CHS QUALITY ASSURANCE VERIFICATION SCHEME

CORE HUMANITARIAN STANDARD ON QUALITY AND ACCOUNTABILITY
The Verification Scheme’s aim is to improve the quality, effectiveness and accountability of development and humanitarian actions by supporting organisations with a standardised means to measure their application of the Core Humanitarian Standard (CHS).

**THE SCHEME WORKS TO:**

- **Demonstrate continuous improvement** in the implementation of, and/or compliance with the CHS.
- Ensure stakeholders using the CHS have a **reliable and objective tool to measure** organisational policies, procedures, programmes and services against the CHS;
- Provides **clear guidance on the different verification options** available to organisations and ensure that they are applied in a fair, consistent and reliable manner; and
- Establishes the **claims** of organisations that use the different options of the scheme.
- **Contribute to an evidence base** on the effect of the CHS and verification towards better quality, more effective and accountable humanitarian and development actions.
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REVISION OF THE CHS QUALITY ASSURANCE VERIFICATION SCHEME (2020)

The Core Humanitarian Standard on Quality and Accountability (CHS) aims to ensure organisations work in ways that effectively and accountably address the needs of people that are vulnerable, at-risk or affected by situations of crisis, in accordance with their priorities and preferences.

The CHS is a measurable and verifiable standard. CHS Alliance is entrusted with the responsibility for the development, management and oversight of the Verification Scheme, which guides and orientates quality assurance and verification processes against the Standard. It is also responsible for regularly reviewing and updating the Scheme to ensure it is fit for purpose and aligned to the needs of stakeholders.

In 2018, CHS Alliance commissioned an external review of the Verification Scheme. This led to the developments in this 2020 version, which replaces the 2016 CHS Verification Scheme. This updated version of the CHS Quality Assurance Verification Scheme includes:

- **Updated verification options.** Revised and updated descriptions of the approved verification options available to organisations applying the CHS.
- **Conditions and claims for external recognition** for organisations participating in verification processes.
- **Clarification on the roles and responsibilities** of the development, management and oversight of CHS verification, including the introduction of the Verification Advisory Panel.
- **Key term** definitions used in the CHS and Quality Assurance Verification Scheme.
- The 2020 Scheme was approved by the CHS Alliance Governing Board on 19 March 2020.
RATIONALE AND PURPOSE OF THE VERIFICATION SCHEME

An increasing number of organisations have committed to using the CHS as a benchmark for applying and continuously improving the quality and accountability in humanitarian and development work. However, committing to adopting the Standard is only the first step.

Organisations and their stakeholders need credible, reliable and trustworthy means to monitor and verify how well they apply the standard and how this contributes to positive outcomes for vulnerable, at-risk and crisis-affected people in need of assistance.

The purpose of the Scheme is to improve the quality, effectiveness and accountability of development and humanitarian actions by supporting organisations with a standardised means to measure their application of the CHS.

The objectives of the Scheme are to:

- Demonstrate continuous improvement in the implementation of, and/or compliance with the CHS.
- Ensure stakeholders using the CHS have a reliable and objective tool to measure organisational policies, procedures, programmes and services against the standard.
- Provide clear guidance on the different verification options available to organisations and ensure that they are applied in a fair, consistent and reliable manner.
- Establish the claims of organisations that use the different options of the scheme.
- Contribute to an evidence base on the effect of verifying against the CHS towards better quality, more effective and accountable humanitarian and development actions.

The purpose of the Scheme is to improve the quality, effectiveness and accountability of development and humanitarian actions by supporting organisations with a standardised means to measure their application of the CHS.
VERIFICATION OPTIONS AND PROCESSES

The Verification Scheme provides **three complementary verification options** based on a step-wise approach towards compliance with the CHS.

Each option uses the same set of CHS indicators to ensure compatibility of data and analysis, but with increasing degree of rigour and objectivity, and generating different outputs. Organisations can select the option that best suits their needs.

**Verification options**

- **Validated CHS Self-Assessment**
  
  Led by the organisation itself. Helps organisations gain an understanding of their capacity and performance against the CHS.

- **CHS Independent Verification**
  
  Provides organisations with an independent, external quality assurance assessment of capacity and performance against the CHS.

- **CHS Certification**
  
  Provides organisations with an independent, external quality assurance assessment and certification of compliance with the CHS.

**Verification Improvement Cycle**
## Table 2 – Verification options summary table

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Learning and improvement</td>
<td>Validated CHS self-assessment</td>
<td>CHS Verification framework and guide</td>
<td>2 years</td>
<td>The organisation itself, supported by CHS Alliance</td>
<td>CHS Alliance</td>
<td>CHS Verification Advisory Panel</td>
<td>• Self-assessment report including dashboards illustrating results scale 0-4 and improvement plan</td>
<td>• Self-improvement, with CHS Alliance support to its members</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Self-assessment manual, online questionnaires and dashboards</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Accredited and independent CAB</td>
<td></td>
<td>• CHS Alliance stamp and certificate recognising the completion of a validated self-assessment. For CHS Alliance members only</td>
<td>• Comparable data in the sector</td>
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<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td>CHS scoring grid</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Accreditation body</td>
<td></td>
<td>• Independent verification report including results scale 0-4</td>
<td>• Self-improvement, with CHS Alliance support to its members</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Demonstrate commitment and documents level of compliance</td>
<td>CHS independent verification</td>
<td>CHS verification framework and guide</td>
<td>4 years</td>
<td>Trained CHS auditors</td>
<td>Accredited and independent CAB</td>
<td></td>
<td>• CHS Alliance stamp and certificate recognising the completion of an independent verification. For CHS Alliance members only</td>
<td>• Comparable data in the sector</td>
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<td>• Audit tools developed by the conformity assessment body (CAB)</td>
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<td>Accreditation body</td>
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<td>• Certification report including results scale 0-4</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>CHS scoring grid</td>
<td>4 years</td>
<td>Trained CHS auditors</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• CHS Alliance stamp and certificate recognising the completion of a certification audit. For CHS Alliance members only</td>
<td>• First step towards external verification options</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Confirm compliance</td>
<td>CHS certification</td>
<td>CHS verification framework and guide</td>
<td>4 years</td>
<td>Trained CHS auditors</td>
<td>Accredited and independent CAB</td>
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<td>• Self-improvement, with CHS Alliance support to its members and annual surveillance audits by the CAB to assure on-going compliance with the CHS</td>
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<td>• Audit tools developed by the CAB</td>
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<td>Accreditation body</td>
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<td>• Comparable data in the sector</td>
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Repeated every two years, the process allows organisations to internally track and monitor continuous improvements against the CHS requirements. The outputs from this process can be used as a first step to prepare organisations for a more rigorous and objective third-party assessment (independent verification or certification).

**Added value of validated CHS self-assessment**

- Self-assessment results can be used to support internal capacity strengthening and continuous improvement.
- The completion of the process is validated by CHS Alliance, providing a degree of confidence that the organisation is committed to apply and continuously improve against the CHS.
- The organisation can use self-assessment findings as an input into the third party verification options.

**Process**

The validated CHS self-assessment option is a process led by the organisation with support from CHS Alliance. More information can be found in the CHS Alliance self-assessment tool; the below is an overview of the data collection, analysis and validation process.

**Data collection process**

- **Key documentation review:** organisations analyse and list their documents to demonstrate how their policies, management systems and processes meet the CHS. This is the same as the one used for the initial stage of independent verification and certification options.
- **Partnership survey:** organisations that work with and through partners complete an online survey to evaluate the strengths of their partnership agreements and due diligence mechanism. This same online survey is completed by a representative sample of partners themselves. These survey are administrated by CHS Alliance.
- **Staff survey:** organisations undertake an online survey developed and administered by CHS Alliance with a representative sample of staff (including staff from partners for organisations who do not implement programmes themselves) on their perceptions of how well the organisation meets the requirements expressed in the key actions of the CHS. The survey results are compiled, and analysed by CHS Alliance.
- **Perceptions of affected people survey:** organisations are asked to collect and measure feedback from the communities they assist on the quality and accountability of their services. The self-assessment manual developed by CHS Alliance offers various ways to complete it using a standardised list of recommended questions harmonised with external verification options, and reporting on it using another online survey administrated by CHS Alliance.

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1 The minimum size of the sample is established by CHS Alliance based on the overall size of the organisation. See the validated CHS self-assessment manual for further details.
Analysis and interpretation

- **CHS Alliance initial review**: after the data collection phase, CHS Alliance compiles the data collected through the online surveys and produces dashboards illustrating the results (both quantitative and narrative), that are shared with the organisation. These dashboards include an analysis of the strength of the data provided (through statistics on the responses collected: number of staff, partners, communities, etc.) and identifies examples of good practices and potential areas for improvement.

- **Organisational improvement plan**: the organisation reviews the data and initial analysis in CHS Alliance dashboards and develops its own recommendations and time-bound action plan to continue to work towards full integration of the CHS in its programmes and services. This is submitted to CHS Alliance for review and validation.

Validation

- **Validation and external recognition**: after the submission, the organisation’s action plan is validated by CHS Alliance. If the plan is considered realistic and achievable, CHS Alliance issues a statement confirming the organisation’s participation in the self-assessment verification exercise and its commitment to continuous improvement and integration of the CHS in its work.

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2 See the full details in the validated CHS self-assessment manual.
CHS INDEPENDENT VERIFICATION

**Independent verification** allows organisations to obtain a comprehensive, rigorous, and objective assessment of their capacity and performance against the CHS. This process determines the degree to which systems and processes integrate and meet the CHS requirements.

The requirement is that the most serious weaknesses in the application of the standard are eliminated within a four-year cycle, within which external auditors will undertake a mid-term audit after two years.

**Added value of independent verification**

- The audit process is conducted by an independent, accredited body, providing a greater degree of objectivity, credibility and confidence in the findings.
- The organisation can use the independent verification report as a baseline to identify gaps and areas for improvement against the CHS.
- Results can be used for organisational development processes aimed at promoting better application and continuous improvement against the Standard.
- The findings also provide a credible means to verify the organisation’s current capacity and performance against the CHS and confirm that the organisation is committed to continuous improvement against the standard.
- The results can be used as inputs into a certification process.

**Rules for eventual bridges between independent verification and certification are established by the conformity assessment bodies themselves without compromising integrity of ISO standards application and best practice.**

**Process**

An **independent verification** is conducted by an approved conformity assessment body. It provides a more rigorous and in-depth analysis than the self-assessment of the organisation’s application of the CHS, as it requires analysing, cross-checking and validating evidence from a number of data sources to verify the degree to which the organisation meets the CHS.

**Note that the specific processes and procedures for data collection and analysis may vary depending on the conformity assessment body, which is responsible for developing its own internal procedures in line with international standards on auditing processes and management systems. As such, the following constitutes a summary description of the requirements for third-party audits against the CHS.**

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3 Serious weaknesses are defined by the conformity assessment bodies carrying out the audit.
Data collection process

- **Key document review:** organisations submit documentary evidence to demonstrate how their policies, management systems and processes meet the CHS. This is reviewed, cross-checked and validated by trained and registered auditors for accuracy, relevance and reliability. Organisations that have conducted a validated CHS self-assessment can submit it as a basis for the auditors work, if it has been completed within 12 months of the start of the audit.

- **Staff and other key informant interviews:** auditors interview a cross-section of staff and other relevant stakeholders to assess the level of knowledge and understanding of the CHS, and the degree to which the CHS requirements are integrated and applied in management, decision-making processes and practice. The audit process also cross-checks and verifies the findings from the key document review.

- **Evidence on the views and perspectives of affected people:** auditors review organisational documentation and evidence on how the organisation collects and analyses feedback from the people it seeks to assist and the measures it takes to address any issues and concerns. Auditors cross-check and validate (or not) this information through interviews with affected people, other relevant stakeholders such as local authorities and direct observation at a representative sample of programme and project sites.

Analysis and interpretation

- **Auditors’ initial review:** the auditors consolidate and analyse the data collected from organisational documents, key informant interviews and visits to programme and/or project sites. The auditors produce a report on the outcomes of the process. This report includes an analysis of the strength of the data and evidence provided, to show the organisation’s capacity and performance against the CHS indicators.

- **Organisational improvement plan:** the organisation reviews the data and analysis from the audit report, and develops its own recommendations and time-bound action plan to address gaps and weaknesses and continue to work towards full integration of the CHS in its programmes and services.

- **Validation.**

- **Validation and external recognition:** validation of the audit is undertaken by the conformity assessment body, that issues a claim and logo to confirm the registration of the participating organisation in the process.

- Members of CHS Alliance should submit to CHS Alliance the audit report from the conformity assessment body. CHS Alliance issues their stamp confirming the organisation’s participation in the CHS verification process as per table 3.

An independent verification is conducted by an approved conformity assessment body. It provides a more rigorous and in-depth analysis than the self-assessment of the organisation’s application of the CHS.
Certification allows organisations to demonstrate that they comply with the CHS, based on an independent and objective audit process. This process determines whether or not an organisation’s systems and processes meet the requirements set out in the Standard.

The certification audit process is similar to an independent verification, but includes a regular series of audits over a four-year period to assess if the organisation consistently complies with the CHS and to monitor continuous improvement in its application of the Standard.

**Added value of certification**

- The audit process is conducted by an independent and accredited conformity assessment body, providing a greater degree of objectivity, credibility and confidence in the findings.
- The organisation can use the certification audit reports as a means to identify and address gaps and areas for improvement against the CHS.
- The results can be used for organisational development processes aimed at promoting better application and continuous improvement against the standards.
- The certification process and findings provide a credible means to verify the organisation’s current capacity, performance and compliance with the CHS and confirm that the organisation is committed to continuous improvement against the Standard.

**Process**

If the outcome is different, the process (data collection, analysis and interpretation, and validation) used for conducting certification is technically almost the same as the one for the independent verification option. The difference is that, in line with ISO standards on certification, the certification cycle includes annual surveillance audits to assure on-going compliance with the CHS.

Note that the specific processes and procedures for data collection and analysis may vary depending on the conformity assessment body, which is responsible for developing its own internal procedures, in line with international standards on auditing processes and management systems. As such, the following constitutes a summary description of the requirements for certification against the CHS.
**VERIFICATION CLAIMS**

Organisations that have undergone one of the verification options and have met the criteria established in the Scheme can publicly communicate the outcomes in line with the following:

**Table 3 – Summary of claims**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>VERIFICATION OPTION</th>
<th>NON MEMBERS</th>
<th>CHS ALLIANCE MEMBERS</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>VALIDATED CHS SELF-ASSESSMENT</strong></td>
<td>No CHS Alliance stamp &amp; certificate</td>
<td>The CHS Alliance confirms that <em>(name of organisation)</em> has shown their formal commitment to applying the Core Humanitarian Standard on Quality and Accountability (CHS), learning and improving how they meet the CHS Commitments by conducting a Self-Assessment in line with the CHS Alliance Verification Scheme. (Date and expiry)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>CHS INDEPENDENT VERIFICATION</strong></td>
<td>No CHS Alliance stamp &amp; certificate</td>
<td>The CHS Alliance confirms that <em>(name of organisation)</em> has shown its formal commitment to learning and improving their application of the Core Humanitarian Standard on Quality and Accountability (CHS), by conducting an Independent Verification in line with the CHS Alliance Verification Scheme and with a CHS accredited Conformity Assessment Body. (Date and expiry)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>CHS CERTIFICATION</strong></td>
<td>CAB issued stamp &amp; certificate</td>
<td>The CHS Alliance confirms that <em>(name of organisation)</em> has shown its formal commitment to learning and improving their application of the Core Humanitarian Standard on Quality and Accountability (CHS), by conducting a Certification in line with the CHS Alliance Verification Scheme and with a CHS accredited Conformity Assessment Body. (Date and expiry)</td>
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</table>

*For independent verification and certification, this claim can be used alongside the stamps issued by the conformity assessment body.*
ROLE AND RESPONSIBILITIES

INDIVIDUAL ORGANISATIONS

Organisations that have adopted the CHS have the primary responsibility for ensuring the aims and purposes of the Standard are respected and applied within their own organisation. This includes the responsibility for developing internal quality assurance processes and quality control mechanisms to monitor if the organisation and/or its partners are meeting the spirit and intent behind the CHS Commitments, Key Actions and Organisational Responsibilities.

The CHS Quality Assurance Verification Scheme and verification options outlined here are open and accessible to any organisation, be they a CHS Alliance member or not. The decision to use or participate in any of the CHS verification options is made by individual organisation. However, at a minimum, organisations are strongly recommended to undergo a self-assessment process, and consider participating in other recognised verification options as a means to support continuous, verified improvements against the Standard.

While any organisation can measure themselves against the CHS using the self-assessment process, only CHS Alliance members can be validated by the CHS Alliance.

Any organisation is welcome to undertake independent verification and certification with a conformity assessment body.

CHS ALLIANCE

CHS Alliance has overall responsibility for the management and oversight of the CHS Quality Assurance Verification Scheme. CHS Alliance ensures that the different quality assurance verification options set out in the Scheme meet the needs of stakeholders, including people vulnerable to and affected by crises; adhere to internationally-recognised good practices for verification, are open and accessible to all interested organisations; and are conducted in a fair and consistent manner for all participating organisations. Working in consultation with stakeholders, CHS Alliance establishes the framework for the different CHS verification options and the overarching criteria to assess and determine compliance with the CHS. The specific roles and responsibilities of CHS Alliance are laid out below.

The CHS Alliance Governing Board

The CHS Alliance Governing Board has overall responsibility for approval of the Scheme and any modifications to it, based on the recommendations from the CHS Verification Advisory Panel. The Board approves accredited third-party conformity assessment bodies to provide independent third-party audits and certification against the CHS Quality Assurance Verification Scheme. The Board also ensures that the decisions around the Verification Scheme are consistent with the aims and purpose of the CHS, are void of conflict of interest and are in accordance with the CHS Alliance’s statutes and policies.

Key functions:

- Approve the Scheme and any modifications to it.
- Validate and approve any policies relating to the Scheme, based on inputs from the CHS Alliance secretariat and/or the CHS Verification Advisory Panel.
- Approve accredited third-party conformity assessment bodies to provide independent verification and certification services against the CHS Quality Assurance Verification Scheme.
While any organisation can measure themselves against the CHS using the self-assessment process, only CHS Alliance members can be validated by the CHS Alliance.

The CHS Verification Advisory Panel

The CHS Verification Advisory Panel provides expert technical advice on CHS verification issues, including interpretation of the CHS indicators and provides recommendations and advice on the management, oversight and improvements to the Scheme. This includes developing proposals and recommendations to the CHS Alliance Governing Board on potential modifications to the Scheme.

Key functions:

✔ Provide oversight, technical advice and quality control on the application of the Scheme.
✔ Review questions and make decisions on interpretation of the CHS indicators.
✔ Ensure processes are in place to regularly review the Scheme and its verification options to ensure it meets the needs of its users and stakeholders and is aligned to internationally-accepted good practices for standards verification.
✔ Review and make recommendations to the CHS Alliance Secretariat on the self-assessment methodology and process.
✔ Review and make recommendations to the CHS Alliance Governing Board on acceptance and approval of third party conformity assessment bodies providing independent CHS independent verification and/or certification.
✔ Provide inputs and advice to CHS Alliance, and if appropriate, approved conformity assessment bodies, on feedback and concerns by users of the Scheme.

The CHS Alliance Secretariat

The CHS Alliance Secretariat is responsible for the day-to-day management of the Scheme and support to the Verification Advisory Panel and the Governing Board.

The Secretariat maintains a close working relationship with stakeholders and users of the Scheme, and establishes formal mechanisms for cooperation and information sharing with third-party conformity assessment bodies approved to provide independent verification and certification against the CHS.

The Secretariat manages the self-assessment verification option, including quality control, validation and recognition of the self-assessment results.

It also provides guidance and assistance to organisations for meeting the CHS Commitments, including opportunities for peer learning to share experiences around application and verification of the Standard.

Key functions:

✔ General management of the Scheme, including providing advice and orientation on the use and application of the Scheme to stakeholders.
✔ Regular consultation with stakeholders and users of the Scheme to identify issues and areas for improvement.
✔ Design, methodology, quality control and validation of the Self-Assessment process and results for participating organisations.
✔ Establish memorandums of understanding with accredited conformity assessment bodies to set out terms for information-sharing and other related matters around independent verification and/or certification.
✔ Act as the Secretariat for the CHS Verification Advisory Panel.
THIRD-PARTY INDEPENDENT CONFORMITY ASSESSMENT BODIES

CHS Alliance approves third-party conformity assessment bodies to provide both independent verification and certification services.

Conformity assessment bodies operating independent verification and certification within the CHS Verification Scheme, need to be accredited against ISO 17065 by an official accreditation body operating in line with the requirements of Regulation EC 765/2008 and with the international standard ISO/IEC 17011.

As far as pertinent, the processes they use for certification must be applied to independent verification. This to ensure the integrity, replicability, and robustness of the Scheme while ensuring comparability and compatibility of verification results.

Approved certification bodies must ensure, as stipulated by international requirements for accreditation of conformity assessment bodies, that:

- The organisation has the capacity to operate audits, which is then followed by reviewing and approving audit findings and issuing certificates/statements, this supported by internal quality control mechanisms.
- The organisation has the requisite knowledge and understanding of the humanitarian and development sectors, quality and accountability issues, and the CHS itself.
- The organisation maintains its independence from CHS Alliance, the standard setting process, and management and governance of the Scheme.
- The organisation has sufficient capacity and experience in social auditing practices, and has obtained ISO 17065 accreditation to provide certification against the CHS.
- The organisation works in conformity with the CHS Verification Scheme through a formal memorandum of understanding with CHS Alliance outlining each organisation’s roles and responsibilities, mechanisms for information sharing and cooperation.
- The organisation has a viable business plan that ensure its services are open, accessible and affordable to all types of organisations, particularly smaller national organisations.
- The organisation has adequate measures in place for addressing complaints or concerns from clients and users of its services, as well as for managing conflicts of interest.
It is also important for the conformity assessment body, to operate within this CHS Verification Scheme, that they have the following in place:

- Adequate internal safeguarding policies and processes.
- Maintain ISO accreditation and ensure audit procedures comply with the CHS Quality Assurance Verification Scheme.
- Issue compliance certification and/or other statements of the outcomes of verification and certification audits.
- Regularly collaborate with CHS Alliance to share information, issues and concerns about implementation of the Verification Scheme, including recommendations on improving the Scheme, and sharing aggregated data, statistics and analysis of audit findings with the aim of promoting continuous improvement in quality and accountability.
- Liaise with CHS Alliance and the CHS Verification Advisory Panel and other stakeholders to explore innovative approaches and other options to promote and facilitate third-party verification and certification against the CHS.

These criteria may be modified at any time in order to conform with international standards and good practices around standards, verification, certification and accreditation or other criteria that support better access to and use of third-party verification against the CHS. Any change to the Verification Scheme will be followed by a transition phase allowing organisations involved in any of the options to adapt without disruption.

Note that the above is a summary of key functions and not an exhaustive list. Approved conformity assessment bodies need to fulfil other requirements in order to obtain ISO accreditation, and other functions in accordance with their own statutes, compliance with legal requirements, etc.