

**[CLEAN]**

**PROPOSED INTERNATIONAL STANDARD ON AUDITING 505  
(REVISED AND REDRAFTED)  
EXTERNAL CONFIRMATIONS**

(Effective for audits of financial statements for periods beginning on or after [date])<sup>\*</sup>

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International Standard on Auditing (ISA) 505 (Revised and Redrafted), “External Confirmations,” should be read in the context of the “Preface to the International Standards on Quality Control,

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<sup>\*</sup> See footnote 1.

Auditing, Review, Other Assurance and Related Services,” which sets out the authority of ISAs.

## Introduction

### Scope of this ISA

1. This International Standard on Auditing (ISA) establishes requirements and provides guidance for the performance of external confirmation procedures. This ISA does not address inquiries regarding litigation and claims. Part C: Procedures Regarding Litigation and Claims of ISA 501, “Audit Evidence – Additional Considerations for Specific Items,” establishes requirements and provides guidance on such inquiries.

### External Confirmation Procedures as a Response to Assessed Risks

2. When properly performed, the auditor may use external confirmation procedures to obtain evidence from an independent source in response to assessed risks of material misstatement at the assertion level. External confirmation procedures may be used to obtain more persuasive audit evidence as the risk of material misstatement increases, or to obtain corroborative evidence to address assessed risks due to fraud. In addition, evidence obtained in the form of external confirmations may increase the assurance the auditor otherwise obtains from evidence existing within the accounting records or representations made by management. (Ref: Para. A1-A6)
3. The auditor also may determine that external confirmation procedures are the only means of obtaining sufficient appropriate audit evidence to address an assessed risk of material misstatement. (Ref: Para. A7)

### Effective Date

4. This ISA is effective for audits of financial statements for periods beginning on or after [date].<sup>1</sup>

### Objective

5. The objective of the auditor when performing external confirmation procedures in response to an assessed risk of material misstatement is to design and perform such procedures to obtain relevant and reliable audit evidence.

### Definitions

6. For the purpose of this ISA, the following terms have the meanings attributed below:
  - (a) External confirmation – Audit evidence obtained as a direct written response to the auditor, whether in paper form, or by electronic or other medium, from a third party (the confirming party).
  - (b) External confirmation process – The process of performing procedures directed towards obtaining an external confirmation.

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<sup>1</sup> This date will not be earlier than December 15, 2008.

- (c) Positive confirmation request – A request of the confirming party to respond directly to the auditor indicating whether the confirming party agrees or disagrees with the information provided, or providing information requested.
- (d) Negative confirmation request – A request of the confirming party to respond directly to the auditor only in the event the confirming party disagrees with the information provided in the request.
- (e) Non-response – When the confirming party does not respond, or does not fully respond, to a positive confirmation request, or when a confirmation request is returned undeliverable. An oral response to a confirmation request constitutes a non-response.
- (f) Exception – A response to a confirmation request indicating a difference between information requested for confirmation, or contained in the entity's records, and information provided by the confirming party.

## **Requirements**

### **External Confirmation Process**

7. When the auditor decides to perform external confirmation procedures in response to an assessed risk of material misstatement, the auditor shall maintain control over the external confirmation process, including:
  - (a) Determining the information to be confirmed or requested;
  - (b) Selecting the appropriate confirming party;
  - (c) Designing and preparing the confirmation requests;
  - (d) Communicating with the confirming party including: addressing the requests, ensuring return information is included in requests, requesting that responses be sent directly to the auditor, and sending requests;
  - (e) Considering the results (responses, non-responses and exceptions) of the external confirmation procedures; and
  - (f) Evaluating the evidence obtained. (Ref: Para. A8-A12)

### **Management Request to Not Confirm**

8. When management asks that the auditor not request a confirmation, the auditor shall ask management to withdraw its request.
9. If management refuses the auditor's request, then the auditor shall:
  - (a) Evaluate the reasonableness of management's request by challenging the reasons provided by management with an attitude of professional skepticism and seeking corroborative evidence for those reasons; (Ref: Para.A13)

- (b) Evaluate the implications on the assessment of the relevant risks of material misstatement, including the risk of fraud, and on the nature, timing and extent of other audit procedures; and (Ref: Para. A14)
  - (c) Where possible, perform alternative procedures designed to obtain relevant and reliable audit evidence. (Ref: Para. A15)
10. When management refuses to withdraw its request that the auditor not request a confirmation, and the auditor is unable to perform adequate alternative procedures, the auditor shall communicate with those charged with governance, and consider the possible impact on the auditor's opinion in accordance with [proposed] ISA 705 (Revised and Redrafted), "Modifications to the Opinion in the Independent Auditor's Report."

#### **Results of the External Confirmation Process** (Ref: Para. A16)

##### *Reliability of Responses to Confirmation Requests*

- 11. The auditor shall consider the reliability of the response to a confirmation request in accordance with [proposed] ISA 500 (Redrafted), "Considering the Relevance and Reliability of Audit Evidence." (Ref: Para.A17)
- 12. When the auditor has doubts about the reliability of the response to a confirmation request, the auditor shall perform audit procedures to resolve those doubts. (Ref: Para.A18)
- 13. When the auditor determines that a response to a confirmation request is not reliable, the auditor shall evaluate the implications on the assessment of the relevant risks of material misstatement, including the risk of fraud, and on the nature, timing and extent of other audit procedures. (Ref: Para. A19)

##### *Non-responses*

- 14. The auditor shall perform alternative audit procedures for non-responses to obtain relevant and reliable audit evidence. When the auditor determines that a response to a positive confirmation request is the only means of obtaining sufficient appropriate audit evidence to respond to assessed risks of material misstatement, and the auditor does not obtain such confirmation, the auditor shall determine the implications for the audit and the auditor's opinion. (Ref: Para A20-A22)

##### *Exceptions*

- 15. The auditor shall investigate exceptions to determine whether or not they represent misstatements. (Ref: Para. A23-A24)

#### **Evaluating the Evidence Obtained**

- 16. The auditor shall evaluate whether the results of the external confirmation process provide relevant and reliable audit evidence or whether performance of further audit procedures is necessary. ISA 330 (Redrafted), "The Auditor's Responses to Assessed Risks," provides guidance when performance of further audit procedures is considered necessary.

## **Negative Confirmations**

17. Unless the following circumstances are met, the auditor shall only use negative confirmations in conjunction with other substantive procedures that address an assessed risk of material misstatement:
- (a) The assessed risk of material misstatement associated with the relevant financial statement assertion is low;
  - (b) A large number of small balances is involved;
  - (c) A substantial number of exceptions is not expected; and
  - (d) The auditor has no reason to believe that respondents will disregard the confirmation requests. (Ref: Para. A25-A26)

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## **Application and Other Explanatory Material**

### **External Confirmation Procedures as a Response to Assessed Risks** (Ref: Para. 2)

- A1. ISA 330 (Redrafted) deals with the auditor's responsibility to design and implement responses to the risks of material misstatement identified and assessed by the auditor in accordance with ISA 315 (Redrafted), "Identifying and Assessing Risks of Material Misstatement Through Understanding the Entity and Its Environment".
- A2. ISA 240 (Redrafted), "The Auditor's Responsibilities Relating to Fraud in an Audit of Financial Statements" indicates that the auditor may design confirmation requests to obtain additional corroborative information as a response to address the assessed risks of material misstatement due to fraud at the assertion level.

### *Relevance of External Confirmations*

- A3. External confirmation procedures frequently are relevant when addressing assertions associated with account balances and their constituent parts, but need not be restricted to these items. For example, the auditor may request confirmation of the terms of agreements, contracts or transactions that an entity has executed with other parties. External confirmation procedures also may be performed to obtain audit evidence about the absence of certain conditions. For example, a confirmation request may specifically address the absence of a "side agreement" that may be relevant to an entity's cut-off assertion. Other examples of situations where external confirmation procedures provide relevant audit evidence in responding to assessed risks of material misstatement include:
- Bank balances and other information relevant to banking relationships.
  - Accounts receivable balances and terms.
  - Inventories held by third parties at bonded warehouses for processing or on consignment.
  - Property title deeds held by lawyers or financiers for safe custody or as security.

- Investments held for safekeeping by third parties or purchased from stockbrokers but not delivered at the balance sheet date.
  - Amounts due to lenders, including relevant terms of repayment and restrictive covenants.
  - Accounts payable balances and terms.
- A4. While external confirmations may provide relevant evidence relating to certain assertions, there are some assertions for which external confirmations provide less relevant evidence. For example, external confirmations provide less relevant evidence relating to the recoverability of accounts receivable balances.
- A5. The auditor may decide to perform external confirmation procedures rather than other audit procedures. For example, while there may be other procedures for obtaining audit evidence about the existence of an entity's bank balances, the auditor may decide to request positive confirmation from the entity's banks to obtain other information relevant to the entity's banking relationships.

*Considerations in Determining the Appropriateness of External Confirmations*

- A6. Factors that may assist the auditor in determining whether external confirmation procedures are an appropriate response to an assessed risk include:
- The confirming party's knowledge of the subject matter – if the subject matter on which external confirmation procedures are being performed is complex or highly subjective, responses may be less reliable if not provided by a person at the confirming party who is knowledgeable about the information being confirmed.
  - The ability or willingness of the intended confirming party to respond – for example, the confirming party:
    - May not view responding to a confirmation request as its responsibility.
    - May consider responding too costly or time consuming.
    - May have concerns about the potential legal liability resulting from responding.
    - May account for transactions in different currencies.
    - May operate in an environment where responding to confirmation requests is not a significant aspect of day-to-day operations.

In such situations, confirming parties may not respond, respond in a casual manner or attempt to restrict the reliance that may be placed on the response.

- The objectivity of the intended confirming party– if the confirming party is a related party of the entity, responses to confirmation requests may be less reliable.

*When a Response to a Positive Confirmation Request is the Only Means of Obtaining Sufficient Appropriate Audit Evidence* (Ref: Para. 3)

- A7. The auditor may determine that a response to a positive confirmation request is the only means of obtaining sufficient appropriate audit evidence to address an assessed risk. Examples of circumstances when obtaining a response to a confirmation request directly from a confirming party may be the only way of obtaining appropriate audit evidence to address the assessed risk include:
- The only information available to corroborate management's assertion(s) resides outside the entity.
  - The entity's information systems and internal controls are unreliable or ineffective.
  - There are specific fraud risk factors, such as the risk of management override of internal controls, which prevent the auditor from relying on evidence obtained from the entity.

**External Confirmation Process** (Ref: Para. 7)

*Control Over the Confirmation Process*

- A8. Control over communications between the intended confirming parties and the auditor minimizes the possibility that the results of the external confirmation process will not be reliable because of the interception, or alteration, of confirmation requests or responses.

*Designing the Confirmation Request*

- A9. The design of the confirmation request may have a direct effect on the confirmation response rate and on the reliability and the nature of the audit evidence obtained from responses to confirmation requests.
- A10. Factors to be considered in designing the confirmation request may include:
- The assertions being addressed.
  - Specific risks identified, including fraud risks.
  - The layout and presentation of the confirmation request.
  - Prior experience on the audit or similar engagements.
  - The ability of the intended confirming party to confirm or provide the requested information (for example, individual invoice amount versus total balance).

*Identifying the Appropriate Confirming Party*

- A11. Responses to confirmation requests provide more relevant and reliable audit evidence when confirmation requests are sent to a confirming party who the auditor believes is knowledgeable about the information to be confirmed. For example, a financial institution official who is responsible for the institution's relationship with an entity or is knowledgeable about the transactions or arrangements for which confirmation is requested



may be the most appropriate person at the intended confirming party from which to request confirmation.

#### *Follow-Up on Confirmation Requests*

- A12. The auditor may perform procedures to obtain external confirmations for non-responses. For example, the auditor may verify that the original address was in fact correct and then send additional or follow-up requests.

#### **Management Request to Not Confirm**

##### *Reasonableness of Management's Request* (Ref: Para 9(a))

- A13. Challenging the reasons provided by management with an attitude of professional skepticism is important because, for example, the existence of a dispute or ongoing negotiation with the intended confirming party is a reason often cited by management and may be an appropriate reason to not confirm but it also may be an attempt by management to mislead the auditor. The auditor also may discuss the reasons provided by management with those charged with governance to confirm that they are aware, and approve, of management's request to not confirm.

##### *Implications on the Assessment of Relevant Risks of Material Misstatement* (Ref: Para 9(b))

- A14. The auditor may conclude from the evaluation in paragraph 9(b) that it would be appropriate to revise the assessment of the relevant risks of material misstatement at the assertion level and modify planned audit procedures accordingly, in accordance with ISA 315 (Redrafted). For example, if management's request to not confirm is unreasonable, this may be a fraud risk factor that requires further evaluation in accordance with ISA 240 (Redrafted).

##### *Alternative Procedures* (Ref: Para 9(c))

- A15. The alternative procedures performed may be similar to those appropriate for a non-response as set out in paragraphs A20 to A22 of this ISA. Such procedures also would take account of the results of the auditor's evaluation as discussed in paragraph 9(b) of this ISA.

#### **Results of the External Confirmation Process** (Ref: Para. 11-15)

- A16. When considering responses to confirmation requests and whether they provide audit evidence that addresses an assessed risk of material misstatement, the auditor may categorize responses as follows:
- (a) A response confirmed correct by the appropriate confirming party;
  - (b) A response deemed unreliable;
  - (c) A non-response; or
  - (d) A response indicating an exception.

*Reliability of Responses to Confirmation Requests* (Ref: Para. 11)

A17. [Proposed] ISA 500 (Redrafted) indicates that, even when audit evidence is obtained from sources external to the entity, circumstances may exist that could affect the reliability of the information obtained. No external confirmation process is without some risks of interception, alteration or fraud. Such risks exist regardless of whether the response is in paper form, or by electronic or other medium. Accordingly, when evaluating responses to confirmation requests, the auditor may have doubts about the reliability of the external confirmation as audit evidence. Indications that a response may include information that is not reliable include responses that:

- Are not delivered directly to the auditor.
- Do not come from the originally intended confirming party.
- Are received by a means that does not provide sufficient evidence as to the originating party.

*Doubts about Reliability* (Ref: Para. 12)

A18. [Proposed] ISA 500 (Redrafted) provides guidance when the auditor has doubts over the reliability of information to be used as audit evidence and requires the auditor to determine what modifications, or additional procedures, are necessary to resolve the matter. In this respect, the auditor may choose to verify the source and contents of a response to a confirmation request in a telephone call to the purported confirming party. When a response has been returned to the auditor indirectly (for example, because the confirming party incorrectly addressed it to the entity rather than to the auditor), the auditor may request that the purported confirming party mail the original response to the confirmation request directly to the auditor.

*Unreliable Responses* (Ref: Para. 13)

A19. When the auditor concludes that a response is unreliable, the auditor may need to revise the assessment of the relevant risks of material misstatement at the assertion level and modify planned audit procedures accordingly, in accordance with ISA 315 (Redrafted). For example, if a response is unreliable, this may be a fraud risk factor that requires further evaluation in accordance with ISA 240 (Redrafted).

*Non-responses* (Ref: Para. 14)

A20. Examples of alternative audit procedures the auditor may perform when a response to a positive confirmation request is not considered the only means of obtaining sufficient appropriate audit evidence include:

- Accounts receivable balances – examination of specific subsequent cash receipts, examination of shipping documentation, and examination of sales near the period-end to provide audit evidence for the cutoff assertion.
- Accounts payable balances – examination of subsequent cash disbursements or correspondence from third parties, and examination of other records, such as goods received notes.

- Bank balances – direct access by the auditor to information held by a third party concerning a client's account.
- A21. The nature and extent of alternative audit procedures are affected by the assessed risk of material misstatement at the assertion level. A non-response to a confirmation request may be indicative of a previously unidentified risk of material misstatement. In such situations, the auditor may need to revise the assessed risk of material misstatement at the assertion level and modify planned audit procedures, in accordance with ISA 315 (Redrafted). For example, a non-response to a confirmation request may be indicative of a previously unidentified fraud risk factor that requires further evaluation in accordance with ISA 240 (Redrafted).
- A22. If a response to a positive confirmation request is the only means of obtaining sufficient appropriate audit evidence to address an assessed risk, and the auditor does not receive an external confirmation, then an inability to obtain sufficient appropriate audit evidence may result. [Proposed] ISA 705 (Revised and Redrafted) provides guidance when there is an inability to obtain sufficient appropriate audit evidence.

*Exceptions* (Ref: Para. 15)

- A23. Exceptions noted in responses to confirmation requests may provide information to assist the auditor in determining the extent of misstatements and potential misstatements. When the auditor identifies a misstatement, ISA 240 (Redrafted) requires the auditor to evaluate whether such misstatement is indicative of fraud. Exceptions may provide a guide to the quality of responses to confirmation requests from similar confirming parties or for similar accounts. Exceptions also may indicate a weakness in the entity's internal control over financial reporting.
- A24. Some exceptions do not represent misstatements. For example, the auditor may conclude that differences identified in responses to confirmation requests are due to timing, measurement, or clerical errors.

**Negative Confirmations** (Ref: Para. 17)

- A25. When no response is received to a negative confirmation request, there is no explicit indication that the intended confirming party has received the confirmation request and verified that the information contained therein is correct. Accordingly, the use of negative confirmation requests provides less persuasive audit evidence than the use of positive confirmation requests.
- A26. The circumstances when the auditor may use negative confirmation requests alone to reduce the assessed risks of material misstatement to an acceptable level are limited. The auditor may, however, find it useful to request negative confirmations to supplement other substantive audit procedures.

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