

Certification Demystification Guide

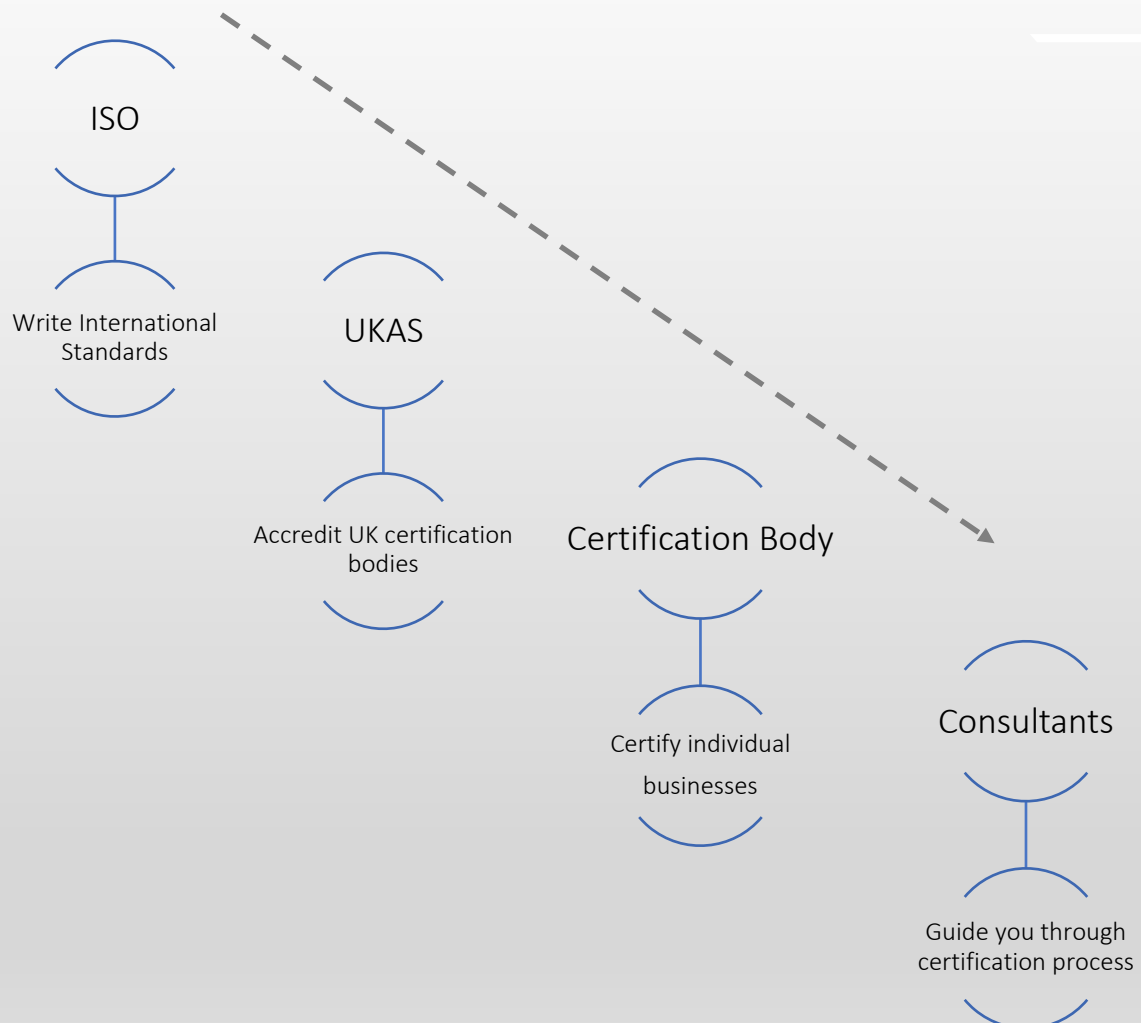
A simple guide on how consultancy and
certification works

Certification Demystification Guide

If you are new to ISO, the assessment process can be quite confusing. We have put together this comprehensive guide to explain everything you need to know about how to become certified.

Who are the main players?

Understanding the difference between ISO, UKAS, certification bodies and consultants is the first step.



ISO

ISO is the International Organisation that writes standards for many different industry sectors – it is formed of 164 member countries. ISO 9001, 14001 and 27001 are some of the best known but there were over 21,000 different ISO standards.

UKAS

UKAS is the sole national accreditation for the UK and oversees the application of ISO. UKAS visit certification bodies to ensure that they and their assessors are performing to a sufficiently high level.

Certification bodies seek to get accreditation from UKAS to demonstrate their competence, and 2SB believe in only suggesting certification bodies who have been accredited by UKAS.

Some certification bodies are not UKAS accredited, but this means the certificate they issue is unregulated – these certificates carry less weight and in the worst cases may not demonstrate your compliance against the ISO standard to potential clients.

Certification Bodies

The next step down is the Certification Bodies (DNV, NQA, ISOQAR, BSI etc). It is the certification bodies who will audit your business to check for compliance against the ISO standards. Some certification bodies specialise in certain industries, some have international reputations, some are more competitively priced than others. There are around 100 certification bodies who are accredited by UKAS and you get to decide which you ask to assess your ISO system

All certification bodies should do a similar job, however like with anything, the type of service given can vary. 2SB can help you select the right body to use for your business and are not affiliated with any certification body.

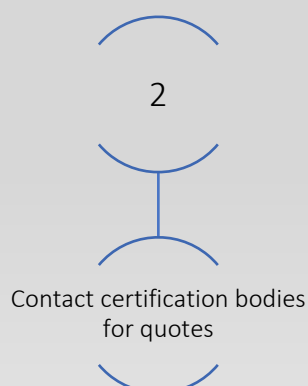
Consultants

Consultants (like 2SB) are used to help guide businesses in implementing management systems. They understand the standards needed to achieve certification but also look to add value to your business. It is possible for a business to successfully gain certification without the use of consultants however it can require considerable internal resources. Consultancies possess the experience, knowledge and training that can streamline the process and provide cost effective guidance as well as bring added value to your systems.

How do I get certification?



Firstly, you will need to have implemented or be in the process of implementing the specific management system you are hoping to achieve certification against. You don't need to have fully implemented the system before contacting the certification bodies, however having made a start or knowing how far you have to go can help set a date to aim for.



The next step is to contact one or more certification bodies to ask for quotes. You will be required to provide information about your business (i.e. nature of your work, number of employees and the roles they do, number of sites) so the certification body can make a good approximation about how many days it will take an assessor to audit your business.

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Decide on which
certification body to use

We recommend contacting at least two certification bodies since the price and number of days they expect the audit to take can vary.

Based upon the quotes received, you will need to decide the most appropriate body to certify with and set a fixed date for your Stage 1 and Stage 2 audits.

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Implement your
management system

Before the external audits you must implement your management system. This includes organising processes, creating policies, conducting internal audits, holding a management review and putting in place other mechanisms.

A good consultant can help you put in place a management system with maximum efficiency.

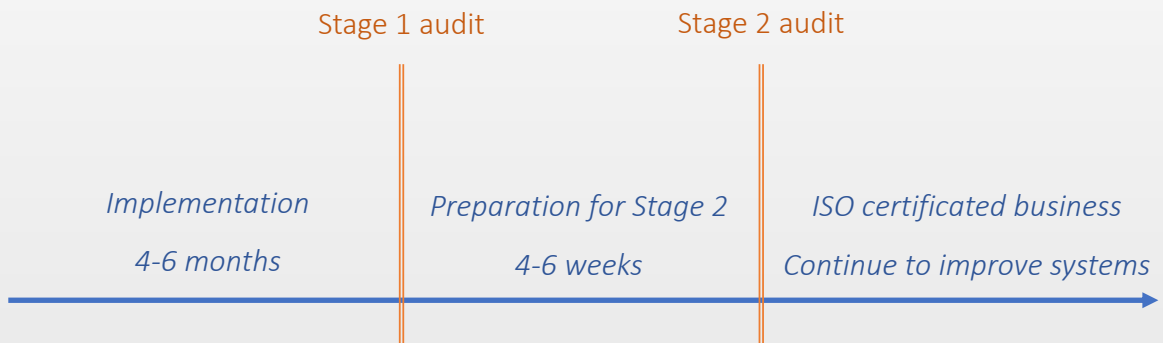
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Undergo external audit

On the agreed dates, you will receive two rounds of audits, a Stage 1 and Stage 2 audit, usually 4 - 6 weeks apart.

On successful completion of these audits, you will receive the certificate.

What are Stage 1 and Stage 2 audits?



Stage 1

A Stage 1 audit is an initial visit from the assessor in which they aim to:

- ✓ *Get a feeling for your business and the processes involved*
- ✓ *Check your readiness for the full Stage 2 audit*
- ✓ *See if there are any major gaps that need to be filled before Stage 2*

This is an important step as if anything is missing it can be resolved before the full audit. You cannot 'fail' a Stage 1 audit however you should have your management system as fully implemented as possible. If your system is particularly weak at Stage 1, the Stage 2 audit may be postponed and you may need another Stage 1 audit to determine readiness at a later date.

A good consultancy like 2SB will help you be ready for your Stage 1 so nothing major is missing from your system and that you can move on smoothly to the Stage 2 audit. At Stage 1 the assessor will want to look around the business but the main focus is on leadership and whether the structure of the management system is in place.

Stage 2

At Stage 2 the assessor will switch their focus away from management and take a much deeper look into your business processes. They will be speaking to staff in the organisation, looking at whether your own processes are well implemented, and checking to see if the systems meet the requirements of the ISO standard.

Stage 2 is a longer audit, and can last anywhere from 2 days up to 6 days depending on a number of factors including:

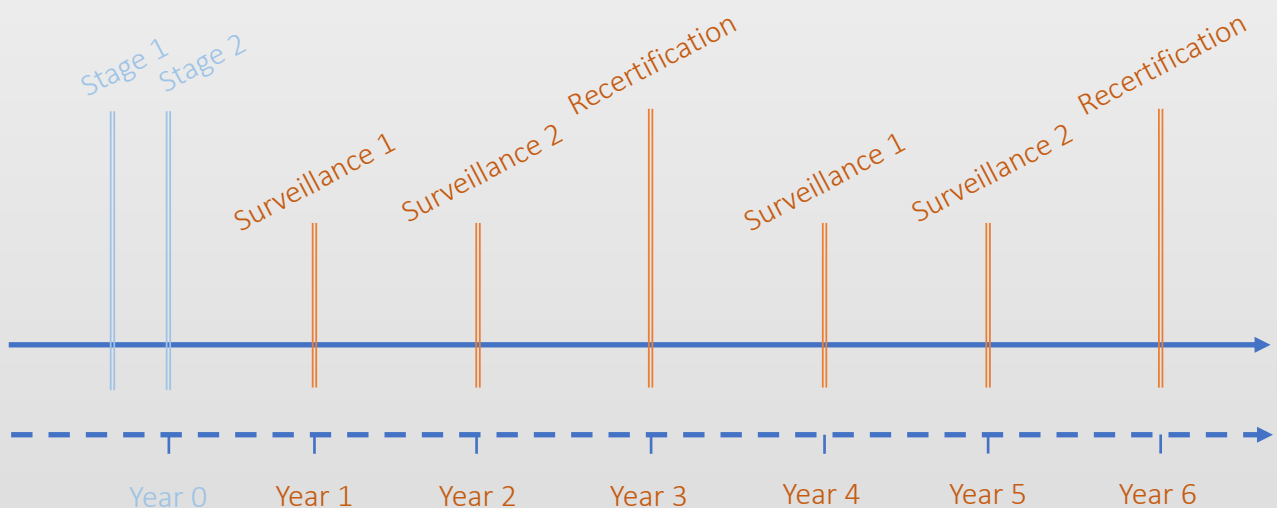
- the size of the business and number of sites
- the complexity of your work
- the number of standards you are certifying against

The Stage 2 audit will give one of three results:

1. Your system is well implemented and meets the requirements of the standard. There may be some recommendations for improvements but there are no nonconformances. You will receive your certificate.
2. There has been minor nonconformances observed, and these need to be resolved. You will receive a report giving you details of the minor nonconformance(s) and a timeframe to address them within. Once you have submitted proof that the nonconformance has been addressed you will receive your certificate.
3. There is a major nonconformance observed. In this case it is likely you will have to resolve the issue and undergo another audit to confirm it has been addressed. Generally, major nonconformances will be prevented by the Stage 1 audit which should highlight any major gaps in the system.

Once gained, the certificate is valid for three years with the UKAS requirement that *surveillance audits* carried out annually and *re-certification* audits every third year.

The three year cycle of surveillance audits and recertification audits



What are surveillance audits?

Once you have gained your initial certification, you will be required to have annual surveillance audits to ensure that your system is still functioning as intended.

Surveillance audits are 'lighter' audits than the initial certification audit and will generally focus on higher risk/more critical business functions and on areas that nonconformances have been previously observed.

If a minor nonconformance is raised during a surveillance audit, you will be required to address this before the next annual audit.

If a major nonconformance is raised, this will need to be addressed and proof submitted or further audits carried out to ensure the system has been repaired.

What is a re-certification audit?

The re-certification audit forms the final part of the certification cycle. It is more in depth than the surveillance audits and successfully passing it will give a renewed certificate for a further three year cycle (with annual surveillance audits).

We can advise you

2SB are highly experienced in the certification process and getting businesses ready for audits - we have 100% track record in helping business attain certification.

We can help you in the following areas:

- ✓ Setting time frames for implementation of an ISO standard
- ✓ Selecting the right shortlist of certification bodies for your business
- ✓ Making applications to certifications and analysing the quotes received
- ✓ Carrying out a gap analysis of your business practices against the requirements of the standards
- ✓ Implementing robust, value-adding management systems
- ✓ Representing your system at Stage 1 and Stage 2 audits
- ✓ Ongoing management system support