



**Accreditation
Board for
International
Standards**

**Guidance on the Application
of ISO / IEC 17020**

Table of Contents

1. The Scheme	3
2. Definitions	3
3. Organisation Structure	4
3.1 Council Committee for Inspection Bodies	4
3.2 Technical Committees and Working Groups	4
3.3 Assessors	5
4. Accreditation Process	5
4.1 Introduction.....	5
4.2 Application.....	5
4.3 Preliminary Assessment.....	5
4.4 Initial Assessment.....	6
4.5 Award of Accreditation	6
4.6 Post-accreditation Assessment.....	7
4.7 Suspension and Withdrawal of Accreditation	7
4.8 Reinstatement of Accreditation	8
4.9 Re-application	8
5. Approved signatories	9
6. Branch Offices.....	9
7. Safety.....	10

1. The Scheme

- 1.1 The Accreditation Scheme for Inspection Bodies is the national accreditation scheme of the Accreditation Council (ABIS). The said scheme will be referred to as "IB Scheme".
- 1.2 The primary objectives of IB Scheme are as follows:
- a) To operate the accreditation of inspection bodies in accordance to international criteria, such as guidance documents and requirements for mutual recognition arrangements
 - b) To provide by means of assessment, the assurance that the professional practice by accredited inspection bodies, are in accordance to international standards and guidelines,
 - c) To ensure that the accreditation processes are carried out with professionalism and integrity
 - d) To strengthen and develop accreditation scheme to meet the needs of stakeholders
 - e) To facilitate trade and market access by establishing and maintaining mutual recognition arrangements with overseas and regional/ international accreditation bodies
- 1.3 IB Scheme gives formal recognition to inspection bodies that have been independently assessed and found to comply with the criteria established by ABIS. Accreditation is granted for specific inspection activities of an inspection body, and is not a blanket approval for its total operations.
- 1.4 ABIS accredits inspection bodies which can demonstrate that they comply with the requirements of "General criteria for the operation of various types of bodies performing inspection" and specific technical requirements that apply to various fields of inspection. This
- 1.5 document should be read in conjunction with ABIS 01, Terms and Conditions for Accreditation, the standard and any specific requirements that may be published as Technical Notes relating to the inspection activities.

2. Definitions

2.1 **Accreditation Criteria:**

The set of requirements an inspection body must meet to be accredited under IB Scheme. Such requirements are specified in the documents as stipulated in Annex 1.

2.2 **Approved signatory:**

An inspector recognised under IB Scheme to sign endorsed inspection reports / certificates issued by an accredited inspection body.

2.3 **Assessment:**

Examination for competency and compliance with predetermined regulations and requirements by independent experts under ABIS.

2.4 **Assessor:**

An individual who carries out some or all functions related to inspection assessment under ABIS.

2.5 **Field of Inspection:**

A broad sphere of science, engineering or technology used to describe a general area of inspection for classification purposes. In addition, for accreditation purposes, fields of inspection are subdivided into specific inspections, groups of inspections or product areas.

2.6 **Inspection:**

Examination of a product design, product, service, process or plant, and determination of their conformity with specific requirements or, on the basis of professional judgment, general requirements

- 2.7 **Inspection Body:**
Body that performs inspection
- 2.8 **Management Representative:**
A person nominated by an inspection body to represent it in all matters relating to accreditation.
- 2.9 **Nonconformity**
Non-fulfillment of a requirement
- 2.10 **ABIS endorsed inspection certificate or report:**
A certificate or report that includes a statement by the inspection body that it is accredited for the inspection reported and that the inspection has been performed in accordance with the terms and conditions for accreditation under ABIS. It bears the accreditation certificate number and the accreditation mark.
- 2.11 **Schedule of Accreditation:**
A schedule issued with the Certificate of Accreditation listing the specific inspections for which accreditation has been granted.
- 2.12 **Surveillance:**
Routine examination of an inspection body to evaluate its continued compliance with IB scheme's requirements
- 2.13 **Suspension of Accreditation:**
Process of temporarily making accreditation invalid, in full or for part of the terms of accreditation
- 2.14 **Terms of Accreditation:**
The inspections or functional tests for which an inspection body is accredited under, including any qualifications such as inspection methods and reference standards.
- 2.15 **Withdrawal of Accreditation:**
Process of cancelling accreditation in full

3. Organisation Structure

3.1 Council Committee for Inspection Bodies

- 3.1.1 The Council Committee for Inspection Bodies (CCIB) is a specialist committee appointed by the ABIS Council. The CCIB is responsible for the formulation of policies, provides guidance and oversees the operation of the Accreditation Scheme for Inspection Bodies.
- 3.1.2 The CCIB is authorised by the ABIS Council to review, evaluate and approve assessment reports for accreditation of inspection bodies through its Review Committees. The CCIB may also co-opt individuals with relevant technical or management expertise as advisors for the review of assessment reports.
- 3.1.3 The term of office for members of the CCIB is three years with provision for re-appointment.

3.2 Technical Committees and Working Groups

- 3.2.1 Technical Committees or Working Groups are established for each field or area of inspection activities, which ABIS offers accreditation.
- 3.2.2 Technical Committee or Working Group members are appointed by the CCIB. The basis of appointment will be the members' knowledge and expertise in respective technical field or area. The Technical Committees or Working Groups are to recommend detailed technical

criteria in their respective fields of inspection and to review, evaluate and approve each assessment reports, on a selected member basis.

- 3.2.3 The term of office for members of the Technical Committee or Working Group is three years with provision for reappointment.

3.3 Assessors

- 3.3.1 Each Technical Committee maintains a panel of technical assessors/specialists who are appointed from the ranks of government departments, academic and professional institutions, and industry practitioners. The technical assessors/specialists are chosen on the basis of their professional knowledge and expertise in a particular area of inspection and their ability to examine and evaluate an inspection body's standard of management and practices.
- 3.3.2 The appointed assessors will conduct assessments of applicants and accredited inspection bodies based on the criteria established under IB Scheme.
- 3.3.3 The assessment team will submit assessment reports to the Review Committee under the CCIB for approval after the assessment.

4. Accreditation Process

4.1 Introduction

- 4.1.1 Enquiries regarding IB Scheme can be made at the Accreditation Council.
- 4.1.2 Inspection bodies interested to seek accreditation may obtain the relevant documents (except ISO/IEC standards) and application form from the ABIS or download them from ABIS
- 4.1.3 Inspection body is advised to study in detail the ABIS Terms and Conditions to ensure that it can substantially meet the accreditation criteria before it lodges an application for accreditation.
- 4.1.4 The management system of the inspection body shall be operational for at least two months before ABIS carries out an assessment of the inspection body.

4.2 Application

- 4.2.1 All applications shall be made in the form provided by ABIS and be supported with documents containing sufficient information regarding its staff, management system, equipment, calibration, inspection methods, or other information necessary or requested by ABIS from time to time for the assessment of the inspection body.
- 4.2.2 The applicant shall nominate a management representative to liaise with ABIS on all matters relating to accreditation and the applicant shall keep ABIS inform of any change in the representative.

4.3 Preliminary Assessment

- 4.3.1 Upon receipt of a duly completed application form and satisfactory supporting documents, ABIS will arrange for a preliminary assessment unless requested otherwise by the applicant.
- 4.3.2 Preliminary assessment is conducted to evaluate the adequacy of the management system implemented and to get impression about the technical abilities of the applicant.

4.3.3 ABIS makes recommendations to the applicant on nonconformities noted and upon full rectification of the nonconformities may recommend the inspection body to proceed with initial assessment.

4.4 **Initial Assessment**

4.4.1 This is an on-site evaluation of the applicant to determine whether it conforms with the accreditation criteria before an accreditation is awarded.

4.4.2 All assessments shall be conducted by ABIS officer(s) and technical assessor(s) appointed by the Chairman of the CCIB.

4.4.3 The applicant shall use the most current inspection methods for its terms of accreditation unless otherwise stated in pre-agreed contractual agreements.

4.4.4 The applicant shall make available personnel such as management representative, key technical staff and inspectors who are nominated as approved signatories of the inspection body for interview during the assessment.

4.4.5 The assessment shall take place at the premises of the inspection body and on a representative sample of inspection sites as recommended by the assessment team.

4.4.6 The applicant shall be advised on the assessment findings which include comments on competence and conformity. During the assessment, nonconformities may be raised. The management representative should ensure that the nonconformities raised are fully understood.

4.4.7 The applicant shall be given one month to respond to the nonconformities and to describe the specific action taken. Once the applicant has taken the necessary corrective actions, the assessment team shall review the corrective actions and if it considers necessary, verify the actions taken on-site, and shall submit an assessment report to the Review Committee within a reasonable time.

4.4.8 A Review Committee comprises appropriate members from the Council Committee for Inspection Bodies and members from the relevant Technical Committee or Working Group as appropriate.

4.4.9 Appropriate technical experts may be co-opted by the Review Committee for evaluation of the reports.

4.5 **Award of Accreditation**

4.5.1 The CCIB grants accreditation to the applicant upon being satisfied that the inspection body meets the criteria for accreditation.

4.5.2 All decisions of the CCIB on the granting of accreditation, extension, reduction, renewal, suspension or withdrawal of the same shall, unless expressly provided herein, be final and not called into question by the inspection body.

4.5.3 A Certificate of Accreditation shall be issued to the accredited inspection body together with a Schedule giving the details of its terms of accreditation. Inspection body may request for an additional certificate and a nominal fee will be charged.

4.5.4 The Certificate of Accreditation is valid for a period of three years with provision for renewal on expiry, subject to the post-accreditation assessment herein set out.

4.5.5 The accredited inspection body shall pay to ABIS an annual certificate fee and other surveillance and administrative fees as determined by ABIS from time to time.

4.5.6 All accredited inspection bodies will be listed in a Directory published by ABIS and in the ABIS website.

4.6 **Post-accreditation Assessment**

- 4.6.1 Post-accreditation assessments refer to surveillance assessments, renewal assessments and non-routine assessments.
- 4.6.2 ABIS shall conduct surveillance assessments and other non-routine assessments on the accredited inspection bodies to ensure that standards of practice complying with the criteria are maintained. A surveillance assessment shall be conducted normally once every twelve months.
- 4.6.3 A renewal assessment will be conducted prior to the expiry of the Certificate of Accreditation. The Certificate will be renewed on the condition that the accredited inspection body has been found to maintain the necessary standard of practice during the validity of the Certificate and is capable of maintaining the standard established.
- 4.6.4 All accredited inspection bodies shall submit a copy of the internal audit report to ABIS prior to the assessment. The inspection bodies may submit the report three months before the date of assessment.
- 4.6.5 The inspection bodies may request for an extension or reduction in the terms of accreditation for consideration during the surveillance and renewal assessment. For such requests, the inspection bodies shall write formally to ABIS at least 1 month before the date of assessment. Upon approval by the CCIB, a revised Schedule will be issued to the inspection bodies to reflect any changes in the terms of accreditation.
- 4.6.6 Non-routine assessments can be made to consider requests for extension in the terms of accreditation, or to investigate complaints made against the accredited inspection body on areas within the scope of accreditation, if these could not be conducted during the surveillance visits. ABIS reserves the right to conduct unannounced visits when the need arises.
- 4.6.7 Unannounced assessments are conducted for special reasons such as to investigate a complaint against an inspection body. ABIS reserves the right to conduct unannounced visits when the need arises
- 4.6.8 ABIS may conduct non-routine assessment for reinstatement of accreditation for an inspection body whose accreditation has been suspended or inoperative due to various reasons such as change of premises or loss of all signatories.

4.7 **Suspension and Withdrawal of Accreditation**

- 4.7.1 A suspension or withdrawal may be made against an accredited inspection body for inspections included in the terms of accreditation for such period as the CCIB may determine if it is satisfied that :
 - a) The inspection body has not maintained a standard of practice complying with the
 - b) accreditation criteria as stipulated in Annex I ;
 - c) The inspection body has violated the terms and conditions for the accreditation stipulated in ABIS 01;
 - d) The inspection body has failed to provide reasonable resources for the assessors to discharge their duties; the inspection body has failed to rectify the non-compliances that have an effect on the validity of the inspection results one month after the given time frame. These may include retrieval and re-issuing of the affected inspection reports;
 - e) The inspection body has failed to submit the corrective actions within the agreed time frame without valid reason; or
 - f) The inspection body has failed to pay all necessary fees levied by ABIS from time to time.

- 4.7.2 Where any failure to comply with any criteria of accreditation is, in the opinion of the CCIB, of a temporary nature and rectification will not be immediate, ABIS may suspend accreditation for any or all inspections covered in the terms of accreditation of that inspection body.
- 4.7.3 ABIS shall withdraw the accreditation when departures from the criteria of accreditation, which lead to suspension of accreditation, are not rectified within the stipulated timeframe, normally not more than a year.
- 4.7.4 The ABIS shall inform the accredited inspection body in writing of the suspension or withdrawal and the reasons for doing so. The inspection body shall have the right to appeal to the ABIS Council.
- 4.7.5 No accreditation shall be suspended or withdrawn unless ABIS:
- a. Has served at least two weeks' written notice to the accredited inspection body, stating the grounds for the suspension or withdrawal; and
 - b. Has considered any written appeal from the accredited inspection body received during these two weeks.
- 4.7.6 During the two weeks' notice, the status of accreditation of the inspection body is considered to be in temporary suspension and no endorsed report shall be issued.
- 4.7.7 If a written appeal has been received, the ABIS Council shall convene an Appeal Committee chaired by a ABIS Council member and comprising of members not involved in the evaluation of the inspection body to consider the explanations given, and if the accredited inspection body so wishes, shall provide an opportunity for the accredited inspection body to be heard as soon as possible. Where necessary appropriate technical experts may be co-opted by and to assist the ABIS Council in hearing the appeal
- 4.7.8 If no appeal has been received by the ABIS Council against the notice of suspension or withdrawal, or if in the opinion of the ABIS Council the explanations submitted are not satisfactory, ABIS shall, on the expiry of the notice, suspend or withdraw the accreditation and inform the inspection body in writing.
- 4.7.9 Any accredited inspection body may voluntarily withdraw its accreditation by giving two weeks written notice to ABIS.
- 4.7.10 An inspection body whose accreditation has been suspended or withdrawn shall not issue ABIS endorsed inspection reports or represent or imply in any way to any party that its accreditation under ABIS is operative.
- 4.7.11 An inspection body whose accreditation has been withdrawn shall return the Certificate of Accreditation and all other appropriate documents to ABIS immediately. It shall stop the use of ABIS mark and accreditation logo in its marketing collaterals.

4.8 **Reinstatement of Accreditation**

- 4.8.1 An inspection body whose accreditation has been suspended in part or in full may have its accreditation reinstated subject to a re-assessment. The inspection body shall satisfy all the criteria of a formal assessment and the award of accreditation as per clause 4.4 and 4.5.

4.9 **Re-application**

- 4.9.1 An inspection body whose accreditation has been withdrawn by ABIS may re-apply one year after its withdrawal date and shall be considered as fresh applicant.

- 4.9.2 An inspection body that has withdrawn its accreditation may re-apply and shall be considered as fresh applicant.

5. Approved signatories

- 5.1 The status of approved signatory shall be granted only to persons nominated by the inspection body.
- 5.2 The status of approved signatory is granted to a nominee for specific inspections which the inspection body is accredited.
- 5.3 As the status of approved signatory is granted in the context of the inspections being performed in a particular inspection body, it shall not be considered as a personal qualification.
- 5.4 The nominees for approved signatory shall have the relevant qualification and experience in the related field and be competent to make critical evaluation of inspection results.
- 5.5 The nominees for signatory approval shall be thoroughly conversant with the ABIS terms and conditions together with other relevant criteria for accreditation. For works that are regulated by authority, the nominee shall be qualified by the relevant authority, where applicable.
- 5.6 No approval will be granted to a nominee without being interviewed by the assessment team. If the nominee for signatory approval is not present in the assessment, a separate visit or interview is required.
- 5.7 In addition to the interview, the nominee, at the discretion of the assessment team, may be required to sit for a written test.
- 5.8 The approved signatory shall ensure the reliability and completeness of inspection reports for which responsibility is taken on behalf of the accredited inspection body concerned.
- 5.9 All approved signatories shall be subjected to review during assessment. It is the responsibility of the accredited inspection body to ensure that existing approved signatories be present when their areas are being assessed. Otherwise their signatory approval may be withdrawn, or a separate visit or interview may be required.
- 5.10 5.10 The status of accreditation may become inoperative if there is no approved signatory for specific inspections or all inspections for which the inspection body is accredited

6. Branch Offices

- 6.1 An accredited inspection body shall not issue ABIS endorsed reports for inspections conducted by the branch inspection office unless accreditation has been extended to cover the work performed by the branch inspection office.
- 6.2 If an accredited inspection body wishes to seek accreditation for its branch inspection office, it shall apply formally to ABIS to request for an extension of the accreditation to the branch inspection office.
- 6.3 ABIS may consider on a case to case basis the accreditation of overseas branch inspection office with Headquarters (HQ) in , if they meet the following criteria:
- a. The HQ oversees and controls the management system and its implementation in the branch inspection office; and
 - b. The branch inspection offices must operate to the same management system and technical procedures as the HQ.

7. Safety

- 7.1 Safe working conditions are essential to good inspection practice and management. The inspection body shall observe all necessary safety precautions to ensure that its inspections are performed in safe working environment.
- 7.2 ABIS will not arrange for on-site assessment if it considers the inspection premises to be unsafe.
- 7.3 It is the inspection body's responsibility to comply with relevant health and safety requirements.

Annex I

Listing of Accreditation Criteria Documents

An inspection body seeking IB Scheme accreditation has to meet the requirements set out in the following documents:

- 1) ISO/IEC 17020: 1998 "General criteria for the operation of various types of bodies performing inspection"
- 2) Technical Notes which amplify and interpret technical requirements of ISO/IEC 17020:1998 for the specific area of inspection activities.
- 3) ABIS 01 "ABIS Terms and Conditions for Accreditation"