

Agenda Item 2–A

EXPOSURE DRAFT OF PROPOSED INTERNATIONAL STANDARD ON QUALITY MANAGEMENT 1 (PREVIOUSLY INTERNATIONAL STANDARD ON QUALITY CONTROL 1) – QUALITY MANAGEMENT FOR FIRMS THAT PERFORM AUDITS OR REVIEWS OF FINANCIAL STATEMENTS, OR OTHER ASSURANCE OR RELATED SERVICES ENGAGEMENTS

(CLEAN)

(Effective as of TBD)

[CONTENTS PAGE TO BE INSERTED]

Proposed International Standard on Quality Management (ISQM) 1, *Quality Management for Firms that Perform Audits or Reviews of Financial Statements, or Other Assurance or Related Services Engagements*, should be read in conjunction with the *Preface to the International Quality Control, Auditing, Review, Other Assurance, and Related Services Pronouncements*.

Introduction

Scope of this ISQM

1. This International Standard on Quality Management (ISQM) deals with a firm's responsibilities to design, implement and operate a system of quality management for audits or reviews of financial statements, or other assurance or related services engagements. ISQM 2¹ deals with the responsibility of the firm and engagement quality reviewers relating to engagement quality reviews. This ISQM is to be read in conjunction with relevant ethical requirements.
2. Other pronouncements of the International Auditing and Assurance Standards Board (IAASB) include requirements for engagement partners and other personnel regarding quality management at the engagement level. ISA 220 (Revised),² for example, deals with the specific responsibilities of the auditor regarding quality management at the engagement level for an audit of financial statements and the related responsibilities of the engagement partner. (Ref: Para. A1)
3. Law, regulation or relevant ethical requirements may also establish responsibilities for the firm's management of quality beyond those described in this ISQM.
4. This ISQM applies to all firms performing audits or reviews of financial statements, or other assurance or related services engagements (i.e., if the firm performs any of these engagements, this ISQM applies).

Scalability

5. This ISQM requires the firm to apply a risk-based approach in the design, implementation and operation of the system of quality management, taking into account:

¹ Proposed ISQM 2, Engagement Quality Reviews

² Proposed International Standard on Auditing (ISA) 220 (Revised), *Quality Management for an Audit of Financial Statements*

- (a) The nature and circumstances of the firm, including whether it is part of a network or uses service providers; and (Ref: Para. A20)
- (b) The nature and circumstances of the engagements performed by the firm, including the types of engagements performed by the firm and the types of entities for which such engagements are performed. (Ref: Para. A21)

Accordingly, the complexity and formality of firms' systems of quality management will vary. For example, a firm that performs different types of engagements for a wide variety of entities, including audits of financial statements of listed entities or entities that may be of significant public interest, will likely have a more complex system of quality management than a firm that performs only reviews of financial statements or compilation engagements.

- 6. The nature and circumstances of the firm and its engagements may change over time. This ISQM requires the firm to identify such changes and respond appropriately.

The Firm's System of Quality Management

- 7. The public interest is served by the consistent performance of quality engagements. Quality engagements are achieved through planning and performing engagements and reporting on them in accordance with professional standards and applicable legal and regulatory requirements. Achieving the objectives of those standards and complying with the requirements of applicable law or regulation involves applying professional judgment and, when applicable, exercising professional skepticism. The purpose of a system of quality management is to support the consistent performance of quality engagements, by providing the firm with reasonable assurance that the objectives of the system, stated in paragraph 21(a) and (b), are achieved. (Ref: Para. A2–A4)
- 8. This ISQM requires professional judgment to be exercised in designing, implementing and operating the firm's system of quality management. A system of quality management is dynamic and iterative and its components are highly integrated. It also does not operate in a linear manner. However, for the purposes of this ISQM, a system of quality management is organized into the following eight components: (Ref: Para. A4)
 - (a) Governance and leadership;
 - (b) The firm's risk assessment process;
 - (c) Relevant ethical requirements;
 - (d) Acceptance and continuance of client relationships and specific engagements;
 - (e) Engagement performance;
 - (f) Resources;
 - (g) Information and communication; and
 - (h) The monitoring and remediation process.

A further description of each of the eight components and their interrelationships is included in Appendix 1.

- 9. The firm's governance and leadership component establishes the environment in which the system of quality management operates because this component addresses the firm's culture, decision-making process, actions, organizational structure and leadership.

10. In taking a risk-based approach to quality management, the firm applies the firm's risk assessment process to the other components. The firm's risk assessment process consists of:
- (a) Establishing quality objectives. The quality objectives established by the firm consist of objectives the firm needs to achieve that, taken together, provide reasonable assurance that the objectives of the system of quality management, stated in paragraph 21(a) and (b), are achieved. The quality objectives that the firm is required to establish are included in this ISQM and are organized by component. However, taking into account the nature and circumstances of the firm and its engagements, the firm is required to determine whether it is appropriate to establish additional quality objectives beyond those required by this ISQM in order to achieve the objective of this ISQM.
 - (b) Identifying and assessing risks to the achievement of the firm's quality objectives (referred to as quality risks). The firm is required to identify and assess its quality risks based on an understanding of the conditions, events, circumstances, actions or inactions that may affect the achievement of the quality objectives, taking into account the nature and circumstances of the firm and its engagements.
 - (c) Designing and implementing responses to address the assessed quality risks. This ISQM includes certain required responses organized by component that are applicable to all firms because they would be expected in every system of quality management. However, the responses required by this ISQM alone are not sufficient to address the quality risks because:
 - (i) The design, implementation and operation of these responses alone will not address all of the quality risks identified and assessed by the firm, and therefore either the quality objectives required by this ISQM or the objective of the system of quality management may not be achieved; and
 - (ii) The nature, timing and extent of the responses that are required to appropriately address the quality risks will vary based on the reasons for the assessment given to the quality risks.

Accordingly, the firm is required to design and implement responses in addition to the responses required by this ISQM to address its assessed quality risks.

11. This ISQM requires the firm to evaluate the design, implementation and operation of its system of quality management through a monitoring and remediation process, which involves:
- (a) Designing and performing monitoring activities and determining whether the findings from those activities, the results of external inspections and any other relevant information that the firm obtains or becomes aware of, indicate the existence of deficiencies in the system of quality management;
 - (b) Investigating the root cause(s) of the identified deficiencies and evaluating the severity and pervasiveness of the identified deficiencies; and
 - (c) Remediating the identified deficiencies.

The monitoring and remediation process provides information that enables the evaluation of whether the system of quality management provides reasonable assurance that the objectives stated in paragraph 21(a) and (b) have been achieved.

12. The resources and information and communication components are necessary to enable the operation of all the other components of the system of quality management. This ISQM also includes requirements for other components of the system of quality management that address subject matter specific topics that are fundamental for the performance of audits or reviews of financial statements, or other assurance or related services engagements (i.e., relevant ethical requirements, acceptance and continuance of client relationships and specific engagements, and engagement performance).
13. All of the components of the system of quality management operating together enable the consistent performance of quality engagements. Accordingly, other pronouncements of the IAASB, such as ISA 220 (Revised),³ may be premised on the basis that the firm is subject to the ISQMs or to national requirements that are at least as demanding.

Networks

14. In some circumstances, the firm may belong to a network. This ISQM includes requirements for the firm in circumstances when the firm belongs to a network and network requirements exist for the firm or network services are used by the firm in the design, implementation and operation of its system of quality management. Network requirements or network services are further described in paragraph 59 of this ISQM, and may promote the consistent performance of quality engagements across the network firms. Notwithstanding the firm's compliance with the network requirements or use of the network services, the firm remains responsible for its system of quality management.

Authority of this ISQM

15. This ISQM contains the objective of the firm in following the ISQM, and requirements designed to enable the firm to meet that stated objective. In addition, it contains related guidance in the form of application and other explanatory material and introductory material that provides context relevant to a proper understanding of the ISQM, and definitions. (Ref: Para. A5–A5C)

Effective Date

20. Systems of quality management in compliance with this ISQM are required to be established by TBD.

Objective

21. The objective of the firm is to design, implement and operate a system of quality management for audits or reviews of financial statements, or other assurance or related services engagements performed by the firm, that provides the firm with reasonable assurance that:
 - (a) The firm and its personnel fulfill their responsibilities in accordance with professional standards and applicable legal and regulatory requirements, and conduct engagements in accordance with such standards and requirements; and
 - (b) Engagement reports issued by the firm or engagement partners are appropriate in the circumstances.

³ Proposed ISA 220 (Revised), paragraph 3

Definitions

22. In this ISQM, the following terms have the meanings attributed below:

- (a) Deficiency in the firm’s system of quality management (referred to as “deficiency” in this ISQM) – This exists when a quality objective or quality risk is absent, or a response to address a quality risk is not appropriately designed or operating, such that a quality objective may not be achieved. (Ref: Para. A6–A7)
- (b) Engagement documentation – The record of work performed, results obtained, and conclusions the practitioner reached (terms such as “working papers” or “work papers” are sometimes used).
- (c) Engagement partner⁴ – The partner or other individual, appointed by the firm, who is responsible for the engagement and its performance, and for the report that is issued on behalf of the firm, and who, where required, has the appropriate authority from a professional, legal or regulatory body.
- (d) Engagement quality review – [Refer **Agenda Item 4–A**]
- (e) Engagement quality reviewer – [Refer **Agenda Item 4–A**]
- (f) Engagement team – All partners and staff performing the engagement, and any other individuals who perform procedures on the engagement, including individuals engaged by the firm or a network firm. The engagement team excludes an external expert engaged by the firm or by a network firm, and also excludes individuals within the client’s internal audit function who provide direct assistance on an audit engagement when the external auditor complies with the requirements of ISA 610 (Revised 2013).⁵
- (g) External inspections – Inspections or investigations undertaken by an external oversight authority related to the firm’s system of quality management or engagements performed by the firm. (Ref: Para. A8)
- (h) Firm – A sole practitioner, partnership or corporation or other entity of professional accountants, or public sector equivalent. (Ref: Para. A9)
- (i) Listed entity – An entity whose shares, stock or debt are quoted or listed on a recognized stock exchange, or are marketed under the regulations of a recognized stock exchange or other equivalent body.
- (j) Network firm – A firm or entity that belongs to a network.
- (k) Network⁶ – A larger structure: (Ref: Para. A10–A11)
 - (i) That is aimed at cooperation, and

⁴ “Engagement partner” and “partner” should be read as referring to their public sector equivalents where relevant.

⁵ ISA 610 (Revised 2013), *Using the Work of Internal Auditors*, establishes limits on the use of direct assistance. It also acknowledges that the external auditor may be prohibited by law or regulation from obtaining direct assistance from internal auditors. Therefore, the use of direct assistances is restricted to situations where it is permitted.

⁶ As defined in the International Ethics Standards Board for Accountants (IESBA) *International Code of Ethics for Professional Accountants (Including the International Independence Standards)* (Code)

- (ii) That is clearly aimed at profit or cost-sharing or shares common ownership, control or management, common quality control policies and procedures, common business strategy, the use of a common brand name, or a significant part of professional resources.
- (l) Partner – Any individual with authority to bind the firm with respect to the performance of a professional services engagement.
- (m) Personnel – Partners and staff.
- (n) Professional judgment – The application of relevant training, knowledge and experience, within the context of professional standards, in making informed decisions about the courses of action that are appropriate in the design, implementation and operation of the firm's system of quality management.
- (o) Professional standards – IAASB Engagement Standards, as defined in the IAASB's *Preface to the International Quality Control, Auditing, Review, Other Assurance and Related Services Pronouncements*, and relevant ethical requirements.
- (p) Quality objectives – The objectives the firm needs to achieve to provide reasonable assurance that the objectives of the system of quality management are achieved.
- (q) Quality risks – Risks arising from conditions, events, circumstances, actions or inactions that may affect the achievement of a quality objective(s).
- (r) Reasonable assurance – In the context of the ISQMs, a high, but not absolute, level of assurance.
- (s) Relevant ethical requirements – Principles of professional ethics and ethical requirements that are applicable to professional accountants when undertaking engagements that are audits or reviews of financial statements or other assurance or related services engagements. Relevant ethical requirements ordinarily comprise the provisions of the *International Ethics Standards Board for Accountants' International Code of Ethics for Professional Accountants (Including International Independence Standards)* (IESBA Code) related to audits or reviews of financial statements, or other assurance or related services engagements, together with national requirements that are more restrictive. (Ref: Para. A12–A13, A65)
- (t) Response (in relation to a system of quality management) – Policies or procedures designed and implemented by the firm to address a quality risk: (Ref: Para. A14–A15, A60)
 - (i) Policies are statements of what should, or should not, be done to address a quality risk. Such statements may be documented, explicitly stated in communications or implied through actions and decisions.
 - (ii) Procedures are actions to implement policies.
- (u) Staff – Professionals, other than partners, including any experts the firm employs.
- (v) System of quality management – A system designed, implemented and operated by a firm to provide reasonable assurance that:
 - (i) The firm and its personnel fulfill their responsibilities in accordance with professional standards and applicable legal and regulatory requirements, and conduct engagements in accordance with such standards and requirements; and

- (ii) Engagement reports issued by the firm or engagement partners are appropriate in the circumstances.

Requirements

Applying, and Complying with, Relevant Requirements

- 23. The individual(s) assigned ultimate responsibility and accountability, and the individual(s) assigned operational responsibility, for the firm's system of quality management shall have an understanding of this ISQM relevant to their responsibilities, including the application and other explanatory material, to understand the objective of this ISQM and to apply its requirements properly. (Ref: Para. A16)
- 24. The firm shall comply with each requirement of this ISQM unless the requirement is not relevant to the firm because of the nature and circumstances of the firm or its engagements. (Ref: Para. A17)

System of Quality Management

- 25. The firm shall design, implement and operate a system of quality management in accordance with the requirements of this ISQM. The requirements are designed to enable the firm to achieve the objective stated in this ISQM. The proper application of the requirements in this ISQM is expected to provide a sufficient basis for the achievement of the objective of this standard. In applying the requirements of this ISQM, the firm shall exercise professional judgment, taking into account the nature and circumstances of the firm and its engagements, such that the objective of this ISQM is achieved. (Ref: Para. A18–A22)

Governance and Leadership

- 26. The firm shall establish the following quality objectives that address the aspects of the firm's environment that support the design, implementation and operation of the other components of the system of quality management, including the firm's culture, decision-making process, actions, organizational structure and leadership:
 - (a) The firm's culture promotes a commitment to quality, including recognizing and reinforcing the importance of professional ethics, values and attitudes throughout the firm and emphasizing the responsibility of all personnel for quality relating to the performance of engagements or activities within the system of quality management. (Ref: Para. A24–A26)
 - (b) The firm has leadership who is responsible and accountable for quality.
 - (c) The firm's strategic decisions and actions, including financial and operational priorities, reflect the firm's commitment to quality and do not undermine the firm's role in serving the public interest, by consistently performing quality engagements. (Ref: Para. A27–A28)
 - (d) The firm has an organizational structure with appropriate assignment of roles, responsibilities and authority that supports the firm's commitment to quality and the design, implementation and operation of the firm's system of quality management. (Ref: Para. A29–A30)
 - (e) The firm plans for its resource needs, including financial resources, and obtains, allocates or assigns resources in a manner that supports the firm's commitment to quality and enables the design, implementation and operation of the firm's system of quality management. (Ref: Para. A31–A33)

- (f) The firm fulfills its responsibilities in accordance with law, regulation and professional standards that relate to the governance and leadership of the firm, if applicable. (Ref: Para. A23)
27. In designing and implementing responses to address the quality risks identified by the firm relating to the governance and leadership quality objectives, the firm shall include the following responses:
- (a) Assigning ultimate responsibility and accountability for the system of quality management to the firm's chief executive officer or the firm's managing partner (or equivalent) or, if appropriate, the firm's managing board of partners (or equivalent). The individual(s) to whom such responsibility and accountability is assigned shall: (Ref: Para. A34)
 - (i) Have the appropriate experience and knowledge to fulfill the assigned responsibility.
 - (ii) Demonstrate a commitment to quality through their actions and behaviors, including recognizing and reinforcing the importance of professional ethics, values and attitudes, and establishing the expected behavior of personnel relating to the performance of engagements and activities within the system of quality management. (Ref: Para. A24–A26)
 - (iii) Establish structures, reporting lines, and appropriate authorities and responsibilities, including assigning operational responsibility for the following matters to personnel who fulfill the requirements in paragraph 28: (Ref: Para A35–A37)
 - a. The system of quality management as a whole; and
 - b. Specific aspects of the system of quality management, as appropriate to the nature and circumstances of the firm, which shall include operational responsibility for compliance with independence requirements and the monitoring and remediation process.
 - (b) Establishing policies or procedures for periodic performance evaluations of the individual(s) assigned ultimate responsibility and accountability for the firm's system of quality management, and the individual(s) assigned operational responsibility for the matters set out in paragraph 27(a)(iii), in order to hold individuals accountable for the responsibilities assigned to them. (Ref: Para. A38–A41)
 - (c) Establishing policies or procedures relating to complaints and allegations about the commitment to quality of the firm or its personnel, including clearly defining channels within the firm that enable reporting by personnel or external parties to appropriate individual(s) within the firm without fear of reprisal and enabling the investigation of the complaints and allegations. (Ref: Para. A42–A45)
28. The personnel assigned operational responsibility for the matters set out in paragraph 27(a)(iii) shall have: (Ref: Para. A37)
- (a) The appropriate experience and knowledge and sufficient time to fulfill their assigned responsibility;
 - (b) A direct line of communication to the individual(s) assigned ultimate responsibility and accountability for the system of quality management; and
 - (c) An understanding of their assigned responsibilities and accountability for such responsibilities.

The Firm's Risk Assessment Process

29. The firm shall establish the quality objectives required by this ISQM to facilitate the achievement of the objective of this ISQM. The firm shall determine whether it is appropriate to establish additional quality objectives beyond those required by this ISQM, in order to achieve the objective of this ISQM. (Ref: Para. A46–A50)
30. The firm shall understand the conditions, events, circumstances, actions or inactions that may affect the achievement of the quality objectives, taking into account the nature and circumstances of the firm and its engagements. (Ref: Para. A46–A47, A51)
31. Based on the understanding obtained in paragraph 30, the firm shall identify quality risks, before consideration of any responses, that: (Ref: Para. A46–A47, A52–A53)
 - (a) Have a reasonable possibility of occurring; and
 - (b) If they were to occur, may individually or in combination with other quality risks, have a significant effect on the achievement of a quality objective(s). (Ref: Para. A54–A55)
32. The firm shall assess the identified quality risks to provide a basis for the design and implementation of the related responses. (Ref: Para. A46–A47, A56)
33. The firm shall design and implement responses to address the assessed quality risks, including the responses required by this ISQM. The design of the responses shall be based on, and responsive to, the reasons for the assessments given to the quality risks. (Ref: Para. A46–A47, A57–A62)

Changes in the Nature and Circumstances of the Firm or its Engagements

34. The firm shall identify changes in the nature and circumstances of the firm or its engagements and modify the quality objectives, quality risks or responses, as appropriate, in response to such changes. (Ref: Para. A46–A47, A63–A64)

Relevant Ethical Requirements

35. The firm shall establish the following quality objectives that address the fulfillment of responsibilities in accordance with relevant ethical requirements, which as defined include the principles of professional ethics: (Ref: Para. A65)
 - (a) The firm, its personnel and others subject to relevant ethical requirements understand the relevant ethical requirements, including those related to independence.
 - (b) The firm, its personnel and others subject to relevant ethical requirements fulfill their responsibilities in relation to the relevant ethical requirements, including those related to independence.
 - (c) The firm, its personnel and others subject to relevant ethical requirements identify and appropriately respond to breaches of the relevant ethical requirements, including those related to independence, in a timely manner.
36. In designing and implementing responses to address the quality risks identified by the firm relating to the relevant ethical requirements quality objectives, the firm shall include the following responses: (Ref: Para. A66–A67 and A74)

- (a) Identifying the relevant ethical requirements and determining the applicability of the relevant ethical requirements to the firm, its personnel and others, including, as applicable, the network, network firms, personnel in the network or network firms, or service providers. (Ref: Para. A12, A68–A69)
- (b) Establishing policies or procedures that address the identification and evaluation of threats to compliance with the relevant ethical requirements and how identified threats should be addressed. (Ref: Para. A70–A71)
- (c) Establishing policies or procedures that address the identification, communication, evaluation and reporting of breaches and actions to address the causes and consequences of the breaches. (Ref: Para. A72–A73)
- (d) Obtaining, at least annually, a documented confirmation of compliance with independence requirements from all personnel required by relevant ethical requirements to be independent.

Acceptance and Continuance of Client Relationships and Specific Engagements

37. The firm shall establish the following quality objectives that address the acceptance and continuance of client relationships and specific engagements that are appropriate in the circumstances: (Ref: Para. A75–A76)
- (a) The firm obtains sufficient appropriate information about the nature and circumstances of the engagement and the integrity and ethical values of the client (including management, and, when appropriate, those charged with governance) and based on such information makes appropriate judgments about whether to accept or continue a client relationship or specific engagement. (Ref: Para. A77–A82)
 - (b) The firm makes appropriate judgments about the firm's ability to perform the engagement in accordance with professional standards and applicable legal and regulatory requirements when determining whether to accept or continue a client relationship or specific engagement, including that the firm has: (Ref: Para. A83)
 - (i) Resources to perform the engagement; and (Ref: Para. A84)
 - (ii) Access to information to perform the engagement, or to the persons who provide such information.
 - (c) The firm's financial and operational priorities do not inappropriately influence the acceptance or continuance of a client relationship or specific engagement. (Ref: Para. A85–A87)
 - (d) The firm responds appropriately in circumstances when the firm becomes aware of information subsequent to accepting or continuing a client relationship or specific engagement that would have caused it to decline the client relationship or specific engagement had that information been known prior to accepting or continuing the client relationship or specific engagement. (Ref: Para. A88–A89)
38. In designing and implementing responses to address the quality risks identified by the firm relating to the acceptance and continuance quality objectives, the firm shall include policies or procedures that address circumstances when the firm is obligated by law or regulation to accept the client relationship or specific engagement, if applicable. (Ref: Para. A90–A91)

Engagement Performance

39. The firm shall establish the following quality objectives that address the performance of quality engagements in accordance with professional standards and legal and regulatory requirements:
- (a) Personnel understand and fulfill their responsibilities in connection with the engagement, including, as applicable:
 - (i) The engagement partner's overall responsibility for managing and achieving quality on the engagement and for being sufficiently and appropriately involved throughout the engagement; and (Ref: Para. A92)
 - (ii) The appropriate direction and supervision of the engagement team and review of the work performed. (Ref: Para. A93–A94)
 - (b) Engagement teams exercise appropriate professional judgment and, as applicable, professional skepticism, in planning and performing engagements such that conclusions reached are appropriate. (Ref: Para. A95–A98)
 - (c) The engagement documentation is appropriately assembled and retained.
40. In designing and implementing responses to address the quality risks identified by the firm relating to the engagement performance quality objectives, the firm shall include the following responses:
- (a) Establishing policies or procedures addressing the nature, timing and extent of the direction and supervision of engagement teams and review of their work, including that such direction, supervision and review is determined on the basis that the work performed by less experienced members of the engagement team is directed, supervised and reviewed by more experienced engagement team members. (Ref: Para. A93–A94)
 - (b) Communicating to engagement teams their responsibility for planning and performing the engagement in accordance with professional standards and applicable legal and regulatory requirements.
 - (c) Establishing policies or procedures addressing consultation on difficult or contentious matters, including the engagement team's responsibilities for consultation, the matters on which consultation is required and how the conclusions should be agreed and implemented. (Ref: Para. A99–A100)
 - (d) Establishing policies or procedures addressing differences of opinion that arise within the engagement team, or between the engagement team and the engagement quality reviewer or personnel performing activities within the firm's system of quality management, including those who provide consultation. (Ref: Para. A101)
 - (e) [Refer to **Agenda Item 4–A**]
 - (f) Establishing policies or procedures addressing assembly and retention of documentation that require:
 - (i) The engagement files to be assembled within an appropriate period of time after the engagement reports have been finalized; and (Ref: Para. A110)

- (ii) The engagement documentation to be retained and maintained to meet the needs of the firm and to comply with law, regulation, relevant ethical requirements, or other professional standards. (Ref: Para. A111–A114)

Resources

41. The firm shall establish the following quality objectives that address appropriately obtaining, developing, using, maintaining, allocating and assigning resources, including human resources, technological resources, and intellectual resources, in a timely manner to enable the design, implementation and operation of the system of quality management: (Ref: Para. A115–A118)
- (a) The firm hires, develops and retains personnel, including engagement partners, who have the competence and capabilities to: (Ref: Para. A119–A121)
 - (i) Consistently perform quality engagements, including knowledge or experience regarding professional standards and applicable law or regulation relevant to the engagements the firm performs; or
 - (ii) Perform activities or discharge responsibilities in relation to the operation of the firm's system of quality management.
 - (b) The firm assigns an engagement partner and other human resources to each engagement that have appropriate competence and capabilities, including being given sufficient time, to consistently perform quality engagements. (Ref: Para. A122–A123)
 - (c) The firm assigns human resources to perform activities within the system of quality management that have appropriate competence and capabilities, including sufficient time, to perform such activities.
 - (d) Personnel demonstrate a commitment to quality through their actions and behaviors, develop and maintain the appropriate competence to perform their roles, and are held accountable through timely evaluations, compensation, promotion and other incentives. (Ref: Para. A124–A126)
 - (e) The firm obtains or develops, implements and maintains technological resources to appropriately enable the operation of the firm's system of quality management. (Ref: Para. A127–A133)
 - (f) The firm obtains or develops, implements and maintains intellectual resources to appropriately enable the consistent performance of quality engagements, and such intellectual resources are consistent with professional standards and applicable legal and regulatory requirements, where applicable. (Ref: Para. A134–A135)
 - (g) Personnel appropriately apply or use the firm's technological and intellectual resources. (Ref: Para. A136)

Information and Communication

42. The firm shall establish the following quality objectives that address obtaining, generating or using information regarding the system of quality management, and communicating information within the firm and to external parties on a timely basis to enable the design, implementation and operation of the system of quality management: (Ref: Para. A137)

- (a) The firm has an information system that identifies, captures, processes and maintains reliable information, whether from internal or external sources, that is relevant to the design, implementation and operation of the components of the system of quality management. (Ref: Para. A138–A140)
 - (b) The firm communicates relevant and reliable information to personnel, the nature, timing and extent of which is sufficient to enable personnel to understand and carry out their responsibilities relating to the performance of engagements or activities within the system of quality management. (Ref: Para. A141)
 - (c) The firm’s culture promotes and emphasizes the responsibility of personnel for the exchange of information with the firm and with one another. (Ref: Para. A141)
 - (d) Personnel communicate relevant and reliable information to the firm when performing engagements or activities within the system of quality management. (Ref: Para. A141)
 - (e) The firm communicates relevant and reliable information to external parties, as the firm determines appropriate. (Ref: Para. A144–A155)
43. In designing and implementing responses to address the quality risks identified by the firm relating to the information and communication quality objectives, the firm shall include the following responses:
- (a) Establishing policies or procedures that address the nature, timing and extent of communication and matters to be communicated with engagement teams. (Ref: Para. A142)
 - (b) Communicating the responsibility for implementing the firm’s responses to relevant personnel. (Ref: Para. A143)
 - (c) Establishing policies or procedures that address the nature, timing, extent and content of communication with external parties including:
 - (i) Communication to external parties as required by law, regulation or professional standards. (Ref: Para. A144)
 - (ii) Communication with the network or service providers. (Ref: Para. A145–A146)
 - (iii) Other communication to external parties about the firm’s system of quality management, in a transparency report or otherwise, when the firm determines it appropriate to do so, taking into account external parties identified by the firm who may use such information to support their understanding of the quality of the engagements performed by the firm. In identifying such external parties, the firm shall take into account the nature of the engagements the firm performs and the types of entities for which such engagements are performed, including whether, and the extent to which the firm performs engagements for entities that may be of significant public interest. (Ref: Para. A147–A155)

Monitoring and Remediation Process

44. The firm shall establish the following quality objectives that address the firm’s monitoring and remediation process that enable the evaluation of the design, implementation and operation of the components of the system of quality management and whether the quality objectives have been achieved: (Ref: Para. A156)

- (a) The firm's monitoring and remediation process provides relevant, reliable and timely information about the design, implementation and operation of the components of the system of quality management.
 - (b) The firm takes appropriate actions to respond to identified deficiencies such that deficiencies are remediated on a timely basis.
 - (c) The individual(s) assigned ultimate responsibility and accountability for the system of quality management evaluate whether the system of quality management provides reasonable assurance that the objectives stated in paragraph 21(a) and (b) have been achieved.
45. The firm shall design and implement responses in accordance with paragraphs 46–58 to address the quality risks identified by the firm relating to the monitoring and remediation quality objectives.

Designing and Performing Monitoring Activities

46. The firm shall determine the nature, timing and extent of the monitoring activities, including the appropriate combination of ongoing and periodic monitoring activities. In designing and implementing the monitoring activities, the firm shall take into account: (Ref: Para. A157–A160)
- (a) For a response, the design of the response and the assessed quality risks, and the reasons for the assessments given to the quality risks; (Ref: Para. A161–A162)
 - (b) For monitoring activities over the firm's risk assessment process, the design of that process;
 - (c) Changes in factors that have affected the firm's system of quality management or changes in the system of quality management; (Ref: Para. A163)
 - (d) Previous monitoring activities and remedial actions, including whether previous monitoring activities continue to be relevant in evaluating the firm's system of quality management; and (Ref: Para. A1644–A165)
 - (e) Other relevant information, including concerns identified regarding the commitment to quality of the firm or its personnel and information from external inspections. (Ref: Para. A166–A168)
47. The firm's monitoring activities shall include the inspection of in-process or completed engagements to determine whether the responses that are required to be implemented at the engagement level have been implemented. In determining the nature, timing and extent of the inspection of in-process or completed engagements, the firm shall: (Ref: Para. A169–A171)
- (a) Take into account the factors in paragraph 46; and
 - (b) Include the inspection of at least one completed engagement for each engagement partner on a cyclical basis determined by the firm.
48. The firm shall establish policies or procedures that:
- (a) Require those performing the monitoring activities to have the competence and capabilities, including sufficient time, to perform the monitoring activities effectively; and
 - (b) Address the objectivity of the individuals performing the monitoring activities. Such policies or procedures shall prohibit the engagement team members or the engagement quality reviewer of an engagement from performing any inspection of that engagement. (Ref: Para. A172)

Identifying and Evaluating the Deficiencies

49. The firm shall establish policies or procedures addressing:
- (a) The evaluation of the findings arising from the monitoring activities, the results of external inspections and any other relevant information to determine whether deficiencies exist, including in the monitoring and remediation process. (Ref: Para. A173–A176)
 - (b) The investigation of the root cause(s) of the identified deficiencies, including that the nature, timing and extent of the procedures to be performed to investigate the root cause(s) take into account the nature of the identified deficiencies and their possible severity. (Ref: Para. A177–A182)
 - (c) The evaluation of the severity and pervasiveness of the identified deficiencies, including the effect of the identified deficiencies, individually and in aggregate, on the system of quality management as a whole. (Ref: Para. A183)

Responding to Identified Deficiencies

50. The firm shall design and implement remedial actions to address identified deficiencies that are responsive to the results of the root cause analysis. In doing so, the firm shall determine whether the firm's quality objectives, quality risks and responses remain appropriate and modify them, as appropriate. (Ref: Para. A184)
51. The individual(s) assigned operational responsibility for monitoring and remediation shall evaluate whether the remedial actions are appropriately designed to address the identified deficiencies and their related root cause(s) and determine whether they have been implemented.

Findings About a Particular Engagement

52. In circumstances when a finding relates to an in-process or completed engagement and there is an indication that procedures required were omitted during the performance of the engagement or the report issued may be inappropriate, the firm shall: (Ref: Para. A185)
- (a) Determine what further action is necessary to comply with relevant professional standards and applicable legal and regulatory requirements; and
 - (b) When the report is considered to be inappropriate, consider whether to obtain legal advice.

Ongoing Communication Related to Monitoring and Remediation

53. The individual(s) assigned operational responsibility for the monitoring and remediation process shall communicate on a timely basis to the individual(s) assigned ultimate responsibility and accountability for the system of quality management and the individual(s) assigned operational responsibility for the system of quality management: (Ref: Para. A186)
- (a) A description of the monitoring activities performed;
 - (b) The identified deficiencies, including the severity and pervasiveness of such deficiencies; and
 - (c) The remedial actions to address the identified deficiencies.

54. The firm shall communicate the matters described in paragraph 53 to personnel to the extent that the information is relevant to their responsibilities to enable the personnel to take prompt and appropriate action in accordance with their responsibilities. (Ref: Para. A187)
55. The firm shall communicate information about the results of the firm's monitoring and remediation process to external parties on a timely basis, in accordance with paragraph 43(c).

Evaluating the System of Quality Management

56. The individual(s) assigned ultimate responsibility and accountability for the system of quality management shall evaluate whether the system of quality management provides reasonable assurance that the objectives stated in paragraph 21(a) and (b) have been achieved. This evaluation shall take into account: (Ref: Para. A188 – A190)
 - (a) The severity and pervasiveness of identified deficiencies; and
 - (b) The evaluation in paragraph 51 regarding whether the remedial actions are appropriately designed to address the identified deficiencies and their related root cause(s), and have been implemented.
57. The evaluation in paragraph 56 shall be undertaken at least annually, or more frequently when the identified deficiencies are of a severity and pervasiveness that indicate that the system may not be providing reasonable assurance that the objectives stated in paragraph 21(a) and (b) have been achieved.
58. If the evaluation indicates that the system of quality management does not provide reasonable assurance that the objectives stated in paragraph 21(a) and (b) have been achieved, the individual(s) assigned ultimate responsibility and accountability for the system of quality management shall take prompt and appropriate action in accordance with their responsibilities, including communicating this fact to: (Ref: Para. A191–A192)
 - (a) Personnel to the extent that it is relevant to their responsibilities; and
 - (b) External parties in accordance with the firm's policies or procedures required by paragraph 43(c).

Network Requirements or Network Services

59. When the firm operates as part of a network, the firm shall understand, when applicable:
 - (a) The requirements established by the network regarding the firm's system of quality management, including requirements for the firm to implement or use resources or services designed or otherwise provided by or through the network (i.e., network requirements); (Ref: Para. A193)
 - (b) Any services or resources provided by the network that the firm chooses to implement or use in the design, implementation and operation of the firm's system of quality management (i.e., network services); and (Ref: Para. A194)
 - (c) The firm's responsibilities for any actions that are necessary to implement the network requirements or network services. (Ref: Para. A195)

Notwithstanding the firm's compliance with network requirements or use of network services, such network requirements or network services shall not override the requirements of this ISQM. The firm

remains responsible for its system of quality management, including professional judgments made in the design, implementation and operation of the system of quality management. (Ref: Para. A10, A196–A197)

The Firm's Risk Assessment Process

60. In complying with the requirements in paragraphs 29–33, the firm shall determine the effect of the network requirements or network services on the firm's risk assessment process, taking into account the appropriateness of the network requirements or network services for the firm's system of quality management. (Ref: Para. A198–A199)

Monitoring and Remediation Process

61. If the network performs monitoring activities relating to the firm's system of quality management, the firm shall:
- (a) Determine the effect of the monitoring activities performed by the network on the nature, timing and extent of the firm's monitoring activities performed in accordance with paragraphs 46–47; (Ref: Para. A200)
 - (b) Determine the firm's responsibilities in relation to the monitoring activities, including any related actions by the firm; and
 - (c) As part of identifying and evaluating deficiencies in paragraph 49, obtain the results of the monitoring activities from the network in a timely manner. (Ref: Para. A201)
62. The firm shall, at least annually, obtain information from the network, about the overall scope and results of the monitoring activities across the network firms' systems of quality management and consider the effect of such information on the nature, timing and extent of the monitoring activities that need to be undertaken by the firm. (Ref: Para. A202–A203)
63. As part of identifying and evaluating deficiencies in paragraph 49, if the firm identifies deficiencies in the network requirements or network services, the firm shall communicate to the network relevant information about the identified deficiencies. (Ref: Para. A204)
64. As part of designing and implementing remedial actions in paragraph 50, for identified deficiencies related to the network requirements or network services the firm shall: (Ref: Para. A205)
- (a) Understand the planned remedial actions by the network;
 - (b) Understand whether the network's remedial actions are designed and implemented to address the identified deficiencies and their related root cause(s); and
 - (c) Determine the supplementary remedial actions needed by the firm, if any.

Service Providers

65. When the firm intends to obtain or use resources provided by a service provider, the firm's responses for resources shall include: (Ref: Para. A206–A207)
- (a) Obtaining an understanding of the service provider, including determining that the reputation, competence and capabilities of the service provider are appropriate in the context of the intended use of the resource; (Ref: Para. A208–A209)

- (b) Establishing the nature and scope of the resources provided by the service provider, including the firm's responsibilities for any actions that are necessary in using the resources; and (Ref: Para. A210)
- (c) Determining whether the resource is appropriate for use in the system of quality management in the context of the quality risks identified by the firm and the reasons for the assessments given to the quality risks, including when changes are made to the resources provided. (Ref: Para. A211)

Notwithstanding the firm's use of a service provider(s), the firm remains responsible for its system of quality management.

66. As part of identifying and evaluating deficiencies in paragraph 49, if the firm identifies deficiencies in the resources provided by the service provider, the firm shall communicate to the service provider relevant information about the identified deficiencies. The firm shall also:
- (a) Understand the planned remedial actions by the service provider and consider whether the service provider's remedial actions are designed and implemented to address the identified deficiencies and their related root cause(s);
 - (b) Determine the supplementary remedial actions needed by the firm, if any; and
 - (c) Consider whether to continue using the services provided by the service provider.

Documentation

67. The firm shall prepare documentation of its system of quality management that is sufficient to: (Ref: Para. A212–A214)
- (a) Support a consistent understanding of the system of quality management by personnel, including an understanding of their roles and responsibilities with respect to the firm's system of quality management;
 - (b) Support the consistent implementation and operation of the responses; and
 - (c) Provide evidence of the design, implementation and operation of the responses, such that the firm is able to evaluate the system of quality management.
68. The documentation shall include: (Ref: Para. A215)
- (a) The firm's quality objectives and quality risks;
 - (b) A description of the responses and how the firm's responses address the quality risks; and
 - (c) Regarding the monitoring and remediation process:
 - (i) Evidence of the monitoring activities performed;
 - (ii) The evaluation of the findings from the monitoring activities, results of external inspections and other relevant information, including the identified deficiencies and their related root cause(s);
 - (iii) Remedial actions to address identified deficiencies and the evaluation of the design and implementation of such remedial actions;
 - (v) Communications about monitoring and remediation; and

- (vi) The basis for the evaluation of whether the system of quality management provides reasonable assurance that the objectives stated in paragraph 21(a) and (b) have been achieved.
69. When network requirements or network services are included in the firm's system of quality management or the firm uses resources provided by a service provider, the documentation shall include:
- (a) The matters in paragraph 68 as they relate to network requirements or network services or resources provided by service providers; and
 - (b) The firm's basis for determining:
 - (i) The appropriateness of the network requirements or network services for the firm's system of quality management.
 - (ii) That it is appropriate to use the resources from a service provider in its system of quality management.
70. The firm shall establish a period of time for the retention of documentation for the system of quality management that is sufficient to permit those performing monitoring procedures to evaluate the firm's system of quality management, or for a longer period if required by law or regulation.

Application and Other Explanatory Material

Scope of this ISQM (Ref: Para. 2)

- A1. Other pronouncements of the IAASB, including ISRE 2400 (Revised)⁷ and ISAE 3000 (Revised),⁸ also establish requirements for the engagement partner for the management of quality at the engagement level.

The Firm's System of Quality Management (Ref: Para. 7–8)

- A2. The IESBA Code contains requirements and application material for professional accountants that enable professional accountants to meet their responsibility to act in the public interest. In the context of engagement performance, the consistent performance of quality engagements forms part of the professional accountant's responsibility to act in the public interest.
- A3. Reasonable assurance is obtained when the firm's system of quality management reduces to an acceptably low level the risk that the objectives stated in paragraph 21(a) and (b) are not achieved. Reasonable assurance is not an absolute level of assurance, because there are inherent limitations of a firm's system of quality management. Such limitations include the reality that human judgment in decision making can be faulty and that breakdowns in the firm's system of quality management may occur, for example, due to human error or behavior or failures in the firm's IT applications.
- A4. Professional judgment is necessary for the design, implementation and operation of the system of quality management, including when making decisions about:

⁷ International Standard on Review Engagements (ISRE) 2400 (Revised), *Engagements to Review Historical Financial Statements*

⁸ International Standard on Assurance Engagements (ISAE) 3000, *Assurance Engagements Other than Audits or Reviews of Historical Financial Information*

- The appropriate organizational structure and assignment of roles, responsibilities and authority that support the firm's commitment to quality.
- Whether additional quality objectives beyond those required by this ISQM are appropriate in order to achieve the objective of this standard.
- The identification and assessment of the quality risks.
- The appropriate nature, timing and extent of the responses to address the quality risks.
- The resources and information and communication that are appropriate to enable the design, implementation and operation of the components of the system of quality management.
- The evaluation of whether the system of quality management provides reasonable assurance that the objectives stated in paragraph 21(a) and (b) have been achieved.
- The effect of the network requirements or network services on the firm's risk assessment process or monitoring activities.

Authority of the ISQMs (Ref: Para. 15)

A5. The objective of this ISQM provides the context in which the requirements of the ISQM are set, and establishes the desired outcome of the ISQM to assist the firm in:

- Understanding what needs to be accomplished and, where necessary, the appropriate means of doing so; and
- Exercising professional judgment, taking into account the nature and circumstances of the firm and its engagements.

A5A. The requirements of this ISQM are expressed using "shall."

A5B. Where necessary, the application and other explanatory material provides further explanation of the requirements and guidance for carrying them out. In particular, it may:

- Explain more precisely what a requirement means or is intended to cover; and
- Include examples that illustrate how the requirements might be applied.

While such guidance does not in itself impose a requirement, it is relevant to the proper application of the requirements. The application and other explanatory material may also provide background information on matters addressed in this ISQM. Where appropriate, additional considerations specific to public sector audit organizations are included within the application and other explanatory material. These additional considerations assist in the application of the requirements in this ISQM. They do not, however, limit or reduce the responsibility of the firm to apply and comply with the requirements in this ISQM.

A5C. This ISQM includes, under the heading "Definitions," a description of the meanings attributed to certain terms for purposes of this ISQM. These definitions are provided to assist in the consistent application and interpretation of this ISQM, and are not intended to override definitions that may be established for other purposes, whether in law, regulation or otherwise. The Glossary of Terms relating to International Standards issued by the IAASB in the *Handbook of International Quality Control, Auditing, Review, Other Assurance, and Related Services Pronouncements* published by IFAC includes the terms defined in this ISQM. The Glossary of Terms also includes descriptions of other terms found in the ISQMs to assist in common and consistent interpretation and translation.

Definitions

Deficiencies (Ref: Para. 22(a))

- A6. A quality risk is absent when a quality risk has not been identified or appropriately assessed, such that a quality objective may not be achieved.
- A7. A deficiency in:
- The design of a response exists when a response necessary to address a quality risk is absent or a response is not properly designed in a manner that effectively addresses a related quality risk, such that a quality objective may not be achieved. A deficiency in the design of a response may also arise from a quality objective or quality risk not being appropriately specific, given the nature and circumstances of the firm and its engagements.
 - The operation of a response exists when a response that is properly designed is not implemented appropriately or does not operate as designed, such that a quality objective may not be achieved.

External Inspections (Ref: Para. 22(g))

- A8. In some circumstances, an external oversight authority may undertake other types of reviews, for example, reviews of specific areas of focus that contribute to the improvement of engagement quality. Paragraph A166 describes such reviews as part of other relevant information considered by the firm in the monitoring and remediation component.

Firm (Ref: Para. 22(h))

- A9. The definition of “firm” in relevant ethical requirements may differ from the definition set out in this ISQM.

Network (Ref: Para. 22(k))

- A10. Networks and the firms within the network may be structured in a variety of ways but are in all cases external to the firm. In some instances, network firms may provide services (e.g., resources) that are used by the firm in its system of quality management. There may also be circumstances when the network includes other structures or organizations that establish requirements for the firm related to its system of quality management, or provides services. For the purposes of this ISQM, any requirements implemented by the firm or services used by the firm in its system of quality management that are obtained from the network, network firms or another structure or organization in the network are considered “network requirements or network services.”
- A11. The IESBA Code provides guidance in relation to the terms “network” and “network firm.”

Relevant Ethical Requirements (Ref: Para. 22(s))

- A12. The relevant ethical requirements that are applicable in the context of a system of quality management may vary, depending on the nature and circumstances of the firm and its engagements. The term “professional accountant” may be defined in relevant ethical requirements. For example, the IESBA Code defines the term “professional accountant” and further explains the scope of provisions in the IESBA Code that apply to individual professional accountants in public practice and their firms.

A13. The IESBA Code addresses circumstances when law or regulation precludes the professional accountant from complying with certain parts of the IESBA Code. It further acknowledges that some jurisdictions might have provisions in law or regulation that differ from or go beyond those set out in the IESBA Code and that professional accountants in those jurisdictions need to be aware of those differences and comply with the more stringent provisions, unless prohibited by law or regulation.

Response (Ref: Para. 22(t))

A14. Policies are implemented through the actions of personnel and other individuals whose actions are subject to the policies, or through their restraint from taking actions that would conflict with the firm's policies.

A15. Procedures may be mandated, through formal documentation or other communications, or may be effected by behaviors that are not mandated but are rather conditioned by the firm's culture. Procedures may be enabled through the application of IT, for example, the firm may use an IT application to facilitate obtaining a documented confirmation of compliance with independence requirements from personnel.

Applying, and Complying with, Relevant Requirements (Ref: Para. 23–24)

A16. In some instances the individual(s) assigned ultimate responsibility and accountability for the system of quality management may also assume operational responsibility for the system of quality management. For example, this may be the case in smaller firms.

A17. Examples of when a requirement of this ISQM may not be relevant include:

- Circumstances when the firm is a sole practitioner, for example, establishing the organizational structure and assigning roles, responsibilities and authority within the firm, and if the firm has no other personnel, appropriate direction, supervision and review and addressing differences of opinion.
- Circumstances when the firm only performs engagements that are related services engagements, for example, obtaining a documented confirmation of compliance with independence requirements from all personnel required by relevant ethical requirements to be independent.

System of Quality Management (Ref: Para. 25)

A18. The nature and circumstances of firms and their engagements vary widely and cannot be fully anticipated in this standard. Accordingly, in applying the requirements of this ISQM, the firm is required to exercise professional judgment, such that the objective of this ISQM is achieved.

A19. Paragraph 56 requires the individual(s) assigned ultimate responsibility and accountability for the system of quality management to evaluate whether the system of quality management provides reasonable assurance that the objectives stated in paragraph 21(a) and (b) have been achieved. Reasonable assurance may not be provided if the firm has not designed, implemented or operated its system of quality management in accordance with the requirements of this ISQM.

A20. The nature and circumstances of the firm may include consideration of matters such as:

- The size and operating characteristics of the firm, including the geographical dispersion and the extent to which the firm concentrates or centralizes its processes or activities.

- The firm's strategic decisions and actions, including those about financial and operational matters.
 - External factors, for example, law or regulation, economic stability and social factors.
 - In the case of a firm that belongs to a network, the nature of the network, how the network is organized and the nature and extent of the network requirements that exist for the firm or network services that are used by the firm in the design, implementation and operation of the firm's system of quality management.
 - The extent to which the firm uses service providers in its system of quality management and the nature of such services.
- A21. The nature and circumstances of the engagements performed by the firm may include consideration of matters such as:
- The types of engagements performed by the firm, for example, whether the firm performs only compilation engagements or performs a variety of engagements, including audits of financial statements.
 - The types of entities for which such engagements are undertaken, for example, the industries in which the entities operate and whether the entities are owner-managed, listed or may be of significant public interest. An entity may be of significant public interest because it has a large number and wide range of stakeholders or due to the nature and size of its business.
 - External factors, such as relevant professional standards and law or regulation.
- A22. The quality of professional judgments made by the firm is enhanced when personnel making such judgments demonstrate an attitude that includes a questioning mind, critical assessment of information in formulating decisions, and being alert to changes in the nature and circumstances of the firm or its engagements.

Governance and Leadership (Ref: Para. 26–28)

- A23. Law, regulation or other professional standards may prescribe additional matters related to the governance or leadership of the firm, for example, the firm may be required to follow an audit firm governance code that may incorporate specific governance principles and require adherence by the firm to specific provisions.

Culture (Ref: Para. 26(a) and 27(a)(ii))

- A24. The firm's culture is an important factor in influencing the behavior of personnel, while at the same time accomplishing the firm's strategic goals. Relevant ethical requirements ordinarily establish the principles of professional ethics, and are further addressed in the relevant ethical requirements component of this ISQM. Professional values and attitudes may include, for example:
- Professional manner, for example, timeliness, courteousness, respect, accountability, responsiveness, and dependability;
 - A commitment to teamwork;
 - Maintaining an open mind to new ideas or different perspectives in the professional environment;

- Pursuit of excellence;
- A commitment to continual improvement (e.g., setting expectations beyond the minimum requirements); and
- Social responsibility.

A25. A culture that promotes a commitment to quality is likely to involve clear, consistent, frequent and effective actions, including communications, at all levels within the firm, that emphasize the firm's commitment to quality. The tone at the top and the attitude towards quality, including recognizing and reinforcing the importance of professional ethics, values and attitudes, are set by the individual(s) assigned ultimate responsibility and accountability for the system of quality management through their personal conduct, communication and actions. The attitude towards quality is further shaped and reinforced by other personnel who are expected to embed or demonstrate the behaviors that reflect the firm's commitment to quality.

A26. The nature and extent of the actions of the individual(s) assigned ultimate responsibility and accountability for the system of quality management in establishing a culture may depend on factors such as the size, structure, geographical dispersion and complexity of the firm. For example, a smaller firm may be able to establish the desired culture through the direct interaction of firm leadership with other personnel. For a larger firm in which personnel are dispersed across many geographical locations, more formal communication may be necessary. Other actions that may be taken to establish the expected behavior of personnel include establishing a code of conduct for personnel.

Strategic Decisions and Actions (Ref: Para. 26(c))

A27. It is important that the firm's strategic decision-making process, which may include establishing a business strategy, takes into consideration how the firm's decisions about financial and operational matters (i.e., those that affect the firm's own interests such as profitability or market share) affect the performance of quality engagements.

Public Sector Considerations

A28. In the public sector, although the firm's strategic decisions and actions may be less influenced by matters such as profit or market share, they are nevertheless affected by financial and operational priorities, for example, the allocation of financial resources.

Organizational Structure (Ref: Para. 26(d) and 27(a)(iii))

A29. The organizational structure of the firm may include operating units, operational processes, divisions or geographical locations and other structures. In some instances, the firm may concentrate or centralize processes or activities in a service delivery center, for example, engagement teams may include human resources from service delivery centers who perform specific tasks that are repetitive or specialized in nature.

A30. How the firm assigns roles, responsibilities and authority within the firm may vary. For example, the leadership structure of a smaller firm may comprise a single managing partner with sole responsibility for the oversight of the firm. Larger firms may have multiple levels of leadership, such as a chief executive officer (or equivalent) and managing board of partners (or equivalent), and further levels that reflect the organizational structure of the firm. Some firms may also have an independent

governing body that has non-executive oversight of the firm. At a jurisdictional level, law or regulation may impose certain requirements for the firm that affect the leadership and management structure or their assigned responsibilities.

Resources (Ref: Para. 26(e))

- A31. The individuals(s) assigned ultimate responsibility and accountability or operational responsibility for the system of quality management are in most cases able to influence the nature and extent of resources that the firm obtains, develops, uses and maintains, and how the resources are allocated or assigned, including the timing of when they are used. The firm's strategic decisions and actions may affect decisions about obtaining, allocating or assigning resources. Paragraph 26(c) requires that the strategic decisions and actions, including the firm's financial and operational priorities, reflect the firm's commitment to quality, including not inappropriately influencing decisions about obtaining, allocating or assigning resources for the system of quality management.
- A32. Resource needs may change over time as a result of changes in the nature and circumstances of the firm (e.g., the emergence of new or advanced technology or evolution in the firm's business model) and the engagements performed by the firm. The resources themselves may also change, for example, the firm may develop new technology that affects human resource needs. The firm's resource planning involves forecasting the firm's future resource needs and determining the resources currently required. However, given the continual changes in the nature and circumstances of the firm and its engagements, it may not be practicable for the firm to anticipate all possible resource needs or changes to the resource needs and therefore, in most cases, the firm's resource planning includes processes to deal with resource needs that cannot be anticipated as and when they arise.
- A33. The quality objective in this component addresses all categories of resources. The resources component includes quality objectives that address specific aspects of human resources, technological resources and intellectual resources. Financial resources are necessary for obtaining, developing, using and maintaining human resources, technological resources and intellectual resources. The quality objectives and responses in governance and leadership, such as those that address financial and operational priorities, address financial resources.

Firm Leadership Responsibility and Accountability (Ref: Para. 26(b) and 27(a))

- A34. Paragraph A30 explains the various leadership structures that may exist in a firm. Ordinarily the person with ultimate responsibility and accountability for the system of quality management is the chief executive officer (or equivalent), or the firm's managing partner (e.g., in the case of a smaller firm). However, some firm management structures may assign shared responsibility and accountability for the system of quality management among the firm's managing board of partners (or equivalent).

Operational Responsibility (Ref: Para. 27(a)(iii) and 28)

- A35. The individual(s) assigned ultimate responsibility and accountability for the system of quality management is responsible and accountable for the firm achieving the objective of this ISQM. The individual(s) assigned operational responsibility for the system of quality management as a whole is responsible and accountable for the design, implementation and operation of the firm's system of quality management. In some instances, operational responsibility for the matters in paragraph

27(a)(iii) may be assigned to one individual, particularly in the case of a smaller firm. These responsibilities may also be fulfilled by the individual(s) assigned ultimate responsibility and accountability for the system of quality management.

- A36. In some instances, the individual assigned operational responsibility for the system of quality management may further assign specific roles, procedures, tasks or actions to other individuals within the firm. For example, in addition to assigning responsibility for compliance with independence requirements and the monitoring and remediation process, the individual may assign responsibility for technological resources.
- A37. In some circumstances, the firm may establish additional criteria for the eligibility of the individual(s) assigned operational responsibility for the matters set out in paragraph 27(a)(iii). For example, a larger firm may assign operational responsibility for compliance with independence requirements to an individual who is autonomous from the service lines within the firm, in order that decisions about independence are undertaken in an impartial manner.

Performance Evaluations (Ref: Para. 27(b))

- A38. Periodic performance evaluations of individual(s) within the firm are a required response to promote the accountability of such individual(s) for their assigned responsibilities. In considering the performance of individuals, the firm may take into account:
- The results of the firm's monitoring activities for aspects of the system of quality management that relate to the responsibility of the individual. For example, the firm may measure the results of the firm's monitoring activities for the aspects of the system of quality management that relate to the responsibility of the individual against preset targets.
 - The actions taken by the individual(s) in response to identified deficiencies that relate to the responsibility of that individual, including the timeliness and effectiveness of such actions.
- A39. A performance evaluation that is positive may be rewarded through compensation, promotion and other incentives that focus on the individual's commitment to quality, and reinforce accountability. On the other hand, the firm may take corrective actions to address a performance evaluation that is negative and may affect the firm's achievement of its quality objectives.
- A40. Given the unique position of the individual(s) assigned ultimate responsibility and accountability for the system of quality management, the performance evaluations may be undertaken by an independent non-executive member of the firm's governing body, or a special committee overseen by the firm's governing body, or the firm may engage a service provider to perform the evaluation. In the case of smaller firms, it may not be practicable to perform performance evaluations; however, in such cases the results of the firm's monitoring activities may provide an indication of the performance of the individual(s).

Public Sector Considerations

- A41. In the case of the public sector, it may not be practicable to perform a performance evaluation of the individual assigned ultimate responsibility and accountability for the system of quality management, or to take actions to address the results of the performance evaluation, given the nature of the individual's appointment. Nevertheless, performance evaluations may still be undertaken for other individuals in the firm who are assigned operational responsibility for aspects of the system of quality management.

Complaints and Allegations (Ref: Para. 27(c))

- A42. Establishing policies or procedures relating to complaints and allegations supports the firm's commitment to quality. Complaints and allegations may originate from within or outside the firm and they may be made by personnel or external parties, such as clients or others within the firm's network. Complaints and allegations may relate to the failure to perform work in accordance with professional standards and applicable legal and regulatory requirements, or non-compliance with the firm's policies or procedures. A complaint or allegation may indicate that there is a deficiency in the firm's system of quality management that would be other information considered by the firm as part of its monitoring and remediation process, as described in paragraph 46.
- A43. Law, regulation or relevant ethical requirements may establish responsibilities for the firm or its personnel in circumstances when complaints or allegations arise, such as an obligation on the firm or its personnel to report the matter to an authority outside the firm. For example, sections 260 and 360 of the IESBA Code address the approach to be taken by the firm or its personnel in responding to non-compliance or suspected non-compliance with laws or regulations, which may include communications external to the firm that are addressed through the firm's policies or procedures for external communication in paragraph 43(c).
- A44. In identifying an appropriate individual(s) to whom complaints and allegations are to be communicated, the firm may consider whether the individual(s) has:
- The experience, knowledge, time and appropriate authority within the firm needed to assume the role; and
 - A direct line of communication to the individual(s) assigned ultimate responsibility and accountability for the system of quality management.

The firm may use a service provider to facilitate the reporting of complaints and allegations.

- A45. The firm may also identify an individual(s) to be responsible for supervising the investigation of the complaint and may consider:
- The factors described in paragraph A44; and
 - Whether the individual(s) is otherwise not involved in the engagement to which a complaint or allegation pertains or has sufficient objectivity from the area or personnel subject to the investigation.

The individual(s) supervising the investigation may involve legal counsel as necessary. In the case of a smaller firm, it may not be practicable to identify an individual to supervise the investigation of an allegation or complaint who is not involved in the related engagement or area of the investigation. As a result, such firms may use a service provider to carry out the investigation into complaints and allegations, for example, legal counsel or a consultant.

The Firm's Risk Assessment Process (Ref: Para. 29–34)

- A46. The approach that the firm takes to the risk assessment process may vary according to many factors, including how the firm is structured and organized. For example, the firm's risk assessment process may be centralized (e.g., the quality objectives, quality risks and responses are established centrally for all business units and service lines) or may be decentralized (e.g., the quality objectives, quality risks and responses are established at a business unit or service line level, with the outputs combined

at the firm level). Although this ISQM is organized by components, the firm's risk assessment process may be undertaken for the system of quality management as a whole.

- A47. When the firm belongs to a network, the network may require the firm to include certain quality objectives, quality risks or responses in the firm's risk assessment process (i.e., network requirements), or the network may provide quality objectives, quality risks or responses that the firm may use at their discretion (i.e., network services). Paragraph 60 requires the firm to determine the effect of network requirements or network services on the firm's risk assessment process

Establish Quality Objectives (Ref: Para. 29)

- A48. The quality objectives that the firm is required to establish are set out in paragraphs 26, 35, 37, 39, 41, 42 and 44. The firm may decide that more granular quality objectives than those set out in this ISQM are appropriate given the nature and circumstances of the firm and its engagements.
- A49. Given the iterative nature of the firm's risk assessment process, the determination of whether it is appropriate to establish additional quality objectives may be undertaken at any stage in the process of establishing quality objectives, identifying and assessing quality risks and designing and implementing responses. The results of the firm's monitoring and remediation process may also highlight the need to establish additional quality objectives, including in circumstances when it is determined that the system of quality management does not provide reasonable assurance that the objectives stated in paragraph 21(a) and (b) have been achieved.
- A50. Although the quality objectives set out in this ISQM are organized by component, an objective in one component may overlap, be related to, support or be supported by a quality objective in another component. For example, the quality objective in information and communication addressing the communication of relevant and reliable information in a timely manner to personnel supports the quality objective in the relevant ethical requirements component addressing the understanding of relevant ethical requirements by the firm, its personnel and others subject to relevant ethical requirements.

Conditions, Events, Circumstances, Actions or Inactions that may Affect the Achievement of the Quality Objectives (Ref: Para. 30)

- A51. In understanding the conditions, events, circumstances, actions or inactions that may affect the achievement of the quality objectives, the firm may consider what could go wrong in relation to the matters identified in paragraphs A20–A21 that could affect the achievement of the quality objectives. Such consideration may also assist with the identification of the quality risks.

Identify and Assess Quality Risks (Ref: Para. 31–32)

- A52. The firm applies professional judgment in identifying and assessing the quality risks. The process for identifying and assessing the quality risks may involve a combination of ongoing and periodic risk identification and assessment procedures. In some circumstances, the identification and the assessment of the quality risks may be undertaken concurrently.
- A53. Under this ISQM, not every risk to the achievement of the quality objectives needs to be identified and further assessed. The firm identifies the quality risks based on a preliminary consideration of the possibility of the quality risks occurring and the effect on the achievement of the quality objectives. Only those quality risks that have a reasonable possibility of occurring and, if they were to occur, a

significant effect on the achievement of the quality objective(s) need to be identified and further assessed. There is a reasonable possibility of a risk occurring when the likelihood of its occurrence is more than remote. The further assessment of the quality risks involves a more detailed consideration of the degree of the likelihood of the quality risks occurring and the significance of the effect of the quality risks on the achievement of the quality objectives.

- A54. The significance of the effect of the quality risk on the achievement of a quality objective(s) is judged in the context of the underlying conditions and events that gave rise to the quality risk, as well as the nature and circumstances of the firm and its engagements, which are further described in paragraphs A20–A21. There may be several quality risks for a quality objective and each quality risk may have a different significance of effect on the quality objective if it were to occur.
- A55. The firm may determine that an individual quality risk may not have a significant effect on the achievement of a quality objective(s). However, the firm is required to consider whether there is a reasonable possibility of the individual quality risk occurring together with other quality risks, and if so, whether the combined effect of the quality risks may have a significant effect on the achievement of a quality objective(s).
- A56. The assessment of the quality risks need not comprise formal ratings or scores, and may involve taking into account:
- The expected frequency of the quality risk occurring.
 - The rate at which the effect of the quality risk would take place, or the amount of time that the firm has to respond to the quality risk.
 - The duration of time of the effect of the quality risk after it has occurred.

Design and Implement Responses to Quality Risks (Ref: Para. 22(t) and 33)

- A57. The responses required by this ISQM are set out in paragraphs 27, 28, 36, 38, 40, 43 and 45 and are applicable to all firms because they represent responses that all firms would be expected to implement in a system of quality management. However, the responses required by this ISQM alone are not sufficient to address the firm's quality risks, as explained in paragraph 10(c). Accordingly the firm is required to design and implement responses in addition to those required by this ISQM. For example, paragraph A67 identifies additional responses that may be appropriate to address quality risks for relevant ethical requirements.
- A58. The firm applies professional judgment in designing and implementing responses to address the quality risks. The nature, timing and extent of the responses are affected by the reasons for the assessment given to the quality risks, which includes:
- The likelihood of the quality risk occurring. For example, the higher the likelihood of the quality risk occurring, the more robust the response needs to be.
 - The significance of the effect on the achievement of the quality objectives. For example, the more significant the effect of the quality risk on the achievement of the quality objectives, the more robust the response may need to be.
 - The conditions, events, circumstances, actions or inactions that give rise to the quality risks. For example, if the quality risk relates specifically to engagements performed for a category of

entities (e.g., audits of financial statements of listed entities), the responses may require specific actions for entities in that category, rather than all engagements performed by the firm.

- A59. The nature and circumstances of the firm and its engagements affect the reasons for the assessment given to the quality risks, and the nature, timing and extent of the responses designed and implemented to address the quality risks. For example, in demonstrating a commitment to quality through their actions and behaviors, as required by paragraph 27(a)(ii), leadership of a smaller firm may engage in direct and frequent interactions with personnel throughout the firm. However, in the case of a larger firm, frequent and direct interactions by leadership with all personnel may not be practicable and therefore the actions taken to demonstrate a commitment to quality may involve multiple actions, including establishing firm values in a code of conduct that all personnel are required to comply with and a series of formal communications that emphasize the importance of quality.
- A60. The responses designed and implemented by the firm may operate at the firm level or engagement level, or there may be a combination of responsibilities for actions to be taken at the firm and engagement level in order for a response to operate as designed. For example, the firm may appoint suitably qualified and experienced personnel to provide technical advice to engagement teams, and in doing so may prescribe specific matters for which consultation by the engagement team is required. The engagement team may have a responsibility to identify when such matters occur and to initiate such consultation as required by the firm's policies or procedures. Communicating to engagement teams their responsibilities for the implementation of the responses is therefore important for the functioning of the system of quality management, and is a response required by paragraph 43(b).
- A61. Detailed documentation of the responses may not be necessary in all circumstances. However, a lack of documentation of the responses may increase the likelihood that personnel are not aware of such responses or they might not be followed. The need for formal policies or procedures may be greater for firms that have many personnel or that are geographically dispersed, in order to achieve consistency across the firm.
- A62. In some cases, the response designed and implemented by the firm may address multiple quality risks across multiple components of the system of quality management. Furthermore, the responses designed and implemented to address a quality risk in one component may affect the quality risks and responses of another component. For example, the implementation of a new technological resource, such as an IT application for the performance of engagements, may create new quality risks within the engagement performance component for which a response is necessary, such as increased direction, supervision and review at the engagement level.

Changes in the Nature and Circumstances of the Firm or its Engagements (Ref: Para. 34)

- A63. In some circumstances, changes in the nature and circumstances of the firm's engagements may affect the design, implementation and operation of the system of quality management. For example, an entity for which the firm performs engagements may commence business in a new industry and this may have an effect on the firm's quality risks or responses.
- A64. Quality objectives, quality risks or responses may also need to be modified as a result of:
- Changes that affect specific components of the system of quality management, for example, changes in the firm's resources.
 - Information from the firm's monitoring and remediation, including identified deficiencies from monitoring activities, external inspections or other relevant information.

Revisions to the quality objectives, quality risks or responses in one component may affect other components because of their interrelationship.

Relevant Ethical Requirements (Ref: Para. 35–36)

A65. The IESBA Code sets out the fundamental principles of ethics that establish the standard of behavior expected of a professional accountant and establishes the International Independence Standards. The fundamental principles are:

- (a) Integrity;
- (b) Objectivity;
- (c) Professional competence and due care;
- (d) Confidentiality; and
- (e) Professional behavior.

The IESBA Code also specifies the approach that a professional accountant is required to apply to comply with the fundamental principles and the International Independence Standards and addresses specific topics relevant to complying with the fundamental principles. Law or regulation in a jurisdiction may also contain provisions addressing ethical requirements, including independence, for example, privacy laws affecting the confidentiality of information.

A66. In some cases, the firm may determine that it is appropriate to design and implement responses that are more specific than the provisions of relevant ethical requirements. For example, having regard to the nature and circumstances of the firm and its engagements, a firm may:

- Prohibit the acceptance of gifts and hospitality from a client, even if the value is trivial and inconsequential.
- Set rotation periods for the engagement partner and other senior personnel for all engagements performed by the firm, including other assurance or related services engagements.

A67. Other components, such as information and communication and resources, have quality objectives that enable the design, implementation and operation of the system of quality management. As a result, such components include responses that may affect or relate to the relevant ethical requirements component. For example, the following are examples of responses for information and communication and resources that may address quality risks for relevant ethical requirements:

- Communicating the independence requirements to all personnel and others subject to independence requirements, as applicable.
- Providing training for personnel on relevant ethical requirements.
- Establishing manuals and guides (i.e., intellectual resources) containing the provisions of the relevant ethical requirements and guidance on how they are applied in the circumstances of the firm and the engagements it performs.
- Assigning personnel (i.e., human resources) to manage and monitor compliance with relevant ethical requirements or to provide consultation on matters related to relevant ethical requirements.

- Establishing policies or procedures for personnel to communicate relevant information to appropriate parties within the firm or to the engagement partner, such as requirements for engagement teams or personnel to:
 - Communicate information about client engagements and the scope of services, including non-assurance services, to enable the firm to identify threats to independence during the period of the engagement and during the period covered by the subject matter.
 - Communicate circumstances and relationships that may create a threat to independence, so that the firm can evaluate whether such a threat is at an acceptable level and if it is not, address the threat by eliminating it or reducing it to an acceptable level.
 - Promptly communicate any breaches of the relevant ethical requirements, including those related to independence.
- Establishing an information system, including through IT applications (i.e., technological resources), to monitor compliance with relevant ethical requirements, including recording and maintaining information about independence.

Furthermore, the individual in the firm that is assigned operational responsibility for compliance with independence requirements is ordinarily responsible for the oversight of all matters related to independence, including the policies or procedures that address communication of breaches of independence requirements and determining that appropriate actions have been taken to address the causes and consequences of the breach.

- A68. Various provisions of the relevant ethical requirements may apply only to personnel and not the firm itself. For example, Part 2 of the IESBA Code applies to individuals who are professional accountants in public practice when performing professional activities pursuant to their relationship with the firm. The firm's system of quality management may need to address personnel's compliance with such relevant ethical requirements, for example, the firm may need to establish policies or procedures to facilitate personnel's compliance with Part 2 of the IESBA Code (e.g., policies or procedures addressing section 260 of the IESBA Code regarding non-compliance with laws and regulations).
- A69. The applicability of the relevant ethical requirements to others (i.e., the network, network firms, personnel in the network or network firms, or service providers) depends on whether the relevant ethical requirements contain specific provisions addressing others, and how the firm uses others in its system of quality management. For example:
- Relevant ethical requirements may include requirements for independence that apply to network firms or employees of network firms.
 - The definition of engagement team under relevant ethical requirement may include any individuals engaged by the firm who perform assurance procedures on the engagement (e.g., a service provider engaged to attend a physical inventory count at a remote location). Accordingly, any requirements of the relevant ethical requirements that apply to the engagement team may also be relevant to such individuals.

The principle of confidentiality may apply to a network, network firm or service provider, given that they may have access to client information obtained by the firm.

- A70. Relevant ethical requirements may contain provisions regarding the identification and evaluation of threats and how they should be addressed. For example, the IESBA Code provides a conceptual framework that specifies an approach for:
- Identifying threats to compliance with the fundamental principles and with independence requirements;
 - Evaluating whether the identified threats are at an acceptable level; and
 - In circumstances when the identified threats are not at an acceptable level, addressing the threats by:
 - Eliminating the circumstances, including interests or relationships, that are creating the threats;
 - Applying safeguards, where available and capable of being applied, to reduce the threats to an acceptable level; or
 - Declining or ending the engagement.
- A71. The IESBA Code requires that in applying the conceptual framework, the firm use the reasonable and informed third party test. This test is a consideration by the firm about whether the same conclusions would likely be reached by another party. Such consideration is made from the perspective of a reasonable and informed third party, who weighs all the relevant facts and circumstances that the firm knows, or could reasonably be expected to know, at the time the conclusion is made.
- A72. The policies or procedures addressing breaches of the relevant ethical requirements, including those related to independence, may address matters such as:
- The communication of breaches of the relevant ethical requirements to appropriate individual(s) within the firm;
 - The evaluation of the significance of a breach and its effect on compliance with relevant ethical requirements;
 - Taking whatever actions might be available, as soon as practicable, to satisfactorily address the consequences of a breach;
 - Determining whether to report a breach to external parties; and
 - Determining the appropriate actions to be taken in relation to the individual(s) responsible for the breach.
- A73. Relevant ethical requirements may include specific requirements regarding how the firm is required to respond to a breach of the relevant ethical requirements. For example, the IESBA Code sets out requirements for the firm in the event of a breach of the provisions of the IESBA Code and includes specific requirements addressing breaches of the International Independence Standards, which includes communication with those charged with governance or, in the case of assurance engagements that are not audits or reviews of financial statements, the engaging party or those charged with governance.

Public Sector Considerations

A74. Statutory measures may provide safeguards for the independence of public sector auditors. However, threats to independence may still exist regardless of any statutory measures designed to protect the firm's independence that will require an appropriate response by the organization.

Acceptance and Continuance of Client Relationships and Specific Engagements (Ref: Para. 37–38)

A75. Other components include quality objectives and responses that affect or relate to the acceptance and continuance of client relationships and specific engagements. For example, the information necessary to support the firm's decisions about the acceptance and continuance of client relationships and specific engagements is identified, captured, processed and maintained through the information and communication component, and may include intellectual resources such as databases of client information or access to external information databases. The firm may also use technological resources in the form of IT applications to facilitate the approval of client relationships or specific engagements at appropriate levels within the firm. In addition, governance and leadership addresses the responsibility of the firm with respect to appropriate resource planning and obtaining, allocating or assigning resources.

A76. Other pronouncements of the IAASB may include requirements for the engagement partner regarding the acceptance and continuance of client relationships and specific engagements, irrespective of whether the engagement partner participated in the firm's decision to accept or continue the client relationship or specific engagement. For example, ISA 220 (Revised)⁹ requires the engagement partner to be satisfied that the firm's policies or procedures for the acceptance or continuance of the client relationship and audit engagement have been followed, and to determine that the firm's conclusions are appropriate.

The Nature and Circumstances of the Engagement and the Integrity and Ethical Values of the Client (Ref: Para. 37(a))

A77. The information obtained about the nature and circumstances of the engagement may include:

- The industry of the entity for which the engagement is being undertaken and relevant regulatory factors;
- The nature of the entity, for example, its operations, organizational structure, ownership and governance, its business model and how it is financed; and
- The nature of the underlying subject matter and the criteria to be applied in the preparation of the subject matter information, for example, in the case of integrated reporting, the underlying subject matter may include social, environmental and health and safety information and the criteria may be performance measures established by a recognized body of experts.

A78. In some circumstances the firm may establish policies or procedures that specify, or prohibit, the types of engagements that may be performed by the firm, for example, the firm may prohibit the performance of assurance engagements over a certain subject matter. The policies or procedures may also prohibit the performance of engagements for certain types of entities, for example, the firm may prohibit the performance of engagements in certain industries.

⁹ Proposed ISA 220 (Revised), paragraph 20

A79. The information obtained to support the firm's judgments about the integrity and ethical values of the client may include the identity and business reputation of the client's principal owners, key management, and those charged with its governance. The extent of information obtained may depend on factors such as:

- The nature of the entity for which the engagement is being performed, including the complexity of its ownership and management structure.
- The nature of the client's operations, including its business practices.
- Information concerning the attitude of the client's principal owners, key management and those charged with its governance towards such matters as aggressive interpretation of accounting standards and the internal control environment.
- Whether the client is aggressively concerned with maintaining the firm's fees as low as possible.
- Indications of a client-imposed limitation in the scope of work.
- Indications that the client might be involved in money laundering or other criminal activities.
- The reasons for the proposed appointment of the firm and non-reappointment of the previous firm.
- The identity and business reputation of related parties.

A80. The firm may obtain the information from a variety of internal and external sources, for example:

- In the case of an existing client, consideration of matters that have arisen during the current or previous engagements, if applicable, or inquiry of other personnel who have performed other engagements for the client.
- In the case of a new client, inquiry of existing or previous providers of professional accountancy services to the client, in accordance with relevant ethical requirements.
- Discussions with other third parties, such as bankers, legal counsel and industry peers.
- Background searches of relevant databases (which may be intellectual resources). In some cases, the firm may use a service provider to perform the background search.

A81. Information that is obtained during the firm's acceptance and continuance process about the nature and circumstances of the engagement and the integrity and ethical values of the client's management, and, when appropriate, those charged with governance is in most cases relevant to the engagement team when planning and performing the engagement. Professional standards may specifically require the engagement team to obtain or consider such information. For example, ISA 220 (Revised)¹⁰ requires the engagement partner to take into account information obtained in the acceptance and continuance process in planning and performing the audit engagement in accordance with the ISAs and complying with the requirements of ISA 220 (Revised).

A82. Professional standards or legal and regulatory requirements may include specific provisions that need to be addressed before accepting or continuing a client relationship or specific engagement and may also require the firm to make inquiries of an existing or predecessor firm when accepting an

¹⁰ Proposed ISA 220 (Revised), paragraph 21

engagement. For example, when there has been a change of auditors, ISA 300¹¹ requires the auditor, prior to starting an initial audit, to communicate with the predecessor auditor in compliance with relevant ethical requirements. The IESBA Code requires the firm to make inquiries of an existing or predecessor firm when accepting an engagement that is an audit or review of financial statements and requires the predecessor auditor, on request by the proposed successor auditor, to provide information regarding identified or suspected non-compliance with laws and regulations to the proposed successor auditor. The IESBA Code also includes requirements that address consideration of conflicts of interests in accepting or continuing a client relationship or specific engagement.

The Firm's Ability to Perform Engagements (Ref: Para. 37(b))

- A83. The consideration of whether the firm is able to perform engagements in accordance with professional standards and applicable legal and regulatory requirements includes determining that the firm, its personnel and others are able fulfill their responsibilities in relation to the relevant ethical requirements.
- A84. The judgments about whether the firm has the resources to perform the engagement may involve reviewing the specific circumstances of the engagement and considering whether the firm has the resources to perform the engagement within the reporting deadline, including whether there are:
- Personnel to direct and supervise the engagement and take overall responsibility.
 - Human resources with the appropriate competence and capabilities, including sufficient time, to perform the engagement. This includes human resources with knowledge of the relevant industry or the underlying subject matter or criteria to be applied in the preparation of the subject matter information and experience with relevant regulatory or reporting requirements.
 - Experts are available, if needed.
 - Engagement quality reviewers who meet the eligibility requirements in ISQM 2, if applicable.
 - Technological resources, for example, IT applications that enable the engagement team to perform procedures on the entity's data.
 - Intellectual resources, for example, a methodology, industry or subject matter-specific guides, or access to information sources.

The Firm's Financial and Operational Priorities (Ref: Para. 37(c))

- A85. Financial priorities may focus on the profitability of the firm, and fees obtained for the performance of engagements have an effect on the firm's financial resources. Operational priorities may include strategic focus areas, such as growth of the firm's market share, industry specialization or new service offerings. There may be circumstances when the fee quoted for an engagement is appropriate but, notwithstanding the firm's operational and financial priorities, it is not appropriate for the firm to accept or continue the engagement or client relationship (e.g., when the client lacks appropriate integrity and ethical values).
- A86. There may be other circumstances when the fee quoted for an engagement is not sufficient given the nature and circumstances of the engagement, which may impact the firm's ability to perform the engagement in accordance with professional standards and applicable legal and regulatory requirements. The IESBA Code explains that a self-interest threat to compliance with the

¹¹ ISA 300, *Planning an Audit of Financial Statements*, paragraph 13(b)

fundamental principle of professional competence and due care may arise if the fee quoted for an engagement is so low that it might be difficult to perform the engagement in accordance with professional standards.

- A87. The information obtained to support the firm's judgment about the acceptance or continuance of a client relationship or specific engagement may also be used by the firm in determining the appropriate fee for the engagement.

Information that Becomes Known Subsequent to Accepting or Continuing a Client Relationship or Specific Engagement (Ref: Para. 37(d))

- A88. Information that becomes known subsequent to accepting or continuing a client relationship or specific engagement may:

- Have existed at the time of the firm's decision to accept or continue the client relationship or specific engagement and the firm was not aware of such information; or
- Relate to new information that has arisen since the decision to accept or continue the client relationship or specific engagement.

The information may come to the attention of the firm in a variety of ways, including through the engagement team. For example, ISA 220 (Revised)¹² requires the engagement partner to communicate information to the firm that may have caused the firm to decline the audit engagement had that information been known prior to accepting or continuing the client relationship or specific engagement.

- A89. The firm's response to address circumstances when information becomes known subsequent to accepting or continuing a client relationship or specific engagement that may have affected the firm's decision to accept or continue a client relationship or specific engagement may include policies or procedures that set out the actions to be taken, including:

- Undertaking appropriate consultation within the firm or with legal counsel.
- Considering whether there is a professional, legal or regulatory requirement for the firm to continue the engagement.
- Discussing with the appropriate level of the client's management and with those charged with governance or the engaging party the appropriate action that the firm might take based on the relevant facts and circumstances, and when it is determined that withdrawal is an appropriate action, informing them of this decision and the reasons for the withdrawal.
- If the firm withdraws from the engagement, considering whether there is a professional, legal or regulatory requirement for the firm to report the withdrawal from the engagement, or from both the engagement and the client relationship, together with the reasons for the withdrawal, to regulatory authorities.
- If the firm does not withdraw from the engagement, considering the effect of the information on the performance of the engagement and the additional actions to be taken by the firm or the engagement partner in managing quality at the engagement level (e.g., assigning more experienced personnel to the engagement, requiring an engagement quality review or

¹² Proposed ISA 220 (Revised), paragraph 22

increasing the extent and frequency of the engagement partner's direction and supervision of engagement team members and review of their work).

Circumstances when the Firm is Obligated to Accept or Continue a Client Relationship or Specific Engagement (Ref: Para. 38)

- A90. There may be circumstances when the firm is obligated to accept or continue a client relationship or specific engagement. For example, jurisdictional law or regulation may impose an obligation on the firm to accept or continue a client engagement, or in the case of the public sector, the firm may be appointed through statutory provisions. In such circumstances, when the firm becomes aware of information that would otherwise have caused the firm to decline or discontinue the engagement, the firm may design and implement additional responses to address quality risk(s) arising from the performance of such engagements. For example, the firm may assign more experienced personnel to the engagement or may require that an engagement quality review be performed in respect of the engagement. There may also be actions at the engagement level to manage quality when performing such engagements, for example, increasing the extent and frequency of the engagement partner's direction and supervision of engagement team members and review of their work.
- A91. In some circumstances, a threat to the firm's integrity may arise as a result of being associated with the subject matter of the engagement. Relevant ethical requirements may include requirements addressing circumstances when the firm becomes associated with information that is false or misleading. For example, the IESBA Code contains requirements addressing circumstances when the professional accountant becomes associated with information that contains a materially false or misleading statement, contains statements that have been provided recklessly or omits or obscures required information where such omission or obscurity would be misleading.

Engagement Performance (Ref: Para. 39–40)

- A92. ISA 220 (Revised)¹³ requires the engagement partner to take overall responsibility for managing and achieving quality on the audit engagement.

Direction, Supervision and Review (Ref: Para. 39(a)(ii) and 40(a))

- A93. The policies or procedures addressing engagement supervision may include responsibilities for:
- Tracking the progress of the engagement;
 - Considering the competence and capabilities of individual members of the engagement team, whether they have sufficient time to carry out their work, whether they understand their instructions and whether the work is being carried out in accordance with the planned approach to the engagement;
 - Addressing matters arising during the engagement, considering their significance and modifying the planned approach appropriately; and
 - Identifying matters for consultation or consideration by more experienced engagement team members during the engagement.
- A94. The policies or procedures addressing the review of the work of engagement teams may address matters such as the reviewer's consideration of whether:

¹³ Proposed ISA 220 (Revised), paragraph 11

- The work has been performed in accordance with professional standards and applicable legal and regulatory requirements;
- Significant matters have been raised for further consideration;
- Appropriate consultations have been made and the resulting conclusions have been documented and implemented;
- There is a need to revise the nature, timing and extent of work performed;
- The work performed supports the conclusions reached and is appropriately documented;
- The evidence obtained for an assurance engagement is sufficient and appropriate to support the report; and
- The objectives of the engagement procedures have been achieved.

Judgments and Conclusions (Ref: Para. 39(b))

- A95. The system of quality management creates an environment that supports engagement teams in making informed decisions about the courses of action that are appropriate given the nature and circumstances of the engagement. For example, the responses designed and implemented by the firm to establish a culture that promotes a commitment to quality or the responses addressing the hiring, development, retention and assignment of personnel with the competence and capabilities to perform engagements are important in supporting the exercise of appropriate professional judgment and, as applicable, professional skepticism, by the engagement team.
- A96. The firm's policies or procedures for consultation and differences of opinion and the performance of engagement quality reviews may also address quality risks related to exercising appropriate professional judgment and, as applicable, professional skepticism in planning and performing engagements. The firm may also design and implement other types of responses, including other forms of engagement reviews that are not engagement quality reviews. For example, for audits of financial statements, the firm's responses may include reviews of the engagement team's procedures on significant risks or reviews of certain matters by individuals within the firm who have specialized technical expertise. In some cases, these other types of engagement reviews may be undertaken in addition to an engagement quality review to appropriately address the quality risks.
- A97. Professional skepticism supports the quality of judgments made on the engagement and, through these judgments, the overall effectiveness of the engagement team in performing the engagement. Other pronouncements of the IAASB may address the application of professional judgment or exercise of professional skepticism at the engagement level. For example, ISA 220 (Revised)¹⁴ explains the impediments to the exercise of professional skepticism at the engagement level and actions that the engagement partner may take to deal with such impediments.
- A98. In performing related services engagements, a practitioner is not required to gather evidence to express an opinion or conclusion on the information. However, the practitioner may form conclusions related to the performance of the engagement, for example, in a compilation engagement the

¹⁴ Proposed ISA 220 (Revised), paragraphs A27–A29

practitioner may conclude that the compiled financial information is misleading and take the appropriate actions set out in ISRS 4410 (Revised).¹⁵

Consultation (Ref: Para. 40(c))

A99. Consultation typically involves a discussion at the appropriate professional level, with individuals within or outside the firm who have specialized expertise, on difficult or contentious matters. While the firm establishes policies or procedures regarding the matters on which consultation is required, the engagement team may identify other matters that require consultation.

A100. In considering its resource needs, the firm may consider the resources needed to enable consultation, for example, appropriate access to intellectual resources to facilitate research and personnel with the competence and capabilities to provide consultations. In some instances, such as a smaller firm, human resources to support consultation may only be available externally, for example, other firms, professional and regulatory bodies, or commercial organizations that provide such services. In such cases, paragraphs 65–66 apply.

Differences of Opinion (Ref: Para. 40(d))

A101. The policies or procedures addressing differences of opinion may be established in a manner that encourages identification of differences of opinion at an early stage. Procedures to resolve such differences may include consulting with another practitioner or firm, or a professional or regulatory body.

Engagement Quality Reviews (Ref: Para: 40(e))

A102–A109. [Refer to **Agenda Item 4–A**]

Engagement Documentation (Ref: Para. 40(f))

A110. Law or regulation may prescribe the time limits by which the assembly of final engagement files for specific types of engagements is to be completed. Where no such time limits are prescribed in law or regulation, the firm ordinarily establishes an appropriate time limit. In the case of an audit of financial statements, for example, such a time limit would ordinarily not be more than 60 days after the date of the auditor's report.

A111. The retention and maintenance of engagement documentation includes managing the safe custody, integrity, accessibility or retrievability of the underlying data. The retention and maintenance of engagement documentation may involve the use of IT applications. The integrity of engagement documentation may be compromised if it is altered, supplemented or deleted without the appropriate authorization to do so, or if it is permanently lost or damaged. The firm's responses may therefore include actions to prevent unauthorized access and create audit trails that indicate access and changes to engagement documentation.

A112. Relevant ethical requirements generally establish an obligation for personnel to observe at all times the confidentiality of client information, unless specific client authority has been given to disclose information, there are responsibilities under law, regulation or relevant ethical requirements to do so,

¹⁵ International Standard on Related Services Engagements (ISRS) 4410 (Revised), *Compilation Engagements*, paragraphs 34–36

or there is a right to do so. Specific law or regulation may impose additional obligations on personnel to maintain client confidentiality, particularly where data of a personal nature is concerned. Accordingly, the firm's responses for relevant ethical requirements may include responses for the retention and maintenance of engagement documentation. The firm's responses to address the confidentiality of client information may need to address all possible locations of client information, including engagement documentation, emails, firm servers or hard copy.

A113. Law or regulation may prescribe the retention period for engagement documentation, or there may be generally accepted retention periods. If the retention periods are not prescribed in law or regulation, the firm may, in determining an appropriate retention period, consider the nature of the engagements performed by the firm and the firm's circumstances, for example, whether the engagement documentation is needed to provide a record of matters of continuing significance to future engagements. In the case of audits of financial statements, the retention period would ordinarily be no shorter than five years from the date of the auditor's report, or, if later, the date of the auditor's report on the group financial statements, when applicable.

A114. Unless otherwise specified by law or regulation, engagement documentation is the property of the firm. The firm may, at its discretion, make portions of, or extracts from, engagement documentation available to clients, provided such disclosure does not undermine the validity of the work performed, or, in the case of assurance engagements, the independence of the firm or its personnel.

Resources (Ref: Para. 41)

A115. Resources for the purposes of the resources component include:

- Human resources.
- Technological resources, for example, IT applications.
- Intellectual resources, for example, written policies or procedures, a methodology or guides.

Financial resources are also relevant to the system of quality management because they are necessary for obtaining, developing and maintaining the firm's human resources, technological resources and intellectual resources. The governance and leadership component addresses appropriate resource planning for all resources. Given the nature of financial resources, the quality objectives and responses in governance and leadership, such as those that address financial and operational priorities, address financial resources. This component addresses specific aspects of human resources, technological resources and intellectual resources.

A116. Resources may be categorized into greater levels of granularity, or combined (e.g., intellectual resources may be combined with technological resources). Resources are pervasive to all components of the system of quality management and therefore the firm's responses for resources will address quality risks specific to resources, as well as quality risks for other components. Such responses may be designed and implemented individually for each component, or they may be designed and implemented for all components holistically.

A117. Resources may be internal to the firm, or may be obtained externally from a network, network firm or service provider. In such circumstances, in addition to complying with the requirements for resources set out in this component, the firm is also required to comply with paragraphs 59–64 addressing network requirements or network services or paragraphs 65–66 addressing the use of resources from a service provider.

A118. Other components, such as information and communication, include quality objectives that enable the design, implementation and operation of the system of quality management, and responses that affect or relate to resources. For example, the information necessary to facilitate the appropriate assignment of personnel or the evaluation of personnel is identified, captured, processed and maintained through the information and communication component.

Human Resources (Ref: Para. 41(a)–41(d))

A119. Competence is the ability of the individual to perform a role to a defined standard and goes beyond knowledge of principles, standards, concepts, facts, and procedures; it is the integration and application of technical competence, professional skills, and professional ethics, values and attitudes. Competence can be developed through a variety of methods, including professional education, continuing professional development, training, work experience or coaching of less experienced engagement team members by more experienced engagement team members.

A120. Professional standards, law or regulation may establish requirements addressing competence and capabilities. For example, law or regulation of a jurisdiction may establish requirements for the professional licensing of engagement partners, including requirements regarding their professional education and continuing professional development.

A121. The firm's responses that relate to the hiring, development and retention of personnel may include:

- Recruitment strategies that focus on selecting individuals who have the ability to develop the competence necessary to consistently perform quality engagements or activities in relation to the operation of the system of quality management.
- Training programs, which may form part of the firm's intellectual resources, to develop personnel's competence to enable them to perform their roles and responsibilities.
- Policies addressing the continuing professional development of personnel, including personnel's responsibility to maintain an appropriate level of continuing professional development, and training resources and other assistance provided by the firm.
- Evaluation mechanisms that establish competency areas and other performance measures, and facilitate the evaluation of personnel at appropriate intervals.
- Compensation, promotion and other incentives, appropriate to the nature and circumstances of the firm, for all personnel, including engagement partners, the individuals assigned ultimate responsibility and accountability for the firm's system of quality management, and the individual(s) assigned operational responsibility the firm's system of quality management or other aspects of the system of quality management.

A122. Human resources assigned to engagements or other roles may include personnel in a service delivery center, human resources engaged by the firm (i.e., a service provider) or human resources from a network or network firm. In circumstances when human resources are external to the firm, in order to comply with paragraphs 59–66, the firm's actions are likely to include obtaining an understanding of the human resources and determining that the competence and capabilities of the human resources are appropriate in the circumstances for which they will be used.

A123. Given the importance of the role of the engagement partner, it may be appropriate for the firm to communicate the identity and role of the engagement partner to key members of client management and those charged with governance.

A124. Timely evaluations and feedback help support and promote the continual development of the competence of personnel. Less formal methods of evaluation and feedback may be used, for example, in the case of smaller firms with fewer personnel.

A125. Evaluations of personnel may be used by the firm in determining the compensation, promotion, or other incentives. In some circumstances, simple or informal incentives that are not based on monetary rewards may be appropriate.

A126. Actions may be taken for personnel who fail to demonstrate a commitment to quality, develop and maintain the competence to perform their role or implement the firm's responses as designed (e.g., an individual breaches the firm's policies or procedures related to independence). The actions taken by the firm may depend on the severity of the failure and the frequency of occurrence and may include, for example:

- Training or other professional development;
- Considering the effect of the matter on the evaluation, compensation, promotion or other incentives of the individual(s); or
- Taking disciplinary action against the individual(s), if appropriate, depending on the severity of the failure and the frequency of occurrence.

Technological Resources (Ref: Para. 41(e))

A127. Technological resources, which are typically IT applications, form part of the firm's IT environment. The firm's IT environment also includes the supporting IT infrastructure and the IT processes and human resources involved in those processes that the firm uses in the operation of its system of quality management:

- An IT application is a program or a set of programs that is designed to perform a specific function directly for the user or, in some cases, for another application program.
- The IT infrastructure is comprised of the network, operating systems, and databases and their related hardware and software.
- The IT processes are the firm's processes to manage access to the IT environment, manage program changes or changes to the IT environment and manage IT operations, which includes monitoring the IT environment.

An IT application, IT infrastructure or IT process may serve multiple purposes within the firm and some of the purposes may be unrelated to the system of quality management.

A128. In some cases, the network may require the firm to use an IT application, the firm may choose to use an IT application provided by the network or the firm may purchase an IT application from a service provider. The firm may also use the network or a service provider to manage certain aspects of the IT processes.

A129. Paragraph 42(a) addresses the firm's responsibility to establish an information system relevant to the system of quality management, which may include the use of IT elements and records in the form of digital information. The firm may also use certain IT applications to enable the operation of various aspects of its system of quality management, for example, IT applications that monitor compliance with relevant ethical requirements and record and maintain information about independence. Other IT applications may be implemented by the firm for use by engagement teams in performing

engagements, for example, the firm may mandate the use of an IT application that facilitates the documentation of work performed or the firm may offer an IT application to perform analyses of the client's information that engagement teams may choose to use.

A130. The IT environment for a larger firm may be comprised of customized or integrated IT applications, with dedicated human resources to manage the IT infrastructure and IT processes. The IT environment for smaller firms may comprise IT applications that are commercial software, and the IT processes may involve authorizing access to the IT applications and processing updates to the IT applications.

A131. The use of IT applications or other aspects in the IT environment may give rise to quality risks, for example:

- Inappropriate reliance on IT applications that are inaccurately processing data, processing inaccurate data, or both.
- Unauthorized access to data that may result in breaches in confidentiality of information contained in the data, destruction of data or improper changes to data.
- Potential loss of data or inability to access data or IT applications as required.
- Unauthorized changes to IT applications or other aspects of the IT environment.
- Failure to make necessary changes to IT applications or other aspects of the IT environment.

The nature and significance of these quality risks may vary based on whether, and the extent to which, the firm relies on IT, including automated controls, to enable the design, implementation and operation of the system of quality management. General IT controls may be part of the responses designed and implemented by the firm to address such quality risks.

A132. When implementing an IT application, it is necessary for the firm to determine that the IT application operates appropriately. This determination may involve consideration of whether:

- The data inputs are appropriate and confidentiality of the data is preserved.
- The IT application operates as designed and achieves the purpose for which it is intended.
- The outputs of the IT application achieve the purpose for which they will be used.
- It is clear how users are required to interact with and use the IT application and users have appropriate support.
- The general IT controls necessary to support the IT application's continued operation as designed are appropriate.

The firm may establish policies or procedures addressing the evaluation of IT applications. Depending on the nature and circumstances of the firm and the nature or use of the IT application, the evaluation may be undertaken by a central IT function within the firm, or by others. For example, the evaluation of an IT application widely used across the firm may be undertaken by a central IT function, whereas the evaluation of an IT application that will be used by only a single engagement team may be undertaken by the engagement team in accordance with the firm's policies or procedures. In some circumstances, the firm may require that the evaluation of all IT applications be undertaken by a central IT function irrespective of the extent of use of the IT application. The firm

may also specifically prohibit the use of certain IT applications or features of the IT applications, including when they have not been approved for use by the firm.

A133. Engagement teams may need training on how to use the IT applications appropriately. Furthermore, for certain IT applications, specialized skills may be needed to utilize the IT application effectively and the firm may need to specify procedures that set out how the engagement team operates the IT application. For example, in some instances the firm's IT application for the performance of engagements may require that the engagement team complete certain information about the client and the circumstances of the engagement in order to generate an appropriate engagement file template for the circumstances of the engagement.

Intellectual Resources (Ref: Para. 41(f))

A134. Intellectual resources include the information the firm uses to promote consistency in the performance of engagements, for example, written policies or procedures, a methodology, industry or subject matter-specific guides, standardized documentation or access to information sources (e.g., subscriptions to websites that provide in-depth information about entities or other information that is typically used in the performance of engagements).

A135. The intellectual resources may be made available to personnel through technological resources, for example, the firm's audit methodology may be embedded in the audit IT application that facilitates the performance of the engagement. The firm may also need human resources to develop, implement and maintain the intellectual resources. Intellectual resources may also be dependent on relevant and reliable information that is identified, captured, processed and maintained through the firm's information and communication component.

Personnel's Use of Technological and Intellectual Resources (Ref: Para. 41(g))

A136. The firm may establish policies or procedures regarding the use of the firm's technological and intellectual resources. Such policies or procedures may:

- Require the use of certain IT applications or intellectual resources in performing engagements, for example, engagement teams may be required to use the firm's methodology in performing the engagement and the IT applications that facilitate the performance of the engagement and the archival of the engagement file.
- Specify the qualifications or experience of personnel that are needed to use the IT application, for example, an IT application for the performance of data analytics may require certain expertise to understand and operate the IT application and interpret the results.
- Set out how the technological or intellectual resources are expected to be used.

Information and Communication (Ref: Para. 42–43)

A137. Obtaining, generating or communicating information is generally an ongoing process that involves all personnel and encompasses the dissemination of information within the firm and externally. Information and communication is pervasive to all components of the system of quality management and therefore the firm's responses for information and communication address quality risks specific to information and communication, as well as quality risks for the other components. Such responses may be designed and implemented individually for each component, or for all components holistically. Paragraphs A50, A67, A77 and A118 explain and provide examples of how the information and

communication component supports the design, implementation and operation of the other components of the system of quality management.

A138. Reliable information includes information that is accurate, complete, timely and valid to enable the proper functioning of the firm's system of quality management.

The Firm's Information System (Ref: Para. 42(a))

A139. The information system in smaller firms is likely to be less sophisticated than in larger firms and involve a less complex IT environment.

A140. The information system may include the use of manual or IT elements, which affect the manner in which information is identified, captured, processed, maintained and communicated. The procedures to identify, capture, process, maintain and communicate information may be enforced through IT applications, and in some cases may be embedded within the firm's responses for other components. For example, information is generated from the results of the firm's monitoring activities, and the firm's responses for monitoring and remediation may define how such information is captured, processed, maintained and communicated. In addition, records in the form of digital information may replace or supplement records in the form of paper documents. For example, the firm may use an IT application to facilitate obtaining a documented confirmation of compliance with independence requirements from personnel.

Communication within the Firm (Ref: Para. 42(b)–42(d) and 43(a))

A141. The firm and its personnel share relevant information to enable the proper functioning of the firm's system of quality management. For example:

- The firm communicates information to engagement teams, such as information that is obtained during the firm's acceptance and continuance process that is relevant to engagement teams in planning and performing engagements.
- Engagement teams communicate information to the firm, for example, information about:
 - The client obtained during the performance of an engagement that would have caused the firm to decline the client relationship or specific engagement had that information been known prior to accepting or continuing the client relationship or specific engagement.
 - The operation of the firm's responses to quality risks (e.g., concerns about the firm's processes for assigning personnel to engagements).

In some cases, the information communicated by the engagement team may indicate a deficiency in the system of quality management.

- Personnel performing activities within the firm's system of quality management share information. For example, the individual(s) assigned operational responsibility for compliance with independence requirements may communicate changes in the independence requirements and how the firm's policies or procedures have been changed in response to such changes to the person with ultimate responsibility for the system of quality management.

Two-way communication may also be among the various parties, for example, engagement teams may communicate information directly to the personnel performing activities within the firm's system of quality management.

A142. Matters communicated by the firm to engagement teams or other personnel performing activities within the firm's system of quality management may include changes to the system of quality management, to the extent that the changes are relevant to their responsibilities and enables the personnel to take prompt and appropriate action in accordance with their responsibilities.

A143. Responsibility for operating the responses designed and implemented by the firm may be assigned to:

- The engagement team, as described in paragraph A60;
- Personnel performing activities within the firm's system of quality management (e.g., assigning responsibility for the performance of an engagement quality review to an engagement quality reviewer); or
- A combination of the engagement team and personnel performing activities within the firm's system of quality management.

The firm may also use human resources external to the firm to assist in operating the responses.

Communication with External Parties (Ref: Para. 42(e) and 43(c))

Communication Required by Law or Regulation

A144. Law, regulation or professional standards may require the firm to communicate information to external parties. For example:

- In circumstances when the firm becomes aware of non-compliance with laws and regulations by a client, relevant ethical requirements may require the firm to report, or to consider whether reporting, the non-compliance with laws and regulations to an appropriate authority outside the client entity is an appropriate action in the circumstances.
- Law, regulation or professional standards may require the firm to publish a transparency report and may specify the nature of the information that is required to be included in the transparency report.

Communicating with the Network or Service Provider

A145. When the firm belongs to a network, frequent communication with the network supports the network in establishing network requirements and providing network services that promote the consistent performance of quality engagements. Furthermore, the network's communication of relevant information supports the firm in the design, implementation and operation of its system of quality management.

A146. When the firm uses a service provider, frequent communication with the service provider supports the service provider in maintaining the resources such that they are appropriate for use by the firm in its system of quality management. Furthermore, the service provider's communication of relevant information to the firm that affects the firm's system of quality management supports the firm in the design, implementation and operation of its system of quality management.

Communication to External Parties about the Firm's System of Quality Management

A147. The firm's ability to maintain stakeholder confidence in the quality of its engagements may be enhanced through effective two-way communication between the firm and its stakeholders. For example, stakeholders' perception of the quality of engagements performed by the firm may be improved when the firm is transparent about the activities that it has undertaken to address quality, and the effectiveness of those activities.

Identifying external parties who may use information about the firm's system of quality management

A148. External parties may include management or those charged with governance of the firm's clients, the firm's network or network firms, external oversight authorities, other firms who use the work of the firm in the performance of engagements (e.g., in relation to a group audit) or service providers. External parties may also include users of the clients' reports, such as current shareholders and credit providers of the entities for whom the firm performs engagements.

A149. The firm uses professional judgment when identifying external parties who may use information about the firm's system of quality management. For example, in the case of a firm that performs audits of financial statements of listed entities or entities that may be of significant public interest described in paragraph A21, external parties who may use information about the firm's system of quality management may include shareholders of such entities, as well as management and those charged with governance. On the other hand, external parties who use information about the firm's system of quality management for a firm that only performs compilations of financial statements of non-listed entities or entities that are not of significant public interest may be limited to client management.

Nature, timing, extent and content of communications to external parties about the system of quality management

A151. The form of communication to external parties may include a publication such as a transparency report or audit quality report, webpage, targeted communication to specific stakeholders (e.g., information about the results of the firm's monitoring and remediation process), or direct conversations with the external party.

A152. The information that is communicated to external parties about the firm's system of quality management may depend on a variety of factors, including the form of the communication, the nature and circumstances of the firm and the external parties with whom the communication is being undertaken. For example, the communication may contain information about:

- The nature and circumstances of the firm, such as the organizational structure and operating environment and whether it is part of a network.
- The firm's governance and leadership, such as its culture and commitment to quality and information about the individuals responsible for the leadership of the firm.
- Factors that contribute to quality engagements, for example, such information may be presented in the form of engagement quality indicators.
- The results of the firm's monitoring activities and external inspections, and how the firm has remediated identified deficiencies or is otherwise responding to them.
- The evaluation undertaken in accordance with paragraph 56 of whether the system of quality management provides reasonable assurance that the objectives stated in paragraph 21(a) and

(b) have been achieved, including the basis for the judgments made in undertaking the evaluation.

- How the firm has responded to emerging developments and changes in the circumstances of the firm or its engagements, including how the system of quality management has been adapted to respond to such changes.

A153. Information that is communicated to external parties about the firm's system of quality management that has the following attributes contributes to an enhanced understanding of the quality of the engagements performed by the firm:

- The information is specific to the circumstances of the firm and is prepared and presented in a timely manner. Relating the matters in the firm's communication directly to the specific circumstances of the firm may help to minimize the potential that such information becomes overly standardized and less useful over time.
- The information is presented in a clear and understandable manner that is neither misleading nor would inappropriately influence the users of the communication (e.g. the information is appropriately balanced towards positive and negative aspects of the matter being communicated).
- The information is accurate and complete in all material respects and does not contain information that is misleading.
- The information takes into consideration the information needs of the users for whom it is intended. In considering the information needs of the users, the firm may consider matters such as the level of detail that users would find meaningful and whether users have access to relevant information through other sources, for example, information located on the firm's website.

A154. In circumstances when the firm is part of a network, it may be useful to provide information about the relationship between the firm and the network in certain external communications, such as a transparency report. Such information helps facilitate an understanding of the responsibilities of the firm and the network, and clarifies how the network requirements or network services promote the consistent performance of quality engagements across the network firms. Such information may include:

- The nature of the relationship between the firm and the network and the overall structure of the network.
- Requirements established by the network for the firm or network services that are used by the firm in its system of quality management.
- Information about the overall scope, extent and results of network monitoring activities across the network firms that the network has provided to the firm in accordance with paragraph 62, if applicable.

In some circumstances, the network may provide external communication about the above matters, for example, in the form of a network transparency report, which may support the firm in communicating the information.

A155. In some cases, law or regulation may preclude the firm from communicating information related to its system of quality management externally. For example, certain information may be subject to privacy

or secrecy laws or regulations or the firm may be precluded from communicating certain information because of the duty of confidentiality under law, regulation or relevant ethical requirements.

Monitoring and Remediation Process (Ref: Para. 44–58)

A156. In addition to enabling the firm's evaluation of the system of quality management, the monitoring and remediation process facilitates the improvement of engagement quality and the system of quality management. Professional judgment is applied in making various decisions within the monitoring and remediation process, including decisions about:

- The nature, timing and extent of the monitoring activities, including the scope of inspection of engagements.
- The evaluation of the findings from the monitoring activities, results of external inspections and other relevant information to determine whether deficiencies exist.
- How to appropriately respond to the findings from the monitoring activities, results of external inspections and other relevant information.
- The evaluation of the severity and pervasiveness of the identified deficiencies.
- Whether the system of quality management provides reasonable assurance that the objectives stated in paragraph 21(a) and (b) have been achieved.

Designing and Performing Monitoring Activities (Ref: Para. 46–48)

A157. The firm's monitoring activities may comprise ongoing monitoring activities, periodic monitoring activities or a combination of both. Ongoing monitoring activities are generally routine activities, built into the firm's processes and performed on a real-time basis, reacting to changing conditions, for example:

- An IT application that continually monitors whether personnel have recorded financial investments as part of the firm's independence responses.
- Inspection of in-process engagements that are focused on specific aspects of completed work.

Periodic monitoring activities are conducted at certain intervals by the firm, for example, inspection of training records to determine that personnel have attended training in accordance with the firm's policies or procedures or inspection of completed engagements. In most cases, ongoing monitoring activities identify deficiencies in the system of quality management in a timelier manner.

A158. The purpose of a monitoring activity is to monitor the responses in the system of quality management. The system of quality management may include responses that are similar in nature to a monitoring activity but have a different purpose (i.e., responses that are designed to detect failures or shortcomings in the system of quality management so that they can prevent a quality risk from occurring). For example, in some circumstances, an in-process review of engagement documentation may be designed as a monitoring activity as part of paragraph 47, in which case the findings from that review are subject to the requirements in paragraph 49. In other circumstances, an in-process review may be designed as a response to address quality risks in the engagement performance component or other components. Determining the purpose of the response is ordinarily necessary in determining its design and implementation.

A159. The nature, timing and extent of the monitoring activities may be affected by factors such as:

- The size, structure and organization of the firm.
- The involvement of the network in monitoring activities.
- The resources that the firm intends to use to enable monitoring activities, for example, the use of IT applications in addition to human resources.
- The design of the response subject to monitoring. For example, the response may comprise in-process reviews of engagement documentation of selected engagements by personnel who are not members of the engagement team. The extent of the review of the engagement documentation, the nature of the matters considered in the review, and how the results of the review are collated may affect the nature, scope and frequency of the monitoring activities over the in-process review.

A160. When performing monitoring activities, the firm may determine that changes to the nature, timing and extent of the monitoring activities are needed. For example, the firm may identify findings that indicate the need for more extensive monitoring activities in a particular area.

The Design of the Response and the Assessed Quality Risks (Ref: Para. 46(a))

A161. The nature, timing and extent of the firm's monitoring activities may be more extensive for areas of the system of quality management where the quality risks are greater and the related responses are more extensive or rigorous. For example, the firm may perform more extensive monitoring activities over compliance with independence requirements for audits of financial statements of listed entities or entities that are of significant public interest because the effect of the quality risks on the achievement of the quality objective(s) may be greater. However, considering other areas of the system of quality management that are less susceptible to risk is also necessary to have a basis for determining that the conclusions reached about the system of quality management are appropriate. For example, although the firm performs more extensive monitoring activities over compliance with independence requirements for engagements that are susceptible to greater risk, some monitoring activities over compliance with independence requirements for other engagements may enable the firm to form appropriate conclusions on the population as a whole.

A162. The reasons for the assessments given to the quality risks may include characteristics associated with certain engagements, for example:

- Engagements performed in respect of certain entities (e.g., a listed entity or entity that may be of significant public interest).
- Engagements where the firm or engagement partner are inexperienced, for example, a new industry, a new service offering or new engagement partner.
- Engagements that have been subject to external inspection and which had negative findings, or engagements where the findings of previous monitoring activities resulted in identified deficiencies.
- Engagements where the firm's engagement acceptance and continuance procedures indicated that matters may exist that may increase the engagement risk.

Changes in Factors that have Affected the System of Quality Management or Changes in the System of Quality Management (Ref: Para. 46(c))

A163. Changes in factors that have affected the firm's system of quality management include changes in the nature and circumstances of the firm and its engagements (e.g., a new service offered by the firm or changes in the firm's environment). Changes in the system of quality management include:

- Changes to address an identified deficiency in the system of quality management.
- Changes to the responses, for example, because they have become obsolete over time or more effective responses are designed and implemented, such as the use of IT applications to replace manual processes.

When changes occur, previous monitoring activities undertaken by the firm may no longer provide the firm with information to support the evaluation of the system of quality management and therefore the firm's monitoring activities may include monitoring areas of change.

Previous Monitoring Activities (Ref: Para. 46(d))

A164. The findings from the firm's previous monitoring activities may indicate areas of focus for the monitoring activities, for example, monitoring may need to continue to be undertaken in certain areas where there is a history of deficiencies. Furthermore, the monitoring activities may need to evaluate the effectiveness of remedial actions implemented to address deficiencies previously identified.

A165. Although areas of the system of quality management may not have changed, previous monitoring activities undertaken by the firm may no longer provide the firm with information to support the evaluation of areas that have not changed, for example, because of the time that has elapsed since the monitoring activities were undertaken.

Other Relevant Information (Ref: Para. 46(e))

A166. Examples of sources of other relevant information may include:

- Information communicated by the network in accordance with paragraphs 61(c) and 62 about the firm's system of quality management, including the network requirements or network services that the firm has included in its system of quality management.
- Information communicated by a service provider about the resources the firm uses in its system of quality management.
- Concerns about the commitment to quality of the firm or its personnel, communicated in accordance with paragraph 27(c).
- The results of industry-wide reviews undertaken by an external oversight authority of focus areas related to systems of quality management or the performance of engagements.
- Other reviews undertaken by an external oversight authority, for example, informal reviews undertaken by an external oversight authority to assess a firm's preparation for the implementation of a new professional standard, or reviews of specific areas of focus that contribute to the improvement of engagement quality.
- Information from regulatory actions and litigation against the firm or other firms in the jurisdiction that may highlight areas for the firm to consider.

- A material restatement of financial statements, an engagement report that required reissuance or litigation against the firm.

A167. The results of external inspections or other relevant information may indicate findings or deficiencies in previous monitoring activities undertaken by the firm, which may affect the firm's consideration of whether the nature, scope and frequency of previous monitoring activities were appropriate.

A168. The results of external inspections cannot be used by the firm as a substitute for undertaking internal monitoring activities. Nevertheless, the information from the results of external inspections may affect the nature, timing and extent of the monitoring activities.

Engagement Inspections (Ref: Para. 47)

A169. The extent and frequency of selection of in-process or completed engagements or engagement partners for inspection depends on many factors, including those described in paragraphs 46(a)–(e) and A162, as well as:

- The nature, timing and extent of other monitoring activities undertaken by the firm at the engagement level.
- The varying nature of the engagements performed by the firm.
- The size of the firm, including the number and geographic location of offices and the nature and complexity of the firm's practice and organization.

A170. The firm may establish different cyclical periods for engagement partners according to the categories of engagements they perform, for example, the firm may determine that the cyclical period for an engagement partner performing audits of financial statements may be three years, whereas the period may be longer for engagement partners performing compilation engagements. The cycle of the inspection may be based on time (i.e., every three years as illustrated) or another factor, for example, number of engagements performed.

A171. The purpose of an inspection of an in-process or completed engagement is to determine that responses designed to be implemented at the engagement level have been implemented. For example, as part of the inspection of in-process or completed engagements, the firm may determine whether engagement teams have applied the firm's methodology appropriately.

Individuals Performing the Monitoring Activities (Ref: Para. 48)

A172. As described in paragraph A65, objectivity is a fundamental principle of the IESBA Code, and the provisions of relevant ethical requirements are relevant in designing the policies or procedures addressing the objectivity of the individuals performing the monitoring activities. For example, a self-review threat may arise when the individual who performs:

- An inspection of an engagement was:
 - An engagement team member or the engagement quality reviewer of that engagement; or
 - In the case of an audit of financial statements, an engagement team member or the engagement quality reviewer for a subsequent financial period.
- The monitoring activity participated in designing, executing or operating the response being monitored.

Identifying and Evaluating the Deficiencies (Ref: Para. 49)

A173. Findings represent the information accumulated from the performance of monitoring activities and may also include the results of external inspections and other relevant information about the firm's system of quality management. Findings may be positive or negative in nature:

- Positive findings may be useful to the firm as they indicate practices that the firm can support or apply more extensively, for example, across all engagements. They may also highlight opportunities for the firm to improve, or further enhance, the system of quality management. An absence of findings may be considered a positive finding, for example, an engagement with very few, or no findings.
- Negative findings are considered by the firm in accordance with paragraph 49 in order to determine whether there are deficiencies in the system of quality management. Not all negative findings are a deficiency in the system of quality management.

A174. Factors that a firm may consider in determining whether a finding is a deficiency include:

- The nature of the finding, for example, a finding that reveals that personnel have not adhered to the firm's policies or procedures may be indicative of a deficiency in the culture of the firm.
- The design of the monitoring activity from which the finding arose, for example, whether it was designed to focus on areas of risk or the whole population, and the tolerable error rate.
- The extent of the monitoring activity from which the finding arose, including the size of sample selected relative to the size of the entire population.
- The extent of the findings in relation to the sample of the population covered by the monitoring activity.
- If the finding relates to a response:
 - The nature of the quality risk to which the response relates, and the extent to which the quality risk could result in a quality objective not being achieved.
 - Whether there are other responses that address the same quality risk and whether there are findings for those responses.
- Whether the finding, in combination with all other findings, indicate a trend or systemic issue.

A175. A finding may affect multiple responses across different components. For example, a finding that suggests that personnel assigned to an engagement were not knowledgeable about the procedures they performed in the engagement may indicate deficiencies in responses related to human resources (i.e., inappropriate competence and capabilities) as well as those related to engagement performance (i.e., inappropriate direction, supervision and review).

A176. The effectiveness of the monitoring and remediation process may be evaluated through considering the findings arising from the monitoring activities, the results of external inspections and any other relevant information source (e.g., network monitoring activities or complaints and allegations). For example, external inspection findings may indicate deficiencies in the system of quality management that have not been identified by the firm's monitoring and remediation process, which highlight a deficiency in that process.

Root Cause of the Identified Deficiencies (Ref: Para. 49(b))

A177. This ISQM requires the firm to investigate the root cause(s) of identified deficiencies. As highlighted in paragraph A173, not all negative findings from the performance of monitoring activities, results of external inspections and other relevant information are a deficiency in the system of quality management. Although not required by this ISQM, investigating the root cause of positive findings may reveal opportunities for the firm to improve, or further enhance, the system of quality management. Identifying the root cause of positive findings on engagements where identified deficiencies did not exist may also help the firm to identify the root causes of identified deficiencies that existed in other engagements and may assist the firm in determining how to remediate identified deficiencies.

A178. The objective of investigating the root cause(s) of identified deficiencies is to understand the underlying circumstances that caused the deficiencies. An improved understanding of the underlying cause(s) of identified deficiencies may:

- Facilitate the design and implementation of more effective actions to address identified deficiencies.
- Directly contribute to the improvement of quality at the engagement level through the participation of engagement teams in the root cause analysis process.
- Enable those assigned ultimate responsibility and accountability or operational responsibility for the system of quality management to proactively monitor actions taken to address identified deficiencies.
- Facilitate more effective communication to personnel by explaining the actual root cause(s) of identified deficiencies, rather than the deficiencies themselves.

A179. Performing a root cause analysis generally involves those performing the assessment applying professional judgment based on the evidence available. The firm's policies or procedures for the nature, timing and extent of the procedures to investigate the root cause(s) of identified deficiencies are required to take into account the nature of the deficiencies and their possible severity which may include:

- The nature and extent of the deficiency, for example:
 - A deficiency that results in an engagement report being inappropriate has greater severity than a deficiency that resulted in the firm's policies or procedures not being followed but the engagement report was still appropriate.
 - A deficiency that has obviously arisen from human error by an individual. In such cases the root cause may be more apparent or easily identified.
- Whether the deficiency, in combination with all other identified deficiencies, indicates a trend or systemic issue, for example, there are multiple engagement reports affected by the same deficiency or certain policies or procedures appear to have high rates of non-compliance.

The procedures undertaken to understand the root cause(s) of a deficiency may be simple, for example, in circumstances when the possible severity of the deficiency is not significant or the root cause is apparent.

A181. There may be multiple root cause(s) of an identified deficiency, the root cause(s) may be complex and interrelated, and the root cause(s) may exist across various components of the firm's system of quality management. Furthermore, a root cause of an identified deficiency may relate to more than one identified deficiency or affect multiple components, for example, in circumstances when the root cause relates to an aspect of the firm's risk assessment process. There may also be circumstances when a single root cause relates to multiple identified deficiencies.

A182. Identifying a root cause(s) that is appropriately specific may support the firm's process for remediating identified deficiencies. For example, it may be identified that an engagement team did not exercise sufficient professional skepticism in complex areas of management judgment. However, the underlying root cause may relate to another matter, such as a cultural environment that does not encourage engagement team members to challenge individuals with greater authority or insufficient direction, supervision and review on the engagement.

Evaluating the Severity and Pervasiveness of Identified Deficiencies (Ref: Para. 49(c))

A183. Factors the firm may consider in evaluating the severity and pervasiveness of an identified deficiency include:

- The nature of the identified deficiency, including whether it relates to a quality objective or quality risk that is absent, a response that is not appropriately designed, or a response that is not operating as designed;
- The root cause(s) of the identified deficiency;
- The frequency with which the underlying finding occurred; and
- The magnitude of the identified deficiency, the rate at which it occurred and the duration of time that it existed.

Responding to Identified Deficiencies (Ref: Para. 50–51)

A184. The nature, timing and extent of remedial actions may depend on a variety of other factors, including:

- The root cause(s), for example, whether it relates to an individual engagement, a certain category of engagements, or is more pervasive throughout the firm.
- The severity and pervasiveness of the identified deficiency and therefore the urgency in which it needs to be addressed.
- The effectiveness of the remedial actions in addressing the root cause(s), for example, the firm may need to implement more than one remedial action in order to effectively address the root cause(s), or may need to implement remedial actions as interim measures until such time as the firm is able to implement more effective remedial actions.

Findings About a Particular Engagement (Ref: Para. 52)

A185. In circumstances when the report issued is inappropriate or procedures were omitted, the further action taken by the firm may include:

- Discussing the matter with management of the entity or those charged with governance.
- Performing the omitted procedures and when the report is considered inappropriate, amending and reissuing the report.

- When the report is considered inappropriate, amending and reissuing the report and taking steps to alert users of the firm's report about the situation (i.e., that the report has been amended and reissued, or if it has not been amended and reissued, alerting users that it has not been amended and reissued).

The actions taken to correct the work performed or the report issued for a specific engagement does not relieve the firm of the responsibility to investigate the root cause(s) of the identified deficiency related to the engagement.

Ongoing Communication Related to the Monitoring and Remediation (Ref: Para. 53–55)

A186. The information communicated about the monitoring and remediation to the individual(s) assigned ultimate responsibility and accountability for the system of quality management and the individual(s) assigned operational responsibility for the system of quality management supports the evaluation of the system of quality management, as required by paragraph 56.

A187. In determining the information to be communicated to personnel, including the nature and extent of such communication, the firm may consider the type of information that is relevant to the particular recipients, including the information needs of the recipients, as a result of their defined roles and responsibilities. For example:

- Information communicated to engagement teams may be focused on deficiencies that have been identified at an engagement level and therefore are likely to be relevant.
- Information communicated to all personnel may relate to matters relevant to compliance with the firm's independence policies or procedures as such policies or procedures may apply to all personnel.

Communicating the root cause(s) of identified deficiencies may increase awareness and understanding of why deficiencies occurred, which may influence the behavior of engagement teams and personnel. Communicating remedial actions may enable the implementation of such actions in a more proactive manner.

Evaluating the System of Quality Management (Ref: Para. 56–58)

A188. An effective system of quality management provides reasonable assurance that the objectives stated in paragraph 21(a) and (b) have been achieved.

A189. The individual(s) assigned ultimate responsibility and accountability for the system of quality management uses the information obtained in accordance with paragraph 53 in evaluating the effectiveness of the system of quality management. The nature and extent of the information, including how the information is communicated, will vary based on the nature and circumstances of the firm. For example, in a smaller firm, the individual(s) assigned ultimate responsibility and accountability for the system of quality management may be directly involved in the monitoring and remediation and will therefore be aware of the information that supports the evaluation of the system of quality management. However, in a larger firm, the individual(s) assigned ultimate responsibility and accountability for the system of quality management may not have direct involvement in the monitoring and remediation process. Therefore, the individuals assigned operational responsibility for various aspects of the system of quality management may need to collate, summarize and present the information that supports the evaluation of the system of quality management in a manner that

enables the individual(s) assigned ultimate responsibility and accountability for the system of quality management to form an appropriate conclusion.

A190. In some circumstances, it may be necessary to obtain information in addition to that described in paragraph 56, which is identified, captured, processed and maintained through the firm's information system.

A191. Prompt and appropriate action when the evaluation indicates that the system does not provide reasonable assurance that the objectives stated in paragraph 21(a) and (b) have been achieved may include:

- Taking steps to determine whether the reports already issued by the firm were appropriate.
- Taking appropriate measures to confirm that reports not yet issued by the firm are appropriate in the circumstances.
- Obtaining legal advice.

A192. The policies or procedures addressing the nature, timing, extent and content of communication with external parties, as required by paragraph 43(c), may identify circumstances when it is appropriate for the firm to communicate to external parties that the system does not provide reasonable assurance that the objectives stated in paragraph 21(a) and (b) have been achieved. Such circumstances may include:

- When the firm belongs to a network and the information is relevant to the network or other firms within the network who use the work performed by the firm, for example, in the case of a group audit.
- When a report issued by the firm is determined to be inappropriate as a result of the failure of the system of quality management, and management or those charged with governance of the entity need to be informed.

In some circumstances, the firm may be required by law or regulation to communicate to an oversight authority or a regulatory body that the system does not provide reasonable assurance that the objectives stated in paragraph 21(a) and (b) have been achieved.

Network Requirements or Network Services (Ref: Para. 59–64)

A193. Network requirements may include, for example:

- Requirements for the firm to include quality objectives or quality risks in the firm's system of quality management that are common across the network firms.
- Requirements for the firm to include responses, including resources, in the firm's system of quality management that are common across the network firms. Such responses designed by the network may include network policies or procedures that specify the leadership roles and responsibilities, including how the firm is expected to assign authority and responsibility within the firm, network developed methodologies for the performance of engagements or IT applications.
- Requirements that the firm is subject to the network's monitoring activities. These monitoring activities may monitor the network requirements (e.g., monitoring that the firm has implemented

the network's methodology appropriately), or they may monitor the firm's system of quality management in general.

A194. Examples of network services include responses designed by the network that are optional for the firm to use in its system of quality management, such as voluntary training programs, or a service delivery center established at the network level, or by another firm or group of firms within the same network.

A195. The network may establish responsibilities for the firm in implementing the network requirements or network services. For example, in the case of implementing an IT application developed by the network, the firm may need to have the appropriate IT infrastructure and IT processes in place.

A196. The firm's understanding of the network requirements or network services and the firm's responsibilities relating to the implementation thereof may be obtained through inquiries of, or documentation provided by, the network about matters such as:

- The network's governance and leadership.
- The procedures undertaken by the network in designing, implementing and, if applicable, operating, the network requirements or network services.
- How the network identifies and responds to changes that affect the network requirements or network services or other information, for example, changes in the professional standards or information that indicates a deficiency in the network requirements or network services;
- How the network monitors the appropriateness of the network requirements or network services, which may include through the network firms' monitoring activities, and the network's processes for remediating identified deficiencies.

A197. Paragraph 43(c) requires the firm to establish policies or procedures that address the nature, timing, extent and content of communication with the network. Such communication includes the matters described in paragraph 61 and paragraph A196.

The Firm's Risk Assessment Process (Ref: Para. 60)

A198. The network requirements or network services may affect the firm's risk assessment process in the following ways:

- The firm may need to identify and assess quality risks for the quality objectives provided by the network.
- The firm may need to design and implement responses to address the quality risks provided by the network, or the firm may need to assess the quality risks provided by the network.
- The firm may identify additional quality risks arising from the responses provided by the network, for example, quality risks may arise from the implementation of a network IT application.

A199. Given the nature and circumstances of the firm and its engagements, in most cases the network requirements or network services may need to be adapted or supplemented by the firm such that they are appropriate for the firm's system of quality management. For example:

- The quality objectives provided by the network may not be at a sufficient level of granularity for the firm, or additional quality objectives may need to be established.

- Additional quality risks may exist for the firm that have not been identified by the network.
- The responses provided by the network may not be designed to address the quality risks and the reasons for the assessments given to the quality risks.

Monitoring and Remediation Process (Ref: Para. 61–64)

A200. The monitoring activities undertaken by the network may affect the nature, timing and extent of the firm's monitoring activities. For example, the network may undertake cyclical inspections of completed engagements of the firm, which may affect the extent of inspections of in-process or completed engagements undertaken by the firm.

A201. The results of the network's monitoring activities of the firm's system of quality management may include information such as:

- A description of the monitoring activities, including their nature, timing and extent;
- Findings from the monitoring activities and deficiencies identified; and
- The network's evaluation of the root cause(s) of the identified deficiencies, the assessed effect of the deficiencies and recommended remedial actions.

A202. The information about the overall scope and results of the monitoring activities across the network firms' systems of quality management may highlight trends and common areas of identified deficiencies across the network, or examples of quality that may be replicated across the network. Such information may be used by the firm to determine the nature, timing and extent of its monitoring activities. It may also indicate deficiencies in network requirements or network services used by the firm in its system of quality management.

A203. In some circumstances, the firm may obtain information from the network about deficiencies identified in a network firm's system of quality management that affects the firm, for example, when the network firm performs work for the firm's engagements, such as in the capacity of a component auditor. The network may also gather information from the network firms regarding the results of external inspections over the network firms' systems of quality management. In some instances, law or regulation in a particular jurisdiction may prevent the network from sharing information with other firms within the network or may restrict the specificity of such information.

A204. Paragraph 44 requires the firm to evaluate the design, implementation and operation of the components of the system of quality management, which includes the network requirements or network services used by the firm. The network requirements or network services may be monitored by the network, the firm, or a combination of both. For example, the network may undertake monitoring activities at a network level for a common methodology, however various monitoring activities at a firm level may support the evaluation of the methodology, including engagement inspections.

A205. In some cases the firm may determine that the remedial actions by the network are inadequate, or such remedial actions may take time to effectively address the identified deficiency. In such cases, the firm may need to implement its own remedial actions to address the identified deficiency until such time as the network has effectively addressed the deficiency.

Service Providers (Ref: Para. 65–66)

A206. The firm may use human resources, technological resources or intellectual resources that are obtained from a service provider. The service providers used by the firm include individuals or organizations that are external to the firm, excluding networks, network firms or other structures or organizations in the network. Examples of resources from a service provider include:

- Human resources used to perform the firm's monitoring activities or engagement quality reviews, or to provide consultation on technical matters.
- A commercial IT application used to perform audit engagements.
- Human resources used in the performance of engagements, for example, to attend a physical inventory count or inspect physical fixed assets at a remote location.
- External experts used in the performance of engagements. In such cases, there may be requirements in the other IAASB standards that address the competence, capabilities and objectivity of the external expert, understanding of the expert and agreement with the expert which apply in conjunction with the requirements of this ISQM.¹⁶

The use of resources from a service provider does not include using the work of an entity's internal audit function in the performance of engagements, in accordance with ISA 610 (Revised 2013).¹⁷

A207. The firm may establish policies or procedures that address circumstances when a service provider is used in the performance of engagements that set out the responsibility of the engagement team when engaging a service provider, which may include responsibility for certain matters in paragraph 65.

A208. Obtaining an understanding of the service provider may include understanding the conditions of the service, for example, how often updates will be provided for an IT application, limitations on the use of the IT application and how the service provider addresses confidentiality of data. Paragraph 43(c) requires the firm to establish policies or procedures that address the nature, timing, extent and content of communication with the service provider. Such communication includes the information to support the firm's understanding of the service provider and use of the resource, for example, updates or changes to the resource, or deficiencies in the resource.

A209. The use of a service provider is a response to a quality risk(s), but may also give rise to quality risks, or may affect the assessment of the quality risks. For example, when the firm uses human resources from a service provider in the performance of engagements, there may be a quality risk that such resources do not have the competence and capabilities to perform the engagement, exercise inappropriate judgment when performing the engagement, do not implement the firm's responses at the engagement level or do not fulfill their responsibilities in accordance with relevant ethical requirements. Such quality risks may also affect the management of quality at the engagement level. For example, in circumstances when the firm uses human resources from a service provider to assist in the performance of engagement procedures, there may be a need for the engagement partner to have greater oversight on a more frequent basis and perform more in-depth reviews of work performed by the individual.

¹⁶ See, for example, ISA 620, *Using the Work of an Auditor's Expert*

¹⁷ ISA 610 (Revised 2013), *Using the Work of Internal Auditors*

A210. The firm's responsibilities in using the service provider may include matters such as the actions the firm needs to take in order to implement the resource or information the firm needs to communicate to the service provider in order that the resource can function effectively. For example, in the case of an IT application, the firm may need to have appropriate supporting IT infrastructure and IT processes in place.

A211. In determining whether the resource is appropriate, the firm may make inquiries of the service provider or request documentation from the service provider about matters such as:

- For human resources, the qualifications, experience and location of the individuals, including professional licenses or membership obligations, and how they develop and maintain the appropriate competence to perform the services.
- For technological or intellectual resources, the procedures undertaken by the service provider in designing, implementing and operating the resources.
- How the service provider identifies and responds to changes that affect the resources, for example, changes in the professional standards or information that indicates a deficiency in the resources;
- How the resource will be evaluated, monitored or remediated by the service provider.

There may be circumstances when the service provider supplies the firm with an assurance report on the description and design of their controls over the resource, and in some circumstances, it may also include assurance on the operating effectiveness of such controls.

Documentation (Ref: Para. 67–69)

A212. Documentation provides evidence that the firm complies with this ISQM and law, regulation or relevant ethical requirements. It may also be useful for training personnel, ensuring the retention of organizational knowledge and providing a history of the basis for decisions made by the firm about its system of quality management. It is neither necessary nor practicable for the firm to document every matter considered, or judgment made, about its system of quality management. Furthermore, compliance with this ISQM may be evidenced by the firm through its information and communication component, documents or other written materials, or IT applications that are integral to the components of the system of quality management.

A213. Documentation may take the form of formal written manuals, checklists and forms, may be informally documented (e.g., e-mail communication or postings on websites), or may be held in IT applications or other digital forms (e.g., in databases). Factors that may affect the firm's judgments about the form, content and extent of documentation may include:

- The size of the firm and the number of offices;
- The nature and complexity of the firm's practice and organization;
- The types of services the firm provides and the nature of the clients to whom services are provided; and
- The nature and complexity of the matter being documented, for example, whether it relates to an aspect of the system of quality management that has changed or an area of greater quality risk.

In a smaller firm, it may not be necessary to have documentation supporting matters communicated because informal communication methods may be effective. Nevertheless, the firm may determine it appropriate to document such communications in order to provide evidence that they occurred.

A214. In some instances, an external oversight authority may establish documentation requirements, either formally or informally, for example, as a result of the outcome of external inspection findings. Relevant ethical requirements may also include specific requirements addressing documentation, for example, the IESBA Code requires documentation of particular matters, including certain situations related to conflicts of interest, non-compliance with laws and regulations and independence.

A215. In some circumstances, it may be appropriate for the firm to document its process and analyses for establishing the quality objectives, identifying and assessing quality risks and designing responses to such risks, to provide a history of the basis for decisions made by the firm about its system of quality management.

Appendix 1

The Components of a System of Quality Management

1. This appendix describes the eight components of a firm's system of quality management. The components in this ISQM have similarities to the components of internal control described in the Committee of Sponsoring Organizations of the Treadway Commission *Internal Control – Integrated Framework*. For example, the governance and leadership component is similar to the entity's control environment and the firm's risk assessment process is similar to the entity's risk assessment process.

Governance and Leadership

2. The governance and leadership component creates the environment in which the other components of the system of quality management operate because it addresses the firm's culture, decision-making process, actions, organizational structure and leadership. The governance and leadership component also provides the basis for the system of quality management because the firm needs to establish structures, reporting lines and appropriate authority and responsibility in order that the other components of the system of quality management can be developed. For example, in order to establish a system of quality management, the firm needs to identify the individual(s) responsible for its development. Accordingly, the governance and leadership component has a pervasive effect on the system of quality management and the other components cannot be effective if the environment in which they operate is not appropriate.

The Firm's Risk Assessment Process

3. The firm's risk assessment process sets out the process the firm is required to follow in implementing the risk-based approach to quality management, which consists of establishing quality objectives, identifying and assessing quality risks to the achievement of the quality objectives and designing and implementing responses to address the quality risks.
4. The quality objectives established by the firm are the quality objectives set out in this ISQM, which are organized by component. However, given the nature and circumstances of the firm and its engagements, the firm is required to determine whether it is appropriate to establish additional quality objectives beyond those required by this ISQM, in order to achieve the objective of this ISQM. The firm may also establish more granular quality objectives.
5. Quality risks arise from conditions, events, circumstances, actions or inactions that affect the achievement of the quality objectives, and which are associated with the nature and circumstances of the firm and its engagements. For example:
 - (a) *Nature and circumstances of the firm*: The firm may have a service delivery center that includes personnel who perform specific tasks for engagement teams. This may create, or increase the likelihood of, the quality risks for the appropriate direction and supervision of the engagement team and review of the work performed because the personnel may not be in the same location as the engagement partner or the engagement team.
 - (b) *Nature and circumstances of the engagements*: The firm may only perform related services engagements and because of the nature of such engagements, the firm may not identify any quality risks relating to compliance with independence requirements, because independence may not be relevant. In relation to the types of entities for which engagements are undertaken,

the firm may perform engagements for entities in a particular industry, such as banks, insurance companies and pension funds. This may create the quality risk that personnel do not have the appropriate knowledge of the industry to perform the engagement.

The nature and circumstances of the firm and its engagements also affect the assessment of the likelihood of the quality risks occurring and the significance of the effect of the quality risk on the achievement of the quality objectives.

6. The responses designed and implemented by the firm consist of:
 - (a) The responses required by this ISQM, which are organized by component; and
 - (b) Additional responses determined by the firm.

The responses required by this ISQM alone are not sufficient to address the quality risks identified and assessed by the firm.

7. The responses designed and implemented by the firm, including the responses required by this ISQM, are affected by the nature and circumstances of the firm and its engagements. For example:
 - (a) *Nature and circumstances of the firm*: In circumstances when the firm has a service delivery center that includes personnel who perform specific tasks for engagement teams, the firm may obtain technology to facilitate interaction between the engagement partner and personnel located in the central location, to support appropriate direction and supervision.
 - (b) *Nature and circumstances of the engagements*: In circumstances when the firm performs engagements in a particular industry, the firm may provide training for personnel on matters unique to that industry, or recruit personnel with experience in the industry.
8. The firm's processes for establishing quality objectives, identifying and assessing quality risks and designing and implementing responses includes identifying changes in the nature and circumstances of the firm or its engagements and modifying the quality objectives, quality risks or responses, as appropriate, for changes in the matters described above.

Relevant Ethical Requirements

9. The relevant ethical requirements component comprises the firm's processes for managing compliance with relevant ethical requirements, in order that the firm, its personnel and others subject to relevant ethical requirements, as applicable, fulfill their responsibilities in accordance with relevant ethical requirements. The processes include how threats to complying with relevant ethical requirements are identified, assessed and addressed and the firm's responses to breaches of the relevant ethical requirements. Relevant ethical requirements include those related to independence.

Acceptance and Continuance of Client Relationships and Specific Engagements

10. The acceptance and continuance of client relationships and specific engagements comprises the firm's processes for consideration of matters in determining whether to accept or continue a client relationship or specific engagement. Such matters include the nature and circumstances of the engagement, the integrity and ethical values of the client, including management, and, when appropriate, those charged with governance and the firm's ability to perform the engagement in accordance with professional standards and applicable legal and regulatory requirements. This

component also requires that the firm does not prioritize the firm's financial and operational interests in its decisions to accept and continue client relationships and specific engagements.

Engagement Performance

11. The engagement performance component comprises the firm's actions to promote and support the consistent performance of quality engagements in accordance with professional standards and legal and regulatory requirements. This includes how the firm supports engagement teams in exercising professional judgment and, as applicable, professional skepticism. Matters addressed in this component include the responsibilities of the engagement team, including in relation to direction, supervision and review, consultation, differences of opinion, the assembly and retention of documentation and engagement quality reviews.

Resources

12. The resources component comprises the firm's processes for obtaining, developing, using, maintaining, allocating or assigning resources to enable the design, implementation and operation of the system of quality management. The resources relevant to the firm's system of quality management include human resources, technological resources and intellectual resources. Furthermore, financial resources are needed for obtaining, developing and maintaining the other types of resources. The firm may have competing priorities that affect the allocation or assignment of resources, however the firm is required to have resource planning, and obtain, allocate or assign resources in a manner that supports the firm's commitment to quality and the design, implementation and operation of the firm's system of quality management.

Information and Communication

13. The information and communication component comprises the firm's actions to obtain, generate or use relevant information to enable the design, implementation and operation of the system of quality management. This includes establishing an information system, whether through the use of manual and automated elements, to identify, capture, process and maintain information.
14. The information and communication component also comprises two-way communication within the firm and communication with external parties, such as information about the firm's system of quality management. Such communication assists external parties in understanding the firm's activities to address quality through its system of quality management and the effectiveness of the firm's system.

Monitoring and Remediation Process

15. Monitoring comprises the firm's processes for evaluating the design, implementation and operation of the system of quality management. It involves undertaking ongoing and periodic monitoring activities, and identifying and evaluating deficiencies in the system of quality management based on the findings from the monitoring activities, results of external inspections or other information sources (e.g., through the firm's complaints and allegations process). In order to understand how the deficiencies arose, this ISQM also requires the firm to understand the root cause of the identified deficiencies.
16. Remediation comprises the firm's actions for responding to identified deficiencies, which includes designing and implementing remedial actions and monitoring those actions to determine whether they appropriately address the identified deficiency. Remediation may also involve addressing the

specific engagement, for example, when the identified deficiency indicates that the engagement report is inappropriate. Communication of the results of monitoring and remediation within the firm also forms part of the firm's remedial actions, since personnel often need to be aware of the results in order to fulfill their roles and responsibilities.

17. This component also includes the responsibilities of the individual(s) assigned ultimate responsibility and accountability for the system of quality management to determine whether the system of quality management provides reasonable assurance that the objectives stated in paragraph 21(a) and (b) have been achieved.

Interrelationship of the Components

18. The firm's risk assessment process sets out the process the firm is required to follow in implementing the risk-based approach to quality management, and in doing so the firm is required to include the quality objectives and responses set out in each of the components of this ISQM.
19. The governance and leadership component is important to the design, implementation and operation of the other components of the system of quality management because it provides the basis for the system of quality management and also creates the environment in which the other components of the system of quality management operate.
20. Other components such as information and communication and resources have quality objectives that enable the design, implementation and operation of the system of quality management, and therefore such components may include responses that affect or relate to the other components of the system of quality management. For example, the information and communication component contains the information system that provides the information needed for the operation of the other components or the resources component addresses the establishment of human resources that are needed to operate the various aspects of the system of quality management. There may be interrelationships within the components as well, for example, human resources are needed for the development of intellectual resources.
21. There are also relationships between components because there are matters that relate to each other, for example, aspects of the relevant ethical requirements component may be relevant when accepting and continuing client relationships and specific engagements.
22. The monitoring and remediation process monitors the entire system of quality management, and therefore the monitoring activities are undertaken over all of the components of the system of quality management.