

# The National Quality Mark Scheme for Land Contamination Management (NQMS) Scheme Audit Plan



## 1 INTRODUCTION

In line with the Terms of Reference of the NQMS Steering Group, this plan has been developed by the group with the objective of creating a documented audit process to ensure that standards are being upheld in the application of the NQMS. The NQMS Steering Group are responsible for deciding whether any proposals for scheme amendments are needed and for reporting such proposals to the National Brownfield Forum and/or the SQP Provider.

The Scheme Administrator is responsible for maintaining this auditing procedure and for holding records of individual declarations for auditing purposes.

The Scheme Administrator will report to each NQMS Steering Group meeting and will provide an annual audit report for the National Brownfield Forum and the SQP Provider that summarises the results of all auditing undertaken, any additional feedback that is received, and any complaints that have been received and how they have been dealt with.

*NOTE: The auditing of the NQMS Scheme (Scheme Audit) is not to be confused with the technical checks that are made by an SQP while operating the scheme (these have been previously referred to as Technical Auditing in the scheme documentation).*

*To assist an SQP to demonstrate (to clients, regulators and stakeholders) that a document has been properly checked the SQP is required to provide a documented response to a list of critical questions before signing off the declaration which accompanies any report. (These questions are set out in Appendix 1 of the NQMS Overview document). For October 2022 onwards this must include completing the 'tick boxes' and signing and dating Appendix 1 where required.*

## 2 FEEDBACK

In at least the early stages of the NQMS, the Steering Group will, through the Scheme Administrator, invite the Environment Agency (EA) and individual Local Authorities (LA) to provide feedback on the operation of the NQMS Scheme and in particular specific feedback on the quality of individual reports that they have received under the NQMS. This feedback will provide useful input to the NQMS Scheme review process.

Whilst the scheme is in its infancy, it is also anticipated that local LA regulator cluster groups will discuss the scheme operation and may perform their own assessments and audits to investigate whether reports carrying the NQMS badge are meeting their expected standards. The NQMS Steering Group will, through the Scheme Administrator, encourage these groups to perform these assessments and to share their findings with the NQMS Steering Group.

In addition, the Scheme Administrator will liaise with the SQP Provider and arrange for the views and feedback of SQPs to be captured. The detail of this survey is to be agreed in advance by the NQMS Steering Group.

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## 3 SCHEME AUDITING PROCESS

### 3.1 Selecting Declarations

- 5% of the total number of declarations submitted in the previous 2 years should be selected for audit.
- No more than one per SQP and no more than two per consultancy should be selected per year.
- Declarations should initially be selected randomly and declarations then added or deleted from the audit list, in order to meet the above criteria with any subsequent selection likewise being carried out randomly.
- The declaration number should be used as the audit reference number.
- If a declaration selected for audit relates to a confidential project, a statement explaining this should be obtained from the SQP and then submitted to the NQMS Steering Group for a decision on whether the audit on this project should be pursued or not.

### 3.2 Check SQP is Active

- Check if the SQP is still active on the SQP Register and record whether they are active or inactive.
- If the SQP is no longer active, obtaining the project documentation may be harder, particularly if there are no longer relevant contact details. In this situation, contact should be made with the project team.
- If efforts to obtain the project documentation fail due to the SQP being inactive or having moved organisation then reference should be made to the NQMS Steering Group as to whether the audit on this project should continue.

### 3.3 Requesting Project Documents for Audit

- Send a generic email (see NQMS Scheme Audit – Generic Email Requesting Documents) to the SQP (or, if appropriate, the point of contact for documents) requesting the project documentation. SQP/Project Team should be advised that the deadline for providing project documents is 2 calendar weeks from notification.
- Documents can be emailed directly or using a transfer site such as Dropbox / WeTransfer.
- Record the date that the email requesting the documents is sent and to whom.
- Allow for one follow up email for any missing documentation or if no response has been received within 2 weeks. Always record dates of any correspondence.
- Record the date the documents are received and from whom.
- Check that all required documents have been received.
- Once a declaration and the report it relates to have been audited and the audit result has been accepted by the NQMS Steering Group, all requested project documentation must be deleted. Do not retain / leave project documents on computers or devices.

### 3.4 Auditing Template

- The audit should be documented within the [NQMS Scheme Audit Template](#).
- There are four grading categories (conformant-good, conformant-improvement possible, non conformant-minor, non conformant-major) and the description for each is provided below in Table 1.

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- The SQP Declaration, based on the supporting documentation, should be assessed on how well it accords with the NQMS and assigned a grade.

Table 1- Grading Criteria

Conformant - Good	Document accords well with the NQMS guidance and meets the requirements.
Conformant-Improvement Possible	Document is acceptable but there are some areas that could have been done better.
Non conformant - Minor	Document is not sufficiently NQMS compliant.
Non conformant - Major	Document is not close to being NQMS compliant or is outside the scope of the NQMS.

- It is important to remember to use the above as a guide only as each project and site is different.

### 3.5 Reviewing the SQP Declaration

- Has the project team responsible for gathering, processing or interpreting the data been appropriately assessed with reference to the National Brownfield Skills Framework taking into consideration degrees, charterships and registrations with organisations such as SiLC, ROGEP, SoBRA, CL:AIRE (DoWCoP), etc.? The auditor should request and review documentation (such as a competency matrix or similar) that verifies this rather than carrying out any specific assessment themselves.
- Have the key aspects of the report either been checked by the SQP directly or been signed off by other delegated individuals with a requisite level of capability within the team? The auditor should request and review documentation (such as a report reviewing form or template together with the competency documentation) that verifies this, rather than carrying out any specific assessment themselves.
- Has the regime under which the report was produced been considered and the objectives of the report understood?
- Has an appropriate documented response been given to whichever section is relevant in the list of critical questions set out in Appendix 1 of the NQMS Overview document applicable at the time of the declaration? For October 2022 onwards this must include completing the tick boxes and signing where required.
- Are any conclusions or recommendations made within the report in line with and complying with the requirements of the NQMS regarding accuracy and reasonableness and have any limitations been clearly identified?
- Assign a grade of 'good to poor'.

### 3.7 Summary Report

- On completion of each annual audit a summary report will be produced and will be issued to SQPs to indicate the primary findings of the audit with the purpose of assisting SQPs in future assignments.