VIETNAM FOREST CERTIFICATION SCHEME

VFCS/PEFC ST 1006:2026

YÊU CẦU ĐỐI VỚI TỔ CHỨC CHỨNG NHẬN THỰC HIỆN HOẠT ĐỘNG CHỨNG NHẬN THEO CÁC TIÊU CHUẨN QUẢN LÝ RỪNG BỀN VỮNG VÀ CHUỖI HÀNH TRÌNH SẢN PHẨM

Requirements for certification bodies operating certification against sustainable forest management and chain of custody standards

Translated version

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Contents

Foreword

The Vietnam Forest Certification Scheme (VFCS) has been developed to promote sustainable forest management and the certification of forest-based products in Vietnam in accordance with the requirements of the Programme for the Endorsement of Forest Certification (PEFC).

This standard specifies the requirements for certification bodies carrying out sustainable forest management (SFM) certification and chain of custody (CoC) certification under VFCS.

Certification bodies conducting SFM certification shall be accredited to ISO/IEC 17021-1 by an accreditation body that is a signatory to the International Accreditation Forum Multilateral Recognition Arrangement (IAF MLA) for management systems certification.

Certification bodies conducting CoC certification shall be accredited to ISO/IEC 17065 by an accreditation body that is a signatory to IAF MLA for product certification.

This standard applies to both individual and group forest management certification. Requirements for group forest management certification are specified in VFCS/PEFC ST 1004 which is in accordance with Appendix A of this standard.

This standard also applies to Trees outside Forests (TOF). Unless otherwise specified in the relevant VFCS requirements for TOF, all provisions applicable to forests and forestry shall also apply to TOF.

The requirements specified in this standard are based on PEFC ST 1004:2024. For SFM certification, no additional certification procedure requirements beyond those specified in PEFC ST 1004:2024 have been introduced.

Introduction

Sustainable Forest Management and Forest Certification (SFM&FC) have been implemented in Vietnam since the early 2000s, based on the implementation of the Vietnam Forestry Development Strategy for the period 2006–2020 and, more recently, the Vietnam Forestry Development Strategy for the period 2021–2030, with a vision to 2050. In addition, SFM&FC have been legally regulated under Articles 27 and 28 of the Law on Forestry.

The Vietnam Forest Certification Scheme (VFCS) was established under Decision No. 1288/QĐ-TTg dated 1 October 2018 of the Prime Minister approving the Scheme on Sustainable Forest Management and Forest Certification. During the period 2019–2021, the Vietnam Administration of Forestry served as the National Governing Body (NGB), and the Vietnam Forest Certification Office (VFCO) operated under the Vietnam Administration of Forestry. During this period, Vietnam became the 51st member of the Programme for the Endorsement of Forest Certification (PEFC) on 30 May 2019, and VFCS was officially endorsed by PEFC on 29 October 2020. In October 2021, the role of the NGB was assigned to the Vietnam Academy of Forest Sciences (VAFS), and VFCO was designated as the operating organisation of VFCS, with legal status under VAFS, pursuant to Decisions No. 3924/QĐ-BNN-TCCB and No. 3925/QĐ-BNN-TCCB dated 4 October 2021 issued by the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development.

Certification of sustainable forest management and chain of custody shall be conducted in accordance with the applicable standards within the VFCS/PEFC system and serves as the basis for certification bodies to carry out certification assessments for forest owners, wood processing enterprises, and forest product businesses.

The requirements for certification bodies operating within the Vietnam Forest Certification Scheme are developed based on Decree No. 22/2026/NĐ-CP detailing a number of articles and measures for the implementation of the Law on Standards and Technical Regulations; PEFC ST 1004:2024 – Requirements for Certification Bodies operating certification against PEFC endorsed forest management standards; PEFC ST 2003:2020 – Requirements for certification bodies providing certification against the PEFC international Chain of Custody standard; TCVN ISO/IEC 17065:2013 (ISO/IEC 17065:2012) – Conformity assessment – Requirements for bodies certifying products, processes and services; and TCVN ISO/IEC 17021-1:2015 (ISO/IEC 17021-1:2015) – Conformity assessment – Requirements for bodies providing audit and certification of management systems.

This document specifies requirements for certification bodies, accreditation bodies, and relevant parties providing accreditation and certification services for SFM and Chain of Custody under the VFCS/PEFC system. This document replaces VFCS/PEFC ST 1006:2019 – Requirements for certification bodies providing certification for sustainable forest management under the Vietnam forest certification scheme or PEFC Chain of Custody certification.

1 Scope

This document applies to certification bodies, accreditation bodies, and authorities, organizations, and individuals involved in the provision of sustainable forest management certification services under the Vietnam Forest Certification Scheme and PEFC Chain of Custody (CoC) certification services.

2 Normative references

The following cited documents are essential for the application of this document. For cited documents stating the year of publication, the cited version shall apply. For cited documents without the year of publication, the latest version, including amendments (if any) shall apply.

PEFC ST 1004:2024, *Requirements for Certification Bodies operating Certification against PEFC Endorsed Forest Management Standards*

PEFC ST 2003:2020, *Requirements for Certification Bodies operating Certification against the PEFC International Chain of Custody Standard*

PEFC ST 2002:2020, *Chain of Custody of Forest and Tree Based Products – Requirements*

PEFC ST 2001:2020, *PEFC Trademarks Rules – Requirements*

VFCS/PEFC ST 1003:2026 (TCVN 14596:2025), *Sustainable forest management – Requirements*

VFCS/PEFC ST 1004:2026, *Group forest management – Requirements*

TCVN ISO/IEC 17065:2013 (ISO/IEC 17065:2012), *Conformity assessment – Requirements for bodies certifying products, processes and services*

TCVN ISO/IEC 17021-1:2015 (ISO/IEC 17021-1:2015), *Conformity assessment – Requirements for bodies providing audit and certification of management systems – Part 1: Requirements*

TCVN ISO/IEC 17000:2020 (ISO/IEC 17000:2020), *Conformity assessment – Vocabulary and general principles*

TCVN ISO 19011:2018 (ISO 19011:2018), *Guidelines for auditing management systems*

IAF MD 4:2025, *IAF Mandatory Document for the Use of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) for Auditing/Assessment Purposes, Issue 3*

3 Terms and definitions

For the purposes of this standard, the relevant definitions given in ISO/IEC 17000, TCVN ISO/IEC 17021-1:2015 (ISO/IEC 17021-1:2015), TCVN ISO/IEC 17065:2013 (ISO/IEC 17065:2012), TCVN 14596:2025, VFCS/PEFC ST 1003 and VFCS/PEFC ST 1004 apply, together with the following definitions:

3.1 Affected stakeholder

A stakeholder who might experience a direct change in living and/or working conditions caused by the implementation of a standard, or a stakeholder who might be a user of a standard and therefore is subject to the requirements of the standard.

NOTE 1: Affected stakeholders include neighbouring communities, Indigenous people, workers, etc. However, having an interest in the subject matter of the standard (e.g., NGOs, scientific community, civil society) is not equal to being affected.

NOTE 2: A stakeholder who might be a user of the standard is likely to become a certified entity, e.g., a forest manager in the case of a forest management standard, or a wood processing enterprise in the case of a chain of custody standard.

3.2 PEFC National Governing Bodies (PEFC NGBs)

PEFC National Governing Bodies are independent national organisations established to develop and implement the PEFC system within their respective countries. A list of PEFC NGBs and their contact details is available on the PEFC website. PEFC NGBs are often also the PEFC authorised bodies.

NOTE: In Vietnam, the Vietnam Academy of Forest Science (VAFS) is the PEFC NGB and also serves as the PEFC Authorised Body. The Vietnam Forest Certification Office (VFCO) is authorised to manage the operation of VFCS (namely VFCS authorised body).

3.3 PEFC recognised database

Databases maintained by PEFC National Governing Bodies (PEFC NGBs) or by holders of group forest certificates, in which all data necessary for the implementation of forest management certification—such as up-to-date participant data and the area covered by the certificate—are collected, maintained, and adequately protected.

3.4 Technical expert

A person who provides specific knowledge or expertise to the audit team.

NOTE: Specific knowledge or expertise refers to knowledge or expertise related to the organisation, process, or activity being audited.

[SOURCE: ISO/IEC 17021:2015, 3.14]

3.5 Certificate

A document issued by a certification body under the provisions of this standard confirming that the requirements specified in the VFCS/PEFC forest management standard and the PEFC Chain of Custody standard are fulfilled.

NOTE: Certificates are sometimes referred as “certification documents”.

3.6 Audit programme

Arrangements for a set of one or more audits planned for a specific time frame and directed towards a specific purpose.

[SOURCE: ISO 19011:2018, 3.4]

3.7 Terminated certification

The certification has been voluntarily cancelled by the client during the validity of the certification cycle.

3.8 Suspended certification

The certification is temporarily invalidated by the certification body.

3.9 Expired certification

The certification is not renewed after the certificate expiry date.

3.10 Information and communication technologies (ICT)

The use of technology for gathering, storing, retrieving, processing, analysing, and transmitting information. ICT includes software and hardware such as smartphones, handheld devices, laptop computers, desktop computers, drones, video cameras, wearable technology, artificial intelligence, and other technologies. The use of ICT may be appropriate for audit and certification activities conducted both on-site and remotely.

NOTE: The use of ICT shall conform with IAF MD 4:2025 and any additional guidance issued by VFCS (if applicable).

[SOURCE: IAF MD4:2025]

3.11 Special audits

Special audits are audits that are unplanned or otherwise outside the audit programme and may be conducted at short notice.

NOTE: Special audits may be necessary due to scope extension or to investigate complaints or substantiated concerns.

3.12 Remote auditing

Audit activities may be conducted at remote locations through the use of information and communication technology (ICT).

3.13 Corrupt practice

Corrupt practices include bribery of public officials; embezzlement, trading in influence, abuse of function, and illicit enrichment by public officials; bribery and embezzlement in the private sector; as well as money laundering and obstruction of justice, in accordance with the Vietnamese legal regulations on anti-corruption and the United Nations Convention against Corruption.

3.14 Audit plan

Description of the activities and arrangements for a specific audit

[SOURCE: ISO 19011:2018, 3.6]

3.15 Substantiated concern

Information or a complaint supported by proof or evidence indicating a serious failure to comply with the requirements of VFCS or PEFC endorsed certification systems and/or a reputational risk for VFCS and PEFC.

NOTE: A substantiated concern may originate from third parties or from the client itself.

3.16 Certification decision maker

A person or a group of persons (e.g. a committee) that has not been involved in the audit process and is assigned by the certification body to make the certification decision.

3.17 Major nonconformity

The absence of, or failure to implement and maintain, one or more requirements of the VFCS/PEFC Sustainable Forest Management standard against which the audit is carried out, which may result in a systemic risk to the function and effectiveness of forest management.

NOTE: A major nonconformity may be an individual nonconformity or a number of related minor nonconformities that, when considered together, are judged to constitute a major nonconformity.

3.18 Minor nonconformity

A failure to fulfil the requirements of the VFCS/PEFC Sustainable Forest Management standard and other applicable requirements of VFCS and PEFC against which the audit is carried out, which does not result in a systemic risk to the function and effectiveness of forest management.

3.19 Reviewer

A person or a group of people (e.g. a committee) that has not been involved in the audit process and is assigned by the certification body to review all information and results related to the audit.

3.20 Documented information

Information required to be controlled and maintained by an organisation, in any format and media, from any source.

3.21 Certification body

A third-party conformity assessment body operating certification VFCS/PEFC standards, which is accredited for that system according to ISO/IEC 17021 by an accreditation body member of IAF MLA.

3.22 Accreditation body

An authoritative body that performs accreditation, where accreditation is the third-party attestation related to a conformity assessment body conveying formal recognition of its competence to carry out specific conformity assessment activities.

[SOURCE: Based on ISO/IEC 17011]

3.23 PEFC authorised body

A PEFC authorised body is an entity authorised by the PEFC Council to issue PEFC trademark licences and to notify certification bodies on behalf of the PEFC Council. Typically, authorised bodies are the PEFC National Governing Bodies.

3.24 Client organisation/client

Organisation, including a group organisation, that is certified or is seeking certification of its forest management system or chain of custody system.

NOTE: The client is the holder of the certificate and is responsible for ensuring that all requirements of the forest management standard are met with respect to the certified area covered by that certificate, or that all requirements of the PEFC CoC standard are met for the CoC system.

4 Requirements for sustainable forest management certification bodies

4.1 General requirements

4.1.1 Legal and contractual matters

4.1.1.1 The certification body shall establish a legally enforceable certification agreement with the client.

4.1.1.2 The certification agreement with the client shall clearly specify:

a) The applicable ISO/IEC standard/s against which the certification body is operating.

b) The certification body's accreditation status, scope of accreditation, and the accreditation body that issued the accreditation; and

c) The PEFC notified certification body status, scope of the notification, and the VFCS authorised body that has issued the notification.

4.1.1.3 The certification agreement shall include, at least, the following content:

– Implementation of the requirements:

a) The client's commitment to fulfil all certification requirements, including appropriate implementation;

b) The client's commitment to implement changes within an agreed transition period when there are changes to certification requirements;

c) The client's commitment to retain records demonstrating compliance with certification requirements for the duration of the current certification cycle plus the previous certification cycle;

d) The client's obligation to inform the certification body within 30 days of any changes that may affect its ability to comply with certification requirements;

– Audit process:

e) Client's commitment to provide access during the certification process to observers from accreditation bodies, the PEFC Council and/or VFCS, as well as representatives of workers and trade unions (e.g. for witnessing activities or validation audits), upon request;

f) Client's commitment to make the necessary arrangements for the conduct of audits and the investigation of complaints;

g) The conditions under which the certification body may conduct special audits, as per 4.4.6.3, and the client's commitment to accept those;

– Use of PEFC trademarks:

h) Client's commitment to use the PEFC and VFCS trademarks, as well as the accreditation body's and certification body's marks, in compliance with applicable requirements and consistent with the scope of certification, and not to make any misleading, unauthorised, or reputationally damaging claims regarding PEFC, VFCS, certification bodies, or accreditation bodies;

i) Upon suspension, withdrawal, or termination of certification, client's commitment to discontinue the use of all advertising materials containing any reference to certification and to take actions and measures as required by VFCS and PEFC (e.g. return of certification documents), as appropriate;

j) Upon suspension, withdrawal, or termination of certification, or where VFCS or the VFCS/PEFC forest management standard is suspended or terminated, client's commitment to cease all use of PEFC claims or PEFC trademarks;

k) If the client provides copies of the certification documents to others, the documents shall be reproduced in their entirety or as specified in VFCS;

l) Client's commitment to keep records of all complaints and substantiated concerns received that relate to compliance with certification requirements;

m) Client's commitment to take appropriate action with respect to complaints and any deficiencies that affect compliance with the requirements for certification;

n) Client's commitment to make records of all complaints and substantiated concerns available to the certification body, PEFC Council, the VFCS authorised body, and/or the accreditation body, on request.

4.1.2 Impartiality

4.1.2.1 The certification body shall establish procedures to ensure that personnel involved in certification activities are free from conflicts of interest and are independent from the client.

4.1.3 Confidentiality

4.1.3.1 The certification body shall comply with all applicable privacy and data protection laws.

4.1.3.2 The certification body shall commit to a data protection related agreement with the PEFC Council and when appropriate, also with VFCS authorised body. The agreement shall specify each party's rights and obligations concerning the protection of personal data. It regulates the particularities of data processing – such as its scope and purpose – as well as the relationship between the controller and the processor.

4.1.4 Risk-based approach

Certification bodies operating sustainable forest management certification shall apply a risk-based approach.

4.2 Resource requirements

4.2.1 Personnel involved in certification activities

4.2.1.1 General

4.2.1.1.1 The certification body shall ensure that personnel involved in the certification activities have the relevant and appropriate knowledge and competencies corresponding to these activities, including specific knowledge of VFCS and PEFC.

4.2.1.1.2 Any personnel involved in VFCS and PEFC certification shall have at least basic knowledge of the VFCS and PEFC systems and the relevant certification criteria appropriate to their roles and responsibilities.

4.2.1.1.3 The certification body should ensure a safe working environment, provide equal opportunities, prevent discrimination, promote gender equality, and ensure that no intimidation or harassment occurs in the workplace. Appropriate training and internal policies shall be implemented.

4.2.1.2 Auditors

4.2.1.2.1 General requirements

The certification body shall have a documented process to ensure that auditors possess personal attributes, knowledge, and skills in accordance with VFCS requirements.

4.2.1.2.2 Education

4.2.1.2.2.1 The certification body shall ensure that auditors have knowledge equivalent to at least post-secondary education (vocational training, college, university, or equivalent).

Note: Post-secondary education, also referred to as tertiary education, is the level of education following the completion of secondary education. It may be obtained, among other ways, at universities, technical institutions, or colleges.

4.2.1.2.2.2 The certification body shall ensure that auditors have completed formal training courses related to forestry.

4.2.1.2.2.3 The specific forestry-related education requirement (4.2.1.2.2.2) may be substituted by relevant work experience, provided that the certification body can demonstrate that such experience is equivalent to the required level of education.

4.2.1.2.3 Work experience

4.2.1.2.3.1 The certification body shall ensure that auditors have a minimum of three years of full-time work experience in a relevant field (e.g. forestry, trees outside forests, biodiversity, natural resource management).

4.2.1.2.3.2 The total years of work experience may be reduced by one year if the auditor has completed post-secondary education (vocational training, college, university, or equivalent) in forestry, biodiversity, or natural resource management.

NOTE: Post-secondary education, also referred to as tertiary education, is the level of education following the completion of secondary education. It may be obtained, among other ways, at universities, technical institutions, or colleges.

4.2.1.2.4 Training in forest management under VFCS/PEFC standards

The certification body shall ensure that new auditors have participated in and completed initial training organised by VFCS before commencing audit activities.

NOTE: The VFCS and PEFC websites provide further information on training courses.

4.2.1.2.5 Audit training

The certification body shall ensure that auditors have completed training in auditing techniques based on ISO 19011.

4.2.1.2.6 Audit experience

For the initial qualification of an auditor, the certification body shall ensure that the auditor has conducted, as an auditor in training, at least 40 hours of forest management audits or equivalent audits (e.g. trees outside forests, ISO 9001, ISO 14001 or ISO 45001 audits in forestry or related fields, biodiversity, natural resource management), under the supervision of a qualified lead auditor within the most recent one-year period.

NOTE: The 40 hours of audit experience as an auditor in training should include different types of audits (initial audits, surveillance audits, and recertification audits).

4.2.1.2.7 Competencies

4.2.1.2.7.1 The certification body shall ensure that auditors demonstrate the ability to apply knowledge and skills in the following areas:

a) Requirements of sustainable forest management standards and group forest management applicable under the VFCS/PEFC;

b) Audit principles, procedures, and techniques, and their appropriate application to different types of audits, ensuring that audits are conducted in a consistent and systematic manner;

c) Organisational management, including organisational size, structure, functions, relationships, general business processes, risk management, and cultural and social aspects;

d) Appropriate knowledge of socio-demographic characteristics, sustainability issues, cultural aspects (including gender equality), interests and values of indigenous peoples and local communities, and applicable regulations, as well as labour relations within the scope of forest management requirements;

e) Knowledge of relevant laws, regulations, or other requirements, including:

   (i) Contracts and agreements and/or collective bargaining agreements (where applicable);

   (ii) National Forest governance and law enforcement systems, including regulations on social rights, labour and trade union rights, and occupational health and safety;

(iii) International conventions related to workers' rights (core ILO conventions);

(iv) International treaties and conventions related to forestry, forest product trade, and products from trees outside forests;

f) Principles of forest management based on technical practices, including forest inventory, planning, protection, forest ecosystem management, identification and management of areas of ecological significance, carbon stocks, and biodiversity, as well as technical aspects of forestry operations and their potential impacts;

g) Understanding and ability to apply Geographic Information Systems (GIS) in forest monitoring and management;

h) Management and control of online documentation, data and records, confidential data, privacy, and data protection; and

i) Application of risk assessment techniques.

4.2.1.2.7.2 The certification body shall ensure that the audit team includes individuals with the full range of competencies appropriate to the audit scope.

4.2.1.2.8 Maintenance of auditor competence

4.2.1.2.8.1 Training in forest management under VFCS and PEFC

4.2.1.2.8.1.1 To maintain auditor qualification, the certification body shall ensure that qualified auditors participate in update training on VFCS and PEFC forest management with each new version of the forest management standard(s) or standards specifying requirements for certification bodies for sustainable forest management, when issued.

4.2.1.2.8.1.2 The certification body shall ensure that the update training specified in 4.2.1.2.8.1.1 is successfully completed before conducting audits against the revised standard.

4.2.1.2.8.2 Audit experience

4.2.1.2.8.2.1 To maintain auditor qualification, the certification body shall ensure that auditors conduct a minimum of 40 hours of forest management audits or equivalent audits (e.g. trees outside forests, ISO 9001, ISO 14001 or ISO 45001 audits in forestry or related fields, biodiversity, natural resource management) per year.

4.2.1.2.8.2.2 In exceptional cases, such as statutory leave, long-term illness, or lack of opportunities to provide certification services, auditors who cannot meet the requirement in 4.2.1.2.8.2.1 shall conduct 20 hours of forest management audits under the supervision of a qualified auditor, or undergo a formal competence evaluation by the certification body before resuming audit activities.

NOTE: The exception may be applied for a period during which the requirements specified in 4.2.1.2.8.2.1 cannot be fulfilled, for a maximum of 24 months.

4.2.1.3 Audit team

4.2.1.3.1 General requirements

4.2.1.3.1.1 The audit team shall include auditor(s) meeting the requirements specified in 4.2.1.2.7.

4.2.1.3.1.2 The certification body shall have documented procedures for the selection and assignment of the audit team, including the audit team leader.

4.2.1.3.1.3 The certification body shall consider gender balance within the audit team.

4.2.1.3.2 Technical expert

4.2.1.3.2.1 The certification body may engage technical experts to support the audit team. Technical experts shall be independent of the client, and their names, qualifications, and affiliations shall be included in the audit report.

4.2.1.3.2.2 The certification body shall ensure that any potential conflicts of interest are declared and managed.

4.2.1.3.2.3 The certification body shall ensure that technical experts report to the audit team leader, operate only within their assigned tasks, do not make certification decisions, and do not issue audit findings.

4.2.1.3.3 Translators and interpreters

4.2.1.3.3.1 Translators and interpreters used during the audit shall be independent of the client.

4.2.1.3.3.2 Where independent translators and/or interpreters are not available, their names and relationship with the client shall be included in the audit report.

4.2.1.3.3.3 The certification body shall ensure that any potential conflicts of interest are managed.

4.2.1.4 Reviewer and certification decision maker

4.2.1.4.1 General

4.2.1.4.1.1 The certification body shall be responsible for, and shall retain authority over, certification decisions.

4.2.1.4.1.2 The certification body shall ensure that the reviewer and certification decision maker are independent from the audit team and the client.

4.2.1.4.1.3 The certification body shall ensure that personnel involved in the review and decision-making process have a legally binding relationship with the certification body, including compliance with the requirements of this standard.

NOTE: The reviewer and certification decision maker may be the same individual.

4.2.1.4.2 Education

4.2.1.4.2.1 The certification body shall ensure that the reviewer and certification decision maker have knowledge equivalent to at least post-secondary education (vocational training, college, university, or equivalent).

NOTE: Tertiary education, also referred to as tertiary education, is the level of education following the completion of secondary education. It may be obtained, among other ways, at universities, technical institutions, or colleges.

4.2.1.3.4.2.2 The certification body shall ensure that the reviewer and certification decision maker have completed formal training courses related to forestry.

4.2.1.3.4.2.3 The specific forestry-related education requirement (4.2.1.4.2.2) may be substituted by relevant work experience, provided that the certification body can demonstrate that such experience is equivalent to the required level of education.

4.2.1.4.3 Work experience

4.2.1.4.3.1 The certification body shall ensure that the reviewer and certification decision maker have work experience relevant to the audits they review.

4.2.1.4.3.2 The certification body shall ensure that the reviewer and certification decision maker have a minimum of three years of full-time work experience in conformity assessment.

4.2.1.4.3.3 The required years of work experience may be reduced by one year if the reviewer and certification decision maker have completed post-secondary education (vocational training, college, university, or equivalent) in a relevant field (e.g. forestry, trees outside forests, biodiversity, or natural resource management).

NOTE: Tertiary education, also referred to as tertiary education, is the level of education following the completion of secondary education. It may be obtained, among other ways, at universities, technical institutions, or colleges.

4.2.1.4.3.4 A qualified VFCS and PEFC forest management auditor shall be considered to meet the minimum work experience requirements.

4.2.1.4.4 Training in forest management under VFCS/PEFC

4.2.1.4.4.1 The certification body shall ensure that new reviewers and certification decision makers have participated in initial training about VFCS/PEFC provided by VFCS.

4.2.1.4.4.2 The certification body shall ensure that such training is successfully completed before they commence certification activities.

NOTE: Detailed information on training courses is available on the VFCS/PEFC websites.

4.2.1.4.5 Audit training

The certification body shall ensure that reviewers and certification decision makers have completed training in auditing techniques based on ISO 19011.

4.2.1.4.6 Audit experience

For the initial qualification of a reviewer or certification decision maker, the certification body shall ensure that the individual has participated as an observer in forest management audits or equivalent audits (e.g. trees outside forests, ISO 9001, ISO 14001 or ISO 45001 audits in forestry or related fields, biodiversity, natural resource management) for a minimum duration of eight hours.

The observation shall include the opening meeting, part of the office audit, part of the field audit, and the closing meeting.

4.2.1.4.7 Competencies

4.2.1.4.7.1 The certification body shall ensure that reviewers and certification decision makers demonstrate the ability to apply knowledge and skills in the following areas:

a) Objectives and requirements of sustainable forest management and group forest management in accordance with applicable standards and regulations under the Vietnam Forest Certification Scheme (VFCS/PEFC).

b) Understanding of socio-demographic characteristics, sustainability issues, and cultural aspects (including gender equality), as well as the interests and values of indigenous peoples and local communities and applicable regulations, and labour relations within the scope of forest management requirements.

c) General knowledge of laws, regulations, or other relevant requirements related to forest management, labour issues, and privacy and data protection.

d) Principles of forest management.

e) Management and control of online documentation, data and records, confidential data, privacy, and data protection; and

f) Application of risk assessment techniques.

4.2.1.4.7.2 The certification body shall ensure that the team of reviewers and certification decision makers collectively includes individuals with the full range of competencies required for the audit scope.

4.2.1.4.8 Maintenance of qualification as reviewer or certification decision maker

4.2.1.4.8.1 Training in forest management under applicable VFCS/PEFC standards

4.2.1.4.8.1.1 To maintain qualification as a reviewer or certification decision maker, the certification body shall ensure that qualified reviewers or certification decision makers participate in update training on VFCS/PEFC forest management whenever a new version of the VFCS/PEFC forest management standard(s) for which they are qualified to perform certification activities, or standards specifying requirements for certification bodies for sustainable forest management, is issued.

4.2.1.4.8.1.2 The certification body shall ensure that such update training is successfully completed before the reviewer or certification decision maker performs certification activities against the updated standard.

4.2.1.4.8.2 Audit experience

To maintain qualification as a reviewer or certification decision maker, the certification body shall ensure that qualified reviewers or certification decision makers participate as observers in forest management audits or equivalent audits (e.g. trees outside forests, ISO 9001, ISO 14001 or ISO 45001 audits in forestry or related fields, biodiversity, natural resource management) for a minimum total of 16 hours within each two-year period, including part of an office audit, part of a field audit, and the closing meeting.

NOTE: Observation activities may be conducted remotely using information and communication technologies (ICT).

4.2.2 Personnel records and annual monitoring

4.2.2.1 The certification body shall maintain records of personnel's compliance with the requirements of this clause.

NOTE: Records can be maintained in digital format.

4.2.2.2 The certification body shall conduct annual monitoring of the performance of sustainable forest management auditors, using methods such as review of audit reports or client feedback, based on the frequency of audits conducted and the level of risk associated with their activities.

4.2.2.3 As part of monitoring activities, the certification body shall conduct audit witnessing for each forest management auditor at least once every five years.

4.2.2.4 The certification body shall maintain documented information on the performance results of sustainable forest management auditors.

4.2.2.5 The certification body shall use the results of performance monitoring and audit witnessing to identify training needs.

Table 1 – Overview of qualification requirements for auditors, reviewers, and Certification decision makers

<table>
<tr><th></th><th>Auditors</th><th>Reviewers and Certification Decision Makers</th></tr>
<tr><td>Education</td><td colspan="2">Knowledge is equivalent to at least post-secondary education (vocational training, college, university or equivalent).
Formal training courses related to forestry.
Specific forestry education may be substituted by relevant work experience if the certification body can demonstrate equivalence.</td></tr>
<tr><td>Work experience</td><td>Minimum of three years of full-time professional experience in a relevant field (e.g. forestry, trees outside forests, biodiversity, natural resource management).
May be reduced by one year if the auditor has completed post-secondary education (vocational training, college, university or equivalent) in forestry, biodiversity, or natural resource management.</td><td>Relevant experience in relation to the audits under review.
A minimum of three years of full-time work experience in conformity assessment.
May be reduced by one year if the reviewer and certification decision maker have completed post-secondary education (vocational training, college, university or equivalent) in a relevant field (e.g. forestry, trees outside forests, biodiversity, or natural resource management).
A VFCS-qualified sustainable forest management auditor shall be considered to meet the minimum work experience requirements for reviewers and certification decision makers.</td></tr>
<tr><td>Training</td><td colspan="2">Initial training provided by VFCS before commencing audit activities.
ISO/IEC 19011.</td></tr>
</table>

	Auditors	Reviewers and Certification Decision Makers
Audit experience	• The auditor shall have conducted, as an auditor in training, at least 40 hours of forest management audits or equivalent audits under the supervision of a qualified lead auditor within the most recent one-year period.	• The reviewer or certification decision maker shall have participated as an observer in forest management audits or equivalent audits for a minimum duration of eight hours. The observation shall include the opening meeting, part of the office audit, part of the field audit, and the closing meeting.
Competence	See 4.2.1.2.7.	See 4.2.1.4.7.
Maintenance of Qualification		
Training	• Participate in update training organised by VFCS whenever a new version of the VFCS/PEFC forest management standard(s) for which they are qualified, or standards specifying requirements for certification bodies for sustainable forest management, is issued. • Update training shall be completed before conducting certification activities against the revised standard.	
Audit experience	• A minimum of 40 hours of forest management audits or equivalent audits per year. • In exceptional cases such as statutory leave, long-term illness, or lack of opportunities to provide certification services, auditors who cannot meet the above requirement shall conduct 20 hours of forest management audits under the supervision of a qualified or undergo a formal competence evaluation by the certification body before resuming audit activities (The exception may be applied for a period during which the requirements specified in 4.2.1.2.8.2.1 cannot be fulfilled, for a maximum of 24 months).	• Participate as an observer in forest management audits or equivalent audits for a minimum of 16 hours within each two-year period, including part of an office audit, part of a field audit, and the closing meeting.

NOTE: This table provides a summary of the requirements for maintaining qualifications of auditors, reviewers, and certification decision makers. Detailed requirements are specified within this standard.

4.3 Information requirements

4.3.1 Publicly information

4.3.1.1 General

4.3.1.1.1 Upon request, the certification body shall provide clients and potential clients with detailed information on the fee structure and estimated costs for obtaining and maintaining certification.

4.3.2 Certification documentation

4.3.2.1 Certification document

4.3.2.1.1 The certificate shall include, at a minimum, the following information:

a) identification of the certification body (including at least the full name, abbreviation (if any), address, and contact information);

b) name and address of the client;

c) unique certificate code;

d) type of certificate (single certificate or group forest certificate);

e) place and date of issue;

f) date of certification issuance, extension or renewal, and expiry date or recertification due date;

g) logo and/or signature of the issuing body;

h) scope of certification and the standard(s) against which certification is granted;

i) accreditation body mark in accordance with applicable rules, including the accreditation number where applicable;

j) VFCS logo and PEFC logo, together with the PEFC trademark license number of the certification body (including a link to the PEFC website and a note stating that information on VFCS is publicly available on the PEFC website); and

k) a note stating that up-to-date information on the certified area and the number of group participants (for group forest certification) can be verified in the PEFC database.

4.3.2.1.2 The effective date on the certification document shall not be earlier than the date of the certification decision.

4.3.2.1.3 The certificate code shall consist of four information elements, each separated by a hyphen, in the following order: **AAA-VFCS-FM-######(-#),** where:

● **AAA** is the abbreviation of the **certification body**. "AAA" is a variable-length uppercase abbreviation of the certification body issuing the certificate, consisting only of uppercase English letters (A–Z) and without spaces. "CC", the ISO 3166 Alpha-2 country code (https://www.iso.org/obp/ui/#search), may be added to distinguish national offices of the certification body from its head office. The country code "CC" for Vietnam is "VN".

● **VFCS is the abbreviation of the Vietnam Forest Certification Scheme**.

● **FM**. is used for sustainable forest management certification. For certification of trees outside forests, "FM" shall be replaced by "TOF".

● **######**: is the numerical identification code of the certificate holder assigned by the certification body.

● **(-#)** optional numerical identification code of a group participant assigned by the certification body, where applicable.

NOTE 1: Parentheses () are not included in the certificate number and are for illustrative purposes only.

NOTE 2: The certification body may determine the length and digits of the numerical identification code, as well as the optional numerical identification code for group participants.

EXAMPLE 1: XWZ-VFCS-FM-877506 (XWZ is a hypothetical abbreviation for a non-existent certification body).

EXAMPLE 2: XWZ-VFCS-TOF-877506 (XWZ is a hypothetical abbreviation for a non-existent certification body).

4.3.2.1.4 The certification body shall coordinate its abbreviation with the VFCS authorised body prior to use. Two certification bodies shall not have the same abbreviation.

NOTE: The accepted abbreviation for a certification body is displayed on the PEFC website, under the Find Certification Bodies section.

4.3.2.1.5 Certification bodies shall use the same abbreviation with all certificate codes on any PEFC recognised certificate they issue against VFCS/PEFC forest management standards.

4.3.2.1.6 If an individual certificate covers several forest areas, those areas shall be described on the certificate, or an appendix to the certificate. Otherwise, the certificate shall include a reference to the PEFC database or the corresponding PEFC recognised database for the information related to the certified areas.

NOTE: PEFC recognised databases are available from the PEFC International database, accessible from the PEFC website.

4.3.3 Reference to certification and use of trademarks

4.3.3.1 Where the certification body uses the PEFC trademark on certification documents or for any other purpose related to VFCS, such use shall be based on a valid licence issued by the PEFC Council or VFCS and shall comply with PEFC ST 2001, PEFC Trademarks Rules – Requirements.

4.3.3.2 The certification body shall inform the client that the PEFC trademark on the issued certificate only refers to the client's compliance with the VFCS certification system and does not grant the client any right to use such trademarks unless the client holds a valid PEFC trademark licence.

NOTE: The client may obtain a PEFC trademark license from the PEFC Council or VFCS.

4.3.4 Confidentiality

4.3.4.1 The certification body shall limit the collection of personal data from the client to what is necessary for certification purposes. The collection of personal data shall always be carried out in accordance with applicable legal requirements.

NOTE: One way to ensure confidentiality is to provide general contact information such as a generic contact person and a general email address rather than personal email addresses, e.g. certification manager, certificationmanager@xmail.com.

4.3.5 Information exchange between the certification body and VFCS and/or the PEFC Council

4.3.5.1 The certification body shall inform VFCS within five (5) working days from the date certification is granted, suspended, terminated, withdrawn, when the scope of certification changes, or when any other changes that affect certification or information that certification bodies are required to report to PEFC.

4.3.5.2 The certification body shall collect and report information as required by VFCS or PEFC.

4.3.5.3 The certification body shall verify the certified area in hectares at each audit and report any changes to VFCS at least annually.

4.3.5.4 Upon request, the certification body shall provide VFCS and/or PEFC with any information related to the certification process and the client, such as full audit reports or information on open nonconformities, where there is a concern about reputational risk to PEFC.

4.3.6 Engagement of affected stakeholders

4.3.6.1 General

4.3.6.1.1 During the audit, the certification body shall verify the effectiveness of the client's procedures for the involvement of affected stakeholders.

4.3.6.1.2 During the audit, the certification body shall consider any information provided by affected stakeholders, where available.

NOTE: This process does not replace the normal complaint handling procedures of the client or the certification body.

4.3.6.2 Engagement process for affected stakeholders

4.3.6.2.1 The certification body shall have a documented process for the involvement of affected stakeholders. This process shall ensure that such involvement does not adversely affect the impartiality, independence, and confidentiality of the certification body's or the client's activities.

4.3.6.2.2 The certification body's process for the involvement of affected stakeholders shall include the following steps:

a) verification of the effectiveness of the client's identification of affected stakeholders;

b) ensure that the client provides public notification of the audit;

c) communication with affected stakeholders during the audit, where necessary;

d) summarizing the involvement of affected stakeholders in the summary audit report.

4.3.6.3 Identification of affected stakeholders

4.3.6.3.1 The certification body shall require the client, prior to the audit, to provide:

a) information on how affected stakeholders have been identified;

b) the relevant needs and expectations of these stakeholders;

NOTE: The identification of needs and expectations of affected stakeholders is specified in the forest management standard under the VFCS/PEFC system.

c) how these needs and expectations are considered in forest management activities.

4.3.6.3.2 The certification body shall take this information into account when planning the audit.

4.3.6.4 Public notification of the audit

4.3.6.4.1 The certification body shall ensure that the timing of the initial or recertification audit is publicly announced to affected stakeholders at least 30 days prior to the audit.

4.3.6.4.2 The notification may be made by the client or by the certification body.

4.3.6.4.3 The notification shall state that, during the audit, auditors will assess the client's engagement and consultation with affected stakeholders and shall require the client to collect written expressions of interest from affected stakeholders.

4.3.6.5 Engagement with affected stakeholders during the audit process

4.3.6.5.1 The certification body shall consider feedback received and assess its relevance to the evaluation of certification requirements. The certification body shall consult affected stakeholders as part of the audit process, in proportion to the feedback received and the requirements of the standard.

4.3.6.5.2 The certification body shall apply effective and culturally appropriate consultation methods with affected stakeholders.

4.3.6.5.3 The audit plan should allocate sufficient time for consultation and communication with affected stakeholders.

4.3.6.6 Summary of affected stakeholder engagement in summary audit reports

4.3.6.6.1 The summary audit report shall describe the process of involvement of affected stakeholders, including how their inputs were considered and the issues raised during this process.

4.3.6.6.2 The certification body shall ensure that the summary audit report does not include any confidential information provided by affected stakeholders.

4.4 Process requirements

4.4.1 Pre-certification activities

4.4.1.1 Application

The certification body shall require the certification applicant to provide the following information as part of the certification application:

a) Name and address of the certification applicant, legal entity (where applicable), and legal status (including valid business registration).

b) Identification of whether the certification is a single forest certificate or a group forest certificate.

c) Area proposed for certification.

d) A brief description of the forest area proposed for certification and the associated forest management activities.

e) A summary of relevant technical facilities or resources (e.g. chemical storage, log yards, maintenance facilities, fire prevention and control facilities, administrative offices, etc.).

f) Any relevant information required for evaluation in the case of certification transfer rather than a new application.

g) A declaration on whether the certification applicant or its predecessor entity has participated in the VFCS/PEFC system or other certification systems for forest management purposes within the last five years. This shall include, but is not limited to, any suspension, withdrawal, or termination of certification within the last five years; identified nonconformities; certification decisions; the basis for such decisions; corrective actions taken (if any); and the corresponding outcomes.

h) Name of any consultant engaged to support the implementation of VFCS/PEFC certification, where applicable.

NOTE 1: This information does not necessarily need to be collected at the first contact with the certification applicant but shall be provided at least before the application review.

NOTE 2: The certification body may request additional information.

4.4.1.2 Application review

4.4.1.2.1 The certification body shall only review the certification application once all information specified in 4.4.1.1 has been provided.

NOTE: 4.4.1.2.13, 4.4.1.2.14 and 4.4.1.2.15 describe the requirements that the certification body shall follow when the application is a transfer of an existing certificate from one certification body to another and not a new application.

4.4.1.2.2 The certification body shall have a documented process for reviewing certification applications.

4.4.1.2.3 The certification body shall ensure that the application review identifies and evaluates the complexity and scale of the forest management activities within the scope of certification.

4.4.1.2.4 The certification body shall have a documented process to ensure that it has the competence and capability to provide certification services to the applicant.

4.4.1.2.5 The certification body shall maintain records of the justification for the decision to accept the certification application.

4.4.1.2.6 The certification body shall refuse to provide certification services if it does not have sufficient competence or capability to do so.

4.4.1.2.7 Prior to accepting the certification application, the certification body shall define acceptance criteria for certification applicants.

4.4.1.2.8 The acceptance criteria shall identify any current or past involvement of the certification applicant, or its predecessor entity, in corrupt practices.

4.4.1.2.9 The certification body shall evaluate the certification applicant against the established criteria, including the predecessor entity where applicable, and retain records of the evaluation results. The evaluation shall determine the suitability of the applicant for certification prior to acceptance.

4.4.1.2.10 The certification body shall reject the certification application where there is evidence that the certification applicant is engaged in corrupt practices.

4.4.1.2.11 In cases of past involvement in corrupt practices, the certification body shall not accept the certification application unless there is evidence that such practices have ceased and that the certification applicant or its predecessor entity is not subject to any ongoing investigations and/or enforcement actions.

4.4.1.2.12 The certification body shall evaluate the information provided by the certification applicant regarding its participation, or that of its predecessor entity, in forest certification under the VFCS/PEFC system or other certification systems. Where such participation has been suspended, withdrawn, or terminated, the certification body shall investigate the level of commitment and capability of the certification applicant to comply with VFCS/PEFC certification requirements. If the results of the investigation indicate that the applicant lacks the capability or is likely to fail to comply, the application certification shall not proceed until the applicant demonstrates its capability and commitment to comply with the requirements.

4.4.1.2.13 Where the certification body determines that the application is to be treated as a transfer of an existing certificate issued by another accredited certification body, it shall follow IAF MD 2 and VFCS/PEFC GD 1011.

4.4.1.2.14 In the case of certification transfer, the certification body shall ensure that all existing major nonconformities have been closed prior to accepting the transfer of certification.

4.4.1.2.15 Certification transfer shall only be carried out where the receiving certification body is notified by VFCS and operates under the same accreditation standard.

4.4.1.2.16 The certification body shall communicate in writing the results of the application review to the certification applicant. Where the application is rejected, the certification body shall provide the applicant with written justification for the rejection.

4.4.1.3 Audit programme

4.4.1.3.1 The certification body shall establish an audit programme covering at least one certification cycle. The audit programme shall be maintained as documented information.

4.4.1.3.2 The certification body shall confirm the audit programme with the client and ensure that the client agrees to the audit approach and audit schedule.

4.4.1.3.3 The certification cycle shall not exceed five years.

4.4.1.3.4 When establishing the audit programme, the certification body shall consider the information and results of the application review, as well as information from previous audits, where applicable.

NOTE: Guidance on establishing an audit programme is provided in Clause 5 of ISO 19011.

4.4.1.3.5 The certification body shall identify seasonal activities and ensure that such activities are covered within the five-year audit programme.

EXAMPLE: Seasonal activities may include site preparation for planting, planting, forest fire prevention and control, and harvesting.

4.4.1.3.6 The certification body shall include, in each audit (surveillance, initial, and recertification), the assessment of requirements related to the following, where applicable:

a) forest conversion and requirements related to degraded forests;

b) maintenance, conservation, or enhancement of biodiversity and areas with significant high carbon stock;

c) requirements related to forests of ecological importance;

d) compliance with core ILO conventions;

e) legal compliance obligations;

f) rights of indigenous peoples and local communities, including customary and traditional rights related to forest land;

g) health, safety, and working conditions.

4.4.1.3.7 Where the certification body considers that feedback is necessary to assess the client's compliance with certification requirements that may affected stakeholders—such as requirements related to human rights, local communities, customary and traditional land rights, health, safety and working conditions, or other requirements—it shall collect feedback from affected stakeholders.

4.4.1.4 Risk-based approach

4.4.1.4.1 The certification body shall identify and maintain documented risk profiles for each client.

4.4.1.4.2 The certification body shall periodically review the risk profiles and adjust the audit programme and audit plans accordingly.

4.4.1.4.3 The certification body shall ensure that the audit programme and audit plan for each client are developed considering the client's risk profile.

4.4.1.4.4 The certification body shall consider, as a minimum, the following risk indicators when conducting the risk assessment:

a) Size and complexity of the certification scope (e.g. certified area, number of forest management units, number of group participants, geographical distribution);

b) Forest type and forest management activities (e.g. natural forest, planted forest, trees outside forests, harvesting, planting, forest protection, nursery, etc);

c) Legal status and land and forest tenure right (e.g. legal documentation, land disputes, boundary overlaps);

d) Environmental values and biodiversity (e.g. ecologically important forest areas, biodiversity conservation, gene sources, threatened, endangered and protected species, forest conversion and forest degradation);

e) Social and labour issues (e.g. free, prior and informed consent (FPIC), complaints, community rights, workers' rights, occupational health and safety);

f) Results of previous assessments (e.g. nonconformities, complaints, corrective actions, significant changes to the management system);

g) Competence and effectiveness of the management system (e.g. experience of the forest owner or group entity, effectiveness of the internal monitoring system, use of contractors);

h) For group forest certification: the number of participants, the proportion of new participants, the homogeneity of the group, the results of internal audits, and the proportion of participants with nonconformities.

NOTE 1: Risk profiles support the determination of the duration of initial and Stage 2 (certification) audits, as well as the development of audit programmes and audit plans, including surveillance and recertification audits.

NOTE 2: Guidance on risk assessment is provided in ISO 31000.

4.4.1.5 Determination of audit duration

4.4.1.5.1 The certification body shall have documented procedures for determining and calculating the audit time and should consider the following criteria:

a) audit time requirements of IAF MD5 for environmental management systems audits considering that the sustainable forest management audit is of higher complexity than an environmental management system audit;

b) for a multi-site certificate, the number of sites in the scope of the certificate and the sampling requirements of IAF MD1;

c) the area within the scope of certification and any changes to the certified area;

d) forest type, location, silvicultural practices, and geographical conditions;

e) number of group participants, and the size and structure of the group;

f) number of full-time equivalent personnel (including contractors and subcontractors) number of effective full;

g) number and location of offices, storage facilities, workshops, visitor facilities, fire watch towers, and/or other infrastructure essential to forest management;

h) outsourcing of any activities within the scope of the forest management standard;

i) seasonal activities;

j) other issues such as road systems and accessibility, and the sale of forest products, where applicable;

k) the management system, including complaint handling procedures, effectiveness of internal monitoring, internal audits, and management review processes;

l) results of previous audits, including audits of the client's management system;

m) risks and results from risk assessment as per 4.4.1.4;

n) geographical coordinates of the forest management unit and the ability to verify them using remote sensing tools to identify risks of deforestation or forest degradation in the area.

4.4.1.5.2 The certification body shall have a procedure to calculate audit time as defined by VFCS/PEFC.

4.4.1.5.3 The certification body shall determine the audit duration, and the basis for this determination shall be maintained as documented information.

4.4.1.6 Sampling

4.4.1.6.1 The certification body shall establish a sampling plan taking into account the results of the risk assessment.

4.4.2 Planning

4.4.2.1 Determination of audit objectives, scope and criteria

4.4.2.1.1 The certification body shall clearly define the scope, extent, and boundaries of the audit, such as group participants, organisational units, activities, and processes to be audited.

4.4.2.1.2 The certification body shall plan the audit tools and techniques to be used during the audit. The use of these tools and techniques shall be clearly defined in terms of their purpose and the requirements they are intended to cover, where applicable.

4.4.2.1.3 The certification body shall consider the following criteria when defining the scope:

a) Representation: the client's operations and processes shall be considered in a random but representative manner. The certification body shall identify processes deemed important to be audited, and their effectiveness shall be reflected in the audit report.

b) Protection: areas with significant impact on achieving the objectives of the forest management standard and identified forests of ecological importance shall be considered.

c) Corrective: high risk areas and areas previously identified with nonconformities shall be considered.

d) Preventive: areas to be audited shall be determined by the certification body based on risk assessment.

4.4.2.2 Audit plan

4.4.2.2.1 The certification body shall have documented procedures to establish a risk-based audit plan for each audit and for each selected group participant. The audit plan shall provide the basis for the implementation and scheduling of audit activities.

4.4.2.2.2 The certification body shall consider existing complaints and substantiated concerns when planning the audit.

4.4.2.2.3 The audit plan, including audit dates, shall be communicated at least ten days in advance and agreed with the client.

NOTE: Guidance on preparing the audit plan is provided in ISO 19011:2018, Clause 6.3.2.

4.4.2.2.4 The certification body shall define the timeframe for submitting the audit report to the client for confirmation of audit findings.

NOTE: The certification body may extend the timeframe for submitting the audit report where additional time is required to fully assess the information collected during the audit. In such cases, the certification body shall inform the client and provide written justification for the extension. Such changes shall be clearly stated in the summary audit report.

4.4.3 Initial certification

4.4.3.1 Stage 1

4.4.3.1.1 The Stage 1 audit shall serve as a document review and a "readiness assessment". The scope of the Stage 1 audit shall include at least the following:

a) confirmation of the scope and objectives of the certification audit;

b) confirmation of group participants, sites, and activities within the scope of the sustainable forest management system;

c) review of the client's forest management documentation;

d) evaluation of site-specific conditions of each forest management area, where applicable;

e) evaluation of internal audit processes and the integrity of the client's management system, as well as the effectiveness of their implementation;

f) determination of the adequacy of the client's procedures for the use of VFCS/PEFC trademarks, where applicable;

g) evaluation of how the client identifies affected stakeholders, their needs and expectations, and how these are addressed in forest management; and consideration of feedback received from affected stakeholders during public notification of the audit, including assessment of its relevance;

h) identification of risks to be considered in the Stage 2 audit;

i) finalization of the audit plan for the Stage 2 audit.

4.4.3.1.2 The Stage 1 audit may be conducted remotely using ICT, in accordance with 4.4.4.3.

4.4.3.2 Stage 2

4.4.3.2.1 The certification body shall assess the client's implementation of system requirements, including the forest management system, processes, and procedures. The Stage 2 audit shall include on-site evaluation of forest management activities. Where appropriate, certain parts of the Stage 2 audit may be conducted remotely using ICT, in accordance with 4.4.4.3.

NOTE: Examples of activities that may be conducted using ICT include interviews with workers and reviews of electronic information.

4.4.3.2.2 The audit plan for Stage 2 shall be adjusted based on substantiated concerns and findings identified during the Stage 1 audit.

4.4.4 Conducting audits

4.4.4.1 Conducting the opening meeting

In cases where some or all elements of the audit are conducted remotely, the certification body may conduct the opening meetings remotely using ICT according to IAF MD4, and any other requirements established by this standard.

4.4.4.2 Conducting the closing meeting

4.4.4.2.1 The audit team leader shall conduct a closing meeting with the certification management and top management of the client to present audit findings and any recommendations regarding the maintenance of certification. The list of participants shall be recorded.

4.4.4.2.2 The audit team leader shall ensure that the client understands the conclusions and all identified nonconformities.

4.4.4.2.3 Where part or all the audit is conducted remotely, the certification body may conduct the formal closing meeting remotely using ICT in accordance with IAF MD4 and other requirements specified in this standard.

4.4.4.3 Remote audits

4.4.4.3.1 The certification body may, where appropriate, use information and communication technologies (ICT) to conduct remote audits for:

a) Stage 1 of the initial certification audit;

b) elements of surveillance audits or the entire surveillance audit;

c) special audits;

d) non-field components of Stage 2 audits in initial certification;

e) non-field components of recertification audits

EXAMPLE: Non-field components of Stage 2 audits in initial or recertification audits may include the closing meeting, closure of nonconformities, or administrative tasks.

4.4.4.3.2 ICT methods may also be used beyond the cases specified in 4.4.4.3.1 under exceptional circumstances where auditors are unable to conduct on-site visits.

NOTE: Exceptional circumstances include restrictions due to national or local regulations or health risks.

4.4.4.3.3 The certification body shall have documented procedures for conducting remote audits or partially remote audits using ICT, including at least:

a) criteria and indicators for assessing the suitability of ICT use;

b) risks associated with ICT use and how these risks may affect audit effectiveness;

c) available technologies and how they will be used;

d) client eligibility criteria (e.g. access to electronic files, access to documented management systems);

e) client competence.

4.4.4.3.4 The certification body shall assess risks and opportunities related to the use of **ICT** and the justification for its use. This assessment shall be maintained as documented information.

4.4.4.3.5 Certification processes may use ICT where:

a) the use of ICT enhances the effectiveness and/or efficiency of the audit while maintaining the integrity of the audit process;

b) the certification body can demonstrate that the audit techniques used provide sufficient confidence in the client's compliance with certification criteria;

c) the results of the evaluation under 4.4.4.3.4, in accordance with the procedures in 4.4.4.3.3, indicate that the risk is low when conducting all or part of the audit remotely;

d) the **client** has a centrally controlled management system that can be accessed remotely and provides the certification body with necessary records to conduct all or part of the audit remotely.

4.4.4.3.6 The certification body shall ensure that auditors using ICT are appropriately trained and deemed competent in its use.

4.4.4.3.7 The certification body shall obtain **client** approval before using ICT during the audit.

4.4.4.3.8 Prior to the audit, the certification body shall determine the ICT to be used and ensure its performance and effectiveness through testing and other appropriate measures.

4.4.4.4 Summary audit report

4.4.4.4.1 In addition to the audit report, the certification body shall prepare a summary audit report.

4.4.4.4.2 The summary audit report shall include at least the following information:

a) name and description of the certification body, name and description of the client, and date of the report;

b) forest area (in hectares) at the time of the audit;

c) description of the certified area;

d) scope, objectives, and audit process, including applied standards and certification criteria, summary of risk assessment, and, where remote technologies are used, the technologies applied and justification for their use;

e) summary of the audit plan, including audit dates, stakeholder involvement process, sites and activities audited, audit duration (including proportion of on-site and remote audit time, where applicable), and the number of audit team members along with their qualifications and experience;

f) audit results:

   i. summary of findings demonstrating conformity or nonconformity;

   ii. brief description of any major nonconformities and verification of the effectiveness of corrective actions taken;

   iii. brief description of minor nonconformities;

iv. evaluation of the effectiveness of actions taken to address minor nonconformities identified in previous audit reports;

v. recommendation for certification decision.

4.4.4.4.3 The summary audit report shall not include any confidential data.

4.4.4.4.4 The certification body shall provide a copy of the summary audit report to the client and VFCS.

4.4.4.4.5 Upon request by the client or VFCS, the certification body shall provide an English version of the summary audit report.

4.4.4.4.6 The summary audit report shall be made publicly available in the PEFC database, accessible through the PEFC website.

4.4.4.5 Cause analysis of nonconformities

4.4.4.5.1 The certification body shall classify nonconformities identified during the audit as major and minor.

4.4.4.5.2 The certification body shall require the client to:

a) determine the root cause of the nonconformity;

b) develop a corrective action plan to address the identified cause;

c) specify a timeframe for completion; and

d) assign responsibilities for implementing the corrective action plan.

4.4.4.5.3 Before the action plan is implemented, the certification body shall assess the action plan provided by the client, including the timeframe and personnel responsible. As part of the assessment, the certification body shall verify that the action plan adequately addresses the nonconformities.

4.4.4.5.4 When an action plan is rejected, the certification body shall explain why and allow the client to review and re-submit it.

4.4.4.6 Effectiveness of corrections and corrective actions

4.4.4.6.1 The certification body shall evaluate the effectiveness of corrective action(s) for all nonconformities identified in audits prior to closing the nonconformities.

4.4.4.6.2 The certification body shall verify major nonconformities on-site unless verification can be undertaken without on-site verification using ICT. The certification body shall justify and document why verification can be undertaken through ICT.

4.4.4.6.3 The time period for completion of the corrective action(s) for major nonconformities identified in audits and their verification by the certification body shall follow the rules of the certification body but not exceed three months.

4.4.4.6.4 If specific natural conditions or extraordinary circumstances do not allow the implementation of corrective actions within the timeframes described in 4.4.4.6.3, the certification body may give an exemption. The maximum time period is 12 months, and the justification shall be documented.

EXAMPLE: Extraordinary circumstances could include a pandemic situation, civil conflict, lack of security, or a natural disaster.

4.4.4.6.5 The certification body shall verify the effectiveness of corrective action(s) for minor nonconformities no later than the next audit.

4.4.4.6.6 Where corrective actions taken to address a major nonconformity have not effectively addressed the issue within the time frame agreed with the certification body, the certification body shall either suspend or withdraw the certificate, as appropriate.

4.4.4.6.7 The certification body shall have procedures for immediate suspension or withdrawal of certification in cases of identification of non-reversible nonconformities or in case of intentional corrupt or fraudulent activities by the client.

NOTE 1: Non-reversible nonconformities are deliberate, serious, and significant major nonconformities that cannot be remedied in a reasonable time frame.

NOTE 2: Fraudulent activities include infringement of legislation.

4.4.5 Certification decision

4.4.5.1 General

4.4.5.1.1 Before granting initial certification and recertification, the **certification body** shall:

a) review, accept, and verify corrections and corrective actions for any major nonconformities;

b) review and accept the plan for correction and corrective actions for minor nonconformities.

4.4.5.2 Certification status

4.4.5.2.1 The certification body shall define the status of certification as:

a) valid;

b) suspended;

c) withdrawn;

d) terminated;

e) expired.

NOTE: Additionally, where VFCS loses PEFC endorsement or is suspended, the PEFC Council shall consider all certificates issued under VFCS as not PEFC recognised. The status is correspondingly updated on the PEFC website and clients affected by the suspension or termination are no longer allowed to make PEFC claims or use the PEFC trademarks in any way.

4.4.5.2.2 If certification is terminated, suspended, or withdrawn, or the PEFC Council suspends or terminates the endorsement of VFCS, the certification body shall inform the client that any continued use of the PEFC trademarks and PEFC claims is not permitted. In cases of suspension, the certification body shall monitor whether the client is in compliance.

4.4.6 Maintaining certification

4.4.6.1 Surveillance activities

4.4.6.1.1 Surveillance audits shall be conducted at least annually. The certification body shall carry out at least four surveillance audits before the certificate expiry date.

NOTE 1: Annually it means twelve months, plus or minus three months.

NOTE 2: Where the certificate is valid for less than five years, the number of surveillance audits may be reduced accordingly.

4.4.6.1.2 In justified circumstances, the frequency of surveillance audits may be increased by the certification body depending on the overall level of risk associated with the client profile and the results of previous audits.

4.4.6.1.3 Part or all a surveillance audit may, where appropriate, be conducted remotely using ICT in accordance with 4.4.4.3, provided that:

a) no major nonconformities were raised in the previous audit;

b) minor nonconformities can be verified remotely; and

c) the client has a centrally controlled management system accessible remotely and can provide all necessary records.

4.4.6.1.4 The certification body shall not conduct more than two consecutive surveillance audits entirely remotely.

4.4.6.2 Recertification

4.4.6.2.1 Recertification audits shall be conducted on-site. Certain parts, such as the opening meeting, closing meeting, closure of minor nonconformities, or other administrative processes (e.g. system documentation, internal audit review, or management review), may be conducted remotely using ICT in accordance with 4.4.4.3. The audit plan shall specify which elements may be effectively conducted remotely.

4.4.6.3 Special audits

4.4.6.3.1 General

4.4.6.3.1.1 The certification body may conduct different types of special audits in according to the requirements of this clause.

4.4.6.3.1.2 The full special audit, or certain components of the special audit, such as the opening and closing meetings, or closure of minor nonconformities and administrative processes, may take place remotely, as per 4.4.4.3. The audit plan shall identify which components of the audit can be effectively conducted remotely.

4.4.6.3.2 Expanding scope

4.4.6.3.2.1 The certification body may conduct expanding scope audits when a request for scope extension is made by the client. Scope expansion requires an assessment to decide whether the extension can be granted.

NOTE: Expanding scope audits may happen where there is a significant change to the defined certified forest area. An expansion of scope may happen, for example, to accommodate new forest types or a significant change in the forest management.

4.4.6.3.3 Unannounced or short-notice audits

4.4.6.3.3.1 Unannounced or short-notice audits may be conducted where the certification body identifies a substantiated concern that the client is intentionally violating a requirement of the standard.

4.4.6.3.3.2 The certification body may suspend or withdraw certification if the client refuses an unannounced or short-notice audit without justified reason.

4.4.6.3.3.3 The certification body shall define the conditions for conducting unannounced or short-notice audits, including provisions for notifying the client.

4.4.6.3.3.4 Such conditions shall include investigation of substantiated concerns and other relevant reasons.

4.4.7 Appeals

4.4.7.1 The certification body shall have a documented process for receiving and handling appeals, enabling clients to request a review of certification decisions.

NOTE: The term “appeal” is defined in ISO 17000:2020 as a request by the provider or subject of a conformity assessment to the conformity assessment body or accreditation body for reconsideration of a decision it has made relating to that object.

4.4.7.2 The certification body shall make publicly available the process for receiving and handling appeals, including defined timelines for processing.

4.4.8 Complaints

4.4.8.1 The certification body shall have a documented complaints handling process, whereby any individual or organisation may submit complaints related to the certification process.

NOTE: The term “complaint” is defined in ISO 17000:2020 as an expression of dissatisfaction, other than an appeal, by any person or organisation to a conformity assessment body or accreditation body, relating to the activities of that body, where a response is expected.

4.4.8.2 This process shall include at least one publicly available mechanism for stakeholders to report potential cases of misrepresentation or corrupt practices.

4.4.8.3 The certification body shall make publicly available its complaints handling process, including defined timelines.

4.4.8.4 The certification body shall inform the complainant about the investigation, the corresponding results, and, where necessary, the actions to be taken by each party.

4.4.8.5 The certification body shall notify VFCS within seven days of becoming aware of a substantiated concern. The certification body shall also inform the client and/or the PEFC Council, as appropriate.

4.4.8.6 Upon request by VFCS, the certification body shall provide details of the investigation, including results, related to a substantiated concern and complaints concerning the client. Where required, this information shall also be provided to the PEFC Council.

4.4.8.7 Upon request by VFCS, the certification body shall provide a summary of complaints received in relation to VFCS certification. This summary shall be provided in English where requested by VFCS.

NOTE: The summary shall include complaints received since the most recent certification (or the most recent recertification, where applicable) and shall include the following information:

a) information on the appellant/complainant (if consent is given);

b) information on the client, including certificate number (for group certification, identification of affected group participants);

c) description;

d) content of the complaint;

e) summary of the complaint handling process;

f) non-complied requirements;

g) evidence;

h) outcome/resolution of the complaint.

4.4.8.8 Upon request, the certification body shall provide the PEFC Council and VFCS with any information regarding its investigation of a substantiated concern related to the client.

4.5 Management system requirements

4.5.1 General

4.5.1.1 The certification body shall have a system to maintain up-to-date information on and monitor changes in national and local legislation, as well as relevant international regulations related to forest management applicable to its clients.

NOTE: Applicable regulatory requirements for forest management are presented in Appendix 6.

4.5.1.2 Upon request, the certification body shall provide the PEFC Council or VFCS with any information necessary for PEFC and VFCS monitoring activities, including but not limited to the management of risks related to conflicts of interest or impartiality, and the certification body's rules and procedures for identifying and addressing client non-compliance.

4.5.1.3 In addition to complaints and appeals mechanisms, the certification body shall carry out monitoring activities to identify and mitigate cases of misrepresentation or corrupt practices.

4.5.1.4 The certification body shall protect the confidentiality and safety of affected stakeholders or any individuals providing information related to VFCS/PEFC certification, such as complaints and appeals.

4.5.2 Internal audit of the certification body

4.5.2.1 Upon request, the certification body shall provide the PEFC Council or VFCS with a summary of the results of its annual internal audits, limited to the implementation of VFCS/PEFC forest management certification.

5 Requirements for chain of custody certification bodies

The certification body shall comply with the requirements of PEFC ST 2003:2020.

Appendix A
(normative)

Group Forest management certification

A.1 Introduction

This Appendix includes additional requirements to those specified in the main body of this standard, to be applied by certification bodies when conducting group certification. This Appendix shall be applied for group forest certification.

The objective of these additional requirements is to ensure that the audit provides sufficient confidence in the conformity of the forest management activities of the group certification client with the forest management standard for all group participants, while also ensuring that the audit is practical and feasible in terms of both cost and operations.

A.2 Legal and contractual matters

A.2.1 Certification agreement

A.2.1.1 The certification agreement shall allow the certification body to perform certification activities for all group participants under group forest certification.

A.3 Information requirements

A.3.1 Certification documents

A.3.1.1 Certificate

A.3.1.1.1 For group certification, the certification body shall issue a single certificate in the name and address of the group entity of the client. The certificate shall include a reference to the PEFC database or other PEFC-recognised database containing information related to the group participants within the scope of the certificate. The scope or other references on the certificate shall clearly indicate that the management system scope includes all participants listed.

NOTE: PEFC-recognised databases are available in the PEFC International database, accessible via the PEFC website.

A.3.1.1.2 The certification body shall have access to the list of all group participants maintained by the group entity, including contact details, forest area under management, and any other information required by VFCS/PEFC. This information shall also be made accessible to VFCS and/or PEFC.

A.3.1.1.3 Where sub-certificates are issued to group participants, they shall have the same or a narrower scope than the main certificate and shall include a clear reference to the main certificate. Sub-certificates shall include the following statement:

“The validity of this sub-certificate depends on the validity of the main certificate and shall be verified in the PEFC database”.

Where a sub-certificate includes a sub-certificate number, this number shall be linked to the main certificate number and included on the certificate.

A.4 Process requirements

A.4.1 Pre-certification activities

A.4.1.1 General

A.4.1.1.1 Before starting the audit process, the certification body shall provide the client with information on eligibility criteria and applicable requirements for group forest certification.

NOTE: Eligibility criteria and applicable requirements for group forest certification are specified in VFCS/PEFC ST 1004, Group Forest Management – Requirements.

A.4.1.2 Application review

A.4.1.2.1 In addition to the name and address of the applicant, legal entity (where applicable), and legal status (including valid business registration) (as required in 5.4.1.1 a)), for group forest certification, the certification body shall require the applicant to provide the following information in the application:

– number of group participants;

– total forest area of participants;

– location of forest plots; and

– information on where documented information on participant registration is maintained and how it can be accessed.

A.4.1.2.2 The certification body shall identify the group entity as its contractual partner and as the party fully responsible for the performance of the certification client.

A.4.1.2.3 Where any eligibility criteria for group certification are not met, the certification body shall:

– reject the application (in the case of initial certification); or

– suspend the certificate (in the case of surveillance or recertification audits).

A.4.2 Planning

A.4.2.1 Audit programme

A.4.2.1.1 The certification body shall have a documented procedure for group certification.

A.4.2.1.2 The certification body shall establish measures to ensure, including but not limited to:

– forest management requirements are applied to all group participants; and

– the management system is effectively implemented by all group participants, ensuring that the criteria of the forest management standard are met.

A.4.2.2 Determination of audit duration

A.4.2.2.1 The certification body shall be able to justify the time allocated for group certification audits, in accordance with its overall audit time allocation policy and VFCS requirements.

A.4.3 Sampling

A.4.3.1 General requirements

A.4.3.1.1 The certification body shall have procedures for selecting group participants within the audit programme/plan.

At a minimum, these procedures shall include:

a) identification of sample groups;

b) determination of sample size;

c) selection of group participants.

A.4.3.2 Determination of sample size

A.4.3.2.1 In general, the sample size of group participants to be individually audited shall be determined as follows:

For initial and recertification audits:

The square root of the number of group participants inspected during internal audits, rounded up to the nearest whole number.

$$y = \sqrt{x}$$

Where:

- y = number of group participants to be audited externally
- x = total number of group participants inspected during internal audits

For surveillance audits:

The square root of the number of group participants inspected during internal audits, multiplied by a factor of 0.5 and rounded up to the nearest whole number.

$$y = 0.5\sqrt{x}$$

Where:

- y = number of group participants to be audited externally
- x = total number of group participants inspected during internal audits

NOTE: The number of group participants referred to here is the minimum number required to be inspected under VFCS/PEFC ST 1004.

A.4.3.2.2 The sample size for external audits may be adjusted in accordance with VFCS/PEFC ST 1004 based on one or more of the following indicators:

a) results of a risk assessment. In this case deviations of sample sizes in case of low or high risk for individual categories shall be defined;

b) results of internal audits or previous certification audits;

c) quality/level of confidence of the internal monitoring programme;

d) use of technologies allowing the gathering of information concerning specific requirements;

NOTE: Such technologies may include the use of remote sensing that allows compliance statements for specific requirements of a sustainability standard.

e) based on other means of gathering information about activities on the ground.

A.4.3.2.3 The calculated sample shall be allocated among groups in accordance with VFCS/PEFC ST 1004.

A.4.3.2.4 Where appropriate, the certification body shall increase sampling frequency based on results of previous internal and external audits.

A.4.3.3 Selection of group participants

A.4.3.3.1 Selection criteria for group participants shall be risk-based and defined in VFCS/PEFC ST 1004.

A.4.3.3.2 Sampling methods shall include random selection, which shall account for at least 25% of the sample size.

A.4.3.3.3 Group participants selected for audit through sampling shall vary from year to year, unless specific conditions require certain participants to be audited in consecutive audits (e.g. due to forest holding size).

A.4.3.3.4 When selecting group participants, the certification body shall select a sample of group participants that have undergone internal audits within the current five (05)-year certification cycle in order to verify system stability, and a sample of group participants that have not undergone internal audits.

NOTE: Requirements for group certification and internal audits are specified in VFCS/PEFC ST 1004.

A.4.4 Conducting audits

A.4.4.1 Analysis of nonconformities

A.4.4.1.1 Where a nonconformity is identified in any group participant, either through the client's internal audit or through the certification body's audit, an investigation shall be conducted to determine whether other group participants may be affected.

A.4.4.1.2 The certification body shall require the client to perform root cause analysis to determine whether there is a risk of systemic failure in the forest management system affecting all group participants.

A.4.4.1.3 Where such a systemic risk is identified, the certification body shall require corrective actions at both the group entity level and the participant level.

A.4.4.1.4 If, during the audit, a nonconformity identified at one or more participants may lead to a systemic failure, it shall be raised at the group level.

A.4.4.1.5 If the number of nonconformities identified among individual participants indicates a systemic issue in the group's internal management system, the nonconformity shall be issued for the entire group.

A.4.4.1.6 It shall not be acceptable for the client to attempt to remove a "problematic" participant from the certification scope in order to avoid addressing a nonconformity during the certification process.

Appendix B
(normative)
Accreditation accepted by VFCS/PEFC

B.1 Forest management certification or product certification shall be carried out by certification bodies accredited by accreditation bodies. These accreditation bodies shall be signatories to the IAF Multilateral Recognition Arrangement (MLA) or to a regional cooperation such as European co-operation for Accreditation (EA), Interamerican Accreditation Cooperation (IAAC), Asia Pacific Accreditation Cooperation (APAC), etc. The accreditation body shall be a signatory to the IAF MLA with the main scope of ISO/IEC 17021-1.

NOTE: In exceptional cases, schemes based on ISO/IEC 17065 are also accepted. Specific accreditation requirements for certification bodies operating certification schemes based on ISO/IEC 17065 are specified in Appendix 4 of this standard.

B.2 The scope of accreditation shall explicitly specify the VFCS/PEFC forest management standard(s), and, where applicable, the VFCS/PEFC group certification standard(s), under which accreditation is granted, including the version and year of issue of the standard covered by the accreditation certificate.

NOTE: The list of VFCS/PEFC standards is publicly available on the VFCS/PEFC website.

B.3 The scope of accreditation shall explicitly state that the certification body is accredited in accordance with ISO/IEC 17021-1.

NOTE: Within accreditation assessments, accreditation bodies should consider consulting stakeholders on the performance of certification bodies, in addition to on-site assessments.

B.4 Upon request, the accreditation certificate shall be provided in English.

Appendix C
(normative)
Notification of certification bodies under VFCS/PEFC

(These requirements do not apply to the accreditation activities of certification bodies)

C.1 Certification bodies conducting VFCS/PEFC forest management certification shall be notified by VFCS.

C.2 Notification shall require that certification bodies hold a valid accreditation in accordance with Appendix 2 of this standard.

C.3 Certification bodies shall provide VFCS with information on certificates issued, in accordance with applicable requirements.

C.4 Upon request by VFCS, certification bodies shall pay PEFC notification fees to VFCS.

C.5 To ensure the independence of certification bodies, the PEFC notification conditions implemented by VFCS shall include:

a) administrative conditions (e.g. exchange of information between certification bodies and VFCS or PEFC, data transfer, etc.);

b) financial conditions (fees applicable to certificate holders);

c) compliance with requirements for certification bodies, as verified through accreditation as described in this standard.

C.6 VFCS and PEFC notification conditions shall not be discriminatory against certification bodies or create barriers to trade.

C.7 The notification contract shall include the necessary provisions to define obligations and responsibilities related to confidentiality and the use of data.

Appendix D
(normative)
Supplementary requirements for certification bodies providing certification against Trees Outside Forests (TOF)

Forest Management	Trees Outside Forests
4.2.1.2.2 Education **4.2.1.2.2.1** The certification body shall ensure that auditors have knowledge corresponding to at least a tertiary education (vocational training, college, university or equivalent). NOTE: Tertiary education, also referred to as third stage, third level, and post-secondary education, is the educational level following the completion of a school providing a secondary education. Tertiary education can be obtained, among others, at universities, technical schools, or colleges. **4.2.1.2.2.2** The certification body shall ensure that auditors have taken formal forestry related courses. **4.2.1.2.2.3** The specific education relating to forestry (requirement 4.2.1.2.2.2) can be substituted by working experience in this sector if the certification body can demonstrate it is equivalent to the required education.	**4.2.1.2.2 Education** **4.2.1.2.2.1** The certification body shall ensure that auditors have knowledge corresponding to at least a tertiary education (vocational training, college, university or equivalent). NOTE: Tertiary education, also referred to as third stage, third level, and post-secondary education, is the educational level following the completion of a school providing a secondary education. Tertiary education can be obtained, among others, at universities, technical schools, or colleges. **4.2.1.2.2.2** The certification body shall ensure that auditors have taken formal forestry related courses and/or courses related to disciplines directly connected to the complementary land use covered by TOF certification (agricultural), as applicable to the VFCS). **4.2.1.2.2.3** The specific education relating to forestry or TOF (requirement 4.2.1.2.2.2) can be substituted by working experience in this sector if the certification body can demonstrate it is equivalent to the required education.
4.2.1.2.3 Work experience **4.2.1.2.3.1** The certification body shall ensure that auditors have a minimum of three (03) years of full-time professional experience in a relevant discipline (e.g. forestry, trees outside forests (TOF), biodiversity, natural resource management). **4.2.1.2.3.2** The total number of years of work experience may be reduced by one year if the auditor has completed tertiary education (vocational training, college, university or equivalent) in forestry, biodiversity or natural resource management. NOTE: Tertiary education (vocational training, college, university or equivalent), also referred to as third stage, third level, and post-secondary education, is the educational level following the completion of a school providing a secondary education. Tertiary education can be obtained,	**4.2.1.2.3 Work experience** **4.2.1.2.3.1** The certification body shall ensure that auditors have a minimum of three (03) years of full-time professional experience in a relevant discipline (e.g. forestry, trees outside forests, biodiversity, natural resource management). **4.2.1.2.3.2** The total number of years of work experience may be reduced by one year if the auditor has completed a tertiary education in forestry, disciplines directly connected to the complementary land use covered by TOF, biodiversity, or natural resources management. NOTE: Tertiary education (vocational training, college, university or equivalent), also referred to as third stage, third level, and post-secondary education, is the educational level following the completion of a school providing a secondary education. Tertiary education can be obtained,

among others, at universities, technical schools, or colleges.	among others, at universities, technical schools, or colleges.
4.2.1.2.4 Training on VFCS/PEFC forest management The certification body shall ensure that new auditors have received and successfully completed the initial training provided by VFCS before they start their audit activities. NOTE: The VFCS website provides further information on training courses.	**4.2.1.2.4** Training on VFCS/PEFC forest management The certification body shall ensure that new auditors have received and successfully completed the initial training provided by VFCS, including specific module on trees outside forests (TOF) certification, before they start their audit activities. NOTE 1: Requirements related to trees outside forests are specifically defined in the VFCS forest management standard. NOTE 2: The VFCS website provides further information on training courses.
4.2.1.2.6 **Audit experience** For the first qualification of an auditor, the certification body shall ensure that the auditor has performed, as auditor-in-training, at least 40 hours of forest management or equivalent audits (e.g., trees outside the forest, ISO 9001, 14001 or 45001 auditing experience in the forestry or related sector, biodiversity, natural resources management) under the leadership of a qualified audit team leader within the last year. NOTE: The 40 hours as a trainee auditor should include different types of audits (initial audits, surveillance audits and recertification audits).	4.2.1.2.6 **Audit experience** For the first qualification of an auditor, the certification body shall ensure that the auditor has performed, as auditor-in-training, at least 40 hours of management audits in disciplines directly connected to the complementary land use covered by TOF or equivalent audits (e.g., forest management, ISO 9001, 14001 or 45001 auditing experience in the forestry, TOF, or related sector, biodiversity, natural resources management) under the leadership of a qualified audit team leader within the last year. NOTE: The 40 hours as a trainee auditor should include different types of audits (initial audits, surveillance audits and recertification audits).
4.2.1.2.7 **Competencies** **4.2.1.2.7.1** The certification body shall ensure that auditors demonstrate the ability to apply knowledge and skills in the following areas: a) Principles, objectives, requirements, criteria and indicators of the VFCS/PEFC Sustainable Forest Management standards and group forest management standards, as applicable. b) Audit principles, procedures and and how to apply them appropriately to different audits while ensuring that audits are conducted in a consistent and systematic manner. c) Management of an organisation, including organisational size, structure, functions and relationships, general business processes, risk management, and cultural and social aspects. d) Appropriate knowledge of socio-demographic characteristics, sustainability issues, cultural issues (including gender equality), the interests and values of indigenous	4.2.1.2.7 **Competencies** **4.2.1.2.7.1** The certification body shall ensure that auditors demonstrate the ability to apply knowledge and skills in the following areas: a) Principles, objectives, requirements, criteria and indicators of the VFCS/PEFC Sustainable Forest Management standards and group forest management standards, as applicable. b) Audit principles, procedures and how to apply them appropriately to different audits while ensuring that audits are conducted in a consistent and systematic manner. c) Management of an organisation, including organisational size, structure, functions and relationships, general business processes, risk management, and cultural and social aspects. d) Appropriate knowledge of socio-demographic characteristics, sustainability issues, cultural issues (including gender equality), the interests and values of indigenous

peoples and local communities, relevant agreements concerning indigenous peoples and local communities, as applicable, and industrial relations in the areas where forest management requirements are applied. e) Knowledge of legislation, regulations or other relevant requirements, including: i. Contracts and agreements and/or collective bargaining agreements (as applicable). ii. Vietnam national forest governance and law enforcement systems, including those covering social, workers and trade union rights and occupational safety and health of workers. iii. International conventions related to workers' rights (ILO core conventions). iv. International treaties and conventions related to forestry, forest product product trade and tree-based products.	peoples and local communities, relevant agreements concerning indigenous peoples and local communities, as applicable, and industrial relations in areas where TOF management requirements are applied. e) Knowledge of applicable legal, regulatory or other requirements, including: i. Contracts and agreements and/or collective bargaining agreements (where applicable) ii. Vietnam national forest and/or TOF (as applicable) governance and law enforcement systems, including those covering social, workers and trade union rights and occupational safety and health of workers. iii. International conventions related to workers' rights (ILO core conventions) iv. International treaties and conventions relating to forestry and/or disciplines directly connected to the complementary land use covered by TOF, forest and/or TOF trade, and tree-based products.
f) The principles of forest management based ontech niques, including: forest inventory, planning, protection, forest ecosystem management, identification and management of ecologically important forest areas, carbon stocks and biodiversity, as well as technical aspects of forestry operations and their potential impacts. g) Understanding and ability to interpret Geographic Information Systems (GIS) as it applies to forest monitoring and management. h) Management and control of online documents, data and records, confidential data, privacy and data protection; and i) Application of risk assessment techniques.	f) The principles of forest and/or disciplines directly connected to the complementary land use covered by TOF management based on techniques, including: inventory, planning, protection, management of forest ecosystems and/or TOF ecosystems (as applicable, according to the disciplines directly connected to the complementary land use covered by TOF certification), identification and management of ecologically important forest areas and ecologically important non-forest areas, carbon stocks and biodiversity, as well as technical aspects of forest operations, and their potential impacts. g) Understanding and ability to interpret Geographic Information Systems (GIS) as it applies to TOF monitoring and management. h) Management and control of online documents, data and records, confidential data, privacy and data protection; and i) Application of risk assessment techniques.
4.2.1.2.7.2 The certification body shall ensure that the audit team consists of individuals who collectively have all the required competencies for the scope of the audit.	**4.2.1.2.7.2** The certification body shall ensure that the audit team consists of individuals who collectively have all the required competencies for the scope of the audit.
4.2.1.2.8 Maintenance of the qualification as an auditor	**4.2.1.2.8 Maintenance of the qualification as an auditor**

4.2.1.2.8.1 Training in VFCS/PEFC forest management	**4.2.1.2.8.1 Training in VFCS/PEFC forest management**
4.2.1.2.8.1.1 In order to maintain auditor qualification, the certification body shall ensure that qualified auditors participate in refresher training on VFCS forest management whenever a new version of the forest management standards for which they are qualified to audit, or standards specifying requirements for forest management certification bodies, is published. **4.2.1.2.8.1.2** The certification body shall ensure that such refresher training is completed before conducting audits against the revised standards.	**4.2.1.2.8.1.1** In order to maintain auditor qualification, the certification body shall ensure that qualified auditors participate in refresher training on VFCS forest management, including TOF module, whenever a new version of the forest management standards and/or TOF requirements for which they are qualified to audit, or standards specifying requirements for TOF certification bodies, is published. **4.2.1.2.8.1.2** The certification body shall ensure that such update training is completed before conducting audits against the revised standards.
4.2.1.2.8.2 Audit experience **4.2.1.2.8.2.1** To maintain auditor qualification, the certification body shall ensure that the auditor has perform a minimum of 40 hours of forest management audits or equivalent audits (e.g. trees outside forests, audit experience based on ISO 9001, ISO 14001 or ISO 45001 in forestry or related sectors, biodiversity, natural resource management) per year. **4.2.1.2.8.2.2** In exceptional cases, such as statutory leave, long-term illness or lack of opportunities to provide certification services, auditors who cannot meet the requirement in 4.2.1.2.8.2.1 shall perform 20 hours of forest management audits under the supervision of a qualified auditor, or undergo a formal evaluation of competencies conducted by the certification body prior to the auditor taking backaudit activities (The exception may be applied for a period during which the requirements specified in 4.2.1.2.8.2.1 cannot be fulfilled, for a maximum of 24 months).	**4.2.1.2.8.2 Audit experience** **4.2.1.2.8.2.1** To maintain auditor qualification, the certification body shall ensure that the auditor has perform a minimum of 40 hours of audits of audits of disciplines directly connected to the complementary land use covered by TOF certification management or equivalent audits (e.g. forest management, audit experience based on ISO 9001, ISO 14001 or ISO 45001 in forestry or TOF-related sectors, biodiversity, natural resource management) per year. **4.2.1.2.8.2.2** In exceptional cases, such as statutory leave, long-term illness or lack of opportunities to provide certification services, auditors who cannot meet the requirement in 4.2.1.2.8.2.1 shall perform 20 hours of forest management audits and/or audits against disciplines directly connected to the complementary land use covered by TOF certificationunder the supervision of a qualified auditor, or undergo a formal evaluation of competencies conducted by the certification body prior to the auditor taking backaudit activities (NOTE: The exception may be applied for a period during which the requirements specified in 4.2.1.2.8.2.1 cannot be fulfilled, for a maximum of 24 months).
4.2.1.4 Reviewer and certification decision maker **4.2.1.4.2 Education** **4.2.1.4.2.1** The certification body shall ensure that reviewers and certification decision makers have knowledge corresponding to at least a	**4.2.1.4 Reviewer and certification decision maker** **4.2.1.4.2 Education** **4.2.1.4.2.1** The certification body shall ensure that reviewers and certification decision makers have knowledge corresponding to at least a

tertiary education(vocational training, college, university or equivalent). NOTE: Tertiary education (vocational training, college, university or equivalent), also referred to as third stage, third level, and post-secondary education, is the educational level following the completion of a school providing a secondary education. Tertiary education can be obtained, among others, at universities, technical schools, or colleges. **4.2.1.4.2.2** The certification body shall ensure that reviewers and certification decision makers have taken formal courses in forestry. **4.2.1.4.2.3** The specific education relating to forestry (requirement 4.2.1.4.2.2) can be substituted by working experience in this sector if the certification body can demonstrate it is equivalent to the required education.	tertiary education(vocational training, college, university or equivalent). NOTE: Tertiary education (vocational training, college, university or equivalent), also referred to as third stage, third level, and post-secondary education, is the educational level following the completion of a school providing a secondary education. Tertiary education can be obtained, among others, at universities, technical schools, or colleges **4.2.1.4.2.2** The certification body shall ensure that reviewers and certification decision makers have taken formal courses in forestry and/or disciplines directly connected to the complementary land use covered by TOF certification. **4.2.1.4.2.3** The specific education relating to forestry and/or disciplines directly connected to the complementary land use covered by TOF certification (requirement 4.2.1.4.2.2) can be substituted by working experience in this sector if the certification body can demonstrate it is equivalent to the required education.
4.2.1.4.4 Training on VFCS/PEFC forest management **4.2.1.4.4.1** The certification body shall ensure that new reviewers and certification decision makers have received initial training provided by VFCS. **4.2.1.4.4.2** The certification body shall ensure that new reviewers and certification decision makers have successfully completed this training before commencing certification activities. NOTE: The VFCS website provides further information on training courses.	**4.2.1.4.4 Training on VFCS/PEFC forest management** **4.2.1.4.4.1** The certification body shall ensure that new reviewers and certification decision makers have received initial training provided by VFCS, including content related to trees outside forests (TOF). **4.2.1.4.4.2** The certification body shall ensure that new reviewers and certification decision makers have successfully completed this training before commencing certification activities. NOTE 1: The VFCS website provides further information on training courses. NOTE 2: Training provided by VFCS shall include content related to trees outside forests.
4.2.1.4.7 Competencies **4.2.1.4.7.1** The certification body shall ensure that reviewers and/or certification decision makers demonstrate the ability to apply knowledge and skills in the following areas: a) Principles, objectives, requirements, criteria and indicators of the VFCS Sustainable Forest Management standards and group forest management standards. b) Knowledge of socio-demographic characteristics, sustainability issues and cultural issues (including gender equality), the interests and values of indigenous peoples and	**4.2.1.4.7 Competencies** **4.2.1.4.7.1** The certification body shall ensure that reviewers and/or certification decision makers demonstrate the ability to apply knowledge and skills in the following areas: a) Principles, objectives, requirements, criteria and indicators of the VFCS Sustainable Forest Management standards and group forest management standards. b) Knowledge of socio-demographic characteristics, sustainability issues and cultural issues (including gender equality), the interests and values of indigenous peoples and

local communities, relevant agreements concerning indigenous peoples and local communities, where applicable, and industrial relations in areas where forest management requirements are applied. c) General knowledge of applicable legal, regulatory or other requirements related to forest management, labour issues, and privacy and data protection. d) Forest management principles. e) Management and control of online documents, data and records, confidential data, privacy and data protection; and f) Application of risk assessment techniques. **4.2.1.4.7.2** The certification body shall ensure that the team of reviewers and certification decision makers consists of individuals who collectively have all the required competencies for the scope of the audit.	local communities, relevant agreements concerning indigenous peoples and local communities, where applicable, and industrial relations in areas where trees outside forests (TOF) management requirements are applied. c) General knowledge of applicable legal, regulatory or other requirements related to forest management and/or disciplines directly connected to the complementary land use cover by TOF certification, labour issues, and privacy and data protection. d) Forest management principles and/or disciplines directly connected to the complementary land use covered by TOF certification. e) Management and control of online documents, data and records, confidential data, privacy and data protection; and f) Application of risk assessment techniques. **4.2.1.4.7.2** The certification body shall ensure that the team of reviewers and certification decision makers consists of individuals who collectively have all the required competencies for the scope of the audit.
4.2.1.4.8 Maintenance of the qualification as a reviewer or certification decision maker **4.2.1.4.8.1 Training on VFCS/PEFC forest management** **4.2.1.4.8.1.1** In order to maintain the qualification of reviewers and/or certification decision makers, the certification body shall ensure that qualified reviewers and/or certification decision makers participate in refresher training on VFCS forest management whenever a new version of the VFCS/PEFC forest management standards for which they are qualified to perform certification activities, or standards specifying requirements for forest management certification bodies, is published. **4.2.1.4.8.1.2** The certification body shall ensure that such update training is successfully completed before reviewers and/or certification decision makers conducts their certification activities against the revised standards.	**4.2.1.4.8 Maintenance of the qualification as a reviewer or certification decision maker** **4.2.1.4.8.1 Training on VFCS/PEFC forest management** **4.2.1.4.8.1.1** In order to maintain the qualification of reviewers and/or certification decision makers, the certification body shall ensure that qualified reviewers and/or certification decision makers participate in refresher training on forest management in accordance with VFCS requirements, including TOF module, for which they are qualified to perform the corresponding certification activities, whenever new standards specifying requirements for sustainable forest management certification bodies is published. **4.2.1.4.8.1.2** The certification body shall ensure that such update training is successfully completed before reviewers and/or certification decision makers conducts their certification activities against the revised standards. NOTE: The VFCS training programme on SFM includes content related to trees outside forests.
4.2.1.4.8.2 Audit experience The certification body shall ensure that qualified reviewers and/or certification decision makers	**4.2.1.4.8.2 Audit experience** The certification body shall ensure that qualified reviewers and/or certification decision makers

has participated as an observers in forest management audits or equivalent audits (e.g. trees outside forests, audit experience based on ISO 9001, ISO 14001 or ISO 45001 in forestry or related sectors, biodiversity, natural resource management) covering at least 16 hours every two years, which includes part office assessment and part field assessment and a closing meeting. NOTE: The observation may take place remotely using ICT.	participate as an observers in audits against disciplines directly connected to the complementary land use covered by TOF certification or equivalent audits covering at least 16 hours every two years, which includes part office assessment and part field assessment and a closing meeting. NOTE: The observation may take place remotely using ICT.

Appendix E
(informative)
List of regulations related to forest management applicable to client organisations

The Vietnamese legal regulations listed below should be referenced when conducting Sustainable Forest Management and PEFC Chain of Custody (CoC) certification audits. It should be noted that only legally effective regulations shall be used, and certification bodies shall ensure that they are kept up to date with the latest Vietnamese legal requirements.

F.1 Forestry-related regulations

– Law on Forestry and related decrees and circulars
– Vietnam Timber Legality Assurance System
– Regulations on harvesting, management, and traceability of forest products
– Regulations on forest reproductive material
– Regulations on silvicultural measures
– Regulations on reduced impact logging and forest roads

F.2 Land-related regulations

– Land Law and related decrees and circulars on land and forest ownership rights

F.3 Environment-related regulations

– Law on Environmental Protection and related decrees and circulars
– Regulations on hazardous waste management,
– Regulations on management and use pesticide
– Law on Biodiversity and related decrees and circulars
– Regulations on environmental impact assessment
– Regulations on protection of wildlife, flora, and lists of endangered and rare species
– Regulations on protection of riparian buffer zones
– Information on high conservation value areas, protection forests, and special-use forests

F.4 Labour-related regulations

– Labour Law and related decrees and circulars
– Regulations on occupational health and safety

F.5 Other relevant regulations

– Regulations on taxation, fees, trade, and customs related to forestry
– Anti-corruption laws and regulations
– Regulations on enterprise management and business registration, …
– Regulations related to the rights of ethnic minorities and local communities in relation to forestry activities

References

Vietnamese documents

[1] National Assembly of the Socialist Republic of Viet Nam (2017), *Law on Forestry*, 2017;

[2] National Assembly of the Socialist Republic of Viet Nam (2025), *Law amending and supplementing several articles of the Law on Standards and Technical Regulations*;

[3] Government of the Socialist Republic of Viet Nam (2018), *Decree No. 156/2018/ND-CP dated 16/11/2018 detailing the implementation of several articles of the Law on Forestry*;

[4] Government of the Socialist Republic of Viet Nam (2026), *Decree No. 22/2026/ND-CP dated 16/01/2026 of the Government detailing several articles and measures for the implementation of the Law on Standards and Technical Regulations;*

[5] VFCS/PEFC ST 1003:2026, TCVN 14596:2025, *Sustainable Forest Management - Requirements;*

[6] VFCS/PEFC ST 1003:2019, *Sustainable Forest Management Standard;*

[7] VFCS/PEFC ST 1004:2026, *Group Forest Management – Requirements;*

[8] Bureau of Accreditation, ARC 18, *Application of iso/iec 17021-1:2015 for the accreditation of certification body operating VFCS certification;*

English documents

[9] IAF Mandatory Document MD 1: 2023, *Audit and Certification of a Management System Operated by a Multi-Site Organisation;*

[10] IAF Mandatory Document MD 2:2017, *Transfer of Accredited Certification of Management Systems;*

[11] IAF Mandatory Document MD 4: 2025, *The use of Information and Communication Technology for auditing purposes;*

[1] IAF Mandatory Document MD 5: 2019, *Determination of audit time of quality, environmental, and occupational health & safety management systems;*

[12] IAF Mandatory Document MD 23: 2023, *Control of Entities Operating on Behalf of Accredited Management Systems Certification Bodies;*

[13] ISO/IEC 17000, *Conformity assessment – Vocabulary and general principles;*

[14] ISO/IEC 17021-1, *Conformity assessment – Requirements for bodies providing audit and certification of management systems – Part 1: Requirements;*

[15] ISO/IEC 17065, *Conformity assessment – Requirements for bodies, certifying products, processes and services;*

[16] ISO/IEC 17067, *Conformity assessment - Fundamentals of product certification and guidelines for product certification systems;*

[17] ISO 19011, *Guidelines for auditing Management systems;*

[18] PEFC ST 1001, *Standard Setting – Requirements* (available from www.pefc.org);

[19] PEFC ST 2001, *PEFC Trademarks Rules – Requirements* (hereinafter PEFC Trademarks standard), *(available from www.pefc.org);*

[20] *ISO/IEC 17000, Conformity assessment – Vocabulary and general principles;*

[21] PEFC ST 1003, *Sustainable Forest Management – Requirements* (available from www.pefc.org);

[22] PEFC ST 1002, *Group Forest Management Certification – Requirements* (available from www.pefc.org).