

**APB ETHICAL STANDARD**  
**PROVISIONS AVAILABLE FOR SMALL ENTITIES**

*Re-issued April 2005*

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## **PREFACE**

APB Ethical Standards apply in the audit of financial statements. They should be read in the context of the Auditing Practices Board's Statement "The Auditing Practices Board – Scope and Authority of Pronouncements (Revised)" which sets out the application and authority of APB Ethical Standards.

The terms used in APB Ethical Standards are explained in the Glossary.

## INTRODUCTION

- 1 The APB issues Ethical Standards which set out the standards that auditors are required to comply with in order to discharge their responsibilities in respect of their integrity, objectivity and independence. The Ethical Standards issued in October 2004 address such matters as:
  - How audit firms set policies and procedures to ensure that, in relation to each audit, the audit firm and all those who are in a position to influence the conduct and outcome of an audit act with integrity, objectivity and independence;
  - Financial, business, employment and personal relationships;
  - Long association with the audit engagement;
  - Fees, remuneration and evaluation policies, litigation, gifts and hospitality;
  - Non-audit services provided to audit clients.

Such Ethical Standards apply to all audit firms and to all audits and must be read in order to understand the alternative provisions and exemptions contained in this Standard.

- 2 The APB is aware that a limited number of the requirements in Ethical Standards 1 to 5 are difficult for certain audit firms to comply with, particularly when auditing a small entity. Whilst the APB is clear that those standards are appropriate in the interests of establishing the integrity, objectivity and independence of auditors, it accepts that certain dispensations, as set out in this Standard, are appropriate to facilitate the cost effective audit of the financial statements of Small Entities (as defined below).
- 3 This Standard provides alternative provisions for auditors of Small Entities to apply in respect of the threats arising from economic dependence and where tax or accounting services are provided and allows the option of taking advantage of exemptions from certain of the

requirements in APB Ethical Standards 1 to 5 for a Small Entity audit engagement. Where an audit firm takes advantage of the exemptions within this Standard, it is required to:

- (a) take the steps described in this Standard; and
- (b) disclose in the audit report the fact that the firm has applied APB Ethical Standard – Provisions Available for Small Entities.

- 4 (i) In this Standard, for the UK a ‘Small Entity’ is:
- (a) any company, which is not a UK listed company or an affiliate thereof, that meets two or more of the following requirements in both the current financial year and the preceding financial year:
    - not more than £5.6 million turnover;
    - not more than £2.8 million balance sheet total;
    - not more than 50 employees.
  - (b) any charity with an income of less than £5.6 million;
  - (c) any pension fund with less than 1,000 members (including active, deferred and pensioner members)<sup>1</sup>;
  - (d) any firm regulated by the FSA, which is not required to appoint an auditor in accordance with chapter 3 of the FSA Supervision Manual which forms a part of the FSA Handbook<sup>2</sup>;
  - (e) any credit union which is a mutually owned financial co-operative established under the Credit Unions Act 1979 and the Industrial and Provident Societies Act 1965 (or equivalent legislation), which meets the criteria set out in (a) above;
  - (f) any entity registered under the Industrial and Provident Societies Act 1965, incorporated under the Friendly Societies Act 1992 or registered under the Friendly Societies Act 1974 (or equivalent legislation), which meets the criteria set out in (a) above;
  - (g) any registered social landlord with less than 250 units; and

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<sup>1</sup> In cases where a scheme with more than 1,000 members has been in wind-up over a number of years, such a scheme does not qualify as a Small Entity, even where the remaining number of members falls below 1,000.

<sup>2</sup> This relates to those firms that are not required to appoint an auditor under rule 3.3.2 of the FSA Supervision Manual.

- (h) any other entity, such as a club, which would be a Small Entity if it were a company.
- (ii) In this Standard, for the Republic of Ireland a 'Small Entity' is:
  - (a) any company, which is not an Irish listed company or an affiliate thereof, that meets two or more of the following requirements in both the current financial year and the preceding financial year:
    - not more than €7.3 million turnover;
    - not more than €3.65 million balance sheet total;
    - not more than 50 employees.
  - (b) any charity with an income of less than €7.3 million;
  - (c) any pension fund with less than 1,000 members (including active, deferred and pensioner members)<sup>1</sup>; and
  - (d) any other entity, such as a club or credit union, which would be a Small Entity if it were a company.

Where an entity falls into more than one of the above categories, it is only regarded as a 'Small Entity' if it meets the criteria of all relevant categories.

## **ALTERNATIVE PROVISIONS**

### ***ECONOMIC DEPENDENCE***

- 5 **When auditing the financial statements of a Small Entity an audit firm is not required to comply with the requirement in APB Ethical Standard 4, paragraph 31 that an external independent quality control review is performed.**
- 6 APB Ethical Standard 4, paragraph 31 provides that, where it is expected that the total fees for both audit and non-audit services receivable from a non-listed audit client and its subsidiaries audited by the audit firm will regularly exceed 10% of the annual fee income of the audit firm or the

part of the firm by reference to which the audit engagement partner's profit share is calculated, but will not regularly exceed 15% the firm should arrange an external independent quality control review of the audit engagement to be undertaken before the auditors' report is finalised. Although an external independent quality control review is not required, nevertheless the audit engagement partner discloses the expectation that fees will amount to between 10% and 15% of the firm's annual fee income to the ethics partner and to those charged with governance of the audit client.

### ***SELF-REVIEW THREAT – NON-AUDIT SERVICES***

- 7 **When undertaking non-audit services for a Small Entity audit client, the audit firm is not required to apply safeguards to address a self-review threat provided:**
- (a) the audit client has 'informed management'; and**
  - (b) the audit firm extends the cyclical inspection of completed engagements that is performed for quality control purposes.**
- 8 APB Ethical Standard 5 requires that, when an audit firm provides non-audit services to an audit client, appropriate safeguards are applied in order to reduce any self-review threat to an acceptable level. APB Ethical Standard 5 provides examples of safeguards that may be appropriate when non-audit services are provided to an audit client (for example in paragraphs 65 for tax services and 125 for accounting services). In the case of an audit of a Small Entity, alternative procedures involve discussions with 'informed management', supplemented by an extension of the firm's cyclical inspection of completed engagements that is performed for quality control purposes.
- 9 The audit firm extends the number of engagements inspected under the requirements of ISQC (UK and Ireland) 1 *'Quality control for firms that perform audits and reviews of historical financial information, and other*

*assurance and related services engagements*<sup>3</sup> to include a random selection of audit engagements where non-audit services have been provided. Particular attention is given to ensuring that there is documentary evidence that 'informed management' has made such judgments and decisions that are needed in relation to the presentation and disclosure of information in the financial statements.

- 10 Those inspecting the engagements are not involved in performing the engagement. Small audit firms may wish to use a suitably qualified external person or another firm to carry out engagement inspections.
- 11 In addition to the documentation requirements of ISQC (UK and Ireland) 1, those inspecting the engagements document their evaluation of whether the documentary evidence that 'informed management' made such judgments and decisions that were needed in relation to the presentation and disclosure of information in the financial statements.

## **EXEMPTIONS**

### ***MANAGEMENT THREAT - NON-AUDIT SERVICES***

- 12 **When undertaking non-audit services for Small Entity audit clients, the audit firm is not required to adhere to the prohibitions in APB Ethical Standard 5, relating to providing non-audit services that involve the audit firm undertaking part of the role of management, provided that:**
  - (a) it discusses objectivity and independence issues related to the provision of non-audit services with those charged with governance; and**

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<sup>3</sup> ISQC (UK and Ireland) 1 requires audit firms to establish policies and procedures which include a periodic inspection of a selection of completed engagements. Engagements selected for inspection include at least one engagement for each engagement partner over the inspection cycle, which ordinarily spans no more than three years.

**(b) it discloses the fact that it has applied this Standard in accordance with paragraph 22.**

13 APB Ethical Standard 5, paragraph 28 provides that where an audit firm provides non-audit services to an audit client that does not have 'informed management', it is unlikely that any safeguards can eliminate the management threat or reduce it to an acceptable level with the consequence that such non-audit services may not be provided to that audit client. This is because the absence of a capable member of management, who has been designated by the audit client to:

- receive the results of the non-audit services provided by the audit firm; and
- make any judgments and decisions that are needed, on the basis of the information provided,

means that there is an increased threat that the audit firm takes certain decisions and makes certain judgments, which are properly the responsibility of management.

14 An audit firm auditing a Small Entity is exempted from the requirements of APB Ethical Standard 5, paragraphs 43(b) (internal audit services), 51(b) (information technology services), 70 (tax services), 99(d) (corporate finance services) 109(c) (transaction related services) and 117(b) (accounting services) in circumstances when there is no 'informed management' as envisioned by APB Ethical Standard 5, provided it discusses objectivity and independence issues related to the provision of non-audit services with those charged with governance and discloses the fact that it has applied this Standard in accordance with paragraph 22.

### ***ADVOCACY THREAT – TAX SERVICES***

15 **The audit firm of a Small Entity is not required to comply with APB Ethical Standard 5, paragraph 73 provided that it discloses the fact that it has applied this Standard in accordance with paragraph 22.**

- 16 APB Ethical Standard 5, paragraph 73 provides that ‘the audit firm should not undertake an engagement to provide tax services to an audit client where this would involve acting as an advocate for the audit client, before an appeals tribunal or court in the resolution of an issue:
- (a) that is material to the financial statements; or
  - (b) where the outcome of the tax issue is dependent on a future or contemporary audit judgment’.

Such circumstances may create an advocacy threat which it is unlikely any safeguards can eliminate or reduce to an acceptable level.

- 17 Where an audit firm auditing a Small Entity takes advantage of the dispensation in paragraph 15, it discloses the fact that it has applied this Standard in accordance with paragraph 22.

#### ***PARTNERS JOINING AN AUDIT CLIENT***

- 18 **The audit firm of a Small Entity is not required to comply with APB Ethical Standard 2, paragraph 44 provided that:**
- (a) it takes appropriate steps to determine that there has been no significant threat to the audit team’s integrity, objectivity and independence; and**
  - (b) it discloses the fact that it has applied this Standard in accordance with paragraph 22.**

- 19 APB Ethical Standard 2, paragraph 44 provides that ‘where a former partner is appointed as a director or to a key management position with an audit client, having acted as audit engagement partner (or as an independent partner, key audit partner or a partner in the chain of command) at any time in the two years prior to this appointment, the firm should resign as auditors and should not accept re-appointment until a two-year period, commencing when the former partner ceased to act for the client, has elapsed or the former partner ceases employment with the

former client, whichever is the sooner'. Such circumstances may create self-interest, familiarity and intimidation threats.

20 An audit firm takes appropriate steps to determine that there has been no significant threat to the audit team's integrity, objectivity and independence as a result of the former partner's employment by an audit client that is a Small Entity by:

(a) assessing the significance of the self-interest, familiarity or intimidation threats, having regard to the following factors:

- the position the individual has taken at the audit client;
- the nature and amount of any involvement the individual will have with the audit team or the audit process;
- the length of time that has passed since the individual was a member of the audit team or firm; and
- the former position of the individual within the audit team or firm, and

(b) if the threat is other than clearly insignificant, applying alternative procedures such as:

- considering the appropriateness or necessity of modifying the audit plan for the audit engagement;
- assigning an audit team to the subsequent audit engagement that is of sufficient experience in relation to the individual who has joined the audit client;
- involving an audit partner or senior staff member with appropriate expertise, who was not a member of the audit team, to review the work done or otherwise advise as necessary; or
- undertaking an engagement quality control review of the audit engagement.

21 When an audit firm auditing a Small Entity takes advantage of paragraph 18 it discloses the fact that it has applied this Standard in accordance with paragraph 22 and documents the steps that it has taken to comply with this Standard.

## DISCLOSURE REQUIREMENTS

- 22 **Where the audit firm has taken advantage of an exemption provided in paragraphs 12, 15 or 18 of this Standard, the audit engagement partner should ensure that:**
- (a) the auditors' report discloses this fact, and**
  - (b) either the financial statements, or the auditors' report, discloses the type of non-audit services provided to the audit client or the fact that a former audit engagement partner has joined the client.**
- 23 The fact that an audit firm has taken advantage of an exemption from APB Ethical Standard – Provisions Available for Small Entities is set out in a separate paragraph of the audit report as part of the Basis of audit opinion. It does not affect the Opinion paragraph. An illustrative example of such disclosure is set out in the Appendix.
- 24 The audit engagement partner ensures that within the financial statements reference is made to the type of non-audit services provided to the audit client or the fact that a former partner has joined the client. An illustration of possible disclosures is set out in the Appendix. Where such a disclosure is not made within the financial statements it is included in the auditors' report.

## EFFECTIVE DATE

- 25 Effective for audits of financial statements for periods commencing on or after 15 December 2004.

## APPENDIX: Illustrative disclosures

### *(a) Illustrative disclosure of the fact that the audit firm has taken advantage of an exemption within the auditors' report*

#### *Basis of audit opinion*

We conducted our audit in accordance with United Kingdom Auditing Standards issued by the Auditing Practices Board. An audit includes examination, on a test basis, of evidence relevant to the amounts and disclosures in the financial statements. It also includes an assessment of the significant estimates and judgments made by [the directors] in the preparation of the financial statements, and of whether the accounting policies are appropriate to the [company's] circumstances, consistently applied and adequately disclosed.

We planned and performed our audit so as to obtain all the information and explanations which we considered necessary in order to provide us with sufficient evidence to give reasonable assurance that the financial statements are free from material misstatement, whether caused by fraud or other irregularity or error. In forming our opinion we also evaluated the overall adequacy of the presentation of information in the financial statements.

We have undertaken the audit in accordance with the requirements of APB Ethical Standards including APB Ethical Standard – Provisions Available for Small Entities, in the circumstances set out in note [x] to the financial statements.

#### *Opinion*

In our opinion the financial statements give a true and fair view of the state of the [company's] affairs as at ....

[Date of the auditors' report, *auditors' signature and address*]

### *(b) Illustrative disclosure of relevant circumstances within the financial statements*

Note [x] In common with many other businesses of our size and nature we use our auditors to prepare and submit returns to the tax authorities and assist with the preparation of the financial statements<sup>4</sup>.

Note [x] In common with many other businesses of our size and nature we use our auditors to provide tax advice and to represent us, as necessary, at tax tribunals<sup>5</sup>.

Note [x] XYZ, a former partner of [audit firm] joined [audit client] as [a director] on [date]<sup>6</sup>.

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<sup>4</sup> Where exemption in paragraph 12 (Management threat in relation non-audit services) is applied.

<sup>5</sup> Where exemption in paragraph 15 (Advocacy threat – tax services) is applied.

<sup>6</sup> Where exemption in paragraph 18 (Partners joining an audit client) is applied.

## **NOTICE TO READERS**

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