

PART I – The GFSI Benchmarking Process

The Global Food Safety Initiative aims to improve food safety and business efficiency. GFSI's work in benchmarking and harmonisation of Professional Recognition Programmes for food safety auditors fosters mutual acceptance of those auditors across the Certification and Food industries. This reduces inefficiencies from duplication of verification of auditor competences, and facilitates access to the profession through a professional framework.

The GFSI Benchmarking Requirements for Professional Recognition Programmes are built through consensus of experts; they form a shared and widely accepted understanding of what constitutes a robust food safety Professional Recognition programme.

The GFSI Benchmarking Requirements are furthermore submitted to extensive public consultation during their development; this ensures a wide review of the proposed approach and fosters the aforementioned mutual acceptance.

Part I of the GFSI Benchmarking Requirements specifies the GFSI Benchmarking Process, the method for the recognition of food safety Professional Recognition Programmes. The objective of this document is to give a clear insight into this process. Further details may be provided on request and during the application process.

The steps and procedures detailed in this document ensure that the GFSI Benchmarking Process is:

- carried out in an impartial and transparent manner by a technically competent Benchmarking Leader under the supervision of the GFSI Technical Manager,
- transparent and open to stakeholder scrutiny,
- reviewed, maintained and updated to ensure consistency and integrity.

A Professional Recognition Programme may have a major focus or a historical focus other than those related to food safety professionals. Only those specified requirements in the Professional Recognition Programme relating to food safety auditors shall be assessed for the purpose of GFSI recognition.

GFSI has defined in a Glossary of terms used in the GFSI Benchmarking Requirements. Part IV, the glossary, is an integrated part of the GFSI Benchmarking Requirements and definitions shall be applied accordingly in GFSI-recognised Professional Recognition Programmes.

For further information and support: gfsibm@theconsumergoodsforum.com.

Section 1: Eligibility Criteria

The Applicant is required to satisfy the below eligibility criteria:

- the Professional Recognition Body is a legal entity,
- the Professional Recognition Body is not governed or owned by a public or governmental entity,
- The Professional Recognition Body is independent from any GFSI certification and/ or conformity assessment and/ or Certification Programme Owner activities,
- there is endorsement from a minimum of three organisations representing the sector (generic and/ or food safety specific),
- The Professional Recognition Body is accredited to ISO/ IEC 17024 by an Accreditation Body members of the International Accreditation Forum (IAF) and signatory to the Multilateral Recognition Arrangement (MLA),
- the Professional Recognition Body has in place the evidence of professional recognition for at least 10 food safety auditors. This evidence shall be related to the Professional Recognition Programme concerned by the

- application. These certificates shall be issued against the version of Professional Recognition Programme concerned by the application,
- the Professional Recognition Programme has been operational for a minimum of 12 months prior to the date of application,
 - the Professional Recognition Body is not undergoing any significant changes,
 - the Professional Recognition Body does not have any practices deemed as restricting access to markets,
 - the Professional Recognition Body has undertaken a self-assessment to validate that it is in alignment with the GFSI Benchmarking Requirements.

Application Options

Professional Recognition Bodies shall apply for **full benchmarking** if the Professional Recognition Programme in the application has:

- not previously undergone benchmarking by GFSI,
- been assessed previously, but the application was withdrawn without completing the benchmarking process (re-submission),
- has successfully undergone benchmarking against a previous version of the GFSI Benchmarking Requirements (re-benchmarking),
- been previously recognised by GFSI but had their recognition withdrawn.

Those Professional Recognition Bodies shall submit a fully completed application form with supporting evidence of compliance to the GFSI eligibility criteria.

If they wish to maintain their recognition status, GFSI-recognised Professional Recognition Programmes shall apply for re-assessment against the new version of the GFSI Benchmarking Requirements within 12 months of its date of publication. The GFSI Steering Committee has the authority to extend this period under special circumstances.

Professional Recognition Bodies shall apply for **continued recognition** if the Professional Recognition Programme in the application is:

- recognised by GFSI against the current version of the GFSI Benchmarking Requirements but will be subjected to changes which could compromise its GFSI Recognition, such as changes to its governance or ownership, its management system, or normative documents,
- subject to suspension of their GFSI recognition.

Those Professional Recognition Bodies shall confirm in writing to the GFSI Technical Manager no less than 28 days before any changes to the Professional Recognition Programme are intended to become effective:

- their application for continued recognition,
- the significant changes introduced to the Professional Recognition Programme, including those changes that would address the cause of suspension of the GFSI recognition if applicable.

Upon receipt of the proposed changes to the Professional Recognition Programme, The GFSI Technical Manager and GFSI Director shall decide within 28 days on the type of actions required to maintain recognition based on the details of the changes introduced to the Professional Recognition Programme.

The GFSI Benchmarking Methodology

Who is involved in the GFSI Benchmarking Process?

GFSI Technical Manager

The GFSI Technical Manager is responsible for safeguarding the GFSI Benchmarking Process. The Technical Manager appoints the Benchmark Leader to a Professional Recognition Programme and supervises all the benchmarking activities and communication with the Professional Recognition Body. The GFSI Technical Manager ensures training and calibration of the Benchmark Leaders.

Benchmark Leader

The Benchmark Leader is selected and approved by the GFSI Technical Manager in order to ascertain whether a Professional Recognition Programme conforms with the GFSI Benchmarking Requirements.

The Benchmark Leader reports to the GFSI Technical Manager; they perform the assessment of the Professional Recognition Programme against the GFSI Benchmarking Requirements and give their recommendation whether to recognise a Professional Recognition Programme based on the result of their assessment.

All Benchmarking Leaders undergo the same initial training and annual calibration activities to maintain alignment of their evaluation approaches. A list of all GFSI-approved Benchmark Leaders is available from GFSI upon request.

GFSI Director

The GFSI Director is accountable for the compliance to the GFSI Benchmarking Process. In particular, they oversee any necessary sanctioning activities. They may reassign the Benchmark Leader at any time, at their discretion, if it is deemed necessary to do so.

GFSI Steering Committee

The GFSI Steering Committee makes a final decision on GFSI recognition of the Professional Recognition Programme, based on the recommendation of the Benchmark Leader and the GFSI Technical Manager. The GFSI Steering Committee also makes final decisions on any suspensions or withdrawals of GFSI recognition, and answer to any appeals.

How much time does the GFSI Benchmarking Process take to complete?

The GFSI Benchmarking Process must be completed in a maximum of 12 months from the date GFSI accepts an application. The GFSI Steering Committee has the authority to extend this time.

Demonstrating alignment and Objective Evidence

The GFSI Benchmarking Process is a pass / fail benchmark: A key element is either met or not met. In order to achieve GFSI-recognition, a Professional Recognition Programme shall demonstrate alignment with each key element of the GFSI Benchmarking Requirements. To do so, the Professional Recognition Body shall provide objective evidence that the Professional Recognition Programme meets the GFSI Benchmarking Requirements.

The Key Procedural Steps

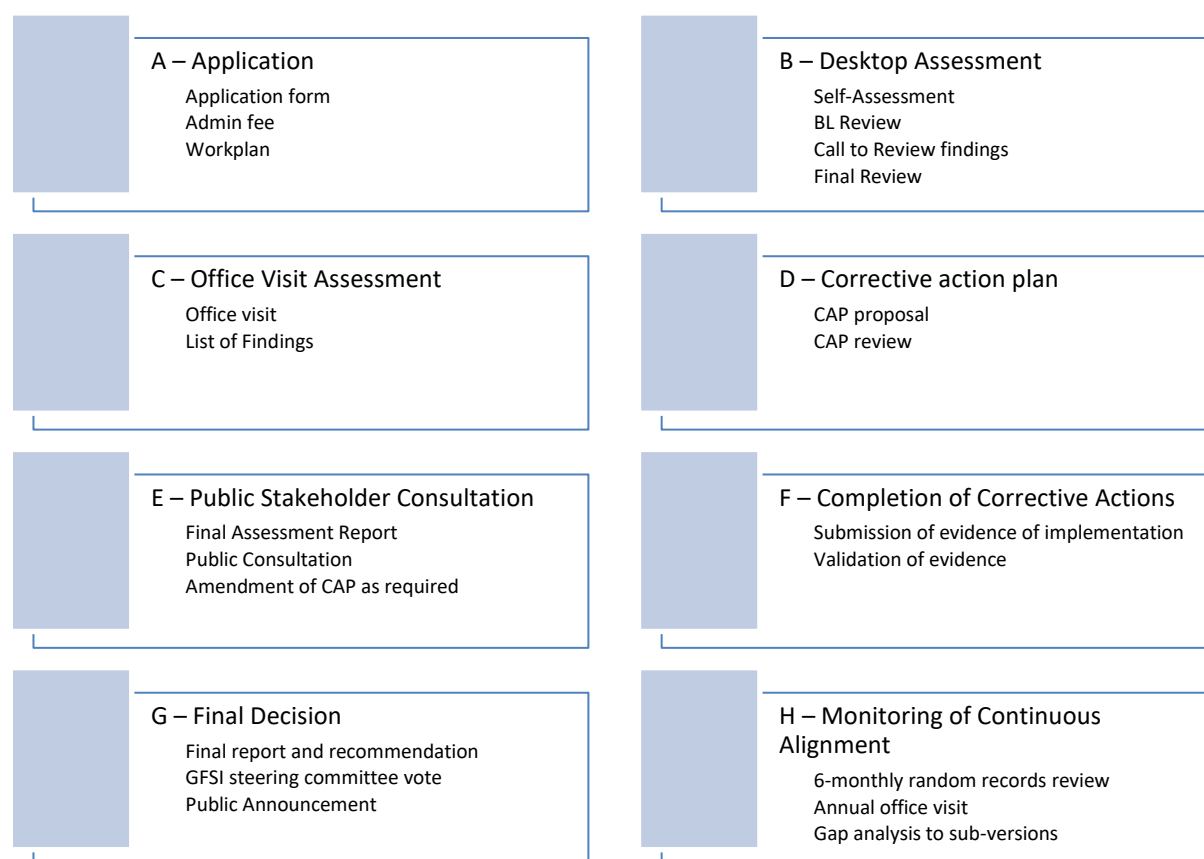
The GFSI Benchmarking Process shall be carried out in accordance with the following key procedural steps:

1. Application: this step confirms that the applicant Professional Recognition Body satisfies the GFSI eligibility criteria and ensures a workplan is agreed,
2. Desktop Review: this step focuses on an assessment of the content of a Professional Recognition Programme's normative documents and governance rules against Part II of the GFSI Benchmarking Requirements,
3. Office Visit: this step focuses on assessing the Professional Recognition Body's compliance to their governance rules through a record review at their office. It focuses on confirming alignment to Part II of the GFSI Benchmarking Requirements,
4. Corrective Action Plan: this step ensures a corrective action plan is agreed and validated to address any non-alignments to the GFSI Benchmarking Requirements,

5. **Public Stakeholder Consultation:** this step ensures that the GFSI Benchmarking Process is transparent and submitted to the scrutiny of GFSI and the Professional Recognition Body's stakeholders,
6. **Completion of Corrective Actions:** this step ensures verification that the planned corrective actions to address any non-conformities are fully implemented in the Professional Recognition Programme,
7. **GFSI Steering Committee final decision and communication:** this step concludes the assessment of the Professional Recognition Programme and ensures communication of the result of this assessment to GFSI and the Professional Recognition Body's stakeholders,
8. **Monitoring of Continued Alignment:** this step ensures that the Professional Recognition Body is monitored regularly and continues to comply with the GFSI Benchmarking Requirements.

Those steps are summarised in table 2.

Table 2: the GFSI Benchmarking Process



APPLICATION

Any Professional Recognition Body may apply for assessment via the GFSI website and email. The Professional Recognition Body may find an Application Form including detailed guidance for its completion on the GFSI website. The Professional Recognition Body completes the form and send it to GFSI with all required supporting documents providing evidence that the Professional Recognition Body satisfies the GFSI Eligibility Criteria.

The GFSI Technical Manager reviews the application. The GFSI Technical Manager reserves the right to reject or refer an application back to the Professional Recognition Body if the quality of the application is poor.

A Professional Recognition Body is permitted to lodge multiple benchmarking applications with GFSI but is only permitted to submit one application for the same Professional Recognition Programme within a 12-month period, if the initial application is deemed unsuccessful.

The GFSI Technical Manager informs the Professional Recognition Body within 2 weeks of receiving the application if it is accepted or rejected.

If the application is rejected, reasons for this decision are clearly detailed.

If the application is accepted, the GFSI Technical Manager appoints a Benchmark Leader for the Professional Recognition Programme assessment:

- A Benchmark Leader may perform the benchmarking activities of a given Professional Recognition Programme for a maximum period of three years,
- The Benchmark Leader profile and current activities outside their contract with GFSI is reviewed to ensure there is no potential conflict of interest or risk to impartiality,
- The Technical Manager may assign additional Benchmarking Leaders to ensure that the assessment takes place within the desired timeframe; this is done with the written consent of the Professional Recognition Body.

NB: A Conflict of Interest, or the appearance of a conflict, can arise whenever a transaction, or an action, undertaken in the framework of the Benchmark Leader's services to GFSI, conflicts with the personal interests, financial or otherwise, of that of the Benchmark Leader.

The GFSI Technical Manager informs the Professional Recognition Body of this appointment in writing. Upon request from the Professional Recognition Body, additional impartiality or confidentiality agreements may be signed between GFSI and the Benchmark Leader.

The Professional Recognition Body agrees the work plan (appendix 1) of activities and key dates with the Benchmark Leader and the GFSI Technical Manager.

In the year prior to the publication of a new version of the GFSI Benchmarking Requirements, no applications for full benchmarking are accepted. A notice is displayed on the GFSI website to indicate the starting date of this one-year period.

DESKTOP REVIEW

The Professional Recognition Body Fills out the Self-Assessment forms.

The objective of the self-assessment is to allow the Professional Recognition Body to demonstrate that the Professional Recognition Programme includes all the key elements listed in the GFSI Benchmarking Requirements.

GFSI provides the self-assessment forms. The Professional Recognition Body completes those forms with their own assessment of their alignment to the GFSI Benchmarking Requirements as well as clear and precise justification against each key element, including the exact reference to the document, page and clause addressing each key element. The Professional Recognition Body sends the completed self-assessment forms as well as the referenced documents sent to the Benchmark Leader for review, and to the GFSI Technical Manager for information.

The Benchmark Leader performs a preliminary desktop review.

The Benchmark Leader reviews the evidence provided by the Professional Recognition Body for each GFSI key element, to ensure it satisfies the GFSI Benchmarking Requirements.

The Benchmark Leader takes note of any key elements where additional information is needed and / or where they do not agree with the self-assessment from the Professional Recognition Body. These notes must include comprehensive

explanations. The Benchmark Leader sends All these findings to the Professional Recognition Body in writing for consideration, and to the GFSI Technical Manager for review.

In a conference call, the Benchmark Leader exchanges their detailed findings with the Professional Recognition Body.

This gives the Professional Recognition Body an opportunity to further clarify and complete their evidence. It also gives greater insight into what additional information and amendment to the self-assessment forms the Benchmark Leader requires. During the conference call, a timeframe is agreed to complete any corrections of the self-assessment forms and the workplan is reviewed accordingly.

The Professional Recognition Body Updates (where applicable) and Resends Final Self- Assessment Forms

Within the agreed timeframe, the Professional Recognition Body sends updated self-assessment forms with any necessary additional information. In order to limit a possible back-and-forth exchange of information, the Professional Recognition Body will be required to provide the requested information and / or adjustments in the final self-assessment. The final version of the self-assessment forms must be complete and validated by the Benchmark Leader before progressing to the next step of the GFSI Benchmarking Process.

The Benchmark Leader may recommend at this point that the process moves to the final recognition recommendation:

- if the desktop review highlights that the Professional Recognition Programme requires significant changes to align to the Benchmarking Requirements,
- if the deadline of the process does not allow for an office visit and a public consultation.

In such situations, the GFSI Technical Manager reviews the recommendation from the Benchmark Leader and agrees the next steps with the Professional Recognition Body.

OFFICE VISIT

The Benchmark Leader and the Professional Recognition Body will organise a visit to the nominated office of the Professional Recognition Body. The purpose of the visit is to check the implementation of the GFSI Benchmarking Requirements Part II by the Professional Recognition Body through a sample record review.

The Professional Recognition Body shall ensure that all resources including expert employees, documentation and records are available to support the visit.

The Benchmark Leader confirms an agenda and required documentation for review at least two weeks before the office visit. The GFSI Technical Manager may join the office visit as an observer and adviser to the Benchmark Leader, who will lead the visit.

The Benchmark Leader sums up all findings from the desktop review and the office visit on a report that is signed between the Professional Recognition Body and the Benchmark Leader before leaving the Professional Recognition Body's premises. A copy of this signed report is given to the Professional Recognition Body, while the Benchmark Leader and GFSI Technical Manager retain one for GFSI records.

CORRECTIVE ACTION PLAN

The Professional Recognition Body shall respond to the Benchmark Leader's report with a corrective action plan within two weeks of the office visit.

The Benchmark Leader reviews the corrective action plan and confirm whether it addresses the findings. Once the Benchmark Leader and the Professional Recognition Body agree a full corrective action plan addressing all findings, the Benchmark Leader sends their draft assessment report, including the proposed corrective action plan, to the GFSI Technical Manager for validation.

The GFSI Technical Manager reviews the assessment report and include their assessment of the Corrective Action plan to this report.

PUBLIC STAKEHOLDER CONSULTATION

The GFSI Technical Manager makes the self-assessment forms and the Benchmark Leader's assessment report available on the GFSI website for a stakeholder consultation of four weeks. The Professional Recognition Body is given the opportunity to approve the content of the published documents before it is made available in the public domain. The report is only put to consultation once agreed by all above parties. The GFSI Technical Manager collects any comments, observations or objections made by stakeholders and shares them with the Benchmark Leader and Professional Recognition Body, who shall address them. The Benchmark Leader and the GFSI Technical Manager evaluates every response from the Professional Recognition Body.

The GFSI Technical Manager ensures that those stakeholders who submitted comments during the stakeholder consultation receive feedback.

IMPLEMENTATION OF CORRECTIVE ACTIONS

The Professional Recognition Body shall complete all required corrective actions and provide evidence of implementation to the Benchmark Leader.

The Benchmark Leader validates the answers from the Professional Recognition Body to all comments and findings gathered during the assessment process, and the implementation of the corrective actions. Once the corrective actions are fully implemented, the Benchmark Leader sends the final assessment report including the completed corrective action plan and a recommendation for recognition to the GFSI Technical Manager for validation.

GFSI STEERING COMMITTEE FINAL DECISION AND COMMUNICATION

The GFSI Technical Manager informs the GFSI Steering Committee of the results of the Benchmark Leader's assessment and the recommendation for recognition in the form of a final summary report previously agreed upon with the Professional Recognition Body.

The GFSI Steering Committee comes to a decision based on the decision-making requirements laid in the GFSI Governance rules. Records shall be kept of the numbers of votes for, against and abstaining. The GFSI Technical Manager communicates the GFSI Steering Committee's decision in writing to the Professional Recognition Body, as soon as is practicable after the GFSI Steering Committee's decision.

In the event that the final decision of the GFSI Steering Committee is non-recognition, the reasons for the Steering Committee's decision shall be clearly documented and the GFSI Technical Manager shall make the Professional Recognition Body aware of the decision and those reasons. The Professional Recognition Body has the right to appeal against the GFSI Steering Committee's decision; the appeal shall be undertaken in accordance with the procedures specified in this document (see section "sanctioning").

In the event of recognition by the GFSI Steering Committee, the GFSI Technical Manager and the Professional Recognition body agree on a GFSI news release confirming this decision. The Professional Recognition body will be expected to issue a similar news release. The timing of these announcements is agreed on by the GFSI Technical Manager and the Professional Recognition body.

The GFSI Technical Manager will ensure that the GFSI website is updated with the new recognition status of the Professional Recognition body.

The GFSI Technical Manager will issue a statement of conformity to the Professional Recognition body.

ANNUAL MONITORING OF CONTINUED ALIGNMENT

The Global Food Safety Initiative has the responsibility to create a transparent and level playing field for all Professional Recognition bodies undergoing benchmarking against the GFSI Benchmarking Requirements. In order to ensure that recognised Professional Recognition bodies have implemented all the necessary controls, GFSI shall carry out an annual monitoring of continued alignment.

The execution of this monitoring is managed by the Benchmark Leader under the supervision of the GFSI Technical Manager in order to ensure that the appropriate confidentiality is in place throughout the process.

The annual monitoring of continued alignment consists of four types of activities:

1. Random record review — twice a year,
2. Professional Recognition body office audit — once a year,
3. Gap analysis against any additions introduced to the GFSI Benchmarking Requirements with the publication of sub-versions,
4. Complaint investigation- incident driven.

Content of the Random Record Reviews

Twice a year, the Benchmark Leader remotely selects at least five random registered auditors and sends the Professional Recognition body a list of objective evidence and files related to these auditors to verify alignment to the GFSI Benchmarking Requirements.

The Benchmark Leader may increase the number of selected auditors if:

- 5 samples do not allow for a representative sampling of the Professional Recognition body's number of auditors
- Authenticated complaints (see complaint investigation) or results of previous assessments raise concerns over the continued alignment of the Professional Recognition Programme to the GFSI Benchmarking Requirements.

The Professional Recognition Body must submit the requested records within two weeks of the Benchmark Leader's request. The Professional Recognition Body and the Benchmark Leader agree on the most convenient manner to allow the Benchmark Leader to verify those records.

The Benchmark Leader reports back their findings to the Professional Recognition body and the GFSI Technical Manager. These GFSI Technical Manager reports those findings to the GFSI Director as per the Sanctioning section of this document.

Content of the Office Audit

The purpose of the visit is to check the implementation of the GFSI Benchmarking Requirements by the Professional Recognition body through a sample record review.

The Benchmark Leader reports back any findings of this office audit to the Professional Recognition body and the GFSI Technical Manager. These GFSI Technical Manager reports those findings to the GFSI Director as per the Sanctioning section of this document.

Gap analysis

Once a year, typically in conjunction with the first random record review, the Benchmark Leader will review the alignment of the Professional Recognition body to any new or amended key elements included in the Benchmarking Requirements since the last assessment of the Professional Recognition body.

Complaint Investigation

Any parties may raise a complaint by writing to gfsinfo@theconsumergoodsforum.com if they have evidence that a GFSI-recognised Professional Recognition Body does not satisfy any of the GFSI Benchmarking Requirements.

The GFSI Technical Manager shall investigate any such complaint. This can be done by a desktop investigation or an office visit. The GFSI Technical Manager is responsible for the investigation of any complaints or suspected non-alignment of a GFSI-recognised Professional Recognition Programme with the GFSI Benchmarking Requirements.

In the event that the GFSI Technical Manager receives a complaint or report regarding the non-alignment of a Professional Recognition Programme with the GFSI Benchmarking Requirements, the Technical Manager acknowledges, in writing and within 4 working days, the receipt of the complaint or report to the party concerned. The GFSI Technical Manager then initiates the required investigative procedures to verify the accuracy of the complaint.

The GFSI Technical Manager shall ensure that the details of the complaint are clearly understood and documented, and that any claims or comments made by the complainant are properly authenticated and appropriately documented. This authentication shall be verified as being accurate and correct by independent sources, in addition to the complainant. It is the responsibility of the complainant to provide information that appropriately authenticates the complaint and can be confirmed as genuine. The GFSI Technical Manager may appoint the Benchmark Leader or an independent assessor at any stage during the investigation process. The GFSI Technical Manager must ensure impartiality and preserve confidentiality.

The GFSI Technical Manager, or the appointed Benchmark Leader or an assessor if applicable, carries out a thorough investigation of the complaint and, where possible, provide a resolution for the issues, fully document the complaint process, and provide a detailed report to the GFSI Director.

Table 2: The GFSI Key Procedural Steps

GATE	STEP	DETAILED INSTRUCTIONS/FOLLOW-UP
A. Application	1 – the Professional Recognition Body downloads the application form from mygfsi.com , completes it and sends it with any required supporting documents to gfsibm@theconsumergoodsforum.com .	[include link to website when set]
	2 – GFSI sends an invoice for the application fee; process progresses when the invoice is paid.	The application fee is non-refundable
	3 –GFSI reviews the application and confirm within 2 weeks of receipts if the application is accepted.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> If the information is complete and complies with the eligibility criteria defined in the GFSI Benchmarking Requirements Part I, the application is accepted, move to step 4. If the information is incomplete or does not satisfies the eligibility criteria defined in the GFSI Benchmarking Requirements Part I, the application is rejected, feedback is sent to the Professional Recognition Body, back to step 1. NB: The Professional Recognition Body may address concerns regarding the eligibility criteria and re-apply. Application fee would be invoiced for this new application.
	4 – GFSI appoints a Benchmark Leader	The appointment of the Benchmark Leader must ensure the absence of conflict of interest between the Benchmark Leader and the Professional Recognition Body.
	5 – A workplan is agreed upon between the Professional Recognition Body and the	The Professional Recognition Body is accountable for their workplan:

	appointed Benchmark Leader.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The workplan should allow the completion of the assessment and recognition process within 12 months from the date the application was accepted, - The workplan must be agreed upon with the Benchmark Leader.
B. Desktop Review	1 - GFSI sends Self-Assessment form(s).	The information included within the self-assessment is the content of the Benchmarking Requirements.
	2 – The Professional Recognition Body completes the Self-Assessment form(s) and submits them to the Benchmark Leader and GFSI with supporting evidence.	<p>The Professional Recognition Body evaluates their Professional Recognition Programme against the GFSI Benchmarking Requirements.</p> <p>For each requirement, the following must be included:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Whether and how the GFSI requirement is covered in the Professional Recognition Programme, - The name of the Professional Recognition Programme’s document covering the requirement with reference to the exact page and clause, - The relevant documents as objective evidence. <p>Files have to be numbered and a list of submitted documents provided together with the completed Self-Assessment forms.</p> <p>All documents may be submitted by email or a secured document sharing platform agreed with GFSI and the Benchmark Leader.</p>
	<p>3 – the Benchmark Leader reviews the completed self-assessment and supporting documents:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The information is complete and allows a comprehensive review by the Benchmark Leader – the Benchmark Leader sends the self-assessment with their assessment and comments, move to step 4, - The information is incomplete, and / or the evidence provided is insufficient – the benchmark leader sends feedback to the Professional Recognition Body, back to step 2. 	<p>The Benchmark Leader assesses the alignment of the submitted information from the Professional Recognition Body with each key element of the Benchmarking Requirements and rates them as follows:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - aligned: the provided information addresses the key element - partly aligned: the provided information addresses some aspects of the key element. The Benchmark Leader highlights the unaddressed element(s) in their comment - not aligned: the provided information does not address the key elements. The Benchmark Leader

		clarifies the expected information in their comment.
	4 – The findings of the self-assessment review are discussed and clarified through a call with the Benchmark Leader, GFSI, and Professional Recognition Body	<p>GFSI will facilitate the scheduling and IT tools necessary for the execution of the call.</p> <p>The following points will be discussed:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - review of Benchmark Leader’s assessment and clarification of any findings, - agreement on a timeframe for the completion of the self-assessment, - review of the workplan in light of the results of the self-assessment. <p>The Professional Recognition Body ensures that relevant and competent representatives are present during the call.</p>
	5 – The Professional Recognition Body updates (where applicable) and sends the final Self-Assessment forms and additional supporting documents to the Benchmark Leader.	Within the agreed timeframe the Professional Recognition Body will send the final version of the Self-Assessment forms to the Benchmark Leader.
	<p>6 – The Benchmark Leader reviews the additional information provided:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - information is complete and addressing the findings would not require a significant re-write of the programme – the Benchmark Leader sends the final validation of the self-assessments and a completed list of findings to the Professional Recognition Body and GFSI, move to “office visit”; - addressing the findings would require a significant re-write of the Professional Recognition Programme - the Benchmark Leader sends the final validation of the self-assessments and a completed report including the list of findings to the Professional Recognition Body and GFSI, move to G; - information is incomplete or unclear – back to step 5. 	<p>The Benchmark Leader may recommend at this point that the process moves to gate G:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - if the self-assessment review highlights that the Professional Recognition Programme requires significant changes to align to the GFSI Benchmarking Requirements - if the deadline of the process does not allow for an office visit and a public consultation.
C. Office Visit	<p>1 - The Benchmark Leader and the Professional Recognition Body plan a visit to the nominated offices of the Professional Recognition Body:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - the date is agreed based on availability - the Benchmark Leader sends a proposed agenda at least 2 weeks before the visit. 	<p>The office visit focuses on record reviews as evidence of the implementation of the governance reviewed during the previous gates.</p> <p>The Professional Recognition Body must ensure that all resources needed to support the office visit process are available during the visit, including expert staff members, documentation, and records.</p>
	2 – The office visit happens at the Professional Recognition Body’s main office:	The Benchmark Leader leads the office visit and determines its length. The duration of the office visit depends on the

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The Benchmark Leader completes the final list of findings and presents it to the Professional Recognition Body, - The Professional Recognition Body representative signs the list of findings. <p>A copy of the signed list of findings is left with the Professional Recognition Body, another copy is sent to GFSI.</p>	complexity of the Professional Recognition Programme, the number of scopes to cover, any needs for interpretation, etc.
D. Corrective Action Plan and reporting	1 – The Professional Recognition Body sends the Benchmark Leader a corrective action plan to address any findings raised during the assessment.	
	2 - The Benchmark Leader reviews the corrective action plan: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The corrective actions address the findings – the Benchmark Leader accepts the corrective action plan, move to step 3, - Some of the corrective actions do not address the findings – the corrective action plan is rejected, back to step 1. 	
	3 – The Benchmark Leader completes the assessment report: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The Benchmark Leader sends the assessment report including the list of findings to the Professional Recognition Body, - The Professional Recognition Body confirms that the content of the report is accurate. 	The assessment report includes: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - the Professional Recognition Programme information (name(s), contact details), - the assessment details (scope of recognition, benchmark leader etc), - an executive summary (summary of findings from Self-Assessment, office visit, any particular complexities). any findings from the self-assessment review and the office visit.
	4 – GFSI validates the finally agreed report and action plan: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The Benchmark Leader sends the final report agreed with the Professional Recognition Body to GFSI, - GFSI reviews the report and validates its content. 	
E. Public Stakeholder Consultation	1 – GFSI prepares the documentation for public consultation, this includes <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - An announcement statement, - The assessment report with the corrective action plan, - The completed and reviewed self-assessments. 	The Professional Recognition Body is asked to approve the documents for public stakeholder consultation.
	2 – The Professional Recognition Body reviews the proposed documentation for the public consultation: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The Professional Recognition Body 	

	<p>approves the documentation: move to step 3,</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The Professional Recognition Body has concerns over the content of the report, they submit their suggested changes to GFSI, back to step 1. 	
	<p>3 – GFSI makes the approved documentation available for stakeholder consultation on mygfsi.com for four weeks.</p>	<p>The assessment report and the completed self-assessment forms are made available from mygfsi.com. Comments are sent to gfsibm@theconsumergoodsforum.com.</p>
	<p>4 – GFSI closes the public consultation and sends the list of received comments to the Professional Recognition Body and the benchmark leader.</p>	
F. Completion of corrective actions	<p>1 – The Professional Recognition Body completes all required corrective actions and:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - answers to any comments from the public consultation requiring an action or comment, - provides evidence of implementation for all corrective actions for the findings of the assessment, - the Professional Recognition Body sends the final report with their above addition, and any required supportive documents, to the Benchmark Leader. 	
	<p>2 – The Benchmark Leader reviews the answers from the Professional Recognition Body to the comments and findings of the assessments:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The Benchmark Leader accepts the comments and completion of the corrective actions from the Professional Recognition Body – move to gate G, - The Benchmark Leader rejects the comments and evidence of completion of corrective actions from the Professional Recognition Body – back to step 1. 	<p>All findings must be addressed with the corrective action plan completed before the process can progress to gate G.</p>
	<p>3 – The Benchmark Leader sends the final assessment report with the completed corrective actions to GFSI:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - GFSI accepts the completed corrective actions: move to G, - GFSI rejects the completed actions and/or asks for more information: back to step 1. 	
G. GFSI Final Recognition Decision and Communication	<p>1 – The Benchmark Leader sends the final assessment report, including the executive summary with their recommendation for recognition, to GFSI.</p>	
	<p>2 – GFSI reviews the final assessment</p>	

	<p>report:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - GFSI accepts the recommendation from the Benchmark Leader: move to step 3, - GFSI challenges the recommendation from the Benchmark Leader: feedback is sent to the Benchmark Leader for consideration, back to step 1. 	
	<p>3– GFSI submits the recommendation to the GFSI Steering Committee who votes for or against this recommendation.</p>	<p>Vote may be organised during a face to face meeting of the GFSI Steering Committee where the quorum is present, or by email. In the latter case, GFSI must gather enough written answers back from GFSI Steering Committee members to respect the GFSI governance rules.</p>
	<p>4 – GFSI informs the Professional Recognition Body of the final decision and confirms next step:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The Professional Recognition Body agrees to communicate publicly the result of their assessment – move to step 5, - The Professional Recognition Body does not want the result of their assessment publicly communicated – move to step 6. <p>In either case, GFSI posts a signed statement of alignment to the Professional Recognition Body.</p>	<p>GFSI informs the Professional Recognition Body of the reasons for the decision. The Professional Recognition Body has the right to appeal the GFSI Steering Committee decision (see Part I of the GFSI Benchmarking Requirements)</p>
	<p>5– GFSI and the Professional Recognition Body agree on a common news release text and publish this jointly on their respective media. Move to step 6</p>	<p>GFSI and the Professional Recognition Body both publish a news release.</p>
	<p>6 – GFSI updates mygfsi.com and ensures the Professional Recognition Body updates their own website when applicable.</p>	
H. Monitoring of continued alignment	<p>1 – Once a year, the Professional Recognition Body completes a monitoring record and sends this to GFSI and the Benchmark Leader.</p>	<p>The monitoring record is issued by GFSI and asks for a declaration of</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Any significant changes in the Professional Recognition Body governance, including changes in procedures, ownership, organisation etc. - Any planned or published new programme version
	<p>2 – The Benchmark Leader and the Professional Recognition Body schedule the required activities of the monitoring of continued alignment.</p>	<p>The GFSI monitoring of continuous alignment includes the following activities:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Gap analysis: against a potential new sub-version of the GFSI Benchmarking Requirements, - Random record review: desktop audit based on sampling exercise. This should occur twice a year, - Office Audit: review of Professional

		Recognition Body's records based at their main office. This should occur once a year.
	3 – The Benchmark Leader carries out the first random record review and the gap analysis with the Professional Recognition Body.	This includes: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - A gap analysis against a potential new sub-version of the GFSI Benchmarking Requirements, - A review of records associated with randomly selected auditors.
	4 – The Benchmark Leader carries out an office visit	The office visit focuses on record reviews as evidence of the implementation of the programme governance. All resources needed to support the office visit process must be available during the visit, including expert staff members, documentation, and records.
	5 – The Benchmark Leader carries out a second random record review.	This includes: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - A review of records associated with randomly selected audits
	6 – The Professional Recognition Body and Benchmark Leader ensure that an acceptable corrective action plan is completed for any findings from the monitoring activities. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Findings are submitted to the GFSI Director for review, - If any findings raise concerns on the recognition status of the Professional Recognition Programme, the sanctioning process may be initiated. 	At each stage of the monitoring of continuous alignment, the Benchmark Leader documents and agrees on a list of findings with the Professional Recognition Body and communicates this to GFSI. The recognition of the Professional Recognition Programme may be maintained, suspended or withdrawn based on the results of the assessment (see "sanctioning").
	7 – GFSI validates that the results justify maintaining the Professional Recognition Programme recognition. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - If any findings raise concerns GFSI recommends next steps to the GFSI Board. 	The recognition of the Professional Recognition Programme may be maintained, suspended or withdrawn based on the results of the assessment (see "sanctioning").

Sanctioning

Whenever the Benchmark Leader or the GFSI Technical Manager find evidence of non-alignment of a GFSI-recognised Professional Recognition Body against the GFSI Benchmarking Requirements, the GFSI Director shall be informed.

The Professional Recognition Body shall submit a corrective action plan for each finding within 2 weeks of receiving the findings. The GFSI Technical Manager and the GFSI Director review the corrective action plan and any relevant evidence from the assessment and agree on one of the following next steps:

1. take no action against the Professional Recognition Body, or
2. maintain recognition and require evidence of re-alignment, or
3. recommend the GFSI Steering Committee to suspend recognition, or
4. recommend the GFSI Steering Committee to withdraw recognition.

Evidence of re-alignment required

In the event that the GFSI Technical Manager and the GFSI Director consider that evidence of re-alignment is required but recognition may be maintained, the GFSI Technical Manager follows up any required actions and the implementation of a Corrective Action Plan from the Professional Recognition Body; the GFSI Technical Manager may ask for the support of the Benchmark Leader.

In the event that the Professional Recognition Body does not implement the corrective actions within the agreed timeline, the GFSI Technical Manager and the GFSI Director review the situation and may recommend to the GFSI Steering Committee that the recognition of the Professional Recognition Body be suspended.

GFSI Suspension of Recognition

If the GFSI Steering Committee considers that a period of suspension of recognition shall be imposed, the GFSI website shall clearly specify the details and conditions of the suspension.

The GFSI Director shall formally inform the Professional Recognition Body of the decision and period of the suspension, and any remediation conditions imposed by the GFSI Steering Committee to regain recognition status.

The Professional Recognition Body shall confirm to the GFSI Technical Manager that these remediation conditions can be achieved within the timescales set out by the GFSI Steering Committee, when evidence of the implementation of the corrective actions will be expected, and alignment to the GFSI Benchmarking Requirements can be re-established.

The GFSI Technical Manager will follow up the implementation of the corrective actions with the Professional Recognition Body; the GFSI Technical Manager may ask for the support of the Benchmark Leader.

Once the re-alignment is confirmed, the GFSI Technical Manager will inform the GFSI Director and the GFSI Steering Committee. The GFSI website is updated accordingly.

In the event that the GFSI Steering Committee is not satisfied with the progress made by the Professional Recognition Body or their commitment to re-align to the GFSI Benchmarking Requirements, they may;

- Extend the suspension period to a maximum of 12 months from the date the initial suspension occurred,
- withdraw recognition of the Professional Recognition Programme.

GFSI Withdrawal of Recognition

If the GFSI Steering Committee considers that a withdrawal of recognition is required, the GFSI Director shall formally inform the Professional Recognition Body of this decision.

In the event that GFSI recognition is withdrawn, GFSI shall issue a news release and the GFSI website shall clearly specify the details and conditions of the withdrawal.

A Professional Recognition Body may choose to voluntarily withdraw from GFSI recognition when unforeseen circumstances put the Professional Recognition Programme into contravention of GFSI Benchmarking Requirements. In this instance, the Professional Recognition Body will make a request to withdraw voluntarily and make a full dossier of the circumstances available to the GFSI Director.

The GFSI Director will inform the GFSI Steering Committee of the circumstances and convene a meeting to discuss the issue as soon as possible. The GFSI Steering Committee may grant voluntary withdrawal or initiate a suspension process. The GFSI Director will inform the Professional Recognition Body of this decision.

GFSI Appeals Procedure

The Professional Recognition Body has the right to appeal against any decisions made by the GFSI Steering Committee, the GFSI Director or any person contracted to GFSI in relation to the Benchmarking Process.

The Professional Recognition Body shall submit an appeal to the GFSI Director within 30 days of the decision in dispute occurring. The appeal shall be submitted in writing to the GFSI Director and shall clearly describe the reason and provide a full explanation together with substantive evidence to support a thorough investigation of the appeal.

When the appeal procedure is initiated, the status of the Professional Recognition Programme is amended on the GFSI website to reflect that the Professional Recognition Programme's recognition status is subject to an appeal.

The GFSI Director ensures that the investigation into the appeal is conducted in an impartial and professional manner, and without any actual or perceived conflict of interest. The GFSI Director appoints an Appeal Committee made of signatories of the GFSI Coalition of Action.

The Appeal Committee considers the appeal evidence. They present the outcome of their investigation and their final decision to the GFSI Steering Committee within 30 days of their appointment; this decision made by the Appeal Committee shall be upheld by the GFSI Steering Committee.

The GFSI Director formally informs the Professional Recognition Body of the GFSI Steering Committee decision.

The decision of the Appeal Committee is final. Once the final decision is given, the appeal process will be closed and the GFSI website updated accordingly.

Appendix 1 – GFSI Workplan

GATE	Step	Typical timeline	Agreed deadline	supporting documents
A. Application	1 – the Professional Recognition Body downloads the application form from mygfsi.com, completes it and sends it with any required supporting documents to gfsibm@theconsumergoodsforum.com			GFSI Application form and terms and conditions
	2 – GFSI sends an invoice for the application fee; process progresses when the invoice is paid.	1 week		
	3 –GFSI reviews the application and confirm within 2 weeks of receipts if the application is accepted.	2 weeks		
	4 – GFSI appoints a Benchmark Leader	2 weeks		
	5 – A workplan is agreed upon between the Professional Recognition Body and the appointed Benchmark Leader.	1 week		GFSI Workplan
B. Desktop Review	1 - GFSI sends Self-Assessment form(s).	1 week		GFSI Self-assessment forms
	2 – The Professional Recognition Body completes the Self-Assessment form(s) and submits them to the Benchmark Leader and GFSI with supporting evidence.	3 months		GFSI Self-Assessment forms
	3 – the Benchmark Leader reviews the completed self-assessment and supporting documents: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The information is complete and allows a comprehensive review by the Benchmark Leader – the Benchmark Leader sends the self-assessment with their assessment and comments, move to step 4, - The information is incomplete, and / or the evidence provided is insufficient – the benchmark leader sends feedback to the Professional Recognition Body, back to step 2. 	4 weeks		GFSI Self-Assessment forms
	4 – The findings of the self-assessment review are discussed and clarified through a call with the Benchmark Leader, GFSI, and Professional Recognition Body	2 hours		GFSI Self-Assessment forms
	5 – The Professional Recognition Body updates (where applicable) and sends the final Self-Assessment forms and	2 weeks		GFSI Self-Assessment forms

	additional supporting documents to the Benchmark Leader.			
	<p>6 – The Benchmark Leader reviews the additional information provided:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - information is complete and addressing the findings would not require a significant re-write of the programme – the Benchmark Leader sends the final validation of the self-assessments and a completed list of findings to the Professional Recognition Body and GFSI, move to “office visit”; - addressing the findings would require a significant re-write of the Professional Recognition Programme - the Benchmark Leader sends the final validation of the self-assessments and a completed report including the list of findings to the Professional Recognition Body and GFSI, move to G; - information is incomplete or unclear – back to step 5. 	3 weeks		GFSI Self-Assessment forms
C. Office Visit	<p>1 - The Benchmark Leader and the Professional Recognition Body plan a visit to the nominated offices of the Professional Recognition Body:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - the date is agreed based on availability - the Benchmark Leader sends a proposed agenda at least 2 weeks before the visit. 	2 weeks before the visit		GFSI office visit agenda
	<p>2 – The office visit happens at the Professional Recognition Body’s main office:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The Benchmark Leader completes the final list of findings and presents it to the Professional Recognition Body, - The Professional Recognition Body representative signs the list of findings. <p>A copy of the signed list of findings is left with the Professional Recognition Body, another copy is sent to GFSI.</p>	1-2 days		GFSI office visit checklist GFSI List of findings
D. Corrective Action Plan and reporting	<p>1 – The Professional Recognition Body sends the Benchmark Leader a corrective action plan to address any findings raised during the assessment.</p>	2 weeks		GFSI List of findings
	<p>2 - The Benchmark Leader reviews the corrective action plan:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The corrective actions address the findings – the Benchmark Leader 	4 weeks after the office visit maximum		GFSI List of findings

	<p>accepts the corrective action plan, move to step 3,</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Some of the corrective actions do not address the findings – the corrective action plan is rejected, back to step 1. 			
	<p>3 – The Benchmark Leader completes the assessment report:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The Benchmark Leader sends the assessment report including the list of findings to the Professional Recognition Body, - The Professional Recognition Body confirms that the content of the report is accurate. 			GFSI Assessment Report
	<p>4 – GFSI validates the finally agreed report and action plan:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The Benchmark Leader sends the final report agreed with the Professional Recognition Body to GFSI, - GFSI reviews the report and validates its content. 	1 week		GFSI List of findings
E. Public Stakeholder Consultation	<p>1 – GFSI prepares the documentation for public consultation, this includes</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - An announcement statement, - The assessment report with the corrective action plan, - The completed and reviewed self-assessments. 	1 week		Assessment Report Self-Assessment forms
	<p>2 – The Professional Recognition Body reviews the proposed documentation for the public consultation:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The Professional Recognition Body approves the documentation: move to step 3, - The Professional Recognition Body has concerns over the content of the report, they submit their suggested changes to GFSI, back to step 1. 	1 week		GFSI Assessment Report GFSI Self-Assessment forms
	<p>3 – GFSI makes the approved documentation available for stakeholder consultation on mygfsi.com for four weeks.</p>	4 weeks		GFSI Public Consultation comment form
	<p>4 – GFSI closes the public consultation and sends the list of received comments to the Professional Recognition Body and the benchmark leader.</p>	1 week		
F. Completion of corrective actions	<p>1 – The Professional Recognition Body completes all required corrective actions and:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - answers to any comments from the public consultation requiring an action or comment, - provides evidence of 	Depending on corrective actions		GFSI Assessment Report

	<p>implementation for all corrective actions for the findings of the assessment,</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - the Professional Recognition Body sends the final report with their above addition, and any required supportive documents, to the Benchmark Leader. 			
	<p>2 – The Benchmark Leader reviews the answers from the Professional Recognition Body to the comments and findings of the assessments:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The Benchmark Leader accepts the comments and completion of the corrective actions from the Professional Recognition Body – move to gate G, - The Benchmark Leader rejects the comments and evidence of completion of corrective actions from the Professional Recognition Body – back to step 1. 	2 weeks		GFSI Assessment Report
	<p>3 – The Benchmark Leader sends the final assessment report with the completed corrective actions to GFSI:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - GFSI accepts the completed corrective actions: move to G, - GFSI rejects the completed actions and/or asks for more information: back to step 1. 	1 week		GFSI Assessment Report
G. GFSI Final recognition Decision and Communication	<p>1 – The Benchmark Leader sends the final assessment report, including the executive summary with their recommendation for recognition, to GFSI.</p>	3 months after the public consultation maximum		GFSI Assessment Report
	<p>2 – GFSI reviews the final assessment report:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - GFSI accepts the recommendation from the Benchmark Leader: move to step 3, - GFSI challenges the recommendation from the Benchmark Leader: feedback is sent to the Benchmark Leader for consideration, back to step 1. 	1 week		GFSI Assessment Report
	<p>3– GFSI submits the recommendation to the GFSI Steering Committee who votes for or against this recommendation.</p>	2 weeks		GFSI Assessment Report
	<p>4 – GFSI informs the Professional Recognition Body of the final decision and confirms next step:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The Professional Recognition Body agrees to communicate publicly the result of their assessment – move to step 5, - The Professional Recognition 	1 week		GFSI Statement of Alignment

	<p>Body does not want the result of their assessment publicly communicated – move to step 6.</p> <p>In either case, GFSI posts a signed statement of alignment to the Professional Recognition Body.</p>			
	<p>5– GFSI and the Professional Recognition Body agree on a common news release text and publish this jointly on their respective media.</p> <p>Move to step 6</p>	2 weeks		
	<p>6 – GFSI updates mygfsi.com and ensures the Professional Recognition Body updates their own website when applicable.</p>			
H. Monitoring of continuous alignment	<p>1 – Once a year, the Professional Recognition Body completes a monitoring record and sends this to GFSI and the Benchmark Leader.</p>			GFSI Monitoring Record
	<p>2 – The Benchmark Leader and the Professional Recognition Body schedule the required activities of the monitoring of continued alignment.</p>			
	<p>3 – The Benchmark Leader carries out the first random record review and the gap analysis with the Professional Recognition Body.</p>	Within 6 months of the last office visit		GFSI Monitoring Checklist
	<p>4 – The Benchmark Leader carries out an office visit</p>	Within 12 months of the previous office visit		GFSI Monitoring Checklist
	<p>5– The Benchmark Leader carries out a second random record review.</p>	Within 6 months of the first random record review		GFSI Monitoring Checklist
	<p>6 – The Professional Recognition Body and Benchmark Leader ensure that an acceptable corrective action plan is completed for any findings from the monitoring activities.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Findings are submitted to the GFSI Director for review, - If any findings raise concerns on the recognition status of the Professional Recognition Programme, the sanctioning process may be initiated. 	CAP submitted within 2 weeks of office visit		GFSI Monitoring Checklist
	<p>7 – GFSI validates that the results justify maintaining the Professional Recognition Programme recognition.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - If any findings raise concerns GFSI recommends next steps to the GFSI Steering Committee. 			GFSI Monitoring Checklist