

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 2018 QMS Cattle & Sheep Assurance Scheme Standards, which are available at www.qmscotland.co.uk/cattle-sheep-standards and the Acoura Certification Regulations, which are available at <http://services.acoura.com/media/52107430/Acoura%20%20Certification%20Regulations>.

QMS annually reviews and sets the Cattle & Sheep Assurance Scheme Standards. Farm assessments have been contracted by QMS to Acoura, an independent inspection and certification company. Acoura is accredited by the United Kingdom Accreditation Service (UKAS) to ISO/IEC 17065, the international standard for product conformity certification and was the first UK company in the food and farming sector to achieve such accreditation in June 1997. QMS has agreed procedures for these assessments with Acoura, who is regularly (at least once each year) audited by UKAS to ensure these procedures are maintained.

Training of Assessors and Consistency of Assessment

Acoura 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 a number of farms under supervision.

To help to ensure consistency of assessment across all farms throughout Scotland, assessor performance is monitored by reviewing their reports and also 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.
- 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 will 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 Acoura assessor. The Assessment Checklist can be found on page 3 of the 2017~~8~~ 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: Acoura 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

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

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 report 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 assured status** until written confirmation has been received from Acoura.

The assessor submits a report describing their findings of the assessment to the Acoura office, 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 Acoura confirming **approved assured status**.
- **Non-compliance(s) identified:**
Satisfactory evidence must be received by Acoura **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 Acoura by post, email or fax, 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 Acoura office as soon as possible after the assessment and at least within 30 days, to discuss a possible extension. Acoura 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 Acoura will send a letter confirming **approved assured status** and issue a Certificate of Conformity.*

- **Minor non-compliance(s) identified:**
Satisfactory evidence must be received by Acoura within **30 days from the date of assessment** to show that non-compliance(s) have been rectified. Holding(s) will retain their **approved assured status** during this period.

Submitted evidence will then be reviewed along with the assessment report and if Acoura are satisfied the standards are now being met, they will issue a letter confirming **approved assured status**.

See below paragraph which explains what happens if evidence is not submitted.
- **Major non-compliance(s) identified:**

A letter will be issued by Acoura confirming that the **approved assured 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 forever.

Satisfactory evidence must be received by Acoura **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 Acoura 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 **approved assured 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 Acoura 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 **approved 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 forever, 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, Acoura 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 an Acoura 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. The assessor must be given access to the member's unit(s) in order to conduct these visits.