

Handbook for Quality Audits of Organisations and Processes

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Overview

The audit process is set out in six stages:

1. Initiate the audit
2. Appoint a head auditor
3. Establish an audit plan
4. Hold an opening meeting with senior auditee management
5. Conduct the audit
6. Closing meeting and report

Stage 1: Initiate the audit

The client auditee requests and authorizes the auditor to conduct an audit of a system.

1. The client chooses the auditor
2. The client specifies the scope of the audit.
3. The auditor is independent.
4. The auditor must be appropriately qualified.
5. If the client is not the auditee, then the auditee must also approve the audit.

The purpose of the audit may be to establish one or more of the following:

- compliance or otherwise with given criteria or requirements
- effectiveness of the system in meeting specified objectives
- improvement possibilities
- acceptability for some kind of registration
- ability of the auditee to meet contractual requirements

Note: The audit does not make the auditor responsible for program quality.

The auditee should avoid excessive and unnecessary quality maintenance functions.

Stage 2: Appoint a head auditor

A person should be in charge of the audit (head auditor), who:

- helps select audit team members
- helps prepare an audit plan and define requirements
- complies with any relevant auditing requirements

- represents the audit team with auditee's management
- reviews documentation
- reports serious noncompliance with standards immediately to auditee and client
- issues the final report to the client. If the client is not the auditee, it is the client's responsibility to provide the auditee's management with a copy.

Stage 3: Establish an audit plan

The audit plan should:

- be written down
- have a specified scope
- be flexible enough to allow necessary changes of emphasis
- allow individuals to be identified when they have significant responsibilities
- identify:
 - relevant documents and standards
 - identify audit team members
 - language of audit
 - date, place, timeframe,
 - meeting schedules
 - confidentiality requirements
 - date of issue of report
 - distribution of report (e.g. list of recipients)

Note: If client and auditee are separate entities the plan for report distribution should protect the interests of both.

Stage 4: Hold an opening meeting with senior auditee management

The opening meeting should:

- introduce audit team
- review scope and objectives of audit
- summarize methods to be used
- establish official communication links
- confirm resources and facilities need by auditor
- confirm time and date for closing meeting.
- clarify anything that is unclear.

Stage 5: Conduct the audit

Auditee is responsible to:

- provide accompanying staff if necessary
- inform employees about audit
- provide all necessary resources
- provide all necessary accesses

Ethical practices for audit team members:

1. Comply with audit requirements.
2. Handle documents appropriately, especially confidential documents.
3. Remain within the scope of the audit.
4. Be objective.
5. Do not disclose any details to auditee that would compromise the audit.
6. Act ethically: For example:
 - be nondiscriminatory on basis of race, gender, religion, etc.
 - respect copyright,
 - do not compromise commercial advantage
 - be free of conflict of interest

Requirements of audit team members when conducting the audit:

1. Plan and conduct the audit efficiently and effectively.
2. Verify corrective actions taken by auditee, if requested by the client.
3. Gather and analyse relevant sufficient information to draw conclusions through interviews, examining documents, and observations of activities. Use interviews to determine whether auditee personnel know, understand and apply procedures and other quality-related documents. Substantiate your observations and verify information by independently getting the same information from other sources.
4. Use forms and checklists; document all observations and evidence and relate them to standards.
5. Determine whether:
 - the documents of system are adequate for quality needs.
 - the auditee's procedures are able to reach the desired objectives.
6. Remain alert to evidence relevant to audit results and that requires more auditing. Follow up clues on apparent

noncompliance to standards, even if they are not on checklists.

7. Report all audit results to the head auditor

Note: If an auditee objects to an audit act, refer the matter to the head auditor, who is responsible to ensure that difficulties are resolved efficiently.

Making changes during an audit:

1. The lead auditor can make changes to the audit while the audit is in process with agreement of other parties.
2. If the audit goals appear to be unattainable, the lead auditor should tell the client and the auditee.

Stage 6: Closing meeting and report

Close the audit with a meeting to explain clearly the audit results:

1. Ensure that auditee and clients understand the report
2. Keep notes of the closing meeting.

The report of audit results should be:

- a written document
- clear and conclusive
- without delay

The report should contain:

- scope of audit
- audit plan details
- identities of audit personnel
- standards documents
- observations and items of noncompliance
- judgement on extent of compliance
- systems ability to achieve defined objectives
- audit report distribution list.

The audit is completed on submission of the audit report and the closing meeting. The auditee is responsible for any corrective actions necessary.

