



AccountAbility

Setting the Standard for Sustainability

Criteria for a Certified Sustainability Assurance Practitioner

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

DATE
April 2024

INTRODUCTION TO THE ACCOUNTABILITY CERTIFIED SUSTAINABILITY ASSURANCE PRACTITIONER (CSAP) PROGRAMME

Why the Need?

There is an increasing need for assurance of sustainability information as part of understanding an organisation's performance on sustainability commitments, policies, and strategies. This is relevant to secure quality internally and to provide credible information to interested stakeholders externally, including those concerned with specific social, environmental, and governance aspects of performance, as well as those more interested in the impact of sustainability on financial performance and valuations. The landscape of assurance is evolving, with new requirements emerging in various jurisdictions. These requirements commonly include criteria such as educational qualifications, passing a professional competence examination, completing practical training, and acquiring qualifications through long-term practical experience. These criteria aim to ensure that assurance practitioners possess the necessary skills, knowledge, and experience to carry out their roles effectively, thereby maintaining the credibility of the assurance process.

Aims of the CSAP Programme

The Certified Sustainability Assurance Practitioner (CSAP) programme aims to:

- ▶ Enable practitioners to develop, validate and communicate their competence in a systematic manner;
- ▶ Make it easier for organisations to identify credible assurance expertise in individuals;
- ▶ Improve confidence for those seeking assurance in the expertise of professionals engaged to assess and pass judgement on their behalf; and
- ▶ Develop a more systematic understanding of key competencies for providing effective assurance, and so establish a basis for informing future development of AA1000 and other standards.

This CSAP programme is for practitioners in sustainability assurance, both internal and external to the organisation whose performance is being assured. In addition, there is a need for a broader range of practitioners to understand the basics of assurance, including those responsible for preparing sustainability reports, managing and commissioning external assurance processes, and stakeholders seeking to judge the quality of an assurance statement and underlying process. For all these groups, there are different levels of certification, as appropriate.

WHO CAN APPLY – CERTIFICATION GRADES

This worldwide programme is open to all individuals currently practicing within the field of sustainability, organisational reporting and sustainability assurance. It offers certification to the grades of recognition described below.

Practicing Certified Sustainability Assurance Practitioner (PCSAP)

- ▶ For practitioners of any seniority who are directly involved in the external assurance process as a team member

As a Practicing Certified Sustainability Assurance Practitioner (PCSAP) you have practical experience in sustainability assurance using AA1000AS. This experience includes active participation in sustainability assurance engagements, including internally within your organisation and as an external assurance provider. Experience in stakeholder engagement is required, although not necessarily as part of formal assurance assignments. It will include relevant formal training and qualifications, although not limited to sustainability assurance. You are an active sustainability assurance practitioner with demonstrable experience over a number of assignments with different clients or, over several assurance cycles covering a range of sustainability issues. Participation in a minimum of five AA1000AS engagements is required for this level.

Lead Certified Sustainability Assurance Practitioner (LCSAP)

- ▶ For practitioners who are directly involved in the external assurance process leading teams and taking responsibility for the formulation of public statements

As a Lead Certified Sustainability Assurance Practitioner (LCSAP) you have well established practical experience of sustainability assurance using the AA1000AS. This experience must include leading sustainability assurance assignments as part of external assurance assignments. Experience in stakeholder engagement as part of assurance assignments is essential, as is the lead role in forming assurance judgments and the preparation of independent assurance statements.

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

To assist you in determining which grade is right for you, you will find a comprehensive description of the certification requirements and examples of evidence of competence that we will accept in Appendix “Sustainability Assurance Competency Framework”.

REQUIREMENTS FOR INITIAL CERTIFICATION

In order to achieve certification to one of the two higher levels of CSAP (which are PCSAP and LCSAP), you must demonstrate that you have met the competency criteria defined in Appendix “Sustainability Assurance Competency Framework” and demonstrate the ability to operate effectively at the grade of practitioner for which you have applied.

We will look at a range of evidence including:

Experience: Experience in sustainability assurance is required.

Formal training and qualifications: This is required for all grades. We accept CSAP training courses licensed by AccountAbility or recognised equivalents. Successful completion of the 3-module licensed AA1000 training programme automatically meets the requirement for the Associate Certified Sustainability Assurance Practitioner (ACSAP) level.

We offer the experience-based route to certification in addition to the standard training/qualification route. Appendix “Sustainability Assurance Competency Framework”, describes the practitioner experience that we will accept as a substitute for training/qualifications.

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

The Appendix “Sustainability Assurance Competency Framework” provides a list of examples that will give you guidance on what is accepted as evidence of meeting the specific criteria.

An interview: Evaluators can request an interview to determine your ability to make informed professional judgements on the quality and robustness of an organisation’s stakeholder engagement, the assurance processes it has in place and its sustainability performance.

Acceptance of Code of Conduct: You will abide by the Code of Practice as set out in the Appendix D of the AA1000AS v3.

APPLYING FOR INITIAL CERTIFICATION

What you do

- ▶ Request the application form for the relevant CSAP level from standards@accountability.org. When requesting this, please write down why you believe you fulfil the criteria (for example, if applying for the LCSAP level, you could write that you have led 30+ AA1000AS engagements during the past 10 years and give more details how you have worked with sustainability topics for the past 10 years.) Please also attach a detailed evidence document showing your AA1000AS experience. This could be a letter from a team leader outlining the AA1000AS engagements you

have been involved with including the Reporting Companies' names and your role in the engagements, and ideally weblinks to the external statements.

- ▶ If the Standards team believes you could be qualified to apply for PCSAP or LCSAP level, they will send you the application package and further information.
- ▶ Once you receive the application package, send in the completed application form electronically along with all the relevant documentation, required evidence, and £224 (GBP) application fees (the invoice will be sent after we receive the completed application form). *Please reserve 2-4 months for this process as all applications are reviewed and evaluated by external technical evaluators and might include reference checks and an interview.*

Electronic submission of documents is preferred.

AccountAbility requires all correspondence in support of the application to be in the English language, or to be accompanied by certified translations of the originals. This is particularly important for educational qualifications, training courses and assurance assignments.

What we do

- ▶ Administrative check
- ▶ Arrange reviews from external Technical Evaluators
- ▶ Telephone interview
- ▶ Competence review process
- ▶ Certification offered and awarded

You should ensure that each section is completed and that the information supplied is accurate and correct at the time of submission (if changes occur during the application period, please inform AccountAbility immediately). Failure to do so will result in a delay in processing the application and a possible decision by AccountAbility not to progress your application. The application fee will not be refunded if you fail to meet the criteria, so please ensure you meet the criteria outlined in the "Sustainability Assurance Competency Framework".

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

The application process can take up to 2-4 months. The time may vary depending on the time required to verify the information submitted with your application. If you can give us all the information we need, this will speed up the application process.

AccountAbility will email you with an offer of certification. Your details are then added to the online register of certificated practitioners and we will send you your relevant CSAP certificate. If you fail to meet the grade of practitioner you apply for, we will inform you of the reasons for our decision.

Appeals

Applicants have the right to appeal against any certification decision taken. AccountAbility operates a quality system that includes an established Issue Resolution Mechanism.

ANNUAL FEES

Fees are for a one-year period, as per the AccountAbility [website](#).

Application for Re-grade Fee

This fee covers costs of evaluating your re-grade (if you have CSAP certification and wish to apply for a higher grade). We need you to pay this fee when you submit your request and, as with the application fee, the re-grade fee is not refundable.

RENEWAL OF CERTIFICATION

You must renew your certification every year. Commencing in 2025, you need to send us the following before the end of the year in your certification period:

Your CPD and practitioner experience log-sheets for the previous year: The purpose of Continuing Professional Development (CPD) is to ensure that you are able to deliver best practice at all times and as such to ensure the credibility of this programme. The concept of CPD, and the value it contributes, is now recognised and accepted throughout all professional fields.

As part of the renewal of certification process, we require you to demonstrate that you have further developed your expertise and gained further practical experience in order to ensure that you employ current best practice and your knowledge of relevant laws, regulations and procedures is current in order to ensure compliance. See the criteria set out in Appendix “CPD Renewal Requirements”.

We will evaluate the information you provide against the renewal requirements listed and make a certification decision. If you are successful, your details will be updated on the AccountAbility Register and you will be sent a new certificate. If you are unable to demonstrate sufficient,

relevant CPD, or fail to meet the renewal requirements for any other reason, the assessment may result your certification not being renewed if remedial action is not taken.

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

Confidentiality

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

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

- ▶ Practicing Sustainability Assurance Practitioner: PCSAP
- ▶ Lead Certified Sustainability Assurance Practitioner: LCSAP

(For example, Mr. A Smith, PCSAP)

Enforcement of Certification

We retain the right to withdraw your certification if you do not continue to meet the certification criteria. Similarly, we reserve the right to undertake action against your certification if we find you have acted contrary to the Code of Practice as set out in the Appendix D of the AA1000AS v3.

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

AccountAbility will process all complaints according to our established Issue Resolution Mechanism. If certification is suspended or withdrawn, the practitioner's details will be removed from the register.

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

Appendix – Sustainability Assurance Competency Framework

Grade	Competence Area	Qualification Criteria			
		Training / Qualification Route	Evidence	Experienced Route	Evidence
PCSAP	Assurance	1. Module C of AA1000 training from an AccountAbility licensed training provider or equivalent.	'Certification' certificate.	As an alternative to 1: One of: A management systems auditor qualification, including any grade of IRCA auditor certification, IEMA auditor certification or equivalent OR A financial accounting qualification awarded by established institutes such as ACCA or equivalent OR Relevant on-the-job training at work covering the intent and application of accounting/data system review principles/ auditing principles, procedures and techniques relating to economic and financial, social and environmental issues.	'Attendance' certificate (including master or bachelor classes), course curriculum and training institution AND/ OR Application form outlining your role and performance.
		2. At least 1 year relevant experience (including minimum of 5 engagements) with regards to AA1000AS sustainability assurance, which includes the analysis and/or implementation of audit and accounting procedures and techniques in assurance.	Application form outlining your role and performance and (client & employer) reference.	As an alternative to 2: At least 3 years relevant experience with regards to sustainability assurance (including experience using AA1000AS), which includes the analysis and/or implementation of audit and accounting procedures and techniques in assurance (including minimum of 5 AA1000AS engagements)	Application form outlining your role and performance and (Client & employer) reference.
	Stakeholder Engagement	3. Module A of AA1000 training from an AccountAbility licensed training provider or equivalent.	'Certification' certificate.	As an alternative to 3 & 4: At least 3 years relevant experience, which includes the analysis and/or implementation of stakeholder engagement in assurance or other	Application form outlining your role and performance and (Client & employer) reference.
	Sustainability	4. At least 1 year relevant experience, which includes the analysis and/or integration of stakeholder engagement in assurance engagements or other	Application form outlining your role and performance and (client & employer) reference.		

		experiences based on the AA1000SES.		experiences based on the AA1000SES.	
		5. Module B of AA1000 training from an AccountAbility licensed training provider or equivalent.	'Certification' certificate.	As an alternative to 5 & 6: At least 3 years relevant experience in sustainability.	Application form outlining your role and performance and (Client & employer) reference.
		6. At least 1 year of experience in sustainability.	Application form outlining your role and performance and (Client & employer) reference.		
		7. Personal statement outlining your understanding of sustainability.	Personal Statement.	7. Personal statement outlining your understanding of sustainability.	Personal Statement.
	Informed Professional Judgement	8. Interview to evaluate your ability to apply informed professional judgment on an organisation's sustainability performance.	Responses during interview on applying informed professional judgment on an organisation's sustainability performance.	8. Interview to evaluate your ability to apply informed professional judgment on an organisation's sustainability performance.	Responses during interview on applying informed professional judgment on an organisation's sustainability performance.

Grade	Competence Area	Qualification Criteria			
		Training / Qualification Route	Evidence	Experienced Route	Evidence
LCSAP	Assurance	1. Module C of AA1000 training from an AccountAbility licensed training provider or equivalent.	Certification certificate.	As an alternative to 1: Experience at PCSAP level.	Listed as a PCSAP, or equivalent evidence.
		2. At least 3 years relevant experience leading a multi-disciplinary team in an AA1000 Assurance Assignment, which includes the analysis and/or implementation of audit and accounting procedures and techniques in assurance to prepare Assurance Statements.	Application form outlining your role and performance and (client & employer) reference.	As an alternative to 2: At least 4 years relevant experience leading a multi-disciplinary team in an AA1000 Assurance Assignment, which includes the analysis and/or implementation of audit and accounting procedures and techniques in assurance.	Application form outlining your role and performance and (Client & employer) reference.
	Stakeholder Engagement	3. Module A of AA1000 training from an AccountAbility licensed training provider or equivalent.	Certification certificate.	As an alternative to 3 & 4: At least 4 years relevant experience, which includes the analysis and/or implementation of stakeholder engagement in assurance or other experiences based on the AA1000SES.	Application form outlining your role and performance and (Client & employer) reference.
	Sustainability	4. At least 3 years relevant experience, which includes the analysis and/or integration of stakeholder engagement in assurance engagements or other experiences based on the AA1000SES.	Application form outlining your role and performance and (client & employer) reference.		
		5. Module B of AA1000 training from an AccountAbility licensed training provider or equivalent.	Certification certificate.	As an alternative to 5 & 6: At least 4 years relevant experience in sustainability.	Application form outlining your role and performance and (Client & employer) reference.
		6. At least 3 years of experience in sustainability.	Application form outlining your role and performance and (Client & employer) reference.		

		7. Personal statement outlining your understanding of sustainability.	Personal Statement.	7. Personal statement outlining your understanding of sustainability.	Personal Statement.
	Informed Professional Judgement	8. Mandatory interview to evaluate your ability to apply informed professional judgment on an organisation's sustainability performance.	Responses during interview on applying informed professional judgment on an organisation's sustainability performance evaluate your ability to apply informed professional judgment on an organisation's sustainability performance.	8. Mandatory interview to evaluate your ability to apply informed professional judgment on an organisation's sustainability performance.	Responses during interview on applying informed professional judgment on an organisation's sustainability performance.

CPD Renewal Requirements

For all CSAP grades:

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

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

- ▶ Associate CSAP (ACSAP) must have completed at least 8 hours CPD
- ▶ Practicing CSAP (PCSAP) must have completed at least 8 hours CPD
- ▶ Lead CSAP (LCSAP) must have completed at least 16 hours CPD

The CPD hours are divided into 3 broad categories:

Unstructured; where 3 hours are accepted as one CPD hour	Semi-structured; where 2 hours are accepted as one CPD hour	Structured; where each hour is accepted as one CPD hour
Distance and open learning study which is not assessed and does not lead to a qualification; The reading of professional and technical journals, books and other publications,	Included in this category would be non-interactive lectures, talks, etc., informal professional body meetings of a more social nature (networking opportunities) the research, preparation and first delivery of lectures/courses, publishing articles and forms of open and distance learning that	Examples of this category would be interactive and highly participative training courses and seminars, professional body meetings with formal lectures, active participation in development of standards.

<p>Relevant aspects of on-the job training, where specific outcomes have been planned and identified,</p> <p>Reading relevant material from AccountAbility and/or other sources.</p>	<p>involve assessment and that result in the acquisition of a qualification.</p> <p>Participation in standards development (i.e. wiki contributions, online discussion forums), AccountAbility's technical committees, and/or AccountAbility's webinars, are/is also accepted.</p>	
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The range of activities that may be included within each category is extensive and the small number of examples above are intended to provide broad guidance only. Most practitioners submit evidence of activities that include all 3 categories, but it is not a requirement that you do so.

2. Relevant CPD related to work experience

<p>Associate Certified Sustainability Assurance Practitioner (ACSAP)</p>	<p>No experience required.</p>
<p>Practicing Certified Sustainability Assurance Practitioner (PCSAP)</p>	<p>Involvement in at least 2 sustainability assurance assignments/ processes based on a recognised assurance framework, which include the analysis and/or implementation of audit and accounting procedures in assurance.</p> <p>If no AA1000AS assurance engagements have been conducted, an explanation of the reason, with alternative experience in applying sustainability frameworks.</p>
<p>Lead Sustainability Assurance Practitioner (LCSAP)</p>	<p>Leading teams in preparing assurance statements resulting from AA1000 sustainability assurance engagements conducted. We need you to provide us with evidence that you have met the requirements, outlining your professional development activities (training, relevant work experience, assignments and comments from clients). It is in your interests to provide us with CPD information in a clear, logical and easily understandable format.</p> <p>If no AA1000AS assurance engagements have been conducted, an explanation of the reason, with alternative experience in applying sustainability frameworks.</p>