

Audit of impact of accreditations on conformity assessment bodies

Swiss Accreditation Service

Key facts

The Swiss Accreditation Service (SAS) accredits and examines conformity assessment bodies (CABs) on the basis of international standards. CABs may be calibration and testing laboratories, inspection and certification bodies, as well as manufacturers of reference materials and providers of suitability reviews. With accreditation, the SAS formally recognises the competence of now more than 700 CABs to work according to specified requirements. Accreditation strengthens confidence in the competence and services of accredited CABs and helps to remove technical barriers to trade.

The Swiss Federal Audit Office (SFAO) examined how accreditations affect the internal control system (ICS) and the supervision of federal CABs or ones affiliated with the Confederation. Its spot checks included the CABs of the Federal Office for Agriculture, the Federal Office of Transport, the Federal Institute of Metrology METAS, the Institute of Virology and Immunology, the Paul Scherrer Institute and Swiss Federal Railways. It also clarified questions about the impartiality and independence of the SAS and the risk orientation of its work. The audit outcome was positive.

Accreditation well integrated, no gaps in supervision identified

The impartiality and independence of the SAS and its employees are of key importance. For the 520 or so experts who are consulted on a case-by-case basis, the choice is very challenging on account of Switzerland's small size, the different languages and, in some cases, the special sectors involved. The mandates are assigned to new senior assessors as part of the fluctuation. The effective rotation intervals are relatively long. The SAS does a lot to ensure impartiality and independence. However, selective improvements are possible.

The SAS works within a straitjacket of specifications according to ISO/IEC and ISO standards. Compliance with these specifications is regularly checked by the European partners. The SAS works in a risk-oriented manner within these guidelines. Leeway is very restricted.

Accreditation, supervision and ICS have different tasks and purposes. The existing interfaces and points of contact can lead to risks. The SFAO did not discover any duplication in the spot checks. No cases of ICS or supervision gaps due to accreditation were found either. Accreditation was well integrated in the audited CABs; the few points of contact with ICS or supervision were shown correctly and transparently.

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