

0. Table of contents

1. Introduction	1
2. The certification process.....	2
2.1. Flowchart.....	2
2.2. Request for information or quotation	3
2.3. Application review	3
2.4. Certification agreement.....	3
2.5. Audit assignment and planning.....	3
2.6. Audit execution	4
2.7. Treatment of nonconformities	4
2.8. Reporting	5
2.9. Review and certification decision.....	5
2.10. Certificate issue	5
3. The certification cycle	5
3.1. Surveillance activities.....	5
3.2. Recertification	6
3.3. Changes to the scope of certification.....	6
3.4. What if the certification scheme's requirements change ?	7
4. Special cases	7
4.1. Transfer of certificate issued by other certification body	7
4.2. Multi-site organizations	7
4.3. Integrated management systems	8
4.4. Special audits.....	8
5. Changes in your organisation.....	9
6. Confidentiality	9
7. The use of certification marks, and reference to Kiwa's name.....	9
8. Complaint handling	9
9. Appeal handling	10
10. Change history	10

1. Introduction

This guide helps you as a customer to understand the different steps in Kiwa's certification process, from the initial request for quotation, all the way to issuing a certificate. Don't hesitate to contact us should you have any questions for your specific certification project.

2. The certification process

2.1. Flowchart

Figure 1 shows the different steps of the certification process. These steps are explained in more detail in the following paragraphs.

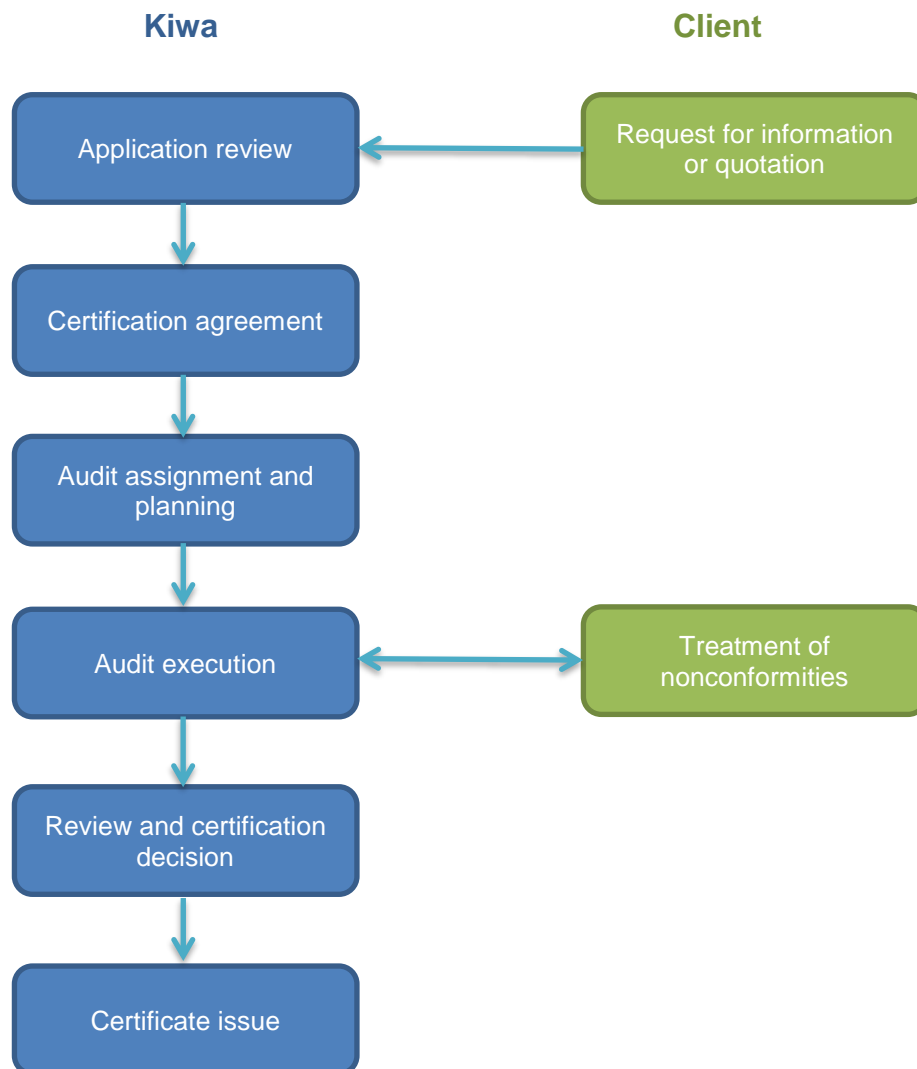


Figure 1: the different steps of the certification process. An audit report can be created after audit execution, or after the review process.

2.2. Request for information or quotation

The requirements that your management system needs to meet in order to be certified, are typically documented in the standard, the evaluation guideline, or any related documents.

Feel free to contact us to get detailed information about those requirements, or about our certification process, or any other subject related to our certification services. You can contact [by e-mail or phone via the contact details you'll find on our website \[www.kiwa.com\]\(http://www.kiwa.com\)](#).

If you like to have a quotation, we will ask you to fill out an application form. This helps us to better understand your organisation's needs, prepare the audit, and determine the audit duration.

2.3. Application review

Once we get the information contained in the application form, we will ascertain that we have all information needed to treat your request. If not, we will contact you and discuss what is missing, all this to make sure we have a good idea of what you need. During this stage we also make sure that all elements in the certification process are clear for you as a customer.

We will then analyse if we can meet your request. We will check if we have the necessary accreditation or notification (when applicable), and if we have competent and qualified auditors during the time frame that you would like to have the audit. We will also assess whether there is any risk to compromise our impartiality, and if so, determine appropriate action to manage this risk.

We will let you know if there is any obstacle, and try to find a solution if so. If it turns out for whatever reason that we cannot meet your request, we will let you know, and explain why.

In the specific case that no certification requirements have yet been established for a particular management system, we can start a project to develop a new certification scheme. We will in such case inform you about the development process, the steps to take, and the costs involved. No project will of course be started without it being clear and agreed upon who will bear the costs.

2.4. Certification agreement

The certification agreement is a formal contract between Kiwa and you as a customer. It contains a clear description of the certification activities, a reference to the certification scheme's requirements, and a description of the corresponding fees for you to obtain initial or re-certification, and of the subsequent surveillance activities that allow to maintain the certificate. These fees cover the audit, license costs, travel and accommodation cost, and any other cost related to the certification process.

The certification agreement also clearly confirms the rights and duties of both parties, either expressed in the agreement itself, or as annexes, such as Kiwa's general terms and conditions, and regulations for certification.

As soon as we receive the signed certification agreement, [the certification process can start](#).

2.5. Audit assignment and planning

We appoint qualified auditors, who have proven knowledge and experience in the field of your activities. This expertise helps them to go further than a strict compliance check with the certification scheme's requirements. Our auditors are trained to assess the strengths of your organisation, and show opportunities for improvement.

We can assign more than one auditor to the audit, for example in case of audits covering more than certification scheme. In such cases, we will appoint one auditor to be the audit team leader, who will act as your single point of contact. The audit team can furthermore also contain interpreters or technical experts, if the situation requires so. If auditors in training are part of the audit team, they will only carry out audit activities under supervision of a qualified auditor.

Should you, for whatever reason, object to one of the members of the audit team, you can let us know. We will try to find a solution for your concern, and appoint another auditor if need be.

The auditor, or the Kiwa planners, will contact you to plan the audit date(s) and location(s), and afterwards confirm the practical details of the audit in writing. The auditor will also prepare a so-called audit programme. This programme describes, for each year in the lifetime of the certificate (the so-called certification cycle), the audit activities required to demonstrate that your management system meets all requirements of the certification scheme. Its content is essentially determined by the certification scheme requirements, and the information we obtain from you about your organisation, its size, the number of sites, the scope and complexity of your management system, and the products and processes that are covered by the certification scope. This programme will be adapted during the certification cycle, and allow us as well you to identify the focal points for the next audit(s).

Kiwa is accredited for quite many of its certification activities. For that reason, representatives of the accreditation body have the right to join us during audits. We will let you know if this is the case for your audit.

2.6. Audit execution

2.6.1. Stage 1 audit

The objective of the stage 1 audit is to review your management system documentation (sometimes referred to as the quality manual), and prepare the stage 2 audit. We will [for instance](#) take a look if internal audits and management review have properly been [set up](#), and confirm the scope of certification.

[For some schemes the](#) stage 1 audit can partially be conducted offsite (= not at your premises).

We might ask you to send us some information beforehand, like the system documentation, or the planning and [progress](#) of the internal audits, to make the audit process more efficient. At the end of the stage 1 audit, we present our findings and conclusions. These might include nonconformities, or areas of concern that might lead to nonconformities in the stage 2 audit.

In exceptional cases the areas of concern identified during stage 1 can be of such serious nature that the stage 2 audit needs to be postponed or cancelled. If this is the case, we will inform you and agree on the nature and timing of the next steps to take.

2.6.2. Stage 2 audit

During the stage 2 audit we evaluate the implementation of the management system, and see if your day-to-day activities satisfy the certification scheme's requirements.

The stage 2 audit essentially takes place at your premises, but might be complemented with remote techniques such as video conferencing.

For the part of the audit that takes place on your premises, we kindly ask you to assign a guide, who accompanies the audit team, arranges visits to specific parts of the site or organization, and informs about any safety and security procedures

At the end of the stage 2 audit, we present our findings and conclusions. These include the strong points and opportunities for improvement that we have observed. They might also include nonconformities. You will have the opportunity to ask questions, if any of the conclusions, or their consequences, are not clear.

2.7. Treatment of nonconformities

A nonconformity is the non-fulfilment of one of the certification scheme's requirements. We distinguish between two types.

- A major nonconformity is a serious nonconformity that affects the capability of the management system to achieve its intended results. They can be linked to a significant doubt that effective process control is in place, or that products or services will meet specified requirements. A major

nonconformity can also be observed when a number of minor nonconformities associated with the same requirement or issue could demonstrate a systemic failure.

- A minor nonconformity is a less serious nonconformity that does not affect the capability of the management system to achieve its intended results.

If the audit team observes any nonconformities during the audit, the audit team leader will present these at the end of the audit. The audit team leader will ask you to solve these nonconformities, and will indicate how much time you have to do so.

Solving a nonconformity means that you do not only fix the problem, but also carefully analyse what caused it, and define appropriate action to avoid that the same problem happens again. For major nonconformity the auditor will require proof that this action has been carried out. For minor nonconformities it is enough that you present an adequate action plan, a precise timing included. The auditor will then follow up during next audit, if the action has correctly been carried out.

Kiwa can decide to organise a special, additional audit to verify the proper implementation of the actions you have defined to resolve major nonconformities. Kiwa can also decide to impose additional surveillance [audits](#), to monitor continued implementation of the corrective actions.

If it transpires, during the audit, or during the treatment of the nonconformities, that a positive certification decision, in all fairness, cannot be expected, the certification procedure may be terminated in mutual agreement. Costs incurred so far will then be invoiced.

2.8. Reporting

After each audit you will receive a detailed audit report. This report will summarize our findings and conclusions, and [show any opportunities we have identified to improve your management system. The report will also highlight any nonconformities that the audit team has identified..](#)

2.9. Review and certification decision

Prior to issuing a certificate, a person who was not involved in the audit process will review the audit report, and the related evidence, to make sure they meet the requirements. If this is the case, we proceed with the certification decision, meaning that we formally approve to issue a certificate.

The certification decision will be based on the records of the completed audit, including [for instance detailed assessment evidence](#), and the treatment of nonconformities, if any. We will confirm this decision to you in writing. When the decision is positive, you will receive the certificate. When it is negative, you will not receive the certificate. We will not start a new certification procedure, unless you have provided evidence of corrective actions to solve the previously observed nonconformities.

2.10. Certificate issue

Once the certification decision is taken, we will issue the certificate. This certificate contains information about the scope of certification, and has an official start and end date. Kiwa will at all times maintain ownership of the certificate. You may make copies if you like (please refer to §7 for more information on referring to certification).

3. The certification cycle

3.1. Surveillance activities

The certification cycle starts with the issue of the certificate. It is the period between the certificate's start and end date. In order to maintain the certificate throughout the certification cycle, Kiwa will organise surveillance audits. These audits allow us to verify continued compliance with the certification scheme's requirements. They do not have to be full audits, which means that they can cover only part of the certification scheme's requirements. The precise content of the surveillance audits is determined

by the audit team leader, and depends among other things on the results of the previous audit(s). Kiwa will make sure that your entire management system is assessed during the surveillance audits.

Surveillance audits take place at least once per calendar year. A higher frequency can be organised if

- the certification scheme requires so,
- we have observed important nonconformities during a previous audit, and we wish to have increased supervision of the effective implementation of the corrective actions,

Please note that the first surveillance audit after the initial certification audit has to take place no more than 12 months after [the certification decision date](#).

If the auditor finds any nonconformities during the surveillance audit, they have to be treated the same way as during the initial audit. If you fail to do so in time, the auditor might [recommend](#) to suspend the certificate. This means that your certificate is temporarily invalid. If at the end of the suspension period the reason for the suspension is not addressed and removed, your certificate will be withdrawn. The auditor might also [recommend](#) to withdraw the certificate without intermediate period of suspension, or to reduce the certification scope.

Please note that there can be other reasons for Kiwa to suspend or withdraw your certificate. For instance, Kiwa can suspend your certificate in case of refusal from your side to organise surveillance audits at the required frequencies. You can find a more detailed list in our regulation for system certification.

Please also note that during suspension, and after withdrawal, you are no longer allowed to refer to your certificate. For more information about your rights to refer to your certificate or use related quality marks, please refer to §7.

3.2. Recertification

At the end of the certification cycle, the certificate has to be renewed. During the recertification audit, Kiwa verifies continued conformity and effectiveness of the management system. A recertification audit is a full audit, it covers all the certification scheme's requirements.

It is important to plan the recertification such that any nonconformities are [handled adequately](#) before the certificate's expiry date. The certificate can only be renewed if all [major nonconformities](#), if any, are solved. [For all minor nonconformities a corrective action plan has to be presented to and accepted by the auditor \(see §2.7\)](#).

The starting date on the new certificate will be the date on which we take the certification decision, which is always based on [all audit records](#), including the treatment of nonconformities. So if any nonconformities are [handled adequately as explained above](#) after the expiry date, there will be a gap in your certification: a period during which you are officially not certified, and cannot refer to your certificate (see §7).

So in order to avoid any gaps in your certification, make sure to plan the recertification in due time (3-4 months before the expiry date).

3.3. Changes to the scope of certification

Organizations and the world in which they operate, change over time. You can change the scope of certification, to cover additional activities, or suppress obsolete activities. In order to do so, just let us know what you want. We will carry out a new application review (see §2.3), and let you know what steps are needed. These might include an extra audit.

The scope of certification can also be changed as a result of an audit, for instance when the activities related to part of the scope do not or no longer satisfy the certification scheme's requirements.

If the scope of certification changes, a new certificate will be issued with a corresponding changed scope.

3.4. What if the certification scheme's requirements change ?

It is possible that the certification scheme's requirements (the criteria that you need to satisfy), change during the certification cycle. If this is the case, we will inform you, and tell you all about the changes, any transition provisions, the nature, scope and cost of any additional audits, and the deadline for you to demonstrate compliance with the new requirements.

If the deadline to do so precedes your certificate's expiry date, failure to demonstrate compliance with the changed requirements, will lead to withdrawal of your certificate at the end of the transition period (ie. the first day on which the old requirements are no longer valid).

If you do demonstrate compliance, you will receive a new certificate, with a clear reference to the changed requirements.

4. Special cases

4.1. Transfer of certificate issued by other certification body

Kiwa can transfer certificates that your organisation has obtained from another certification body. We verify a number of conditions, that allow us to conclude whether or not there is a justified doubt about the certificate's validity. For example, the certificate should not be suspended, and any outstanding nonconformities have to be resolved.

If there is no doubt concerning the validity of the certificate, Kiwa will issue a new certificate, with the same scope and expiry date. The planning for the next (surveillance and recertification) audits will be aligned with the planning which was already in place.

4.2. Multi-site organizations

If your organisation is spread over different locations, you can have all or some of these locations appear on the certificate. In principle, each location mentioned on the certificate has to be audited. However, if certain conditions are met, we can proceed with what is called multi-site certification.

A multi-site organization is defined as an organization covered by a single management system, comprising an identified 'central function', and a number of sites (permanent, temporary or virtual) at which such processes/activities are fully or partially carried out. The 'central function' is the function that is responsible for and centrally controls the management system. It is where operational control and authority from the top management of the organization is exerted over every site.

The eligibility requirements for multi-site certification are the following.

1. The organization has a single management system.
2. The organization identifies its central function. The central function is part of the organization and is not subcontracted to an external organization.
3. The central function has organizational authority to define, establish and maintain the single management system.
4. The organization's single management system is subject to a centralized management review.
5. All sites are subject to the organization's internal audit programme.
6. The central function is responsible for ensuring that data is collected and analysed from all sites and is able to demonstrate its authority and ability to initiate organizational change as required in regard, but not limited, to system documentation and system changes, management review, complaints, evaluation of corrective actions, internal assessment planning and evaluation of the results, etc.

If the sites are each performing very similar processes/activities, and there are no obvious reasons for which sampling would lead to insufficient confidence in the effectiveness of the management system, we do not need to audit each and every individual site. It is then enough to audit a sample of all sites, roughly proportionate with the square root of the number of sites.

If your organization does not have similar processes/activities in all sites, but meets the eligibility requirements for multi-site certification, we might still set up a sampling approach which avoids having to audit each site during the surveillance audits. Contact your local Kiwa office to know more about this possibility.

Kiwa will check during application review (see §2.3) if your organisation meets the requirements for [multi-site certification and sampling](#).

Please note the following important remarks.

- The sampling approach applies to the remote sites. The central [function](#) will always be audited.
- When nonconformities are found at any individual site, you will have to verify whether or not they indicate an overall system deficiency applicable to other sites. If they are found to do so, you have to carry out corrective action at [all](#) affected sites.
- As long as any of the sites has one or more nonconformities [that are not handled adequately \(see §2.7 and 3.2\)](#), certification will be denied. You cannot exclude a 'problematic' site from the certification scope, in order to overcome the obstacle raised by a nonconformity at that site. Such exclusion can only be agreed in advance.
- Multi-site certificate(s) have to be suspended / withdrawn in its (their) entirety, including all certified sites.
- It is possible to add new sites, to an already certified multi-site organisation. The set of new sites will first be treated in an initial audit approach, and once found compliant, added to the existing sites. The precise approach and sample sizes will be determined by qualified Kiwa staff.

4.3. Integrated management systems

If your certification scope covers more than one certification scheme, the requirements of each scheme have to be audited. If your management system deals in an integrated way with these requirements, Kiwa can offer a substantial reduction in audit duration.

The conditions to obtain this reduction are the following.

- There is an integrated way of document handling, including office instructions
- The management review is done in an integrated way for all certification schemes
- There is an integrated approach to internal audits
- There is an integrated approach to policy and objectives. Building up strategy and goals is done in an integrated way for all the schemes.
- There is an integrated approach to systems and processes
- There is an integrated approach to improvement mechanisms (corrective and preventive actions)
- Management support and responsibilities are built up in a uniform way for all standards
- All certification schemes are managed by the same person

Kiwa will check during application review (see §2.3) if your organisation meets the requirements for audit time reduction based on integrated management systems..

4.4. Special audits

4.4.1. Trial audit

If you like, Kiwa can organize a trial audit, during which the auditor conducts a gap analysis. You can decide yourself which topics the auditor evaluates. This can be especially interesting if certification is rather new for your organization, and you want to make sure you are well prepared for the certification audit.

The duration (and related costs) of the trial audit depends on the topics you chose to have evaluated. It is important to note that a trial audit cannot lead to a certificate, even if it has covered all requirements, and no gaps have been identified.

4.4.2. Short-notice and unannounced audits

In some specific cases, Kiwa might have to carry out short-notice or even unannounced audits. Some examples include, but are not limited to the investigation of complaints Kiwa received about your products or services, the follow up of nonconformities, or the investigation of the impact of changes to your organization or processes that might jeopardize compliance of your management system.

- Short-notice audits follow the same process as regular audits, however with much reduced (if any) possibility for you to postpone the audit date. Kiwa will clearly describe the specific nature and scope of the audit, and indicate which functions need to be present.

- Unannounced audits follow the same process as regular audits, however without previous communication of the exact date. Kiwa will make sure that the scope of the audit is such that unavailability of specific functions does not hinder the proper execution of the audit.

Given the limited (or non-existent) possibility to object to a specific member of the audit team, Kiwa will take special care in appointing the audit team, taking into account, if possible, any objections made in the past.

5. Changes in your organisation

You need to inform Kiwa of any change that can have an impact on the capability of the management system to continue to fulfil the certification scheme's requirements. Some examples include, but are not limited to, changes relating to:

- the legal, commercial, organizational status or ownership;
- organization and management (e.g. key managerial, decision-making or technical staff);
- contact address and sites;
- scope of operations under the certified management system;
- major changes to the management system and processes.

6. Confidentiality

Kiwa will at all times treat as confidential all information gathered during the application review, and the planning and audit execution process, as stipulated in Kiwa's general terms and conditions. Kiwa will not make any statements to third parties about an ongoing certification procedure, without your permission.

Please note that once your certificate is issued, Kiwa is obliged to inform, upon request, any interested parties about its status.

7. The use of certification marks, and reference to Kiwa's name

As soon as, but not before, the certificate is issued, you can refer to the certificate, and use the applicable Kiwa logo or pictogram in your internal and external communications.

In doing so, you have to strictly obey the rules laid down in Kiwa's policy on the use of certification marks. This policy is documented in our regulation for system certification.

8. Complaint handling

We do our daily best to offer an excellent service. When for one reason or another you are not happy, and wish to voice your dissatisfaction, don't hesitate to send us your feedback. We value every opportunity to improve our services.

We consider a complaint as an expression of dissatisfaction related to our services, or to the services of one of our certified clients. The procedure to handle complaints, consists of the following steps.

1. We acknowledge receipt of the complaint within 10 working days. Such acknowledgement is meant to confirm we have correctly received the complaint.
2. We appoint one or more persons who were not involved in the subject of the complaint to conduct the following steps.
 - a. Gather and verify information available to analyse the complaint
 - b. Validate the complaint, in order to make sure it is linked to an assessment activity for which Kiwa is responsible
 - c. Investigate the complaint, in order to determine its cause, and, if appropriate, identify any corrective actions, to prevent the same problem from happening again in the future.
 - d. Decide what is the appropriate course of action to settle the complaint.
3. We inform you about the outcome of the complaint handling process.
4. We document and store all relevant information related to the complaint in our complaint database.
5. We monitor the execution of the corrective actions that were identified in the complaint handling process

All information received in the treatment of the complaint will be treated in a confidential manner, as stipulated in Kiwa's general terms and conditions

9. Appeal handling

An appeal is an expression of disagreement with a decision made, or measure imposed by Kiwa. This can for instance be based on our auditors' interpretation of certification requirements, which can lead to disagreement with the conclusions our auditors reach with respect to (non)conformity, with Kiwa's certification decision, or with Kiwa's certification processes.

Our appeal handling process is documented in a separate document, which you can find on our website.

10. Change history

Date	Description
2018-12-21	Some changes based on feedback received during implementation, and on IAF-MD1:2018. Changes in blue font.
2017-03-22	Changed Kiwa logo
2017-02-09	Adapted paragraph about appeals, in line with discussion with legal dept, by referring to decision taken or measure imposed by Kiwa
2016-12-21	Adapted paragraph about complaints and appeals, in line with discussion with legal dept
2016-11-23	Added elements from the regulation for system certification. Rewrote paragraph concerning complaints and appeals (removed dispute)
2016-09-28	Corrected some minor spelling mistakes
2016-09-14	Added possibility for customer to lodge dispute (in addition to complaint and appeal). Added consequences of scheme modification (new version). Added obligation Kiwa to inform interested parties about the status of a certificate. Added Kiwa's right to impose additional surveillance audits as result of NCFs
2016-07-27	First version