

**GFSI & Auditors
Hub Webinar Q&A:
New Approach to
Assuring Food
Safety Auditor
Training and
Professional
Development
(ATPD)**

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The purpose of this document is to provide further clarity in response to questions raised at the “Improving Food Safety Auditor Qualification Process” webinar hosted by GFSI in collaboration with Auditors Hub.

As part of the GFSI “Race to the Top Initiative” and following extensive stakeholder consultation, GFSI is piloting a new approach to the verification and assurance of food safety auditor competence and Continuing Professional Development (CPD). Central to this approach is the establishment of a new set of GFSI benchmarking requirements designed to recognise organisations responsible for validating common competencies in a food safety auditor (Professional Recognition Bodies or “PRBs”), in an effort to eliminate repetitive validations of common competencies and deliver independent assessment of auditor competence. The project is currently undergoing a pilot phase.

What will the new approach to auditor competence look like?

Our ambition is to rationalise the approach to assessment of food safety auditor competence by removing duplicate verification of the same information by various entities. The development of the Professional Recognition Body (PRB) allows core competencies to be validated once by a GFSI-recognised PRB.

Will I lose my current status as a ‘GFSI auditor’ when Professional Recognition Bodies assume responsibility for assessing auditor competence?

There is no current ‘GFSI auditor status’ per se as GFSI itself does not assess or verify auditor competence. GFSI is a benchmarking and harmonising organisation. Food safety auditors currently receive approval from GFSI-recognised Certification Programme Owners (CPOs) to audit against their standards based on GFSI recognition requirements for CPOs.

The objective is to develop a **once certified, recognised everywhere** approach for food safety auditors. By doing this, we aim to remove redundancies such as the same qualification and competencies being reviewed multiple times across every single GFSI-recognised Certification Programme.

Do I have to take extra exams, except for the one organised by the Certification Programme Owner?

GFSI’s new approach to auditor competence and ongoing professional development is to take a more holistic view of the skills, knowledge and behaviours required to be a food safety auditor. Whilst qualifications will inevitably form a part of what a PRB may require to demonstrate competence, it will be necessary for the PRB to review other evidence to make a competence assessment such as work experience. Additional knowledge which is specific to a GFSI-recognised Certification Programme itself i.e. knowledge of the requirements of the standard, will still be subject to additional evaluation by the CPO.

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Does the approval by PRBs mean extra costs for the auditor?

It is envisioned that the costs of assessing auditor competence and professional development will vary from PRB to PRB. The pilot phase will enable interested PRBs to fully understand what is required of them to become a GFSI-recognised PRB and what will be expected of them moving forward. All PRBs will be expected to be open and transparent about their costs of assessment. The outcomes of the ATPD pilot stage will inform timing and costs associated with the process, which will be published in full transparency with the final requirements.

Will Professional Recognition Bodies handle the recognition of auditors in all GFSI-recognised standards now?

The role of GFSI-recognised Professional Recognition Bodies (PRBs) will be to assess and verify common competencies in a food safety auditor, ensuring that baseline qualifications (skills, knowledge and behaviours) are checked once.

Does recognition by PRB mean each CB will not have to approve me as food safety auditor separately anymore?

The new proposed approach solely focuses on common competencies, simplifying the task for CBs and reducing the burden on both CBs and auditors. The role of the PRB will be to make an assessment and then verify the common competencies of food safety auditors. CBs will remain responsible for ensuring that the knowledge required to audit against a specific standard recognised by GFSI is demonstrable.

What's the point of PRBs? CPOs will continue doing their own exams anyway.

The PRB approach is designed to deliver significant improvements in the way in which auditor competence is assessed and verified. The benefits to auditors are that core auditor competencies will only be assessed once by the PRB. That simply leaves the standard specific elements to be assured by each of the GFSI-recognised CPOs and not to make any further review of core competence.

How many PRBs are there?

We will recognise as many PRBs as we received successful applications from. We have no targets or expectations as to how many PRBs will be recognised. GFSI's approach focuses on harmonisation of outcomes whilst leaving the market demand to dictate how many recognised entities are necessary to cater for the global food safety auditor community.

Who will the pilot be undertaken with?

Organisations dedicated to the development and validation of professional competence are welcome to apply to participate in the pilot phase, that will undergo validation through the pilot. As long as they meet the current proposal of GFSI Benchmarking Requirements for PRBs. Such organisations already exist in various sectors including quality management, food science and technology and accounting. Organisations with training or development programmes who may not yet have a focus on validation of competence have also expressed an interest and can see the opportunity this new approach represents.

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Will CPD be required and what will that include?

Continuing Professional Development (CPD) is a way for professionals to continue to learn and develop throughout their career, so that they keep their skills, knowledge and behaviour up-to-date, and are able to continue practising their profession and grow their career. Particular elements of CPD will be trialled and validated based on the outcomes of the pilot alongside a professional development framework. This will not only enable all PRBs to share a common approach to the development of food safety auditors, but also provide a consistent and transparent way for those wishing to progress their career to do so. Professional development frameworks are commonplace in many other safety-critical professions such as healthcare and engineering.

In the draft document I read about grandparenting, is this a potential role for very experienced auditors in CBs? I think this kind of mentoring can be precious.

Grandparenting consists of a senior auditor mentoring entry level auditors. This concept is yet to be trialled during the pilot phase. The requirements will then be validated based on the outcome of the pilot. The existing proposal for PRB Benchmarking Requirements will be tested through the pilot.

We seem to have covered the requirements and what existing auditors will need to do - but how will this actively engage new auditors to improve the shortage?

By professionalising food safety auditing in the same way as other safety-critical professions, it will make it easier for those wishing to enter the profession to identify basic requirements as well as additional requirements in order to further develop their expertise. The simplified process and clear career pathway, coupled with career development programmes including mentoring and coaching makes the profession more attractive to all and enables food safety auditors to be credited for the incredibly vital work that they do to ensure safe food for people everywhere.