ALTE

Association of Language Testers in Europe

Procedures for
Auditing

April 2022

Contents

Section 1

1.0 Introduction

1.1 Focus, aims and approach

The **ALTE Procedures For Auditing (PFA)** document derives from ongoing work in the Quality Management System Working Group (QMS WG) and in ALTE as a whole, and draws on approaches to auditing adopted by two renowned quality-focused organisations:

* Evaluation and Accreditation of Quality in Language Services(EAQUALS): http://eaquals.org/
* International Organization for Standardization (ISO) as published in ISO9001: http://www.iso.org. See also further reading section in Appendix 6, p.41.

As in the case of other quality management and audit systems (for example, the ISO9001 standards), the ALTE approach is based on monitoring the required standards while promoting improvement. In practice this means identifying both where the required standard and good practice are being met, and providing guidance and support where this is not the case. The ALTE approach is, however, different in that it focuses exclusively on language testing as a professional activity and thereby aims to deliver an in-depth investigation of issues specific to language tests.

The aim of the audit process is to allow ALTE members to make a formal, ratified claim that a particular examination or suite of examinations has a quality profile appropriate to its context, use and candidature. In describing the quality profile there is no intention to impose a set of uniform quality standards across the ALTE Framework. Different examinations are used in different contexts, by different groups of examination users, and accommodating these is a key function of the audit system.

However, before a test can be considered for an ALTE audit, it must be made absolutely clear whether there are any other partners involved in the development of the test and exactly what their role is. Such partners could be: other examination developers or boards, public organisations, software developers, private or commercial companies. For any audit, only one organisation can assume responsibility for the audit and all Minimum Standards and they alone can be the beneficiary of the ALTE Q-Mark.

The approach adopted by ALTE is as follows:

* Members requesting an audit of their quality systems and procedures are invited to *build an argument* that the quality standards within their examination(s) are sufficient and appropriate for that/those examination(s). It is this *argument* which is the subject of the audit, rather than the examination or the organisation itself. For detailed information on the *argument*, see Section 1.3, p.4 and Appendix 3, p.35.
* The audit has both a **consultancy** and **quality control** role. The audit aims to:
  – establish that minimum quality standards are being met in a way appropriate to the context of an examination;
  – offer recommendations for improvement towards good practice;
  – enable an initially unsuccessful organisation to implement an Action Plan aimed at working towards and ultimately reaching the minimum standards.

An audit can include one examination or a *suite* of examinations. In the latter case, information is requested on the similarities of the examination formats and why the examinations are to be considered as a suite, and therefore suitable to be audited at the same time(see Section 5. p.16, for more information on how to apply for an audit of a suite of examinations).

1.2 Basic principles

Auditors carrying out an audit are the representatives of ALTE and, therefore, ALTE members are the ultimate arbiters of decisions resulting from the audit process. In order to facilitate this activity, these decisions are made through the Standing Committee. ALTE members are invited to nominate a representative to sit on this committee, and they may also nominate a replacement who can only be present at the meetings of the Standing Committee if the representative is unable to attend. Each ALTE member has one institutional vote.

The ALTE audit process aims to be:

i. Professional:

Auditors have significant backgrounds in theoretical and practical knowledge and expertise of test development systems and can be ALTE members, expert consultants or former employees of ALTE members. For further details on auditor recruitment, see Section 4, pp.14-15.

ii. Confidential:

Throughout the course of an audit, an auditor is party to the confidential material which lies at the core of all examinations and their development. Members of the ALTE Standing Committee are also given access to certain information in order to be able to reach a decision regarding the audit outcome. The purpose of confidentiality is therefore to protect all sensitive information and prevent it from appearing in the public domain. ALTE aims to reassure auditees by maintaining confidentiality in the following ways:

- The **ALTE-Auditor Agreement** contains a confidentiality agreement. This is to ensure the confidentiality of the received documents and that any information referring to the audit is respected.
- Members of the Standing Committee are obliged to sign a confidentiality agreement, records of which are stored with the ALTE Secretariat.
- Audit outcomes are only given as a general summary at ALTE Annual General Meetings and Member Update Meetings (see Section 8.3, p.26); individual audits, specific report contents and audit outcomes are never discussed outside the Standing Committee.
- Anything that can identify an organisation within an audit and audit report is confidential but not the audit itself, and anonymised extracts from audit reports maybe used for auditor and auditee training. The use of anonymised report extracts is also outlined in the **ALTE Auditee Agreement,** to which the auditee is asked to confirm their agreement.
- It is expected that from mid–2022 onwards a secure file transfer platform will be used to send confidential documents between the auditor, auditee and ALTE (Secretariat and Standing Committee).

iii. Transparent:

Although confidentiality is a significant part of an audit and specific information cannot be made public, transparency of the audit process is also important in demonstrating that it is fair and open to discussion. To this end, the following statements apply:

- The PFA document clearly defines the different stages of the audit process and where responsibility for each lies. This, along with all other associated documentation, is agreed and approved by the ALTE membership as a whole.
- Decisions at Standing Committee meetings regarding the final audit outcome are only made after close scrutiny and discussion of audit reports. Summarised records of these discussions are kept in the minutes of the meetings as taken by the Secretariat. The relevant extracts of minutes are made available to audited organisations and auditors when required.

- Members of the Standing Committee are elected by representatives of all ALTE members and serve a term of three years.
- All communication between the Standing Committee and auditee/auditor is in writing via the ALTE Secretariat who must ensure that this happens in a timely and objective fashion.
- Review of the audit process is the responsibility of the QMS WG and any changes must be agreed by the group as a whole. They are then approved by the Standing and Board of Trustees before they can be adopted.
- It is the responsibility of the ALTE Secretariat to assist the review process and ensure that all related documentation is updated accordingly and that auditees and auditors are kept informed of all changes.

iv. Comprehensive:

The audit covers all aspects of the design and delivery of the examination(s), including test construction, administration and logistics, marking and grading, test analysis, and communication with stakeholders.

v. Impartial:

Auditors and Standing Committee members should not be influenced by personal relationships. If members of the Standing Committee are affected by committee discussion as auditors or auditees of the case under discussion, they are asked to leave the meeting for the duration of the discussion, unless the Committee decides that their presence is necessary for sake of clarification. They also do not take part in voting on the outcome of the audit in question.

vi. Consistent:

Auditors undergo a standardised process of recruitment, training and co-ordination, and their work is subject to monitoring and evaluation. Standard procedures are also adopted for all phases of the audit (pre-auditing documentation, the auditing event itself, and post-auditing feedback to the auditee), thus ensuring consistency across different types of audit and across time.

vii. Supportive:

All phases of the audit are designed to be supportive of the auditee and respectful of the auditor.

1.3 Building an argument

At the core of the ALTE Audit System are the Minimum Standards (MSs) - see Appendix 2, pp.32-33 - each of which must be met for the audit outcome to be *Resolved*. The **Validity Argument of the Auditee** form enables the auditee to build a case or argument for their examination(s) by providing the following information against each standard:

1) A description of what is done to meet the MS.
2) A description of why doing this adequately addresses the MS.
3) Evidence of what is done and that it is adequate.

Key points to remember:

- The **Validity Argument of the Auditee** must be completed comprehensively in order to give the auditor as complete a picture as possible of what is done and why.
- The auditee must remember to provide evidence to substantiate what is said.
- The onus is on the auditee to demonstrate that the exam quality profile meets the MS, and not on the auditor to find that it does not.
- The clearer the picture presented to the auditor, the more likely it is that useful advice will result from the audit.
- This exercise should not, however, be thought of as something done solely for the sake of the ALTE QMS. Gathering sufficient information to inform decisions is clearly beneficial in itself and being able to demonstrate this may be useful to the auditee in dealing with a wide range of stakeholders (see Appendix 3, p.35, for more information).

This document should be read in conjunction with the ALTE audit forms listed in Appendix 6, p.41.
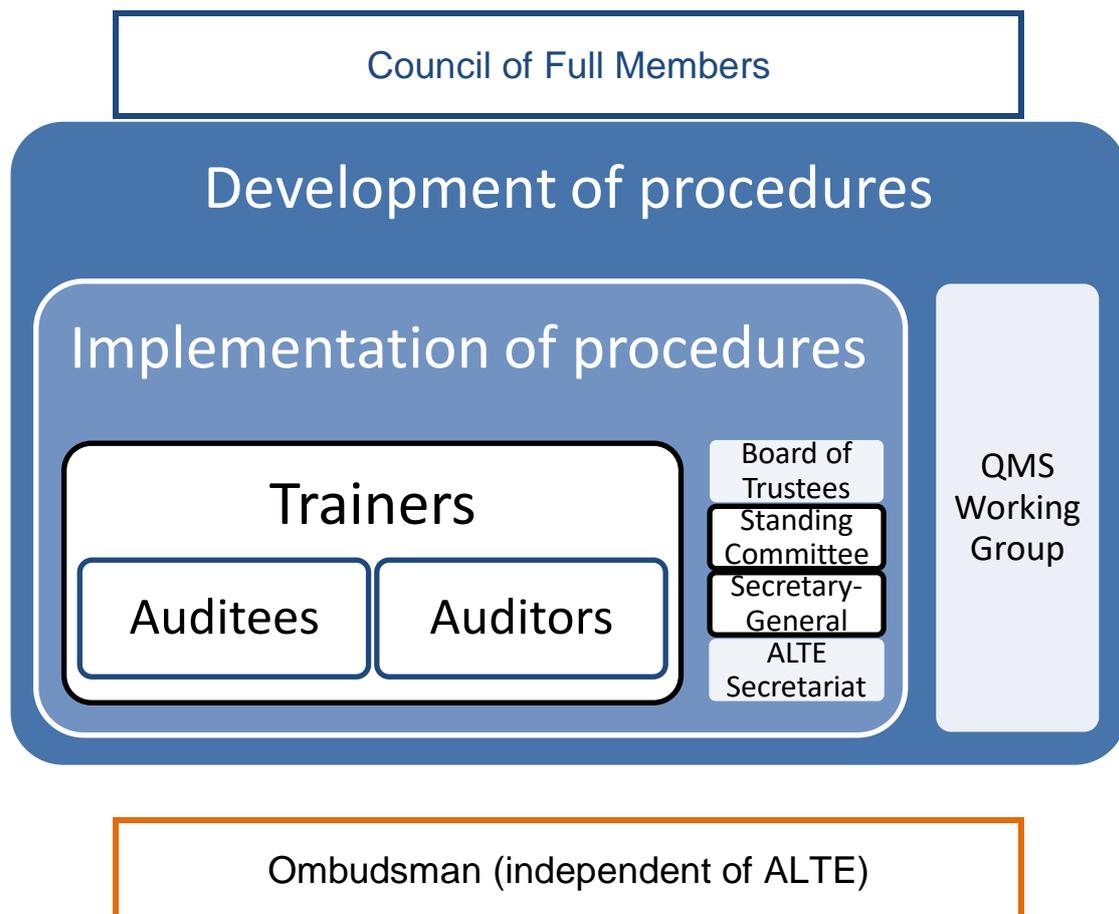
1.4 Parties involved in the ALTE Audit System

Auditee:	The organisation which has put forward its exam quality profile to be audited, or representatives of this organisation. At least one person must be nominated to be trained by ALTE to act as the organisation's representative during the audit process. This person must attend the Orientation to the ALTE Audit System and any other training required by ALTE. If the skills and expertise needed for a complete and comprehensive audit do not reside in one person, the auditee may seek support from colleagues with expertise in specific areas.
Auditor:	The person appointed by ALTE to undertake the audit. They will be an experienced professional who has attended the Orientation to the ALTE Audit System and auditor training, as required by ALTE, and is expected to attend the ALTE Auditor Standardisation sessions regularly.
ALTE Secretariat:	Responsible for administering the system and, as far as possible, ensuring that the auditing needs of organisations are met and that audits are adequately supported and procedures followed.
Standing Committee:	Elected by the Council of Full Members of ALTE, acting to ensure the quality and fairness of the system in operation, e.g. that the results of all audits are comparable and that the basic principles and approach listed above are observed.
Board of Trustees	The highest body elected by the Council of Full Members of ALTE, which represents the membership of the association. It makes day-to-day decisions on behalf of the Council of Full Members and meets at least twice a year on the occasion of the bi-annual ALTE meetings and conference. The agreement of this body is required for any change in the ALTE Constitution.
ALTE Secretary – General:	Appointed by the Council of Full Members of ALTE, he/she has, among his/her duties, the day-to-day administration of the Association and has to ensure that the financial contribution system is operated properly and promptly.
Quality Management System Working Group (QMS WG):	May be freely attended by ALTE members and affiliates and is responsible for developing the ALTE QMS in order to deliver an improved system. The responsibilities of the QMS WG include: • Monitoring the performance of the ALTE QMS, with the administrative assistance of the ALTE Secretariat. • Reviewing relevant evidence presented by the ALTE Secretariat or the Standing Committee. • Developing specific areas of the system, such as auditing procedures, auditee/auditor training and the collection of information for system monitoring. • Informing and involving the wider ALTE membership in system developments.
Ombudsman:	The General Assembly of the Council of Full Members of ALTE shall appoint, by simple majority vote, an Ombudsman as an independent arbiter in cases of disagreement between members, or between the

	ALTE Secretariat and a member (or members). The appointment shall be for a period of three years and shall be non-stipendiary. Candidates for the position of Ombudsman shall be persons who have had an active involvement in the work of ALTE but who no longer represent the organisation or any of its members.

(See Appendix 4, pp.36-38for more information on parties involved in the ALTE Audit System.)

1.5 The overall system

The following diagram represents the ALTE QMS in terms of the parties involved:

Implementation of procedures:

Auditor/Auditee:	• Receive training prior to start of auditing. • Communicate with each other directly once audit is underway.
Standing Committee (SC):	• Responsible for ensuring quality and fairness of all audits and deciding outcome of audit.
ALTE Secretariat:	• Supports auditees, auditors and the Standing Committee, and corresponds with the auditee and auditor on behalf of the Standing Committee once the audit outcome has been decided.
Board of Trustees:	• The highest body elected by the Council of Full Members of ALTE which represents the membership of the association.

ALTE Secretary-General:	• Responsible for the day-to-day administration of the Association. • Ensures that the financial contribution system is operated properly and promptly.
Ombudsman:	• An independent arbiter in cases of disagreement between members, or between the ALTE Secretariat and a member (or members).

Development of procedures:

Quality Management System Working Group (QMS WG):	• Leads development of system but is not involved with individual audits.
	 • Works closely with the Standing Committee and the ALTE Secretariat to:
	   − ensure that QMS system reflects current ideas and adapts to change
	   − suggest possible improvements.

Section 2

2.0 Practical information

2.1 Language

It is not always possible for audits to be carried out by native speakers of the language being tested. In such cases, an auditor with knowledge of the tested language at not less than B2 level for receptive skills and B1 for productive skills is desirable. It is also recommended that the auditor is familiar with technical assessment terminology in the language being tested. This is to:

1. Enable the preparation of pre-audit documentation.
2. Carry out the audit visit.

The following options should be considered if an auditor with the preferred language ability and required skills is not available:

a)
- Agreeing on a common language to be used during the audit.
- The auditor/auditing team may ask the auditee to translate certain documents into the agreed language.
- The auditee should supply a document (written in the agreed language) which summarises the contents of the pre-visit documentation and guides the auditor through its relevant sections; all auditing documents should be numbered and listed in the summary.

b)
- The auditor may call on the support of a third person, who is a master of the language being tested, to help in translating the audit documentation. This must be agreed beforehand between auditor and auditee and it is advised that the auditee issues a confidentiality agreement to the translator too. Any costs that this would imply are borne by the auditee.

N.B. The final version of the audit report is written in English, regardless of whichever language is used for the audit visit.

2.2 Audit format

An ALTE audit is in one of two formats:

- First audit (see Sections 5. – 6. – 7. – 8.)

- Re-audit (see Section 9.)

2.3 Costs and payment

The costs of and payment for the Audit System are covered as follows:

- ALTE covers the costs of running auditor training courses, i.e. hiring a venue (where applicable), and the fees, transportation, accommodation and subsistence costs of the trainer(s).
- ALTE provides the auditee with the ALTE-Auditee Agreement, which stipulates the cost of the audit for the auditee. In addition, expenses incurred in the audit, such as the auditor's travel, accommodation and subsistence costs, must be paid by the auditee to ALTE.
- Members should however be aware that failure to pay audit costs is in breach of the ALTE Agreement and could lead to sanctions being imposed.

2.4 Outcomes of the audit

The auditor gives an outcome to each individual MS and to the overall audit as follows. The outcomes are then reviewed and, if agreed, are ratified by the Standing Committee.

i.   Outcomes for the individual MSs

Standard met:	Well	**Good practice (GP)**
	Minimum required	**Satisfactory with recommendations for improvement (RFI)**
Standard not met:		**In need of improvement (INI)**

ii.   Outcomes for the whole audit:

All MS met:	**Resolved**
One or more MS = INI:	**Unresolved**

Resolved
- This is awarded when all MSs are found to be *Good practice* and/or *Satisfactory with recommendations for improvement*.

Unresolved
- This is awarded when one or more MSs have not been met.
- The Standing Committee requests that an Action Plan should be outlined using the **ALTE Audit Action Plan** form (see Section 8.5, p.27).

N.B. The audit is considered at an end only when the examination(s) meet(s) all Minimum Standards.

2.5 Audit validity period

An audit outcome is valid for the following timescales and under the following conditions:

a. For five years either:

– From the date of the original outcome letter
or
– For audits initially *Unresolved* but where an Action Plan is later successfully implemented, verified and approved, from the date of the second outcome letter (see Section 8.5, p.27 for further details on the Action Plan).

Once the five-year validity period has expired, the examination, or the suite of examinations, must be submitted for a re-audit (see Section 9, p.30 for further details on the re-audit process).

b. Until there is a significant change in the validity argument, whichever is sooner. All significant changes in the validity argument should be notified to the Secretariat using

the **ALTE Audit − Change in the Validity Argument** form. The Standing Committee will decide, on a case by case basis, whether a re-audit is needed.

2.6 ALTE Q-mark and Framework

The ALTE Q-mark is the quality indicator which member organisations can use to show that their examinations have passed the rigorous audit and meet all of ALTE's Minimum Standards (MS). Each member organisation is allocated a unique Q-mark reference and logo which it may use with reference to the successfully audited examination(s) in certain documentation and marketing collateral. This is for the five-year validity period of the audit.

For full details on how the Q-mark can be used, please refer to Appendix 6, p.41 **ALTE Q-mark Terms of Use***.*

Examinations which have been awarded the Q-mark are displayed on the **ALTE Framework** according to their level. The following information is displayed:

- The Q-mark plus the month and year of the re-audit.

For more information on the Q-mark and Framework, please visit the following page of the ALTE website:

https://www.alte.org/Setting-Standards

How to obtain the Q-mark post-audit and highlight a successful audit is covered in Section 8.6, p.28.

N.B. The Q-mark does not in any way signify that ALTE endorses or authorises the exam(s) displaying the Q-mark nor the organisation in question; it indicates only that the particular exam(s) has (have) successfully passed the audit.

Section 3

3.0 ALTE audit training

3.1 The ALTE Audit System Training Programme

The ALTE Audit System Training Programme is designed as an introduction to the ALTE Audit System and preparation for the auditing process. The programme is held prior to one of the bi-annual ALTE Meetings and Conferences and consists of two parts:

3.1.1 Orientation to the ALTE Audit System:

It is a requirement for all prospective auditors and auditees (at least one person from the organisation to be audited) to attend the Orientation session.

The session comprises a one-day face-to-face training session and covers:

- Basic training on the ALTE Audit System.
- Interpretation of the MSs.
- How to construct validity arguments using the MSs.
- How to provide evidence for the MSs.

3.1.2 New ALTE Auditor training:

It is mandatory for all individuals who wish to become ALTE auditors to attend in addition to the Orientation session; auditees may also attend.

The session comprises a one-day face-to-face training session and covers:

- Training on judgement of a validity argument.
- Preparation and conduct of an auditing visit.
- Report writing.
- Elements of standardisation.

- **3.1.3 Shadowing**
-
- Following the ALTE Auditor training day, interested participants are asked to submit an application form detailing their availability, language skills and experience. "Novice" auditors will be asked to shadow an experienced auditor carrying out a re-audit as soon as a suitable audit comes up. During the re-audit, the shadow auditor will give their opinion on some for the Minimum Standards, deciding if they are GP, RFI or INI and if they are not GP what additional information is required.

- The main auditor will be responsible for writing the final audit report and be asked to give feedback on the work of the shadow auditor. Following this a decision will be made as to when the shadow auditor is ready to be given their own audit. This decision will be made following a conversation between the auditor, shadow auditor and Chair of the Standing Committee. This would then be referred to the Standing Committee.

3.2 ALTE auditor training

On-going training (also known as standardisation or co-ordination sessions) is a requirement for all auditors. It is mandatory for new auditors to attend a standardisation session prior to their first audit. Face-to-face sessions are currently organised every 12 or 18 months and last one day.

Standardisation takes place to ensure that auditors are making decisions in line with the agreed approach and are confident in interpreting information. The sessions usually include reviewing anonymised reports and comparing standards for the more relevant or challenging MSs across different contexts.

Section 4

4.0 Auditors

4.1 Becoming an ALTE auditor

Applications to become an ALTE auditor are welcome from staff of ALTE member organisations and non-member consultants alike who have completed the required training (see Section 3, p.12) and have knowledge or expertise in the following areas of test development, construction and administration:

- Operational test-writing
- Construct theory
- Marking and grading
- Statistical analysis
- Examination administration and logistics
- Communication with stakeholders

In addition, knowledge of an additional European language at B2 level or above for receptive skills, and B1 level or above for productive skills, is desirable.

A database of fully trained ALTE auditors is held by the ALTE Secretariat.

4.2 Assigning auditors to audits

When an organisation has submitted an application for an audit, the Secretariat assigns an auditor, aiming to give the auditor at least six months' notice. The following should be noted:

- It is not always possible to assign auditors to audits of examinations in their mother tongue. In such cases, knowledge of the tested language is desirable to at least B2 for receptive skills and B1 for productive skills. If this is not feasible,
  - a) the Secretariat will contact the auditee and auditor to agree on a common language to be used during the audit .In such cases, the auditee is also expected to provide the auditor with documentation translated into the common language, if requested. OR
  - b) if available, the auditor proposes a third person, who is a master of the language being tested, to help in translating the audit documentation. This must be agreed beforehand between auditor and auditee and it is advised that the auditee issues a confidentiality agreement to the translator too. Any costs that this would imply are borne by the auditee.
- Auditors are not assigned where there may be any possibility of a conflict of interest or where the audited organisation is a direct competitor. Auditors are requested to declare any such interest from the outset or alert the Secretariat if any concerns arise at a later stage.
- It is mandatory for all new auditors to attend a standardisation session prior to their first audit.

4.3 Responsibilities of an auditor

An auditor assumes a number of important responsibilities in undertaking their role during and beyond the auditing process. These are:

- Comprehensively reviewing the validity argument document.

- Offering assistance to the auditee where he/she has not developed and documented a validity argument which is sufficient for the purposes of an ALTE audit.
- Preparing a preliminary audit report.
- Communicating with the auditee and the Secretariat on the progress of the audit.
- Conducting the audit visit according to the agreed schedule.
- Notifying the Secretariat when the audit visit has been completed.
- Finalising the audit report and sending it to the Secretariat.
- Carrying out any follow-up work as requested by the Standing Committee.
- Attending regular standardisation meetings.

If an auditor is at any stage concerned that they will not be able to maintain the anticipated level of commitment, they should notify the Secretariat at once.

4.4 Contract/agreement

The contract is between the organisation to be audited and ALTE. Once a suitable auditor has been selected, the Secretariat sends the **ALTE-Auditee Agreement** to the auditee.

Further information regarding costs and payments for the Audit System can be found in Section 2.3, p.9.

4.5 Confidentiality

In signing the confidentiality agreement, which forms part of the **ALTE-Auditor Agreement** the auditor is expected to adhere to it not only during the lifetime of the audit itself and all follow-up activities but indefinitely. This includes auditor training and standardisation sessions as well as ALTE meetings and conferences.

Section 5

5.0 Applying for an ALTE audit

5.1 Who is eligible to apply

An existing ALTE member or a new institution applying for membership can apply for an ALTE audit. They should, however, only consider doing this if the answer to all the following questions is YES:

- Is the organisation confident that the examination or suite of examinations in mind meets an appropriate quality profile for the context of that examination?
- Is the organisation prepared to meet the demands of the auditing process?
- Has a representative from the organisation attended at least the **Orientation to the ALTE Audit System**?
- Has the organisation given a period of six months' notice to allow the pre-visit activity to be carried out?

The following steps are suggested to help the organisation decide:

- Completion of the **ALTE Quality Assurance Checklists** (see: https://www.alte.org/Materials)
- Reviewing all MSs (see Appendix 2, pp.33 - 34).
- Familiarisation with the Procedures for Auditing (this document).

5.2 The audit application process

As audit eligibility is restricted as outlined above, application forms are only available from the Secretariat. The process to apply is as follows:

- Once a request for an application form has been received, the Secretariat checks that a representative from the organisation has attended at least the **Orientation to the ALTE Auditing System** before forwarding an application form.
- The auditee submits the application to the Secretariat, who checks that the form has been completed correctly.
- Applications for audits of a single examination or a suite of examinations are both reviewed and approved by the Standing Committee at the next scheduled meeting, so auditees should bear this in mind in the planning stage. Three Standing Committee meetings are scheduled per year, usually in February, April and November.
- In the case of a suite of examinations, information is requested on the similarities of the examination formats and why the examinations are to be considered as a suite, and therefore suitable to be audited at the same time. Similarities of the examination formats include:
  - Domain, e.g., general, work, specific type of work (medicine or law), academic;
  - Audience, e.g., general, young learners, pupils, students;
  - Purpose, e.g., general, school leaving exam, academic exam, migration/integration;
  - Test format, e.g. number of items/tasks, type of items/tasks ;
  - Procedures, e.g., pretesting, data analysis;
- In reviewing the application, the Standing Committee considers a number of factors, for example whether the auditor could be unfairly burdened because examinations are insufficiently similar.
  All considerations are made in relation to the fairness of the system and its efficient operation.
- Once the application is approved, the Secretariat identifies a suitable auditor for the audit.

- The selected auditor should have the requisite professional skills as defined in Sections 2.1, p.9 and 4.1, p.14.
- The Secretariat contacts the proposed auditor to confirm they are available to do the work and advises the auditee of the proposed auditor. The auditee can reject the appointment of the proposed auditor only where there may be a possibility of a conflict of interest.
- Once confirmation from both parties has been received, the Secretariat sends the **ALTE Auditee Agreement** to the auditee.
- From this point onwards all arrangements relating to the audit are made between auditee and auditor. The first step is to establish a timetable for the pre-visit period, which shall not exceed a six months' timespan from the signature of the agreement to the audit visit. Any delay that could result in a pre-visit period lasting longer than six months must be communicated from the auditee to the Standing Committee, via the Secretariat. If the pre-visit period ends up lasting more than 12 months, the audit process is automatically invalidated, resulting in the auditee being required to reapply for a new audit (see Section 6, pp.19-20 for further information).
- Auditees may find it useful to review the reference documentation in the further reading section, as this may help in determining whether the examination(s) has/have an appropriate quality profile for auditing, or whether further improvements to quality issues should be made before applying for an audit.

N.B. Once the ALTE-Auditee Agreement has been signed, the audit status is *In progress.*

5.3 Flowchart of audit application process
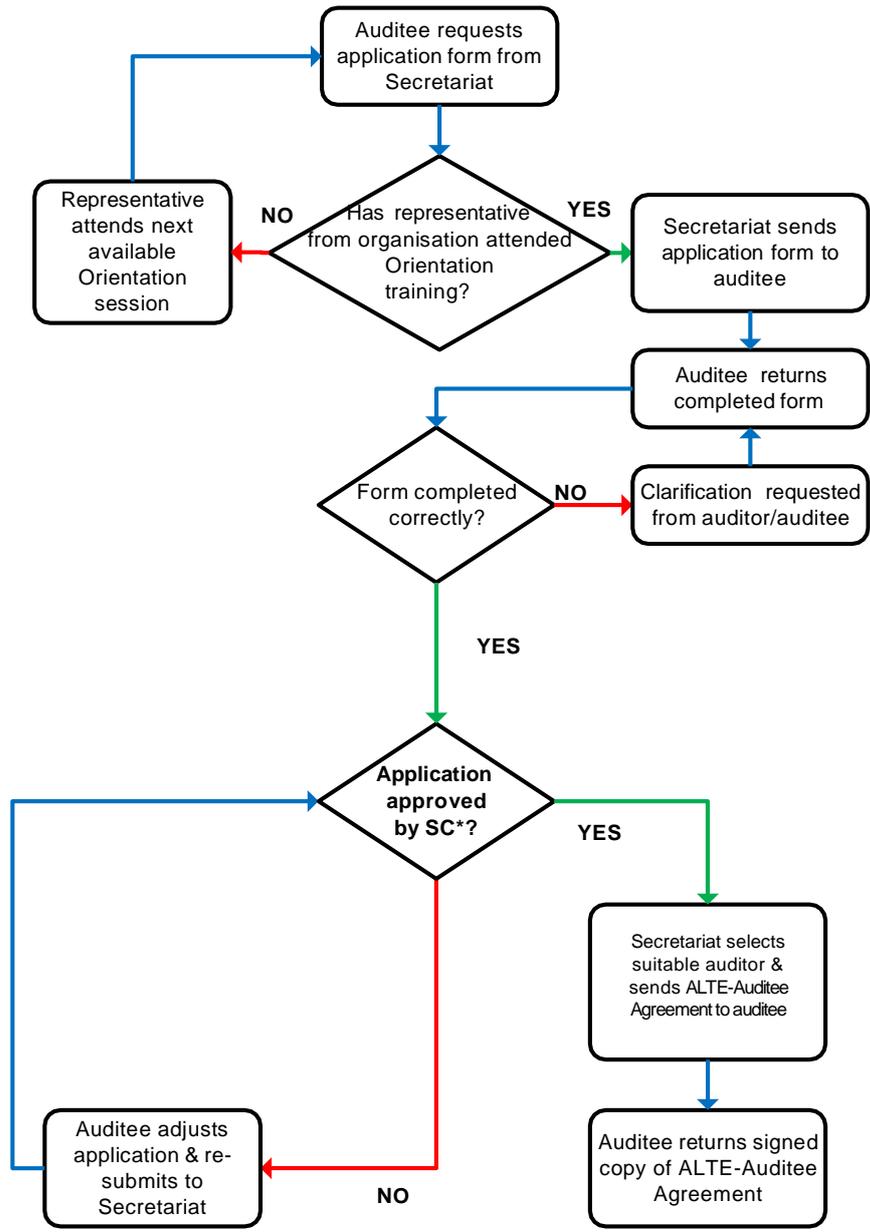
* Standing Committee

Section 6

6.0 The audit process: Pre-visit phase

The purpose of the pre-visit phase is to prepare written documentation on the examination(s) according to all the Minimum Standards. The auditee writes the validity argument (see below), which the auditor reads along with all supporting documentation. The auditor then writes a preliminary report or a list of questions.

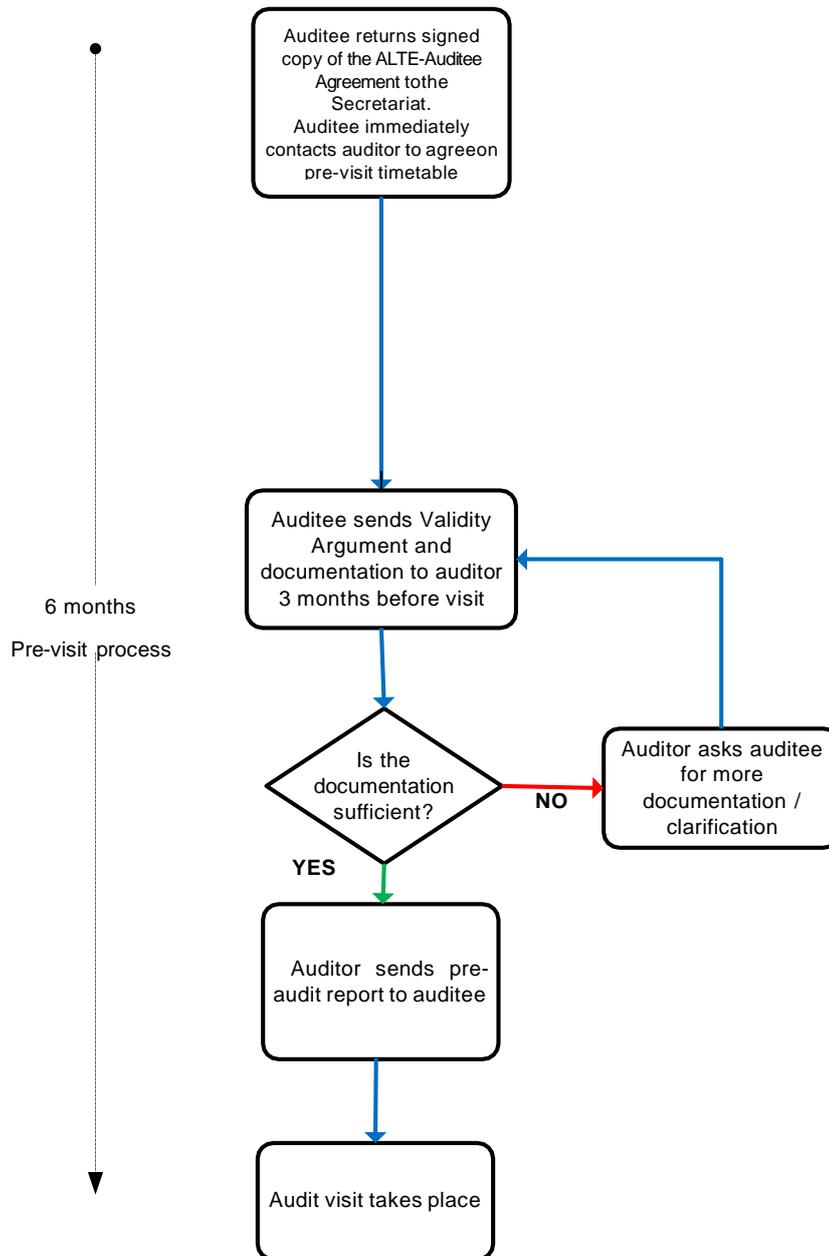The main stages of the pre-visit phase are as follows:

- The auditee completes the **Validity Argument of the Auditee** template, a copy of which is sent by the ALTE Secretariat as soon as the ALTE-Auditee Agreement has been signed**.** This is the basis of the audit and focuses on the description of all the Minimum Standards. It guides the auditee through the process of constructing a validity argument for the examination(s) under scrutiny, and a summary of the validity argument of 2–3 pages is required.
- The auditee sends the completed Validity Argument to the auditor, along with other supporting documentation, at least three months before the scheduled audit visit and is responsible for providing all necessary information for the audit process.
- Supporting documentation will vary depending on the argument put forward by the auditee, but may include the following:

- Test specifications
- Handbooks for candidates, teachers and/or other test-users
- Item-writer guidelines
- Reports or other research carried out (e.g. into alignment with external frames of reference)
- Sample tests
- Mark schemes
- Rated samples of candidate production
- Results of item analysis
- Demographic data on candidature
- Details of accreditation (e.g. by national government)
- Information on application procedures for centres
- Administration instructions for centres
- Information on centre monitoring procedures
- Publicity information for candidates, teachers and/or other test-users
- Information for candidates with special needs.

- The auditee must also provide a checklist of the documents included. This should be in the language in which the audit will be conducted and provides a guide to the documentation. If the auditor feels further documentation is required at this stage, he/she must request it directly from the auditee.

In preparation for the audit visit, the auditor sends a preliminary audit report, using the **ALTE Audit Report** template, to the auditee. This can be a description of the strong and weak points of the validity argument or a list of questions covering the main points of interest for the audit visit. (The auditor is sent a copy of the report template by the Secretariat as soon as the ALTE – Auditee Agreement has been signed by the auditee).

N.B.
- Pre-visit scrutiny of documentation forms a significant part of the audit itself and the auditor uses it to identify areas which may require closer attention during the audit visit. This is because the audit visit cannot be an in-depth check of all aspects of the construction and delivery of an examination due to time and practicality constraints.
- From this point on, an open dialogue must proceed between auditor and auditee.

6.1 Pre-visit phase summary

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┌──────────────────────────┐
│  Auditee returns signed  │
│ copy of the ALTE-Auditee │
│   Agreement to the       │
│      Secretariat.        │
│  Auditee immediately     │
│ contacts auditor to agree on │
│   pre-visit timetable    │
└──────────────────────────┘
             │
             ▼
┌──────────────────────────┐
│  Auditee sends Validity  │
│     Argument and         │
│ documentation to auditor │
│   3 months before visit  │
└──────────────────────────┘
```

6 months

Pre-visit process

```
        ◇ Is the
          documentation      NO     ┌──────────────────┐
          sufficient? ───────────▶  │ Auditor asks auditee │
                                    │    for more           │
        YES                         │  documentation /      │
         │                          │  clarification        │
         ▼                          └──────────────────┘
┌──────────────────────────┐
│  Auditor sends pre-      │
│  audit report to auditee │
└──────────────────────────┘
             │
             ▼
┌──────────────────────────┐
│  Audit visit takes place │
└──────────────────────────┘
```

Section 7

7.0 The audit process: The audit visit

The purpose of the audit visit is for the auditor to review the validity argument presented by the auditee and clarify points where necessary. The success of the audit may be compromised if questions remain unanswered.

The auditor's preliminary audit report and the auditee's validity argument are the key documents for the visit.

7.1 Preparations for the audit visit

The main points to preparing for an audit visit are as follows:

- The auditor and auditee liaise directly to agree on a schedule for sending pre-visit documentation and for the audit visit. The audit visit usually lasts one day but may take longer if a suite of exams is being covered.
- The auditee must ensure that all staff identified as required to take part will be available at agreed times.
- As a result of pre-visit preparation, the auditor must send a detailed list of the priorities to be discussed during the visit.
- The auditor may also ask for further documentation or evidence in advance of the audit visit, e.g. details of how candidates with special needs are catered for or how test constructors are recruited and trained. The auditee must respond in a timely manner and agree with the auditor what is needed and by when.

N.B. If the skills and expertise needed for a complete and comprehensive audit do not reside in one person, the auditee may seek support from colleagues with expertise in specific areas.

7.2 The audit visit

The key points are:

Audit objective:	To confirm the auditee's argument that the examination(s) meet(s) the MSs in a way that is appropriate for the context of the examination.
Format:	An interview or series of interviews with staff of the audited organisation.
Length:	Minimum of one day, depending on the number of examinations audited.
Key documents for the visit:	• The Minimum Standards described by the auditee in the **Validity Argument of the Auditee** and other supporting material form the basis of the visit; • **The Preliminary Audit Report** by the auditor forms the basis of the final audit report.
Feedback:	Where appropriate, the auditor should give oral feedback to either senior personnel or staff closely involved with the examination(s) being audited.

7.3 Conflicts or disagreements

In the case of disagreement between the auditor and the auditee, both parties should contact the Standing Committee via the Secretariat, outlining their concerns and the details of the disagreement in full. The Standing Committee will discuss the case at their next scheduled meeting and their decision will be reported to both parties, again via the Secretariat. The process may take up to six months, during which time the status of the audit will be classified as *Pending*.

If, even after this process, a disagreement remains, the case can be referred to the Ombudsman who is an independent arbiter in instances of unresolved disagreements.

Section 8

8.0 The audit process: Post-visit phase

The purpose of the post-visit phase is for the auditor to write the final audit report. In this report an outcome must be given for each of the MSs and for the audit as a whole (see Section 8.3, p.26). The report and the auditor's judgements will be discussed and approved by the Standing Committee.
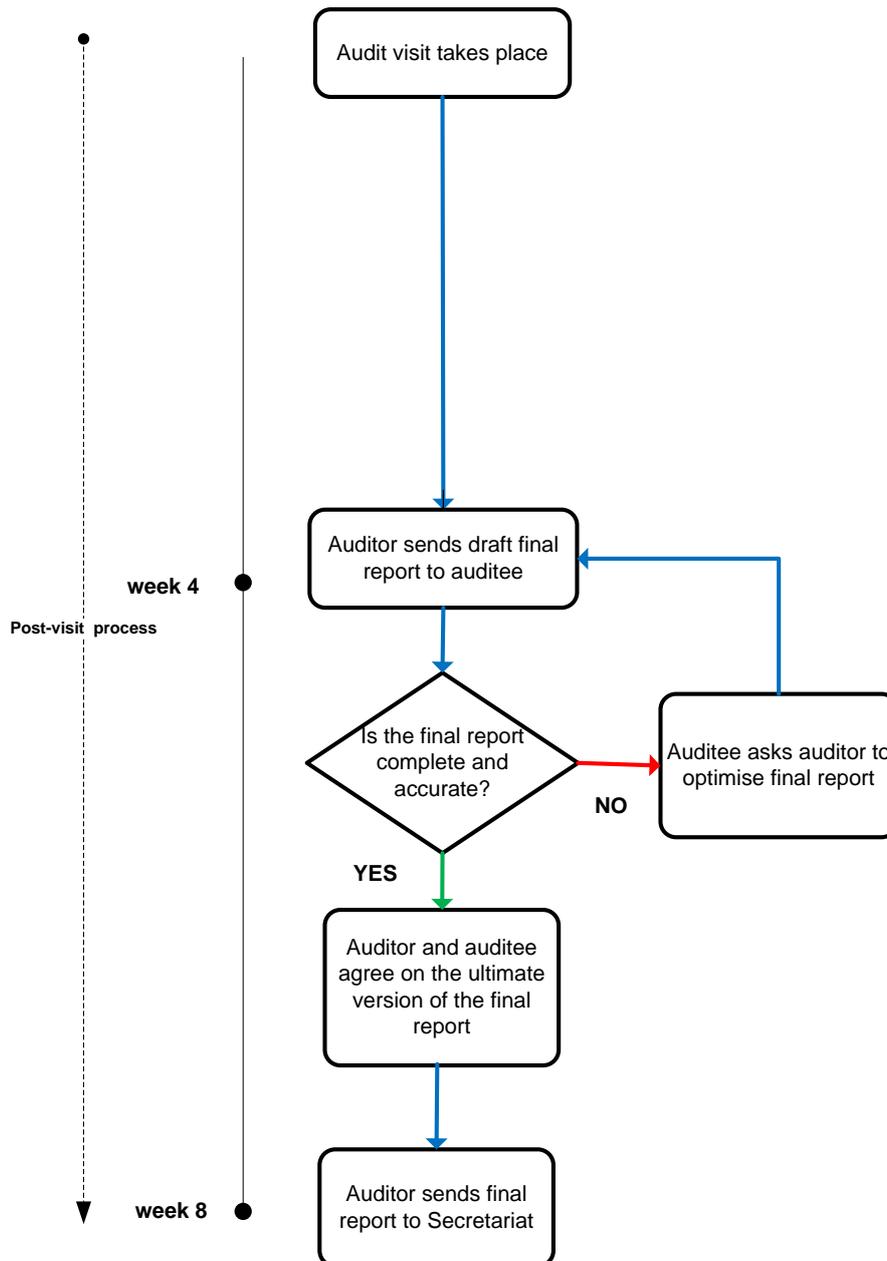
8.1 Finalising the audit report

After the visit, the auditor completes the final audit report, based on the preliminary audit report and using further information gained during the visit. The key points to the report-writing stage post-audit are as follows:

- The auditor writes the first draft of the final audit in English, within four weeks of the audit visit. The Final Report must be written using the report template (as supplied to the auditor by the ALTE Secretariat), which includes sections corresponding to the 17MSs;when describing the auditee's argument in the report, the auditor should ensure that sufficient information is provided to enable the members of the Standing Committee to reach a reliable and fair judgement on whether or not the MSs have been met.
- Each individual MS is given one of three possible outcomes while the overall audit is given one of two possible outcomes (see Section 2.4, p.10).
- The report should be sent electronically by the auditor to the auditee within four weeks of the audit visit. The auditor must notify the Secretariat when this has been done.
- The auditee is allowed four weeks to correspond with the auditor to clarify any queries or issues raised, or to correct any factual inaccuracies or misunderstandings.
- The ALTE Audit Report is a joint responsibility of both the auditee and the auditor. The auditee needs to ensure that the final version of the report includes all the necessary information that had been provided to the auditor and, if applicable, point out those sections of the report that require more details. The ultimate version of the Final Report must be approved by the auditee.
- Once the Final Report has been approved by the auditee, the auditor sends a copy of it to the Secretariat.
- The Secretariat keeps the Final Report securely on file and also forwards it to the Standing Committee.
- Each report is independently analysed and commented on by two members of the Standing Committee who report their conclusions back to the Committee for further collective discussion. These two members are selected on a rotational basis. While analysing the audit report, the two Standing Committee members may contact the auditor and the auditee for further clarification, if necessary. Prior to the Standing Committee discussion, they share their conclusions with the auditor.
- The Standing Committee, as the representative of ALTE, scrutinises and either rejects or ratifies the report's findings at the next scheduled Standing Committee meeting. Decisions are taken by majority vote, and a minimum of five 'pro' votes is required to pass any decision.
- Based on the decision, the Secretariat draws up the audit outcome letter, which is then sent to the auditee. The outcome letter communicates the decision of the Standing Committee, either "resolved" or "unresolved" and in the latter case an action plan form for the auditee. For details the auditee is referred to the audit report if the Standing Committee has endorsed it fully. In cases where the Standing Committee has come to a decision that differs from that of the audit report, the outcome letter will also explain the difference.
- Unless sufficient information is provided to the Standing Committee, the final decision cannot be made and in such cases the auditee or the auditor will need to be contacted again for further clarification.
- Once the report has been reviewed and the outcome formally decided, the auditor receives feedback via the Secretariat.

N.B.
Confidentiality is an important issue. Therefore, all information and documentation on the audited examination(s) and the organisation concerned which is not publicly available and which was used by the auditor must be destroyed or, on request, returned to the auditee. This includes hard copies as well as electronic copies of documentation submitted before the audit visit, documents relating to the audit visit itself and also the auditor's preliminary and Final Reports.

8.2 Post-visit phase summary

Audit visit takes place

week 4

Post-visit process

Auditor sends draft final report to auditee

Is the final report complete and accurate?

NO → **Auditee asks auditor to optimise final report**

YES

Auditor and auditee agree on the ultimate version of the final report

week 8

Auditor sends final report to Secretariat

8.3 Audit outcomes

Once a decision has been agreed by the Standing Committee, the result of the audit is considered final. The outcomes of each MS and the audit as a whole are communicated to the auditee via a formal **Outcome Letter** from the Secretariat, as described in Sections 8.3.1 and 8.3.2, p.26. Should the Standing Committee reach different outcomes than the auditor, these will be outlined in the outcome letter.

> **N.B.**
> The overall audit outcome is valid for five years from the date of the original outcome letter. In cases where the outcome is initially *Unresolved,* but where an Action Plan is later successfully implemented, then verified by the auditor and approved by the Standing Committee, the audit is valid from the date of the second outcome letter (see below).

8.3.1 Outcomes for the individual MSs

Standard met:	Well	**Good practice (GP)**
	Minimum	**Satisfactory with recommendations for improvement (RFI)**
Standard not met:		**In need of improvement (INI)**

Standard met: Good practice (GP):

- This is awarded if evidence of efficient, well-defined and focused procedures is presented. The appropriate involvement of stakeholder groups in the examination processes is also taken into consideration;
- See **The Principles of Good Practice** (version October 2001) for further information. This represents the benchmark for the quality of standards described here.

Standard met: Satisfactory with recommendations for improvement (RFI):

- This is awarded if a MS is met but where there are areas which could benefit from improvement. In cases where *RFI* is given, the outcome letter states which aspect(s) of the MS concerned could be improved and the Standing Committee may recommend actions to be taken.

Standard not met: In need of improvement (INI):

- This is awarded if no aspect of the MS concerned is implemented, or if it is implemented in an inappropriate way.
- The outcome letter states the MS(s) which are not met and the Standing Committee will request that an Action Plan should be outlined and completed by the auditee (see Section 8.5, p.27).

8.3.2 Outcomes for the whole audit

All MSs met:	**Resolved**
One or more MS = INI:	**Unresolved**

Resolved:

- This is awarded when all MSs are found to be either *GP* or *RFI*.

- The **ALTE Q-mark** is awarded to the audited exam(s). The auditee is entitled to make use of the Q-mark in its documentation as described in the Terms of Use (see Appendix 6, p.41 for the **ALTE Q-mark Terms of Use** and Section 8.6, p.28).
- Where *RFI* have been recorded, these should be taken into account by the auditee in order to strive for further improvement and good practice.

Unresolved:

- This is applied when one or more MSs has/have not been met;
- The Standing Committee requests that an Action Plan should be outlined using the **ALTE Audit Action Plan 1 – Outline** template (see Section 8.5, p.27).

N.B. The audit is complete only when the examination(s) meet(s) *all Minimum Standards.*

8.4 Communication about the audit programme

At the ALTE General Meeting and Members' Update Meeting, the Secretariat reports back in general terms on audit activity. This includes a summary of:

- Completed audit outcomes.
- Audits in progress.
- Audits that have been superseded by a re-audit.
- Examinations not yet audited.

Note: See Appendix 5, p.39 for a timeline of the audit validity lifecycle.

8.5 Follow-up: ALTE Audit Action Plan

In the case of an *Unresolved* outcome, when one or more of the MSs are found to be *INI***, t**he Standing Committee asks the auditee to write an Action Plan.

The key stages to creating an Action Plan are:

- Once the audit outcome has been communicated to the auditee, the Secretariat emails them a partially completed copy of the **ALTE Audit Action Plan 1 - Outline.** This forms the basis of the Action Plan and is the first of three documents which are completed at various stages to record the progress of the Action Plan.
- Section A of the Action Plan Outline is completed by the Secretariat before it is sent to the auditee and contains details of each of the MSs not met and judged to be *INI*. It may also include extracts from the audit report, the auditor's suggestions, and comments from the Standing Committee.
- In Section B, the auditee describes the actions to be undertaken for the MSs concerned and gives a timescale for completion.
- The auditee must send the completed template to the Secretariat within six months of receipt of the audit outcome letter.
- The actions mentioned in the outcome letter must be completed within a period of up to five years from the date of the outcome letter.
- An **Interim Report (ALTE Audit Action Plan 2)** on the progress of the action plan should be sent to the Secretariat after 18 months, in order to be approved by the Standing Committee at the next scheduled meeting. (The exact timescale of when this should be completed is detailed in the outcome letter). A copy of the relevant template is sent from the Secretariat to the auditee by the due date.
- After the Action Plan has been carried out, the auditee writes up the details in the **Final Report(ALTE Audit Action Plan 3).**The Secretariat arranges for the original auditor, if

possible, to thoroughly review the finalised Action Plan (in the same way as the Audit Report).

- The **ALTE-Auditee Action Plan Agreement** is issued to ratify further arrangements between ALTE and the auditee. In the event of an Action Plan requiring more consultancy from the auditor, as separate Services Agreement will be written.
- The Final Report and the auditor's findings are submitted to the Standing Committee and reviewed at their next scheduled meeting. If the actions can be verified, the Action Plan is approved; if not, a re-audit is required.
- Once the plan has been approved and the audit outcome modified from *Unresolved* to *Resolved*, the Q-mark is awarded to the audited exam(s) with the 5-year validity period beginning from the date of the second outcome letter.

8.6 Highlighting a successful audit

All completed audits are displayed on the ALTE Framework page. Once a successful audit outcome has been communicated to the auditee, the auditee receives an Outcome letter and an ALTE Quality certificate, the Secretariat updates the Framework document to display the organisation's Q-mark alongside the audited examination(s). (See Section 2.6, p.11 for further information).

The auditee can also highlight the success of an audit in the following ways:

- Use the Q-mark in documentation and marketing collateral relating to the audited exam(s). A copy of the Q-mark in various formats and colours can be obtained from the Secretariat, while details on how the Q-mark may be used are described in the ALTE Q-mark Terms of Use. The Secretariat may ask to check the proposed use.

8.7 Feedback

The **ALTE Procedures for Auditing** are a quality management system, and as such are subject to review. ALTE welcomes feedback regarding the audit system and both auditors and auditees will be given the opportunity to send feedback to the Standing Committee via the Secretariat, when an audit is resolved. This is in the form of a questionnaire which will be sent to auditors and auditees and will then be used by ALTE to inform future development of the audit system.

8.8 Appeals

Disputed outcomes which cannot be resolved by the auditor and auditee must be outlined in writing to the Standing Committee and will be discussed at the next scheduled Standing Committee meeting. See Section 7.3, p.22 for further information.

8.9 Consultancy role

An important feature of the outcome of the audit visit is that the auditor functions as consultant. Where the outcome is *Resolved*, the auditor may feel that some aspects of the examination(s) could still benefit from improvement, even if they meet the MSs. These recommendations form part of the report, although the extent to which they are acted upon is at the discretion of the auditee.

8.10 Post audit summary

```
                        ┌─────────────────────┐
                        │ Auditor sends audit │
                        │  report to SC via   │
                        │     Secretariat     │
                        └─────────────────────┘
                                  │
                    NO        ◇ Sufficient ◇
┌──────────────┐  ◄───────    ◇  detail?  ◇
│ Clarification│              ◇           ◇
│requested from│                  │ YES
│ auditee via  │
│ Secretariat  │
└──────────────┘
```
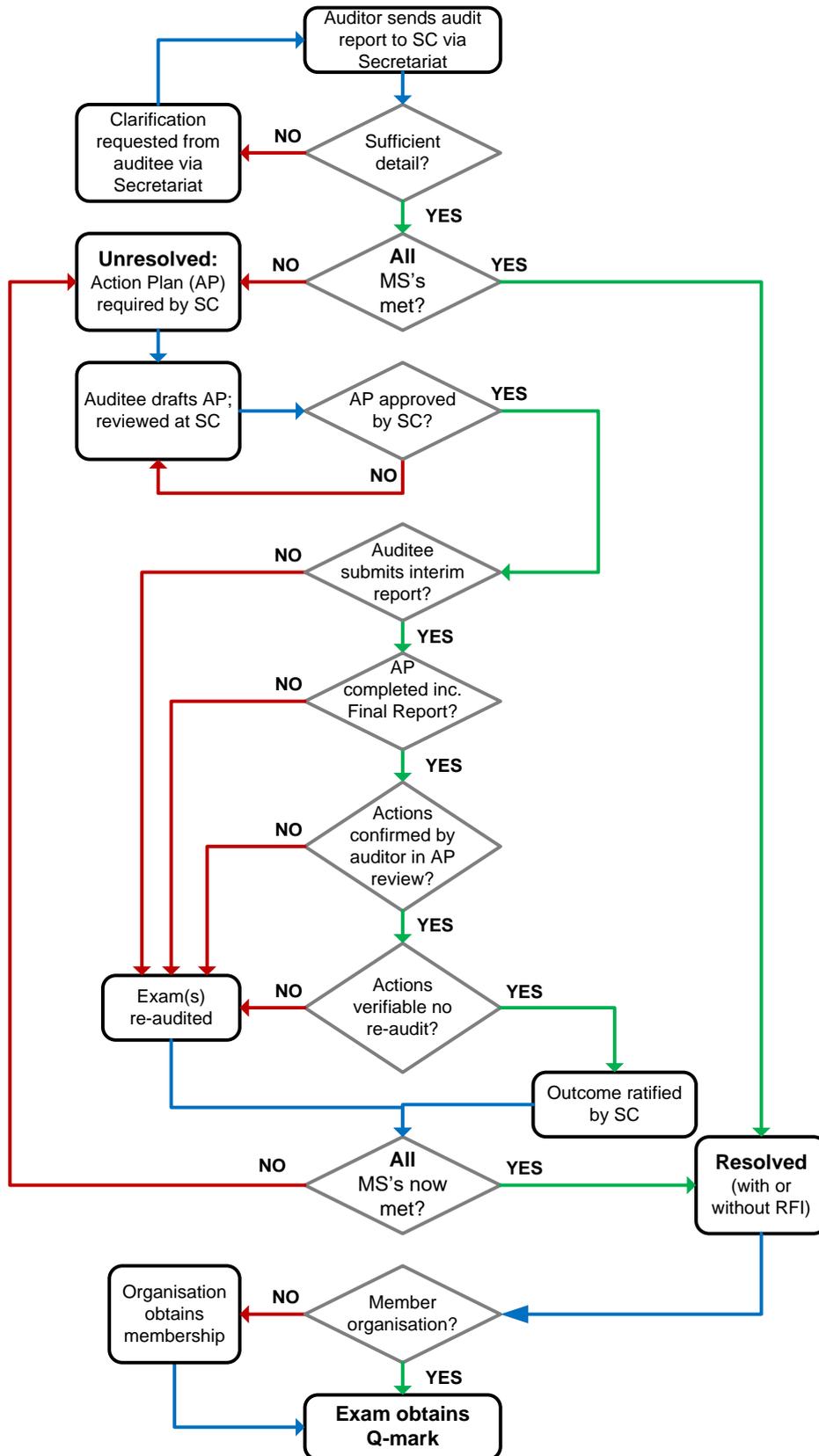
Section 9

9.0 Re-audit

Once the five-year validity period of an audit has expired, the examination, or the suite of examinations, must be submitted for a re-audit. The re-audit process is based on the assumption that the quality standards verified in the previous audit have been maintained throughout the period and that, in a perspective of an ongoing enhancement to the system, improvements in the procedures have been introduced. The re-audit therefore represents for the auditee an important occasion to verify the progress on the re-audited examination's processes related to the 17 MSs and to reflect on future improvements.

9.1 Timing

Eighteen months prior to the audit expiry date, the auditee receives a letter from the Secretariat reminding them that their examination/s is/are due for a re-audit. A new application must be submitted for the approval of the Standing Committee (see section 5.2, pp 16-17). When necessary, an additional six months to complete the re-audit process after the expiry date is always granted and the Q-mark can be kept during this period.

In exceptional cases (ie. where there are relevant changes in the validity argument due to be introduced imminently), a request to postpone the re-audit can be submitted by the auditee to the Standing Committee prior to the audit expiry date. If approved by the Committee, a maximum extension of two years is granted by the end of which a re-audit should be completed. If no re-audit is completed within that period of time, the Q-mark will be withdrawn.

9.2 Re-audit process and documentation

The re-audit process comprises the following phases:

- Once the application has been approved by the Standing Committee, the Secretariat informs the auditee and sends them the **Validity Argument of the Auditee – Re-audit** template and a copy of the prior Audit Report of the examination or suite of examinations in question. The prior Audit Report is taken as a point of reference by the auditee when developing the Validity Argument for the re-audit, by highlighting what procedures have been maintained throughout the five years without major changes and what improvements have been introduced and how these have positively impacted on the validity argument. Evidence of the maintaining and implementation of any procedure must be attached to the Validity Argument.

- The **ALTE-Auditee Agreement** is issued to ratify arrangements between ALTE and the auditee. A standard re-audit process is expected to last around five months from the signature of the Agreement to the issue of the Final Report and would involve the auditor for 3–4 working days.

- The auditee contacts the auditor advise him/her on the estimated date for the re-audit documentation to be ready to be sent to him/her. This should be within two months from the ALTE-Auditee Agreement signature date.

- The Auditee sends the **Validity Argument of the Auditee – Re-audit**, with the annexed documentation, to the auditor.

- The auditor reviews the documentation and fills out a first draft of the **ALTE Audit Report – Re-audit** template, a copy of which has previously been sent to him/her by the Secretariat. In revising the Validity Argument, the auditor focuses on the evidence that is provided by the auditee to sustain their argument that the procedures have been maintained in line with

the 17 MSs throughout the years and he/she pays particular attention to the MSs on which a previous *RFI* has been advised by the Standing Committee, to verify whether measures of improvement have been adopted and, if so, whether they are adequate.

- While reviewing the documentation, auditor and auditee maintain communication. If major changes in the validity argument have been introduced throughout the years, such to make a re-audit visit necessary to verify evidence in loco, the auditor agrees with the auditee to arrange a re-audit visit and informs the Standing Committee, via the Secretariat, of the decision. In case of disagreement, the Standing Committee is the final arbiter.

- The auditor finalises the **ALTE Audit Report – Re-audit** and sends a first draft to the auditee.

- Procedures follow as per first audit (see Section 8.1, pp. 23-24)

Appendices

Appendix 1
Glossary of technical terms

The glossary below explains terminology which appears in this document and also the associated forms which make up the ALTE Audit System.

bias	If a particular section of the candidate population is (dis)advantaged by some feature of the test which is not relevant to what is being measured.
clerical marking	A method of marking in which markers do not need to exercise any special expertise or subjective judgement. They mark by following a mark scheme which specifies all acceptable responses to each test item.
construct	A hypothesised ability or mental trait which cannot necessarily be directly observed or measured, e.g. listening ability.
cut score	The minimum score a candidate has to achieve in order to get a given grade in a test/examination.
discrimination	The power of an item to discriminate between weaker and stronger candidates.
domain	The defined area of content and/or ability which is to be tested by a specific task or component of an examination.
examiner/ rater	Someone who assigns a score to a candidate's performance in a test, using subjective judgement to do so.
impact	The effect created by a test, both in general terms, and in terms of the individuals who are affected by test results.
item	Each testing point in a test which is given a separate mark or marks.
item analysis	A description of the performance of individual test items, usually employing classical statistical indices such as facility and discrimination.
item writer guidelines	Documentation on a test giving details on how to construct the test items.
optical mark reader	An electronic device used for scanning information directly from mark sheets or answer sheets (also referred to as a scanner).
pretesting	A stage in the development of test materials at which items are tried out with representative samples from the target population.
rating	The process of assigning a score to performance in a test through the exercise of judgement.
reliability	The consistency or stability of the measures from a test. The more reliable a test is, the fewer random errors it contains.
skill	In language testing, receptive skills (listening and reading) and productive skills (speaking and writing) are often distinguished.
stability	An aspect of reliability where the estimate is based on the test/re-test approach. It relates to how stable test scores are over time.
standardisation	The process of ensuring that assessors adhere to an agreed procedure and apply rating scales in an appropriate way.
task	A combination of rubric, input and response, e.g. a reading text with several items, all of which can be responded to by referring to a single rubric.
test analysis	Analysis of tests after they have been used with candidates, often employing statistical and computerised methods.
test construction	The process of selecting items or tasks and putting them into a test.
test specifications	Detailed documentation on a test giving details on design, content, level, task, item types used, target population, use of the test, etc.
validity	The extent to which scores on a test enable inferences to be made which are appropriate, meaningful and useful, given the purpose of the test.

The entries of this glossary are based on the definitions of the *Multilingual Glossary of Language Testing Terms*, Studies in Language Testing 6, UCLES/CUP 1998.

Appendix 2
Minimum Standards for establishing quality profiles in ALTE examinations

In each case, please explain whether the examination meets these standards, and if so, in what way.

TEST CONSTRUCTION	
1	You can describe the purpose and context of use of the examination, and the population for which the examination is appropriate.
2	The examination is based on a theoretical construct, e.g. on a model of communicative competence.
3	You provide criteria for selection and training of constructors, expert judgesand consultants in test development and construction.
4	Parallel examinations are comparable across different administrations in terms of content, stability, consistency and grade boundaries.
5	If you make a claim that the examination is linked to an external reference system (e.g. Common European Framework), then you can provide evidence of alignment to this system?

ADMINISTRATION AND LOGISTICS	
6	All centres are selected to administer your examination according to clear, transparent, established procedures, and have access to regulations about how to do so.
7	Examination papers are delivered in excellent condition and by secure means of transport to the authorized examination centres, your examination administration system provides for secure and traceable handling of all examination documents, and confidentiality of all system procedures can be guaranteed.
8	The examination administration system has appropriate support systems (e.g. telephone helpline, web services, etc.).
9	You adequately protect the security and confidentiality of results and certificates, and data relating to them, in line with current data protection legislation, and candidates are informed of their rights to access this data.
10	The examination system provides support for candidates with special needs.

MARKING AND GRADING	
11	Marking is sufficiently accurate and reliable for purpose and type of examination.
12	You can document and explain how reliability is estimated for rating, and how data regarding achievement of raters of writing and speaking performances is collected and analysed.

TEST ANALYSIS	
13	You collect and analyse data on an adequate and representative sample of candidates and can be confident that their achievement is a result of the skills measured in the examination and not influenced by factors such as L1, country of origin, gender, age or ethnic origin.
14	Item-level and task-level data (e.g. for computing the difficulty, discrimination, reliability and standard errors of measurement of the examination) is collected from an adequate sample of candidates and analysed.

COMMUNICATION WITH STAKEHOLDERS

| 15 | The examination administration system communicates the results of the examinations to candidates and to examination centres (e.g. schools) promptly and clearly. |

| 16 | You provide information to stakeholders on the appropriate context, purpose and use of the examination, on its content, and on the overall reliability of the results of the examination. |

| 17 | You provide suitable information to stakeholders to help them interpret results and use them appropriately. |

Appendix 3
Building an argument

Some examples referring to different MS.

The form, *Validity Argument of the Auditee* is designed to guide auditees through the process of constructing a validity argument. To use it, however, it is important to be exhaustive and to try to include information about relevant elements of the examination (such as each component). Auditees have to construct an argument so that it is not only explained what they do but also WHY this is appropriate (especially in terms of the interpretation of examination scores) given the purpose of the examination.

For example:
The overview of an argument for MS 8 (The examination administration system has appropriate support systems (e.g. telephone helpline, web services, etc.) could look like this:
1) a description of the relevant services offered by telephone and internet and how they are publicised
2) a description of why the services mentioned provide adequate support needed in the administration and logistics stage. This might include an explanation of the level of service (e.g. the number of telephone queries that can be dealt with in an hour) and an explanation of why no further types of service are required (e.g. centres cannot request further hard copies of procedures, as they are available to download from the internet).
3) a list of evidence which shows:
i) that procedures are followed (e.g. a log of calls to the helpline)
ii) that services provided are adequate and sufficiently comprehensive (e.g. the log shows the response time and the topic of calls, where topics are those prepared for).

As well as paying due attention to the argument for each MS, auditees should also be aware of the way in which all MS contribute to an overall argument for the examination(s). Such consideration focuses itself on modern understandings of validity, where the interpretation of test scores is important, e.g. a particular test score may be taken to mean that a candidate has sufficient ability to study at a university However, this interpretation may be questioned if the theoretical construct is uncertain (MS 2), if parallel exams are not shown to be stable (MS 4), if support is not provided for candidates with special needs (MS 10), if marking is not shown to be reliable (MS 11), if item-level data is not analysed (MS 14), and so on for all of the MS.

Care should also be taken to understand the relationships between what is described in each MS. For example, MS 4 (Parallel examinations are comparable across different administrations in terms of content, stability, consistency and grade boundaries) is unlikely to be proven if MS 11 (Marking is sufficiently accurate and reliable for purpose and type of examination) is not. Likewise, MS 13 (You collect and analyse data on an adequate and representative sample of candidates and can be confident that their achievement is a result of the skills measured in the examination …) is difficult to substantiate if MS 1 (You can describe the purpose and context of use of the examination, and the population for which the examination is appropriate) is not sufficiently dealt with because MS 13 implies an argument for what is an adequate sample of the population described in MS 1.

The ALTE Quality Assurance Checklists can also provide more insight here (https://www.alte.org/Materials).

Appendix 4
Parties involved in the ALTE Audit System

Auditee: refers to the organisation which has put forward its exam quality profile to be audited, or representatives of this organisation. The organisation will need to nominate at least one person to act as its representative during the audit process who will need to attend the Orientation to the ALTE Audit System required by ALTE. The role includes:

- attending Orientation to the ALTE Audit System Training and other training, as required
- making arrangements for the audit with the ALTE Secretariat
- making the purpose and arrangement of the audit known to his/her colleagues
- co-ordinating the construction of an argument for the examination(s) to be audited
- submitting appropriate documents on or before the time agreed
- corresponding with the auditor to assist him/her in reviewing the documents
- providing supplementary material as requested
- arranging the details of the audit visit with the auditor by attempting to fulfil the requests of the auditor. This is likely to include ensuring colleagues and appropriate evidence are available during the visit, etc.
- accompanying/contributing/assisting the auditor during the audit visit
- corresponding with the auditor during the month after the audit report is received from the auditor to ensure that it is accurate and reasonable
- circulating the report amongst colleagues and assisting them in interpreting and making use of it
- collaborating with the ALTE Secretariat in post-audit administration
- completing and returning auditee feedback forms
- responding to any requests from the Standing Committee
- collaborating with relevant colleagues to draw up, if required, an Action Plan to deal with any issues considered by the Standing Committee to be in need of attention.

Auditor: refers to the person appointed by ALTE to undertake the audit. This person will be an experienced professional who has attended the Orientation to the ALTE Audit System and auditor training, as required by ALTE. The role includes:

- attending auditor training or standardisation as required by ALTE
- making his/her availability known to the ALTE Secretariat, as requested
- making arrangements to conduct an audit with the ALTE Secretariat
- corresponding with the auditee on technical or logistical questions which he/she may have concerning the audit
- reviewing audit documentation sent by the auditee and assessing its adequacy
- requesting further documentation from the auditee, as necessary
- identifying people and evidence to be reviewed during the audit visit, informing the auditee and collaborating in constructing a provisional schedule for the visit
- conducting an audit visit
- considering findings for each MS and deciding whether the MS is adequately met
- writing a report containing findings, suggestions for improvement and opinions on the adequacy of the argument within one month of the visit
- corresponding with the auditee after the report has been written to ensure that it is accurate and reasonable
- sending the completed report to the ALTE Secretariat, copying in the auditee
- corresponding with the ALTE Secretariat or the Standing Committee on matters concerning the audit, as required
- completing and returning auditor feedback forms.

ALTE Secretariat: this body administers the system and, as far as possible, ensures that the auditing needs of organisations are met, audits are adequately supported and procedures are followed. The role of the ALTE Secretariat, in respect of the ALTE QMS, includes:

- monitoring the requirements for audits and training and ensuring that, as far as is possible and practicable, all needs are met
- matching auditors to auditees using criteria of suitability and availability
- monitoring the progress of audits with the assistance of the auditor and auditee
- ensuring procedures are followed, as far as possible
- storing relevant information on individual audits and conveying this to the Standing Committee
- collecting and storing relevant information on the audit system as a whole and providing it to the QMS WG and the Standing Committee, as required
- monitoring the completion of Action Plans by auditees and reporting this to the Standing Committee
- supporting the Standing Committee and QMS WG in their work
- keeping ALTE members informed of matters relating to the ALTE QMS
- conducting elections for the Standing Committee, as required, according to procedures.
- creating agreements with both auditors and auditees

ALTE Secretary-General: is appointed by the Council of Full Members of ALTE.
The duties of the Secretary-General are:
- the day to day administration of the Association
- to ensure that all meetings of the Association are properly held and minutes promptly circulated
- to ensure that the financial contribution system is operated properly and promptly
- to sign contracts on behalf of the Association
- to carry out such duties and the members and/or the Council may delegate to him from time to time.

Standing Committee: this body is elected by the Council of Full Members of ALTE and acts to ensure the quality and fairness of the system in operation; e.g., it must ensure that the results of all audits are comparable and that the basic principles and approach listed above are observed. Its duties include:

- reviewing each audit by considering the auditor's report and supporting material, if needed
- requesting further evidence and information where this is deemed necessary
- concluding final outcomes of the audit according to the classifications available
- identifying issues which need further action and communicating them clearly to the auditee with the assistance of the ALTE Secretariat
- directing an auditee to compile an Action Plan to address issues identified
- reviewing proposed actions plans to assess whether they are likely to adequately address the issues
- deciding how best to review Action Plans after they have been implemented and arranging for this to be done
- adjudicating in disputes between auditees and auditors
- presenting a summary of their work to ALTE members on appropriate occasions
- codifying the procedures by which it (Standing Committee) operates and make these known to ALTE Members, as appropriate.

Board of Trustees: this is the highest body elected by the Council of Full Members of ALTE which represents the membership of the association. The Board of Trustees makes day-to-day decisions on behalf of the Council of Full Members and the agreement of this body is required for any change in the ALTE Constitution. The Board of Trustees meets at least twice a year on the occasion of the biannual ALTE meetings and conference. Meetings of the Board of Trustees cover at least the following areas:

- approval of annual accounts
- approval of subscription levels
- amendments to categories of members
- proposed amendments to the Constitution
- review and adoption of proposed project plan for ALTE
- agreement on the location of future meetings of the Association
- approval of the annual report for public release.

Quality Management System Working Group (QMS WG): this body may be freely attended by ALTE members and affiliates and has the responsibility to develop the ALTE QMS in order to deliver an improved system. The responsibilities of the QMS WG include:

- monitoring the performance of the ALTE QMS, with the administrative assistance of the ALTE Secretariat
- reviewing relevant evidence presented by the ALTE Secretariat or the Standing Committee
- developing specific areas of the system, such as the auditing procedure, training for auditees and auditors and the collection of information for monitoring the system
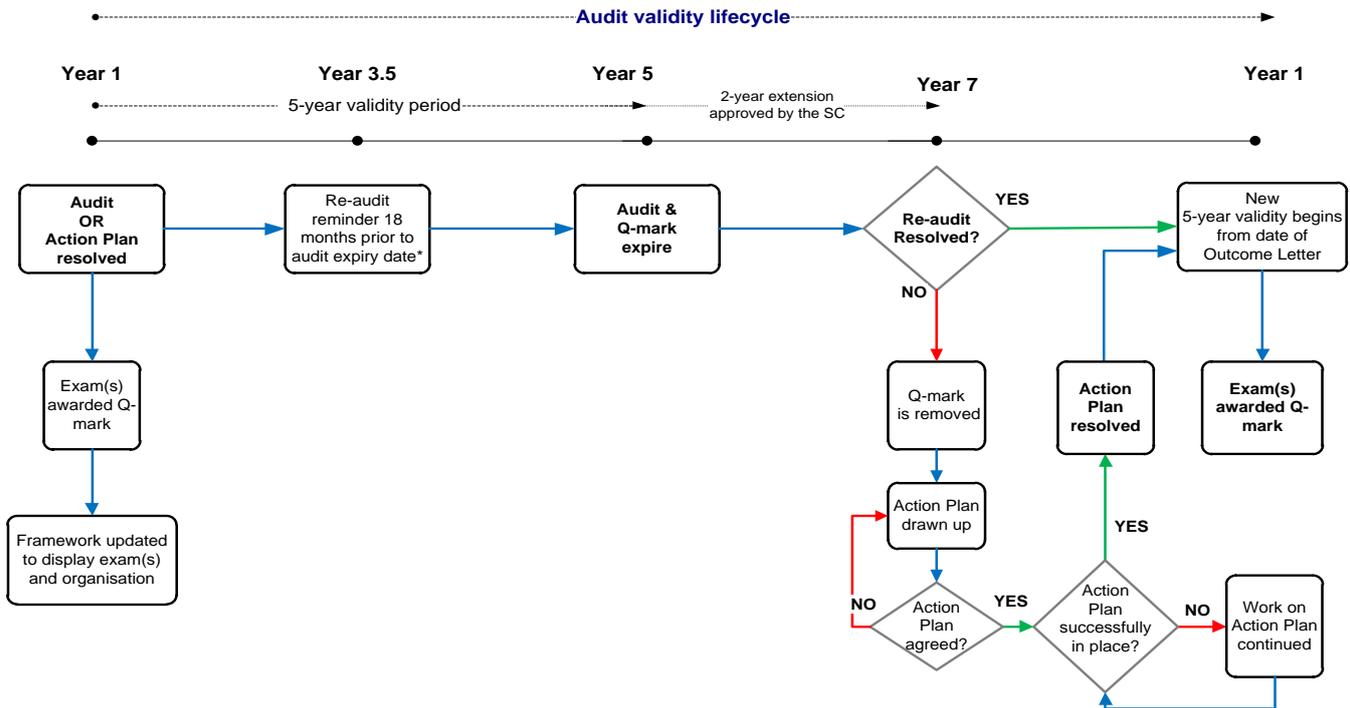- informing and involving the wider ALTE membership in system developments.

Appendix 5: Timeline of the ALTE audit validity lifecycle

Timeline of ALTE audit validity lifecycle
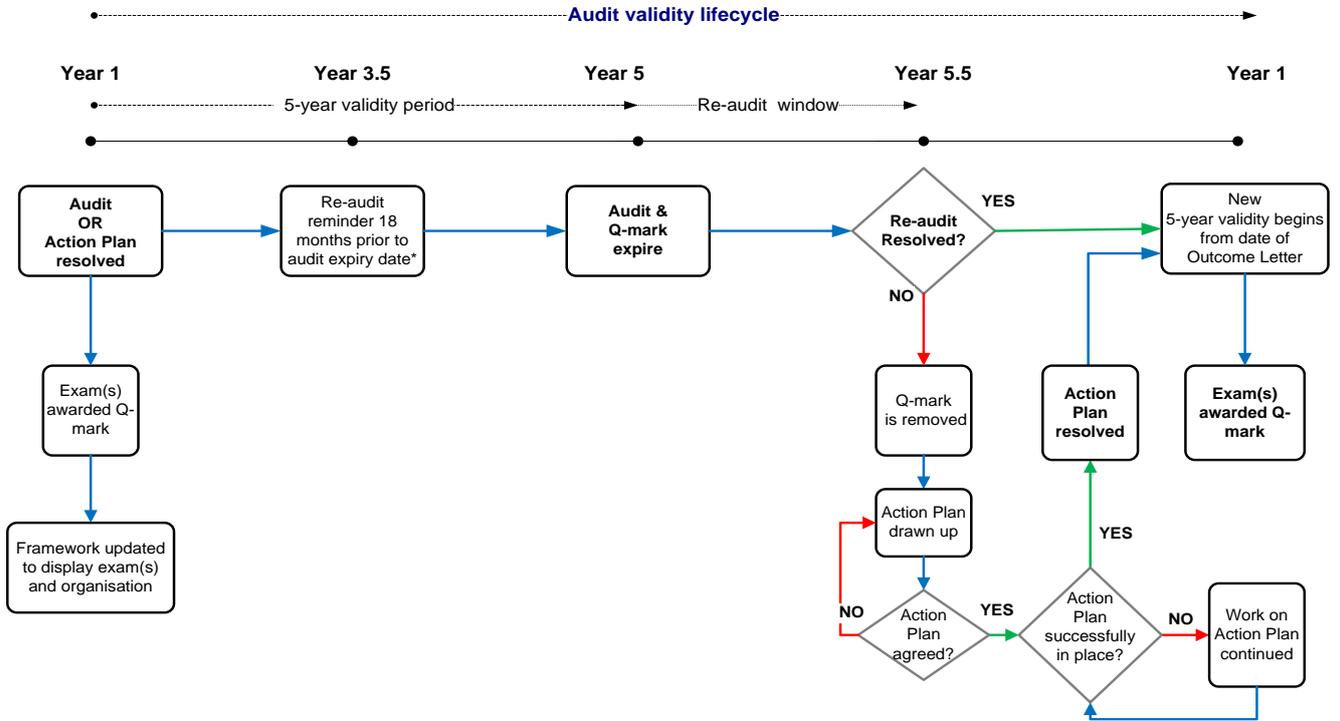
*sent by ALTE Secretariat

Timeline of ALTE audit validity lifecycle when a 2 year-extension is approved by the Standing Committee

-------------Audit validity lifecycle-------------

Year 1	Year 3.5	Year 5	Year 7	Year 1

------5-year validity period------   2-year extension approved by the SC

Audit OR Action Plan resolved

Re-audit reminder 18 months prior to audit expiry date*

Audit & Q-mark expire

Re-audit Resolved? — YES →

New 5-year validity begins from date of Outcome Letter

NO

Exam(s) awarded Q-mark

Q-mark is removed

Action Plan resolved

Exam(s) awarded Q-mark

Framework updated to display exam(s) and organisation

Action Plan drawn up

NO

Action Plan agreed? — YES →

Action Plan successfully in place? — NO →

Work on Action Plan continued

YES

*sent by ALTE Secretariat

Appendix 6
Associated documentation

ALTE audit forms

ALTE Audit Application Form
ALTE Audit Application Form – Re-audit
ALTE – Auditee Agreement
ALTE Auditor Agreement
Validity Argument of the Auditee
Validity Argument of the Auditee – Re-audit
ALTE Audit Report
ALTE Audit - Change in the Validity Argument
ALTE Audit Report – Re-audit
ALTE Audit Action Plan 1 – Outline
ALTE Audit Action Plan 2 – Interim Report
ALTE Audit Action Plan 3 – Final Report
ALTE Auditor Application Form
Questionnaire for Auditees
Questionnaire for Auditors

Further reading

ALTE (1998)*Multilingual Glossary of Language Testing Terms*, Studies in Language Testing 6, UCLES/Cambridge University Press.

ALTE (2005) *CEFR Grid for the Analysis of Speaking Tasks,*Council of Europe:

ALTE (2005)*CEFR Grid for the Analysis of Writing Tasks*(analysis and presentation),Council of Europe:

ALTE *Code of Practice* (1994):https://www.alte.org/Materials

ALTE *Content Analysis Checklists for Speaking and Writing* (1993):

ALTE *Item-writer Guidelines* (2005):

ALTE *Principles of Good Practice* (2001):https://www.alte.org/Materials (available in a range of languages)

ALTE *Quality Assurance Checklists* (2013):https://www.alte.org/Materials

ALTE Q-mark terms of use is available here

Council of Europe (2009) *Manual for Relating Language Examinations to the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Learning, Teaching, Assessment (CEFR)*: http://www.coe.int/t/dg4/linguistic/Source/ManualRevision-proofread-FINAL_en.pdf

Council of EuropeManual for Language Test Development and Examining

http://www.coe.int/t/dg4/linguistic/ManualLanguageTest-Alte2011_EN.pdf

Dutch CEFR Construct Project (2004) *The CEFR Grid for the analysis of Reading and Listening tasks*: http://www.lancaster.ac.uk/fss/projects/grid/

ISO9001:2015, International Organization for Standardization:https://www.iso.org/obp/ui/%20#iso:std:iso:9001:ed-5:v1:en

Research Notes 39 (2010)*Quality assurance and its impact on language assessment, language and teaching.*Cambridge ESOL:http://www.cambridgeenglish.org/images/22867-research-notes-39.pdf

Research Notes 22 (2005), Saville, N.*Setting and monitoring professional standards: a QMS approach.* Cambridge ESOL:http://www.cambridgeenglish.org/images/23141-research-notes-22.pdf