



***Statement on  
Quality Management Standards***

*June 2022*

**2**

***Issued by the Auditing Standards Board***

**Engagement Quality Reviews**

***(AICPA, Professional Standards, QM sec. 20)***

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<sup>1</sup> All ET sections can be found in AICPA *Professional Standards*.

*Conduct requires compliance with these standards when firms perform auditing and accounting services for a nonissuer.*

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## **Statement on Quality Management Standards No. 2, *Engagement Quality Reviews***

### **Introduction**

#### **Scope of This Statement on Quality Management Standards**

1. This Statement on Quality Management Standards (SQMS) addresses the following:
  - a. The appointment and eligibility of the engagement quality reviewer
  - b. The engagement quality reviewer's responsibilities relating to the performance and documentation of an engagement quality review
2. This SQMS applies to all engagements for which an engagement quality review is required to be performed in accordance with SQMS No. 1, *A Firm's System of Quality Management*, including when the firm has determined that an engagement quality review is an appropriate response to assessed quality risks.<sup>1</sup> This SQMS is to be read in conjunction with the AICPA Code of Professional Conduct (AICPA code) and other relevant ethical requirements.
3. An engagement quality review performed in accordance with this SQMS is a specified response that is designed and implemented by the firm in accordance with SQMS No. 1.<sup>2</sup> The performance of an engagement quality review is undertaken at the engagement level by the engagement quality reviewer on behalf of the firm.

#### ***Scalability***

4. The nature, timing, and extent of the engagement quality reviewer's procedures required by this SQMS vary depending on the nature and circumstances of the engagement or the entity. For example, for engagements involving fewer significant judgments made by the engagement team, the engagement quality reviewer's procedures would likely be less extensive.

#### **The Firm's System of Quality Management and Role of Engagement Quality Reviews**

5. SQMS No. 1 establishes the firm's responsibilities for its system of quality management and requires the firm to design and implement responses to address the quality risks in a manner that is based on, and responsive to, the reasons for the assessments given to the quality risks.<sup>3</sup> The specified responses in SQMS No. 1<sup>4</sup> include establishing policies or procedures addressing engagement quality reviews in accordance with this SQMS.
6. The firm is responsible for designing, implementing, and operating the system of quality management. Under SQMS No. 1, the objective of the firm is to design, implement, and operate a system of quality management for engagements performed by the firm in its accounting and auditing

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<sup>1</sup> Paragraph 35f of Statement on Quality Management Standards (SQMS) (previously Statement on Quality Control Standards) No. 1, *A Firm's System of Quality Management*.

<sup>2</sup> See footnote 1.

<sup>3</sup> Paragraph 25 of SQMS No. 1.

<sup>4</sup> Paragraph 35f of SQMS No. 1.

practice<sup>5</sup> that provides the firm with reasonable assurance that

- a. the firm and its personnel fulfill their responsibilities in accordance with professional standards and applicable legal and regulatory requirements, and conduct engagements in accordance with such standards and requirements; and
- b. engagement reports issued by the firm or engagement partners are appropriate in the circumstances.<sup>6</sup>

7. As explained in SQMS No. 1, the public interest is served by the consistent performance of quality engagements. Quality engagements are achieved through planning and performing engagements and reporting on them in accordance with professional standards and applicable legal and regulatory requirements. Achieving the objectives of those standards and complying with the requirements of applicable law or regulation involves exercising professional judgment and, when applicable to the type of engagement, maintaining professional skepticism.

8. An engagement quality review is an objective evaluation of the significant judgments made by the engagement team and the conclusions reached thereon. The engagement quality reviewer's evaluation of significant judgments is performed in the context of professional standards and applicable legal and regulatory requirements. However, an engagement quality review is not intended to be an evaluation of whether the entire engagement complies with professional standards and applicable legal and regulatory requirements or with the firm's policies or procedures.

9. The engagement quality reviewer is not a member of the engagement team. The performance of an engagement quality review does not change the responsibilities of the engagement partner for managing and achieving quality on the engagement or for the direction and supervision of the members of the engagement team and the review of their work. The engagement quality reviewer is not required to obtain evidence to support the opinion or conclusion on the engagement, but the engagement team may obtain further evidence in responding to matters raised during the engagement quality review.

### **Authority of This SQMS**

10. This SQMS contains the objective for the firm in following this SQMS and requirements designed to enable the firm and the engagement quality reviewer to meet that stated objective. In addition, it contains related guidance in the form of application and other explanatory material and introductory material that provides context relevant to a proper understanding of this SQMS and definitions. SQMS No. 1<sup>7</sup> explains the terms *objective*, *requirements*, *application material* and *other explanatory material*, *introductory material*, and *definitions*.

### **Effective Date**

11. This SQMS is effective for

- a. audits or reviews of financial statements for periods beginning on or after December 15, 2025, and

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<sup>5</sup> The term *auditing and accounting practice* is defined in paragraph 17a of SQMS No. 1.

<sup>6</sup> Paragraph 15 of SQMS No. 1.

<sup>7</sup> Paragraphs 12 and A6–A9 of SQMS No. 1.

- b. other engagements in the firm's accounting and auditing practice beginning on or after December 15, 2025.

## Objective

**12.** The objective of the firm, through appointing an eligible engagement quality reviewer, is to perform an objective evaluation of the significant judgments made by the engagement team and the conclusions reached thereon.

## Definitions

**13.** For purposes of the SQMSs, the following terms have the meanings attributed as follows:

**Engagement quality review.** An objective evaluation of the significant judgments made by the engagement team, and the conclusions reached thereon, performed by the engagement quality reviewer and completed before the engagement report is released.

**Engagement quality reviewer.** A partner, other individual in the firm, or an external individual appointed by the firm to perform the engagement quality review.

**Relevant ethical requirements.** Principles of professional ethics and ethical requirements to which the engagement team and engagement quality reviewer, when undertaking an engagement quality review, are subject, which consist of the AICPA Code of Professional Conduct together with rules of applicable state boards of accountancy and applicable regulatory agencies that are more restrictive. (Ref: par. A11–A14)

## Requirements

### Applying, and Complying With, Relevant Requirements

**14.** The firm and the engagement quality reviewer should have an understanding of this SQMS, including the application and other explanatory material, to understand the objective of this SQMS and to properly apply the requirements relevant to them.

**15.** The firm or the engagement quality reviewer, as applicable, should comply with each requirement of this SQMS, unless the requirement is not relevant in the circumstances of the engagement.

**16.** The proper application of the requirements is expected to provide a sufficient basis for the achievement of the objective of this standard. However, if the firm or the engagement quality reviewer determines that the application of the relevant requirements does not provide a sufficient basis for the achievement of the objective of this standard, the firm or the engagement quality reviewer, as applicable, should take further actions to achieve the objective.

### Appointment and Eligibility of Engagement Quality Reviewers

**17.** The firm should establish policies or procedures that require the assignment of responsibility for the appointment of engagement quality reviewers to an individual or individuals with the competence, capabilities, and appropriate authority within the firm to fulfill the

responsibility. Those policies or procedures should require such individual or individuals to appoint the engagement quality reviewer. (Ref: par. A1–A3)

**18.** The firm should establish policies or procedures that set forth the criteria for eligibility to be appointed as an engagement quality reviewer. Those policies or procedures should require that the engagement quality reviewer (Ref: par. A4)

- a.* not be a member of the engagement team;
- b.* have the competence and capabilities, including sufficient time, and the appropriate authority to perform the engagement quality review; (Ref: par. A5–A10)
- c.* comply with relevant ethical requirements, including those addressing threats to the objectivity and independence of the engagement quality reviewer; and (Ref: par. A11–A13)
- d.* comply with provisions of law and regulation, if any, that are relevant to the eligibility of the engagement quality reviewer. (Ref: par. A14)

**19.** The firm’s policies or procedures established in accordance with paragraph 18c should also address threats to objectivity created by an individual being appointed as the engagement quality reviewer after previously serving as the engagement partner. (Ref: par. A15–A17)

**20.** The firm should establish policies or procedures that set forth the criteria for eligibility of individuals who assist the engagement quality reviewer. Those policies or procedures should require that such individuals

- a.* not be members of the engagement team;
- b.* have the competence and capabilities, including sufficient time, to perform the duties assigned to them; and (Ref: par. A18)
- c.* comply with relevant ethical requirements, including addressing threats to their objectivity and independence and, if applicable, the provisions of law and regulation. (Ref: par. A19–A20)

**21.** The firm should establish policies or procedures that

- a.* require the engagement quality reviewer to take overall responsibility for the performance of the engagement quality review and
- b.* address the engagement quality reviewer’s responsibility for determining the nature, timing, and extent of the direction and supervision of individuals assisting in the engagement quality review and the review of their work. (Ref: par. A21)

***Impairment of the Engagement Quality Reviewer’s Eligibility to Perform the Engagement Quality Review***

**22.** The firm should establish policies or procedures that address circumstances in which the engagement quality reviewer’s eligibility to perform the engagement quality review is impaired and the appropriate actions to be taken by the firm, including the process for identifying and appointing a replacement in such circumstances. (Ref: par. A22)



**23.** When the engagement quality reviewer becomes aware of circumstances that impair the engagement quality reviewer's eligibility, the engagement quality reviewer should notify the appropriate individual or individuals in the firm and, (Ref: par. A23)

- a.* if the engagement quality review has not commenced, decline the appointment to perform the engagement quality review, or
- b.* if the engagement quality review has commenced, discontinue the performance of the engagement quality review.

### **Performance of the Engagement Quality Review**

**24.** The firm should establish policies or procedures regarding the performance of the engagement quality review that address the following:

- a.* The engagement quality reviewer's responsibilities to perform procedures in accordance with paragraphs 25–26 at appropriate points in time during the engagement to provide an appropriate basis for an objective evaluation of the significant judgments made by the engagement team and the conclusions reached thereon
- b.* The responsibilities of the engagement partner in relation to the engagement quality review, including that the engagement partner is precluded from releasing the engagement report until notification has been received from the engagement quality reviewer, in accordance with paragraph 27, that the engagement quality review is complete (Ref: par. A24–A26)
- c.* Circumstances in which the nature and extent of engagement team discussions with the engagement quality reviewer about a significant judgment give rise to a threat to the objectivity of the engagement quality reviewer and appropriate actions to take in these circumstances (Ref: par. A27)

**25.** In performing the engagement quality review, the engagement quality reviewer should do the following: (Ref: par. A28–A33)

- a.* Read, and obtain an understanding about, information communicated by (Ref: par. A34)
  - i.* the engagement team regarding the nature and circumstances of the engagement and the entity and
  - ii.* the firm related to the firm's monitoring and remediation process, in particular, identified deficiencies that may relate to, or affect, the areas involving significant judgments made by the engagement team.
- b.* Discuss with the engagement partner and, if applicable, other members of the engagement team, significant matters and significant judgments made in planning, performing, and reporting on the engagement. (Ref: par. A35–A38)
- c.* Based on the information obtained in (*a*) and (*b*), review selected engagement documentation relating to significant judgments made by the engagement team and evaluate the following: (Ref: par. A39–A43)

- i. The basis for making those significant judgments, including, when applicable to the type of engagement, the maintenance of professional skepticism by the engagement team
  - ii. Whether the engagement documentation supports the conclusions reached
  - iii. Whether the conclusions reached are appropriate
- d. Evaluate the basis for the engagement partner's determination that relevant ethical requirements relating to independence, when applicable, have been fulfilled. (Ref: par. A44)
- e. Evaluate whether appropriate consultation has taken place on difficult or contentious matters or matters involving differences of opinion and the conclusions arising from those consultations. (Ref: par. A45)
- f. For engagements conducted in accordance with generally accepted auditing standards, evaluate the basis for the engagement partner's determination that the engagement partner's involvement has been sufficient and appropriate throughout the engagement such that the engagement partner has the basis for determining that the significant judgments made and the conclusions reached are appropriate given the nature and circumstances of the engagement. (Ref: par. A46–A47)
- g. Review,
  - i. for audits of financial statements, the financial statements and the auditor's report thereon, including, if applicable, the description of the key audit matters; (Ref: par. A48)
  - ii. for reviews of financial statements or financial information, the financial statements or financial information and the review report thereon; or (Ref: par. A48)
  - iii. for other engagements, the engagement report, and when applicable, the subject matter information. (Ref: par. A49)

**26.** The engagement quality reviewer should notify the engagement partner if the engagement quality reviewer has concerns that the significant judgments made by the engagement team, including the appropriate maintenance of professional skepticism by the engagement team when applicable to the type of engagement, or the conclusions reached thereon, are not appropriate. If such concerns are not resolved to the engagement quality reviewer's satisfaction, the engagement quality reviewer should notify the appropriate individual or individuals in the firm that the engagement quality review cannot be completed. (Ref: par. A50)

### ***Completion of the Engagement Quality Review***

**27.** The engagement quality reviewer should determine whether the requirements in this SQMS with respect to the performance of the engagement quality review have been fulfilled and

whether the engagement quality review is complete. If so, the engagement quality reviewer should notify the engagement partner that the engagement quality review is complete.

## **Documentation**

**28.** The firm should establish policies or procedures that require the engagement quality reviewer to take responsibility for documentation of the engagement quality review. (Ref: par. A51)

**29.** The firm should establish policies or procedures that require documentation of the engagement quality review in accordance with paragraph 30 and require that such documentation be included with the engagement documentation.

**30.** The engagement quality reviewer should determine that the documentation of the engagement quality review is sufficient to enable an experienced practitioner, having no previous connection with the engagement, to understand the nature, timing, and extent of the procedures performed by the engagement quality reviewer and, when applicable, individuals who assisted the reviewer and to understand the conclusions reached in performing the review. In doing so, the engagement quality reviewer should determine that the documentation of the engagement quality review includes the following: (Ref: par. A52–A54)

- a.* The names of the engagement quality reviewer and any individuals who assisted with the engagement quality review
- b.* An identification of the engagement documentation reviewed
- c.* The basis for the engagement quality reviewer's determination in accordance with paragraph 27
- d.* The notifications required in accordance with paragraphs 26 and 27
- e.* The date of completion of the engagement quality review

## **Application and Other Explanatory Material**

### **Appointment and Eligibility of Engagement Quality Reviewers**

#### ***Assignment of Responsibility for the Appointment of Engagement Quality Reviewers (Ref: par. 17)***

**A1.** Competence and capabilities that are relevant to an individual's ability to fulfill responsibility for the appointment of the engagement quality reviewer may include appropriate knowledge about the following:

- The responsibilities of an engagement quality reviewer
- The criteria in paragraphs 18–19 regarding the eligibility of engagement quality reviewers
- The nature and circumstances of the engagement or the entity subject to an engagement quality review, including the composition of the engagement team

**A2.** The firm’s policies or procedures may specify that the individual responsible for the appointment of engagement quality reviewers not be a member of the engagement team for which an engagement quality review is to be performed. However, in certain circumstances (for example, in the case of a smaller firm or a sole practitioner), it may not be practicable for an individual other than a member of the engagement team to appoint the engagement quality reviewer.

**A3.** The firm may assign more than one individual to be responsible for appointing engagement quality reviewers. For example, the firm’s policies or procedures may specify a different process for appointing engagement quality reviewers for audits of financial statements than for attestation examination engagements or other engagements, with different individuals responsible for each process.

### ***Eligibility of the Engagement Quality Reviewer (Ref: par. 18)***

**A4.** In some circumstances, for example, in the case of a smaller firm or a sole practitioner, there may not be a partner or other individual in the firm who is eligible to perform the engagement quality review. In these circumstances, the firm may contract with, or obtain the services of, individuals external to the firm to perform the engagement quality review. An individual external to the firm may be a partner or an employee of a network firm, a structure or organization within the firm’s network, or a service provider. When using such an individual, the provisions in SQMS No. 1 addressing network requirements or network services or service providers apply.

### ***Eligibility Criteria for the Engagement Quality Reviewer***

#### ***Competence and Capabilities, Including Sufficient Time (Ref: par. 18a)***

**A5.** SQMS No. 1 describes characteristics related to competence, including the integration and application of technical competence, professional skills, and professional ethics, values, and attitudes.<sup>8</sup> Characteristics that the firm may consider in determining that an individual has the necessary competence to perform an engagement quality review include, for example, the following:

- An understanding of professional standards and applicable legal and regulatory requirements and the firm’s policies or procedures relevant to the engagement
- Knowledge of the entity’s industry
- An understanding of, and experience relevant to, engagements of a similar nature and complexity
- An understanding of the responsibilities of the engagement quality reviewer in performing and documenting the engagement quality review, which may be attained or enhanced by receiving relevant training from the firm

**A6.** The conditions, events, circumstances, actions, or inactions considered by the firm in determining that an engagement quality review is an appropriate response to address one or more quality risks<sup>9</sup> may be important to the firm’s determination of the competence and capabilities required to perform the engagement quality review for that engagement. Other considerations that the firm may take into account in determining whether the engagement quality reviewer has the competence and

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<sup>8</sup> Paragraph A92 of SQMS No. 1.

<sup>9</sup> See footnote 8.

capabilities, including sufficient time, needed to evaluate the significant judgments made by the engagement team and the conclusions reached thereon include, for example, the following:

- The nature of the entity
- The specialization and complexity of the industry or regulatory environment in which the entity operates
- The extent to which the engagement relates to matters requiring specialized expertise (for example, with respect to IT or specialized areas of accounting or auditing), or scientific and engineering expertise, which may be needed for certain assurance engagements (Also see paragraph A19.)

**A7.** In evaluating the competence and capabilities of an individual who may be appointed as an engagement quality reviewer, the findings arising from the firm's monitoring activities (for example, findings from the inspection of engagements for which the individual was an engagement team member or engagement quality reviewer) or the results of external inspections may also be relevant considerations.

**A8.** A lack of appropriate competence or capabilities affects the ability of the engagement quality reviewer to exercise appropriate professional judgment in performing the review. For example, an engagement quality reviewer who lacks relevant industry experience may not possess the ability or confidence necessary to evaluate and, when appropriate, challenge significant judgments made and the maintenance of professional skepticism by the engagement team on a complex, industry-specific accounting or auditing matter.

*Appropriate Authority (Ref: par. 18a)*

**A9.** Actions at the firm level help to establish the authority of the engagement quality reviewer. For example, when the firm has created a culture of respect for the role of the engagement quality reviewer, the engagement quality reviewer is less likely to experience pressure from the engagement partner or other personnel to inappropriately influence the outcome of the engagement quality review. In some cases, the engagement quality reviewer's authority may be enhanced by the firm's policies or procedures to address differences of opinion, which may include actions the engagement quality reviewer may take when a disagreement occurs between the engagement quality reviewer and the engagement team.

**A10.** The authority of the engagement quality reviewer may be diminished when

- the culture within the firm promotes respect for authority only for personnel at a higher level of hierarchy within the firm.
- the engagement quality reviewer has a reporting line to the engagement partner, for example, when the engagement partner holds a leadership position in the firm or is responsible for determining the compensation of the engagement quality reviewer.

*Relevant Ethical Requirements (Ref: par. 13c and 18b)*

**A11.** The relevant ethical requirements that are applicable when undertaking an engagement quality review may vary, depending on the nature and circumstances of the engagement or the entity. Various provisions of relevant ethical requirements may apply to an individual, such as an engagement quality reviewer, and not the firm itself. For example, if a firm uses an external provider to perform an

engagement quality review, that individual may be subject to independence requirements; however, the independence requirements imposed on that individual as a result of performing the engagement quality review may not extend to the entire firm for which that individual works.

#### Threats to the Objectivity of the Engagement Quality Reviewer

**A12.** Threats to the engagement quality reviewer's objectivity may be created by a broad range of facts and circumstances. Examples follow:

- A self-review threat may be created when the engagement quality reviewer previously was involved with significant judgments made by the engagement team, in particular, as the engagement partner or another engagement team member.
- A familiarity or self-interest threat may arise when the engagement quality reviewer is a close or immediate family member of the engagement partner or another member of the engagement team, or through close personal relationships with members of the engagement team.
- An intimidation threat may be created when actual or perceived pressure is exerted on the engagement quality reviewer (for example, when the engagement partner is an aggressive or dominant individual, or the engagement quality reviewer has a reporting line to the engagement partner).

**A13.** Relevant ethical requirements may include requirements and guidance to identify, evaluate, and address threats to objectivity. They may also include provisions that address threats to independence created by long association with an audit or assurance client.

#### *Law or Regulation Relevant to the Eligibility of the Engagement Quality Reviewer (Ref: par 18c)*

**A14.** Law or regulation may prescribe additional requirements regarding the eligibility of the engagement quality reviewer. For example, the audit requirements of the FDIC regulations<sup>10</sup> for certain financial institutions require the auditor (which includes the engagement quality reviewer) to be in compliance with the AICPA's Code of Professional Conduct and also meet the independence requirements and interpretations of the SEC and its staff.

#### *Considerations Related to Assigning the Previous Engagement Partner as Engagement Quality Reviewer (Ref: par. 19)*

**A15.** In recurring engagements, the matters on which significant judgments are made often do not vary. Therefore, significant judgments made in prior periods may continue to affect judgments of the engagement team in subsequent periods. Therefore, the ability of an engagement quality reviewer to perform an objective evaluation of significant judgments is affected when the individual was previously involved with those judgments as the engagement partner. In such circumstances, it is important that appropriate safeguards are put in place to reduce threats to objectivity, in particular, the self-review threat, to an acceptable level. The following factors may be taken into consideration when designing policies or procedures to maintain the objectivity of

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<sup>10</sup> See Title 12, Chapter III, Subchapter B, Part 363.3(f) of the U.S. *Code of Federal Regulations*.

an engagement quality reviewer who served as the engagement partner on the previous year's engagement:

- The extent of changes in the matters on which significant judgments are made and the facts and circumstances around those significant judgments compared to the period or periods in which the individual was the engagement partner. For example, if a business combination with a material effect on the financial statements has occurred, the significant judgments made in the current period may vary from those of the prior period to such an extent that an objective evaluation of those judgments could be made by the individual who served as the engagement partner in the previous period.
- The incentives and disincentives within the firm that may affect the objectivity of the engagement quality reviewer.

**A16.** A firm may establish policies or procedures that limit the eligibility to be appointed as engagement quality reviewers of individuals who previously served as the engagement partner, for example, by establishing a specified cooling-off period during which the engagement partner is precluded from being appointed as the engagement quality reviewer. Determining a suitable cooling-off period depends on the facts and circumstances of the engagement.

**A17.** The firm's policies or procedures may also address whether a cooling-off period is appropriate for an individual other than the engagement partner before becoming eligible to be appointed as the engagement quality reviewer on that engagement. In this regard, the firm may consider the nature of that individual's role and previous involvement with the significant judgments made on the engagement. For example, the firm may determine that an engagement partner responsible for the performance of audit procedures on the financial information of a component in a group audit engagement may not be eligible to be appointed as the group engagement quality reviewer because of that audit partner's involvement in the significant judgments affecting the group audit engagement.

*Circumstances in Which the Engagement Quality Reviewer Uses Assistants (Ref: par. 20-21)*

**A18.** In certain circumstances, it may be appropriate for the engagement quality reviewer to be assisted by an individual or team of individuals. For example, assistance from individuals with highly specialized knowledge, skills, or expertise may be useful for understanding certain transactions undertaken by the entity to help the engagement quality reviewer evaluate the significant judgments made by the engagement team related to those transactions.

**A19.** The guidance in paragraph A14 may be helpful to the firm when establishing policies or procedures that address threats to objectivity of individuals who assist the engagement quality reviewer.

**A20.** When the engagement quality reviewer is assisted by an individual external to the firm, the assistant's responsibilities, including those related to compliance with relevant ethical requirements, may be set out in the contract or other agreement between the firm and the assistant.

**A21.** The firm's policies or procedures may include responsibilities of the engagement quality reviewer to

- consider whether assistants understand their instructions and whether the work is being carried out in accordance with the planned approach to the engagement quality review and
- address matters raised by assistants, considering their significance and modifying the planned approach appropriately.

*Impairment of the Engagement Quality Reviewer's Eligibility to Perform the Engagement Quality Review (Ref: par. 22–23)*

**A22.** Factors that may be relevant to the firm in considering whether the eligibility of the engagement quality reviewer to perform the engagement quality review is impaired include the following:

- Whether changes in the circumstances of the engagement result in the engagement quality reviewer no longer having the appropriate competence and capabilities to perform the review
- Whether changes in the other responsibilities of the engagement quality reviewer indicate that the individual no longer has sufficient time to perform the review
- Notification from the engagement quality reviewer in accordance with paragraph 23

**A23.** In circumstances in which the engagement quality reviewer's eligibility to perform the engagement quality review becomes impaired, the firm's policies or procedures may set out a process by which alternative eligible individuals are identified. The firm's policies or procedures may also address the responsibility of the individual appointed to replace the engagement quality reviewer to perform procedures sufficient to fulfill the requirements of this SQMS with respect to the performance of the engagement quality review. Such policies or procedures may further address the need for consultation in such circumstances and may include, for example, the following:

- Evaluation of whether procedures performed by the previous engagement quality reviewer could be relied on by the newly assigned engagement quality reviewer or whether all work would need to be reperformed
- Consideration of the effect of an engagement quality review assistant on the transition, when such assistant has been involved in the engagement quality review prior to transition
- Procedures undertaken by the engagement team to inform the newly assigned engagement quality reviewer about planning meeting discussions that have already occurred and other matters in which the previous engagement quality reviewer had been involved
- Documentation of the circumstances necessitating the change

**Performance of the Engagement Quality Review (Ref: par. 24–27)**

***Engagement Partner Responsibilities in Relation to the Engagement Quality Review (Ref: par. 24b)***



**A24.** Statement on Auditing Standards (SAS) No. 146, *Quality Management for an Engagement Conducted in Accordance With Generally Accepted Auditing Standards*<sup>11</sup> establishes the requirements for the engagement partner in audit engagements for which an engagement quality review is required, including the following:

- Determining that an engagement quality reviewer has been appointed
- Cooperating with the engagement quality reviewer and informing other members of the engagement team of their responsibility to do so
- Discussing significant matters and significant judgments arising during the audit engagement, including those identified during the engagement quality review, with the engagement quality reviewer
- Not releasing the auditor's report until the completion of the engagement quality review

**A25.** Professional standards include requirements that address the engagement report date. When the engagement quality review is completed after the report date, there may be instances in which the date of the report is required to be changed because additional procedures are needed or additional evidence is required. In such instances, the report date is changed to the date when the additional procedures have been satisfactorily completed or the additional evidence has been obtained, in accordance with the professional standards applicable to the engagement. The need to change a report date may be indicative of a deficiency or deficiencies in the firm's system of quality management.

**A26.** AT-C section 105, *Concepts Common to All Attestation Engagements*,<sup>12,\*</sup> also establishes requirements for the engagement partner in relation to the engagement quality review.

***Discussions Between the Engagement Quality Reviewer and the Engagement Team (Ref: par. 24c)***

**A27.** Frequent communication between the engagement team and engagement quality reviewer throughout the engagement may assist in facilitating an effective and timely engagement quality review. However, a threat to the objectivity of the engagement quality reviewer may be created depending on the timing and extent of the discussions with the engagement team about a significant judgment. The firm's policies or procedures may set out the actions to be taken by the engagement quality reviewer or the engagement team to avoid situations in which the engagement quality reviewer is, or may be perceived to be, making decisions on behalf of the engagement team. For example, in these circumstances, the firm may require consultation about such significant judgments with other relevant personnel in accordance with the firm's consultation policies or procedures.

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<sup>11</sup> Paragraph 36 of Statement on Auditing Standards (SAS) No. 146, *Quality Management for an Engagement Conducted in Accordance With Generally Accepted Auditing Standards*.

<sup>12</sup> Paragraph 45 of AT-C section 105, *Concepts Common to All Engagements*.

\* All AT-C sections can be found in AICPA *Professional Standards*.

***Procedures Performed by the Engagement Quality Reviewer (Ref: par. 25–27)***

**A28.** The firm’s policies or procedures may specify the nature, timing, and extent of the procedures performed by the engagement quality reviewer and also may emphasize the importance of the engagement quality reviewer exercising professional judgment in performing the review.

**A29.** The timing of the procedures performed by the engagement quality reviewer may depend on the nature and circumstances of the engagement or the entity, including the nature of the matters subject to the review. Timely review of the engagement documentation by the engagement quality reviewer throughout all stages of the engagement (for example, planning, performing, and reporting) allows matters to be promptly resolved to the engagement quality reviewer’s satisfaction before the release of the engagement report. For example, the engagement quality reviewer may perform procedures in relation to the overall strategy and plan for the engagement at the completion of the planning phase. Timely performance of the engagement quality review may also reinforce the exercise of professional judgment and, when applicable to the type of engagement, maintenance of professional skepticism by the engagement team in planning and performing the engagement.

**A30.** The nature and extent of the engagement quality reviewer’s procedures for a specific engagement may depend on the following, among other factors:

- The reasons for the assessments given to quality risks,<sup>13</sup> for example, engagements performed for entities in emerging industries or with complex transactions.
- Identified deficiencies, and the remedial actions to address the identified deficiencies, related to the firm’s monitoring and remediation process and any related guidance issued by the firm, which may indicate areas where more extensive procedures need to be performed by the engagement quality reviewer.
- The complexity of the engagement.
- The nature and size of the entity, including whether the entity is a listed entity.
- Findings relevant to the engagement, such as the results of inspections undertaken by an external oversight authority in a prior period, or other concerns raised about the quality of the work of the engagement team.
- Information obtained from the firm’s acceptance and continuance of client relationships and specific engagements.
- For assurance engagements, the engagement team’s identification and assessment of, and responses to, risks of material misstatement in the engagement.
- Whether members of the engagement team have cooperated with the engagement quality reviewer. The firm’s policies or procedures may address the actions the engagement quality reviewer takes in circumstances in which the engagement team has not cooperated with the engagement quality reviewer, for example, informing an appropriate individual in the firm so appropriate action can be taken to resolve the issue.

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<sup>13</sup> Paragraph A49 of SQMS No. 1.

**A31.** The nature, timing, and extent of the engagement quality reviewer's procedures may need to change based on circumstances encountered in performing the engagement quality review.

#### *Group Audit Considerations*

**A32.** The performance of an engagement quality review for an audit of group financial statements may involve additional considerations for the individual appointed as the engagement quality reviewer for the group audit, depending on the size and complexity of the group. Paragraph 21a requires the firm's policies or procedures to require the engagement quality reviewer to take overall responsibility for the performance of the engagement quality review. In doing so, for larger and more complex group audits, the group engagement quality reviewer may need to discuss significant matters and significant judgments with key members of the engagement team other than the group engagement team (for example, those responsible for performing audit procedures on the financial information of a component). In these circumstances, the engagement quality reviewer may be assisted by individuals in accordance with paragraph 20. The guidance in paragraph A22 may be helpful when the engagement quality reviewer for the group audit is using assistants.

**A33.** In some cases, an engagement quality reviewer may be appointed for an audit of an entity or business unit that is part of a group, for example, when such an audit is required by law, regulation, or for other reasons. In these circumstances, communication between the engagement quality reviewer for the group audit and the engagement quality reviewer for the audit of that entity or business unit may help the group engagement quality reviewer in fulfilling the responsibilities in accordance with paragraph 21a. For example, this may be the case when the entity or business unit has been identified as a component for purposes of the group audit and significant judgments related to the group audit have been made at the component level.

#### *Information Communicated by the Engagement Team and the Firm (Ref: par. 25a)*

**A34.** Obtaining an understanding of information communicated by the engagement team and the firm in accordance with paragraph 25a may assist the engagement quality reviewer in understanding the significant judgments that may be expected for the engagement. Such an understanding may also provide the engagement quality reviewer with a basis for discussions with the engagement team about the significant matters and significant judgments made in planning, performing, and reporting on the engagement. For example, a deficiency identified by the firm may relate to significant judgments made by other engagement teams for certain accounting estimates for a particular industry. When this is the case, such information may be relevant to the significant judgments made on the engagement with respect to those accounting estimates and, therefore, may provide the engagement quality reviewer with a basis for discussions with the engagement team in accordance with paragraph 25b.

#### *Significant Matters and Significant Judgments (Ref: par. 25b–c)*

**A35.** For audits of financial statements, SAS No. 146<sup>14</sup> requires the engagement partner to review audit documentation relating to significant matters<sup>15</sup> and significant judgments, including

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<sup>14</sup> Paragraph 31 of SAS No. 146.

<sup>15</sup> Paragraph .08c of AU-C section 230, *Audit Documentation*. All AU-C sections can be found in AICPA *Professional Standards*.

those relating to difficult or contentious matters identified during the engagement, and the conclusions reached.

**A36.** For audits of financial statements, SAS No. 14616 provides examples of significant judgments that may be identified by the engagement partner related to the overall audit strategy and audit plan for undertaking the engagement, the execution of the engagement, and the overall conclusions reached by the engagement team.

**A37.** For engagements other than audits of financial statements, the significant judgments made by the engagement team may depend on the nature and circumstances of the engagement or the entity. For example, in an attestation engagement performed in accordance with Statements on Standards for Attestation Engagements, the engagement team's determination of whether the criteria to be applied in the preparation of the subject matter information are suitable for the engagement may involve or require significant judgment.

**A38.** In performing the engagement quality review, the engagement quality reviewer may become aware of other areas where significant judgments would have been expected to be made by the engagement team for which further information may be needed about the engagement team's procedures performed or the basis for conclusions reached. In those circumstances, discussions with the engagement quality reviewer may result in the engagement team concluding that additional procedures need to be performed.

**A39.** The information obtained in accordance with paragraphs 25*a–b*, and the review of selected documentation, assists the engagement quality reviewer in evaluating the engagement team's basis for making the significant judgments. Other considerations that may be relevant to the engagement quality reviewer's evaluation include, for example, the following:

- Remaining alert to changes in the nature and circumstances of the engagement or the entity that may result in changes in the significant judgments made by the engagement team
- Applying an unbiased view in evaluating responses from the engagement team
- Following up on inconsistencies identified in reviewing engagement documentation or inconsistent responses by the engagement team to questions relating to the significant judgments made

**A40.** The firm's policies or procedures may specify engagement documentation to be reviewed by the engagement quality reviewer. In addition, such policies or procedures may indicate that the engagement quality reviewer exercises professional judgment in selecting additional engagement documentation to be reviewed relating to significant judgments made by the engagement team.

**A41.** Discussions about significant judgments with the engagement partner and, if applicable, other members of the engagement team, together with the engagement team's documentation, may assist the engagement quality reviewer in evaluating the maintenance of professional skepticism, when applicable to the engagement, by the engagement team in relation to those significant judgments.

**A42.** For audits of financial statements, SAS No. 14617 provides examples of the impediments to the maintenance of professional skepticism at the engagement level, unconscious auditor biases that may

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<sup>16</sup> Paragraph A93 of SAS No. 146.

<sup>17</sup> Paragraphs A33–A35 of SAS No. 146.

impede the maintenance of professional skepticism, and possible actions that the engagement team may take to mitigate impediments to the maintenance of professional skepticism at the engagement level.

**A43.** For audits of financial statements, the requirements and relevant application material in AU-C section 315, *Understanding the Entity and Its Environment and Assessing the Risks of Material Misstatement*;<sup>18</sup> AU-C section 540, *Auditing Accounting Estimates and Related Disclosures*;<sup>19</sup> and other AU-C sections also provide examples of areas in an audit where the auditor maintains professional skepticism or examples of where appropriate documentation may help provide evidence about how the auditor maintained professional skepticism. Such guidance may also assist the engagement quality reviewer in evaluating the maintenance of professional skepticism by the engagement team.

*Whether Relevant Ethical Requirements Relating to Independence Have Been Fulfilled (Ref: par. 25d)*

**A44.** SAS No. 146<sup>20</sup> requires the engagement partner, prior to dating the auditor's report, to take responsibility for determining whether relevant ethical requirements, including those related to independence, have been fulfilled.

*Whether Consultation Has Taken Place on Difficult or Contentious Matters or Matters Involving Differences of Opinion (Ref: par. 25e)*

**A45.** SQMS No. 1<sup>21</sup> addresses consultation on difficult or contentious matters and differences of opinion within the engagement team or between the engagement team and the engagement quality reviewer or individuals performing activities within the firm's system of quality management.

*Sufficient and Appropriate Involvement of the Engagement Partner on the Engagement (Ref: par. 25f)*

**A46.** SAS No. 146<sup>22</sup> requires the engagement partner to determine, prior to dating the auditor's report, that the engagement partner's involvement has been sufficient and appropriate throughout the audit engagement such that the engagement partner has the basis for determining that the significant judgments made and the conclusions reached are appropriate given the nature and circumstances of the engagement. SAS No. 146<sup>22</sup> also indicates that the documentation of the involvement of the engagement partner may be accomplished in different ways. Discussions with the engagement team, and review of such engagement documentation, may assist the engagement quality reviewer's evaluation of the basis for the engagement partner's determination that the engagement partner's involvement has been sufficient and appropriate.

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<sup>18</sup> Paragraph A255 of AU-C section 315, *Understanding the Entity and Its Environment and Assessing the Risks of Material Misstatement*.

<sup>19</sup> Paragraph .A11 of AU-C section 540, *Auditing Accounting Estimates and Related Disclosures*.

<sup>20</sup> Paragraph 21 of SAS No. 146.

<sup>21</sup> Paragraphs 32d–e and A80–A83 of SQMS No. 1.

<sup>22</sup> Paragraph 40a of SAS No. 146.

**A47.** SAS No. 146 is adapted, as necessary, to engagements performed in accordance with generally accepted auditing standards other than audits of financial statements. Accordingly, the requirement in paragraph 25f is applicable to those engagements.

Engagement Quality Reviewer's Review of Financial Statements and Engagement Reports (Ref: par. 25g)

**A48.** For audits of financial statements, the engagement quality reviewer's review of the financial statements and auditor's report thereon is consistent with the engagement quality reviewer's understanding of those matters based on the review of selected engagement documentation and discussions with the engagement team. In reviewing the financial statements or financial information, the engagement quality reviewer may also become aware of other areas where significant judgments would have been expected to be made by the engagement team for which further information may be needed about the engagement team's procedures or conclusions. The guidance in this paragraph also applies to reviews of financial statements or financial information and the related engagement report.

**A49.** For engagements other than audits or reviews of financial statements or financial information, the engagement quality reviewer's review of the engagement report and, when applicable, the subject matter information may include considerations similar to those described in paragraph A46 (for example, whether the presentation or description of matters relating to the significant judgments made by the engagement team are consistent with the engagement quality reviewer's understanding based on the procedures performed in connection with the engagement quality review).

Unresolved Concerns of the Engagement Quality Reviewer (Ref: par. 26)

**A50.** The firm's policies or procedures may specify the individual or individuals in the firm to be notified if the engagement quality reviewer has unresolved concerns that the significant judgments made by the engagement team, or the conclusions reached thereon, are not appropriate. Such individuals may include the individual assigned the responsibility for the appointment of engagement quality reviewers. With respect to such unresolved concerns, the firm's policies or procedures may also require consultation within or outside the firm (for example, a professional or regulatory body).

#### **Documentation (Ref: par. 28–30)**

**A51.** Paragraphs 58–61 of SQMS No. 1 address the firm's documentation of its system of quality management, which includes the firm's policies and procedures addressing engagements that are required to be subject to engagement quality reviews. This SQMS addresses additional documentation requirements related to such policies and procedures as well as documentation requirements related to the performance of engagement quality reviews undertaken at the engagement level.

**A52.** The form, content, and extent of the documentation of the engagement quality review may depend on the following factors:

- The nature and complexity of the engagement

- The nature of the entity
- The nature and complexity of the matters subject to the engagement quality review
- The extent of the engagement documentation reviewed

**A53.** The performance and notification of the completion of the engagement quality review may be documented in a number of ways. For example, the engagement quality reviewer may document the review of engagement documentation electronically in the IT application for the performance of the engagement. Alternatively, the engagement quality reviewer may document the review through means of a memorandum. The engagement quality reviewer's procedures may also be documented in other ways, for example, in the minutes of the engagement team's discussions when the engagement quality reviewer was present.

**A54.** Paragraph 24*b* requires that the firm's policies or procedures preclude the engagement partner from releasing the engagement report until the completion of the engagement quality review, which includes resolving matters raised by the engagement quality reviewer. Provided that all requirements with respect to the performance of the engagement quality review have been fulfilled, the documentation of the review may be finalized after the release of the engagement report but before the assembly of the final engagement file.