Introduction

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Why would you want or need certification

Certification is formal attestation that a certain object or organisation complies with a defined set of requirements. Certification is done to instil confidence and trust with any stakeholder that the object or organisation has certain characteristics or embodies a specified minimum quality. To ensure this, it is important that the assessment is done by an independent, impartial and objective third party, called a certification body. You may want to become certified, just because you want to demonstrate to the world that your products, processes, services or organisation is of a certain level. Or you may require certification to be able to get into a certain market or because your customers ask you to.

Kindly note that this document provides guidance only. It might not fully reflect specific processes for your organisation. For legal and financial processes, please consult the Terms of Contract available on our website.

The first step in a certification process consists of completing an application form for the applicable scheme as available on the Control Union Certifications website. If you are not sure you have the correct form or can't find the program you are looking for, you may also contact certifications@controlunion.com and we will send the applicable application form to you.

The information in the application form is the basis for us to provide you with an offer that relates to the correct scope of activities, products, processes and or units to be certified. From a legal perspective it is important that this offer reflects the rights and obligations that both parties have and therefore must give a realistic indication of the amount of time needed to perform an assessment that enables the certification body to reach a well-founded certification decision.

Please complete and submit the application form. It will be forwarded automatically to one of the Control Union branch offices.

The process

We will review your application to make sure we have all the information necessary to issue an offer. We'll get in touch with you if we need further information. Once we have reviewed your application, we will send you an offer, together with the applicable regulations/annexes. This includes the Terms of Contract.

You are requested to respond to this offer within a certain amount of time. If you wait too long, things may have changed such that the offer no longer accurately represents the conditions under which we are able to offer you our services. If you agree with its contents and the Terms of Contract, you can indicate this by:

- Agreeing to the proposal on the portal, or
- Uploading a signed copy of the offer letter in your portal.

Subsequently we will send you a Confirmation of Registration, which details how your organisation, units, processes, products and applicable standards are registered in our system.

When you sign the offer and send it back to us, both parties enter into a legal contract for auditing and certification.

All relevant documents and or links needed for you to prepare for your audit can be found on your portal:

- Normative documents from CUC
- Relevant standards; some scheme owners require you to obtain the standard directly from them, normally at a fee

To ensure our impartial position, we are required by the rules of accreditation to receive payment before the (first) audit. For purposes of invoicing, we require the following information from you:

- VAT number
- Invoice address (if different from the address in your application)

- Finance contact (if different from the address in your application)

You can edit this information in the portal.

Note: CUC will only make (travel) arrangements and carry out the initial audit after payment of the first invoice has been received.

The audit

The audit will be carried out by one of our auditors, who will contact you to make an appointment for the first audit visit. We will plan a convenient time and location with you for the audit to take place. He or she may request you to submit documentation that we must assess before this first visit. In some types of audit, such as an ISO 9001 or food safety audit, the first visit may be part of a phase 1 assessment. This phase 1 assessment is not the actual audit, but is meant to get a clear insight in the conditions under which the company is performing its activities. This will include, for instance, legislation, maturity of your organisation's processes, personnel and the quality system documentation. The phase 2 audit, being the actual audit, is done after completion of the phase 1 assessment. In other types of audit, the first visit will be the actual audit.

Please note that in some cases, standards dictate that we must carry out an unannounced visit to your premises. If this is relevant, it will be clearly mentioned in your contract. However, in most cases you will receive a confirmation of the arrival date and time of our auditor, his/her name and the planning of the visit, a so-called audit plan. The audit plan also indicates what kind of documents and which persons need to be available during the audit.

During the visit, your activities will be fully reported. We request you to give auditors the right and the necessary assistance to access your premises and/or your production companies. We also request you to enable our auditor to audit the relevant accounts and to take samples for analysis. These samples, if required by CU, have to be placed free of charge at the disposal of the auditor.

The main elements of an audit are:

- *The opening meeting, in which the following elements are explained and discussed:*
  - confirm the previously documented scope of the audit (departments involved, scope, products, etc)
  - the audit plan and who will be looking at what and when
  - the aim of the audit is to seek objective evidence that the system plan (QMS) conforms to the standard and that the organisation complies with its own processes and procedures
  - Confirm the logistical arrangements (office accommodation, meals, etc).
  - verify that staff has been informed that the audit is taking place and confirm access to facilities and records
  - workers will be interviewed during the audit and request a list of employees
  - invite any questions about the audit
  - statement as to the confidentiality of the findings
- *The actual audit*
  Auditors will be looking for evidence of compliance with the standard. During the audit they will visit facilities, interview workers and managers. Also documents and records will be checked. During all these activities auditors review the effectiveness and implementation of your system and how it complies with the appropriate standard(s). Auditors use standardised forms to lay down findings in writing. During the audit they will raise issues that they consider will result in non-conformities to be presented at the closing meeting
- *The closing meeting, containing t*he following elements:
  - give an overall summary and conclusions
  - any follow up actions to be taken, if applicable
  - the method of reporting
  - which non-conformities have been found, the grading of these non-conformities, and their implications
  - invite the auditees to discuss specific points and agree on dates for the corrective actions necessary

Findings and non-conformities

In the actual audit, we will assess your products, processes, services or management system against the requirements as specified in the applicable standard. During this assessment we may request to see documentation, invoices, registrations, conduct personnel interviews and have a look in your production area. We may have to inspect your machinery for maintenance, your food processing lines for leakages or wear, your buildings for proper flooring, etc. During this assessment, the auditor may run into issues that are not compliant with the requirements. If so, the next question is: to what extent is the issue not compliant? Generally speaking, if the issue at hand is an infringement of a legal requirement, or a breach that affects the ability of the subject of assessment to fulfil its intended goal, or it raises serious doubt about the ability of the organisation to provide compliant products or processes, then we call this a major non-conformity. A major non-conformity can be so serious that we have to declare it a critical non-conformity and have to stop operations there and then. If the non-conformity is still a breach of a requirement, but does not warrant a major non-conformity, it will become a minor non-conformity. Be aware that if we find a lot of minors, we may conclude that the company still does not manage its products or processes properly and issue a major non-conformity.

The auditor will explain why and pertaining to which clause of the regulation the non-conformity has been established. The auditor will also indicate the deviation from the standard, its grade (major/minor) and the deadline for solving the issue. The moment the audit is finalised, the timeframe for closing the non-conformity starts.

If you fail to close the non-conformity in time the system will also inform you about the suspension process that Control Union will start in accordance with accreditation rules. Even though this process must be started, CU will support you in closing the non-conformity.

How you handle major and minor non-conformities largely depends on the program, but generally speaking we will want you to tackle major non-conformities reasonably quickly, normally within 6 weeks or so. You may have more time to solve minor non-conformities, but be aware that this does not go for all programs! Critical non-conformities may lead to immediate suspension, so we will require you to respond quickly. In such cases you may want to respond quickly as well, since you will no longer have a certificate, which may in turn interfere with your business activities.

In solving non-conformities, we will expect you to solve the problem and to send us proof of this within an agreed timeframe. Your organisation is expected to do a root cause analysis of the non-conformity and to determine the extent of the problem. In general, you are required to solve the immediate problem (e.g. *'fix the hole in the wall'*) and make sure it cannot reoccur (e.g. *'stop the trolley from banging into the wall and making a hole'*). For that, the concepts of extent and root cause analyses are applied. A root cause analysis means that you have to ask yourself what the actual underlying problem is. One way to do that is to ask you why this problem occurred. For instance: *'why do these tiles fall of the wall'?*. Answer: *'because the door slams shut with a bang every now and again'*. Then you ask the same why question again: *'why does the door slam'?* Answer: *'because the wind can freely play with it'*. In general, you should ask yourself *why* five times, although you may reach your conclusion earlier than that. To determine the extent of the problem, you have to ask yourself: *'I have this problem here. Can I have the same or a similar problem elsewhere or is it likely that this course of the problem also affects other areas in my business'?* If the answer is yes, you have more to solve. Our Client portal will guide you through these steps and will remind you when the non-conformity is nearing its deadline.

If you fail to provide CUC with evidence that you solved the non-conformity within the agreed period of time, we will give it the higher grading. This means that a minor non-conformity will become a major and a major non-conformity will become a critical and may lead to suspension. You will be given the period of time set for that grade of non-conformity to still resolve the problem. If not, your certificate may be (temporarily) suspended and eventually may even be withdrawn altogether.

However, if you provide evidence as required, we will make an assessment whether we find your solution sufficient or not. In many cases, a document review may be sufficient, but it may also be that we need to assess the situation on the floor in your company to be able to establish that everything has been taken care of. Once we have found that all non-conformities have been properly managed and solved, we will either decide that you are awarded a certificate stating that you comply, or decide that there is no need to suspend the certificate that is already in place.

Certification

Based on the result of the audit the CU certifier will take a certification decision. If the certification decision is positive, you will receive a scope certificate from us, stating your certified products processes and/or units and where the products are produced or processed. Please be advised that we are not in a position to issue or re-issue a certificate if there is an outstanding minor or major non-conformity with the requirements of the applicable standard(s). The certificate will normally have a validity period of, in many cases, 3 years. Some programs have a shorter validity of 1 year, some have a longer validity. In the year that the validity of the certificate expires, we will have to do a re-certification audit, in which we again determine whether or not we can issue a new certificate. Between recertification audits we perform so-called surveillance audits. These are meant to establish that your product, process or organisation remains in compliance, but does not require a certification decision. Be aware though that, based on our findings in a surveillance audit, we may come to the conclusion to revoke the certificate based on findings that severely impact the performance of the quality system.

For your information, the certificate always remains the property of the certification body. Meaning that, if we find the need to do so, we have the power to revoke the certificate – we simply reclaim what is our property.

In the process of an audit we may have to take samples. These are used to verify that your product is indeed in compliance with specifications. We are required to send these samples to a laboratory that is accredited to the ISO 17025 standard. Samples taken are divided into three parts. One part will be given to you to store as a counter sample (which we may need to use in specific situations at a later stage), one part will be sent to the laboratory and the third part will be kept by us, also as a counter sample.

After certification

Auditing and certification are an on-going process. At least once a year CUC has to carry out an on-site audit on each of your processing facilities in order to verify compliance to the applicable standards. CU will only perform audits on the sites that are mentioned in your application form. You must always inform CU about any change of your organisation's activities (products/size/processing facilities) before the audit.

Keeping your data up-to-date

- New units: if you wish to include new units into the certification program, CU should be informed about the relevant information of the units. Based on that information the audit plan will be updated. This is also applicable for withdrawal of units from the program
- New products: A product can be added to your contract if you fill out a CU product specification

Import and transaction certificates

- For all transports of certified you should apply for transaction certificates at your CUC office. This can be done through your portal

Use of marks and logos

Upon issuance of a certificate, you may be authorised to use a designated certification mark or logo. Your right to use any such mark is contingent on maintaining a valid certificate in respect of the certified management system or products and compliance with the scheme governing the use of the mark. If you have been authorised to use the mark of an accrediting body, you must also comply with the rules governing the mark of that body. However, it is not mandatory to make use of such authorisation.

The use of indications that refer to the certified production method or to CUC is only allowed after the applicable certificate has been issued. The use of marks and logos will be evaluated during the audit against the program specific requirements.

You must be very aware that in case of management system certification, no mark, logo or statement of certification may be used on a product or product packaging or in any other way that may be interpreted as denoting product conformity.

When making reference to and making use of the certificate and marks or logos, the following applies:

- It is not allowed to make any misleading statement regarding the status of certification;
- It is not allowed to suggest that certification relates to activities, units, products etc. that are not included in the scope of certification;
- Certificates, marks and logos must be represented in their entirety, including frames;
- Logos may only be represented in their intended colours or in black and white;
- It is not allowed to place logos on testing reports of laboratories or calibration reports or certificates;
- If a Client after withdrawal or resignation of a certificate keeps using logos or other expressions that give rise to the suggestion that certification is still valid, CUC may take legal action;
- CUC expressly reserves the right to publish any unlawful use of its logos and certificates;

CUC will take suitable action, at the expense of the Client, to deal with incorrect, unlawful or misleading references to certification or use of certificates and certification marks. These may include legal action and/or publication of the transgression. Incorrect, unlawful or misleading use of such a mark or logo is considered a critical non-conformity with certification requirements and will most likely result in immediate suspension of certification.

Information and confidentiality

It is very important to us to emphasise that everything we do is done in strict confidentiality. Only if so required by either the scheme owner, the accreditation body or by law will we hand over information we acquire during our audits to these organisations. All these organisations are then also bound by confidentiality. No other party will receive any information from us regarding your product, process or company without your explicit written consent. The reason is simple: we have to rely on co-operation to provide us with the information we need to come to an objective decision regarding your compliance. We cannot jeopardise that by handling your trusted information without proper care. At the same time, we require you to handle any information that you gather regarding our operations with the same confidentiality. In your efforts to protect your organisation's confidentiality you may not deny us access to information or facilities. We require full access to your organisation to be able to come to a justifiable certification decision, and therefore you must provide it to us. Otherwise we cannot issue the certificate. In serious cases your refusal to grant us access may even lead to discontinuation of the audit. Similarly, only with good reason can a previously agreed audit be cancelled. Normally, only *force majeure* or Acts of God can lead to either party cancelling a planned or on-going audit.

If you have any further questions relating to your certification or this process, please contact certifications@controlunion.com