

FINAS Finnish Accreditation Service principles of service

FINAS Finnish Accreditation Service

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Foreword

These principles of service at FINAS have been prepared in 2017–2019 by the working group appointed by the Advisory Committee for Accreditation Matters, Subcommittee for Accreditation Matters (VANK-P). The working group had the following members:

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The service principle of FINAS represents the shared view of FINAS and its stakeholders on the principles of customer service at FINAS, which serve to ensure that customer service by FINAS meets the needs of its customers.

Further information: www.finas.fi

Table of contents

Foreword	2
1 Introduction	4
2 The service promise of FINAS	4
3 The accreditation process	5
4 Confidentiality of accreditation	12
5 Digital services	12
6 Data collection and communication	13

1 Introduction

As a national accreditation body, FINAS has a legal obligation (Act on the verification of competence of conformity assessment services, No 920/2005 and its Amendment 764/2014, Regulation (EC) No 765/2008 of the European Parliament and of the European Council setting out the requirements for accreditation and market surveillance relating to the marketing of products) to provide services related to accreditation and competence assessment. Customers of FINAS include laboratories, inspection bodies, certification bodies, verifier organisations and proficiency testing providers. The customers of FINAS operate in very different industries and may have varying needs. Despite this, a number of common expectations on services by FINAS are shared by all customers. This description of service principles at FINAS lists principles of good customer service that apply to all customers.

The aim of this description of FINAS service principles is to clarify the structure and timetable of the assessment process from the customers' perspective, as well as bring attention to viewpoints related to modern collaboration between organisations and their personnel.

In addition to assessment services, FINAS offers training and expert services. This description of the service principles of FINAS focuses on assessment services and their related customer communication and expert collaboration.

2 The service promise of FINAS

The service promise of FINAS to its customers provides a structure and a timetable for the assessment process. The need for the service promise is mutual. It improves transparency of the rules of assessment at various stages of the process, takes into account international requirements and makes the policies of FINAS public or available to customers upon request. In turn, customers are expected to commit to accreditation and its requirements.

The service promise involves the following areas:

- A clear description of the accreditation process and its stages, requirements, timetables and costs. The description is public or available upon request.
- Comprehensive planning of assessments during the accreditation cycle
- High-quality and impartial assessment work, equal treatment of customers
- Confidentiality

- Reporting principles and quality. Reporting for the purpose of developing operations.
- FINAS delivery times – time limits and minimum service times
- Scope of accreditation: FINAS shall maintain its scopes of accreditation up-to-date and consistent to allow for international comparability
- Digital services: FINAS shall develop its procedures for electronic services and introduce new functionalities and tools for its customers
- Collecting customer feedback and describing trends to customers based on the results
- Up-to-date public communication on issues related to accreditation

To cover its costs, FINAS charges a fee for the assessment services it provides. The grounds for the fees and the currently valid rates are given in the price list published annually.

3 The accreditation process

The aim of this description of service principle is to clarify the structure and timetable of the accreditation process from the customers' perspective, as well as bring attention to viewpoints related to modern collaboration between accreditation bodies and customer organisations and their personnel.

Accreditation is based on qualification requirements described in international ISO standards. FINAS shall inform its customers of the currently valid requirements and of any changes to these.

In order to ensure a smooth accreditation process, good collaboration and long-term planning is required between the accredited bodies or prospective accredited bodies and the accreditation body. FINAS shall prepare for its customers an assessment plan that covers the entire accreditation cycle and takes into account operational risks. By ensuring the competence and expertise of the assessment team, FINAS ensures that assessment is targeted to areas critical for activities. The customer is responsible for facilitating the smooth progress of the assessment process, including ensuring that all necessary persons are present at assessments and all information required for the assessment is available.

The scope of accreditation of accredited bodies indicates the activity that has been deemed competent. It is the duty of FINAS to ensure that the scopes of accreditation are up-to-date and internationally comparable. For the purpose

of reassessment, the customer is obligated to notify FINAS of changes to its activities that fall under the scope of accreditation.

To ensure equal treatment of customers and compliance with international practices, FINAS trains experts in an industry to act as technical assessors in accordance with international requirements. FINAS shall also organise regular conventions for assessors on the harmonisation of assessment procedures. By actively taking part in international collaboration on accreditation in the form of general conventions, committees, working groups and peer evaluation, FINAS maintains its own competence and participates in the development of accreditation.

It is the duty of FINAS to provide the assessment process with tools and resources that make use of collaboration, planning and competence. The customer is expected to commit to using the provided tools. All assessors shall use document templates that follow a common format and have been prepared by FINAS for each specific purpose.

The **accreditation process** (initial assessment, re-assessment, periodic surveillance) is described in the table below. The table describes the various process stages and responsibilities. The table also lists target times for various process stages and aspects that may be employed to streamline and speed up the process. (The arrows in the table depict the direction of document transfers between the customer and FINAS.)

New customer		FINAS (target time)		Accredited customer (target time)	Streamlining the assessment
Processing the application and/or material request					
Application	→	Confirmation of receipt of the application and access rights to FINAS extranet (1 week)			
Delivery of assessment material (appendices to the application)	→				Clear proposal on the scope of application/applicant
		Review of the application (4 weeks of receiving the application)			

New customer		FINAS (target time)		Accredited customer (target time)	Streamlining the assessment
		Material request (7 weeks before the assessment visit)	→		
		Review of the completed material request	←	Delivery of the material (3 weeks before the assessment visit)	Sufficient material in advance/customer In large-scale extensions, FINAS must be notified 4-6 months before the assessment/customer
Forming the Assessment Team					
	←	Forming the Assessment Team (new applicant), Details of assessors proposed for the customer (1-3 months of receiving the application)			Information on potential assessors under special circumstances/ applicant
Feedback on the proposed assessors (2 weeks of the proposal)	→				
		Changes to the Assessment Team (accredited customer), information on the assessors proposed for the customer (3-6 months before the assessment visit)	→		Change needs related to the scope of accreditation reported to FINAS 6 months before the assessment visit if the change requires the addition of new assessors to the Assessment Team
			←	Feedback on the proposed assessors (2 weeks of the proposal)	
	←	Requesting approval of the assessors	→		
Approving the assessors	→		←	Approving the assessors	

New customer		FINAS (target time)		Accredited customer (target time)	Streamlining the assessment
	←	Confirming the Assessment Team members (2-4 months before the assessment visit)	→		
Planning the assessment					
	←	New applicant, proposal for the date of the preliminary visit (once the Assessment Team is ready), date of actual assessment visit to be agreed at the preliminary visit			
Approving the date	→				
		Accredited customer, proposal for the date of the assessment visit or confirmation of the date agreed at the previous visit (4-6 months before the time of assessment visit)	→		
			←	Approving the date	
		Planning the content/programme of the assessment visit (2-3 weeks), based on the plan for the accreditation cycle	←	Notifying FINAS of any requests and needs (3 weeks)	At large-scale or multidisciplinary sites (broad scope of application and/or several locations), planning is carried out together with the customer 3-6 months before the time of the assessment visit/FINAS
	←	Programme for the preliminary visit/assessment visit (agreed with the customer and Assessment Team) (1-2 weeks before the assessment)	→		
	←	Cost estimate for the assessment	→		

New customer		FINAS (target time)		Accredited customer (target time)	Streamlining the assessment
Preliminary visit					
		Preliminary visit			
	←	Summary of the preliminary visit and agreed follow-up measures (presented at the end of the visit)			
Implementation of follow-up measures before the actual assessment visit, possible additional material for future assessment	→				
	←	Date of actual assessment visit			
Confirming the date	→				
Assessment visit					
		Review of assessment material (Assessment Team)			
		Assessment visit		Ensuring the success of the assessment visit (all relevant personnel present, access to premises, possibility to monitor activities)	Utilisation of digital tools/FINAS
	←	Summary of the assessment and non-conformities (presented at the final meeting concluding the assessment)	→		Opportunity to clarify the assessment's observations in the final meeting/FINAS

New customer		FINAS (target time)		Accredited customer (target time)	Streamlining the assessment
	←	Reports of the assessment visit (4 weeks)	→		
Possible comments to the reports	→		←	Possible comments to the reports	Timeliness and clarity of reports/FINAS
Measures to correct non-conformities (up to 4 months)	→	Assessment of corrective measures	←	Measures to correct non-conformities (1-2 months)	Investigation of the root causes of non-conformities/customer
	←	Processing of corrective measures and assessment report (3-6 weeks)	→		
Accreditation decision					
		Preparing of the decision documents (3-6 weeks from approving corrections)			
	←	Request to review the scope of accreditation and confirmation (3-6 weeks from approving the corrections)	→		Defining the scope of accreditation together with the Assessment Team and customer/FINAS
Review and confirmation of the scope of accreditation	→		←	Review and confirmation of the scope of accreditation	
	←	Accreditation decision (3-6 weeks from approving the corrections)	→		
		Publishing the scope of accreditation on the website (1 week from the decision)			
	←	Customer feedback form (enclosed with the decision)	→		
Completing the form	→		←	Completing the form	Speedy processing of customer feedback/FINAS
Events during the accreditation cycle					

New customer	FINAS (target time)		Accredited customer (target time)	Streamlining the assessment
	Planning the accreditation cycle			
	Planning meetings with customers (large-scale or multidisciplinary sites)	→		
		←	Reporting changes between assessment visits in accordance with FINAS guidelines	
	Assessment of changes (documentation review, interview, assessment visit), result of the assessment, change of accreditation decision if necessary (3-6 weeks from the assessment/approval of corrections)	→		

Quality assurance of the accreditation process

FINAS employs procedures for the quality assurance of the accreditation process and the implementation of customer service principles:

- The assessment criteria are based on international ISO standards and international guides applicable to accreditation.
- FINAS employs a quality management system that takes into account the requirements of standard ISO/IEC 17011 for accreditation bodies. The quality management system is developed according to needs.
- FINAS demonstrates compliance with the requirements imposed on its activities by means of international peer evaluations every 4 years.
- FINAS also carries out internal audits to monitor the conformity of its activities.

- FINAS collects customer feedback both from each assessment and by means of periodic customer satisfaction surveys. The results of these are compared to predefined performance metrics and used for the development of activities.
- FINAS personnel (own personnel and third party assessors) have been specified qualification requirements, conformity with which is ensured by means of qualification training and orientation and periodic monitoring.
- FINAS personnel (own personnel and third party assessors) are committed to impartiality and confidentiality in their work
- The consistency of practices is ensured by means of continuous harmonisation of practices, both internally and internationally.
- The FINAS operations monitoring system is used to collect up-to-date data on the implementation of the accreditation process and the fulfilment of quality objectives. The system employs various metrics to evaluate the performance of activities.

4 Confidentiality of accreditation

The principles of confidential conduct of FINAS are described in FINAS leaflet 2, which is available on the FINAS website. The principles of confidential conduct define the principles of openness of activities by FINAS and the confidential processing of documents used in accreditation, responsibilities in document management, procedures for document transfer, and the confidential destruction of documents. The principles of conduct take into account guidelines on data protection in government activities, guidelines published by Tukes, and the requirements of Regulation (EC) No 765/2008 and standard SFS-EN ISO/IEC 17011 on the confidentiality of activities.

5 Digital services

The use of digital services between the accrediting body and customers is continuously developing and expanding. FINAS currently uses electronic document exchange via extranet, electronic tools (remote connection) in interviews, and encrypted access to customers' electronic document management system. FINAS develops and provides digital assessment services for its customers, with the aim to allow as much of the accreditation process as possible to be handled electronically. It is the duty of customers to use the provided tools. Future development goals of FINAS include electronic signatures, a da-

tabase for preparing/managing scopes of accreditation, and electronic tools for scheduling assessment visits. The current extranet used for document exchange will be developed according to needs, and FINAS will evaluate other potential tools.

6 Data collection and communication

The accuracy of data produced by the accrediting body and the timeliness of communications are central to the assessment process. For this reason, in addition to providing accurate assessment, FINAS aims to focus to its provided service as a whole. FINAS employs various practices for collecting and communicating data.

FINAS collects data on topical issues related to accreditation by participating in international accreditation cooperation (EA European co-operation for Accreditation, ILAC International Laboratory Accreditation Cooperation, IAF International Accreditation Forum Inc.). EA encompasses a number of networks and working groups that discuss matters related to accreditation in various sectors and in the notification procedure of EU directives. FINAS is an active member in these networks and is able to receive technical support for its own activities. FINAS also makes use of the experiences of other accrediting bodies in its own assessment duties.

National stakeholder cooperation is a means to collect and distribute information on matters related to accreditation. FINAS works in close cooperation with public authorities on the use of accreditation in regulated sectors. The principles of stakeholder cooperation are described in the FINAS policy document A6 *Principles for cooperation with national authorities*.

Where necessary, FINAS has set up technical support groups for various fields. They are tasked with supporting FINAS in developing its assessments by various means, including providing information such as insight on the field's current situation and prospects. These support groups mainly handle technical details related to a specific field. The aim of the support groups is to foster mutual understanding in assessment activities, and to identify and attempt to solve problems specific to the field under assessment. The support groups also communicate information on topical matters related to accreditation. The support groups consist of members of expert organisations in the field (such as in the technical support group for clinical analysis) or representatives of public authorities and accreditation customers (as in the technical support group for food and water control laboratories). Meetings of the support group and secretary services are arranged by FINAS. The principles of FINAS for the establishment and activities of support groups are described in

FINAS policy document A9 *Technical support for assessment – Principles applied by FINAS*. Detailed information on the support groups' work is available on the FINAS website.

Information on recent developments in accreditation is communicated to the customers of FINAS on the FINAS website, at customer days and meetings, and via leaflets and training events. The FINAS website contains information about FINAS as an accrediting body, general information on accreditation in Finland and internationally, a description of the accreditation process, instructions on how to apply for accreditation, and a list of accredited bodies and their scopes of accreditation. The website also contains news about the activities of FINAS and information about training services offered by FINAS. FINAS holds open events for its customers every two years. Customer meetings are held regularly with larger customers and with smaller customers according to need. Leaflets are published on the FINAS website and sent to customers by email if necessary.

References

SFS-EN ISO/IEC 17011:2017 Conformity assessment - Requirements for accreditation bodies accrediting conformity assessment bodies

FINAS Finnish Accreditation Service policy documents:

A6/2016 Principles for cooperation between FINAS and national authorities

A9/2013 Technical support for assessment – Principles applied by FINAS.

Leaflet 2 FINAS Finnish Accreditation Service principles of confidential conduct