



Link-Up

Powered by Achilles

# Achilles Link-Up Audit Scheme Rule Book

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## Introduction and Objectives

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### Introduction

The Link-Up Audit provides Achilles customers with assurance and visibility of a supplier's level of compliance against one or more of the following Network Rail Supplier Qualification modules:

- NR/L2/SCO/302 Module 01 Supplier Qualification – Core Requirements
- NR/L2/SCO/302 Module 02 Supplier Qualification – CDM Requirements
- NR/L2/SCO/302 Module 03 Supplier Qualification – Sentinel Scheme Requirements
- NR/L2/SCO/302 Module 04 Supplier Qualification – Rail Interface (Safe Work) Planning Requirements
- NR/L2/SCO/302 Module 05 Supplier Qualification – On Track Plant (OTP) Requirements

Achilles is an approved Supplier Assurance Provider, assessed by Network Rail to act in this capacity. As a Supplier Assurance Provider, Achilles does not sponsor staff in the Sentinel scheme.

The Link-Up Audit is clearly differentiated from ISO certification in that it provides the buying organisations with a high-level view of the existing management systems and supporting resources against community specific risk areas.

An audit is mandatory for suppliers providing goods / services under certain product codes that may introduce risk onto the rail infrastructure.

The results of the Achilles Link-Up audits are published online and used by buying and compliance representatives within each subscribing company.

Audit results are also communicated to Network Rail and Network Rail's supporting agencies e.g. Sentinel as required.

The Link-Up Audit is an independent assessment and is not delivered by third parties who may provide consultancy services. Achilles does not use sub-contract companies to deliver Link-Up audits.

### Objectives

The objective of this handbook is to provide an overview of the Link-Up Audit and guidance for the execution of Link-Up audits of suppliers' management systems as part of the pre-qualification of a suppliers' organisation. This includes the organisation, co-ordination, and delivery of Link-Up audits as well as the training and briefing of all parties involved in the delivery of Link-Up audits.

The objective of the Link-Up Audit is to establish a formal and consistent audit of a supplier's management system and supporting resources.

## Definitions and Abbreviations

Definitions	Description
Achilles	Achilles Information Ltd
Achilles Link-Up	Achilles Link-Up Community Network qualification scheme
Supplier Assurance Provider	An organisation approved by Network Rail to assess suppliers against the requirements described in Network Rail standard NR/L2/SCO/302 to ensure that they have the required systems and processes in place to safely deliver the products and services selected from the Rail Industry Commodity Classification List and/or have otherwise indicated that they work or intend to work on Network Rail Managed Infrastructure
Audit	Systematic, independent and documented process for obtaining evidence and evaluating it objectively to determine the extent to that the specified criteria are fulfilled
Auditor	Competent person participating in the planning, execution and reporting of Link-Up Audits
Buyer	Company that has signed a standard agreement to subscribe to Achilles Link-Up Community Network
Supplier	Provider of service and/or products to the rail industry
Management Systems	The organisation and arrangements, including methodologies that enable a business to meet its objectives

Abbreviations	Description
RICCL	Rail Industry Commodity Classification List
IIRSM	International Institute of Risk & Safety Management
IOSH	Institution of Occupational Safety and Health
IRCA	International Register of Certified Auditors
ISO	International Standards Organisation
NEBOSH	National Examination Board in Occupational Safety & Health

## Governance and Organisational Control

### Governance

The Audit process shall follow the principles of the standard ISO 19011, latest version, "Guidelines for auditing management systems". Auditors undertake the Audit process in a consultative manner where the auditor works with the Supplier to accurately reflect the status of their management system. A key part of this process includes the acceptance of the report findings. Such acceptance shall be given during the Audit closing meeting.

The Audit process also abides by the rules and principles as defined within Network Rail Supplier Qualification Requirements and applicable specified standards such as ISO 17021.

### Organisational Control

All personnel involved in the delivery of the Link-Up programme will be directly employed by Achilles.

## Audit Scope, Categorisation and Output

### Scope and Categorisation

The scope of the audit is to cover both industry minimum expectations (Core Audit) and specific requirements set by infrastructure managers.

The process shall involve an assessment of the Supplier's submitted information in the Link-Up Portal and a visit to the supplier's premises to validate implementation of the management systems described. The Audit report will be transparent to both the supplier and the buyers and the supplier shall be informed of findings from the Audit.

Suppliers to the GB Rail Industry vary in organisational size and product/service offerings therefore it is necessary that the audit programme cater for these differences. A suite of audit protocols has been developed to align with the correct depth of audit depending on a number of relevant factors.

Minimum audit duration is calculated using the tables below (extracted from Network Rail Company Standard NR/L2/SCO/302).

Module	Minimum Audit Duration in Days
NR/L2/SCO/302 Module 01 Supplier Qualification	0.5
Add each RICCL discipline area (below) where the supplier has selected auditable product codes	
A-Transverse Railway Services & Supplies	0.25
B-Control Command & Signalling	0.25
C-Infrastructure	0.25
D-Plant	0.25
E-Rail Vehicles	0.25
F-Energy	0.25
G-Operations and Traffic Management	0.25
H-General Business Suppliers & Services	0.25

## Audit Scope, Categorisation and Output

The CDM module is applicable to all organisations who have selected auditable codes with the following activities - Construct, Install, Maintain, Commission, Design, Modify, Decommission.

Module	Minimum Audit Duration in Days
NR/L2/SCO/302 Module 2 CDM Requirements	0.5

The Sentinel Scheme Module is applicable to all organisations that wish to sponsor staff within the Sentinel Scheme.

Module	Minimum Audit Duration in Days
NR/L2/SCO/302 Module 3 Sentinel Scheme Requirements	0.5

The SWP module is applicable to all organisations that plan for the protection of staff from the operational railway (e.g. SSWPS).

Module	Minimum Audit Duration in Days
NR/L2/SCO/302 Module 4 SWP Requirements	0.5 (1 (where both Module 4 & 5 are undertaken the same day))

The OTPS Scheme Requirements are applicable to all organisations that supply, operate or convert OTP for use on Network Rail infrastructure.

Module	Minimum Audit Duration in Days
NR/L2/SCO/302 Module 5 On-Track Plant Operations Scheme Requirements	0.5 (1 (where both Module 4 & 5 are undertaken the same day))

**Note:** Where the final audit duration has a part day, the duration shall be rounded, down where there is 0.25 of a day and up where there is 0.50 or 0.75 of a day, to the nearest whole day.

### Output

Each module has been created to ensure that an amalgamated and structured audit methodology can be applied, and a comprehensive and transparent audit report produced.

### Audit Findings

Audit findings will be categorised within the Link-Up audit report against the following criteria:

- **Positive Element:** A finding where the organisation being audited significantly exceeds requirements.
- **Questionnaire Discrepancies:** A finding where the audit evidence varies from statements / evidence contained in the audited supplier's Link-Up questionnaire.
- **Observation:** A finding that, whilst compliance to requirement is demonstrated, the auditor believes there are further process efficiencies possible.
- **Minor Non-Compliance:** A finding that identifies a failing against part of a requirement that does not carry significant risk to personnel, the environment or clients (clients shall include the relevant infrastructure owner if applicable).
- **Major Non-Compliance:** A finding that identifies a failing against a whole requirement or a part of a requirement that carries significant risk to personnel, the environment or clients (clients shall include the relevant infrastructure owner if applicable).

### Auditor Qualifications

Professional Auditors delivering Link-Up audits shall as a minimum be in receipt of the following;

- An IRCA recognised (or equivalent) Lead Auditor certificate
- NEBOSH General Certificate or equivalent
- Current awareness of appropriate management systems standards
- Relevant industrial/sector experience
- Passed the Achilles Auditor Licensing Course
- Knowledge of the Link-Up Scheme Rules

### Licensing and Approval of Auditors

Auditors have undergone specific licensing to deliver Achilles Audits.

### Subcontract Audit Resource

Achilles will not subcontract any Link-Up audits. All Link-Up audits will be delivered by directly employed and appropriately licensed qualified auditors.

## Scheme Requirements

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### Parent Company Relations with Subsidiaries

All supplier organisations with a different company registration number undertake their own subscription and where necessary an audit.

Franchises with a different company registration number undertake their own subscription and where necessary an audit.

### Audit Support

Where a supplier organisation uses external consultancy to support their activities, the supplier must be able to demonstrate their ability to meet the audit requirements without the consultant present. Suppliers must be represented by their direct employees during the Link-Up audit.

In the event of an auditor having concerns that a consultant is present during the audit then this matter will be raised with their line manager at the time of audit and the audit will be stopped and the company marked as failing the audit due to failure to comply with the documented requirements.

### Location of Audit

The audit shall be completed at the office location of the registered company.

Where multiple location audits are required, this must be agreed with Achilles Scheduling Team at the point of booking.

### Alignment of Audit and Questionnaire

The audit expiry date is a fixed point in time determined by the last day of the previously completed audit.

Audit reports are valid for a period of up to 12 months.

An Audit Report will be valid throughout the duration of a valid Link-Up subscription. Thereafter the invitation of validity through the online system will be removed.

Where an audit is deemed necessary the audit must be carried out within 12 weeks of the payment date.

Suppliers will be provided with three reasonable dates in separate weeks to select their audit date.

Link-Up questionnaire and audit expiration dates will not align.

## Scheme Requirements

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The supplier's Pre-Qualification Questionnaire must be completed by the time the physical audit is undertaken. Erroneous product code data or incomplete questionnaires may result in non-compliances being identified, as the audit acts as a validation of the questionnaire.

### Validity and Renewal

Suppliers will be invited to renew their audit 4 months prior to the expiration date in order to have ongoing registration.

Renewal audits must be booked within a period of 4 weeks of the 'Renewal Notification'.

The audit must be booked to take place a minimum of 15 working days prior to the expiry date in order for the report to be quality checked and published.

The supplier must make payment by the 'Payment Deadline Date' in order to receive their audit and report in time. The payment date is set at 8 weeks prior to the expiry date or prior to the audit; whichever occurs first.

If the audit is not booked under the following requirements, there is a strong likelihood that audits will expire and a supplier will not be visible to the buying community.

### Cancellation Policy

Where a supplier chooses to cancel/postpone an audit then the cancellation fees will be made in accordance with the Terms and Conditions included within the Audit Confirmation email.

### Audit Result Appeals Process

The Appeals process exists to ensure that there is a means of redress available to those Suppliers that believe that the Audit process has not been applied in the correct manner or that the real-life conditions of the supplier premises/operations have not been understood and/or reflected in the proper manner.

Whilst the Appeals process is available to Suppliers, both Suppliers and Auditors should always ensure that every possible action has been taken to address any issues at the time of the audit.

Auditors shall inform suppliers that appeals shall be submitted in writing to the Technical Committee Chair through the [feedback@achilles.com](mailto:feedback@achilles.com) mailbox.

## Scheme Requirements

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The Appeals process is instigated by formal written communication from the supplier to Achilles.

Achilles will escalate appeals, where deemed appropriate, to clients and relevant infrastructure owners as necessary.

### Complaints Process

Complaints will be managed in accordance with the complaints process as detailed in Achilles QMS which available upon request via [feedback@achilles.com](mailto:feedback@achilles.com).

### Risk Control Process

Where a Supplier has between one and five Major Non-Compliances at the end of the audit, they are given five working days to close out the non-compliances;

Upon completion of an audit where up to five Major Non-Compliances are raised, a risk mitigation process is undertaken, A failure notification shall be sent to the Nominated Supplier Assurance Platform to allow Network Rail to review the Non-Compliances raised and determine, based on the risk likely to be imported to the infrastructure, whether the Supplier:

- I. May continue to work as normal
- II. Must work under certain restrictions
- III. Must be immediately suspended on Sentinel

At the end of the five-day period if all Major Non-Compliances have been closed out, the Audit report shall be marked as a "Pass". If any of the Major Non-Compliances have not been closed out, with suitable evidence provided to the Supplier Assurance Provider, then the Audit shall be deemed to have been failed.

## Scheme Requirements

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Suppliers who receive between one and five Major Non-Compliances shall be subjected to a one-day re-audit within 12 weeks of the initial Audit so any corrective actions put in place to close the Major non-conformance are followed, failure to undertake this audit or failure at the audit shall result in the supplier being shown as failed against the relevant module.

**Note:** Minor non-compliances from a previous audit that have not been closed shall be raised again as minor non-compliance and a major non-compliance shall be raised against "Failure to close out Minor Non-Compliances".

### Audit Failure

Suppliers who have had six (6) or more major non-conformances will fail their audit.

- A failure notification will be issued to the industry within a period of 24 hours after the audit has closed.
- In order to become qualified, the supplier must undergo an audit within 12 weeks of the failure.
- If the 12 weeks' period has passed, the supplier must undergo an entirely new audit.

### Communication of Results

Failure and requalification notifications will be communicated to the Nominated Supplier Assurance Platform by 23.59hrs of the next working day following the last day of the audit.

Communication of a pass a maximum of 10 working days following the last day of the audit API to the Nominated Supplier Assurance Platform.



 **Achilles**  
Global Risk Management