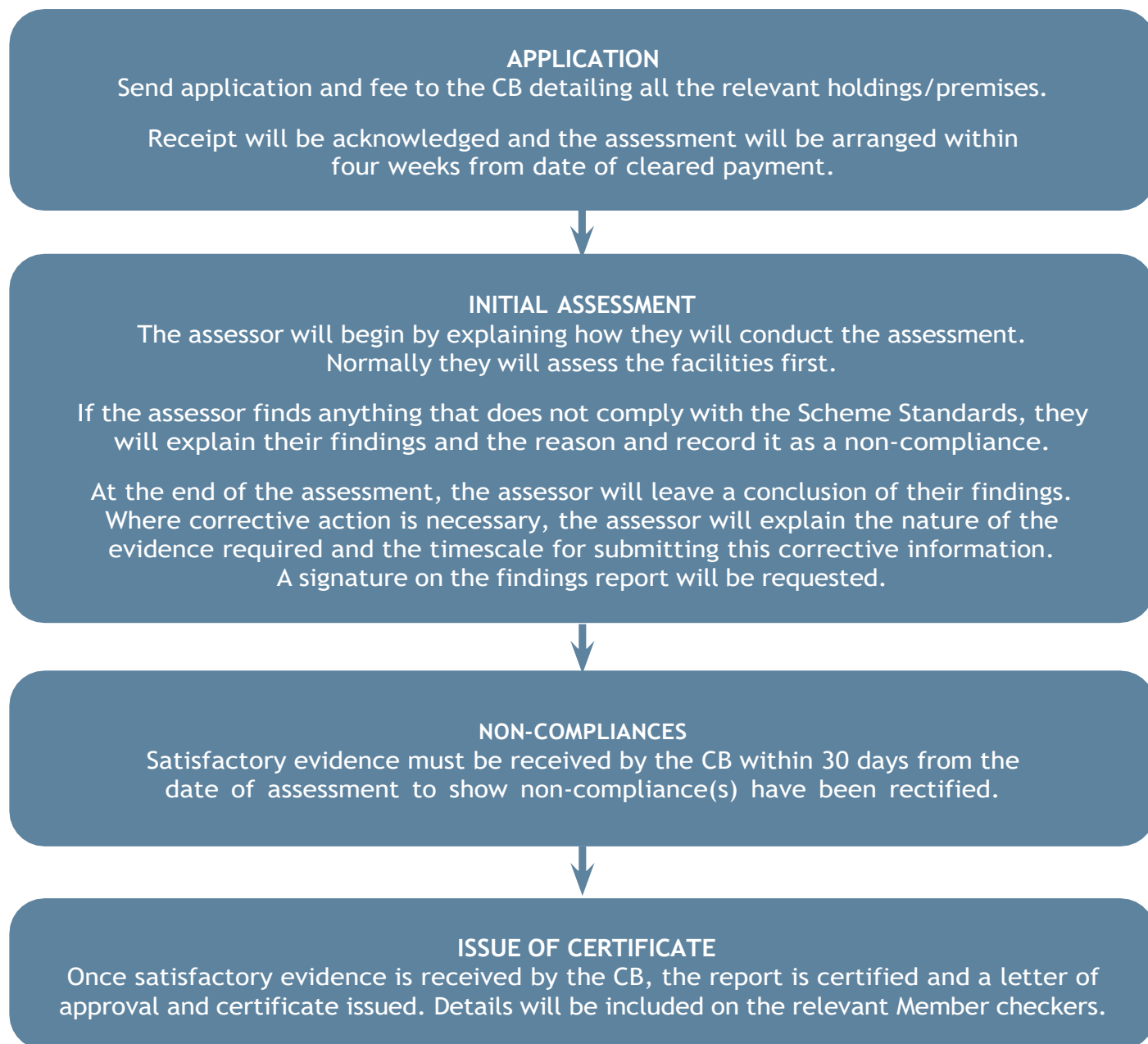
How to Apply

You can apply to join the Scheme(s) at any time throughout the year, however, the payment year for each Scheme is detailed below and an entire year's payment will be required regardless of the point in the payment year at which you join the Scheme.

SCHEME	SCHEME YEAR	RENEWAL DUE
QMS Cattle & Sheep	1st April to 31st March	April
QMS Pigs	1st April to 31st March	July
QMS Feed	N/A	July
QMS Haulage	1st April to 31st March	July
QMS Auction Market & Collection Centres	1st April to 31st March	July
QMS Processor	1st April to 31st March	July
QMS UK GI	1st April to 31st March	July

If you operate more than one farming enterprise or food supply chain activity, you can select those Schemes in respect of which you wish to be assessed and certified. If applying for more than one enterprise or activity, you may be entitled to a discounted payment and the CB will, when possible, co-ordinate any assessment(s) together in a single visit.

Application Process for QMS Schemes



Training of Assessors and Consistency of Assessment

The CB aims to recruit assessors with recent and relevant industry experience and ideally with relevant formal qualifications. Assessors complete an intensive training programme covering QMS Assurance Scheme Standards, related legislation, codes of practice, assessing skills, an overview of animal welfare assessment procedures and food safety issues. They become approved only after shadowing experienced assessors and assessing several farms under supervision.

To help to ensure consistency of assessment across all QMS Assured sites throughout Scotland, assessor performance is monitored by reviewing their reports and by a programme of witnessed assessments.

Frequency of Assessments

- New applicants wishing to join the Scheme will be contacted by an assessor, following receipt of application and payment cleared, to make an appointment for an assessment.
- The date and time for an initial or surveillance assessment will be scheduled by prior agreement to take place within four weeks of receipt of application and payment.
- Existing Scheme Members will be assessed at least once every assessment year - further information on frequency of assessments can be found in the Scheme-specific Standards.
- The interval between assessments may vary slightly from year to year to allow the business to be seen at different times.

Duration of Assessments

The duration of an assessment will vary depending on the size of site/farm and nature of the business, and may take between one-and-a-half and three hours. The assessment visit will run more smoothly if the assessment checklist is completed in advance and documents are readily available for the assessor. The assessment checklist can be found at the start of each of the Standards booklets.

The Assessment Visit

The assessor will begin by explaining how they will conduct the assessment. Normally they will assess the facilities first, including any stock - cattle/sheep/pigs and livestock vehicles/trailers which must be on-site at the time of assessment, where relevant to the scheme.

Note: For livestock Schemes - stock must be present on the farm for the assessment to take place. The CB can only assess and certify the species of livestock which are present on-farm on the day of assessment. If you are due an assessment and have no stock, please notify the CB.

When there are KEY Standards, these are critical to achieving compliance to Assurance Schemes. These are based on animal welfare, environmental impact and food safety - areas critical to brands integrity. Additional Standards are there to meet current legislation and continually achieve good agricultural practice.

If the assessor finds anything that does not comply with the Scheme Standards, they will explain their findings and the reason and record it as a non-compliance. Non-compliances may be raised as a:

Minor non-compliance

When an attempt has been made to meet the requirements of the Standard(s), but the Standard is not being complied with in full. There will be no serious risk to animal health and welfare or food safety.

Major non-compliance (KEY Standards where applicable)

When there has been no attempt to meet the requirements of the Standard(s), or there is a serious risk to animal health and welfare and/or food safety.

Recommendation

A recommendation does not require any corrective action.

At the end of the assessment, the assessor will leave a conclusion of their findings. When corrective action is necessary, the assessor will explain the nature of the evidence required and the timescale for submitting this corrective information. A signature on the visit report will be requested.

The Post-Assessment Process

Members must not claim to be approved until written confirmation has been received from the CB.

The assessor submits a report describing their findings of the assessment to the CB. It is independently reviewed by the certification team and in the event of:

- **No non-compliance(s) identified:**

A letter will be issued by the CB confirming **approval status**.

- **Non-compliance(s) identified:**

Satisfactory evidence must be received by the CB **within 30 days from the date of assessment**, to show that non-compliance(s) have been rectified. The assessor will explain what format is acceptable and this corrective action evidence must be submitted to the CB by post or email, along with a copy of the visit report left by the assessor.

Examples of evidence:

- *Copies of documents or records*
- *Before and after photographs*
- *Copies of invoices to show work has been carried out.*

If more than 30 days is reasonably required, please contact the CB as soon as possible after the assessment, and at least within 30 days, to discuss a possible extension.

Where there is evidence that an extension will not unduly impact animal health, welfare and/or food safety, the CB will set out the requirements of an extension (i.e. timeframe, action to be taken) that the Member must agree to, in writing, before it can be granted.

Note: New applicants will only become approved after any non-compliances have been rectified and corrective actions reviewed, after which the CB will send a letter confirming approval status and issue a Certificate of Conformity.

Minor non-compliance(s) identified:

Satisfactory evidence must be received by the CB **within 30 days from the date of assessment** to show that non-compliance(s) have been rectified. Holding(s)/site(s) will retain their **approved status** during this period.

Submitted evidence will then be reviewed along with the assessment report and if the CB is satisfied the Standards are now being met, they will issue a letter confirming **approval status**.

The CB reserves the right to suspend the certificate where there are multiple minor non-compliances indicating a failure to comply with the Scheme Standards, pending the submission of suitable corrective evidence.

Major non-compliance(s) identified:

A letter will be issued by the CB confirming that the **approval status** of site(s)/holding(s) relating to the membership number has been suspended and the Certificate of Conformity is then invalid. For livestock schemes, any animals moved off the holding during this suspension period will lose their Scotch eligibility status.

Satisfactory evidence must be received by the CB **within 30 days from the date of assessment** to prove that non-compliance(s) have been rectified. If a revisit is required to verify that the Standards are now being met, this will be advised by letter and may incur an additional cost.

➔ How the Schemes Work (continued)

Submitted evidence will then be reviewed with the assessment report and if the CB is satisfied the Standards are now being met. They will issue a new Certificate of Conformity along with a letter confirming the date of reinstatement of **approval status**.

See below paragraph which explains what happens if evidence is not submitted.

Failure to submit evidence within 30 days from the date of assessment:

If the CB does not receive satisfactory evidence within 30 days from the date of assessment, to show that non-compliances have been rectified, they will issue a letter notifying that the **assurance status** of holding(s) relating to the membership number has been **suspended** and the **Certificate of Conformity** is invalid.

Suspension

When a certificate is suspended, the Member has a further 90 days from the date of suspension to provide suitable corrective evidence of corrective action and/or undertake a spot check which proves compliance with the Scheme Standards.

When your certificate status is suspended, you may not sell products (livestock) as QMS Assured or make claims that you are QMS Approved.

If your certification has been suspended and you do not take the necessary action to rectify any notified non-compliance(s) within 90 days of such suspension, your certification will be withdrawn with immediate effect by written notice from the CB, whereupon your membership will be automatically terminated.

For Cattle and Sheep Scheme, all remaining animals on the holding(s) will lose their Scotch potential eligibility status, if traded after this date of notification. It will then be necessary to reapply to join the Scheme, pay a non-refundable subscription fee, undertake a reassessment and a new membership number will be issued.

The CB may also suspend your certificate when:

- You fail to agree to and allow the assessor to conduct surveillance assessments in accordance with the frequency required by the Scheme.
- You fail to agree to and allow the assessor access to conduct a revisit within 30 days of the initial or surveillance assessment to ascertain compliance with the Scheme Standards.
- You fail to agree to and allow the assessor access to conduct a spot check.

Revisits

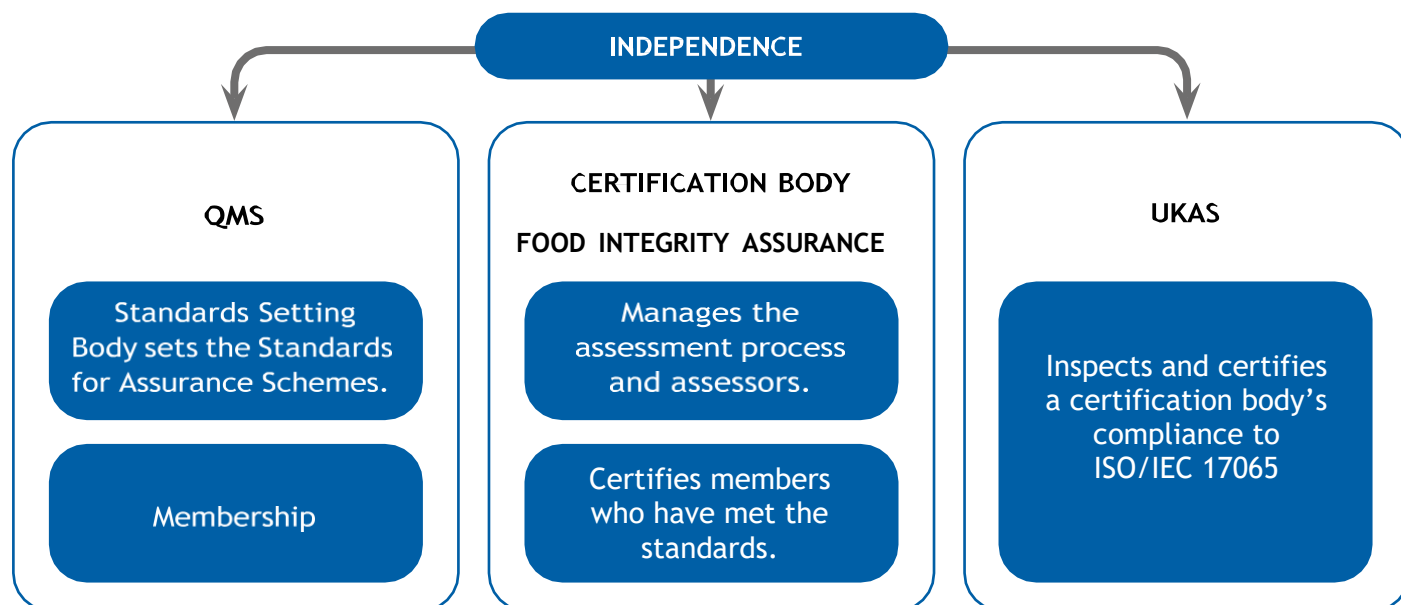
During the assessment year, the CB may carry out revisits after the routine assessment, to verify corrective action for non-compliances. This may incur an additional cost to the Member, which will be advised at that time. The assessor may be accompanied by a colleague, a Scottish SPCA representative or a UKAS representative, to monitor the assessment performance. In these circumstances, the Scheme requires Members to allow access to their premises for the purpose and observation of the assessment.

Spot Checks

Assurance Scheme Members may be subject to spot check visits to ensure ongoing compliance with Scheme Standards. These may be triggered by information received from farmers, other parts of the supply chain, public, press, government agencies or previous assessment history.

The assessor must be given access to the Member's site/unit(s) to conduct these visits. In line with the CB's regulations, when a Member does not reasonably accommodate a spot check, this may result in withdrawal from the Scheme.

The Role of QMS and the Certification Body



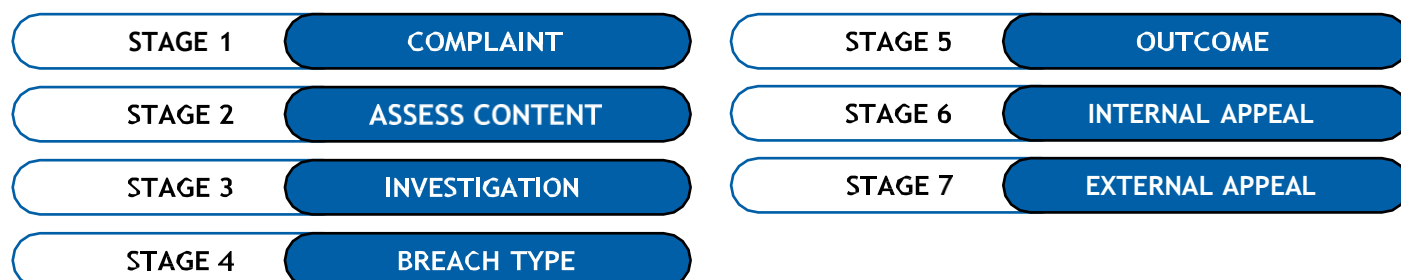
Complaints and Appeals Procedure

If you are not satisfied with the way your application, assessment or certification decision has been conducted, you may lodge a complaint, in writing, to the CB either by email to info@foodassurance.co.uk or by post: **FIA Ltd, The Rural Centre, West Mains, Newbridge EH28 8NZ**. All complaints and appeals will be investigated and dealt with in accordance with the CB's Certification Rules and Regulations, which can be downloaded from www.foodintegrityassurance.co.uk or by requesting a copy direct from the CB by phone on **0131 609 0558**.

If you wish to raise a formal complaint (such as a formal expression of dissatisfaction about QMS's personnel, services, decisions, contractors or the services of the CB), you should supply details of the complaint and supporting evidence in accordance with QMS's Complaints Procedure, a copy of which will be provided upon request (provided that where your complaint relates to a QMS decision or to the outcome of any appeal to your CB, your complaint must be sent to QMS within 10 days after the date of the QMS decision or - as the case may be - within 10 days after you have been notified of the outcome of the appeal to the CB).

Decisions taken by QMS to terminate your membership at any time are subject to a right to appeal in accordance with QMS's appeal procedure (which requires you formally submit your intention to appeal within 10 days after the date of the QMS decision). Please see outlined procedure below.

Member Rules Governance Process





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