

Quality Assured Seal for DMCs

Guidance Notes



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Application & Audit Process

When deciding to apply for the QA Seal, DMCs need to adhere to the application and audit processes accordingly. In this regard, DMCs shall:

- comply with a number of specific criteria by presenting relevant documentation at application stage (102, 105, 107, 108, 109, 110, 111, 113, 117);
- be assessed according to criteria as checked by the auditors at pre-audit stage (101, 106, 118, 119, 120, 121, 201, 208);
- be assessed according to criteria as verified by the auditors during the on-site audit (103, 104, 111, 112, 114, 115, 116, 202, 203, 204, 205, 206, 208, 209).

Introduction to the Guidance Notes

The aim of these Guidance Notes is to explain, in further detail, the requirements to obtain the Quality Assured (QA) Seal for Destination Management Companies (DMCs).

At the same time, these Guidance Notes are also meant to serve as a guide to best practice for all DMCs aiming to provide high-quality services to clients.

The QA Seal for DMCs consists of two distinct but complementary categories:

1. Mandatory Criteria
2. Pass or Fail Criteria

Each criterion is herein explained in terms of the key points which shall be assessed during the audit and, where appropriate, a clear indication of how a pass is expected to be achieved.

N.B. Wherever the term *auditors* appears in the document, this refers to the MTA auditors who shall be auditing the DMC applying for the QA Seal.

Pass or Fail Criteria

When assessing the criteria for a pass, each one has a specific number of measures or parameters that need to be satisfied.

In order to obtain the QA Seal, DMCs are required to comply with all the Mandatory Criteria before proceeding with the assessment of the Pass or Fail Criteria. All documentation indicated need to be submitted with the application. Candidate DMCs must have a minimum of 8 passes to qualify.

Mandatory Criteria

Criterion 101 – Registration & MTA Licence

Scan of business registration and MTA licence need to be provided at application/renewal stage and shall be reviewed accordingly by the auditors.

Criterion 102 – Compliance (new applicants only)

All the professional operations of the DMC need to be carried out in full compliance with the law. A statement of intent needs to be submitted by company owners, directors or managers.

Criterion 103 – Parametres to qualify to apply

The DMC must have a minimum of 500 delegates per annum and handle 5 events with a minimum group size of 10 people.

DMCs are required to prepare an excel sheet indicating number of groups and total delegates. In the event of a DMC that also handles substantial numbers in Special Interest groups, a separate excel sheet needs to be prepared. In this scenario, auditors will also audit a random group selected from SIT.

N.B. In order to obtain the QA Seal according to the aforementioned thresholds, all the events should be held in Malta.

Criterion 104 – DMC Services

In the case of a mother company handling various operations, a separate division with full-time staff should be in place for DMC services. Jobsplus records of employment need to be provided to clearly indicate said staff.

N.B. This criterion is not applicable for fully-fledged independent DMCs.

Criterion 105 – Full-Time Employees

The DMC areas of sales, operations and administration need to be effectively manned by at least two full-time employees. Jobsplus records of employment need to be provided to clearly indicate said staff.

Criterion 106 – Personnel

The staff size needs to be adequate and proportional to the size of the DMC as well as to its operational services. As always temporary staff will be taken into account.

Criterion 107 – Office

The DMC needs to be situated in a proper registered office, operating regular office hours. Planning Authority approval shall be provided.

Criterion 108 – Bank Reference

The latest bank reference shall be reviewed prior to the audit. Such bank reference must not be older than 12 months.

N.B. Where the DMCs bank requires that the MTA make the request for said reference, the DMC needs to immediately at reminder stage (July) supply the auditors with the bank contact details.

Criterion 109 – Client References

The DMC must provide three client references which need to be presented prior to the audit and be not older than 6 months.

Criterion 110 – Supplier References

The DMC must provide three supplier references which need to be presented prior to the audit and be not older than 6 months. These must comprise services in terms of accommodation, transport, entertainment, and caterers.

Criterion 111 – Financials

The DMC must present a declaration by the auditing firm confirming sound financial standing and adequate liquidity, explaining any concerns that might have arisen.

N. B. The auditors will need to see the final signed copy of the audited financials during the audit.

Criterion 112 – Insurance

The auditors shall review and assess third-party liability of the DMC. Auditors request extensions to the basic policy for groups over 2,000 delegates, American and Canadian groups as well as for specific activities. Such extensions need to be kept on file for the two-year audit period. Auditors will request proof of the extension of insurance if required by the random groups selected.

Criterion 113 – Supplier Insurance

The DMC is required to keep a database of suppliers excluding those licensed by MTA and Transport Malta. The insurance certificates for the past two years representing the auditing period need to be retained. Softcopy in a folder or hardcopies must be provided at the time of the audit for each randomly selected group.

Criterion 114 – Staff Qualifications & Experience

The DMC is required to indicate someone who is either trained as a DMC operator or holds relevant qualifications (Tourism, Management and such) or has relevant experience in the field (minimum of 4 years). Qualifications for other employees need to be reflective of the positions held.

N.B. Educational training templates need to be presented for all staff in the case of new applicants or new staff for renewals.

Criterion 115 – Contracts

Any agreements and contracts entered by the DMC need to be produced in full compliance with the legal standards governed by Maltese Law. Hardcopies signed by both parties shall be reviewed during the audit for the randomly selected groups.

Criterion 116 – Invoicing

Quotations and invoices provided by the DMC should be as transparent as possible. Parameters of quotations and invoices need to be properly itemised whilst also specifying any additional overheads (e.g. overtime rate). Relevant tax rates also need to be clearly indicated.

Criterion 117 – International/Local Membership

The DMC should be a member of a recognised international/local association or chamber.

Criterion 118 – DMC Operator

The DMC is required to indicate an individual of its staff who shall be available throughout any organised events. This needs to be assessed via any of the following: the work log, indicated in emails, schedules or programmes.

Criterion 119 – MTA Seminars/Training

Seminars, workshops and/or trainings shall be organised by the MTA on MICE or any other relevant topics. DMCs are required to take part in such activities.

Criterion 120 – MICE Statistics

DMCs are required to provide statistics to the MTA for purposes of quality assurance and development.

Criterion 121 – Client Satisfaction

DMCs are required to present emails that show the survey was sent out. This criterion is backed up by criterion 208, where when it is sent and follow-ups are assessed.

Pass or Fail Criteria

Criterion 201 – Self-Representation & Quality of Website

To obtain a pass in this criterion the website must contain the below:

- a distinctive webpage (for DMCs as part of a larger company);
- overall up-to-date, attractively laid out, easy-to-use website;
- a clear “About us” page;
- up-to-date testimonials (no more than 2 years old);
- an updated attractive gallery;
- about Malta details;
- clear up-to-date contact details and address;
- the QA logo in a visible position;
- where available, biography and news sections need to be updated.

Criterion 202 – Emails

The DMC must operate email addresses with a private domain. Furthermore, to obtain a pass in this criterion the email signature (at least in first reply) needs to show:

- name and surname;
- position;
- landline;
- mobile number (even if generic);
- website;
- QA logo.

Criterion 203 – Business Cards

Business cards must reflect the professional image of the DMC and contain the below whilst it is taken as given that these are clearly printed and offer maximum legibility:

- name and surname;
- position;
- landline;
- mobile number (even if generic);
- website & email address;

Criterion 204 - Training

The DMC is required to carry out induction training programmes which include job shadowing, site visits and any other generic in-house training for new employees.

Other suggestions for ongoing training are first aid, health and safety awareness, dealing with difficult people, customer care, visits to attractions and relevant sites, etc. The auditors will assess the training efforts made over a period of 2 years for employees. These efforts can be for different staff over different periods in the 2 years.

N. B. Receipts, tickets, manuals, attendance sheets, emails, and certificates will be requested during the audit.

Criterion 205 – Acknowledgment Response Time

The DMC is required to manage proposal requests in a professional and timely manner within 24 hours. Phone calls should be followed up with emails. The 3 random groups selected shall be assessed for this criterion. Weekends and public holidays are taken into consideration when considering response time.

Criterion 206 – Complaint Response Time

The DMC is required to manage complaints received via email or phone in a professional and timely manner within 24 hours. Phone calls should be followed up with emails. The 3 random groups selected shall be assessed for this criterion. Weekends and public holidays are taken into consideration when considering response time.

N. B. This may be marked as *Not Applicable (N/A)* if no complaints are received.

Criterion 207 – Proposal Response Time

The DMC is required to send an initial proposal which addresses all the client's demands and requirements within 72 hours. This shall be assessed for the 3 random groups selected for the audit purposes. Exceptions can be made in circumstances where client indicates no sense of urgency or specifies their own response deadline. Weekends and public holidays are taken into consideration when considering response time.

Criterion 208 – Feedback Request

The DMC is expected to collect feedback from clients. All emails and correspondence should be properly grouped for auditors to view. This will be assessed via the 3 randomly selected groups during the audit.

To pass in this criterion, the DMC must have performed the below:

- sent the request for feedback within 1 month of the date of the departure of the group;
- sent at least one reminder within 3 months of the date of departure;
- final reminder sent up to 6 months following the date of departure.

Criterion 209 – Complaint Handling & Record Keeping

When it comes to client's complaints, DMCs should operate as intermediaries between suppliers and themselves by implementing a well-established procedure.

To pass this criterion, the DMC needs to ensure the following:

- when a complaint is successfully handled on site minor or major, this needs to be communicated post event to the team in writing;
- when a complaint is successfully handled over the phone, this needs to be followed up by an email and disseminated to the team;
- recurring complaints and issues with a supplier need to be communicated to the team.

N.B. The auditors will ask to see emails to this effect.

Criterion 210 – Sustainability Measures

Sustainable initiatives comprise both eco-friendly and Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) initiatives. DMCs may seek to address this criterion both internally within their offices and via clients. These may be in the form of implementing any of the below measures.

To pass this criterion, a DMC needs to at least have in place 6 of the below.

- legal waste separation procedures (basic recycling) at the office;
- energy-efficient lighting at the office;
- resource conservation policies (e.g. water, electricity, paper, etc.) at the office or sourcing service providers with such policies;
- double flushing or reducers for waterflows;
- light sensors and timers at the office;

- sponsorship of eco-related events both as an office team or encouraging clients to take on initiatives (e.g. clean-ups, car-sharing initiatives, tree-planting activities, etc.);
- organisation of eco-related events;
- participation/collaboration with environmental NGOs;
- formal energy audits for larger offices;
- investments in solar panels for larger office buildings;
- organisation of fundraising activities or donations;
- provision of flexible working conditions for employees;
- opportunity for apprenticeships and internships.

N.B. The auditors will take into consideration other initiatives or efforts not on this list. Evidence of the efforts being presented to the auditors need to be provided in term of visual inspection, emails, receipts, letters and photos.