Certification Decision, Suspension, Withdrawal or Reducing scope of Certification Procedure

1.0 PURPOSE:

To ensure that the GCQ certification decision and subsequent notification of client companies is carried out in a planned and efficient manner.

GCQ complying the requirements of NABCB, ISO 17021 standards for suspension, withdrawal and/or reducing the client certification scope.

2.0 SCOPE:

This procedure applies to all audit packages received by GCQ for the purpose of third- party certification to a specified standard or specification and defines responsibilities and actions for the processing of audit documentation and the issuing of Management System Certification Certificates.

3.0 RESPONSIBILITIES:

- A competent Certifying Authority is responsible for making the formal certification decision on audit packages, and certification changes. Where qualified for the relevant Certification Function, the Certifying Authority may also act as Technical Reviewer.
- The Technical Reviewer is responsible for assuring that audit packages are technically complete and correct and that the recommendation for certification is technically sound.
- The certification decision shall not be outsourced.

4.0 DEFINITIONS

- **Audit Package:** the complete documentation of an audit visit. The specific contents of an audit package vary according to the type of audit.
- **Technical Review:** The function of technical review is to verify that the audit has been conducted in accordance with all GCQ procedural requirements, including team competence, audit time spent, structure of audit plan etc. and to confirm that the output of the audit is technically appropriate and adequate to support the recommendation of the audit team
- **Certification Decision:** The Certification Decision is not a further technical evaluation but is a management level review to verify that the overall process applied to the submission has been conducted in accordance with GCQ procedures including completeness of the pack, resolution of any queries, completion of Technical Review by appropriate authorized individuals and to make the final decision that it is appropriate for GCQ to issue a certificate.

5.0 Rules, Roles and Responsibilities:

- The Lead Auditor (GCQ full time or contract) shall not do Technical Review or Certification Decision, where he/she is part of the same Audit Team for the respective audit. Lead Auditor is responsible for planning, leading, executing, recommending certification and reporting audits.

- The Technical Reviewer or Certification Manager or Chief Executive Officer or Chief Operating Officer shall carry out this role, provided they are not part of the audit team. Technical Reviewer is responsible for reviewing and take technical approval of audit report and package.
- Certification Decision Maker (GCQ full time employee: Technical Manager or Certification Manager shall do Certification Decision, where he/she is independent and not part of the same Audit Team for the respective audit. The Certification Decision Maker shall review the audit package and ensure completeness of certification process, prior to approve certification.
- **Note** – Where appropriately qualified Technical Review and Certification Decision may be completed by the same person.
- All GCQ personnel, contract personnel or voluntary personnel shall sign and acknowledge GCQ Code of Conduct Policy and ensure Impartiality in the certification process.

6.0 PROCEDURE

6.1 General

- The actions and responsibilities described below cover process for granting, refusing, maintaining of certification, expanding or reducing the scope of certification, renewing, suspending or restoring, or withdrawing of certification.
- Audit records/ related documents shall be submitted directly for Technical Review regardless of non-conformities identified during the audit.
- Completed audit packages shall be presented for technical review, where they are reviewed technically and ensure the audits are carry out as per the requirements.
- Both the Technical Reviewer and Certification Decision Maker shall have veto authority and shall not have participated in the audit for which the package is being reviewed.

6.2 Certification Decision Process:

- Lead Auditor completes audit report (Stage 1 & 2) and submit the report along with Client File Records Checklist (GCQ-FRM-23) and relevant records of the audit to the Technical Manager for technical review and comments.
- Technical Manager review the reports, if any clarification required, report back to the Lead Auditor and clarify. If no comments required, the report will be technical reviewed, approved and forward to the Certification Decision Maker.
- Certification Decision Maker review the package including technical review comments, if there is no further comments, approve the package for issuance of certificate. In case of any further clarification, the package will be returned to the Technical Manager/Lead Auditor.
- Approved audit package shall be handed over to Administration for issuance of Certificate.
- All issued certificates shall be verified and confirmed by the client and ensure details in the certificate are correct, prior to issue of final certificate.

- Original certificate along with audit package shall be submitted to Chief Executive Officer for authorization /signature on the certificate.
- All issued certificates shall be scanned and details uploaded in GCQ website.

6.3 Technical Review and Certification Decision

- The Technical Reviewer reviews the audit report for technical content, procedural conformance and the level of confidence that can be placed on the audit team's recommendation based on the information contained in the audit package. Technical approval is based on the aspects listed in the Audit Report Technical Review Record (GCQ-FRM-20) and shall be captured by appropriate actions and records.

- When an audit report is found incomplete or any inconsistencies with GCQ procedures are identified, the report is placed on hold and the audit team is contacted as necessary to correct any missing or incomplete information.

- Where there are non-conformities which prevent certification (refer to GCQ-OCP- 04) the report shall be placed on hold awaiting the appropriate action. On completion of this action the Technical Review shall be completed.

- If any inconsistencies with GCQ procedures are identified, a Mandatory Improvement Request may be raised at the discretion of the reviewer.

- All reports placed on hold shall be appropriately identified and documented. Reasons for report on hold should be tracked and reasons of queries submitted for management review.

- When satisfied with all aspects of the Audit Report and completion of the technical review, the Certifying Authority makes the decision that certification may be issued. Certificate Decision – The date has to be after the Audit if the auditor finds that the client can be recommended based on the nature of NC. Or else after the technical review date.

- When satisfied with all aspects of the Audit Report and completion of the technical review, the Certification Decision Maker makes the decision that certification may be issued by action and records.

- The file is then forwarded to administration to produce a certificate or notify the client of Major Nonconformity, as appropriate.

- Surveillance reports are monitored to confirm that the certification process is functioning effectively. In addition to a random sampling, any large, complex or confusing reports may be chosen at the discretion of the administrative staff to be reviewed by a Technical Reviewer or Certifying Authority. For surveillance packages, no technical review is required if no change is made to the certification status unless evaluation of the package identifies a necessary change.

6.4 Suspension of certification

- GCQ can suspend management system certification at any time the condition of the management system cannot be verified or is verified as not being effectively maintained. Certifications may also be suspended in cases where the client fails to meet the requirements of their contract with GCQ, including failure to satisfy invoices in a timely manner, and
inability to meet visit timing rules.

- The decision to suspend a certificate shall be communicated to the customer by a formal letter. The letter shall include:
  - A statement on the decision to suspend the certificate including a proper
  - description of the situation, argumentation, and reference to objective evidences.
  - The right to respond and appeal to the decision. Normally a 15 working days' notice for response and appeal are given. An appeal may be lodged through the complaint's procedures.
  - Start date of the suspension (normally from the receipt of the letter)
  - Conditions and due date of required action in order to revoke the suspension and the Consequence if satisfactory actions are not performed.
  - The means of follow-up by GCQ to verify that conditions have been met and needed corrective actions have been implemented.
  - A statement that the certificate is invalid during suspension and that use of all advertising matter containing a reference to Certification are prohibited during time of suspension.
  - A statement that both the customer and GCQ shall inform all enquirers that the certificate is suspended. A certificate shall not be suspended for more than 6 months.

  If suspension is due to nonconformity and access issues, an on-site visit is required. For financial issues, no on-site visit is required.

- Auditors shall provide a report on the on-site visit. The report shall be in the appropriate reporting format and include a clear recommendation to lift the suspension or to withdraw the certificate. Appropriate supporting documentation (e.g. nonconformity response documentary evidence, etc.) shall accompany the report.
- The report from the auditor is reviewed and the reviewer indicates the decision as part of the approval process. A satisfactory finding by the auditor and the Certifying Authority will result in the suspension being lifted.
- A confirmation letter is sent to the client and copied with all associated documentation to the Contract file. The closure of the suspension shall be documented.
- If Corrective action taken by the client fails to resolve the suspension issue in a time established by GCQ the certificate shall be withdrawn or scope of certification reduced.

6.5 Restoration

GCQ may restore the suspended certification if the issue that has resulted in the suspension has been resolved. The Technical Committee is responsible for verifying if the client has taken sufficient action to resolve the reason for suspension in sufficient time and recommend restoration of certification. The Certification Decision Committee is the final authority for Suspension, Restoration, Withdrawal, Cancellation and reduction of scope etc.
In all such cases of suspension, restoration, withdrawal, cancellation or reduction in scope, the status will be updated in the GCQ client database and in the website in not more than 30 working days.

GCQ shall make suitable agreement about certification withdrawal with the client to ensure the client shall stop using every promotion material related to certification when the client is informed the notification of withdrawal.

GCQ ensures certification status of clients publicly accessible through its website:
www.gcqcertifications.in

6.6 Withdrawal of certification

- Certification will be withdrawn where a client's management system demonstrates significant nonconformity with the audit standard or planned arrangements and a failure in its ability to react to and correct the nonconformities in a timely manner. Failure of the client to pay GCQ invoices for services provided or a failure of the client to provide GCQ auditors access to the certified facility for audit purposes may also result in withdrawal of the certification.

- In most cases, withdrawal will be preceded by a suspension of the certification but in cases of severe nonconformity or failure of the client to cooperate, withdrawal may occur immediately.

- The decision to withdraw a certificate shall be formally communicated to the customer including the requirements to:

➢ Terminate use of the certification mark and any reference to certification.
➢ Return certificate(s) and copies to GCQ.
➢ The customer has a right to appeal. An appeal may be lodged through the complaint's procedure.
➢ All Communications with respect to Suspension/ withdrawal of certificate shall be documented

6.7 Cancellation of certification

- Cancellation of a certification occurs when the client no longer desires to maintain their certification with GCQ, or the Certificate is superseded by another.

- In the case of a client certificate being withdrawn by GCQ, or voluntarily canceled by the client during the certification period, the GCQ Manager shall ensure that de- certification information is forwarded to the same external publications in which the original certification was announced). Information shall include the company name, address, withdrawn / cancelled certificate number(s), the date of withdrawal / cancellation and the (formerly) applicable standard(s).

6.8 Notification to Clients

- Upon approval by the Certifying Authority the Client shall be informed of the suspension, withdrawal or cancellation details as follows :-

- issue of formal letter to be sent by email or registered mail (or similar carrier ensuring signed receipt records) which:
  ➢ confirms the suspension/withdrawal or cancellation of the certificate
  ➢ for withdrawal and cancellation: - confirms the client must immediately cease any claims of certification including any use of the certification mark, and requests return of the certificate
  ➢ For suspensions: -confirms the client must cease any promotion of their certification, including any use of the certification mark during the suspension period.

6.9 Reducing the Scope of Certificate:

GCQ shall reduce the scope of certification to exclude the parts not meeting the requirements when the certified client has persistently or seriously failed to meet the certification requirements for those parts of scope of certification. Any such reduction shall be in line with the requirements of the standard used for certification.

GCQ shall reduce the scope of certification when the certified client persistently or seriously fails to meet the certification requirements for specific parts of the certified scope, including applicable management system standard requirements, statutory and regulatory requirements, or contractual obligations related to those activities, products, services, or locations.

6.9.1 Initiation of Scope Reduction

The scope reduction process may be initiated by:

a) Audit findings indicating that part of the certified scope no longer conforms to certification requirements;

b) Failure of the client to address nonconformities affecting specific activities, processes, products, services, or sites within the certified scope;

c) Voluntary request from the certified client to reduce the scope of certification; or

d) Regulatory, legal, or contractual restrictions affecting specific parts of the certified scope.

6.9.2 Review and Decision Process

a) The Lead Auditor shall document the justification and objective evidence supporting the proposed scope reduction.

b) The certification file, audit findings, corrective action status, and other relevant information shall be reviewed by the Certification Manager and submitted for certification decision in accordance with the impartial certification decision-making process.

c) The certification decision-maker shall determine whether scope reduction is appropriate and define the revised scope of certification.

6.9.3 Modification of Certification Documents

Upon approval of the scope reduction:

a) The certification records shall be updated.

b) The certificate shall be amended to reflect the reduced scope of certification.

c) The previous certificate shall be withdrawn and replaced with a revised certificate showing the updated scope and validity details.

d)IAF Certsearch will be updated accordingly.

6.9.4 Communication to the Client

a) GCQ shall formally notify the certified client in writing of the decision to reduce the scope of certification, including the reasons for the decision and the effective date.

b) The notification shall be issued within seven (7) working days of the certification decision.

c) The client shall also be informed of its right to appeal the decision in accordance with the GCQ Appeals Procedure.

6.10 Expanding scope

Upon receipt of an application for expansion of the scope of an existing certification, GCQ shall review the application and determine whether the requested extension falls within the scope of accreditation and certification activities offered by GCQ.

The Technical Manager or designated competent personnel shall review the application and evaluate the extent of audit activities required to assess the additional scope, including any changes to processes, products, services, sites, statutory and regulatory requirements, complexity, risks, and competence requirements of the audit team.

Where necessary, GCQ shall revise the audit programme, audit duration, audit team competence requirements, and certification scope details before conducting the assessment.

GCQ shall conduct the required audit activities to verify conformity with the applicable certification requirements and the relevant management system standard. These audit activities may be conducted:

- As a separate special audit; or
- In conjunction with a scheduled surveillance audit; or
- During a recertification audit, as deemed appropriate by GCQ.

Any nonconformities identified during the scope expansion assessment shall be managed in

accordance with the applicable nonconformity management procedure and shall be effectively closed prior to granting the expanded scope.

Following completion of the audit and satisfactory closure of any identified nonconformities, the audit package shall undergo Technical Review and Certification Decision in accordance with this procedure.

The Certification Decision Maker shall determine whether the requested scope extension can be granted. The individual making the certification decision shall be competent and independent of the audit activities conducted for that client.

Where approval is granted:

- A revised certificate reflecting the expanded scope shall be issued.
- The certification IAF database and website records shall be updated accordingly.
- The client shall be formally notified of the revised certification scope.

Where the scope extension is refused, the client shall be informed in writing of the reasons for the decision and their right to appeal in accordance with the GCQ Appeals and Complaints Procedure.

6.11 Refusal of Certification

GCQ shall refuse to grant certification when an applicant fails to demonstrate conformity with the applicable certification requirements, management system standard requirements, statutory and regulatory obligations, or when major nonconformities identified during the certification process remain unresolved.

The decision to refuse certification shall be based on objective evidence obtained through the certification audit and evaluation process. The applicant shall be formally notified of the refusal decision, including the reasons for refusal and details of the objective evidence supporting the decision.

The refusal decision shall be documented and communicated in writing to the applicant within seven (7) working days from the date of the decision. The communication shall also include information regarding the applicant’s right to appeal in accordance with GCQ's appeals process.

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