QUALITY MEAT SCOTLAND CATTLE & SHEEP ASSURANCE SCHEME

FARM ASSESSMENT INFORMATION

Overview
This document explains the farm assessment process for scheme applicants and for existing members of the QMS Cattle & Sheep Assurance Scheme. It provides an overview of assessor training, the frequency and duration of assessments and the post assessment process. It should be read in conjunction with Appendix 1 and 2 of the 2022 QMS Cattle & Sheep Assurance Scheme Standards and the Certification Body’s Regulations, which can be accessed on the QMS website at https://www.qmescotland.co.uk/cattle-sheep-standards.

QMS annually reviews and sets the Cattle & Sheep Assurance Scheme Standards. Farm assessments have been contracted by QMS to an independent inspection and certification company, which is accredited by the United Kingdom Accreditation Service (UKAS) to ISO/IEC 17065, the international standard for product conformity certification. QMS has agreed procedures for these assessments with the Certification Body (CB), who is regularly (at least once each year) audited by UKAS to ensure these procedures are maintained.

Training of Assessors and Consistency of Assessment
The CB aims to recruit assessors with a minimum of 5 years recent agricultural experience and ideally with formal agricultural qualifications. Assessors complete an intensive training programme covering QMS assurance scheme standards, related legislation, codes of practice, assessing skills, an overview of animal welfare assessment procedures and food safety issues. They only become approved after shadowing experienced assessors and assessing several farms under supervision.

To help to ensure consistency of assessment across all farms throughout Scotland, assessor performance is monitored by reviewing their reports and by a programme of witnessed on-farm assessments.

Frequency of Assessments
- New applicants wishing to join the scheme will be contacted by an assessor, following receipt of application and payment, to make an appointment for an assessment.
- The date and time for an initial or surveillance assessment will be scheduled by prior agreement to take place within 4 weeks of receipt of application and payment.
- Existing scheme members will be assessed at least once every assessment year.
- The interval between assessments may vary slightly from year to year to allow the business to be seen at different times.

Duration of Assessments
The duration of an assessment will vary depending on the size of farm and nature of the business and may take between 1.5 and 3 hours. The assessment visit will run more smoothly if the Assessment Checklist is completed in advance and documents are readily available for the assessor. The Assessment Checklist can be found on page 6 of the 2022 QMS Cattle & Sheep Assurance Scheme Standards.

The Assessment Visit
The assessor will begin by explaining how they will conduct the assessment. Normally they will assess the facilities first, including the cattle and sheep which must be on-farm at the time of assessment.

Note: The CB can only assess and certify the species of livestock which are present on farm on the day of assessment.

They will look in particular at:
- All categories of livestock
- Housing/water supply/feed systems/lighting
- Handling and loading facilities
- Feed storage/handling/mixing
- Medicine storage
- Records & documents as required
KEY standards are critical to achieving compliance to the Cattle & Sheep Scheme. These are based on animal welfare, environmental impact and food safety – areas which are critical to Brands Integrity. Additional standards are there to meet current legislation and continually achieve good agricultural practice.

If the assessor finds anything that does not comply with the scheme standards, they will explain their findings and the reason and record it as a non-compliance. Non-compliances may be raised as a:

**Minor non-compliance**
Where an attempt has been made to meet the requirements of the standard(s), but the standard is not being complied with in full. There will be no serious risk to animal health and welfare or food safety.

**Major non-compliance (KEY standards)**
Where there has been no attempt to meet the requirements of the standard(s), or there is a serious risk to animal health and welfare and/or food safety.

**Recommendation**
A recommendation is an advisory clause which does not require any corrective action.

At the end of the assessment the assessor will leave a conclusion of their findings. Where corrective action is necessary, the assessor will explain the nature of the evidence required and the timescale for submitting this corrective information. If in agreement with the findings, a signature on the visit report will be requested.

**The Post Assessment Process**
Livestock must not be sold as approved status until written confirmation has been received from the CB.

The assessor submits a report describing their findings of the assessment to the Certification Body (CB), where it is independently reviewed by the Certification team and in the event of:

- **No non-compliance(s) identified:**
  A letter will be issued by the CB confirming assured status.

- **Non-compliance(s) identified:**
  Satisfactory evidence must be received by the CB within 30 days from the date of assessment, to show that non-compliance(s) have been rectified. The assessor will explain what format is acceptable and this corrective action evidence must be submitted to the CB by post or email, along with a copy of the visit report left by the assessor.

**Examples of evidence:**
- Copies of documents or records
- Before and after photographs
- Copies of invoices to show work has been carried out.

If more than 30 days is reasonably required, please contact the CB as soon as possible after the assessment and at least within 30 days, to discuss a possible extension. The CB will request a ‘statement of intent’ to be completed and returned, which explains the plan of action and proposed timescale.

**Note:**
New applicants will only become assured after any non-compliances have been rectified and corrective actions reviewed, after which the CB will send a letter confirming assured status and issue a Certificate of Conformity.

**Minor non-compliance(s) identified:**
Satisfactory evidence must be received by the CB within 30 days from the date of assessment to show that non-compliance(s) have been rectified. Holding(s) will retain their approved status during this period. Submitted evidence will then be reviewed along with the assessment report and if the CB are satisfied the standards are now being met, they will issue a letter confirming assured status.

**Major non-compliance(s) identified:**
A letter will be issued by the CB confirming that the approval status of holding(s) relating to the membership number has been withdrawn and the Certificate of Conformity is then invalid. Any animals moved off the holding during this withdrawn period will lose their Scotch eligibility status.

Satisfactory evidence must be received by the CB within 30 days from the date of assessment to prove that non-compliance(s) have been rectified. If a revisit is required to verify that the scheme standards are now being met, this will be advised by letter and may incur an additional cost.

Submitted evidence will then be reviewed with the assessment report and if the CB are satisfied the standards are now being met, they will issue a new Certificate of Conformity along with a letter confirming the date of reinstatement of approval status.

See below paragraph which explains what happens if evidence is not submitted.

**Failure to submit evidence within 30 days from the date of assessment:**
If the CB do not receive satisfactory evidence within 30 days from the date of assessment, to show that non-compliances have been rectified, they will issue a letter notifying that the assurance status of holding(s) relating to the membership number has been withdrawn and the Certificate of Conformity...
is invalid. All remaining animals on the holding(s) will lose their Scotch potential eligibility status, if traded after this date of notification. It will then be necessary to reapply to join the scheme, pay a non-refundable subscription fee, undertake a reassessment and a new membership number will be issued.
**Revisits**
During the assessment year, the CB may carry out revisits after the routine assessment, to verify corrective action for non-compliances. This may incur an additional cost to the member, which will be advised at that time. The assessor may be accompanied by a colleague, a Scottish SPCA representative or a UKAS representative, in order to monitor the assessment performance. In these circumstances, the scheme requires members to allow access to their premises for the purpose and observation of the assessment.

**Spot-checks**
Cattle & Sheep Scheme members may be subject to spot check visits to ensure ongoing compliance with Scheme Standards. These may be triggered by information received from farmers, other parts of the supply chain, general public, press, government agencies or previous assessment history. The assessor must be given access to the member’s unit(s) in order to conduct these visits. In line with the Certification Body’s Regulations, where a member does not reasonably accommodate a spot check, this may result in withdrawal from the scheme.