



Banc Ceannais na hÉireann
Central Bank of Ireland

Eurosystem

2011

Protocol between the Central Bank of Ireland and the Auditors of Regulated Financial Service Providers – “The Auditor Protocol”



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Introduction

1. The aim of this Protocol is to enhance the information sharing between the Central Bank of Ireland ('the Central Bank') and auditors of regulated financial service providers ('firms') thereby improving the regulatory and statutory audit processes.
2. This Protocol is in addition to the statutory requirements on auditors of firms to report to the Central Bank under Irish legislative requirements e.g. under 'prescribed' enactments and under Sections 27B and 27C of the Central Bank Act, 1997. However, the Protocol does not extend in any way the nature and purpose of the statutory audit as required under legislation.
3. The Protocol covers the following areas:
 - bilateral meetings; and
 - trilateral meetings.

The General Framework

4. To facilitate both the Central Bank and the auditors of firms to achieve the effective fulfilment of the two parties' statutory powers, communication channels between both parties should always be open and an environment that facilitates frank discussions should exist. These goals can be achieved through the adoption of the following measures:
 - Firms shall advise the Central Bank of the contact details of the audit partner responsible for the audit within 5 days of their appointment.

- Firms shall advise its auditor of the contact details of its senior examiner in the Central Bank within 5 days of the auditor's appointment.
 - Meetings between the Central Bank and auditors shall be governed by the following principles:
 - (a) The Central Bank shall endeavour to share all information, which it believes would lead to higher quality audits, with the auditor;
 - (b) The auditing firm shall endeavour to share with the Central Bank any information that it believes may assist the Central Bank in the exercise of its supervisory functions;
 - (c) All communications between the Central Bank and auditors shall be deemed confidential under Section 33AK of the Central Bank Act, 1942 (as amended).
5. Material information (i.e. information which is deemed would be of immediate interest to the other party) shall be shared between both parties at the earliest instance even if a meeting between both parties is not planned.
6. Barriers to the sharing of information should be identified and, where possible, removed with a view to maximising the effectiveness of communication between both parties.
7. Contractual agreements between auditors and firms should not hinder information sharing. Specifically, the terms of the audit engagement shall include a provision that acknowledges that the Central Bank and the firm's auditors can discuss any issue that is of relevance to their

oversight of the firm and that this communication will not be determined to be a breach of duty by either party.

8. In order for any meetings between the auditor and the Central Bank to be mutually beneficial, it is envisaged that the auditor will be represented by the lead partner and the Central Bank by the senior examiner.

Bilateral Meetings

9. It is expected that there will be at least two formal bilateral meetings per year. These meetings will take place at the pre audit stage and the post audit stage.

Pre Audit Meeting:

10. It is envisaged that this meeting will be held as part of the Trilateral Meeting process (see below) but it could also be held as a bilateral meeting if both the Central Bank and the auditor believe that it would be more beneficial to do so.
11. It is expected that this meeting will have an Agenda which covers, inter alia, the following issues:
 - (i) The risk profile of the firm – e.g. changes in business lines, drivers of income, strategy.
 - (ii) Weaknesses identified in previous audits.
 - (iii) Overview of weaknesses identified through the supervisory process.

- (iv) The audit approach and the application of the materiality concept.
- (v) Changes in the corporate governance and internal governance structures of the firm.
- (vi) Observations on the control functions of the firm (e.g. risk management function, internal audit, compliance).

Post Audit Meeting:

12. It is envisaged that this meeting will be arranged after the audit report is signed off. However, this meeting may occur before audit sign off if it is deemed more beneficial.
13. It is expected that this meeting will have an Agenda which covers, inter alia, the following issues:
- (i) The Going Concern Concept.
 - (ii) An update on the items outlined in the pre audit meeting.
 - (iii) Discussion on whether the auditors were able to follow their intended audit plan and/or whether they had to make any amendments based on their findings during the audit.
 - (iv) Discussion on the audit findings as originally presented to the firm and the adequacy of the firm's response to these findings.
 - (v) Discussion on areas where management of the firm applied significant judgement and its impact on the auditor's view of the financial statements and on the risk profile of the firm. This discussion would include how the level of professional scepticism was applied by the auditor.

- (vi) Any issues that affected communications between the auditor and/or the Central Bank and/or the firm during the year that could be improved.
- (vii) The future strategy of the firm and the impact that it may have on audit and regulatory issues.

Trilateral Meetings

14. The Central Bank, through its Corporate Governance requirements, places a significant onus on the Audit Committee to monitor the effectiveness and adequacy of the firm's internal control (including around IT systems) and internal audit. It is because of this reliance that the Central Bank believes that trilateral meetings should take place between the Central Bank, the auditor and the Chair of the Audit Committee or, if an Audit Committee is not in place, an appropriate Independent Non-Executive Director, to discuss areas of concern and/or mutual interest regarding the firm. The Trilateral Meeting will, in the normal course of audits, be conducted at the planning stage of the audit process. These meetings should cover all issues that the parties consider may be of interest to the other parties in carrying out their statutory or fiduciary functions.

Continuous Review

15. This Protocol will be subject to annual review and will be updated to reflect changes in legislation, auditing practice and other relevant developments.

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