TRUSTED MARK® CERTIFICATION SCHEME

Trust 203: Certification Audit Personnel Qualification and Competence Requirements

Revision History

Version	Date	Description
1.0	28.11.2020	Initial issue – Audit Personnel Qualification and Competence Requirements
2.0	06.08.2026	Comprehensive revision based on experience gained from Certification Audits; competence requirements revised to reflect the customer-centric nature of TRUSTED MARK Standards; alternative qualification routes introduced; Scheme-specific competence requirements strengthened; and IRF TRUSTED MARK Auditor Qualification Programme prescribed for retail/service industry professionals qualifying through the sector-experience route.

Scheme Owner:
IRF Trusted Mark LLP

Trusted Mark Secretariat

S 61A, Okhla Industrial Area, Phase II, New Delhi - 110 020 India

Ph: +91 11 40525000 F: 011-40525001

Email – rsroy@irftrustedmark.org

www.irftrustedmark.org

TRUSTED MARK® CERTIFICATION SCHEME

Trust 203: Certification Audit Personnel Qualification and Competence Requirements

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1. Purpose

This document defines the qualification, knowledge, skills, experience, training and competence requirements for personnel engaged in Certification Audits under the IRF TRUSTED MARK Certification Scheme.

The requirements are intended to ensure that Certification Audits are conducted by personnel who possess the appropriate combination of:

a) knowledge of the applicable retail or service sector;
b) understanding of customer expectations and customer-facing operations;
c) ability to understand and evaluate organisational systems, processes and records;
d) audit and assessment skills; and
e) specific competence in the applicable IRF TRUSTED MARK Standard, Certification Scheme, audit methodology and scoring system.

The requirements shall be applied in conjunction with the applicable TRUSTED MARK Certification Standard, Certification Process, Audit Workbook/Checklist and other Scheme documents.

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2. Background and Rationale for Revision

The IRF TRUSTED MARK Certification Scheme establishes customer-centric Standards for retail and service organisations and evaluates whether the systems, processes and operational practices established by an Applicant are capable of consistently delivering the prescribed standards of customer service, safety, transparency, convenience and experience.

During more than five years of implementation of the Scheme and Certification Audits across different categories, IRF Trusted Mark has gained significant practical experience regarding the competence required for conducting these audits effectively.

Experience has demonstrated that **conventional auditor qualifications or generic management-system auditing experience alone do not necessarily provide an auditor with sufficient understanding of the customer-centric nature, assessment methodology and scoring requirements of the TRUSTED MARK Scheme.**

The Certification Audit is not intended merely to establish whether documented procedures exist. The Auditor is required to understand the intent of each applicable TRUSTED MARK requirement and evaluate how effectively the Applicant's systems, processes and practices translate into the effective implementation of the applicable customer-facing requirements.

The Auditor must therefore be capable of reviewing documented systems and records, interviewing responsible personnel, examining objective evidence, evaluating operational implementation and, wherever applicable, considering customer-facing observations and Mystery Audit findings before assigning scores in accordance with the prescribed methodology.

Experience from Certification Audits has also demonstrated that **Auditors who have undergone the IRF TRUSTED MARK Auditor Qualification Programme have been able to understand and apply the Scheme requirements and scoring methodology more consistently**, while difficulties have arisen where Auditors unfamiliar with the Scheme have attempted to approach the Certification Audit primarily through conventional management-system audit practices.

Accordingly, the Auditor competence requirements have been revised to place greater emphasis on **demonstrated sector knowledge, customer-centric understanding, audit capability and appropriate Scheme-specific training, orientation and competence.**

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3. Principles Governing Auditor Competence

Auditor competence under the TRUSTED MARK Certification Scheme shall be based on the auditor's demonstrated ability to apply relevant knowledge, skills and professional judgement to the particular Certification Audit.

Competence shall therefore be evaluated on the basis of the **combined capability of the individual**, rather than solely on possession of a particular management-system auditor qualification or sector classification.

The Auditor shall have sufficient competence to:

a) understand the Applicant's business model, operating environment and customer proposition;

b) understand customer expectations relevant to the applicable retail or service category;

c) interpret the intent and requirements of the applicable TRUSTED MARK Standard;

d) understand and apply the prescribed TRUSTED MARK Certification Audit methodology;

e) evaluate organisational systems, processes, procedures and operational controls;

f) review records and other objective evidence;

g) conduct interviews and obtain relevant information from responsible personnel;

h) assess whether documented systems and processes are effectively implemented;

i) consider relevant Mystery Audit findings and verify corrective actions or areas requiring further examination, where applicable;

j) distinguish between conformity, differing levels of implementation/maturity and areas requiring improvement, in accordance with the applicable TRUSTED MARK scoring methodology;

k) assign Audit Value Ratings and scores objectively and consistently;

l) maintain appropriate audit notes and objective evidence; and

m) prepare clear, factual and evidence-based audit findings and reports.

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4. Applicable Conformity Assessment and Audit Principles

The TRUSTED MARK Certification Scheme is a certification scheme for customer-centric retail and service standards.

Personnel competence and the Certification Audit methodology shall be established with due regard to the applicable conformity assessment requirements and, where relevant, the audit principles and guidance contained in:**ISO/IEC 17065:2012** – Conformity assessment — Requirements for bodies certifying products, processes and services;

ISO/IEC 17067:2013 – Conformity assessment — Fundamentals of product certification and guidelines for product certification schemes; and

ISO 19011:2026 – Guidelines for auditing management systems, particularly the principles relating to auditing, auditor competence, evidence gathering, professional judgement and evaluation of auditors.

The TRUSTED MARK Scheme requirements and applicable category Standard shall determine the specific competence necessary for conducting the Certification Audit.

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5. Minimum Qualification and Professional Experience

A Certification Auditor shall satisfy **either Route A or Route B** below and fulfil the applicable TRUSTED MARK Scheme-specific competence requirements.

Route A – Certification Body Qualified / Approved Auditor

The Auditor shall have:

a) recognised Auditor/Lead Auditor qualification or demonstrated equivalent audit competence formally evaluated and approved by the Certification Body;

b) appropriate knowledge and/or experience relevant to the retail, service or business sector being audited.

For Auditors already qualified and approved by a Certification Body, completion of the **IRF TRUSTED MARK** Auditor Qualification Programme **shall be desirable but not mandatory**.

However, before conducting a TRUSTED MARK Certification Audit, such Auditors shall be appropriately familiarised with the applicable TRUSTED MARK Standard, Certification Scheme, Audit Workbook/Checklist, evidence requirements, Audit Value Ratings and scoring methodology.

A conventional management-system auditor qualification shall be recognised as evidence of audit competence but shall not, by itself, establish competence in the applicable TRUSTED MARK Standard or its scoring methodology.

Route B – Retail / Service Industry Professional

A retail/service industry professional may qualify as a Certification Auditor where the individual has a **minimum of 15 years of relevant professional experience** in the applicable or closely related sector.

Relevant experience may include retail or shopping centre operations and management; customer experience and customer service; restaurant or hospitality operations; cineplex operations; retail research; consulting; quality/service assessment; operational audits; compliance; facilities management; safety and security; or other relevant professional functions.

For professionals qualifying through this route, successful completion of the **IRF TRUSTED MARK Auditor Qualification Programme shall be mandatory before independent assignment as a Certification Auditor.**

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6. IRF TRUSTED MARK Auditor Qualification and Scheme Orientation

The TRUSTED MARK Certification Audit requires an understanding not only of audit techniques but also of the **customer-centric intent of the applicable Standard, prescribed assessment methodology and Audit Value Rating/scoring system**.

Accordingly, Scheme-specific competence shall be established as follows:

6.1 Certification Body Qualified / Trained Auditors

For Auditors already trained, qualified and accepted under the competence-management system of a Certification Body, completion of the **IRF TRUSTED MARK Auditor Qualification Programme is desirable**.

Such Auditors shall, however, receive appropriate **Scheme-specific orientation/briefing** before undertaking their first TRUSTED MARK Certification Audit.

The orientation shall cover, as applicable:

the applicable TRUSTED MARK Standard; customer-centric intent of the requirements; Certification Process; Self-Evaluation & Audit Workbook/Checklist; Mystery Audit interface, where applicable; evidence requirements; Audit Value Ratings; scoring methodology; recording of observations; and final audit reporting requirements.

The purpose of the orientation is to enable the Auditor to apply existing audit competence within the customer-centric framework, assessment methodology and scoring requirements specific to the TRUSTED MARK Certification Scheme.

6.2 Retail / Service Industry Professionals

Professionals seeking qualification under **Route B** shall successfully complete the **IRF TRUSTED MARK Auditor Qualification Programme** before being authorised to independently conduct Certification Audits.

The Programme shall include appropriate training and competence evaluation covering:

a) TRUSTED MARK Scheme architecture and Certification Process;

b) applicable TRUSTED MARK Standard and interpretation of requirements;

c) customer expectations and customer-centric principles underlying the Standard;

d) prescribed Certification Audit methodology;

e) Self-Evaluation & Audit Workbook/Checklist;

f) Audit Value Ratings, weightages and scoring methodology;

g) evaluation of systems, processes, records and objective evidence;

h) review and use of Mystery Audit findings, where applicable;

i) interviewing, observation and sampling techniques;

j) identification and recording of audit findings;

k) impartiality, confidentiality and professional conduct; and

l) completion of the final Audit Workbook and Audit Report.

Successful completion shall demonstrate that the sector professional has acquired the **audit methodology and Scheme-specific competence necessary to complement the individual's industry expertise.**

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7. Category-Specific Sector Competence

In addition to the common competence requirements, the Auditor shall demonstrate appropriate knowledge and/or professional experience relevant to the category being audited.

TRUSTED MARK Category	Relevant Sector Knowledge and Experience
TRUSTED SHOP	Retail operations, customer service, store operations, merchandising/customer interface, consumer protection, customer facilities, safety and complaint handling
TRUSTED SHOPPING CENTRE	Shopping centre/mall operations, customer experience, facilities and amenities, tenant/customer interface, service-provider management, housekeeping, parking, safety and security, digital/customer information and complaint handling
TRUSTED RESTAURANT	Restaurant/foodservice operations, customer service, food safety and hygiene, service delivery, customer facilities and complaint handling
TRUSTED CINEPLEX	Cinema/cineplex operations, hospitality/customer service, ticketing and digital interfaces, food & beverage operations, customer facilities, safety and security
TRUSTED e-COMMERCE PLATFORM	E-commerce operations, digital customer journey, information security/customer privacy interface, fulfilment, returns/refunds and customer service
TRUSTED PHARMACY	Retail pharmacy operations, applicable regulatory/customer-facing requirements, customer service, product handling and safety
TRUSTED SALON / SPA	Salon/spa/service operations, hygiene, customer service, customer safety and service-delivery practices
TRUSTED FUNZONE	Leisure/entertainment operations, customer safety, equipment/customer interface, hygiene and customer service
TRUSTED JEWELLER	Jewellery retail operations, applicable labelling/customer-information requirements, customer service, security and consumer-facing practices
Other TRUSTED MARK Categories	Relevant sector knowledge and experience as prescribed by the IRF Trusted Mark Secretariat

The above knowledge may be demonstrated through relevant professional experience, audit experience, consulting, research, training or other evidence acceptable under the Scheme.

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8. Customer-Centric Assessment Competence

Since TRUSTED MARK Standards are designed around customer expectations and the systems required to consistently deliver them, the Auditor shall demonstrate the ability to evaluate an organisation **from both a systems perspective and a customer-experience/outcome perspective..**

The Auditor shall be capable of assessing, where applicable:

customer accessibility and convenience; availability and quality of customer facilities and services; communication and transparency; responsiveness of personnel; customer feedback and complaint resolution; safety and security; hygiene and housekeeping; digital information and customer interfaces; fairness and consistency of customer-facing terms and practices; and effectiveness of systems supporting the customer experience.

The Auditor shall not limit the assessment to the existence of policies, procedures or records where the applicable Standard requires evidence of effective implementation.

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9. Audit Skills

All Certification Auditors shall demonstrate appropriate skills in:

Audit planning and time management – ability to organise and complete the prescribed assessment within the allocated audit duration.

Interviewing – ability to obtain relevant information through effective questioning and interaction with management and operational personnel.

Observation – ability to identify relevant operational conditions and practices without relying solely on documentation.

Evidence evaluation – ability to determine whether information and records constitute sufficient and appropriate objective evidence.

Sampling – ability to select representative records, locations, processes and evidence appropriate to the scope of certification.

Analytical judgement – ability to relate evidence to the intent of the applicable Standard and determine the appropriate Audit Value Rating.

Note taking and reporting – ability to maintain sufficient and appropriate records of audit evidence and prepare clear, factual and evidence-based observations.

Communication – ability to explain audit requirements and findings professionally without providing consultancy or directing the Applicant towards a particular solution.

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10. Language and Communication Skills

The Auditor shall possess sufficient proficiency in English and/or another language appropriate to the audit location to conduct interviews, review relevant information and communicate audit findings effectively. Where language limitations could materially affect the effectiveness of the audit, appropriate language support shall be arranged.

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11. Qualification of Retail / Service Industry Professionals

A professional qualifying through Route B shall not be considered competent to independently conduct a TRUSTED MARK Certification Audit solely on the basis of length or seniority of industry experience.

In addition to the prescribed **minimum 15 years of relevant professional experience**, the individual shall:

a) successfully complete the IRF TRUSTED MARK Auditor Qualification Programme;

b) demonstrate understanding of the applicable Standard and its customer-centric intent;

c) demonstrate the ability to examine systems, processes, records and objective evidence;

d) demonstrate competence in applying the prescribed Audit Value Ratings and scoring methodology; and

e) satisfactorily complete such competence evaluation as may be prescribed under the Scheme.

Depending upon the individual's previous audit/assessment experience, competence evaluation may include a written or practical assessment, technical interview, scoring exercise, supervised audit, witnessed audit or review of an audit report.

Professional experience establishes sector expertise but shall not, by itself, be considered sufficient evidence of audit competence.

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12. Maintenance of Auditor Competence

All Auditors qualified to conduct TRUSTED MARK Certification Audits shall maintain their competence through continued involvement in relevant professional activities and by remaining updated on:

changes to the TRUSTED MARK Certification Scheme;

revisions to applicable Standards;

changes to Audit Workbooks, scoring methodology and certification processes;

relevant regulatory or industry developments; and

guidance or training issued by the IRF Trusted Mark Secretariat.

Refresher training or re-evaluation may be prescribed whenever significant changes are made to the Scheme, Standard or audit methodology.

Where an Auditor has remained inactive under the Scheme for an extended period, refresher training or competence re-evaluation may be required before further audit assignment.

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13. Impartiality, Confidentiality and Professional Conduct

All personnel involved in Certification Audits shall maintain impartiality, confidentiality and professional conduct.

Before assignment, the Auditor shall disclose any relationship, employment, consultancy assignment, financial interest or other circumstance that could create an actual or potential conflict of interest with the Applicant.

An Auditor shall not be assigned where previous involvement or another relationship could compromise, or could reasonably be considered to compromise, the impartiality of the assessment.

Information obtained during the Certification Audit shall be treated as confidential and used only for purposes authorised under the TRUSTED MARK Certification Scheme.

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14. Technical Experts

Where an Auditor does not individually possess all specialised knowledge necessary for a particular audit, a suitably competent **Technical Expert** may be included in the audit team.

The Technical Expert shall provide specialist knowledge to the Auditor but shall work under the direction of the Audit Team Leader and shall not independently determine audit scores unless separately qualified as a Certification Auditor in accordance with this document.

The competence of the audit team as a whole shall be appropriate to the certification scope.

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15. Audit Team Leader

Where an audit is conducted by more than one Auditor, an Audit Team Leader shall be designated.

The Audit Team Leader shall have demonstrated competence in:

the applicable TRUSTED MARK Standard and Scheme;

audit planning and management;

allocation and coordination of audit activities;

evaluation and consolidation of objective evidence;

resolution of differences within the audit team;

application of Audit Value Ratings and scoring methodology; and

completion and submission of the final Certification Audit Workbook and Report.

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16. Review and Certification Decision Personnel

Personnel undertaking review or certification decision functions shall possess sufficient knowledge of:

the TRUSTED MARK Certification Scheme;

the applicable Standard;

certification scope;

audit methodology and scoring system;

requirements for objective evidence; and

the certification decision process.

Personnel making the certification decision shall not have participated in the Certification Audit or other evaluation activities forming the basis of the certification decision, in accordance with the applicable Scheme requirements for impartiality and independence of the certification decision.

The IRF Trusted Mark Secretariat and/or Certification Body, as applicable under the Scheme, shall maintain appropriate competence requirements and records for personnel performing these functions.

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17. Competence Records

Appropriate records shall be maintained to demonstrate the competence and continued competence of Certification Auditors and other relevant certification personnel.

Records may include:

educational and professional qualifications;

employment and professional experience;

sector experience;

auditor qualifications;

IRF TRUSTED MARK Auditor training and assessment records;

audit and assessment experience;

witnessed/supervised audit evaluations;

technical evaluations;

refresher training; and

continuing competence reviews.

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18. Authority to Determine Competence

Qualification of Certification Auditors shall be based on the appropriate combination of **audit competence, sector knowledge, customer-centric understanding and TRUSTED MARK Scheme-specific competence**.

Certification Body qualified/trained Auditors may demonstrate audit competence through their recognised auditor qualification, training and the CB's personnel-competence process, supplemented by the required TRUSTED MARK Scheme orientation.

Retail/service industry professionals qualifying through the experience route shall demonstrate sector competence through their professional experience and shall successfully complete the **IRF TRUSTED MARK Auditor Qualification Programme** and prescribed competence evaluation before independent audit assignment.

Neither possession of an Auditor/Lead Auditor qualification nor length of industry experience, when considered in isolation, shall establish competence to conduct a particular TRUSTED MARK Certification Audit.

Note: Completion of the **IRF TRUSTED MARK** Auditor Qualification Programme **is desirable for Auditors already trained/qualified and accepted by a Certification Body and mandatory for retail/service industry professionals qualifying under the sector-experience route.**

Certification Body Auditors who have not completed the Programme shall nevertheless undergo appropriate orientation on the applicable TRUSTED MARK Standard, Certification Process, Audit Workbook, evidence requirements and scoring methodology before undertaking a TRUSTED MARK Certification Audit.