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UKAS guidance on the use of a blended approach to auditing for management systems by certification bodies

Draft for consultation

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1. Introduction

The intention of this document is to build upon and adapt the lessons learned during the coronavirus pandemic into a more normal working environment, defining a framework for the provision of a blended approach to auditing that ensures the same level of confidence in accredited management system certification, whilst realising a more sustainable and flexible approach to its delivery.

To ensure the continued integrity of management system certification, the certification process must be completed in a competent, thorough and transparent manner. Therefore, it is important to ensure that the output of any audit process must be, through evidence, proven as effective as traditional techniques and meets the requirements of the standards /schemes.

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2. Scope

This document sets out a consistent method for the delivery of a blended approach to certification audits which includes remote audit activity (see IAF MD 4), henceforth referred to as “blended audits”. The scope of this document is for the accreditation of management system certification, although the same overall principles may be applied to the certification of Persons and Products/processes/services following a demonstrated effective methodology.. It is applicable to certification bodies (CBs) across all applicable management systems certification standards but may not always be appropriate for individual schemes, as some standards and schemes may contain specific provisions or restrictions on the use of remote audits. Therefore, when the audit relates to a specific scheme, the use of blended audits must be approved/endorsed by scheme owners.

Throughout this document the term “audit” is used but it is recognised that the term is not used across all certification standards. For clarity when this document is used to support certification the following applies:

- ISO/IEC17021-1: 2015 and related parts – “blended audit”. Refer to Clause 3.4 for Certification Assessment

Throughout this document the terms ’standard’ and ‘scheme’ are referenced, typically these terms should apply in the following manner

- Management Systems (ISO/IEC17021-1: 2015) - Standard relates to IAF Level 5 Standards (e.g. ISO 9001) and Scheme relates to sector schemes (Schemes have scheme owners such as the Aerospace sector scheme)

3. Related Documents

IAF MD 4:2018 IAF Mandatory Document for the Use of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) for Auditing and Assessment Purposes

IAF MD 5:2019 Determination of Audit Time of Quality, Environmental, and Occupational Health & Safety Management Systems

IAF ID 3:2011 Management of Extraordinary Events or Circumstances

IAF ID 12:2015 Principles on Remote Assessment

ISO/IEC 17011: 2017 Requirements for accreditation bodies accrediting conformity assessment bodies

ISO/IEC 17021-1: 2015 Requirements for bodies providing audit and certification of management systems

ISO/IEC 27006:2015 Information technology - Security techniques - Requirements for bodies providing audit and certification of information security management systems

4. Definitions

Blended Audit: A combination of physical on-site auditing and the remote use of information and communication technology (ICT) techniques.

Remote Audit: The facilitation of an evaluation from a location other than that of the physical location of the auditees.

Permissible Scheme: a scheme that permits blended auditing.

Special Audit: Audits not forming part of the expected certification cycle, including but not limited to, reinstatement after sanctions.

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5. Process for Determining the Applicability of a Blended Audit Approach

5.1 The CB shall firstly confirm, using a risk assessment, that a blended approach is permissible for the scheme and acceptable to the client.

5.2 The outcome of the individual risk assessment for a given organisation shall determine the applicable route for the progression of a blended audit based on high, medium or low risk, as defined in process maps 1-3.

Note 1: for the determination of risk for quality, environmental, and occupational Health & Safety Management Systems see IAF MD 5.

5.3 Activities that can typically be considered for the remote activities that form part of the blended approach include, but are not limited to: -

- Interviews
- File Reviews
- Management System Document Reviews
- Witnessing of Activities
- Client Location Reviews
- Opening and Closing Meetings
- On-site auditors supported by offsite-team members (e.g., Technical Experts)

Note: for further information on using ICT for the activities above please see IAF MD4

5.4 While it is accepted that the combination of some audit scopes and ICT capabilities will permit a higher percentage of remote activities than those indicated in the process maps, any blended audit must be, through evidence, demonstrated as effective as traditional techniques.

The CB shall firstly determine the applicability using the Blended Audit Framework in Appendix 1 ensuring that the defined steps can be met.

This document uses indicative process maps to indicate a suitable blend of remote and physical activity to indicate a level of blended techniques that would be typically accepted, however, the combination of some audit scopes and ICT capabilities may permit a higher percentage of remote activity depending on the individual risk assessment. The blend percentages shown in the process maps refer to the percentage of the overall audit process that could be covered by remote activity and are to be defined and justified by the CB based upon the individual risk assessment.

Note: the percentages shown in the process maps are considered to be indicative of the expected outcome of a risk assessment (but are not prescriptive).

6. Approach to Planning a Blended Audit

6.1 The risk assessment shall be conducted by the CB to ascertain the feasibility of applying the blended audit approach to the assessment of a given organisation. The risk assessment should be based on knowledge of the client and historic data. A blended audit shall not be permitted if the risk assessment identifies an unacceptable threat to the effectiveness of the audit process.

6.2 Each individual risk assessment shall be maintained and be revisited at least once within the certification cycle or where other circumstances dictate.

6.3 For initial audits, the results of the Stage 1 should inform and confirm the ongoing approach.

6.4 The output of the risk assessment shall be used as an input to the audit planning process and should be reflected in appropriate audit documentation.

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6.5 Audit plans shall make clear that a blended approach is being implemented in respect to a given audit activity and contain concise detail as to both the ICT (reference IAF MD 4:2018) or remote method to be used and its objective.

Note: An example of the above would be the use of 'Microsoft Teams' to facilitate the opening and closing meeting and audit interviews, whereas 'WhatsApp' could be used to facilitate an interactive site tour.

6.6 Audit plans and risk assessments shall be retained as client records (See ISO/IEC 17021-1 9.9).

6.7 The Blended Audit Framework in Appendix 1 indicates the considerations for the different stages in the certification process.

6.8 Whether the audit is conducted physically, blended or remotely the certificate content must comply fully with ISO/IEC 17021-1. There is no requirement to state on the certificate the type of audit undertaken.

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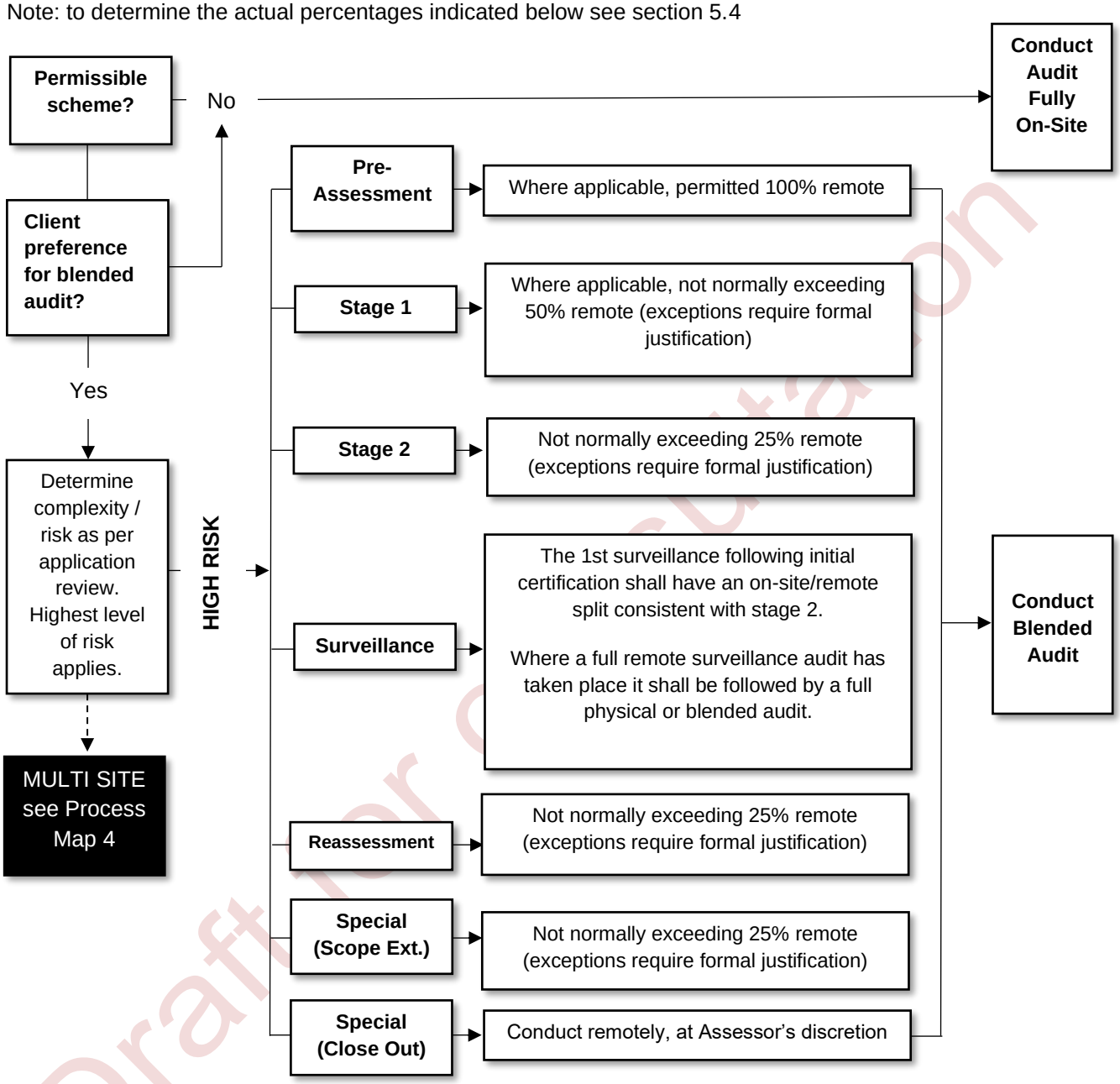
Process Map 1: High Risk

Note: to determine the actual percentages indicated below see section 5.4



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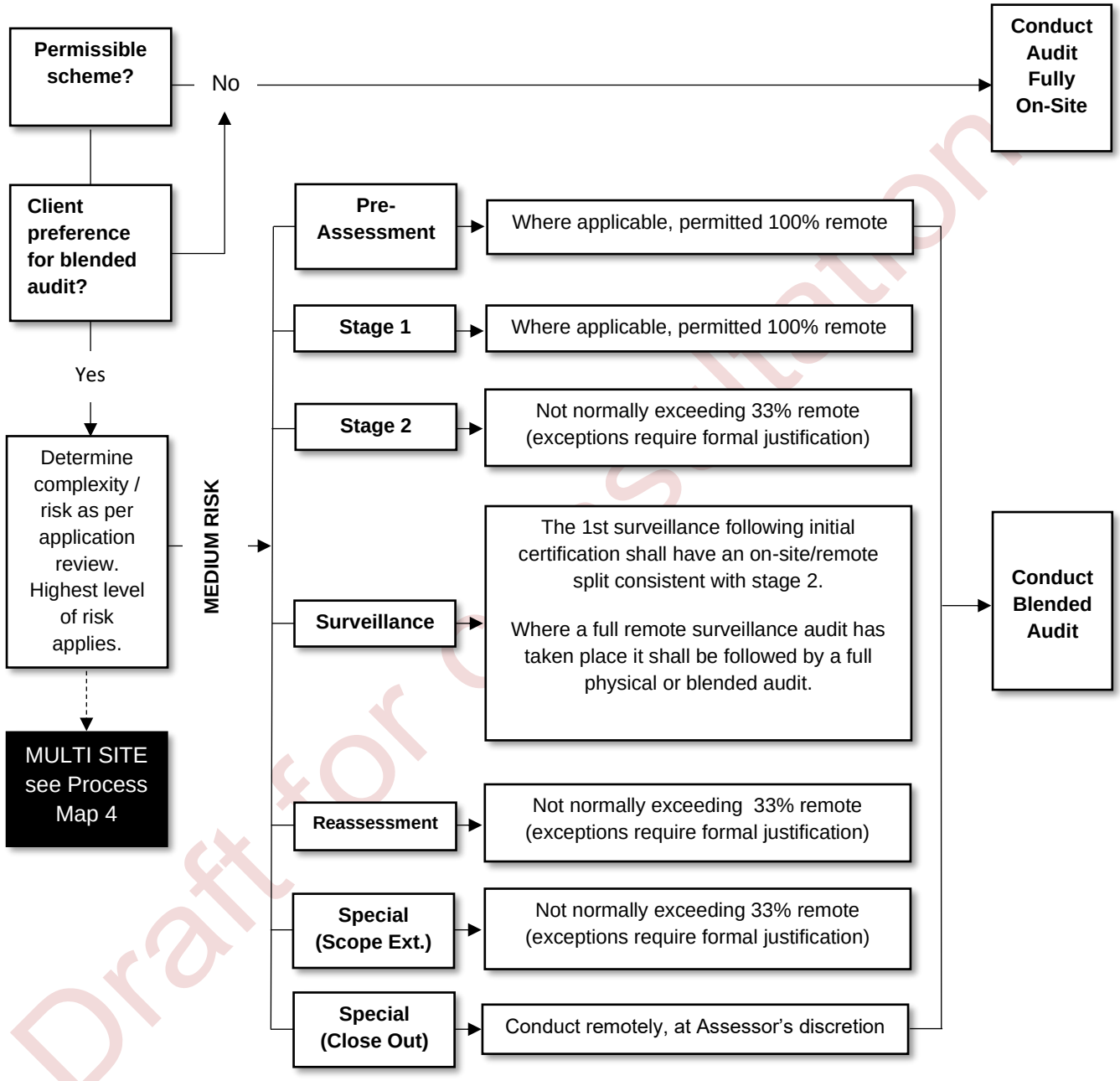
Process Map 2: Medium Risk

Note: to determine the actual percentages indicated below see section 5.4



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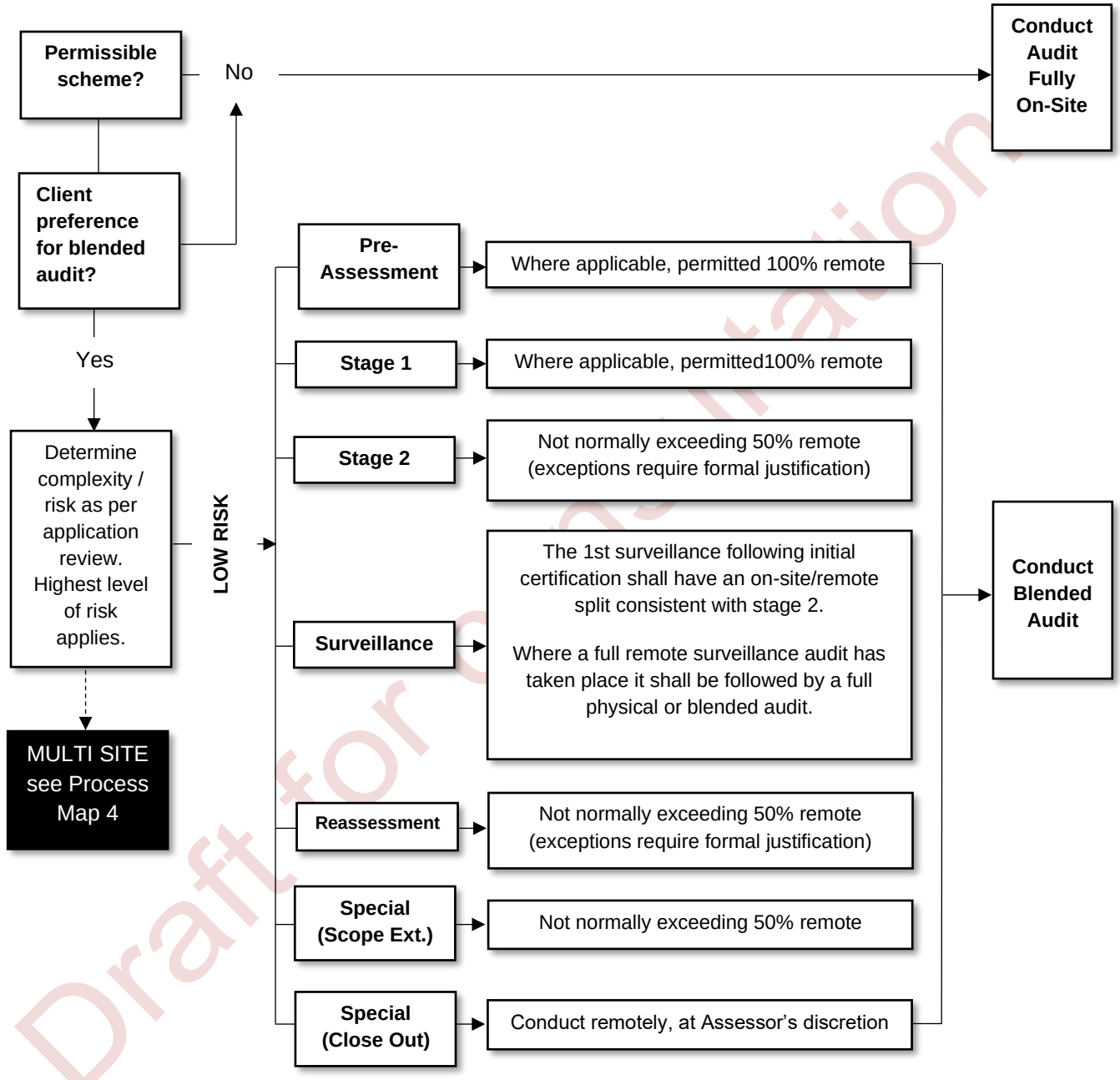
Process Map 3: Low Risk

Note: to determine the actual percentages indicated below see section 5.4



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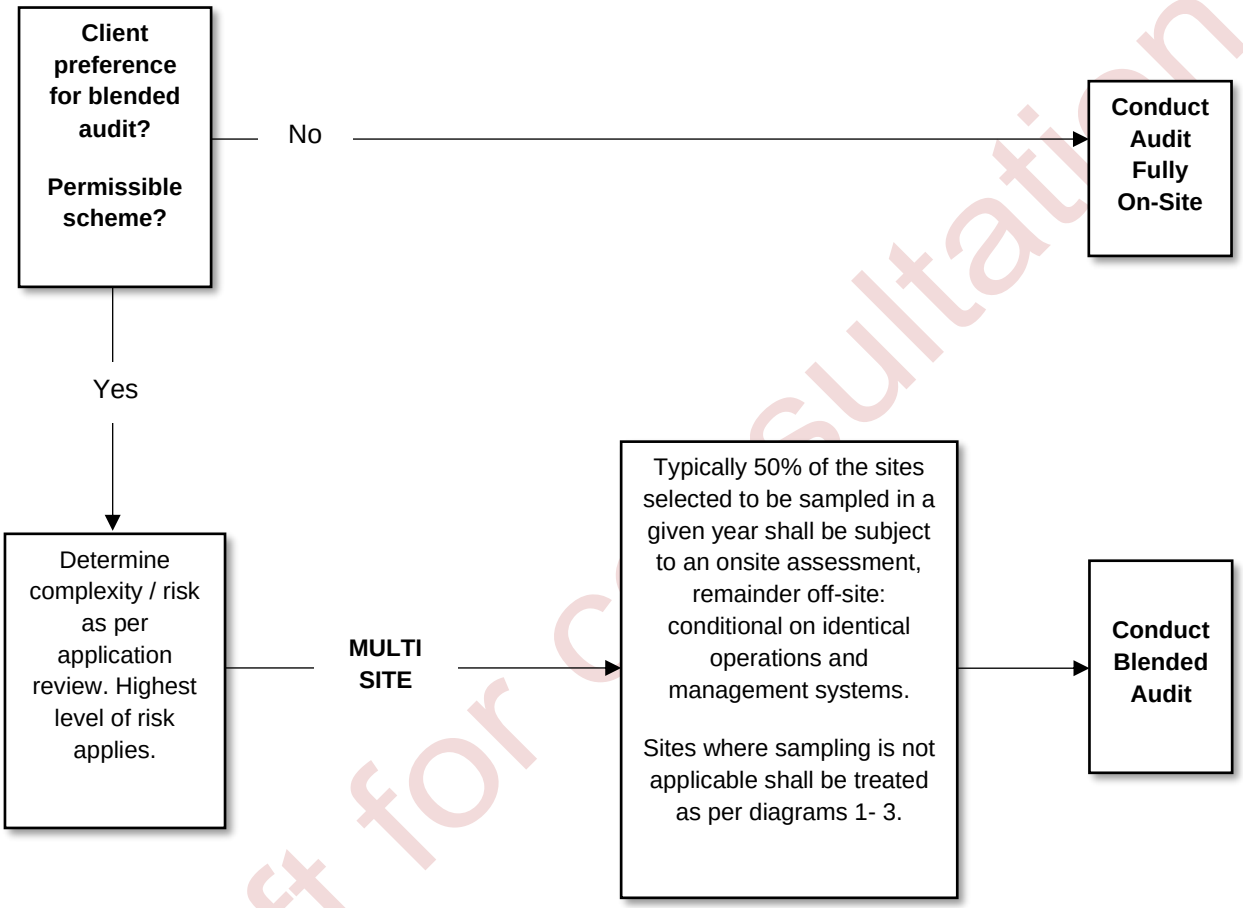
Process Map 4: Multi Sites

Note 1: Multi site means multiple physical locations.

Note 2: to determine the actual percentages indicated below see section 5.3



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Appendix 1: Blended Audit Framework

To determine the steps required for the potential implementation of a blended audit the CB shall firstly determine the applicability using this Blended Audit Framework or an equivalent.

Stage in Certification Process	Actions/Inputs	Output/Evidence	Notes
Precertification	Application review		All of 9.1 - ISO/IEC 17021
Planning	Determine audit objective		
	Perform risk assessment	Provisional risk assessment	To be verified from the subsequent activities and updated where necessary
	Produce stage one audit plan	Audit plan	
	Confirm ICT capability	Confirm blend of audit delivery	Can the ICT equipment and methods deliver the required level of detail
Initial certification audit	Carryout stage one initial certification audit	Confirm blend of audit delivery	Initial audit shall include an element of onsite auditing The results of stage 1 shall be documented in a written report. The certification body shall review the stage 1 audit report before deciding on proceeding with stage 2 and shall confirm if the stage 2 audit team members have the necessary competence; this may be done by the auditor leading the team that conducted the stage 1 audit if deemed competent and appropriate.
Conducting audits	Feedback on the effectiveness of ICT shall be an output of each visit	Where required reconfirm the planned audit blend	
Decision	Risk assessments shall be available to the decision maker		
Surveillance	Identify with client if any changes have occurred which may impact upon the risk assessment		First surveillance shall include an element of onsite auditing consistent with Stage 2
Recertification	Review risk assessment	Confirm blend of audit delivery	Recertification shall include an element of onsite auditing
Transfers	Blended audit programme defined by the issuing CB	Blended audit programme defined by the accepting CB based upon that of the issuing CB	To prevent the potential risk of consecutive remote surveillances
Special Audits	Determine audit objective	All of the above	

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