SQF Auditor Professional Development Guide

The goal of the SQF Auditor Professional Development Guide is to assist the registered SQF auditor in outlining a roadmap for Professional Development (PD). By identifying specific skills and knowledge to develop, setting clear goals, and creating a strategy for achievement, auditors will be able to meet the annual re-registration requirements and build a lifetime of career success in the auditing profession.

The registered SQF auditor is required to complete a minimum of 15 hours of Professional Development (PD). Details on generally acceptable/unacceptable PD activities are found in Annex 1. One contact hour of a qualified activity accrues one hour of PD.

The SQF and GFSI auditor competencies, initially discussed in the SQF auditor training (e.g., Auditing SQF Systems, Auditing the SQF Code Requirements) are referenced in Annexes 2 and 3 and can be an additional tool to identify areas for PD.

Self-assessment

Below are five areas for you to consider when identifying professional development activities. Under each section is a series of questions designed to accurately select relevant activities for auditor skill development and professional growth.

Carefully consider the questions below and record your answers. Once completed, your list will be used to develop a goal plan.

1. Specialized Industry Knowledge

    a. What are the opportunities for me to build knowledge of industry-specific practices to aid my ability to effectively evaluate compliance and provide value to the auditee?

    b. What new products and processes are associated with my food sector category (ies)?

    c. Where are new sampling and testing methods available relative to my food sector category (ies)?

    d. What new updates to the SQF Code require me to obtain new knowledge or complete additional training?

e. Are there new requirements in the SQF auditor criteria related to my food sector category (ies) necessary for me to complete?

f. How will I address any new information during my assessment of the site documentation, my observations, and in my interviews with site employees?

2. Knowledge of Food Safety Principles

a. How can new or updated information coming out of recent recalls and outbreaks inform my knowledge of food safety and how it impacts the way I assess sites within my food sector category (ies)?

b. In what ways can I develop my ability to apply risk-based thinking in assessing food safety systems and prioritize areas of higher risk?

3. Technological developments

a. Have there been changes or advancements in the audit approach such as the use of remote technology that would require me to gain additional training or knowledge?

b. Are there opportunities for me to incorporate new technologies such as artificial intelligence (AI) into my activities as an SQF auditor?

c. In what ways can I familiarize myself with blockchain-based traceability platforms and other digital tools used for tracking food products throughout the supply chain?

d. What opportunities are there for me to increase my technological skills in support of my role as an SQF Auditor such as video conferencing tools and digital document-sharing platforms?

4. Relevant laws and regulations

   a. What are the opportunities based on recent updates to food safety regulations to impact the products and processes for the industry sectors I audit?

   b. What food safety trends or emerging issues such as recent outbreaks or product withdrawals are prompting changes in legislation or regulatory priorities?

   c. Are there any upcoming compliance deadlines or new enforcement measures I should prepare for?

   d. Have there been any significant changes in global food safety standards, such as those from GFSI, Codex Alimentarius, or specific country requirements?

   e. What resources or tools are available to help me understand and implement new regulatory requirements effectively?

   f. How will I address any regulatory changes in my review of the site documentation, my observations, and in my interviews with site employees?

5. Principles of auditing and audit delivery

   a. Are there opportunities for me to improve my knowledge and ability of how to manage the aspects of planning and conducting audits, including managing time effectively during pre-audit preparation, on-site activities, and post-audit tasks such as report writing and follow-up actions, while ensuring alignment with the audit objectives and scope?

   b. How can I build my communication and interpersonal skills in building rapport, asking open-ended questions, handling challenging situations during audits, and effectively communicating with personnel at all levels within the site and across language barriers?

c. Do I consistently use appropriate techniques to collect and evaluate evidence, such as sampling methods, critical thinking, and root cause analysis, and documenting my findings accurately?

d. How often do I seek feedback from colleagues, auditees, or supervisors, and what professional development opportunities (e.g., training or certifications) could help address any gaps in my competence?

Goal Setting

Look at your answers and identify 2-5 topics to focus on.
For each, create a SMART Goal Plan.

Specific: Target a specific area for improvement using a skills self-assessment.

Measurable: Identify targets, milestones, and end points that will define success when achieved.

Achievable: Make the goal challenging, but not impossible.

Realistic/Relevant: Take a moment to think about what you want to achieve and whether you've settled on the right target.

Time-bound: Determine the timeframe for completing the goal.
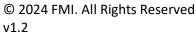
Action Plan

Create a list of actionable steps, including training programs, mentorship opportunities, certifications, or project involvement, to reach the set goals.

Activities Identification

Identifying activities like workshops, online courses, conferences, or internal training programs to support development. Once identified, document the activities in your Audit Log.

Progress Tracking

Regularly monitor progress towards goals and make adjustments as needed.

Annex 1

Generally Accepted and Unaccepted PD Activities

The individual is responsible for identifying activities that align with their Professional Development Plan.

Accepted — generally accepted PD activities

a. SQF Unites — Education Sessions and Knowledge Swaps.

b. Continuing education activities (seminars, conferences) offered by professional associations and formal non-credit courses offered through a university.

c. Short courses or technical workshops.

d. Serving as a speaker in technical sessions at regional, national, or international conferences

e. Teaching employees.

f. Writing articles and blogs.

g. Self-directed study.

h. Formal college or university course work at any level (undergraduate, graduate, or doctoral) offered by regionally/globally accredited programs. Courses may be taken via remote or virtual education.

Unacceptable/Generally Unacceptable PD activities

a. Performing activities associated with day-to-day responsibilities as a registered SQF auditor (e.g., conducting audit activities, report writing, review of corrective and preventive action plans, approving corrective actions).

b. Attending or participating in committee or board meetings, serving on leadership committees, etc.

c. Association membership and leadership activities.

d. Business meetings.

e. Expositions at conferences.

f. Supervision of subordinates, including interns.

Annex 2

SQF Food Safety Auditors - Key Competencies

Key Competency	Level of Competence H / M / L	Notes
1. General Competencies		
i. Proficiency in auditing, management and effective communication techniques		
ii. The ability to demonstrate the personal attributes and professional integrity necessary for the effective performance of audits		
iii. Knowledge and experience of auditing in the food industry		
iv. The ability to identify and assess potential quality defects at all links in the food supply chain		
v. The ability to plan, lead and organize the audit		
2. Food Safety Competencies		
i. The ability to identify and assess potential food safety hazards at all links in the supply chain including: • Biological hazards • Chemical hazards (including allergens) • Physical hazards		

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ii.	The ability to assess the effectiveness of methodologies for controlling food safety hazards		
iii.	An understanding of the current principles and practices of HACCP to the current edition of the Codex Alimentarius Commission Guidelines		
iv.	Auditors applying for FSC27 shall demonstrate the knowledge of packaging materials manufacture.		
v.	Auditors applying for FSC 15 shall demonstrate competency in thermo-processing through an industry recognized qualification.		
i.	Experience and a sound technical knowledge of the product and the process		
ii.	Knowledge of relevant pre-requisite programs, industry codes of practice, legal requirements, industry guidelines and standards		

Annex 3

GFSI Competencies:

Key Competency:	Level of Competence H / M / L	Notes
1. Auditing Skills and Knowledge		
1.1 Plan and organize work effectively		
1.2 Conduct the audit within the agreed timeframe		
1.3 Communicate with auditee personnel at all levels		
1.4 Collect evidence by conducting interviews		
1.5 Collect evidence by observation and inquiry		
1.6 Collect evidence by review of documentation and records		
1.7 Analyze, verify and consolidate audit evidence and generate audit findings		
1.8 Prepare written audit reports		
2. Technical Skills and Knowledge		
2.1 Food Safety Management (FSM) Requirements for Industry Scopes AI, AII, BI, C, D, EI, EII, EIII, EIV, and L		
2.2 Good Agricultural/Aquaculture Practice (GAP) Requirements for Industry Scopes AI, AII, BI, and BII		

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2.3 Good Manufacturing Practice (GMP) Requirements for Industry Scopes D, EI, EII, EIII, EIV, and L		
2.4 HACCP Requirements for all GFSI Industry Sectors		
3. Behavior and Systems Thinking		
3.1 Auditor Conduct and Behavior (personal behavior, audit leadership)		
3.2 Systems Thinking (critical thinking, problem solving, root cause analysis)		
3.3 Organizational Behavior and Practices		