

Application

All applicants to QMSCERT for the IFS Standards are required to complete the application form for each audit. The application form also asks for an undertaking that the applicant will abide by the QMSCERT certification terms/contract. These can be found at the QMSCERT web link: <http://www.qmscert.com/en/certification-procedures/>

Planning Audit Visits

Assessments are conducted at a mutually convenient date, unless, an unannounced audit is selected by the customer.

Audit frequency is set at 12 months for all IFS standards. Audit window for already certified companies is described in all standards with an objective not to have a break in certification. As a result, audits should be scheduled between 8 weeks before the anniversary audit date and 2 weeks after the anniversary date.

In case of a KO non conformity, a full new audit is required.

In case that company's score is less than 75%, a full new audit is required.

In case that the company's score is more than 75% but a Major non conformity has been issued, a re-audit shall be scheduled to cover, as a minimum, the closing of the non conformity (Major). This re-audit in must take place between 6 weeks after the audit (under certain requirements a concession can be granted to reduce the time for the re-audit) and no later than 6 months after the audit. If re-audit is not scheduled within 6 months, then a full new audit shall be scheduled.

For all IFS audits, a normal day is considered 8 man hours. In exceptional circumstances, this might be increased to 9 or 10 man hours, however, certain limitations exist, e.g. no allowance of a 10 hour two consecutive days.

The time required will be assessed based on the information provided in the application form and by discussion in line with guidance contained in the individual IFS Standards.

For IFS food audits, assessment duration is determined using the on line IFS tool for minimum time duration, based on the information provided in the company's application form. A normal audit day is considered 8 man hours. Certain factors can necessitate for an increase in the duration for the assessment, e.g. large number of findings in previous year's audit, complexity of production, large number of products/flow diagrams etc. Calculated audit duration may also be decreased; this takes into account the limitations provided in the IFS protocol, e.g. a) audit time \leq 2 man days, no reduction is allowed, b) 3 man days \leq calculated audit time \leq 2 man days, audit time: minimum 2 man days, c) 4 man days \leq calculated audit time \leq 3 man days, audit time: minimum 3 man days.

For IFS Logistic audits, minimum audit time duration is set to 1 man day (8 hours). A number of factors can result to an increase or decrease in audit time duration; these are described in the relative protocols. IFS Logistic audit time cannot be less than 6 hours.

For IFS Broker audits, minimum audit time duration is set to 6 hours.

For combined audits, e.g. IFS Logistic / IFS Broker audits, minimum audit time duration should be 1.5 man days. A maximum of 0.5 man day reduction is allowed from the original calculated audit time.

In cases where audit teams are used, a minimum of 2 hours is to be allocated as shared time for opening and closing meetings.

Specific rules apply for all IFS standards in relation to multi site companies or companies with a head office which is remote from the main production facility. These are described in detail in the relative standards.

Two weeks before the audit, a detailed audit plan is sent to the company, which clearly states the name of the auditor or the audit team members, the standards that are to be covered during the audit, audit date(s), the scope of certification and the time duration, as resulted from the application review. The audit plan shall also contain information concerning the audit flow, i.e. opening and closing meeting hours, factory visit, documentation/office audit etc. In case of an audit team, the audit program shall clearly state the responsibility of each auditor, so that it can be traced, which auditor covered specific areas of the audited standard.

Scope of Audits

For production sites, IFS Food and/or IFS HPC are applicable. The IFS Broker is a Standard for auditing Brokers who select suppliers for retailer and wholesaler branded food and non-food products. The IFS Broker can only be used when the company has trading activities. If an entity runs transport, storage and distribution activities then the IFS Logistics Standard applies. For IFS Logistics, the audit scope shall describe the logistical activities of the company (e.g. transport, incl. type of transport, storage) as well as the product scope(s) which is / are handled (food, non-food) and the conditions of the handling (e.g. ambient stable, chilled, frozen).

The scope of the assessment will be defined with the client prior to undertaking the assessment and reconfirmed at the opening and closing meetings. The scope shall be clearly and unambiguously stated in the contract between the company and the certification body, in the audit report and on the certificate.

Exclusions are allowed under exceptional circumstances. Such exclusions will be clearly defined in the report and certificate. For IFS Food, exclusions must be justified by using the relative IFS decision tree.

It is expected that all critical processes and products (or product groups) are covered during the IFS audit. If that's not the case, then these processes and/or products are excluded from the scope of certification and in order to be included, a re-audit must be scheduled.



Scoring and Findings

Scoring from the on-site audit is classified as:

A	Full compliance	20 points
B (deviation)	Almost full compliance	15 points
C (deviation)	Small part of the requirement has been	5 points
D (deviation)	Requirement has not been implemented	-20 points

Audit findings are presented during the closing meeting, where a signed action plan is handed by the auditor.

Frequency for company's response on audit findings, i.e. deviations and non-conformities included in the action plan is described in individual standards and is set at 14 days. The completed action plan must contain company's response, i.e. intended corrective actions for all deviations (B, C, D) and non-conformities (Major/KO), with reference to responsibilities, timeframe and status for all B deviations scored for KO requirements, C & D deviations and non conformities (Major – KO).

It is the lead auditor responsibility to assess and approve the submitted action plan.

In all IFS standards, there are two types of non-conformities, Major and a Knock-Out (KO).

A Major non-conformity can be given to any requirement which is not defined as KO requirement and is issued where there is a substantial failure to meet the requirements of the Standard, which includes food safety and/or the legal requirements of the production and destination countries. A Major can also be given when the identified non-conformity can lead to a serious health hazard. A Major subtracts 15% of total possible score. Certificate shall not be awarded, unless a re-audit is scheduled, which takes place provided that the score reached during the audit is ≥75%.

A Knock-Out (KO) finding can only be referred to specific clauses of the IFS standards (see IFS standards). A KO results in no certification and a full new audit is due. A KO non conformity subtracts 50% of the total possible score. KO requirements are evaluated using the following chart with regard to scoring:

A	Full Compliance	20 points
B (deviation)	Almost Full Compliance	15 points
C (deviation)	Small part of the requirement is implemented	No Scoring Possible
KO (=D)	The requirement is not implemented	50% of the total possible score is subtracted

Preparation for the Audit

Prior to each audit the operation should be reviewed in relation to the requirements of the Standard with a view to making any necessary amendments or improvements to the operation and systems. It is the supplier's responsibility to ensure that they are using the issue of the IFS Standard valid at the time of the audit. It is important that the activities to be certified are in operation at the time of the audit and this will be discussed when arranging the audit. If particular operations such as loading occur at night or early in the morning it may be necessary for the audit to occur at this time.

Audit Process

Assessments will usually be conducted in local languages, unless limitations exist from the standard owner. In cases where the protocol allows audits to be conducted from an auditor that does not speak the floor language of the company/system, an approved translator will be used. Extra time for translation will be taken into account; usually, 20% extra time will be added to the calculated audit time. Assessments consist of six elements:

- Opening meeting
- Inspection of the operations (1/3 of the audit time expected to be spent)
- Document review including HACCP or hazard and risk management and Quality Management Systems
- Check back of audit trails, verification and further documentation checks.
- Final evaluation of findings by the auditor in preparation for the closing meeting.
- Closing meeting.

It is expected that at the opening and closing meetings those attending on behalf of the company will be managers who have the appropriate authority to ensure that corrective action can be progressed, if nonconformities are found.

The assessor will prepare a copy of the assessment summary, deviations and non-conformances, which are left with the company's technical representative on the day or in exceptional circumstances provided within 1 day of the assessment. The decision to award certification has to be taken independently of the auditor following a review of the assessment report and any documented action plans provided or re-visit corrective action verification provided, independently by QMSCERT.

Audit Reports

After each audit a full written report is prepared in accordance with the required format dictated and formatted per IFS rules.

Corrective Action Audit

In order for a certificate to be issued it is necessary for action plans to be closed within 2 weeks from the action plan receipt. For a single Major, in cases where total score is more than 75% compliance, re-visits are to be completed satisfactorily, with focus mainly (but not limited) to the Major non conformity, 6 weeks to 6 months following the original assessment.

If more than one Major non conformity is issued, a single D is score in a KO requirement or total score is less than 75% compliance, a full new audit is required.

Distribution of Audit Reports

The report is dispatched to the client usually within 42 days of the assessment date. The person paying for the assessment is regarded as the customer. As such, it is this party that receives the assessment report. Reports are also uploaded to the IFS database and will only be made available to IFS members when permitted by the owner of the report. QMSCERT will also retain a copy of the report and the information on which a certification decision is based for a period of 5 years.

Certificates

Certificates will be issued to clients who meet the requirements of the standard and in accordance with the requirements of the IFS Certification protocol. The certificate remains the property of QMSCERT and is issued subject to the client complying with the Certification Terms/Contract.

Maintaining Certification

It is the client's responsibility to maintain certification, except in the case of unannounced audits. The issue of the certificate provides an assurance to customers that QMSCERT has assessed the certified site and is satisfied that the requirements of the Standard have been met through the audit and any deviations and non conformities have been addressed as suggested by the submitted action plan. In addition, that processes are in place to ensure that the Standard is maintained for at least the duration of the certificate. It is important therefore for the integrity of the Standard that in the event that there are substantial changes to the premises or products, these must be notified in writing to QMSCERT.

Certification Charges and Invoicing

Assessment charges are calculated after consideration of the size, type and location of the operation. The time duration of an assessment depends on the evaluated standard that is to be audited, e.g. IFS Food (as per IFS tool calculator), IFS Logistics (1 man day = 8 hours), IFS Broker (6 man hours), combined audit (IFS Logistics + IFS Broker) etc. and is calculated and agreed with the company before the audit. An additional half day is allocated for report writing.

Travel to and from assessments will be charged at the current mileage rates and will be declared on any quotes. Overnight expenses are charged at cost. All assessment charges are agreed with the client and confirmed in writing. Normally the client is invoiced after completion of the assessment. In addition to the costs for the assessment the IFS shall charge a registration fee for the annual assessment. This charge will be shown separately on the invoice and is paid directly and in full to IFS by QMSCERT.

Cancellation of Audit Visits

In the event a client wishes to cancel or postpone an audit visit, written notification must be sent to QMSCERT at least ten working days prior to the date the audit visit is due.

In the event that an audit visit is cancelled or postponed QMSCERT will charge the client:

- any expenses that occurred such as air tickets, hotel payments, car rental etc.
- if written notification is sent to QMSCERT 10 days or earlier from the first audit day: 30% of the agreed quote.
- If written notification is sent to QMSCERT 5 days or earlier from the first audit day: 50% of the agreed quote.
- If written notification is sent to QMSCERT less than 5 days before the first audit day: 100% of the agreed quote.

Complaints and Appeals

QMSCERT operates a documented complaints and appeals procedure as part of the quality system. Complaints and appeals must be made in writing by named person(s) and addressed to the Quality Manager, QMSCERT, Vlasiou Gavriilidi 28, Thessaloniki 54627, Greece.