

# Accreditation:

A global tool to support Public Policy



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Standards, accreditation and conformity assessment are market-based tools that can be used by Government policy makers to deliver better regulation, environmental protection, public safety, fraud prevention, fair markets and public trust. These tools are not as widely known and understood, or used, as they should be. However, there are many instances around the world where the public sector has embraced accredited conformity assessment as a means of delivering public policy objectives. This brochure therefore contains an overview for policy makers, regulators and public sector officials explaining why and how these tools could be used in their areas of activity, using case studies which demonstrate how:

- **Government can help improve the performance of business by encouraging the use of conformity assessment**
- **Government can rely on accreditation bodies to minimise risks and promote trade**
- **Accredited conformity assessment can help government deliver and enforce its policies**
- **Private sector uses accreditation in order to deliver confidence in the market place**
- **Accredited conformity assessment helps regulators regulate**
- **Government can improve its own performance by using conformity assessment in its own departments.**

By showcasing the policy areas where conformity assessment is used, such as economic development, public sector, healthcare and environmental protection, the intention is to provide insight so that accredited conformity assessment can serve as a tool to support public policy.

For further information, a full range of case studies, independent research papers, and supporting information can be accessed online at [www.publicsectorassurance.org](http://www.publicsectorassurance.org), a website that has been developed specifically to provide public sector organisations with greater insight into the benefits of using accredited conformity assessment services.



Construction



Crime - security



Economic development



Efficient delivery of public services



Energy



Environmental protection



Food safety



Health - safety



Healthcare



Products-services



Trade

# What is the relationship between standards and accreditation?

Standards are an agreed way of doing something; they are documents that capture current good practice through trusted and transparent processes involving all relevant stakeholders in the drafting process.

Accreditation determines the technical competence and integrity of organisations offering conformity assessment services such as testing, certification, inspection and calibration based on international standards. Accreditation can thus be used to verify compliance with a standard. Accreditation is an impartial and objective process carried-out by third-parties; it offers the least duplicative, the most transparent and the most widely accepted route for the provision of credible and trustworthy conformity assessment results.

These arrangements are managed by IAF, in the fields covering accreditation of certification bodies and verification/validation bodies, and ILAC, in the areas of laboratory and inspection body accreditation. This system helps to make work carried out by accreditation bodies consistent across the globe, and maintains international standards from one accreditation body to others. As a result, products and services tested, inspected or certified once under the IAF and ILAC umbrella can be accepted everywhere with equal confidence.

Accreditation bodies are established in most countries to ensure that conformity assessment bodies are subject to oversight by a competent body. Internationally recognised accreditation bodies, which have been evaluated by peers as competent, sign international arrangements that enhance the acceptance of products and services across borders, thereby creating a global infrastructure to support trade regulatory approval processes, and confidence in the marketplace.



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# How can accreditation support public policy?

Accreditation can be used to support Government policy in different ways. For example, markets can 'self-regulate' through businesses voluntarily agreeing to meet set standards. This can be applied where there is a need to reassure markets on the conduct of business while minimising risks, but where there is no desire by Government for regulatory intervention. For example, an industry or profession might choose to develop and adopt its own code of practice promoting ethical conduct. Government can encourage the use of standards to deliver policy, or indeed may wish to sponsor the creation of a standard for a particular purpose. Government might also work with an industry to develop a standard or code of practice or a means of determining compliance that involves other parties in setting standards and authorising the activity. Accredited conformity assessment provides this assurance of compliance with such standards.

## Case Study – Forensic Science to meet the needs of the Criminal Justice System

- The UK Home Office approved Codes of Practice and Conduct requires forensic science providers submitting evidence to be carried out by 'competent' organisations.
- Approved Codes of Practice and Conduct builds on ISO/IEC17025, the internationally accepted laboratory testing standard with additional focus on validation, contamination control and information security.
- Public and private laboratories implement the Code of Practice to ensure they comply.
- Accreditation of these laboratories provides confidence to the Regulator and the Criminal Justice System.

## Case Study – Hong Kong Housing Authority specifies the use of certified products

- The Hong Kong Housing Authority builds an average of 20,000 flats per year for the public sector of Hong Kong.
- The quality of building materials and components is a prime concern to the Housing Authority and the industry since rework of any non-complying building products would have time & cost implications to the housing projects.
- The Housing Authority specifies the requirement to use certified products for ten major building materials in its construction projects.
- Accredited Product certification provides a reliable means for assuring production quality throughout the whole production process from incoming raw materials, production, inspection, sample selection and testing.

Alternatively, businesses that demonstrate compliance with standards through accreditation may earn 'recognition' from regulators, who trust them to comply with their legal obligations. This enables regulators to reduce oversight and inspection visits,

saving tax payers money. This 'Earned recognition' can achieve the same or better outcomes as regulation, but on a voluntary basis. In this way, the cost of regulation is reduced for both the government and the regulated business.



### Case Study – Supporting sustainable animal health in Africa

- The Botswana Vaccine Institute (BVI) is a public company established through the technical cooperation between MERIAL, a leader in the research, manufacture and supply of livestock vaccines, and the Government.
- Accredited testing and certification ensures the quality of the vaccines that they manufacture, generates internal efficiencies, reduces waste and saves money.
- It also improves market access and the eligibility for new tenders, which is demonstrated by year-on-year growth.
- Two thirds of all vaccines produced at BVI are exported annually to over 15 countries in Africa and the Middle East.

### Case Study – Food safety in Victoria, Australia

- The Prime Safe scheme in the Australian state of Victoria works across all areas of the meat, poultry and seafood supply chain.
- Operating a risk-based system of audits, where, ‘the frequency of audits for licensees is set in line with the level of risk inherent in the product processed at the facility. The greater the assessed risk, the greater the number of audits required’.
- The scheme recognises the benefit of accredited certification to ISO 9001 as, ‘Any meat processing facility subject to a quarterly audit schedule and has incorporated into its operations an accredited ISO 9001 quality assurance system can have their audit frequency adjusted to a bi-annual audit schedule.’

The accreditation system can also support public policy, where Government sets the top level regulatory requirements and leaves the market to define how these general principles should be met in terms of technical solutions. In some cases, the use of

standards can be referenced in regulation. In others, the market itself may decide to develop standards for their own guidance on the technical state of the art and thus assist with compliance.

### Case Study – The New Approach in the European Union

- The European “New Approach” to technical harmonization involves over 4,000 standards that are used to support regulation.
- Under the New Approach, accreditation is used to ensure the competence of those organisations that check compliance with the standards (‘Notified Bodies’).
- In line with the World Trade Organization’s Technical Barriers to Trade Agreement (WTO TBT Agreement), compliance with regulation is mandatory and compliance with standards remains voluntary.

### Gulf Coast Countries (GCC) operate single Market Regulatory System

- GCC Member states (United Arab Emirates , Kingdom of Bahrain, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, Sultanate of Oman, State of Qatar, State of Kuwait and the Republic of Yemen) operate a single regulatory system to control products in the GCC market.
- The System is comprised of two sets of Technical Regulations (TR) – Horizontal Regulations applied to all products wishing to access the GCC Single market, and Vertical Regulations each addressing a Category of Products such as Toys and low voltage devices.
- Accreditation is an essential tool for the implementation of this regulatory system as it is used in all regulations to assure the competence of notified bodies.

# What benefit does accreditation provide?

Accredited conformity assessment bodies can support, amongst others, the following functions:

- **Verification of conformity with standards and regulations**
- **Demonstration of competence**
- **Assessment of risk and its management**
- **Enforcement of safety regulations such as building codes**
- **Safety of food and drinking water**
- **Environmental protection**
- **Oversight of health and social care services**
- **Control of commerce and trade**
- **Trade facilitation**
- **Efficient delivery of public services**
- **Conduct of forensic investigations**
- **Investigation of product or process failures**

## **Case Study – Underpinning the ENERGY STAR US energy efficiency programme**

- ENERGY STAR is a U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) voluntary program that promotes energy efficiency.
- The ENERGY STAR programme includes requirements that third-party laboratories providing test data are accredited by signatories to the ILAC MRA.
- No need for the EPA to develop its own set of agency-specific rules or to create duplicative laboratory requirements, thereby limiting costs to the agency.
- The ILAC MRA provides assurance to consumers that products carrying the ENERGY STAR label meet strict programme requirements.

## **Case Study – Accreditation ensures quality of steel imports into India**

- The Indian Directorate General of Foreign Trade relaxes its import rules for steel and steel products and relies on the ILAC and IAF arrangements to maintain quality assurance.
- Steel imports are used to support projects in sectors such as infrastructure, petroleum, nuclear reactors and defence without the need for additional local certification or inspection.
- Quality certification should be either from a product certification body (ISO Guide 65/ISO 17065) accredited by an IAF MLA signatory, or from an inspection body accredited in accordance with ISO/IEC 17020 by an ILAC MRA Signatory.
- Accredited conformity assessment provides confidence to the local developer and the regulator.

# The benefits of accreditation

- Accreditation offers an alternative to regulation, or can support regulation and enable its simplification. It is already being used to support policy delivery across a wide range of Government and regulatory activities. Accredited conformity assessment can be used to address a wide range of regulatory requirements – it is a flexible tool that can be applied to all sectors and to any kind of assessment, approval, validations or evaluation process.
- Accreditation can reduce costs for Government by relying on the private sector. Accredited conformity assessment is market driven and funded by fees from these organisations, thereby removing the need for Government to operate and fund its own laboratories and inspectorates.
- Accreditation can support risk-based regulation by providing information to help target Government intervention where it is most needed.
- Through openness and independence, standards and accreditation have the necessary legitimacy and degree of market acceptance to be used as tools for policy delivery. Through international agreements on mutual recognition of accreditation, they are becoming more widely used as tools for regulators in both the developed and developing world.



# Further information

Visit [www.publicsectorassurance.org](http://www.publicsectorassurance.org) to access examples of how accredited conformity assessment is used around the world by central government, local government and regulators to deliver positive benefit.

Further information on the ILAC mutual recognition arrangement (MRA) and a list of Signatories is available on the ILAC website <http://ilac.org/ilac-mra-and-signatories/>

Further information on the IAF Multilateral Recognition Arrangements (MLA) and a list of Signatories is available on the IAF website [http://www.iaf.nu//articles/IAF\\_MEMBERS\\_SIGNATORIES/4s](http://www.iaf.nu//articles/IAF_MEMBERS_SIGNATORIES/4s).



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