GSTC ACCREDITATION MANUAL

A guide to the accreditation of sustainable tourism certification programmes

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CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

This manual sets out the basis upon which the Global Sustainable Tourism Council (GSTC) accredits schemes that provide certification to tourism enterprises for their compliance with the globally accepted principles of sustainable tourism.

Following this introduction, the manual is in three parts:

PART 1   Contains the GSTC Standard for Sustainable Tourism, which sets out the minimum criteria requirements that certification schemes should meet in certifying GSTC-aligned sustainable tourism providers. It also covers procedures for updating the GSTC Standard and for aligning the standards used by certification schemes with it.

PART 2   Contains the GSTC Accreditation Criteria for Certification Bodies, which specify the procedures that the GSTC requires certification bodies to conform to when implementing certification schemes for sustainable tourism.

PART3   Contains the procedures that will be followed to accredit certification schemes for their compliance with the GSTC Standard and Accreditation Criteria

The need for sustainable tourism

Tourism accounts for around 10% of the world's economic activity. It is a rapidly growing sector, with international tourist arrivals forecast to grow from around 1 billion in 2010 to 1.6 billion in 2020[1].

The UN's Millennium Development Goals provide a clear challenge for the development and management of all economic sectors, requiring a focus on the eradication of extreme poverty and hunger, sound resource management and social equity and wellbeing. Tourism can and must play a major part in addressing these challenges owing to its size, its widespread presence in urban and rural areas across the world, its substantial capacity to drive voluntary shifts of wealth from rich to poor and its special dependency on environmental and cultural resources and social interaction. The latter arises partly from a unique aspect of tourism, that the product is consumed at the place of production.

The impact of tourism on global and local environments and on host communities can be both positive and negative, providing both opportunities and responsibilities.

Negative impacts and concerns associated with tourism include:
- Its contribution to climate change, being responsible for an estimated 5% of global CO_2 emissions which is growing rapidly;
- Depletion of natural and precious resources, such as the use of land and water;
- Creation of pollution of all kinds;
- Social changes and dislocation of traditional societies;
- Pressure on cultural heritage sites, natural environments and biodiversity;

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[1] UN World Tourism Organisation, *Tourism 2020 Vision,* 2010

- Poor labour conditions and exploitation in parts of the sector.

On the other hand, tourism can deliver many positive benefits, including:
- A growing opportunity for enterprise development and employment creation, with quite low barriers for entry;
- Direct and indirect support for local communities, through the provision of jobs, income, services and infrastructure;
- Awareness of natural and cultural heritage and support for their conservation;
- Health, wellbeing and educational benefits for tourists and hosts, which should be accessible to all.

Sustainable tourism requires an approach to tourism development and management that recognises and responds to these responsibilities and opportunities.

Actions that encourage, identify and promote a positive response from enterprises are crucial for the future of the tourism sector and the contribution it can make to sustainable development. The tourism sector is highly fragmented. While there are some important multinational players, many of the providers of tourism services are independent businesses and the majority are small and micro enterprises. Tourism enterprises of all sizes are responding in different ways and to different degrees to the need for sustainable tourism.

The Global Sustainable Tourism Council (GSTC)

GSTC is a multi-stakeholder initiative formed in 2010 under the umbrella of the United Nations, including amongst its founding partners UNEP, UNWTO, UN Foundation, Sabre Holdings and Rainforest Alliance, amongst others. It was formed in response to the challenges and opportunities of sustainable tourism, by merging two previous initiatives.[2]

Over 50 organisations from the public, private and voluntary sectors and from the world of tourism, environmental management and sustainable development have been contributing to the work of the GSTC and its two predecessor bodies.

The GSTC is a Membership Council with a Board of Directors. The Board provides the governance of the organisation. However, the Council, which elects the Board, has responsibility for the by-laws of the GSTC, for its principles, criteria and operational guidelines, for admittance of members and for resolving disputes.

The mission of the GSTC is:
"to improve tourism's potential to be a driver of positive conservation and economic development for communities and businesses around the world and a tool for poverty alleviation".

The GSTC fulfils its mission by fostering increased knowledge and understanding of sustainable tourism practices and the adoption of universal sustainable tourism principles.

The GSTC sees its Accreditation Programme as an important tool in pursuing its mission. It also works in many other ways to strengthen education, communication,

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[2] The Partnership for Global Sustainable Tourism Criteria and the Sustainable Tourism Stewardship Council

knowledge-sharing and business engagement in the field of sustainable tourism and to achieve improved market access for sustainable tourism products.

A broad and common agenda for sustainable tourism

The challenges of sustainable tourism articulated earlier encompass economic, social and environmental impacts. This broad spectrum of concern is increasingly recognised by bodies promoting sustainable tourism. UNEP and UNWTO identified an agenda for sustainable tourism based on twelve functional aims[3] and showed how there are economic, social and environmental dimensions to each of them. The dimensions are seen as interrelated.

In the private sector, in tourism as well as in other economic spheres, enterprises and investment projects are encouraged to consider a triple bottom line. Many companies report on Corporate Social Responsibility policies and actions, which address a broad range of economic, social and environmental impacts and initiatives beyond straight financial reporting. Some companies use the guidelines of the Global Reporting Initiative, the world's most widely used sustainability reporting framework (www.globalreporting.org).

The GSTC Accreditation Programme is in line with this broad approach to sustainable tourism and encourages certification schemes to move beyond a more mono-dimensional, often environmental focus.

The **principles for sustainable tourism** in tourism enterprises, which lie behind the Accreditation Programme, are that:
- **Sustainability objectives should be defined and actions coordinated by an effective management system**
- **Tourism should bring the greatest possible social and economic benefits to local communities and any negative impacts on them should be minimised**
- **Local cultural heritage must be respected and opportunities should be taken to strengthen its integrity and richness.**
- **Impacts on the global and local environment, through pollution and depletion of natural resources, should be minimised and support should be given to the conservation of local landscapes and biodiversity.**

These principles of sustainable tourism are seen as relevant in all parts of the world and can be reflected in many different kinds of tourism enterprise. The overall agenda remains the same. However, key concerns about tourism impact and priorities for improving sustainability will vary from place to place. It is hoped and expected that certification standards will be adapted to local and industry sector conditions and that they will far exceed the minimum requirements outlined in this manual.

The accreditation model

The accreditation model involves the GSTC engaging with certification bodies operating in all parts of the world at an international, national or local level. These certification bodies may already exist or be newly established. Each certification

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[3] UNEP, UNWTO *Making Tourism More Sustainable, A Guide for Policy Makers, 2005*

body may have its own standard for sustainable tourism and its own procedures for certifying tourism enterprises. Others may use national or regional standards.

The accreditation process entails:
- assessing the conformity of the **content of the standard** used by the certification body (and in most cases created by that body) with the GSTC Standard contained in Part 1 of this manual.
- assessing the conformity of the certification **procedures** used by the certification body with the GSTC Accreditation Criteria contained in Part 2 of this manual.

The accreditation process will be carried out on behalf of the GSTC by an Accreditation Body that is established or appointed by the GSTC. The accreditation procedures are contained in Part 3 of this manual.

Certification schemes that are accredited as being in compliance with the GSTC Standard and Accreditation Criteria will be licensed to apply the GSTC Accredited mark alongside their own logo. The GSTC Accredited mark may also be used alongside the accredited scheme's mark or label by enterprises that are fully in compliance with the accredited scheme's standard.

Fig 1   The GSTC accreditation model
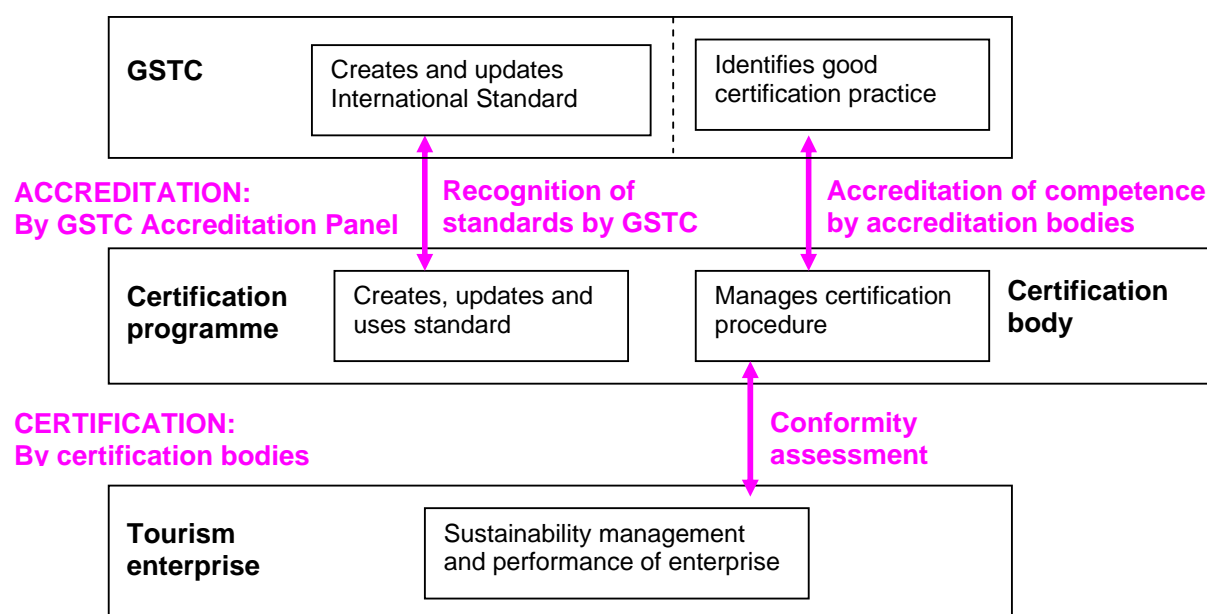
The purpose of certification and accreditation

Certification

The main purpose of **certification schemes** is to provide a reliable basis for identifying those enterprises which are genuinely pursuing sustainable tourism. Certification involves independent third-party verification of claims made by enterprises and acts against greenwashing[4]. It assists consumers and trade buyers

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[4] Greenwashing means making a false or misleading claim to be environmentally friendly in order to gain public approval

who are looking for sustainable products. It provides a basis for sustainable businesses to differentiate themselves in the marketplace and to promote and network with each other with mutual confidence.

Certification can provide a useful tool for destination managers seeking to influence and work with tourism enterprises in developing and promoting sustainable destinations. It can be used as the basis for incentive schemes and rewards. Most valuably, it can help enterprises understand what they need to do to be considered sustainable. The process can help them identify weaknesses and gaps in their performance and seek to fill them within a programme of continuous improvement.

Accreditation

Accreditation involves certifying the certifiers. The purpose of the **GSTC Accreditation Programme**, as with other accreditation schemes, is to add value to the certification process. The overarching aim is to ensure that certification activity in tourism is being carried out professionally and fairly and genuinely assesses sustainability. A key objective is to strengthen the confidence, consistency and performance of certification bodies in their work.

The Accreditation Programme aims to reduce consumer confusion between different schemes and labels, foster trade confidence in certification and encourage mutual trust between schemes. It provides a credible basis for the GSTC to raise the profile of certification, certified enterprises and sustainable tourism generally – offering a global brand for sustainable tourism that is meaningful to tourists and trade on the basis of "certified once, recognised everywhere and by everyone".

Accreditation and certification offer consumers confidence in the information they receive. In no way should this process standardise and threaten the rich diversity of tourism experiences across the world which is so vital for the success of tourism.

Principles for the implementation of the accreditation programme

The following principles apply both to the delivery of the accreditation process and also to what is expected of certification schemes.

1   Integrity
Integrity should be demonstrated in every aspect of the process, requiring honesty, fairness and consistency throughout.

2   Credibility
The process should spread confidence in certification as a meaningful way of identifying and stimulating good sustainability practice in the tourism sector.

3   Impartiality
The process should not be open to any forms of influence which might raise doubts about the objectivity of the decisions taken.

4   Accessibility
Accreditation should be as accessible as possible to all relevant certification schemes and certification should be as accessible as possible to all tourism enterprises. There should be no discrimination on grounds of size and location and financial barriers should be minimised.

5 Comprehensiveness
All accredited certification schemes covering sustainable tourism should address all aspects of sustainability, including socio-economic, cultural and environmental impacts.

6 Rigorousness
Accreditation and certification should be robust processes and require high standards and levels of sustainability to be met.

7 Effectiveness
The process should be impacts-driven and shaped to help as many tourism enterprises as possible achieve maximum change towards sustainability. The accreditation programme should strengthen the impact of the certification schemes.

8 Transparency
The standards required and processes adopted should be transparent and available for scrutiny by stakeholders.

9 Diversity
The process should recognise and encourage the diversity of local, regional and sectoral certification schemes, including their criteria and standards, provided there is no loss of sustainability outcomes.

10 Achievability
The accreditation process must be practicable and sustainable over time and not place burdens on certification schemes that they could not meet.

International standards

The GSTC Accreditation Programme has been designed to reflect the relevant international standards for conducting conformity assessment within the context of environmental, economic and social sustainability.

In determining the procedural requirements of certification bodies, ISO standards relating to conformity assessment of services and of management systems have been taken into account. Tourism enterprises, which typically include accommodation and catering establishments, visitor attractions, activity providers and tour operators, are involved in delivering a service. The ISO Standard for conformity assessment of both products and services is ISO Guide 65[5] (to be replaced by ISO 17065[6]).

However, within tourism enterprises there is often a very close and sometimes indivisible relationship between management and service delivery, particularly in addressing sustainability issues. The GSTC is concerned with ensuring effective sustainability management as well as with the impact of tourism operations.

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[5] ISO/IEC Guide 65: 1996 *General requirements for bodies operating product certification systems*
[6] ISO/IEC CD 17065 review document *Conformity assessment – Requirements for certification bodies certifying products, processes and services*

Therefore the requirements of ISO 17021[7], the standard relating to management systems, have equally been taken into account.

Attention has also been paid to ISO 14024[8], the international standard relating to the granting of eco-labels, which has been used as guidance by a number of certification schemes in the tourism sector. ISO 14024 refers to ISO Guide 65 in its requirements for elements of certification procedure.

The approach of the GSTC to the design and execution of the accreditation procedures has been informed by ISO 17011[9] which relates specifically to such activity, as well as International Accreditation Forum (IAF) guidance on ISO Guide 65.[10]

The GSTC has sought to relate its Accreditation Programme for sustainable tourism to parallel accreditation programmes in other sectors, such as those for sustainable forestry and fisheries and for organic agriculture. Many of the leading international organisations operating such accreditation programmes are members of the ISEAL Alliance[11]. The GSTC has taken account of the guidelines produced by ISEAL, notably its standards-setting code[12]. This code in turn draws from ISO Guide 59[13] and guidance from the World Trade Organization[14]. The code is reflected in the GSTC's requirements for reviewing and updating standards, set out in Part 1 of this manual.

The position of certification schemes

The GSTC Accreditation Programme is designed to be applicable to all schemes certifying tourism enterprises for their sustainability management and performance. Relevant certification schemes and the bodies that run them vary from quite sizeable international operations or national schemes, some with support from government agencies, to small schemes covering local areas or particular types of tourism product.

The GSTC intends to build a long term relationship with all certification schemes. An aim of the Accreditation Programme is to continually increase the percentage of schemes that are accredited. However, it is recognised that many schemes do not currently cover all the elements of the GSTC Standard for Sustainable Tourism or comply with all the criteria in the GSTC Accreditation Criteria for Certification Bodies. It may take some time for these bodies to complete the changes required to achieve compliance and the GSTC acknowledges these challenges by recognising three categories for certification schemes:

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[7] ISO/IEC 17021 *Conformity assessment – Requirements for bodies providing audit and certification of management systems,* 2006
[8] ISO 14024 *Environmental labels and declarations – Type 1 environmental labelling – Principles and procedures,* 1999
[9] ISO/IEC 17011 *Conformity assessment – General requirements for accreditation bodies accrediting conformity assessment bodies,* 2004
[10] IAF Guidance on the Application of ISO/IEC Guide 65:1996 (IAF GD 5:2006)
[11] Formerly the International Social and Environmental Accreditation and Labelling Alliance
[12] *ISEAL Code of Good Practice for Setting Social and Environmental Standard*s Vs 5.0, 2010
[13] ISO/IEC Guide 59 *Code of good practice for standardization*
[14] WTO Technical Barriers to Trade Agreement Annex 3 *Code of good practice for the preparation, adoption and application of standards.*

- **GSTC-recognized standard.** This constitutes recognition that a published standard is in conformity with the GSTC Standard. It can be applied to standards of differing types, including those used for third-party certification (eligible for accreditation), as well as other types of assessment (for example third-party evaluation of a hotel chain's internal standard, not eligible for accreditation).
- **GSTC – Accredited**. These schemes meet the accreditation requirements in full and are licensed to use the GSTC Accredited mark.
- **GSTC – Working Towards Accreditation.** These schemes have registered their intention to become accredited through a formal commitment to the GSTC. They are implementing a plan of action to make the necessary changes or may be in the application stage. Schemes identified as 'working towards accreditation' should apply for accreditation within two years of their registration.

Not all certification schemes cover all aspects of sustainability: economic, social and environmental. For example, a number are solely covering environmental matters and may grant the use of an eco-label. These schemes would only be seen as eligible for GSTC accreditation if they transformed themselves into sustainable tourism certification programmes and included the other aspects of sustainability. The GSTC encourages certification schemes, where appropriate, to consider this transition.

Definitions and terminology as used in this manual

The following are not stock definitions but rather have been written to reflect and elucidate the meaning of terms used in this manual, although account has been taken of generic definitions used elsewhere. For those terms not defined here, the hierarchy of definitions used is according to ISEAL standards setting code version 5, IAF guidance on Guide 65, ISO/IEC 17011 and ISO/IEC Guides 17000 and 2.[15]

GSTC Accreditation	Voluntary, third-party assessment of the conformity of a certification scheme to the GSTC Accreditation Criteria and its certification standard to the GSTC Standard. It is a two-step process, involving verifying and recognizing that a given sustainable tourism certification standard complies with the GSTC Standard, and that the certification bodies that perform conformity assessment of the standard are competent to do so.
GSTC Accreditation Panel	An independent body of the GSTC that is technically competent and impartial, that will make decisions on recognizing sustainable tourism certification standards and on accrediting certification schemes and bodies.
GSTC Accreditation Criteria	The requirements that a certification body shall meet in terms of its structure, management and operational procedures
GSTC Criteria	Global Sustainable Tourism Criteria are an effort to come to a common understanding of sustainable tourism, and are the minimum that any tourism business should aspire to reach. They are organized around four main themes: effective sustainability planning; maximizing social and economic benefits for the local community; enhancing cultural heritage;

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[15] ISEAL Setting Social and Environmental Standards v5.0, IAF GD 5:2006 "IAF Guidance on the Application of ISO/IEC Guide 65:1996, Issue 2", ISO/IEC 17011:2004 "Conformity assessment — General requirements for accreditation bodies accrediting conformity assessment bodies", ISO/IEC 17000:2004, "Conformity assessment — Vocabulary and general principles", and ISO/IEC GUIDE 2:2004 "Standardization and related activities — General vocabulary"

	and reducing negative impacts to the environment. Although the criteria are initially intended for use by the accommodation and tour operation sectors, they have applicability to the entire tourism industry. Revisions to the Criteria are conducted under the auspices of the Global Sustainable Tourism Council, following internationally accepted best practices.
GSTC Standard	The minimum requirement of a tourism enterprise that can be recognised as fully complying with principles of sustainable tourism as identified by the GSTC and the GSTC Criteria.
GSTC-recognized standard	A sustainable tourism standard that has been published and evaluated by the GSTC as in conformity with the GSTC Standard.
Accreditation body	An independent entity that operates in conformity with the standard ISO/IEC 17011 and that is technically competent to accredit certification bodies to perform conformity assessment using a GSTC-recognized standard.
Audit	A systematic and comprehensive process of investigation through checking documents, conducting interviews, observation and other means
Certification	Voluntary, third-party assessment, through an audit, of a tourism enterprise for conformity to a certification standard
Certification body	The organisation responsible for a determining the conformity of a business or activity with a recognized, published standard.
Certification scheme	A specific, named programme of certification resulting in the granting of a certificate of compliance to a tourism enterprise and right to display a mark associated with the scheme
Certification standard	A set of rules and guidelines that define the requirements of tourism enterprises in delivering sustainable tourism, as established for a certification scheme by a certification body. For GSTC accreditation, the certification standard shall conform with the GSTC Standard.
Client	A tourism enterprise that is provided with a certification service by a certification body
Conflict of interest	A situation where the capacity for objectivity of an individual or body is put at risk
Conformity assessment	A process of checking and verifying the extent to which a tourism enterprise or certification scheme meets a specified standard and criteria
Consultancy	The provision, for a fee (directly or indirectly), of expertise to a tourism enterprise or certification body on the design, management and operation of their services
Deficiency	A weakness in meeting the requirements of a standard or performance criteria
Impartiality	The ability to make judgements and take decisions that are objective, based strictly on facts and free from other influences
Non-conformity	The absence of, or failure to meet, an element of a standard or performance criteria
Non-discriminatory	All entities or activities that are eligible for certification or accreditation according to published rules may apply for the process at a reasonable cost.
Prescriptive advice	"Give advice or provide consultancy services to the applicant as to methods of dealing with matters which are barriers to the certification [or accreditation] requested."[16] "Participation in an active creative manner in the development and ongoing monitoring/improvement of the product, process, or service by, for example: a) providing specific support/advise on elements of the design. b) preparing or producing manual, handbooks or procedures. c) involvement in the supplier's monitoring, review and decision making process applicable to the product."[17]

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[16] ISO/IEC Guide 65:2004 4.2.o.2
[17] IAF GD 5:2006 Issue 2 IAF Guidance on the Application of ISO/IEC Guide 65:1996

Reasonable cost	A cost for the services of certification, accreditation, auditing, or other activities that does not put the service out of reach of the financial capabilities of the large majority of eligible target entities.
Third-party	Carried out by an individual or body that is independent of the entity being certified or accredited
Tourism enterprise	An entity providing one or more services to tourists.
Tourism services	Tourism characteristic activities and products as extracted by the Tourism Satellite Account (TSA) from the *International Recommendations for Tourism Statistics 2008.*[18] These include: 1. Accommodation services for visitors 2. Food and beverage serving services 3. Railway passenger transport services 4. Road passenger transport services 5. Water passenger transport services 6. Air passenger transport services 7. Transport equipment rental services 8. Travel agencies and other reservation services 9. Cultural services 10. Sports and recreational services 11. Country-specific tourism characteristic goods 12. Country-specific tourism characteristic services
Levels of requirement	
''will'	The body commits to undertake the specified action
'shall'	The body must take the specified action to be in compliance
'should'	The body is expected to take the specified action
'may'	The body is allowed to take the specified action

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[18] http://unstats.un.org/unsd/tradeserv/TSA%20RMF%202008%20edited%20whitecover.pdf.

PART 1   The GSTC Standard for sustainable tourism

This part of the manual contains the GSTC's standard for sustainable tourism. It shows how it was derived and how it will be maintained and updated. It also sets out how a standard in use by an individual certification scheme should relate to the GSTC standard.

The Global Sustainable Tourism Criteria

The **GSTC Standard for sustainable tourism is based on the Global Sustainable Tourism Criteria (GSTC Criteria)**. These criteria were developed between 2007 and 2008 by a partnership of 27 organisations.

The development of the criteria involved a broad-based stakeholder consultation process. Key aspects of the process included:
- Consultation with the tourism industry and with sustainability experts.
- An analysis of more than 4,500 existing criteria in the field of tourism sustainability, used by over 60 certification schemes and other initiatives.
- Preparing draft criteria and inviting comments on them from across the sector.
- Assessing comments received from over 2,000 stakeholders as a basis for amending the criteria.
- Widely disseminating the final criteria and promoting awareness of them.

The process was implemented by a working group of partners representing public, private and voluntary sector interests from different global regions.

The process of establishing the GSTC Criteria took note of the requirements of the ISEAL Standard-setting code as a key reference point.

The GSTC Criteria are grouped under four headings that reflect the sustainable tourism principles on page 3 of this manual.

The GSTC Standard

The tables below contain the GSTC standard. The left hand column contains the Global Sustainable Tourism Criteria[19], which form the standard. The right hand column breaks the criteria down into specific statements that identify conditions and actions that are required of tourism enterprises and that should be reflected in the certification scheme's own standard and verified in the certification process.

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[19] The scope of the GSTC Criteria is limited, at present, to accommodation facilities and tour operators. It will be expanded to other sectors but the present version should not be interpreted as having a wider scope.

A   Demonstrate effective sustainable management

GSTC Criteria reference	Statement for compliance and verification	
A.1. The enterprise has implemented a long-term sustainability management system that is suitable to its reality and scale, and that considers environmental, sociocultural, quality, health and safety issues.	A.1.i	The enterprise has a long-term sustainability **management system** (SMS) that is **suitable** to its size and scale.
	A.1.ii	The sustainability management system (SMS) is being **implemented**.
	A.1.iii	The SMS considers **environmental** issues
	A.1.iv	The SMS considers **sociocultural** issues
	A.1.v	The SMS considers **quality** issues
	A.1.vi	The SMS considers **health and safety** issues
A.2. The enterprise is in compliance with all relevant international or local legislation and regulations (including, among others, health, safety, labour, and environmental aspects).	A.2.i	The enterprise **maintains** an up-to-date list of international legal requirements
	A.2.ii	The enterprise **maintains** an up-to-date list of local (national and more local) legal requirements
	A.2.iii	Legal requirements considered include health, safety, labour and environmental aspects.
	A.2.iv	The enterprise is in **compliance** with all **relevant international and local legislation and regulations**
A.3. All personnel receive periodic training regarding their role in the management of environmental, sociocultural, health, and safety practices.	A.3.i	**All personnel** receive periodic **training** regarding their role in the management of environmental practices.
	A.3.ii	**All personnel** receive periodic **training** regarding their role in the management of sociocultural practices.
	A.3.iii	**All personnel** receive periodic **training** regarding their role in the management of health, and safety practices.
A.4. Customer satisfaction is measured and corrective action taken where appropriate.	A.4.i	Customer satisfaction is **measured**
	A.4.ii	**Corrective action** is **taken** where appropriate.
A.5. Promotional materials are accurate and complete and do not promise more than can be delivered by the enterprise.	A.5.i	Promotional materials are **accurate**
	A.5.ii	Promotional materials are **complete**
	A.5.iii	Promotional materials **do not promise more** than can be delivered by the enterprise.
A.6.1. Design and construction of buildings and infrastructure comply with local zoning and protected or heritage area requirements.	A.6.1.i	**Land use** is in **compliance** with local zoning and protected or heritage area laws and regulations
	A.6.1.ii	**Design and construction** is in **compliance** with local zoning and protected or heritage area laws and regulations

A.6.2. Design and construction of buildings and infrastructure respect the natural or cultural heritage surroundings in siting, design and impact assessment and land rights and acquisition	A.6.2.i	Siting **respects** natural and cultural heritage **surroundings**
	A.6.2.ii	Design **respects** natural and cultural heritage **surroundings**
	A. 6.2.iii	Natural and cultural impact has been **assessed**
	A.6.2.iv	Property has been **acquired in a legal manner**, complying where applicable with local, communal and indigenous **rights**.
A.6.3. Design and construction of buildings and infrastructure use locally appropriate principles of sustainable construction	A.6.3.i	**Design** is based on **locally appropriate principles** of sustainability
	A.6.3.ii	**Construction** is based on **locally appropriate principles** of sustainability
A.6.4. Design and construction of buildings and infrastructure provide access for persons with special needs	A.6.4.i	**Access** is provided for persons with **special needs**
A.7. Information about and interpretation of the natural surroundings, local culture, and cultural heritage is provided to customers, as well as explaining appropriate behaviour while visiting natural areas, living cultures, and cultural heritage sites.	A.7.i	**Information** is provided to customers about the natural surroundings, local culture, and cultural heritage
	A.7.ii	**Interpretation** of the natural surroundings, local culture, and cultural heritage is provided to customers
	A.7.iii	**An explanation is given of appropriate behaviour** while visiting natural areas, living cultures, and cultural heritage sites.

B   Maximize social and economic benefits to the local community and minimize negative impacts

GSTC Criteria reference	Statement for compliance and verification	
B.1. The enterprise actively supports initiatives for social and infrastructure community development including, among others, education, health, and sanitation.	B.1.i	The enterprise **actively supports** initiatives for social and infrastructure **community development,** which may include education, health or sanitation.
B.2. Local residents are employed, including in management positions. Training is offered as necessary.	B.2.i	Local residents are **employed**.
	B.2.ii	Local residents are employed in **management positions**
	B.2.iii	**Training is offered** as necessary.
B.3. Local and fair-trade services and goods are purchased by the enterprise, where available.	B.3.i	Local and fair-trade services and goods are **purchased** by the enterprise, where available.

B.4. The enterprise offers the means for local small entrepreneurs to develop and sell sustainable products that are based on the area's nature, history, and culture (including food and drink, crafts, performance arts, agricultural products, etc.)	B.4.i	The enterprise **offers the means for local small entrepreneurs** to develop and sell sustainable products that are based on the area's nature, history, and culture (which may include food and drink, crafts, performance arts, agricultural products, etc.).
B.5. A code of conduct for activities in indigenous and local communities has been developed, with the consent of and in collaboration with the community.	B.5.i	A **code** of conduct is in place for activities in indigenous and local communities
	B.5.ii	**The code of conduct has been developed** with the consent of and in collaboration with the community.
B.6. The enterprise has implemented a policy against commercial exploitation, particularly of children and adolescents, including sexual exploitation.	B.6.i	The enterprise has **a policy** against commercial exploitation of children and adolescents, including sexual exploitation.
	B.6.ii	The policy is being **implemented** by the enterprise.
B.7. The enterprise is equitable in hiring women and local minorities, including in management positions, while restraining child labour.	B.7.i	The enterprise is **equitable in hiring** women and local minorities.
	B.7.ii	The enterprise is **equitable** in hiring women and local minorities in **management positions**.
	B.7.iii	The enterprise does not employ **child labour**.
B.8. The international or national legal protection of employees is respected, and employees are paid a living wage.	B.8.i	The international **legal protection of employees is respected**
	B.8.ii	The national **legal protection of employees is respected**
	B.8.iii	Employees are paid a **living wage.**
B.9. The activities of the enterprise do not jeopardize the provision of basic services, such as water, energy, or sanitation, to neighbouring communities.	B.9.i	The activities of the enterprise do **not jeopardize the provision of basic water services** to neighbouring communities.
	B.9.ii	The activities of the enterprise do **not jeopardize the provision of basic energy services** to neighbouring communities.
	B.9.iii	The activities of the enterprise do **not jeopardize the provision of basic sanitation services** to neighbouring communities.

C   Maximize benefits to cultural heritage and minimize negative impacts

GSTC Criteria reference	Statement for compliance and verification	
C.1. The enterprise follows established guidelines or a code of behaviour for visits to culturally or historically sensitive sites, in order to minimize visitor impact and maximize enjoyment.	C.1.i	The enterprise **follows established guidelines or a code of behaviour for visits** to culturally or historically sensitive sites, in order to minimize visitor impact and maximize enjoyment.
C.2. Historical and archaeological artefacts are not sold or traded, and are displayed, only as permitted by law.	C.2.i	Historical and archaeological artefacts are **not sold** or **traded,** and are **displayed** only as permitted by law**.**
C.3. The enterprise contributes to the protection of local historical, archaeological, culturally, and spiritually important properties and sites, and does not impede access to them by local residents.	C.3.i	The enterprise **contributes to the protection** of local historical, archaeological, culturally, and spiritually important properties and sites.
	C.3.ii	The enterprise **does not impede access** by local residents to local historical, archaeological, culturally, and spiritually important properties and sites.
C.4. The enterprise uses elements of local art, architecture, or cultural heritage in its operations, design, decoration, food, or shops; while respecting the intellectual property rights of local communities.	C.4.i	The enterprise **uses elements** of local art, architecture, or cultural heritage in its operations, design, decoration, food, or shops.
	C.4.ii	The enterprise **respects the intellectual property** rights of local communities.

D   Maximize benefits to the environment and minimize negative impacts

D.1   Conserving resources

GSTC Criteria reference	Statement for compliance and verification	
D.1.1 Purchasing policy favours environmentally friendly products for building materials, capital goods, food, and consumables.	D.1.1.i	The enterprise has a **purchasing policy which favours environmentally friendly products** for building materials, capital goods, food, and consumables.
D.1.2 The purchase of disposable and consumable goods is measured, and the enterprise actively seeks ways to reduce their use.	D.1.2.i	The purchase of disposable and consumable goods is **measured**
	D.1.2.ii	The enterprise **actively seeks ways to reduce** the use of disposable and consumable goods.

D.1.3 Energy consumption should be measured, sources indicated, and measures to decrease overall consumption should be adopted, while encouraging the use of renewable energy.	D.1.3.i	Energy consumption is **measured**
	D.1.3.ii	Measures have been adopted to **decrease** overall consumption of energy
	D.1.3.iii	**Sources** of energy are indicated
	D.1.3.iv	Use of **renewable energy** is encouraged**.**
D.1.4 Water consumption should be measured, sources indicated, and measures to decrease overall consumption should be adopted	D.1.4.i	Water consumption is **measured**
	D.1.4.ii	Measures have been adopted to **decrease** overall consumption of water
	D.1.4.iii	**Sources** of water are indicated

D.2. Reducing Pollution

GSTC Criteria reference	Statement for compliance and verification	
D.2.1 Greenhouse gas emissions from all sources controlled by the enterprise are measured, and procedures are implemented to reduce and offset them as a way to achieve climate neutrality.	D.2.1.i	Greenhouse gas emissions from all sources controlled by the enterprise are **measured**
	D.2.1.ii	Procedures are implemented to **reduce** greenhouse gas emissions controlled by the enterprise
	D.2.1.iii	Procedures are implemented to **offset** greenhouse gas emissions as a way to achieve climate neutrality.
D.2.2 Wastewater, including gray water, is treated effectively and reused where possible.	D.2.2.i	Wastewater is **reused** where possible.
	D.2.2.ii	Wastewater, including gray water, is **treated effectively**
D.2.3 A solid waste management plan is implemented, with quantitative goals to minimize waste that is not reused or recycled.	D.2.3.i	The enterprise has a **solid waste management plan** with **quantitative goals** to minimize waste that is not reused or recycled.
	D.2.3.ii	The solid waste management **plan is implemented**
D.2.4 The use of harmful substances, including pesticides, paints, swimming pool disinfectants, and cleaning materials, is minimized; substituted, when available, by innocuous products; and all chemical use is properly managed.	D.2.4.i	**The use** of harmful substances, including pesticides, paints, swimming pool disinfectants, and cleaning materials, **is minimized.**
	D.2.4.ii	**The use** of harmful substances, including pesticides, paints, swimming pool disinfectants, and cleaning materials, **is substituted**, when available, by innocuous products.
	D.2.4.iii	The use of all chemicals is **properly managed.**

	D.2.5	The enterprise **implements practices to reduce pollution** from noise, light, runoff, erosion, ozone-depleting compounds, and air and soil contaminants.
D.2.5 The enterprise implements practices to reduce pollution from noise, light, runoff, erosion, ozone-depleting compounds, and air and soil contaminants.		

D.3 Conserving biodiversity, ecosystems and landscapes		
GSTC Criteria reference	**Statement for compliance and verification**	
D.3.1 Wildlife species are only harvested from the wild, consumed, displayed, sold, or internationally traded, as part of a regulated activity that ensures that their utilization is sustainable.	D.3.1	Wildlife species are **only** harvested from the wild, consumed, displayed, sold, or internationally traded, **as part of a regulated activity that ensures that their utilization is sustainable.**
D.3.2 No captive wildlife is held, except for properly regulated activities, and living specimens of protected wildlife species are only kept by those authorized and suitably equipped to house and care for them.	D.3.2.i	No captive wildlife is held, **except for properly regulated activities**
	D.3.2.ii	Living specimens of protected wildlife species are **only kept by those authorized and suitably equipped** to house and care for them.
D.3.3 The enterprise uses native species for landscaping and restoration, and takes measures to avoid the introduction of invasive alien species.	D.3.3.i	N**ative species** are used for landscaping and restoration
	D.3.3.ii	The enterprise takes **measures to avoid the introduction of invasive alien species.**
D.3.4 The enterprise contributes to the support of biodiversity conservation, including supporting natural protected areas and areas of high biodiversity value.	D.3.4.i	The enterprise **contributes** to the support of biodiversity conservation,
	D.3.4.ii	The enterprise **supports** natural protected areas and areas of high biodiversity value.
D.3.5 Interactions with wildlife must not produce adverse effects on the viability of populations in the wild; and any disturbance of natural ecosystems is minimized, rehabilitated, and there is a compensatory contribution to conservation management.	D.3.5.i	Interactions with wildlife do **not produce adverse effects** on the viability of populations in the wild.
	D.3.5.ii	Any disturbance of natural ecosystems is **minimized.**
	D.3.5.iii	Any disturbance of natural ecosystems is **rehabilitated.**
	D.3.5.iv	A **compensatory contribution** is made to conservation management

Requirements for updating and applying the standard

The following sections set out the processes for updating the GSTC Standard and for aligning certification standards with it.

Attention is drawn to the definitions presented on page 9 of this manual, including the meaning of the words 'will', 'shall', 'should', and 'may' in the statements below.

1.1 Reviewing and updating the GSTC Standard

The sustainability challenges of tourism and the possible responses available are not static. Pressures, priorities and technologies change over time. The GSTC Standard will need to be reviewed and updated to reflect this. In addition, lessons from the application of the standard will point to helpful and necessary improvements that should be taken on board.

A systematic process for revising the standard is required, reflecting international guidelines as presented in the ISEAL Standard-Setting Code.

1.1.1 The GSTC Standard will be based on the **Global Sustainable Tourism Criteria** (GSTC Criteria)[20]. The future development of the GSTC Criteria will take account of their role and performance as the basis of the international standard used in the Accreditation Programme. The revision (which will include a review and updating) of the GSTC Criteria and of the GSTC Standard will be an integral process.

1.1.2 The Standards Working Group[21] of the GSTC, which includes representatives of different stakeholder interests, will oversee the development, review and revision of the GSTC Criteria/ GSTC Standard. There will be a clear separation between this group and those responsible for making decisions on conformity assessment.

1.1.3 Comments and suggestions on the GSTC Criteria/ GSTC Standard are welcome at any time via the GSTC's website[22]. Any submissions on the standard will be compiled for the next formal standard review process.

1.1.4 The GSTC Criteria/GSTC Standard will be reviewed and if necessary updated **at least every four years**[23]. A more frequent schedule may be adopted as considered appropriate or necessary. The next review process is scheduled for the first half of 2011[24].

1.1.5 The review will reconfirm the **need, purpose and objectives** of the GSTC Standard, as well as its **content**.

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[20] The only difference between the GSTC Criteria and the GSTC Standard will be one of style not content. The GSTC Standard may be written down in a more disaggregated format, as shown in the table earlier.
[21] In full, the International Standards Development Working Group
[22] www.sustainabletourismcriteria.org
[23] The ISEAL Code requires review at least every five years.
[24] This revision of the GSTC Criteria will provide the first formal opportunity to consult on and adopt a GSTC Standard and will take account of lessons, feedback and comments from the establishment of the Accreditation Programme.

1.1.6   The revision process will be based on **documented procedures**. At the outset of each revision process, the procedures will be made available to interested parties through the GSTC's website and in other ways as appropriate. This will set out a summary of the process, timelines, clearly identified opportunities for contributing and information on how decisions will be made.

1.1.7   The GSTC will **encourage participation** in the revision process from all interested parties, and identify targets for participation and success criteria. The GSTC will update its database of stakeholders[25], identifying major interest sectors and key interested parties to be engaged in the revision process.

1.1.8   The Standards Working Group will seek to encourage the participation of any **disadvantaged groups** that will be directly affected by implementation of the standard whose interests may be under-represented, paying particular attention to the needs of developing countries and small and medium-sized enterprises.

1.1.9   Revision of the standard will allow for two possible rounds of **submission of comments** each lasting 60 days[26]. The second round will be necessary if substantive, unresolved issues persist after the first round.

1.1.10   Following the close of each round, the Standards Working Group will **consider all of the inputs made**, compiling comments received according to the issues raised in relation to each criterion. A written synopsis will be made publicly available on the GSTC's website, summarising the inputs made accompanied by a preliminary response as to how the issues raise have been addressed.

1.1.11   The Standards Working Group will strive for **consensus on the content** of the standard, guided by documented procedures which may include the use of voting. Should it not prove possible to reach consensus on a given issue, the working group will revert to a clearly documented, alternative set of procedures for making a decision. The working group will make public any decisions on the content of the standard.

1.1.12   Once approved, the **final standard** will be published promptly, and made freely available in electronic format. Hard copies will be provided on request on a cost-recovery basis.

1.1.13 The official language of the GSTC Standard is English. Translations in other languages can be used for internal uses but only GSTC approved versions of translated documents shall be used for official compliance assessments.

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[25] Stakeholders include those with sustainable tourism expertise, those that are materially affected by the standard and those that could influence the implementation of the standard.
[26] This period may be shortened to 30 days where justified in writing by the GSTC.

1.2 Alignment of certification standards to the GSTC Standard

An important purpose of GSTC accreditation is to assure tourists and other tourism stakeholders that enterprises certified by an accredited scheme comply with the basic requirements of sustainable tourism. Therefore, the standard used by an accredited certification body must be in line with the international standard. At the same time, the body must be happy with its standard and feel that it is relevant to its objectives and to the specific and local circumstances of its clients.

1.2.1   The certification body shall use consistently a **clearly documented standard** (hereafter referred to as the certification standard) for assessing the performance of its clients in adhering to sustainable tourism principles and practices. The procedures for conformity assessment against this standard shall be as specified in Part 2 of this manual.

1.2.2   The assessment of conformity of the certification standard to the GSTC Standard will be an integral part of the accreditation procedure undertaken by the GSTC Accreditation Panel as outlined in Part 3 of this manual. The GSTC Accreditation Panel will make a judgement on whether the certification standard and its application have met the requirements set out below in 1.2.3 to 1.2.10.

1.2.3   The certification standard may differ from the GSTC Standard in the way it is **structured and expressed**, but should avoid conflicting and inconsistent use of **terminology and definitions.**

1.2.4   The coverage and content of the certification standard shall be as **consistent as possible** with the GSTC standard, at a minimum, but are encouraged to go beyond the GSTC in including additional criteria, local adaptation, or sector specificity.

1.2.5   The certification body shall indicate the **degree of correspondence** between its own certification standard and the GSTC Standard, through preparing a matrix mapping the requirements of one against the other.

1.2.6   The certification body may be required to **justify the contention** that any or all of the requirements of its certification standard correspond to those of the GSTC Standard.

1.2.7   The content of the certification standard may **take into account local and regional differences**, including economic, social and ecological realities or regulatory conditions. However, this shall be informed by guidelines provided by the GSTC and shall require the certification body to justify variations between the certification standard and the GSTC Standard, as set out in 1.2.8 to 1.2.10.

1.2.8   The GSTC may from time to time provide **guidelines on how to interpret and apply** the GSTC Standard. Certification bodies should use these guidelines to determine how to take local conditions into account in the formulation and application of certification. These guidelines will assist certification bodies and the GSTC Accreditation Panel in considering the degree of correspondence between certification standards and the GSTC

Standard.   The guidelines will not be subject to the full requirements of review procedures as outlined in 1.1.6 to 1.1.11.

1.2.9   Where a certification body believes that there is **justification for non-inclusion** of an element of the GSTC Standard in the certification standard, it may indicate this. In all such cases it shall provide written, evidence-based justification for this non-inclusion. This shall include evidence that the element is not an issue[27] for the sustainability of tourism in any of the countries and types of tourism enterprise covered by the certification scheme. The justification shall not be based on a difference in interpretation of the meaning and coverage of sustainable tourism between the certification body and the GSTC.

1.2.10 The certification body may indicate in its certification standard (or guidance attached to it) circumstances where the requirement of the standard (which may also be requirements of the GSTC Standard) are **not applicable** and may reflect this in the certification. This practice shall be described in a policy document. Reasons for non-applicability shall be as covered in 1.2.9.

1.2.11 The GSTC will notify certification bodies of the timetable for **review and revision** of the GSTC Standard and involve them in the process outlined above (1.1.3 – 1.1.11).

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[27] For example, this may include evidence of total irrelevance to local circumstances or evidence that an issue is fully covered by legislation and regulation which is fully enforced and universally complied with in the countries covered.

PART 2   The GSTC Accreditation Criteria for Certification Bodies

The criteria contained in this part of the manual cover the basic structural and procedural requirements to be met by a certification body in order for its certification scheme to be accredited by the GSTC. Requirements of the certification standard used by a scheme were covered in Part 1.

Attention is drawn to the definitions presented on page 9 of this manual, including the meaning of the words 'shall', 'should' and 'may' in the statements below.

2.1   Structure and responsibility

In order to maximise accountability and efficiency, the nature and structure of the certification body and the location of responsibility for different actions should be clearly identified.

2.1.1   The certification body shall have documents which show that it is, or is a clearly defined part of, a **legal entity**. The certification body shall have legal documents which confirm its rights over the use of the certification standard and associated trademarks and labels.

2.1.2   The certification body shall clearly document its governance and operational structure, showing **lines of responsibility and authority** between committees, officers and any contracted bodies[28].   This documentation shall identify the board, committee or personnel responsible for:
   − development of policies and certification services;
   − supervision of implementation of procedures;
   − supervision of finances;
   − provision of resources for certification activity;
   − performance of evaluation and certification activity;
   − making decisions on certification;
   − delegation of authority and contractual arrangements;
   − handling of complaints and appeals.

2.1.3   The certification body shall be **responsible for final decisions** on the granting, maintaining, extending, suspending or withdrawing of certification. Authority to take decisions on these matters may be delegated to individuals or a certification committee, established by the certification body and within its organisational control, which has clear responsibilities and procedural rules.

2.1.4   The certification body shall have a legally enforceable **certification agreement** with its clients, which sets out the responsibilities of the certification body and the responsibilities of the client, signed by both parties prior to initiating the certification process.

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[28] This shall also show the relationship and lines of authority with other parts of the same legal entity.

2.1.5   The **responsibilities of the certification scheme and body** shall include:
  – Maintaining and updating its own standard for sustainable tourism against which it certifies clients, in line with the GSTC Standard (see Section 2 of this manual)
  – Provide guidance on the standard to clients and other interested parties
  – Carrying out an effective and impartial certification procedure
  – Communicating any changes in the standard and requirements to clients and other interested parties
  – Providing clear information to clients and other interested third parties on its certification procedures and effectively communicating any changes in them.

2.1.6   The **responsibilities of the client** shall include:
  – Consistent fulfilment of the certification requirements;
  – Correct communication of the meaning of the certification, avoiding misleading claims and withdrawing reference to certification following any termination;
  – Recording, handling, and informing the Certification Program of complaints and corrective actions taken relating to compliance with the certification requirements/standards, at least annually;
  – Timely[29] communication of any changes that may affect compliance with the certification requirements;
  – Provision of all necessary information and arrangements for the auditing process;
  – Abide by certification body's policies and procedures, particularly the use of the certification mark.

2.2   Scope and accessibility

The tourism sector covers a broad range of types of enterprise and service. Consumers may purchase services from individual enterprises or select a composite tour package or destination involving a number of suppliers. Given this complexity, it is very important to be clear about exactly what has been certified to be sustainable and what this means.

The tourism sector embraces many enterprises, large and small. For reasons of impact, equity and relevance to consumers, certification should be available to all tourism service providers that can demonstrate sustainability.

2.2.1   The certification body shall assess the conformity of the client's tourism services with a specific **certification standard** whose scope and coverage is made known to potential clients, consumers and other interested parties.

2.2.2   The certification standard used shall comply with the **requirements of Part 1** of this manual, including alignment with the GSTC Standard and procedures for reviewing and updating the standard.

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[29] According to the procedures of the certification body

2.2.3 The certification body shall clearly **define the scope** of the certification, specifying those services that have been subjected to assessment of conformity with the standard and for which the certification has been granted.

2.2.4 Where a tourism service offered by a client provides multiple tourism services, the certification document will clearly delimit the services that have been assessed, and the certification body will ensure that the enterprise limits its use of the certification logo to the certified services.

2.2.5 The policies and procedures adopted by the certification body shall be **non-discriminatory**. However a certification body might have a special geographical or regional focus.

2.2.6 The certification body shall make its services **available to all** applicants whose activities fall within its declared field of operation. Access to the certification process shall not be conditional upon the size of the client or membership of any association or group, nor shall certification be conditional upon the number of certifications already issued. However, the certification body may require a client to meet or have met certain prerequisites, such as may be defined by regulations or other voluntary programmes, provided that these are clearly relevant to sustainable tourism and are in turn accessible to all enterprises[30].

2.2.7 The certification body shall **limit its requirements** to those matters specifically related to the scope of the certification.

2.3 Impartiality and conflict of interest

The perceived and actual objectivity of the certification process is essential. This means that the certification body, including its subcontractors, should avoid situations or activities which might compromise its independence and neutrality or bias its judgement[31].

At the same time, the GSTC wishes to maximise the impact of certification on improving the sustainability of tourism, through its role as a guide and an incentive to tourism service providers and through the associated interaction between them and knowledgeable professionals.

2.3.1 The certification body shall have a written policy which expresses its **commitment** to impartiality, confidentiality, and the objectivity of its activities.

2.3.2 All personnel and committees, either internal or external to the certification body, who could influence certification activities, shall declare that they will

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[30] An example would be compliance with official sanitation, safety or quality programmes.
[31] Impartiality can be threatened by:

- Self interest, where the certification body can gain benefit from granting the certification
- Self review, where the certification body is partly evaluating the results of its own work through previous consultancy or advice given to the client
- Over familiarity, causing the certification body not to seek a full set of objective evidence
- Undue influence on the certification body or its personnel, as may arise from intimidation, inducement, competition or personal advocacy.

act impartially and not allow any commercial, financial or other pressures to compromise their impartiality.

2.3.3 All personnel, internal or external, shall be required to reveal any situations that may present them or the certification body with a **conflict of interest**.

2.3.4 The certification body shall **document** an assessment of risks to impartiality and potential conflicts of interest, together with measures taken to eliminate or minimise these risks and conflicts.

2.3.5 The organisational structure of the certification body shall include an **impartiality committee**, which may serve on a voluntary basis as needed, made up of representatives of interested parties[32] affected by the certification system. The committee[33] shall be well balanced, with no single interest predominating. The committee shall review periodically policies and measures taken to ensure impartiality and recommend appropriate action as necessary.

2.3.6 The certification body shall ensure that the impartiality of its certification process shall not be threatened by providing **consultancy** to existing or potential clients[34]. There needs to be a clear separation of functions. Where a certification body has provided consultancy to a tourism enterprise, the personnel involved shall not be used to audit or asses that enterprise for certification within two years of the completion of the consultancy. In undertaking auditing and assessment, the performance of the enterprise shall be fully investigated and any prior knowledge shall not be taken into account, nor shall any previous relationship with the client affect the certification decision.

2.3.7 Certification shall not be offered to clients that have received consultancy from other organisations if the **relationship** between the consultancy organisation and the certification body poses a threat to the impartiality of the decision. Personnel who have provided consultancy to a client or have been employed by them, within two years prior to the certification, shall not be used by the certification body to undertake evaluations or partake in certification decisions pertaining to that client. The certification body shall not imply that certification would be easier, faster or less expensive if a specific consultancy is used.

2.3.8 Prior to, and during, the certification process the certification body shall not give **prescriptive advice** to a client in a form and to a level of detail that could compromise its ability to undertake objective conformity assessment.

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[32] Such parties may include, for example, personnel of the certification body and contracted bodies, clients, tourism trade bodies, relevant public sector bodies, experts in tourism sustainability, conformity assessment experts, NGOs and consumer organisations.
[33] This does not need to be a separate, dedicated committee and could be the existing Board of governance.
[34] It is accepted that a certification body may be involved in the provision of consultancy on sustainability to tourism enterprises, but that this needs to be separated from the provision of certification. A definition of consultancy is given on page 9. This requirement serves to prevent a situation where a certification body may be reluctant to identify a non-conformity of deficiency in a clients' performance owing to the fact that the certification body may itself have designed or somehow influenced the client's processes and activities. A full description of the international best practices may be found in IAF Guidance GD 5:2006 on the Application of ISO/IEC Guide 65:1996.

However, the certification body should provide clients with a detailed **description and explanation** of what is necessary to meet the standard and certification requirements and may provide additional **clarification** on this if requested to do so[35].

2.3.9   The certification body may provide **general information** to assist tourism service providers strengthen the sustainability of their operations and to understand and comply with the standard, through publications, seminars, training courses and other activity, provided this is not seen as part of the certification process and is open to all existing or potential clients in a non-discriminatory manner.

2.4 Financial stability and liability

The effective impact of a certification scheme requires that it can be continued for sufficient time to gain profile and not be cut short through lack of funding. Financial instability can be a threat to impartiality as it can make a certification body more susceptible to commercial pressure.

2.4.1   The certification body shall have the **financial resources** required for the operation of a certification system.   Income may come from operations and subsidy from government or other sources. Where financial stability depends on subsidy, this should be covered by documented agreement and cover at least the period of the next certification cycle. Sources of funding should be governed by agreements that ensure that they will not affect the impartiality of certification decisions.

2.4.2   The certification body shall evaluate its financial risks and demonstrate that it has adequate **arrangements to cover liabilities** arising from its operations.

2.5 Professional capacity

The credibility of a certification scheme is partly dependent on the competence of the personnel used by the certification body to carry it out. Assessment against a sustainable tourism standard requires an understanding of tourism, in all its varied aspects, and of the different components of sustainability. It is also necessary for personnel to have professional skills in executing comprehensive and objective audits.

2.5.1   The certification body shall ensure that the personnel, internal and external, used at all levels in the certification process are **competent** to perform the functions ascribed to them.

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[35] This requirement is made for similar reasons to those given in the footnote above. However, it is recognised that helpful communication between the certification body and the client can be a very valuable way of achieving more sustainable tourism. Rather than providing one-to-one prescriptive advice prior to, or during, the certification procedure, enterprises may be helped by a process of clarification of what is required, such as though the provision of illustrative examples of what other enterprise have done in similar circumstances. More detailed comment and advice may then be supplied to the enterprise following the completion of the certification procedure.

2.5.2 The certification body shall have access to **sufficient numbers** of competent personnel to cope with the volume of applications for certification and to process them within an acceptable timescale and at a reasonable cost.

2.5.3 Where possible, the certification body should **recruit** auditors who have professional qualifications and experience in conformity assessment and in sustainable tourism. Auditors may be employed directly by the certification body, be independent personnel working under contract to the certification body, or be employed by an external body that is sub-contracted to provide auditing services.

2.5.4 The certification body shall only **outsource** certification activities to external bodies that fulfil the relevant requirements as specified by the certification scheme. The certification body shall
   − take responsibility for all outsourced activities
   − have legally enforceable agreements with all bodies that provide outsourced services
   − have procedures for checking that such bodies are adhering to this agreement and for taking any necessary corrective action.

2.5.5 Personnel, internal and external, involved in the certification process shall sign a document that **commits** them to abide by the rules of the certification body, including matters relating to confidentiality and conflict of interest.

2.5.6 The certification body shall identify the **training needs** of the internal and external personnel used in the certification process and provide access to sufficient **training programmes** to ensure that they are competent to fulfil their functions. Training of auditors shall ensure that they fully understand the standard and the certification requirements and shall involve on-site training on conducting an audit to the standard.

2.5.7 The certification body shall establish procedures for **monitoring the performance** of auditors. This should involve a combination of review of audit reports, feedback from clients and observation of audits. The results of this monitoring shall be communicated to auditors together with any recommendations to improve performance.

2.5.8 The certification body shall maintain a **record** of all personnel used, including their relevant qualifications, level of experience, training received and, for organizations, with more than 20 employees, performance appraisals.

2.6 Information and confidentiality

It is very important that all interested parties should have easy access to clear information about the sustainable tourism certification scheme if it is to be credible and effective. Tourists, trade buyers and other stakeholders need to be clear about the basis for the scheme, what it covers and means and what they should expect from certified enterprises and services. Therefore, the certification body should be transparent about its actions, while respecting the need for commercial confidentiality where this is necessary to protect the interests of clients and the viability of the certification body itself.

2.6.1 The certification body shall make **publicly available and easily accessible**, without charge[36] information on the following:
- The certification body, its location, contact details and the authority under which it operates.
- The rules for granting certification and the evaluation procedures and certification processes used[37].
- A description of the means by which the certification body obtains financial support and the charges made to clients.
- A description of the rights and duties of certified clients in how they should refer to the certification and identify themselves with it[38].
- Information about how to make complaints and appeals and how these will be handled.
- Upon request, a complete schedule of fees and estimated overall costs for certification and associated activities.[39]

2.6.2 The certification body shall identify the **standard** to which the certification is awarded. The full content of the standard, showing all the aspects of sustainability to which the tourism service must conform, shall be publicly available and easily accessible without charge. However, the certification body may restrict access to documentation which reveals the proprietary systems used in verification and assessment.[40]

2.6.3 The certification body shall provide certified clients with a formal, signed **certification document** which identifies:
- The name and address of the certification body and of the client
- The services covered by the certification
- The standard to which the services comply
- A unique record number or code
- The dates of granting[41] and of expiry of the certification
- Any other information required by the scheme.

2.6.4 The certification body shall have a policy governing references made by clients to the certification scheme and the **use of any mark or logo** identifying certified clients with the certification. This shall be reflected in requirements placed on clients concerning how they refer to their certification status and display the mark or logo, which shall be set out in the certification agreement (see 2.1.4).

2.6.5 Any mark or logo shall be **traceable** to the certification body.[42]

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[36] This information shall be available on a website, either on webpages or downloadable documents, to which access is not restricted. The information should also be available in printed form on request and a reasonable charge may be made to cover the costs of its reproduction and distribution.
[37] A clear summary should be available on the website, with full documentation made available on request.
[38] See footnote 31.
[39] Overall costs should include estimates of the range of audit costs, which depend on the location, size, and complexity of the business.
[40] Transparency of the standard is necessary for the certification scheme to be credible and meaningful to users, but it is accepted that some management systems used by certification bodies may be commercially confidential.
[41] This date shall be after the date of the certification decision.

2.6.6 The certification body will continuously monitor and **control** the use of the mark or logo and any references made to the certification scheme and shall take action to deal with any incorrect or misleading use. These actions shall address any use of the certification logo or mark by un-certified parties, and discontinuation of its use where certification has terminated or been withdrawn.[43]

2.6.7 The certification body shall keep up to date a **directory** with details of all services certified by them and shall make this publicly available and easily accessible.

2.6.8 The certification body shall have a written policy which expresses its commitment to confidentiality. It shall implement a policy to **safeguard the confidentiality** of information it has obtained through the performance of certification activities. This shall include:
   – Informing its clients and agreeing with them the information it intends to place in the public domain
   – Requiring all internal and external personnel to abide by the confidentiality policy
   – Informing the clients of any information that it may be required to make available by law
   – Agreeing with the client on the release of any information required for other purposes, such as handling complaints.

2.7 Certification process

The certification process should be efficient, objective and transparent. It should be sufficiently rigorous and robust to ensure that certified enterprises are truly delivering sustainable tourism but should also avoid placing unnecessary administrative burdens on them. The process needs to be clear, so clients know exactly what is expected of them. Feedback from the process should help the clients understand their strengths and weaknesses, leading to increased sustainability in the future.

2.7.1 The certification body shall have a **consistent, systematic and documented** process for conducting conformity assessment of clients and determining whether to grant certification.

2.7.2 Upon receipt of an **expression of interest in certification**, the certification body shall:
   – Ensure that the enterprise is fully aware of the process and costs;
   – Clarify the certification required and the scope of activities to be covered;
   – Obtain initial information about these activities, relevant to planning the evaluation;
   – Reach agreement to proceed and plan the evaluation process.

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[42] There should be some means of determining which certification body awarded the certificate. This is particularly important where many certification bodies have been accredited to evaluate conformity to a single standard.
[43] However uncertified tour operators may use the mark next to the name of a certified supplier, if the certification body permits and as long as this is done in a way that is not misleading.

2.7.3   The certification body, or sub-contracted body, shall **select an auditor** (or auditors) to carry out the evaluation. The auditor shall not be selected by the client, but the latter shall be given the opportunity to raise any objections about the auditor selected, for example on grounds of conflict of interest.

2.7.4   The auditor shall **obtain documentary evidence** from the client on its policies, activities and performance concerning the different components of the standard. Based on scrutiny of the documentary evidence, the auditor should draw significant concerns about non-conformities to the attention of the client and may request further information. A period may be allowed for non-conformities to be addressed and reported to the certification body. This should be documented with a management plan. The certification may be terminated, by agreement, at this stage.

2.7.5   The auditor shall **conduct a site visit** to the premises of the client. This visit shall involve: interviews with key personnel; obtaining additional documentary evidence as required; verification of the documentary evidence supplied; and relevant observation of the premises where the tourism service is delivered.

2.7.6   The auditor may undertake **consultation with knowledgeable stakeholders**[44] within or external to the client body in order to clarify aspects of the client's activity and performance. The auditor should undertake such consultation where there is significant doubt about the sufficiency, quality, or veracity of information supplied by a client. The client shall be informed in writing about any stakeholder consultation undertaken.

2.7.7   At the end of the visit, the auditor shall conduct an **exit interview** with the client to ensure that the audit process has covered all relevant matters accurately. The auditor should at this stage point out any initially apparent issues of non-conformity with the standard or more minor deficiencies and seek clarification and comment from the client. The auditor shall make sure that the client realises that this is only an informal exchange of information which does not predetermine the outcome of the decision.

2.7.8   The auditor shall prepare a written **report of audit** which:
   – Sets out the process of the audit, including dates, documents scrutinised and interviews held.
   – Identifies areas of major and minor non-conformity with the standard.
   – May include comments and recommendations relevant to the decision on whether to grant certification.
   – Provides sufficient detail to enable a well informed certification decision to be taken.
   – Is submitted to the certification body.
   – Is made available to the client, in full or in summary form.

2.7.9   The certification body may invite the client to correct **areas of non-conformity** within a specified time period and inform the certification body when this rectification has been completed. The certification body may then implement a suitable re-evaluation process to verify conformity in these areas.

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[44] Someone who has knowledge about the business or its impacts

2.7.10 The certification body shall assign one or more individuals to review all information and results from the evaluation and **make a decision** on whether or not to grant the certification. This decision shall be documented. Individuals involved in making this decision shall not include those involved in undertaking the audit.

2.7.11 The certification body shall **communicate to the client** the results of the decision. This communication shall provide justification for the decision and shall specify clearly all non-conformities and deficiencies identified. Irrespective of the decision, the communication should include helpful observations and feedback to the client on the sustainability of its tourism services.

2.8 Renewal, monitoring and termination of certification

The delivery of tourism services is a flexible activity that can quickly change. There are many pressures on tourism enterprises which could influence their attitude and level of response to sustainability both in their management and in their operations. It is therefore important to check conformity with the tourism sustainability standard on a regular basis.

2.8.1 The **period of validity** of the certification shall be not greater than three years from the date on which it was granted as shown on the certification document, subject to the qualification in 2.8.6.

2.8.2 The certification body should **notify** the client of the need for renewal of certification in sufficient time for a re-certification process to be carried out prior to the end of the current validity period.

2.8.3 The **process of renewal** of a certification shall follow all the requirements of certification as set out in this manual.

2.8.4 If certification has not been renewed by the expiry date, the certification body shall **terminate** the certification. The certification body shall inform the client that it is no longer certified and require that it removes all references to its previous certification. The certification body shall adjust its records and make publicly available information to reflect this termination.

2.8.5 The certification body may carry out **monitoring** of a certified client's activities to check that conformity with the standard is being maintained. This may include a requirement that the client undertakes an annual self-assessment and prepares a report and statement of compliance. Random unannounced monitoring visits may also be made.

2.8.6 Should the period of validity of the certification, as stipulated in 2.8.1, be greater than two years, the certification body shall monitor the performance of the client during this period. This monitoring might be a simpler process than during the certification.

2.8.7 Should the certification body have any **concerns** about the client's conformity with the standard, as may arise from monitoring, notified changes (see 2.1.6), complaints (see 2.9.5) or other information received, it should contact the client, investigate the situation and if necessary instigate a re-certification process.

2.8.8   The certification body shall have the **right to terminate** the certification upon substantiating any non-conformity. The certification body shall inform the client of the reasons for termination and take action as specified in 2.8.4.

2.9   Appeals and complaints

Correct procedures for allowing appeals to be made against certification decisions and for receiving and handling any complaints about clients and the certification body are important for the fairness, transparency and credibility of certification schemes. This process can help in improving the performance of schemes and, through lessons learnt and corrective action, the sustainability of participating tourism services.

2.9.1   The certification body shall have a **documented appeals procedure** for receiving, evaluating and making decisions about appeals made by clients or third parties against the certification decision.

2.9.2   The certification body shall **record** all appeals or complaints, and actions taken to resolve them.

2.9.3   The **appeals process** will be to the GSTC Accreditation Panel in the first instance, and in the second instance the GSTC Board of Directors (after the recusal of members with a potential conflict of interest).

2.9.4.   The **appeals procedure** should include:
– Acknowledging receipt of the appeal
– Investigating the appeal in a timely manner
– Gathering any necessary information
– Making a decision on the appeal, which should be approved by an individual(s) not involved with the original certification decision.
– Informing the appellant of the outcome of the appeal
– Taking necessary action to resolve issues arising.

2.9.5   The certification body shall have a **documented complaints procedure** for receiving, evaluating and making decisions about complaints against the certification body and scheme or against a client.

2.9.6   The certification body shall **record** all complaints and actions taken to address them.

2.9.7   The **complaints procedure** should include:
– Acknowledging receipt of the appeal
– Confirming whether the complaint relates to the certification scheme
– Investigating the complaint in a timely manner
– Drawing the complaint to the attention of any client involved
– Gathering any necessary information
– Making a decision on the complaint, which should be approved by an individual(s) not involved with certification activities related to the complaint
– Informing the complainant and client of the outcome
– Taking necessary action to resolve issues arising.

2.10 Management system

An effective and efficient certification scheme that is able to demonstrate its objectivity must be well managed.   Commitment to quality management should be clear at all levels of operation. All decisions and actions should be traceable and so correct maintenance of documents and records is essential. The certification body should set an example to its clients in its own management practices.

2.10.1   The certification body shall have a comprehensive **management system** that is described in a manual or a set of linked documentation. This should include the objectives of the certification scheme and all the policies and procedures for managing and operating it. The documentation shall be accessible to all relevant personnel and understood by them.

2.10.2   The certification body shall have procedures for the **control of documents.** These should cover the adequacy, updating, changing, identity, legibility, use, distribution, removal and disposal of documents, which may be in any medium.

2.10.3   The certification body shall have procedures for the **control of records**. These should cover the identification, storage, protection, retrieval, retention and disposal of records, which may be in any medium.

2.10.4   The certification body shall conduct a regular **internal audit** of its procedures, conducted by qualified and knowledgeable personnel, to verify that the management system is effectively implemented. Auditors shall not audit their own work. The results of the audit shall be made known to personnel implicated by the audit. For certification bodies with five or fewer employees, the internal audit will be conducted by the totality of the personnel, in open review.

2.10.5   The certification body shall **review** its management system at least once every 12 months. The review should be based on information from a variety of sources, including internal audit, inputs from personnel, feedback from clients, complaints and appeals, and the results of actions.

2.10.6   The certification body shall take action to address identified weaknesses in its management and operations, including non-conformities with the requirements of this manual. These shall include both **preventive and corrective actions**. The actions taken and the results achieved should be recorded.

2.10.7   The certification body should gather and record evidence on the **impact** that the presence of the certification scheme has had on its clients and their sustainability policies and actions[45].

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[45] Evidence of positive impact can be used to motivate employees, justify the certification, promote the business, and motivate other businesses to obtain certification.

PART 3   The GSTC Accreditation Procedure

This part of the manual sets out the process which the GSTC will put in place for the accreditation of certification schemes. Many requirements of the accreditation structure and procedures are similar to those required of certification schemes as set out in Part 2. Less detail is provided here on management processes; the main purpose is to provide information on the way the accreditation will be undertaken.

3.1   Scope and accessibility

It is important to be clear about the bodies, schemes and situations to which accreditation is applicable in order to avoid wasting time at the outset and to ensure that the programme is focused on activity for which is was designed. Accreditation should be an open service but should only be offered to relevant and active certification schemes that are able to demonstrate their compliance with requirements.

3.1.1   The accreditation process will be **available to all** certification schemes in the field of tourism which assess the conformity of tourism enterprises to a **sustainable tourism standard**[46] that covers elements of sustainability management and the socio-economic, cultural and environmental impacts of tourism.[47]

3.1.2   Access to accreditation will be **non-discriminatory** and is not conditional upon the size of the applicant certification body and its scheme or on its membership of any association or group, as long as independent third-party conformity assessment is implemented. Access to accreditation is not affected by the number of schemes already accredited through the GSTC Accreditation Programme.

3.1.3   Accreditation will be awarded to a certification body that is competent to assess conformity with a GSTC-recognized standard. In those cases where the development of the standard is under the control of an organization distinct from the certification body, the standardization body may indicate that the standard is recognized by the GSTC and indicate, with the GSTC accreditation logo, those certification bodies that are accredited to certify to this standard.

3.1.4   The accreditation process **assesses the conformity** of the certification scheme with:
  − The GSTC Standard, requiring that the standard used by the certification scheme is aligned with this and meets the requirements of Part 1 of this manual, and
  − The GSTC Accreditation Criteria for Certification Bodies, requiring that the certification processes meet the requirements of Part 2 of this manual or

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[46] A sustainable tourism standard is one that that has been formally recognized by the GSTC as in accordance with the GSTC Standard.
[47] At the date of this publication, the GSTC criteria apply to lodging facilities and tour operators. However accreditation will be extended to other tourism sectors as the appropriate standards become available.

the appropriate ISO standard: currently ISO/IEC Guide 65 for services, ISO/IEC 17021 for management systems, or ISO 14024 for ecolabels.

3.1.5 The certification scheme shall be **established and in operation** for at least two years before an application for accreditation is made. Certification shall have already been awarded to more than one tourism enterprise.

3.2 Structure and management

The structure and personnel involved with the accreditation processes and the procedures that are followed need to be clear. They should demonstrably meet the basic principles of integrity, impartiality and transparency.

3.2.1 GSTC Accreditation is a programme of the GSTC and is based on the GSTC Standard. However, in order to ensure impartiality and full separation from other GSTC activities, **responsibility** for the accreditation process and the granting of accreditation will be placed in the hands of a separate GSTC Accreditation Panel, within or linked with the GSTC, which shall be independent of the GSTC Board of Directors and of the Standards Working Group.

3.2.2 The GSTC may decide, with full notification of interested parties, to **outsource** the accreditation procedure to one or more accreditation bodies which will be licensed to undertake accreditation of certification schemes against the GSTC Standard and Accreditation Criteria. Outsourced bodies shall then be bound by all the requirements set out in this manual.

3.2.3 Where programmes exist, or may be established, at a **national or international level** to accredit certification schemes for compliance with sustainable tourism principles, the GSTC will work closely with those programmes to establish alignment between them and the GSTC Accreditation Programme. Should sufficient equivalency be clearly evident and accepted by all parties, the GSTC will license and negotiate a **memorandum of understanding** with those accreditation bodies that:
- Are compliant with ISO 17011, as demonstrated by peer review, ISEAL membership, or as IAF-MLA signatories;
- Have agreed to abide by GSTC requirements and procedures, as set out in this manual; and
- Have demonstrated competence to audit (and conduct witness audits) of sustainable tourism certification bodies to a GSTC-recognized standard, as set out in ISO/IEC Guide 65 and corresponding IAF guidance."

3.2.4 The accreditation process will be based on a clearly defined and well documented **management system.** This system and documentation will cover and require provision of:
- Control and management of documents and records;
- Internal audits to be carried out annually
- Regular management reviews
- Taking and recording of preventive and corrective action
- Procedures for handling and recording complaints.

3.2.5   The GSTC Accreditation Panel will have access to sufficient internal or
         external **human resources,** in the form of well qualified personnel, to carry
         out the management functions and accreditation processes. The
         Accreditation Panel will select accreditation bodies or auditors to undertake
         the assessment, who may be appointed under contract. Actions will be taken
         and documented to:
         −   Ensure that personnel understand the tasks required of them and have
             sufficient knowledge and experience.
         −   Provide sufficient training in the management systems and conformity
             assessment activities
         −   Record all personnel used, including their qualifications and experience
         −   Monitor the performance of auditors and other personnel involved in
             accreditation.

3.2.6   The accreditation process will reflect the GSTC's principle of **transparency**
         while maintaining a clear **confidentiality** policy and procedures to ensure that
         the certification body's commercial interests are protected.

3.2.7   Procedures will be followed to ensure the **impartiality** of the accreditation
         process and avoid **conflict of interest**. These will include:
         −   Restricting any personnel involved in the assessment and auditing from
             participating in the decision on awarding the accreditation.
         −   Requiring all personnel involved in the assessment, auditing and decision
             making to declare that they have no known recent past, current or future
             interest or involvement with the certification scheme, within a period of 24
             months past or future.
         −   Allowing the certification body to object to the involvement of any auditor
             or member of the decision committee on the grounds of conflict of interest.
         −   Having members of the Accreditation Panel that represents a spread of
             interests and ensuring that no single interest predominates.
         −   Analysing and documenting relationships with any related bodies to
             determine potential conflicts of interest with regard to the confidentiality,
             objectivity or impartiality of accreditations.
         −   Not suggesting or implying that obtaining consultancy from any specific
             person or company will result in the accreditation being simpler, easier,
             faster or less expensive.

3.2.8   The GSTC is involved in the provision of **training and exchange of
         knowledge** on the sustainability of tourism. The GSTC will ensure that these
         and other activities are **separated from its accreditation function** and can
         not influence the accreditation activities and decisions.[48] In meeting this
         requirement, the GSTC will:

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[48] IAF/ILAC Guidance on the Application of ISO / IEC 17011:2004: "G.4.3.6.1 Consultancy
services (refer clause 3.11 of ISO/IEC 17011) and conformity assessment services that CABs
perform (refer clause 1 of ISO/IEC 17011) are considered services that can affect impartiality
and cannot be offered nor provided by accreditation bodies (irrespective of whether the
accreditation body can or cannot accredit the conformity assessment service). Accreditation
bodies can carry out the following duties that are not considered a threat to impartiality: a)
arranging and participating as a lecturer in training, orientation or educational courses,
provided that these courses confine themselves to the provision of generic information which
is freely available in the public domain, i.e. they should not provide specific solutions to an
CAB in relation to the activities of that organization; b) adding value during assessments and

- Not offer consultancy to certification bodies on the management and delivery of certification schemes.
- Not offer consultancy to any tourism enterprise potentially subject to be certified.
- Not establish or run a certification scheme in sustainable tourism.
- Ensure that any training on tourism sustainability and conformity assessment is provided generically and open to all and not directed at any one certification scheme.

3.3 The accreditation process

A systematic accreditation process will be followed so that all certification bodies are aware of what will happen and can prepare adequately for the accreditation. The communication and exchanges between the GSTC Accreditation Panel, auditors and certification bodies should be constructive and positive, with the aim of strengthening the performance and success of the certification scheme.

3.3.1   The GSTC Accreditation Panel will provide certification bodies interested in accreditation with an **application pack** which provides full details of the process and contains an application form.

3.3.2   The certification body should return the completed application form together with all the documentation requested. This will be **reviewed for completeness** by the GSTC Accreditation Panel and further information and documentation may be requested.

3.3.3   The GSTC Accreditation Panel will **appoint a qualified accreditation body, auditor** or auditors to undertake the conformity assessment of the certification scheme.

3.3.4   An initial **assessment of documentation** will be undertaken. Should this reveal any clear non-conformities with the GSTC Standard and Accreditation Criteria or a significant number of deficiencies in compliance these will be drawn to the attention of the certification body. The certification body will be asked to comment and may be invited to provide further evidence relating to the non-conformities and deficiencies. The certification body may be required to submit a plan of action for addressing the non-conformities and deficiencies within a specified time period and subsequently to report actions taken.

3.3.5   The auditor will assess the report of actions taken. Should the auditor believe that clear non-conformities remain or that the number of deficiencies are too great to allow the application to proceed further, this will be communicated to the certification body and to the Accreditation Body. The Accreditation Body will then decide whether the assessment process should be **continued or terminated**. The certification body may appeal against any decision at this stage (see 3.4.3).

3.3.6   The auditor will **conduct an on-site visit** at the premises of the certification body.   The certification body will have been informed in advance about the

surveillance visits, e.g., by identifying opportunities for improvement, as they become evident, during the assessment without recommending specific solutions."

arrangements required and documents to be provided for inspection. The visit will involve meetings with officers of the certification body and inspection of files, documents and records.

3.3.7　At the time of the on-site visit, or at some other time, the auditor will conduct a **witness audit**, which will involve observing a representative auditor from the certification body undertake an audit of a tourism enterprise that has applied for certification.

3.3.8　At the end of the on-site visit the auditor will have an **exit meeting** with the main officers responsible for the certification scheme and provide a preliminary verbal report of the assessment, drawing attention to apparent non-conformities and deficiencies and inviting comments on them.

3.3.9　The auditor will write an **evaluation report** based on the assessment of documents, the on-site visit and the witness audit. This will pay particular attention to any non-conformities and deficiencies. The report will be submitted to the Accreditation Body and to the certification body for comment.

3.3.10　The certification body will be invited to **correct** any non-conformities and address any deficiencies within a specified time period and to submit a report containing evidence of actions taken.

3.3.11　The Accreditation Body will identify personnel to review the auditor's report and all other relevant evidence and take a **decision** on whether to grant the accreditation, which will be subject to ratification by the GSTC Accreditation Panel. The results will be communicated to the certification body by the GTSC Accreditation Panel. The accreditation will only be granted if all the non-conformities have been rectified and deficiencies have been reduced to a number deemed acceptable by the Accreditation Body. Certification bodies may be required to address remaining deficiencies within a certain period, through a management plan and documented action.

3.3.12　The certification body shall submit an **annual report** to the Accreditation Body outlining the performance of the certification scheme and confirming its ongoing conformity with the GSTC Standard and Accreditation Criteria. The report shall refer to the previous 12 month period and include: any changes to the structure of the certification body and operation of the scheme; brief financial summary, including forward projection; any changes to the standard used; the number and type of enterprises assessed for certification and certified; any appeals and complaints received, with actions taken; any issues that might affect impartiality and conflict of interest; professional development and training activity; results of the annual internal audit and review

3.3.13　The accreditation will last for a period of **four years** following the date upon which it was granted, or the period used by the accreditation body, whichever is shorter. Prior to the end of this period, a full **re-accreditation** will be conducted following the process outlined above. Two years after the initial accreditation and each re-accreditation, an **on-site monitoring visit** will be made to the premises of the certification body, which will involve an inspection of documents, an interview with officers, scrutiny of previous non-conformities and deficiencies, an exit interview and a written report of findings.

3 3.14 Should the annual report or monitoring visit reveal any non-conformities or a significant number of deficiencies, the certification body will be invited to **rectify** them within a specified time period and to submit a report containing evidence of actions taken. This will be reviewed by the GSTC Accreditation Panel to determine whether full re-accreditation may be necessary.

3.3.15 Should the GSTC Accreditation Panel have reason to be concerned about the ongoing conformity of a certification scheme with the GSTC Standard and Accreditation Criteria, it may require **more frequent** reports and monitoring visits than stipulated in 3.3.12 and 3.3.13.

3.4 Rights and responsibilities

The accredited certification body and the GSTC have a number of rights and responsibilities towards each other and other interested parties which should be understood and respected. In order to ensure that the accreditation programme and certification schemes are seen as fair and meaningful it is important that these are upheld.

3.4.1 Upon granting the accreditation to a certification scheme, the GSTC and the certification body will sign an **accreditation agreement** which sets out the responsibilities of each party. The GSTC Accreditation Panel will issue the certification body with an **accreditation certificate** which specifies the scope of the certification scheme covered by the accreditation and the norms with which it complies.

3.4.2 The GSTC Accreditation Panel has the **right to withdraw** accreditation from the certification scheme at any time should it consider that its performance does not comply with the requirements of GSTC accredited certification schemes.

3.4.3 The certification body has a **right to appeal** against any decision taken by the GSTC Accreditation Panel concerning the accreditation of its certification scheme. Appeals should be made in writing to the Accreditation Panel. If the matter cannot be resolved by communication between the parties, the appeal will be referred to a separate **appeals committee**, containing personnel not involved with the original decision.

3.4.4 Any **complaints** made about matters relating to the subject of the accreditation shall be drawn to the attention, respectively, of the GSTC Accreditation Panel and the implicated certification body and recorded by both parties, who will discuss the subject of the complaint and agree appropriate action. Actions taken shall be recorded and communicated to the complainant.

3.4.5 The GSTC Accreditation Panel will give due notice to the certification body of any **changes to the accreditation requirements** and subsequent actions that it may need to take.

3.4.6 The certification body shall abide by the requirements of the accreditation. It will inform the GSTC Accreditation Panel of any **substantial changes** to the accredited certification scheme.

3.4.7 The GSTC will make publicly available a **list of the accredited certification schemes** together with brief details of each scheme.

3.4.8 The GSTC will make publicly available and implement a clear policy on the use of the **'GSTC Accredited' mark.** This will include surveillance of the use of the mark and taking action against its incorrect use. Accredited certification schemes shall have the right to use the 'GSTC Accredited' mark in their communications and publicity. The certification bodies shall also have the right to sub-license the use of the 'GSTC Accredited' mark alongside the mark of the certification scheme by tourism enterprises it has certified.

3.5 Payment for accreditation

Accreditation should be a financially sustainable process. Pricing should be equitable but also reflect the financial situation of certification bodies and their ability to meet the costs.

3.5.1 The certification body will be required to **pay a fee** for the process of accrediting its certification scheme.

3.5.2 Fees will be paid in **stages**, upon application and before the site visit, to enable the accreditation process to be terminated after the first stage without penalty.

3.5.3 A **scale of charges** will be determined by the GSTC. The level of charge shall reflect the number of already certified enterprises and number of certifications undertaken by the certification body in an average recent year.

3.5.4 The current charges will be made **publicly available** by the GSTC.

3.5.5 **Expenses incurred** in undertaking auditing, including travel and subsistence expenses, will be passed on to the certification body.