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GENERAL REGULATIONS

ISO 3834

Manufacturer Certification for the Management of Quality in Welding

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CONTENT

1 Scope

The current General Regulations define the rules applied to the certification and registration for the Management of Quality in Welding according to the international recognized standard ISO 3834 which describes the quality requirements for fusion welding of metallic materials.

They also apply when the assessment of the management system is done in combination with the specific assessment requested by some Directives for which Vinçotte nv (Vsa) has been notified or with national normative documents.

2 Reference standards

The certification process applied is based upon a demonstrated compliance with the requirements of the latest version of the following normative international documents :

- **ISO 3834-1** : Quality requirements for fusion welding of metallic materials - Part 1: Criteria for the selection of the appropriate level of quality requirements
- **ISO 3834-2** : Quality requirements for fusion welding of metallic materials - Part 2 : Comprehensive quality requirements
- **ISO 3834-3** : Quality requirements for fusion welding of metallic materials - Part 3 : Standard quality requirements
- **ISO 3834-4** : Quality requirements for fusion welding of metallic materials – Part 4 : Elementary quality requirements
- **EA-6/02 M:2022** : “EA Guidelines on the Use of EN 45011 and ISO/IEC 17021 for Certification to EN ISO 3834”

3 Definitions and acronyms

The following general definitions and acronyms apply throughout the whole of this document :

- **Vsa** : Vinçotte nv
- **Applicant** : Organization seeking the certification and registration of its management system by Vinçotte nv (Vsa).
- **Organization** : under the current Regulations, the term “Organization” is used to designate an organization as defined in the ISO 9000:2005 standard (§3.3.1: group of people and facilities with an arrangement of responsibilities, authorities and relationship).
- **Certified/Registered Organization** : Organization of which the management system has been certified by Vsa and to which a certificate of conformity has been issued by Vsa.
- **QMS** : Quality Management System.
- **I/EWE** : International/European Welding Engineer.
- **I/EWT** : International/European Welding Technologist.
- **I/EWS** : International/European Welding Specialist.
- **RWC** : Responsible Welding Coordinator.

4 General rules

The current General Regulations are the only ones applied by Vsa for certification and registration of management systems complying with the standards and normative documents listed in § 2.

Any Organization seeking certification and registration of its management system by Vsa must abide by the General Regulations in force at the time the certification contract is concluded.

When the General Regulations are revised, the Organizations concerned may choose either to adopt the revised version or the one already applicable to them. This option is available until the next (re)certification audit.

An exception to this is when the General Regulations have to be adapted as a result of a change to the accreditation rules.

The requirements of the current General Regulations supersede the corresponding requirements of the Vsa Standard Terms and Conditions of Supply of Services.

The specific conditions defined in the certification contracts may neither alter nor modify the requirements of the current General Regulations.

5 Certificate characteristics

5.1 Scope

The Vsa management system certificate attests that the management system implemented by a Certified Organization, complies with the requirements of the referenced part of the ISO 3834.

5.2 Period of validity

The Vsa certificate is valid for a period of five years from the date of issue for as long as the conditions of validity (§ 5.3) are met. The issue date is the date of the final decision of the granting of the certificate taken by the Certification Commission.

At the end of each foreseen validity period or any period prematurely completed by system changes that require a new certificate (§ 5.3), a request for surveillance or new certification must be submitted by the Certified Organization to Vsa. Not fulfilling this requirement means cessation of the certificate.

5.3 Conditions of validity

The validity of an Vsa certificate is maintained provided that the Certified Organization concerned continuously complies with the following requirements :

a) The certified management system is continuously maintained (e.g. AV's auditor must be able to assess the continuous practical implementation of the documented quality system during his annual or additional surveillance audits).

b) A controlled and updated copy of the management manual and/or documented procedures for the management system is maintained at the Organization's site, for review by Vsa. The manual will be made available to Vsa upon request.

c) Any significant modification to the management system is communicated to Vsa within one week after they have come into force.

Examples of these modifications are, but not limited to :

- Changes in the Organization's name or address, including the certified workshop(s)
- Significant changes within the organization, processes
- Stop or cessation of existing activities
- New or significantly changed organizational structure
- Significant increase or decrease in the number of employees
- Changes in the listed welding processes
- Changes in the listed base materials
- Changes in the listed product or construction standards and directives
- Appointment of a new Responsible Welding Coordinator
- Bankruptcy
- See also § 8.1
- …

d) Any complaint raised by a third party about the quality of products or services covered by the certified management system, must be recorded, managed and presented to Vsa's auditors at the beginning of each audit or upon request by the auditor.

e) Any official report concerning an aspect of the Organization's activities included in the scope of certification, has to be presented to the Vsa's auditors at the beginning of the audit or on request of the auditor.

f) An annual surveillance audit is a minimum necessity to ensure continued certification. In the case of joined certification (see § 8.3), a yearly surveillance audit is not systematically required for all sites.

g) Vsa is authorized to carry out any unscheduled audit at any time and without notice.

h) All financial obligations with regard to Vsa are satisfied.

6 Application for Certification

Any Organization interested in the certification of its management system of Quality in Welding may apply to Vsa.

As soon as the Organization's intention is known, Vsa will supply the Organization with a Preliminary or Informative Questionnaire. The interested Organization(s) should complete the questionnaire and return it to Vsa together with appropriate documentation which provides a clear description of the Organization's organizational structure and the activit(y)(ies), product(s) or service(s) to be covered by the management system to be certified.

Vsa may also send one of its employees to the interested Organization to collect the necessary data, to get a precise idea about the management system and to offer Vsa's services in detail.

As soon as the necessary information has been collected and reviewed, the Applicant and Vsa agree the certification conditions, which are finalized in a quotation.

At the Applicant's request, the certification process may include a pre-audit of the management system that is to be certified.

Ordering proceeds with the filling in and the signing of the applicable declaration form by the Applicant which may, if so indicated by the Applicant, serve as order form. These forms are part of the Vsa quotation. The relevant declaration form must be returned to Vsa, if necessary attached to a standard order. The provisions of the purchase order must conform to the requirements of the Vsa order forms, the current General Regulations and the requirements of the Certification Scheme (see § 18 for a graphical representation of the scheme).

7 Certification Process

7.1 Registration

Vsa acknowledges all orders received. Before the beginning of the documentation review, Vsa communicates to the Applicant the names of the auditors who will conduct the certification services. The Applicant will be informed beforehand if there is any change to the assigned auditors.

The Applicant may refuse the participation of an auditor, providing such refusal is made in writing to the Auditors Hierarchical Responsible (including justification) or the Lead Auditor and not less than four weeks before the beginning of the certification process. If the Applicant is unable to accept any of the auditors proposed by Vsa, the certification order is considered to be void. Vsa will inform the Applicant of this decision in writing.

Requirement of auditor impartiality: an auditor may not be assigned to and participate in the certification process if he/she has provided consulting or internal audit services to the Organization concerned within the last 2 years.

7.2 Preparation of the audit and review of the documentation

The management system should be implemented for at least 3 months so that significant evidence will be available. The purpose of the preparation stage is to obtain the optimal preparation of the certification audit.

According to the contract (depending on the reference standard, the size of the Organization, the scope of the audit, and the status of “initial certification” or “renewal”), this preparation mostly takes the form of a preliminary visit on site, or will be executed at a distance using phone calls, faxes or e-mail. It includes, as a general rule :

- acquaintance with the Organization and its activities ;
- the review of the system documentation (the auditors examine the manual and/or documented procedures to assess their compliance with the requirements of the legislative reference document, accordingly the Applicant provides these documents to Vsa) ;
- checking the level of preparedness for the certification audit in the light of the internal audits and management review reports ;
- the establishment of an audit program and all necessary arrangements.

In principle, the Lead Auditor takes care of the preparation, but he may delegate this task to an Auditor of the audit team. This preliminary site visit mainly involves the Applicant’s Quality Management Head or Coordinator and the Responsible Welding Coordinator.

The Auditor will communicate possible findings regarding non-conformities and needs for clarification to the Applicant. The Applicant is expected to take necessary actions and to submit to the auditor any modifications to the documentation that may resolve all non-conformities.

The certification audit will be scheduled after completion of the preparation visit or documentation examination, on a date (normally 3 to 4 weeks later) allowing the Applicant to make any improvements that may be necessary.

7.3 Certification audit

During the certification audit, the appointed auditors verify that the management system described in the manual and in the supporting documented procedures is implemented effectively and in compliance with the requirements of the reference normative document. For this purpose, all documented procedures not yet reviewed are examined, the personnel involved in the management system are interviewed and the relevant management reports are thoroughly analyzed. In this phase, all levels of responsibility are involved and the audit is conducted on the Applicant’s premises and other premises (e.g. subcontractors) if these areas are relevant to the agreed scope of the audit.

During the audit, the auditor will interview the (responsible) welding coordinator(s) to verify the competence and experience of the coordinator, depending on the requirements stated in the chosen part of the ISO 3834 series.

This interview could be limited at the discretion of the auditor provided that the (responsible) welding coordinator(s) are officially recognized as (C)I/EWE, (C)I/EWT, (C)I/EWS or EN 1090 RWC-c/s/b. The auditor will inquire the welding coordinator to provide objective evidence of past experience and work performed by him.

In the event that a non-conformance or an indication of non-conformance regarding a requirement of the chosen part of the ISO 3834 series is found, the auditor will immediately inform the Applicant. At the same

time, the auditor will determine the major or minor character of the non-conformity. See § 7.4 for a breakdown of the non-conformities.

The auditor will assess if the non-conformity can simply be resolved by a "correction[1] " or if it needs to be subject to further analysis and possibly be covered by the implementation of a "corrective action[2] or measurement" (e.g. in case of a non-conformity suspected to be systematic in nature,…). The Applicant shall submit his position and justification with regard to the auditors request for correction or corrective action and, if applicable, his action plan with a set date for the implementation of the correction(s) or corrective action(s) for each accepted request. These responses will be sent by the Applicant to Vsa at the earliest convenience but in any event not later than two weeks after the end of the certification audit (see § 7.5).

For the duration of the audit, an office with sufficient seating and desks will be allocated to the audit team for their private meetings.

The audit process commences with an introduction meeting involving the Applicant's management and the auditors. During the meeting, the participants introduce themselves and the details of the audit program are defined.

The audit ends with a closing meeting with the Applicant's management and the auditors. During the closing meeting, the auditors will present their conclusions and issue any possible request(s) for correction or corrective action.

7.4 Request for Correction or Corrective Action (CAR)

The deviations and observations that were identified during the initial or a surveillance audit will be recorded in reports. They represent a non-compliance with the requirements of the standard.

Major nonconformities (or severe shortcomings or serious defects) mean that there is no process link, or that a system fails completely.

Minor nonconformities (or slight deficiencies or small deviations) mean that a requirement of the standard or a provision in the applicable documents or remark in the procedures or work instructions of the organization is not met, but on the basis of objective evidence the conformity of the product is not in doubt. Several small deviations – usually against a common requirement of the system or standard – may be considered as a major nonconformity.

Observation or opportunity for improvement is a situation where the evidence presented indicates a requirement has been effectively implemented, but based on the auditor experience and knowledge, additional effectiveness or robustness might be possible with a modified approach.

- A **non-exhaustive** list of major nonconformities can be found below :

  - introduction of unapproved changes to the system ;
  - incorrect definition or application of the used part of the ISO 3834 ;
  - use of base material or welding processes and others, outside the application domain stated on the certificate or mentioned in the audit report(s) ;
  - use of other than in the scope mentioned welding processes, base and filler materials and/or misclassification of these processes or materials ;
  - incorrect use of qualified welders or the use of unqualified welders ;
  - no availability of a properly qualified responsible welding coordinator ;
  - no or incomplete control over outsourced activities (when applicable) ;
  - failure to comply with prior requested correction measures or not solving non-conformities ;

[1] correction : action to eliminate a detected nonconformity
[2] corrective action : action to eliminate the cause of a nonconformity and to prevent recurrence

- non authorized use of the certificate as provided in Vsa's General Terms and Conditions and this document ;
- not maintaining the documented system up to date (manual and procedures) when the implemented system evolves ;
- when the system of implementing the necessary corrections in order to maintain the requirements of the corresponding standards proofs to be inadequate or inefficient ;
- insufficient planning of the quality management system considering the objectives to be reached: insufficient, unsuitable or non-existent management plan or lack of resources to realize the established objectives (missing capability) ;
- lack of an essential QMS component: no evidence of documentation or of implementation of a criterion (or of a significant part thereof) of the reference standard ;
- when only a part of a system component is missing and when the missing part has a critical influence on the global operation of the system or on the delivered product, and this to such an extent that the negative consequences of this failure are established in the past period.
- evident / deliberate non-conformance with statutory or regulatory requirements ;
- breach of a statutory or regulatory requirement which can call into question consumer safety (or the general interest) ;
- when a nonconformance is such that the balance of the system and its global working is harmed ;
- accumulation of minor non-conformities which leads to a lack of confidence in the system's efficiency ;
- too long a period for the resolution of the correction or corrective action requests established by the auditors, in such that the Organization's capability to handle them may be in doubt.

- A **non-exhaustive** list of minor nonconformities can be found below :

  - incomplete documentation of an applicable criterion of the reference standard, on the condition that the missing documentation is not essential for the operation ;
  - incomplete implementation of an applicable criterion of the reference standard, on the condition that the missing implementation is not essential for the operation ;
  - lack of evidence demonstrating the conformity with a criterion of the reference standard, if this does not harm confidence in the implementation of an essential element of the system.

7.5 Response and implementation of Correction or Corrective Action Request

Within a fortnight after the audit the Organization provides answers to the Requests for Correction or a Corrective Action along with an action plan. The auditor checks if the proposed measurements are suitable for remedying the non-conformities discovered and their causes.

Both the major and minor nonconformities must be resolved - and their implementation verified if necessary - before the audit is finalized. For an initial certification audit, this means that the certificate itself can only be issued when **all** the nonconformities are duly treated and approved.

For **major nonconformities**, corrections should take place as soon as possible (preferably immediately or within a few days) while the corrective actions should be implemented and verified within 6 weeks after the audit.
For **minor nonconformities**, corrections should take place as soon as possible (preferably immediately or within a few days) while the corrective actions should be implemented and verified (if deemed necessary) within three months after the audit.

If the correction or implementation of the corrective action takes more than indicated above, than Vsa may decide to suspend the audit, in which case Vsa will let the manufacturer know that the audit team will return after the corrections and corrective actions have been taken and implemented.

The nonconformities identified during the subsequent surveillance audit(s) are subject to the same measures with the distinction that the certification need not be interrupted as long as the implementation of the correction(s) or corrective action(s) will not take longer than the above mentioned time(s).

7.6 Audit report

During and following the audit, a (or several) confidential report(s) is (are) prepared by the auditor(s).

These reports include a brief description of the Applicant, the description of the products or services covered by the related management system and the Requests for Correction or Corrective Action with all of the nonconformities found.

The report(s) also contains the Applicant's responses to the Requests for Correction or Corrective Action.

7.7 Certification

Based on the certification file and the audit report(s), the Lead auditor will draw up his recommendation.

The complete certification file (including the audit reports, together with the recommendation of the Lead Auditor) are then reviewed by a recognized independent person. This independent reviewer will formulate his advice towards granting or otherwise of the certificate to the Certification Committee.

The concerned auditor(s) is (are) heard when necessary. In each case, the Certification Committee will decided either to grant a certificate stating the conditions, or to refuse the certification stating the reason(s).

The granting or maintaining of a certificate is refused when the Certification Committee judges that the management system implemented substantially derogates from the requirements of the reference normative document. This judgment is based upon the following factors :

- Evidence of critical / major non-conformities.
- Accumulation of minor non-conformities giving rise to a lack of confidence in the operability of the management system.
- Attitude of the Applicant towards the resolution of Corrective Action Requests.

If awarded, the effective date of issuance of the certificate is the date of the positive review by the Independent Reviewer unless the Certification Committee ultimately decides otherwise. The certificate is generally valid for 5 years, except for the limitations described in § 15 (change in reference normative documents).

The certificate is made available to the manufacturer but remains property of Vsa, subject to satisfactory surveillance (see § 7.9) and as long as the 'Conditions of Validity' defined in the General Regulations are maintained.

7.8 Certification registration

When a certificate is granted, a registration number is assigned to it. This number is printed on the certificate. The certificate itself is comprised out of 2 parts, a general part and an annex stating the scope of work more in detail.

The first part (general) normally states:

- the reference normative document(s) ;
- the certified Organization's name and address(es) ;
- the scope of the certification (activities, products or services covered) ;
- the reference of the latest audit report ;
- the date of first and current issue, and ;
- the period of validity.

The second part (annex) normally states:

- reference to used product standards and regulation frame ;
- the implemented welding process(es) ;
- the base material (sub)group(s) used ;
- the name of the responsible welding coordinator (RWC) ;
- the reference of the latest audit report ;
- the date of first and current issue, and ;
- the period of validity.

7.9 Certification surveillance

When a certificate is granted, a surveillance program is defined. Maintaining the certificate requires the execution of this surveillance program. The practical arrangements are defined when the order is made, based on the proposal made by Vsa.

For the purpose of monitoring, Vsa will perform annually (with maximum three months of tolerance) surveillance and possibly additional audits supported by documented yearly internal audits that the Certified Organization will perform itself.

The Certified Organization is obliged to fill in a surveillance questionnaire (ref. form-261-18) and send it to the lead auditor when any of the therein mentioned topics change (e.g. change of RWC, …), which will help the audit team to determine the focus for the planned surveillance audit or possibly additional audit. Additional documentation or information may be requested from the Certified Organization at that time.

The **surveillance audits** include :

- the review of the Conditions of Validity (see §5.3);
- the review of complaints received since the last review ;
- dealing with the Requests for Correction or Corrective Action Requests issued during the previous audit(s) ;
- the review of internal audits and their scheduling ;
- the review of parts of the management system * ;
- the review of the use of the certificate.

* As a general rule, all elements of the reference normative document will be reassessed during the validity period of the certificate.

In the case of a certification that includes the assessment of conformity with regulatory requirements (European directives) or parts thereof, the requirements established by law are applicable by rights.

Additional audits may be taken in a number of cases such as :

- a (some) major modification(s) of the certified management system ;
- major or minor nonconformities found during the scheduled surveillance audits ;
- a complaint raised by a third party.

These additional audits involve reviews of the documentation at Vsa's offices or audits at the Certified Organization's premises or at the site that so requires.

A report is written for all audits. These reports are sent to the Certified Organization within one month after the receipt of acceptable measures in response to any requests for correction(s) or corrective action(s).

The reports, together with the recommendations of the auditors, are presented to the Certification Committee during its next meeting. The Certification Committee decides whether to maintain, modify, suspend or withdraw the corresponding certificate or to impose additional conditions.

The conditions given in § 7.7 also apply in this situation.

7.10 Certification renewal

The Applicant has to act promptly to submit a request for the renewal of the Applicants certification so there is no interruption to the validity of the certification.

Normally three months before the end of the validity period of a given certificate, Vsa issues a proposal for the renewal of the certificate. However this does not relieve the Applicant of its responsibility to contact Vsa if a proposal for renewal from Vsa is not obtained within a two month period before the expiry of the certificate.

The renewal process is comparable to the original certification. However :

- the program takes account of the knowledge gained of the management system to be reassessed ;
- the General Regulations in force at the date of the renewal proposal are applicable.

The renewal audit and independent review have to be performed before the expiration date. After this date, no temporary certificate is issued, but Vsa can confirm by letter that the renewal process is ongoing, on condition that the new contract is signed and the audit dates are agreed.

If the audit cannot be programmed before the expiration of the certificate, this audit will have to be considered as an initial certification audit. A new tender has to be prepared and the audit time duration has to be reassessed.

The certificate is then issued for 5 years from the new decision date (after the independent review) and a new registration number is allocated.

In the case of renewal of a certificate previously issued by another certification body, the “Renewal” status can be maintained after a “transfer procedure” similar to that described in § 8.3.

8 Specific cases

In addition to the standard certification program described above, special cases can also be accommodated. The most common examples are detailed below.

8.1 Changes to the certification

A Certified Organization may request that modified activities be covered by its current certificate (see also § 5.3c). This request may involve new products, services, activities or locations or another reference standard. See § 6 for the application procedure.

In such a case, a specific program is developed and an additional audit is planned, taking account of the nature of the request. In general, the program is limited to the Certified Organization’s new activities.

In cases where the modification is granted, either the initial certificate is adapted to the new situation or it is withdrawn and replaced by a new certificate with new conditions, or an additional certificate is established. The certification surveillance program is modified accordingly.

8.2 Combined certification

Upon request, Vsa can at the same time certify the management system according several reference standards (e.g. EN1090) and/or the compliance with a regulation/directive (e.g. CPR 30/2011, PED 97/23/EC, …) if this is practically possible.

The intention of combined certification is to examine the common parts for the different systems, thus saving time and resources if this is feasible.

The specific parts of every management system are examined separately.

8.3 Transfer of certificates

On the request of a Certified Organization that wishes to transfer a certificate issued by another certification body to Vsa, Vsa can, on some conditions (e.g. the original certification body must also be ISO 17065 accredited, all audit reports available, certificate status valid, …), issue a certificate based on previous audit results and take over the certification programs. This will always be decided on a case by case basis.

The original certificate and all the current certification cycle audit reports are examined and assessed, including the status of outstanding nonconformities, as well as complaints and actions taken.

The results of this Transfer Review and a supplementary transfer audit are submitted to the Certification Committee, which issues (or not) a certificate, expiring on the same date as on the original certificate.

The Certification Committee decides about possible complementary actions (preliminary audit, etc.) and defines the new surveillance program (or confirms the original one).

9 Use and misuse of the certificate and the registration logo

The Certified Organization may :

- Display, reproduce and issue copies of the certificate (additional originals are available from Vsa).
- Disclose only full copies of the audit reports to any third party.
- Reproduce the Vsa registration logo referring to the applicable normative document, but only on correspondence, promotional documentation, advertising documentation (including websites) and company vehicles. In this case, the following conditions apply :
  - The registration logo will always be used together with the name of the certified Organization.
  - The logo will never be associated with activities, products or services in such a way as to seem themselves to have been certified by Vsa ;
  - Therefore, the logo may not be applied on the product itself or on its direct packaging ;
  - The registration logo will only be related to activities, products or services covered by the relevant certificate. The Certified Organization will identify the activities, goods or services to which the certificate applies when the use of the logo might lead to confusion.
  - The Certified Organization discontinues any use of the logo, judged unacceptable by Vsa and any form of declaration relating to the authority of the Certified Organization for the use of the logo, which Vsa might deem to be misleading.
  - Upon termination of the certification for whatever reason (expiration of the validity period, withdrawal notified by Vsa, etc.), the Certified Organization undertakes to discontinue all use of the logo immediately, and destroy stock of any material on which it appears.
  - In the case of scope modification, the Certified Organization commits itself to use the modified certificate and/or logo.
  - The logo to be used is transmitted by Vsa. Any derogation requires a written request to be addressed to the Certification Committee.

10 Certificate renunciation, suspension and withdrawal

10.1 Renunciation

The manufacturer can renounce the certification in writing to Vsa for any reason and at any time. As a consequence of renunciation, the manufacturer must :

- give back the certificate to Vsa ;
- refrain from using any copy of the certificate ;
- remove from all documentation and printed material any reference to the certification.

Renunciation of the certification is acknowledged in writing to the manufacturer by Vsa.

10.2 Suspension

Suspension of certification is decided by Vsa, as a consequence of :

- non-respecting the Conditions of Validity (see §5.3).
- deviations from compliance with requirements, insufficient to warrant withdrawal, but not removed by an agreed date ;
- inappropriate use of the certificate ;
- modifications to the manufacturer's organization, already in force but not yet notified to, and/or not yet evaluated by Vsa ;
- repetitive refusal of proposed dates for the continuous surveillance.

Suspension of certification is notified in writing to the manufacturer by Vsa, together with the supporting reasons and the conditions for restoring certification.

The suspension is removed only after Vsa has verified and confirmed that conformity with the requirements has been reinstated. The suspension removal is notified in writing to the manufacturer.

10.3 Withdrawal

Withdrawal of certification is decided by Vsa, as a consequence of :

- non-respecting the Conditions of Validity (see §5.3).
- important deviations from compliance with requirements ;
- misuse of the certificate ;
- modifications to the manufacturer's organisation not acceptable to Vsa ;
- refusal to allow surveillance audits or checks ;
- cessation of the certified activity.

The withdrawal of certification is notified in writing to the manufacturer by Vsa, together with the supporting reasons.

As a consequence of withdrawal, the manufacturer must :

- give back the certificate to Vsa ;
- refrain from using any copy of the certificate ;
- remove from all documentation and printed material any reference to the withdrawn certification.

If the manufacturer decides to seek certification again, a new application must be submitted.

10.4 Notification obligation

As a consequence of renunciation, suspension or withdrawal of the certificate, the manufacturer must inform current customers about the situation.

11 Appeals and complaints

Any party concerned that wants to object to a decision made by the Certification Committee has the right to appeal, or when they feel that they have been unfairly treated during the audit may file a complaint. To be considered, all objections – including justifications – must be sent to the Vsa Manager by registered mail.

To resolve a complaint, Vsa will operate its proper internal procedures thereto.

To resolve an appeal, a meeting of the Appeals Committee is called. The Certification Committee's decision continues to apply during the appeal procedure.

The members of the Appeals Committee will be communicated to the appellant. The appellant has the right to contest members of the committee by registered letter – including justifications – within 8 days of being notified of the Appeals Committee members.

A meeting of the Appeals committee is called within two weeks after the final agreed upon constitution of the Committee members. During the meeting, both the appellant and the Certification Committee will be entitled to be heard in confidence. The Appeals Committee may also hear any other individual(s) who may be relevant to the appeal. Each interviewee is given one week's notice of the time and place of the Appeals Committee meeting.

The Appeals Committee shall release its decision on the appeal within two weeks after the meeting.

The decision of the majority of the Appeal Committee, as declared by its Chairman, will be final.

The appealed decision will stand for the duration of the appeal procedure.

12 Confidentiality

All information about the applicants and the Certified Organizations and the certification files are held confidential.

Vsa commits itself not to disclose any private information about the applicant or Certified Organizations nor any information collected during the audits, except for the data directly related to the status of the certification (all the data mentioned on the certificate).

However, Vsa may disclose parts or all of the certification files to the accreditation bodies if requested upon.

Where appropriate, the Organizations accept the presence of representatives of the accreditation bodies, or auditors undergoing training.

13 Languages

By default, Vsa conducts certification services in Dutch, French and English. Audits may be conducted in any other language by mutual agreement, if Vsa can provide for an auditor capable of conducting the audit in the language.

The language(s) to be used during the audit as well as the language of the report will be defined by the Applicant at the time of contract acceptance. If the chosen language for the report is not one of the 3 languages mentioned above, a translation will be provided in one of them (bilingual report). The certificate may be issued in any language by mutual agreement.

14 Certification fees

The certification fees fixed by Vsa are defined in lump sums and a set of daily and hourly rates.

The sums notably cover:

- the audit preparation and documentation review (§. 7.1 to 7.2)
- the certification audit and report (§ 7.3 to 7.6)
- the certification, registration and publication (§ 7.7 to 7.8)
- the certification surveillance program (§ 7.9)

The sums are defined on the basis of the chosen certification model such that the audit times depend on organizational characteristics such as the size of the Organization, her complexity,… as well as on technical specificities such as the different welding processes and base materials used, product standards used, … Account can be taken of any existing certification or previous review of the management system by Vsa.

A sum is fixed per certificate for certification and registration. All sums are invoiced after completion of the corresponding certification phase (generally after sending the report to the Organization).

Supplemental activities not chargeable to Vsa such as re-review of the documentation, re-audit, additional performances as described in § 7.9 and § 15, etc... are invoiced at the daily and hourly rates (based on the same principles as the standard costs).

15 Reference standards changes

When a revised reference standard or normative document is published, Vsa will inform the Certified Organization. Depending on the extent of change(s), Vsa will indicate a transition period wherein the Certified Organization should make the change(s). After the date on which the changes to the certified organization should be implemented, Vsa will audit the certification system according to the revised standards or documents.

Non-conformities against the new version of the standard will first be noted as remarks and will be written as Requests for Correction or Corrective Action Requests only after the transition period.

16 Loss of accreditation

Vsa is supervised by an accreditation body (BELAC) and takes all the necessary measure to maintain the accreditation that has been awarded. Should Vsa lose all or part of an accreditation for a reference standard (e.g. for a specific sector), all the relevant contractual obligations with the applicants are immediately terminated and dissolved.

17 Applicable law & disputes

The current general regulations are governed by Belgian law. Subsequent to an attempt to reach an amicable settlement, any dispute about the validity, interpretation and implementation of the regulation shall be judged by the Brussels first court of instance.

18 Overview of the Certification Scheme

The in this General Regulations referred to Certification Scheme is graphically represented here below.