



IAS Technical Note – AC474

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From: IAS Management

Subject: Recurring Nonconformities Observed During AC474 Assessments of Personnel Certification Bodies

During IAS assessments conducted under AC474, recurring nonconformities have been observed across multiple Personnel Certification Bodies (PCBs). Analysis of assessment outcomes indicates that several requirement areas of ISO/IEC 17024 continue to present implementation challenges.

These recurring findings have frequently resulted in extended assessment activities, follow-up reviews, and additional corrective action cycles, contributing to increased time and resource commitments for both IAS and the assessed organizations.

This Technical Note provides an overview of the most frequently identified issues and offers practical guidance intended to support stronger preparation, improve management system effectiveness, and promote more efficient assessment processes.

Scope:

This Technical Note is relevant to:

- Accreditation and reassessment activities performed under
 - a. **ISO/IEC 17024**, Conformity assessment – General requirements for bodies operating certification of persons
 - b. **Global Accreditation Cooperation (IAF) Mandatory Documents**
 - c. **IAS AC474**, Accreditation Criteria for Bodies Operating Certification of Persons
- Personnel Certification Bodies developing, implementing, or maintaining certification schemes
- PCBs preparing for initial accreditation, scope expansion, surveillance, or reassessment
- Ongoing conformity with internal management system requirements

The observations summarized below are derived from aggregated assessment data and are presented in order of frequency.

Key Observations from IAS Assessments:

Clause numbers indicated are based on the ISO/IEC 17024:2012 standard.

1. Examination Process (Clause 9.3)

The most frequently identified issues relate to examination design and validation practices. Assessment results indicate that statistical techniques are often not applied to evaluate examination performance, including measures such as difficulty index, discrimination analysis, or reliability indicators.

Additionally, documented traceability between examination questions, scoring and job/task analysis domains is not always evident. When this linkage is unclear, demonstrating the validity and fairness of the certification decision becomes more difficult.

Experience suggests that establishing structured psychometric practices and maintaining documented evidence of examination analysis significantly supports scheme credibility.

2. Certification Scheme Development and Review (Clauses 8.4 and 8.5)

Findings commonly indicate that certification schemes are not subject to systematic and ongoing validation. In some cases, scheme governance structures do not sufficiently reflect balanced participation from interested parties, which may create risks related to impartiality and industry relevance.

Organizations have benefited from implementing periodic scheme reviews supported by measurable inputs such as industry feedback, examination performance data, and changes in professional practice.

3. Management Review (Clause 10.2.5)

Management reviews are occasionally conducted outside the expected 12-month cycle and/or omit required inputs. Frequently absent elements include audit results, stakeholder feedback, and the status of corrective actions.

Effective management reviews tend to function as strategic evaluation tools rather than administrative exercises, enabling leadership to proactively identify systemic risks.

4. Internal Audits (Clause 10.2.6)

Internal audit programs sometimes lack independence or are not performed at planned intervals. Situations where personnel audit their own work continue to be identified during assessments.

Ensuring appropriate sectorial auditor competencies for compliance to ISO/IEC 17024 and maintaining objectivity within the audit function and scope of accreditation has consistently supported stronger management system performance.

5. Public Information (Clause 7.2)

Publicly accessible information is not always sufficiently detailed. Websites occasionally omit certification prerequisites, fee structures, application processes, or mechanisms for verifying the status of certified individuals.

Transparent public information contributes directly to stakeholder confidence and supports the credibility of the certification process.

6. Resource and Personnel Requirements (Clauses 6.1 and 6.2)

Assessment outcomes indicate that personnel records are sometimes incomplete or not regularly updated. Structured monitoring of examiner performance is also not consistently implemented.

Maintaining comprehensive competence records and periodically evaluating examiner reliability has proven effective in strengthening assessment consistency.

7. Management of Impartiality (Clause 4.3)

Threats to impartiality are not always identified on a continuous basis, and committee structures may lack balanced representation.

Proactive risk identification and diverse committee participation have been observed to reduce impartiality-related vulnerabilities.

8. Decision on Certification and Certificates (Clause 9.4)

Certificates occasionally lack essential details such as scheme references, validity dates, or scope clarity. In some cases, independence between training, examination, and certification decision activities is not sufficiently demonstrated.

Clear separation of functions supports defensibility of certification decisions.

9. Recertification (Clause 9.6)

Recertification processes sometimes rely primarily on continuing professional development hours without objective confirmation of continued competence.

More robust recertification models typically incorporate performance evidence, reassessment elements, or structured competence verification.

Additional Areas Requiring Attention:

Less frequent but still significant findings have been observed in the following areas:

- Assessment methodology documentation
- Outsourcing controls and enforceable agreements
- Correct use of accreditation marks and logos

- Corrective and preventive action processes
- Financial sustainability and liability coverage
- Accessibility considerations within application processes
- Examination security practices
- Document control and record retention
- Organizational independence between training and certification

While individually less common, these issues may still influence overall conformity when present.

Observed Impact on Assessment Activities:

Assessment experience indicates that recurring gaps most often lead to:

- Increased corrective action cycles
- Follow-up assessments
- Extended assessment durations
- Delays in accreditation decisions

Early internal verification of high-risk requirement areas has consistently supported smoother assessment outcomes.

Guidance for Personnel Certification Bodies:

Organizations preparing for accreditation or reassessment have found it beneficial to:

- Treat certification schemes as living systems requiring periodic validation
- Integrate statistical examination analysis into routine operations
- Use management reviews for strategic oversight
- Preserve independence across certification functions
- Maintain current competence records
- Ensure transparency of public information
- Monitor impartiality risks continuously

Addressing these areas in advance has frequently reduced the likelihood of significant findings.

Summary:

Assessment data demonstrates that nonconformities tend to cluster around several core elements of ISO/IEC 17024, particularly examination validity, scheme governance, and management system effectiveness.

Strengthening these foundational areas has consistently supported more predictable assessments and reduced the need for follow-up activities.

Note: This Technical Note is intended to promote awareness of commonly observed challenges and to encourage proactive system improvements across accredited and applicant Personnel Certification Bodies.