

**Certification as a**

# **Sustainability Assurance Practitioner**

Including the AccountAbility Sustainability Assurance Competency Framework built on AA1000 Assurance Standard platform



The information detailed within this document was correct at the time of publication. For more details about this programme the other services we provide, we advise you to see the AccountAbility website at [www.accountability.org](http://www.accountability.org)

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## 1. About AccountAbility

AccountAbility [www.accountability.org](http://www.accountability.org) is a leading international organisation providing innovative solutions to the most critical challenges in corporate responsibility and sustainable development. Since 1995 we have been helping corporations, non-profits and governments embed ethical, environmental, social and governance accountability into their organisational DNA.

AccountAbility's leading-edge innovations include the AA1000 Series of Standards:

### **AA1000APS (2008), the AccountAbility Principles Standard**

### **AA1000AS (2008), the Assurance Standard**

### **AA1000SES (2005) the Stakeholder Engagement Standard**

AccountAbility is also known for its work on Collaborative Governance and Responsible Competitiveness. Standards in the AA1000 Series are developed using a broad-based, multi-stakeholder process. They are internationally accepted and freely available for download at [www.accountability.org](http://www.accountability.org) the AccountAbility Standards Technical Committees have responsibility for the content of the AA1000 Series standards. Developing the AA1000 Series is an ongoing task and one that is continuously subject to refinement and additions reflecting latest developments in the field and feedback from our stakeholders.

### *The AA1000 Assurance Standard (2008)*

The AA1000 Assurance Standard, AA1000AS (2008), was launched on October 24, 2008. It supersedes AA1000AS (2003).

AA1000AS (2008) assurance provides a platform to align the non-financial aspects of sustainability with financial reporting and assurance. It provides a means for assurance providers to go beyond mere verification of

data, to evaluate the way reporting organisations manage sustainability, and to reflect that management and resulting performance in its assurance statements.

AA1000AS (2008) assurance provides a comprehensive way of holding an organisation to account for its management, performance and reporting on sustainability issues by evaluating the adherence of an organisation to the AA1000 AccountAbility Principles (see AA1000APS (2008)) and the quality of the disclosed information on sustainability performance.

AA1000AS (2008) assurance also provides a means to capture and place in context a wide range of other verification and certification schemes that deal with specific dimensions of sustainability such as those for greenhouse gas emissions, environmental management systems, sustainable forest management or fair trade labelling.

The information found in sustainability reporting provides the starting point for AA1000AS (2008) assurance, as sustainability reporting is designed to provide stakeholders with sufficient information to understand the sustainability performance of an organisation and to make informed decisions.

Use of AA1000AS (2003) was recognised until December 2009. It has now been withdrawn.

The AA1000AS (2008) is supported by a variety of guidance notes:

[\*For Assurance Providers: Guidance for the Use of AA1000AS \(2008\)\*](#)

[\*For Stakeholders: Guidance for the Use of AA1000AS \(2008\)\*](#)

[\*Guidance for Reporting Organisations Seeking Assurance to AA1000AS \(2008\)\*](#)

## 2. Introduction to the Sustainability Assurance Practitioner Programme

### *Why the Need?*

There is an increasing need for assurance of non-financial information as part of understanding an organisation's performance against sustainable development commitments, policies and strategies. This is relevant to secure quality internally, and to provide credible information to interested stakeholders externally. This is important to those stakeholders concerned with specific social, environmental and economic aspects of performance, and to those more interested in the impact of non-financial aspects on financial performance and valuations.

AccountAbility developed the AA1000 Assurance Standard to provide a credible foundation for sustainability assurance, combining the best from both traditional auditing methodologies and leading edge practice in stakeholder engagement and indicator development. Since the launch of the first edition in 2003 and now with the second edition published in 2008, it has underpinned the independent external assurance of sustainability reporting, as well as being used internally for learning and improvement. It is increasingly used in conjunction with related standards such as the GRI Sustainability Reporting Guidelines and the ISAE3000 non-financial assurance guidelines provided by the International Assurance and Auditing Standards Board; a positive sign of standards convergence.

Standards governing the emerging profession of sustainability assurance practitioners are therefore gaining increasing importance. They respond to the growing need to professionalize the discipline and to codify what experience is relevant and how best to judge individual competence, often as part of assurance teams.

### *Aims of the programme*

The Sustainability Assurance Practitioner programme aims to:

- enable practitioners to develop, validate and communicate their competence in a systematic manner;
- make it easier for organisations to identify credible assurance expertise;
- improve confidence for those seeking assurance in the expertise of professionals engaged to assess and pass judgement on their behalf; and
- develop a more systematic understanding of key competencies for providing effective assurance, and so establish a basis for informing this and other standards in the future.

This Sustainability Assurance Practitioner programme is for practitioners in sustainability assurance, both internal and external to the organisation whose performance is being assured. In addition, we acknowledge the need for a broader range of practitioners to understand the basics of assurance, including those responsible for preparing sustainability reports, managing and commissioning external assurance processes, and stakeholders seeking to judge the quality of an assurance statement and underlying process. For these latter groups, the Associate certification status is particularly appropriate.

This programme is for all practitioners in sustainability assurance, including but not restricted to those explicitly using the AA1000AS (2008). That said, the Competency Framework has been built on an AA1000AS (2008) platform and can be best interpreted when used in conjunction with the Standard. In particular, the AA1000AS (2008) requires external assurance assignments to include a publicly available statement of assurance provider competencies, both individual and organisational.

### *Status of individual practitioner certification*

AccountAbility appreciates the considerable challenges in delivering an effective practitioner certification programme in this field. Assurance practitioners approach their work with a range of relevant experience and qualifications, making the codification of what is necessary particularly difficult. Given the diverse circumstances in which assurance is undertaken, often requiring multi-disciplinary teams this makes it even harder. Moreover, the non-financial or sustainability assurance field is rapidly evolving, as corporate governance and other legislation and the potential for litigation becomes more relevant. This is particularly continual improvement of the AA1000 Assurance Standard, the GRI Guidelines and other relevant standards and frameworks.

### *Continuing Development of the Competency Framework and this programme*

An extensive consultation process has informed the development of both the Competency Framework (see Appendix III) and the certification process described in this document.

Defining the technical competencies for specific aspects of sustainable development has been a particularly difficult issue to resolve. The decision, as reflected in the Competency Framework, has been to focus on a general appreciation of sustainable development and skills in making judgments about technical matters, particularly through demonstrable skills and experience in stakeholder engagement.

The outcome of the consultation process is the practitioner programme outlining the basic competencies a practitioner requires to operate within the current environment. We anticipate that this programme will continuously develop as a result of experience gained in its operation; in the development of

the field; and from feedback from key stakeholders. On this basis we are committed to the ongoing development of this programme informed by stakeholder expectations.

The competency requirements and the continuous professional development criteria of the programme will be reviewed on an ongoing basis. Therefore, to support advances in the area of sustainability assurance competence your opinions are valuable to us.

We welcome and look forward to your feedback at [www.accountability.org](http://www.accountability.org)

### 3. Who can apply – Certification Grades

This worldwide programme is open to all individuals currently practising within the field of sustainable development, organisational reporting and sustainability assurance, and to those starting in this field. It offers certification to three grades of recognition described below.

Please note that the difference between the 3 grades is not simply a matter of increased experience or skills. It also reflects a function of the practitioner's role in assurance engagements. The emphasis therefore shifts from theoretical skills acquired through training to a demonstrable ability to make informed professional judgements on an organisation's sustainability performance, an enhanced understanding of sustainable development and performing a specific role in assurance engagements.

#### *Associate Sustainability Assurance Practitioner (ACSAP)*

For professionals of any seniority who are not directly involved in the assurance process or for trainee assurance practitioners (internal or external)

As an Associate Sustainability Assurance Practitioner you have an understanding of the field of sustainability assurance. You will have gained this knowledge by attending relevant training. Your knowledge can include, but does not require, practical assurance experience, or direct experience in stakeholder engagement. This grade is most relevant to those beginning their career in sustainability assurance, and those involved in related topics, such as report preparation or general management, who wish to demonstrate their knowledge of the field.

#### *Certified Sustainability Assurance Practitioner (CSAP)*

For practitioners of any seniority who are directly involved in the assurance process (internal or external) as a team member

As a Sustainability Assurance Practitioner you have practical experience in sustainability assurance using AA1000. This experience includes active participation in sustainability assurance engagements, whether internally within your organisation or as an external assurance provider. Experience in stakeholder engagement is required, although not necessarily as part of formal assurance assignments. It will include relevant formal training and qualifications, although not necessarily specific to sustainability assurance. You are an active sustainability assurance practitioner with demonstrable experience over a number of assignments with different clients or, for internal practitioners, over several assurance cycles covering a range of sustainability issues.

#### *Lead Sustainability Assurance Practitioner (CLSAP)*

For practitioners of any seniority who are directly involved in the assurance process (internal or external) leading teams and taking responsibility for the formulation of public statements

As a Lead Sustainability Assurance Practitioner you have well established practical experience of sustainability assurance using the AA1000AS (2008). This experience must include leading sustainability assurance assignments, either internally within your organisation or as part of external assurance assignments. Experience in stakeholder engagement as part of assurance assignments is essential, as is the lead role in forming assurance judgments and the preparation of external or internal assurance statements.

As a Lead Practitioner you are currently active in the provision of sustainability assurance and you have been so for several years or you have led a significant number of sustainability assurance assignments.

To assist you in determining which grade is right for you, you will find a comprehensive description of the certification requirements and examples of evidence of competence that

we will accept in Appendix III "Sustainability Assurance Competency Framework"

### *Competence Requirements*

We will evaluate your application for the grades described above based on the competencies required of an effective practitioner as described in Appendix III and summarized below:

- An understanding of the AccountAbility Principles
- An understanding of Sustainability Assurance, including accounting and data review procedures and auditing practice
- An understanding of the techniques and processes of stakeholder engagement and an ability to assess and assure against these criteria
- An overall understanding of sustainable development encompassing:
  - Social and ethical issues
  - Environmental issues
  - Economic issues
- The ability to make informed professional judgments on an organisation's sustainability performance (not the Associate grade).

### *Notes on the Practitioner Competence Requirements*

Competence Requirements: Sustainability Assurance seeks to assure stakeholders in order to influence their behaviour and thereby impact on the organisation's success. Auditing, verification etc. are specific tools to provide this assurance.

Stakeholder engagement is central to the AA1000AS (2008) and the whole area of sustainability assurance. It is a powerful tool that informs decision-making, and enables learning and innovation through accountability processes designed to embrace issues that are material to diverse organisations and their stakeholders. Therefore, practitioners of all three grades need to demonstrate the appropriate skills and expertise in this area.

Competence in 'sustainable development' is difficult to judge. We do not require you to demonstrate technical expertise in specific dimensions of sustainable development such as human rights or global climate change. What is required, however, for all three grades is that you demonstrate a basic appreciation of the meaning and scope of sustainable development, covering social, environmental and economic responsibilities and issues, including ethical and financial issues. In most instances, competence may be demonstrated through your formal training and practical experience relating to the other two competency areas described above. You may, of course, also supply as evidence of competence qualifications and experience distinct from those gained in the fields of assurance and stakeholder engagement.

## 4. Requirements for Initial Certification

One of the criteria for becoming a Certified Practitioner is membership of AccountAbility. You or the organisation you are affiliated with must be a member of AccountAbility.

AccountAbility has established an Assurance Provider Membership program. Individual practitioners who are affiliated with a member organisation do not have to have individual practitioner membership in AccountAbility. Their membership is covered under the membership of their organisation.

Individual practitioners who do not have affiliation with an AccountAbility Assurance Provider member must become individual practitioner members of AccountAbility.

This requirement is to ensure that you have access to current information, thinking and guidance and to establish a network that contributes to the ongoing development of professional capacity in the area of assurance.

In order to achieve certification to one of the three grades of Practitioner, you must demonstrate that you have met the competency criteria defined in Appendix III "Sustainability Assurance Competency Framework" and demonstrate the ability to operate effectively at the grade of practitioner for which you have applied.

We will look at a range of evidence including:

**Experience:** This is required for the two higher grades and is desirable but not necessary for the lower, associate grade.

**Formal training and qualifications:** This is desirable and recommended for all three grades. We accept Sustainability Practitioner training courses certified by AccountAbility or recognised equivalents. Successful completion of the 5 day certified training programme meets the training requirement for the Associate Sustainability Assurance Practitioner level.

To recognise that expertise may be gained from experience as well as from training, we offer an alternative experience-based route to certification in addition to the standard training/qualification route. Appendix III, "Sustainability Assurance Competency Framework", describes the practitioner experience that we will accept as a substitute for training/qualifications.

**A personal statement:** A short statement of approximately 1,000 words outlining your professional development to date and explaining in your own words why and how you think you meet the competence criteria.

The "Competency Framework" Matrix provides a list of examples that will give you guidance on what is accepted as evidence of meeting the specific criteria.

**An interview:** Evaluators can request an interview to determine your ability to make informed professional judgements on the quality and robustness of an organisation's stakeholder engagement, the assurance processes it has in place and its sustainability performance. This is mandatory for the Lead Practitioner grade and discretionary for the other grades.

**Acceptance of Code of Conduct:** You will abide by the Code of Practice as set out in Appendix II of this document.

## 5. Applying for Initial Certification

### *What you do*

Request an application pack via [standards@accountability.org](mailto:standards@accountability.org)

If you wish to contact us by mail, please use the following address:

AccountAbility CSAP Programme  
AccountAbility  
Warnford Court  
29 Throgmorton Street  
London EC2N 2AT

### *Application Periods:*

Applications are assessed four times a year. Candidates should ensure that their completed application and all relevant supporting documentation is received by AccountAbility at least 2 weeks before the application assessment date.

The annual application assessment dates are as follows:

January 1st  
March 1st  
June 1st  
October 1st

When you apply for certification, please:

Complete the application form as instructed and for CSAP and CLSAP applications have it signed by two witnesses; and

Enclose supporting evidence (i.e. educational qualifications, certificates, training course attendance sheet, employer's brief etc.) demonstrating how you meet the competency criteria for the grade you are applying for.

[Electronic submission of the documents is preferred](#). Unfortunately, we will not be able to progress applications that are not accompanied by an application fee. The application fee, along with all other fees, is payable via the AccountAbility website.

AccountAbility requires all correspondence in support of the application to be in the English

language, or to be accompanied by certified translations of the originals. This is particularly important for educational qualifications, training courses and assurance assignments.

At the application stage, please send only the application fee. Do not send an annual certification fee. If your application is successful, we will write to you and ask you to pay the annual certification fee.

### *What we do*

- Administrative check
- 1st review
- 2nd review (CSAP, LCSAP only)
- Telephone interview (not mandatory for all grade)
- Review of the process of competence reviews
- Offer of certification
- Certification awarded after payment of the annual fee and membership

All references, qualifications and training referred to within the application form must be supported by documentary evidence. An example of acceptable evidence would be a good quality scan of the original certificate, indicating the awarding body, the title and date of the award and the name of the person to whom the award was made. If any of this information is not available or is not clear, we may ask you to supply us with more evidence. The same applies if a copy of the certificate is not available, for example where it has been lost or destroyed. Acceptable evidence would include an official letter from the awarding body confirming the award. A transcript (i.e. an official, detailed account of the course content) of an award would also be acceptable evidence if it clearly states the date and title of the award. If no documentary evidence can be supplied by the awarding body, it is unlikely we would accept your qualification.

You should ensure that each section is completed and that the information supplied is accurate and correct at the time of submission (if changes occur during the application period, please inform AccountAbility

immediately). Failure to do so will result in a delay in processing the application and a possible decision by AccountAbility not to progress your application. The application fee will not be refunded if you fail to meet the criteria outlined within the Assurance Competency Framework, so please do not hesitate to contact AccountAbility if you are unsure of any certification criteria or if you have any questions.

### *Internal Checks*

Random checks of your references and verification checks of your experience are integral components of the assessment process and are an essential element supporting the overall credibility of the programme and may be performed at any stage.

The assessment process has four parts:

#### *1. Administrative Check*

We will check that application documents adhere to the format asked for and undertake any random checks with regard to the references provided.

#### *2. Technical Evaluation*

The assessment procedure uses a number of quantitative and qualitative techniques to evaluate and assess your personal attributes, expertise and practical experience. The mix of evaluation techniques used will be determined by your personal statement, information included within your application form, supporting evidence and the grade applied for. In general, there will be two independent technical evaluations completed for each application (except the ACSAP grade which requires only 1 Technical Evaluation).

In certain circumstances, we may request additional information, references or a telephone interview (where appropriate), where the evidence you supply does not clearly demonstrate that you meet the criteria. In the event that we decide that a telephone interview is necessary, you will be given

adequate notice to arrange the interview. For the Lead Sustainability Assurance Practitioner Grade a telephone interview is mandatory in order to determine your ability to make an informed professional judgment and will be conducted by the two assigned technical evaluators independently. You will be given adequate notice to arrange the interview.

The application process usually takes about 6 weeks (excluding any telephone interview). The time, however, may vary depending on the time required to verify the information submitted with your application. If you can give us all the information we need, this will speed up the application process.

Please note that:

All AccountAbility staff and technical evaluators are required to declare any conflicts of interest with applicants and to sign confidentiality agreements before starting a review process.

Any verification checks will be made in the strictest of confidence and confidential findings of any work undertaken are not required or sought.

#### *3. Certification*

The AccountAbility Certification Manager makes the final decision on certification. The certification decision is performed independently from the technical evaluation process (detailed above).

#### *4. Offer and Award of Certification*

AccountAbility will write formally to you with an offer of certification to the appropriate grade and invoice you for your first annual fee. Your details are then added to the [online register of certificated auditors](#) and we will send you your CSAP certificate. During the certification period of 3 years, at the end of the first and second years, you may maintain certification by payment of your annual certification fee. Your CSAP certification will be withdrawn if you fail to maintain your

AccountAbility membership during the 3 year certification period.

If you fail to meet the grade of practitioner you apply for, we will inform you of the reasons for our decision.

### *Appeals*

Applicants have the right to appeal against any certification decision taken. AccountAbility operates a quality system that includes established procedures for considering appeals and complaints.

A representative from AccountAbility's standards technical committees will sit on appeal panels relating to the CSAP programme.

## 6. Fees

Fees are set annually and apply for the calendar year (1 January - 31 December). All fees are payable via [the AccountAbility website](#).

### *Application Fee*

We need you to pay this fee when you send in your application. Unfortunately, we will not be able to process applications that are not accompanied by an application fee. This fee covers the costs of the application process. Please note that this fee is not refundable if the application is unsuccessful.

Membership of AccountAbility is a requirement of the certification and you must maintain membership throughout the period of your certification.

### *Annual Certification Fee*

This fee covers the annual cost of administering your certification. We will normally send you the invoice one month before payment is due.

### *Application for Re-grade Fee*

This fee covers costs of evaluating your re-grade. We need you to pay this fee when you submit your request and, as with the application fee, the re-grade fee is not refundable. If you are re-graded during the year we will not ask you to pay any further certification fees for that current year. You may request a re-grade at any stage during the certification period. There is no re-grade fee if you are re-graded as part of the (3 year) renewal of certification process.

## 7. Renewal of Certification

You must renew your certification every 3 years. We will write to you approximately 3 months before the end of the third year in your certification period and ask you to send us:

**Your CPD and practitioner experience log-sheets for the previous 3 years:** See the Continuing Professional Development (CPD) criteria set out below under "Guidance on CPD Requirements"

**Compliance with the Code of Practice:** We need you to make a declaration that you have always acted in compliance with the Code of Practice as set out in Appendix II of this document and your commitment to do so in the future.

**Personal Statement:** A brief summary (maximum 1,000 words) on expertise and experience gained in the preceding three year period, outlining your roles and responsibilities related to assurance within this period.

**The annual fee and evidence of current AccountAbility membership:** We need you to pay the annual certification fee (please note that there is no additional fee for renewal). Because the fee you pay will be dependent on the grade we offer you after the renewal process, we do not ask you to pay the annual fee until after we have completed your renewal. We will write to you with results of the renewal and enclose the fee invoice and your new certificate. We will not renew your certification if you fail to maintain your AccountAbility membership during your 3 year certification period.

We will evaluate the information you provide against the renewal requirements listed below and make a certification decision. We will then write to you with the results. If you are successful, your details will be updated on the AccountAbility Register and you will be sent a new certificate. If you are unable to demonstrate sufficient, relevant CPD, or fail to meet the renewal requirements for any other reason, the assessment may result in the withdrawal of your certification or your certification being re-graded.

Please contact us if you need further advice on how to renew your certification.

## *Guidance on CPD Requirements*

The purpose of Continuous Professional Development (CPD) is to ensure that you are able to deliver best practice at all times and as such to ensure the credibility of this programme. The concept of CPD, and the value it contributes, is now recognised and accepted throughout all professional fields.

As part of the renewal of certification process, we require you to demonstrate that you have further developed your expertise and gained further practical experience in order to ensure that: you employ current best practice and your knowledge of relevant laws, regulations and procedures is current in order to ensure compliance.

We realise that there are many topics that will enhance your competence and that no single method for learning suits everyone. Therefore, we accept that CPD related to new developments in the field is acquired in ways that range from reading, self study, networking via training, conferences and workshops, to experience gained while undertaking research or best practice writing (See (1) below). Additionally, experience gained while undertaking relevant fieldwork is seen as a crucial part of CPD (See (2) below).

## *CPD Renewal Requirements*

For all grades:

You must have completed the CPD as outlined below for your grade during the 3-year period immediately prior to renewal of certification, focused on maintaining your awareness of new developments (1) and relevant work experience (2).

### *1. Relevant CPD related to new developments in the field of sustainability assurance*

Associate Practitioners must have completed at least 21 hours CPD

Practitioners must have completed at least 40 hours CPD

Lead Practitioners must have completed at least 80 hours CPD.

*The CPD hours are divided into 3 broad categories:*

**Unstructured;** where 3 hours are accepted as one CPD hour:

Distance and open learning study which is not assessed and does not lead to a qualification;

The reading of professional and technical journals, books and other publications,

Relevant aspects of on-the job training, where specific outcomes have been planned and identified,

Reading relevant material from AccountAbility and/or other sources,

Participation in standards development (i.e. wiki contributions, online discussion forums), AccountAbility's technical committees, and/or AccountAbility's webinars, are/is also accepted.

**Semi-structured;** where 2 hours are accepted as one CPD hour

Included in this category would be non-interactive lectures, talks, etc., informal professional body meetings of a more social nature (networking opportunities) the research, preparation and first delivery of lectures/courses, publishing articles and forms of open and distance learning that involve assessment and that result in the acquisition of a qualification.

**Structured;** where each hour is accepted as one CPD hour

Examples of this category would be interactive and highly participative training courses and seminars, professional body meetings with formal lectures, active participation in development of standards.

The range of activities that may be included within each category is extensive and the small number of examples above are intended

to provide broad guidance only. Most practitioners submit evidence of activities that include all 3 categories, but it is not a requirement that you do so.

## 2. Relevant CPD related to work experience

You must also demonstrate that you have gained relevant practical experience within the 3 years as outlined below:

**Associate Sustainability Assurance Practitioner:**  
No experience required.

**Certified Sustainability Assurance Practitioner:**

Involvement in at least 2 sustainability assurance assignments/ processes based on AA1000, which include the analysis and/or implementation of audit and accounting procedures in assurance.

**Lead Sustainability Assurance Practitioner:**

Leading teams in preparing assurance statements resulting from AA1000 sustainability assurance engagements conducted during the previous 3 years.

We need you to provide us with evidence that you have met the requirements, outlining your professional development activities (training, relevant work experience, assignments and comments from clients).

We have developed experience and CPD log forms for you to record your CPD. It is in your interests to provide us with CPD information in a clear, logical and easily understandable format.

## 8. Transition requirements to the new AA1000AS (2008) Standard

The AA1000 Assurance Standard, AA1000AS (2008), was launched on October 24, 2008. It supersedes AA1000AS (2003).

AA1000AS (2008) assurance provides a platform to align the non-financial aspects of sustainability with financial reporting and

assurance. It provides a means for assurance providers to go beyond mere verification of data, to evaluate the way reporting organisations manage sustainability, and to reflect that management and resulting performance in its assurance statements.

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AA1000AS (2008) assurance also provides a means to capture and place in context a wide range of other verification and certification schemes that deal with specific dimensions of sustainability such as those for greenhouse gas emissions, environmental management systems, sustainable forest management or fair trade labelling.

The information found in sustainability reporting provides the starting point for AA1000AS (2008) assurance, as sustainability reporting is designed to provide stakeholders with sufficient information to understand the sustainability performance of an organisation and to make informed decisions.

Use of AA1000AS (2003) is no longer recognised by AccountAbility and has been withdrawn.

## 9. How to Re-grade

You may wish to re-grade your certification to another grade if your role changes, for example, from implementing the AA1000 Assurance Standard to undertaking an assurance process. In order to do this, we need you to submit the following:

**Supporting evidence:** (educational qualifications, training course certificates, assurance processes undertaken etc.) demonstrating how you meet the competence criteria for the new grade you are applying for

**Personal Statement:** A brief summary (1,000 words) on your expertise and experience gained since the last certification was granted, outlining your roles and responsibilities related to assurance within the last 3 years and how you think you meet the competence criteria of the new grade

For the Lead Sustainability Assurance Practitioner grade:

A telephone interview is mandatory in order to determine your ability to make an informed professional judgment and you will be given adequate notice to arrange the interview.

For other grades:

A telephone interview is not mandatory, but may be necessary where sufficient evidence cannot be provided to meet the criteria for your grade. We will give adequate notice for you to arrange a telephone interview if one is required

Re-grade fee as appropriate and proof of current AccountAbility membership. Your certification will be withdrawn if you fail to maintain AccountAbility membership during the 3 year certification period.

If your application for re-grade is successful, we will write formally to you with an offer of certification to the new grade. There is no re-grade fee if you are re-graded as part of the (3 year) renewal of certification process. If you decide not to apply for re-grade in your initial certification period, we will inform you of

your re-grade requirements when we write to you approximately 3 months before the end of your certification period as part of your renewal process.

Please contact us if you need further advice on how to re-grade.

## 10. Other Information

### *The Certification Period*

When your application is successful we award certification for a period of 3 years. This period is referred to as the 'certification period'. At the end of each certification period we require you to renew your certification. If you are successful at renewal, we award you certification for a further 3 year certification period.

During the certification period, you may maintain certification at the end of the first and second years by payment of the annual certification fee and by compliance with the Code of Practice (see Appendix II). We do not require you to submit other documentation at the end of year 1 and 2. At the end of the third year, you are required to complete the renewal of certification process.

### *Confidentiality*

AccountAbility employees and subcontractors are bound by confidentiality agreements (complying with the UK Data Protection Act) and all information and materials supplied as part of your application will be treated in the strictest of confidence. However, AccountAbility reserves the right to publish relevant details of each Certified Practitioner.

### *Online Register*

Details of all certified practitioners are available via the [online register](#).

### *Scope of Certification*

The scope of certification is general, i.e. it does not include nor does it require any industry sector specific competence. However, as a certified Practitioner, you may disclose up to 6 geographic regions within which you have acquired experience. These details are self-declared and are therefore outside the scope of certification. However, AccountAbility may undertake random checks and false declarations will be interpreted as breach of

the Code of Practice as set out in Appendix II, and your certification may be withdrawn.

### *Post Nominal Letters*

After you are granted certification, you can choose to carry the appropriate letters behind your name as follows.

-Associate Sustainability Assurance Practitioner: ACSAP

-Sustainability Assurance Practitioner: CSAP

-Lead Sustainability Assurance Practitioner: CLSAP

(For example, Mr A Smith, CSAP)

### *Legal Status*

The certification and re-grading of practitioners by AccountAbility and all activities associated with the administration of the register is governed in accordance with English law and is subject to the exclusive jurisdiction of the English Courts.

### *Enforcement of Certification*

We retain the right to withdraw your certification if you do not continue to meet the certification criteria or fail to maintain your membership with AccountAbility during the 3 year certification period.

Similarly, we reserve the right to undertake action against your certification if we find you have acted contrary to the Code of Practice as set out in Appendix II of this document.

Please note that AccountAbility accepts formal complaints against Certified Practitioners from any party, including the contracting organisation, civil society and governmental bodies etc., relating to breaches of the Code of Practice. If you wish to invoke such a process please contact the CSAP Certification Manager at [standards@accountability.org](mailto:standards@accountability.org) for further information.

AccountAbility will process all complaints according to our established complaints

procedure. If certification is suspended or withdrawn the practitioner's details will be removed from the register.

### *Declaration of Complaints*

We need you to tell us about any complaints made against your professional conduct. It is important that we know of any complaints. We will investigate all instances of complaints. If complaints are made against your conduct and you do not declare them, the consequences will be far more serious and may result in suspension or withdrawal of your certification.

## Appendix I Glossary

### Assurance engagement

An engagement in which an assurance provider evaluates and expresses a conclusion on an organisation's public disclosure about its performance as well as underlying systems, data and processes against suitable criteria and standards in order to increase the credibility of the information for the intended audience (AA1000AS (2008)).

### Technical Evaluator

An appropriate practitioner with a recognised professional record that AccountAbility uses to evaluate applications for certification. The pool of technical evaluators includes a range of practitioners with competence over the 3 subject matter areas.

### Personal Statement

A personal statement (not exceeding 1,000 words) that provides information in response to the questions asked. See the application form for further guidance.

### Competency Framework

A matrix that will assist you in outlining your professional development relating to the experience and expertise focusing on the 3 Key Competency Areas.

## Appendix II- Code of Practice

Certification, particularly the non-Associate grades, reflects both the technical abilities of the practitioner and their underlying commitment to furthering sustainable development outcomes. Values associated with this latter commitment should deepen and reinforce professionalism and effectiveness.

All certified practitioners are required to agree to act in accordance with, and be bound by the following Code of Practice.

Certified Sustainability Assurance practitioners shall:

1. Exercise due care, diligence, honesty and objectivity in every assurance engagement. In particular, they shall not endorse information supplied by a client or other organisation unless reasonable steps have been taken to establish its validity according to accepted principles of engagement and associated criteria. No declaration or assertion should be included in an Assurance Statement that the practitioner believes to be untrue, or which is or may be misleading due to the omission of material information.
2. Consider and apply when professionally appropriate the AA1000 AccountAbility Principles that secure integrity of the assurance engagement.
3. Fully disclose their competencies, and acknowledge limitations by not participating in any assurance contract, assignment or other duties that he/ she knows is beyond their professional capability. Certified practitioners shall upon reasonable request provide transparent, independent and accurate information about their individual key competencies to their employers, or client organisations and interested stakeholders.
4. Be supported by a person or persons, when necessary, with the necessary (technical) language skill in order to conduct the work.
5. Avoid any undue influence being exerted on professional independence and objectivity through an actual or potential conflict of interest with the client organisation. Certified practitioners shall make all relevant parties, including their employers, aware where such a conflict exist or may arise.

Following the requirements set out in the AA1000AS (2008) , it is a precondition of any external assurance assignment that individual practitioners and their employers make:

6. A Statement of Independence from their client, including an account of any recent, on-going or potential financial, commercial or personal relationship.
7. A Statement of Impartiality with respect to stakeholder interests, including an account of any recent, on-going or potential financial, commercial or personal relationship with the organisation's stakeholders.
8. Not accept any inducement, commission, discount or any other favour from anyone connected to their clients (external or internal) or their stakeholders, nor knowingly allow personnel for whom you are responsible to do so.
9. Continually strive for improvement in the proficiency, effectiveness and quality of the assurance profession through sharing experience and expertise with colleagues and candidates wishing to enter the profession.
10. Behave in a manner that peers and society at large would view as professional and appropriate.
11. Not act intentionally in a manner that would damage the reputation, interest or credibility of AccountAbility. Differences of opinion pertaining to the programme and its underlying standards, or the implementation of either, should be dealt with appropriately and in a professional manner.

12. Enhance personal competence by meeting the continuing professional development criteria of the certificated assurance practitioner programme.
13. Maintain a written log of all related assurance work completed and training undertaken, which should be available to support applications for renewals and re-grades and upon reasonable request.
14. Ensure that he/ she fully understand the expectations of the engaging organisation in order to avoid false trust based on an expectation gap.
15. Ensure that the necessary resources are allocated in order to perform the assurance engagement.
16. Ensure that the necessary knowledge, skills and competencies are available in relation to the subject matter and the complexity of the organisation. This may require a multidisciplinary team.
17. Co-operate fully in any formal enquiry procedure in the event of any alleged breach of this code.

## Appendix III – Sustainability Assurance Competency Framework

### Associate Sustainability Assurance Practitioner (ACSAP) Grade

Competency Areas	Certification Criteria
	Qualification / Training
<p><b>Assurance:</b></p> <p>Basic understanding of the AccountAbility Principles presented in AA1000AP (2008), the purpose of sustainability reporting and assurance and of what is required to evaluate adherence to the AA1000AP (2008) AccountAbility Principles and the quality of sustainability performance information using the AA1000 Assurance Standard (2008).</p> <p>Basic understanding of the type and level of assurance required by the organisation and its stakeholders.</p> <p>Audit procedures and techniques:</p> <p>Basic understanding of what is required to audit systems, processes, internal controls, and information, and to apply and embed internal and external audit principles, procedures and techniques, including a variety of audit methods as appropriate.</p> <p>Ability to support the planning and implementation of an assurance engagement relevant to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• the size and complexity of the organisation;</li> <li>• the scope of the assurance engagement;</li> <li>• the organisation’s material issues; and</li> <li>• the organisation’s stakeholders.</li> </ul> <p>Ability to support the formulation of an appropriate assurance statement (including findings, opinions, conclusions and recommendations).</p> <p>Accounting procedures and techniques/data assurance:</p> <p>Basic understanding of what is required to evaluate the quality of publicly disclosed information of sustainability performance (including the reliability and accuracy of that information).</p>	<p>1. Relevant Assurance Training (1 day minimum), covering the significant elements of the AccountAbility Principles and sustainability reporting and assurance including courses acknowledged by the AccountAbility training provider certification programme or equivalent.</p> <p>Evidence: ‘Attendance’ certificate, course curriculum (including master or bachelor classes), and training institution</p> <p>2. One of:</p> <p>A financial accounting qualification awarded by established institutes such as ACCA or equivalent</p> <p>Evidence: ‘Certification’ certificate</p> <p>Or</p> <p>A management systems auditor qualification, including any grade of IRCA auditor certification, IEMA auditor certification or equivalent.</p> <p>Evidence: ‘Certification’ card</p> <p>Or</p> <p>Relevant training focusing on the auditing and accounting requirements as referred to within the left column, including courses acknowledged by the AccountAbility training provider certification programme.</p> <p>Evidence: ‘Attendance’ certificate, course curriculum (including master or bachelor classes), and training Institution</p> <p>Or</p> <p>Relevant on-the-job training at work covering the intent and application of accounting/data system review principles/ auditing principles, procedures and techniques relating to economic and financial, social and environmental issues.</p> <p>Evidence: Application form outlining your role and performance and (employer) reference No experience required.</p>

<p><b>Stakeholder engagement:</b></p> <p>Basic understanding of stakeholder engagement and the AA1000 Stakeholder Engagement Standard, as well as what is required to evaluate stakeholder engagement strategies and practices and to link these practices to the principle of inclusivity.</p>	<p>3. Relevant training (1 day minimum) on stakeholder engagement including courses acknowledged by the AccountAbility training provider certification programme or equivalent.</p> <p>Evidence: 'Attendance' certificate, course curriculum (including master or bachelor classes), and training Institution. No experience required.</p>
<p><b>Sustainable development:</b></p> <p>Basic understanding of sustainable development, i.e. reasonable balance of knowledge encompassing:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Social and ethical issues</li> <li>•Environmental issues</li> <li>•Economic and financial issues</li> </ul>	<p>4. Brief statement outlining your understanding of sustainable development.</p> <p>Evidence: Personal statement (see Appendix I) and information on any formal training covering sustainable development ('attendance' certificates, including master courses or equivalents)</p> <p>No experience required.</p>

*Certified Sustainability Assurance Practitioner (CSAP) grade*

Competency Area	Qualification Criteria	
	Qualification / Training & Experience Route	Experience Route
<p><b>Assurance:</b></p> <p>Good understanding of the AccountAbility Principles presented in AA1000AP (2008), the purpose of sustainability reporting and assurance and of what is required to evaluate adherence to the AA1000AP (2008) AccountAbility Principles and the quality of sustainability performance information using the AA1000 Assurance Standard (2008).</p> <p>Good understanding of the type and level of assurance required by the organisation and its stakeholders.</p> <p>Audit procedures and techniques:</p> <p>Good understanding of what is required and the ability to audit systems, processes, internal controls, and information, and to apply and embed internal and external audit principles, procedures and techniques, including a variety of audit methods as appropriate.</p> <p>Ability to support the planning and implementation of an assurance engagement relevant to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•the size and complexity of the organisation</li> <li>• the scope of the assurance engagement;</li> <li>• the organisation’s material issues; and</li> <li>• the organisations stakeholders.</li> </ul> <p>Ability to support the formulation of an appropriate assurance statement</p>	<p>1. Relevant Reporting and Assurance Training (2 day minimum), covering the significant elements of sustainability reporting and assurance including courses acknowledged by the AccountAbility training provider certification programme or equivalent.</p> <p>Evidence: ‘attendance’ certificate, course curriculum (including master or bachelor classes), and training institution</p> <p>2. At least 1 year relevant experience with regards to sustainability assurance (including experience using AA1000 AS), which includes the analysis and/or implementation of audit and accounting procedures and techniques in assurance.</p> <p>Evidence: Application form outlining your role and performance and (client &amp; employer) reference</p> <p>3. One of: A financial accounting qualification awarded by established institutes such as ACCA or equivalent</p> <p>Evidence: ‘Certification’ certificate</p> <p>Or</p> <p>A management systems auditor qualification, including any grade of IRCA auditor certification, IEMA auditor certification or equivalent.</p> <p>Evidence: ‘Certification’ certificate</p> <p>Or</p> <p>Relevant training focusing both on the auditing and accounting requirements as referred to within the left column, including courses acknowledged by the AccountAbility training provider certification programme (see <a href="http://www.accountability.org">www.accountability.org</a>) or equivalent.</p> <p>Evidence: ‘Attendance’ certificate (including master or bachelor classes), course curriculum and training institution</p>	<p>As an alternative to 1, 2 &amp; 3:</p> <p>At least 3 years relevant experience with regards to sustainability assurance (including experience using AA1000AS), which includes the analysis and/or implementation of audit and accounting procedures and techniques in assurance.</p> <p>Evidence: Application form outlining your role and performance and (Client &amp; employer) reference</p>

<p>(including findings, opinions, conclusions and recommendations).</p> <p>Accounting procedures and techniques/data assurance:</p> <p>Good understanding of what is required and the ability to evaluate the quality of publicly disclosed information of sustainability performance (including the reliability and accuracy of that information).</p> <p>Accounting procedures and techniques/data assurance:</p> <p>Good understanding of what is required and the ability to evaluate the quality of publicly disclosed information of sustainability performance (including the reliability and accuracy of that information).</p>	<p>Or</p> <p>Relevant on-the-job training at work covering the intent and application of accounting/data system review principles/ auditing principles, procedures and techniques relating to economic and financial, social and environmental issues.</p> <p>Evidence: Application form outlining your role and performance</p>	
<p><b>Stakeholder engagement:</b></p> <p>Good understanding of stakeholder engagement and the AA1000 Stakeholder Engagement Standard, as well as what is required and the ability to evaluate stakeholder engagement strategies and practices and to link these practices to the principle of inclusivity..</p>	<p>4. Relevant training (1 day minimum) on stakeholder engagement covering the questions 'why', 'how' and 'so what' including courses acknowledged by the AccountAbility training provider certification programme or equivalent.</p> <p>Evidence: 'Attendance' certificate, course curriculum (including master or bachelor classes), and training institution</p> <p>5. At least 1 year relevant experience, which includes the analysis and/or integration of stakeholder engagement in assurance engagements or other experiences based on the AA1000 SES.</p> <p>Evidence: Application form outlining your role and performance and (client &amp; employer) reference</p>	<p>As an alternative to 4 &amp; 5:</p> <p>At least 2 years relevant experience, which includes the analysis and/or implementation of stakeholder engagement in assurance or other experiences based on the AA1000 SES</p> <p>Evidence: Application form outlining your role and performance and (Client &amp; employer) reference</p>
<p><b>Sustainable development:</b></p> <p>Good understanding of Sustainability development, i.e. reasonable balance of skills encompassing</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Social and ethical issues;</li> <li>• Environmental issues; and</li> </ul>	<p>6. Expertise in at least 2 of the 3 dimensions of sustainability development through training, attendance of workshops etc. (at least 5 days in the last 3 years in total)</p> <p>Evidence: 'Attendance' certificate, course curriculum (including master or bachelor classes), and training institution</p>	<p>As an alternative to 6, 7 &amp; 8:</p> <p>At least 2 years relevant experience across at least 2 of the 3 domains of sustainability development.</p>

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Economic and financial issues.</li> </ul>	<p>7. At least 1 year relevant experience across at least 2 areas of the 3 areas of sustainability development.</p> <p>Evidence: Application form outlining your role and performance and (Client &amp; employer) reference</p> <p>8. Personal statement outlining your understanding of sustainability development. (see Appendix I)</p> <p>Evidence: Personal statement</p>	<p>Evidence: Application form outlining your role and performance and (Client &amp; employer) reference</p> <p>and</p> <p>Personal statement outlining your understanding of sustainability development. (see Appendix I)</p> <p>Evidence: Personal statement</p>
<p>Demonstrable ability to make informed professional judgment on the quality and robustness of a sustainability assurance process, of an organisation's sustainability performance reporting, and of an organisation's stakeholder engagement.</p>	<p>9. Optional interview to evaluate your ability to apply informed professional judgment on an organisation's sustainability performance</p>	<p>Optional interview to evaluate your ability to apply informed professional judgment on an organisation's sustainability performance.</p>

*Lead Certified Sustainability Assurance Practitioner (LCSAP) Grade*

Competency Area	Qualification Criteria	
	Qualification / Training & Experience Route	Experience Route
<p><b>Assurance:</b></p> <p>Well established understanding of the AccountAbility Principles presented in AA1000AP (2008), the purpose of sustainability reporting and assurance and of what is required to evaluate adherence to the AA1000AP (2008) AccountAbility Principles and the quality of sustainability performance information using the AA1000 Assurance Standard (2008).</p> <p>Well-established ability to apply the AA1000 Assurance Standard (2008).</p> <p>Well-established understanding of the type and level of assurance required by the organisation and its stakeholders.</p> <p>Ability to lead a multi-disciplinary team and take the lead in preparing assurance statements.</p> <p>Audit procedures and techniques:</p> <p>Well established understanding of what is required and the ability to audit systems, processes, internal controls, and information, and to apply and embed internal and external audit principles, procedures and techniques, including a variety of audit methods as appropriate.</p> <p>Ability to plan and implement an assurance engagement relevant to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•the size and complexity of the organisation</li> <li>•the scope of the assurance engagement</li> </ul>	<p>1. Relevant Assurance Training (3 day minimum), covering the significant elements of sustainability assurance including courses acknowledged by the AccountAbility training provider certification programme or equivalent.</p> <p>Evidence: 'Attendance' certificate, course curriculum (including master or bachelor classes), and training institution</p> <p>2. At least 3 years relevant experience leading a multi-disciplinary team in an AA1000 Assurance Assignment, which includes the analysis and/or implementation of audit and accounting procedures and techniques in assurance.</p> <p>3. At least one year's experience in taking the lead role in preparing Assurance Statements.</p> <p>Evidence: Application form outlining your role and performance and (Client &amp; employer) reference</p> <p>4. One of:</p> <p>A financial accounting qualification awarded by established institutes such as ACCA or equivalent</p> <p>Evidence: 'Certification' certificate</p> <p>Or</p> <p>A management systems lead auditor qualification, including any grade of IRCA auditor certification, IEMA auditor certification or equivalent.</p> <p>Evidence: 'Certification' certificate</p> <p>Or</p>	<p>As an alternative to 1, 2, 3 &amp; 4:</p> <p>At least 4 years relevant experience leading a multi-disciplinary team in an AA1000 Assurance Assignment, which includes the analysis and/or implementation of audit and accounting procedures and techniques in assurance.</p> <p>And,</p> <p>At least 2 year's experience in taking the lead role in preparing Assurance Statements.</p> <p>Evidence: Application form outlining your role and performance and (Client &amp; employer) reference</p>

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•the organisation’s material issues and</li> <li>•the organisations stakeholders.</li> </ul> <p>Ability to lead the formulation of an appropriate assurance statement (including findings, opinions, conclusions and recommendations).</p> <p>Accounting procedures and techniques/Data assurance:</p> <p>Well-established understanding of what is required and the ability to evaluate the quality of publicly disclosed information of sustainability performance (including the reliability and accuracy of that information).</p>	<p>Relevant training focusing both on the auditing and accounting requirements as referred to within the left column, including courses acknowledged by the AccountAbility training provider certification programme (see <a href="http://www.accountability.org">www.accountability.org</a>) or equivalent.</p> <p>Evidence: ‘Attendance’ certificate (including master or bachelor classes), course curriculum and training institution</p> <p>Or</p> <p>Relevant on-the-job training at work covering the intent and application of accounting/data system review principles/auditing principles, procedures and techniques relating to economic and financial, social and environmental issues.</p> <p>Evidence: Application form outlining your role and performance.</p>	
<p><b>Stakeholder engagement:</b></p> <p>Well-established understanding of stakeholder engagement and the AA1000 Stakeholder Engagement Standard, as well as what is required and the ability to evaluate stakeholder engagement strategies and practices and to link these practices to the principle of inclusivity.</p>	<p>5. Relevant training (1 day minimum) on stakeholder engagement including courses acknowledged by the AccountAbility training provider certification programme or equivalent.</p> <p>Evidence: ‘Attendance’ certificate, course curriculum (including master or bachelor classes), and training institution</p> <p>6. At least 3 years relevant experience, which includes the analysis and/or implementation of stakeholder engagement in assurance.</p> <p>Evidence: Application form outlining your role &amp; performance and (Client &amp; employer) reference</p>	<p>As an alternative to 5 &amp; 6:</p> <p>At least 4 years relevant experience, which includes the analysis and/or implementation of stakeholder engagement in assurance.</p> <p>Evidence: Application form outlining your role &amp; performance and (Client &amp; employer) reference.</p>
<p><b>Sustainable development:</b></p> <p>Well-established understanding of sustainability development, encompassing:</p>	<p>7. Expertise in all 3 dimensions of sustainability development through training, attendance of workshops etc. (at least 7 days in the last 3 years in total)</p>	<p>As an alternative to 7, 8 &amp; 9:</p> <p>At least 4 years relevant experience across the three</p>

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Social and ethical issues;</li> <li>• Environmental issues; and</li> <li>• Economic and financial issues.</li> </ul>	<p>Evidence: 'Attendance' certificate, course curriculum (including master or bachelor classes), and training institution</p> <p>8. At least 3 years relevant experience across the three areas of sustainability development.</p> <p>Evidence: Application form outlining your role and performance and (Client &amp; employer) reference</p> <p>9. Personal statement outlining your understanding of sustainability development. (see Appendix I)</p> <p>Evidence: Personal statement</p>	<p>areas of sustainability development.</p> <p>Evidence: Application form outlining your role and performance and (Client &amp; employer) reference</p> <p>and,</p> <p>Personal statement outlining your understanding of sustainability development.</p> <p>Evidence: Personal statement</p>
<p>Demonstrable ability to make informed professional judgment on the quality and robustness of a sustainability assurance process, of an organisation's sustainability performance reporting, and of an organisation's stakeholder engagement.</p>	<p>10. Mandatory interview to evaluate your ability to apply informed professional judgment on an organisation's sustainability performance.</p>	<p>Mandatory interview to evaluate your ability to apply informed professional judgment on an organisation's sustainability performance.</p>