

## FINAS policy for sector schemes

## Foreword

FINAS policy documents are drawn up by a working group appointed by the Advisory Committee for Conformity Assessment Matters, Subcommittee for Accreditation Matters (VANK-P). The new version A5/2016 replaces the previous version A5/2012. Document was updated by FINAS taking into account international guidelines.

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

FINAS accreditation criteria, policy documents and guidelines are presented in the valid FINAS Leaflet 10.

Further information: [www.finas.fi](http://www.finas.fi)

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## 1 Introduction

Sector schemes have been created or have arisen in areas where there has been a need to introduce sector-specific additions or specifications to the general requirements used for the assessment of conformity assessment bodies (CABs) and their activities.

The needs of various market operators (users, clients, authorities or other stakeholders) have constituted the starting point for the creation of sector schemes. Both FINAS and other accreditation bodies have used sector schemes in their operations in numerous areas for many years. Often the operating principles of accreditation bodies have been defined separately for each sector scheme.

## 2 The EA operating principles

The EA (European co-operation for Accreditation) has defined general principles for the accreditation of sector schemes: : EA-1/22 A-AB, *EA Procedure and Criteria for the Evaluation of Conformity Assessment Schemes by EA Accreditation Body Members*.

FINAS will comply with the EA principles when evaluating, upon request by a scheme owner (SO) or an application for accreditation of a new sector scheme. The criteria is used when evaluating if a given conformity assessment scheme (CAS) is appropriate and acceptable as an EA MLA Level 4 CAS (see EA-1/06) and, if so, under which harmonized standards (EA MLA Level 3 – see EA-1/06) containing general requirements for conformity assessment bodies (CABs).

The acceptance of a CAS by an EA member requires:

- The identification of the most suitable standard to be used to assess the competence of the CABs participating in the CAS. Consequently that standard will be the one used as the reference for the accreditation of CABs;
- That the CAS and the scheme owner (SO) meet the requirements laid down in EA-1/22 A-AB.

EA members' acceptance of a given CAS does not mean a judgment on the technical robustness, market value or usefulness of the technical requirements of the CAS. The responsibility for the technical robustness and market acceptance of the CAS lies entirely with the SO.

It is however the responsibility of the home AB (hAB – see 2.6) to ensure that the process undertaken for ensuring the technical robustness and market acceptability of the scheme by the SO was suitable and thorough.

### 3 Active sector schemes and applications of sector schemes

At present, the activities of CABs accredited by FINAS cover sector-specific schemes in the areas of both testing and certification. Among the sector schemes of testing laboratories, the laboratories accredited by FINAS use the schemes of the European Federation for Immunogenetics (EFI), the World Antidoping Committee (WADA) and electro technical equipment and component testing (IEC). In practice, these schemes also involve cooperation between the relevant international organizations and accreditation bodies. When scopes of accreditation have been defined in accreditation decisions, the testing methods have not been specified according to the schemes in question (by names of the schemes).

Sector schemes are used in certification of products and persons, and also management systems in Finland; examples include the food safety management system (ISO 22000), certification of information security systems (ISO 27001), certification of medical devices (ISO13485), certification of sustainable forest management (PEFC/FFCS), and certification of welding processes (ISO 3834).

There is active cooperation between accreditation bodies and scheme owners in various sectors. The initial goal is to harmonize the assessments and to combine the sector specific assessment visits with the assessments made by local accreditation bodies and to prepare for the joint use of technical assessors.

Sector schemes have been developed and are under development nationally and internationally in many other areas, too. In discussions with stakeholders for example the following sectors have been identified:

- certification of origin (e.g. origin of electricity, plant production free of genetic modification)

- transports (e.g. high-technology products)
- food (e.g. EurepGap/GlobalGap, sustainable production)
- energy, energy efficiency (e.g. Energy star, EuP, energy labelling of buildings, sustainability criteria)
- services/persons (hotel and taxi services, waterproofing, cleaning services)
- safety (e.g. monitoring and safety of chemicals)
- information security (electronic signature/identification, products)
- environment (various environmental labels on products, EoW, noise measurement)
- corporate social responsibility (working conditions, sustainable development, ethical production, healthy buildings)
- electronic filing.

According to EA principles, one national accreditation body will be named as a home accreditation body (hAB), which takes the lead for evaluating a new conformity assessment scheme according to EA-1/22 AAB. For the national schemes, FINAS conducts the evaluation according to EA-1/22 AAB before starting the assessments.

FINAS tries to inform early enough organizations developing sector schemes to ensure that they are aware of sector scheme requirements presented in EA-1/22. If the sector scheme does not meet all the requirements, the CAB shall amend the scheme accordingly.

## 4 Prioritisation aspects of sector schemes

From FINAS's perspective the following aspects are the primary grounds for adopting sector schemes:

- The sector scheme must conform to the EA policy on sector schemes or must be based on statutory requirements.
- There must be genuine market demand for the scheme among FINAS's clients.
- There is a national interest for the sector scheme.
- A national support group or cooperation among the authorities are possible and expertise is available.
- Potential for networking or cooperation with other accreditation bodies.

- The scheme is in agreement with the strategic outlines for the assessment of competence (Advisory Committee for Conformity Assessment Matters).

## 5 Adoption of a new sector scheme at FINAS

For adopting a new, accepted sector scheme, FINAS follows a process where the needs, means and time tables of information, training and implementation of the new sector scheme are defined. FINAS appoints a leader for the project. A technical support group is formed whenever necessary. The support group consists of other lead assessors in the sector, technical assessors/experts and, possibly, representatives of stakeholders.

The group defines and presents the following for the scheme/project:

- 1) Information needs (internal/external, means, timetable, etc.)
- 2) Training needs (lead assessors, technical assessors, clients, stakeholders, other)
- 3) Need for a potential technical background group (e.g. VANK-P or a group assembled otherwise of representatives of stakeholders in the scheme)
- 4) Implementation plan, timetables, monitoring, reporting
- 5) Impact on FINAS's operating system and guidelines (N.B. also P1 and V1).

## 6 Future developments – anticipation, monitoring, acquisition of information

Anticipation and monitoring of changes in the operating environment are part of FINAS's operating policy. Assessing the development of sector schemes is an element of this. The goal of anticipation is to produce early information about schemes that may have an impact on FINAS's future activities or operating environment. This may be related to factors such as future client needs, demand, development input, acquisition of expertise, subcontracting, specialisation, cooperation and division of labour between various accreditation bodies, needs for training, for guidelines and for information, etc.

For instance, in its international contacts, FINAS needs support and expertise from stakeholders in order to be able to take a stand on new sector schemes.

When anticipating and monitoring the development of sector schemes and when acquiring information, FINAS utilises its existing network of experts and stakeholders and its clientele. Presentations of new schemes and the development prospects of sector schemes is a recurring feature during the FINAS Days.

The Advisory Committee for Conformity Assessment Matters (VANK), especially its Sub-committee for Accreditation Matters (VANK-P), is an important forum whose operating plan must include the systematic assessment and monitoring of the development of sector schemes. The most important stakeholders in accreditation matters in public administration and in the private sector are represented on the Subcommittee. Whenever needed, the Subcommittee may establish ad hoc working groups for special tasks in a topical area.

Legislation may lead to the creation of new sector schemes. An example of an implemented scheme is the accreditation of GHG verifiers referred to in the legislation on emissions trading. FINAS makes use of its stakeholder network when monitoring developments in legislation, both within the EU and nationally.

FINAS is a member of the international accreditation bodies EA (European co-operation for Accreditation), IAF (the International Accreditation Forum) and ILAC (the International Laboratory Accreditation Cooperation). FINAS is active in the committees dealing with issues associated with sector schemes.

FINAS follows standardisation carried out in national and international standardisation bodies with respect to sector schemes. The main emphasis in standardisation is on projects included in the work programmes of the ISO Committee on Conformity Assessment (ISO/CASCO). To make the acquisition of information, monitoring and influencing more efficient, FINAS cooperates with the Finnish Standards Association SFS and the Ministry of Employment and the Economy. Standardisation issues are discussed regularly at the meetings of VANK-P.

FINAS's technical assessors and experts are involved in assessment of national sector schemes according to EA-1/22. If needed, FINAS can establish working groups in order to create criteria for more profound assessment in a new sector. Experts from the relevant organizations are



invited to participate in the working groups so that various interest groups are represented in a balanced manner.