

Technical Support for Assessment – Principles Applied by FINAS

Finnish Accreditation Service FINAS

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Foreword

This policy document for FINAS was drawn up in 2011–2012 by a working group appointed by the Advisory Committee for Accreditation Matters (VANK-P). The working group had the following members:

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The purpose of the policy documents is to clarify the application of accreditation requirements in practice. They have been drawn up taking into account the principles agreed within the international cooperation organizations of accreditation bodies (European co-operation for Accreditation (EA), the International Laboratory Accreditation Cooperation (ILAC) and the International Accreditation Forum (IAF)).

The policy documents currently in force are presented in FINAS Leaflet 10 “FINAS accreditation criteria, policy documents and guidelines”.

Further information: www.finas.fi

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1 Introduction

Accreditation requires sound expertise of the operations carried out by the bodies to be accredited and by applicants operating in new sectors. Technical expertise is needed to support assessment. This expertise also ensures the correct targeting of assessment. Moreover, technical expertise is utilized in interpreting and implementing sector-specific accreditation programmes and requirements. Thus, technical expertise supports the implementation of FINAS Policy Document A5 (FINAS policy for sector schemes) at the practical level.

This document defines the principles for the procedure used by FINAS to ensure technical expertise by utilizing technical expert groups and networks. FINAS applies these principles when selecting means for technical support.

The means available are the establishment of a technical support group, the utilization of existing expert groups, and use of the EA technical networks.

2 Establishment of a support group and operating principles

The need to set up a support group for a technical sector may arise from many different sources. In addition to FINAS, the initiative may come, for instance, from customers, VANK-P¹, stakeholders or from the authorities.

A support group can be established if there is a need to apply accreditation requirements to a new field or if a substantial need for harmonization is recognized in a sector already in use. A support group may also be established to meet other emerging needs if such a group is considered to fit the purpose.

Increasingly often, new legislation and new decrees require accreditation. In cooperation with the authorities, it is determined whether the sector already has existing groups for addressing the requirements laid down in legislation.

FINAS is responsible for practical measures when support groups are set up.

Support groups are guided by the principles of transparency and the openness of activities. A support group's opinions are public and generally available on FINAS's website. Openness reduces any problems that might arise from disqualification. It is determined in each case whether the support

¹ Advisory Committee for Accreditation Matters

group's operations concern one issue at hand or the activities of the sector in general.

3 Composition of the support group

The support group must represent the widest possible range of interests in order to attain balanced competence and to display differing viewpoints. The inclusion of a representative from FINAS in each support group ensures up-to-date knowledge of accreditation matters.

VANK-P is informed of the members selected for the support group, e.g. to ensure impartiality.

A support group may be established for a certain term of office or it may function for the duration of an assignment on an ad hoc basis.

In the case of a support group having a certain term, FINAS evaluates the implementation of the group's plan for operations once a year and assesses the need for continued operations at the end of the group's term.

If the support group's work is associated with technical standards and their interpretation, the Finnish Standards Association SFS and its network of experts are used as help whenever possible.

4 The support group's tasks and operations

The support group's task is to assist FINAS in developing assessments, for instance, by presenting views on the current situation and future prospects in the sector. Support groups may also discuss new standards and guidelines and their practical application (e.g. guides issued by the EA, Eurolab, Eurachem and other corresponding organizations). Support groups focus mainly on technical issues in their sector. The objective of the work done by support groups is to create common understanding with regard to assessment issues and, whenever possible, to identify and resolve special problems pertaining to assessment in each sector.

The purpose of support groups is not to deal with disputes or claims, or the problems of individual accredited bodies.

The goals and mandates of support groups established by FINAS are described explicitly in the group's action plan drawn up by FINAS and the

group together. VANK-P may also take a stand on a support group's goals and mandate.

The support group's chairperson is selected from inside the group. Support groups meet as needed. Between meetings, the group operates as deemed appropriate by utilizing electronic means of communications. A support group can also make use of expertise outside the group, when considered necessary. Support groups report at regular intervals to FINAS, in the manner agreed. FINAS, in turn, informs VANK-P of the support groups' activities.

5 Use of an existing group of experts

Groups and structures already in existence can be utilized. FINAS and the authorities have their established forms of cooperation, such as joint working groups with Evira, the Energy Market Authority and Trafi.

Groups whose expertise can be utilized in technical matters also exist in connection with scientific societies. FINAS designates a contact person to cooperate with the above groups. If no FINAS representative participates in the group's activities, the group is asked to name a contact person for FINAS. As far as possible, the contact person ensures that the group has competence associated with accreditation. For instance, the person may be FINAS's technical assessor or a person in charge of an accredited activity.

When FINAS cooperates with the above groups, the principles described in this document are adhered to whenever possible. FINAS's contact person reports on the groups' activities to FINAS.

6 Use of the EA technical networks

The EA has operational networks and working groups that deal with issues associated with accreditation in various sectors and with accreditation pertaining to the notification procedure of EU Directives. FINAS is an active member of these networks and can thereby receive technical support for its operations. The experiences gained by other accreditation bodies are also utilized for assessment tasks.