



INFORMATION
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TECHNICAL RELEASE

re:Assurance

ASSURANCE REPORTS ON THE OUTSOURCED PROVISION OF INFORMATION SERVICES AND INFORMATION PROCESSING SERVICES

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SCOPE

- 1 This Technical Release provides guidance to reporting accountants on undertaking an assurance engagement and providing a report (“assurance report”) in relation to the control procedures of a service organisation. The guidance is specifically developed for the provision of information and information processing services.
- 2 It is also expected to assist customers in understanding the scope and type of assurance conveyed in the assurance report. The guidance is also aimed at providing assistance to the directors of service organisations who prepare a report on their control procedures by clarifying their expected responsibilities.
- 3 It is for the directors of the service organisation to decide whether to prepare a report on their organisation’s control procedures and whether to have this reported on by reporting accountants. In certain circumstances, directors may, for example, consider it more appropriate to allow access to customers and their auditors or provide a report on a specific aspect of its operations as this impacts an individual customer. It is not the intention of the guidance to oblige service organisations to report on control procedures in the manner described in this guidance. However, if the directors decide to provide a report other than in accordance with this guidance, they may not make any reference to this guidance in their report.
- 4 This guidance replaces the Institute’s guidance FIT 1/94 *Reports on the Processing of Transactions by Service Organisations*.

TRANSITION FROM FIT 1/94

- 5 The Technical Release is effective for periods ending on or after 30 April 2007. However, service organisations and reporting accountants are encouraged to apply this guidance before that date as best practice.

ASSURANCE ENGAGEMENTS

International developments

- 6 In 2004, the International Auditing and Assurance Standards Board published the *International Framework for Assurance Engagements* (the Framework) and the first International Standard on Assurance Engagements (ISAE) 3000, *Assurance Engagements Other Than Audits or Reviews of Historical Financial Information*. These pronouncements provide high level principles for assurance engagements other than audits and reviews of historical financial statements.
- 7 The Framework defines the elements of assurance engagements and describes objectives for such engagements. ISAE 3000 provides generic guidance on the principal aspects of assurance engagements and refers to an assurance engagement involving three separate parties. Together these two international pronouncements provide the appropriate framework within which to develop specific guidance covering subject areas and topics such as internal control where, hitherto, no specific guidance has existed.

The types of assurance

- 8 There are two types of assurance engagements and associated objectives specified in the Framework: reasonable assurance engagements and limited assurance engagements.
- 9 In a reasonable assurance engagement, reporting accountants seek to obtain sufficient appropriate evidence that enables them to express a positive conclusion on the directors' report prepared for customers. In a limited assurance engagement, reporting accountants seek to gather evidence sufficient to obtain a meaningful level of assurance as the basis for a negative form of expression. This guidance is prepared for reporting accountants performing a reasonable assurance engagement.

Nature of engagement

- 10 The service organisation is responsible for providing information on specific control procedures ("control procedures") to meet the agreed control objectives as criteria. The reporting accountants perform the engagement in accordance with this guidance. As discussed below the directors' and assurance reports may be made available to others, e.g. customers and their auditors.
- 11 The directors of the service organisation are responsible for preparing a report concerning the control procedures in place. The report is for the information of customers and their auditors and it is therefore appropriate that any report provided by service organisations has regard to those operations which are likely to be relevant to customers and their auditors as well as the operations specified in this guidance.
- 12 The reporting package comprises a report by the directors of the service organisation concerning the control procedures of the service organisation and a reasonable assurance report by the reporting accountants, explaining the scope of work carried out and giving their conclusion on relevant parts of the directors' report. The conclusion is in the form of a qualitative judgment. The judgment and the report relate to historic matters.

Control objectives as criteria

- 13 Assurance engagements require the reporting accountants to express an overall conclusion on the information assessed relative to certain *criteria*. Criteria also help the directors of service organisations and their customers to understand how the reporting accountants have evaluated control procedures to reach their conclusion. In an assurance report on control procedures, the criteria are the control objectives around which the service organisation has designed its control procedures. The criteria need to be relevant, complete, reliable, neutral and understandable so as to communicate the basis of the evaluation.
- 14 The control objectives collectively reflect the level of control over the outsourced provision of information services and information processing services.
- 15 There is a number of standards and guidance that may be relevant to the assurance engagements of the outsourced provision of information services and information processing services. Such standards and guidance provide examples of control objectives around which the service organisation may have designed its control procedures. The directors of service organisations ensure that these control objectives meet the characteristics listed in paragraph 13 and consider if these are sufficient to meet the expectation of customers. Examples of such standards and guidance are stated in Appendix 1.
- 16 Reporting accountants consider the control objectives and whether they reflect the characteristics stated in paragraph 13. Reporting accountants also consider the control objectives and supporting control procedures specified by the service organisation to form an overall opinion in the specific engagement circumstances at the time when the work was undertaken. Reporting accountants also consider the linkage of the control procedures to the stated objectives and obtain sufficient appropriate evidence to reach their opinion. Through tests of control procedures, reporting accountants may obtain sufficient appropriate evidence to conclude whether the relevant specified control objectives are met.

The assurance report

- 17 The reporting accountants' conclusion is expressed in a written report attached to the directors' report. The title of the report includes the term 'assurance' to distinguish it from non assurance engagements, for instance, agreed-upon procedures engagements. The report draws the attention of the readers to the basis of the reporting accountants' work, i.e. ISAE 3000 and this guidance.
- 18 The report by the reporting accountants reflects the agreement set out in the engagement letter. The report makes clear for whom it is prepared and who is entitled to rely upon it and for what purpose.
- 19 Reporting accountants conclude on the fairness of the description and the design and, where applicable, operating effectiveness of control procedures in relation to a specified reporting period.
- 20 Control procedures have inherent limitations and accordingly errors and irregularities may occur and not be detected. Also, control procedures cannot guarantee protection against fraudulent collusion especially on the part of those holding positions of authority or trust. The reporting accountants refer to such inherent limitations in their report.

- 21 Key elements of the assurance report are shown in the table below. Pro forma reports on the control procedures over information and information processing services are available in Appendix 3 (i) and (ii).
- 22 Reporting accountants consider a suitable form of report in accordance with the specific engagement, depending on who signs up to the letter of engagement. Appendix 3 provides two types of reports: Report (i) provides an example for an engagement to which customers of the service organisation are party in addition to the service organisation whereas Report (ii) provides an example for an engagement formed between the reporting accountants and the service organisation only.

Elements of reporting accountants' assurance report

- (a) A title indicating the report is an assurance report.
- (b) An addressee identifying the engaging parties to whom the assurance report is directed.
- (c) Identification of the applicable engagement letter.
- (d) Use of the report by the directors.
- (e) Restrictions on the use of the assurance report to the directors [and customers party to the engagement] and the replication of the report in whole or in part.
- (f) Limitation of the liability of the reporting accountants to the directors [and customers party to the engagement].
- (g) An identification and description of the subject matter information (see paragraph 23–24).
- (h) The identification of the directors as the responsible party and the respective responsibilities of the directors and the reporting accountants.
- (i) Reference to ISAE 3000 and this guidance.
- (j) Criteria against which control procedures were evaluated.
- (k) A summary of the work performed.
- (l) The period covered/ the point in time specified by the report
- (m) Inherent limitations associated with the evaluation/measurement of the subject matter against the criteria.
- (n) The reporting accountants' conclusion.
- (o) The name and signature of the firm/reporting accountants and the location of the office performing the engagement.
- (p) The assurance report date.

23 The engagement letter confirms that the assurance report is not to be recited or referred to in whole or in part in any other published document, without the express prior written consent of the reporting accountants. This may also be stated in the report.

24 The subject matter of the assurance report by the reporting accountants may be either:

- (a) the description and design of the policies and procedures of the service organisation only at the point in time specified; or
- (b) the description and design of the policies and procedures of the service organisation and tests of operating effectiveness over a period of time.

Where the subject matter of the assurance report is limited to the description and design of the policies and procedures of the service organisation only, this does not affect the directors' responsibilities over the description and design of the control policies and procedures and effective operation of the control procedures for the relevant period.

25 More detailed aspects of the two reporting options are considered in the section *Guidance for reporting accountants*. While all paragraphs in the section apply to type (b) report, specific guidance in paragraphs 72 to 80 and 85 may not be applicable to type (a) report.

RESPONSIBILITIES OF A SERVICE ORGANISATION

The role of a service organisation

26 The role of a service organisation in relation to the customers is likely to involve some combination of authorising, recording, processing, safeguarding and reporting of records relating to the customers' business operations or transactions.

The responsibility of the directors

27 To meet the customers' expectations in terms of the level of control over the information services or information processing services, the directors of the service organisation identify control objectives together with the control procedures which they consider appropriate to enable these control objectives to be met. The key responsibilities of directors in relation to these are summarised as:

- Acceptance of responsibility for control procedures;
- Evaluation of the effectiveness of the service organisation's control procedures using suitable criteria;
- Supporting their evaluation with sufficient evidence, including documentation; and
- Providing a written report of the effectiveness of the service organisation's control procedures for the relevant period.

a. Acceptance of responsibility for control procedures

28 The directors are responsible for the design, implementation and operation of the control procedures of the service organisation. This is acknowledged in their report. It is also the responsibility of the directors to take reasonable steps to prevent and detect fraud.

29 Suitably designed control procedures, when complied with individually or in combination with other control procedures, are expected to operate so as to prevent or detect errors that could result in the failure to achieve specified control objectives. The directors also evaluate the design and operation of control procedures during the relevant reporting period. In this regard, the reporting accountants' tests are separate from the service organisation's own procedures for evaluating the effectiveness of the control procedures. The work of the reporting accountants cannot be used as part of the basis for the service organisation's assessment of whether control procedures are suitably designed or the operation of control procedures is effective.

b. Evaluation of the effectiveness of the service organisation's control procedures using suitable criteria

30 In order to evaluate the effectiveness of control procedures the directors refer to suitable criteria.

31 The directors ensure, when using the standards and guidance materials suggested in Appendix 1 or similar or comparable materials, that these are suitable criteria for the service activities that they provide to their customers using the characteristics stated in paragraph 9 in this guidance. The directors make a statement in their report that they have referred to the relevant control objectives and where these are available.

c. Supporting their evaluation with sufficient evidence, including documentation

32 The directors support their assertions with respect to the design, implementation and operating effectiveness of the service organisation's control procedures with sufficient evidence. The nature of the directors' evaluation activities depends largely on the circumstances of the entity and the significance of particular controls but evaluation procedures include review and testing by internal audit, business risk and compliance review, direct testing by others under the direction of management or review by means of a self assessment process. The directors consider the sufficiency of this evidence and whether any additional evaluation of specific areas or locations may be appropriate to enable them to provide a written assessment of the effectiveness of the control procedures.

33 The process that the directors undertake includes considering:

- evidence available from on-going monitoring of control procedures;
- whether further control procedures are to be tested by them, including consideration of the locations or business units to include in the evaluation for an entity with multiple locations or business units;
- any deficiencies in control procedures that have come to their attention, for example, through management testing, internal audit reports and reports by regulators; and
- evaluation as to the likelihood that failure of certain control procedures could result in a control objective not being met, the extent to which it might not be met and the degree to which other control procedures, if effective, achieve the same control objective.

34 Documentation of control procedures in place is in itself evidence of control procedures being identifiable, capable of being monitored and communicable to those responsible for their performance. Inadequate documentation may indicate a deficiency in the service organisation's control procedures and is subject to evaluation by the reporting accountants as to its significance (e.g. it could be merely a deficiency, material weakness or in extreme cases a limitation on the scope of the engagement).

35 Documentation of control procedures may take various forms, depending on the nature and the type of the relevant information. For instance, policy manuals, process models, flowcharts and job descriptions could be used for recording the control procedure design, while documents and forms could be the record of operating and monitoring of control procedures.

36 Directors evaluate whether the documentation includes:

- the design of control procedures over all relevant control objectives;
- information about how significant transactions are authorised, recorded, processed and reported; and
- the results of management's testing and evaluation.

Where the service organisation has introduced significant changes to its control procedures within the previous 12 months, the control procedures before and after the change and the implications are documented. The judgement as to the significance of the change is based on its impact on the risk assessment of the customers and their auditors.

d. Providing a written report of the effectiveness of the service organisation's control procedures for the relevant period

37 Through evaluation and documentation, the directors accumulate sufficient information to come to an overall conclusion as to the effectiveness of the service organisation's control procedures during a specified period. Their conclusion is based on the specified criteria and includes an assessment of the impact of exceptions and deficiencies. The directors communicate the conclusion and the details of significant deficiencies to customers in their report. The following key matters are to be included in the report of the directors:

Contents of directors' report

- (a) A statement of directors' responsibilities.
- (b) The service organisation's control objectives and a reference to the control objectives specified in this guidance with details of any omitted or additional control objectives considered appropriate by the directors with explanations for such omissions and additions.
- (c) Aspects of the service organisation's control environment, risk assessment, management information, communication and monitoring process that may be relevant to the services provided.
- (d) Details of each of the specific control procedures designed to achieve the control objectives.
- (e) Reference to the use of this guidance.
- (f) Details of any significant changes to the control objectives and procedures during the period.
- (g) Details of any significant deficiencies and exceptions and their impact on the control objectives during the period.
- (h) The assertions by the directors that they have assessed the effectiveness of the control procedures and their opinion that:
 - i their report describes fairly the control procedures that relate to the control objectives referred to in (b) above which were in place as at [date];
 - ii the control procedures described are suitably designed such that there is reasonable assurance that the specified control objectives would be achieved if the described control procedures were complied with satisfactorily [and customers applied the control procedures contemplated]; and
 - iii if relevant to the assignment, the control procedures described were operating with sufficient effectiveness to provide reasonable assurance that the related control objectives were achieved during the specified period.
- (i) The name and signature of the director signing on behalf of the Board of Directors.
- (j) The directors' report date.

Example paragraphs from an illustrative directors' report on matters referred to at (a), (e), (h), (i), and (j) are set out at Appendix 2.

- 38 In applying the framework presented above, it is not necessary to list the control procedures and related control objectives in both the directors' report and in the assurance report.
- 39 The directors are responsible for the completeness, accuracy, validity and method of presentation of the description of control objectives and procedures. The description sets out information about the service organisation's control objectives and procedures that may be relevant to the customers. The reporting accountants may assist the service organisation in preparing the description; however, the representations in the description are the responsibility of the service organisation's directors.
- 40 The directors, where appropriate, seek to describe control procedures in a manner which permits verification and is understandable to customers. To achieve this and to promote consistency in approach, the directors may find it helpful to differentiate between the different components of the overall system which are being described in their report. The principal components are in general likely to include control objectives, control policies, process descriptions and control procedures. Process and control procedure descriptions in particular are factual and precise wherever possible in order to avoid the possibility of different interpretations being placed on these by different customers.
- 41 The description of control objectives and procedures does not necessarily address every service provided by the service organisation but presents a level of detail that provides sufficient information for customers to assess control risk and for the auditors of the customers to plan an audit of the customers' financial statements, as if a service organisation were not used.

Significant deficiencies

- 42 A control procedure deficiency (or a combination of control procedure deficiencies) is classified as a significant deficiency where, by itself or in combination with other control procedure deficiencies, it results in more than a remote likelihood that a control objective may not be met. Where such significant deficiencies were corrected during the year, customers may find it helpful to be informed of this in the directors' report.

Complementary control procedures of the customers

- 43 The activities of the service organisation may be described with the assumption that customers have control procedures in place, with respect to such general matters as the authorisation of transactions, the written notification of changes, the timely review of reports provided by the service organisations and appropriate restrictions on access to on-line terminals. If this is the case, the description of the control procedures at the service organisation refers to such required complementary control procedures of customers.

Other responsibilities of service organisations

- 44 Other responsibilities of service organisations include:
- providing the reporting accountants with access to appropriate service organisation resources, such as service organisation personnel, systems documentation, contracts and minutes of management/audit committee meetings;
 - disclosing to the reporting accountants any significant changes in control procedures that have occurred since the service organisations' last examination or within the last 12 months if the service organisations have not previously engaged reporting accountants to issue an assurance report;

- disclosing to the reporting accountants and the affected customers any illegal acts, fraud, or uncorrected errors attributable to the service organisations' management or employees that may affect its customers and the entity's whistle-blowing arrangements;
- disclosing to the reporting accountants any relevant design deficiencies in control procedures of which it is aware, including those for which the directors believe the cost of corrective action may exceed the benefits;
- disclosing to the reporting accountants all significant instances of which it is aware when control procedures have not operated with sufficient effectiveness to achieve the specified control objectives; and
- providing the reporting accountants with a letter of representation.

Service organisations that use other service organisations

- 45** Additional considerations are required where a service organisation uses another service organisation (a sub-service organisation) to perform certain aspects of the processing performed for the customers.
- 46** In addition to describing its control objectives and procedures, a service organisation that uses a sub-service organisation describes the functions and nature of the processing performed by the sub-service organisation in sufficient detail for the customers and their auditors to understand the significance of the sub-service organisation's operations to the information services or information processing services provided for customers.
- 47** The purpose of the description of the functions and nature of the processing performed by the sub-service organisation is to alert the customers and their auditors to the fact that another entity is involved in the information services and information processing services and to summarise the functions the sub-service organisation performs.
- 48** The service organisation determines whether its description of control procedures includes the relevant control procedures of the sub-service organisation. The two alternative methods of dealing with sub-service organisations are as follows:
- *The exclusive method:* The sub-service organisation's relevant control objectives and procedures are excluded from the description and from the scope of the reporting accountants' engagement. The service organisation states in the description that the sub-service organisation's control objectives and related procedures are omitted from the description and that the control objectives in the report include only the objectives which the service organisation's control procedures are intended to achieve.
 - *The inclusive method:* The sub-service organisation's relevant control procedures are included in the description and in the scope of the engagement. The description clearly differentiates between control procedures of the service organisation and control procedures of the sub-service organisation. The set of control objectives includes all of the control objectives which both the service organisation and the sub-service organisation are expected to achieve. To accomplish this, the service organisation co-ordinates the preparation and presentation of the description of control procedures with the sub-service organisation.

Other information provided by the service organisation

- 49 A service organisation may wish to present in its report other information that is not a part of the description of control procedures: for example, background information on the entities involved and the services they provide. Where information of this nature is presented, it is presented in a separate section of the report and made clear that it does not constitute a part of the service organisation's description of control objectives and control procedures.

GUIDANCE FOR REPORTING ACCOUNTANTS

Accepting an engagement

- 50** It is important that there is a clear understanding and agreement concerning the scope and purpose of the engagement between the reporting accountants and the service organisation and, if applicable, customers that may also be party to the engagement (see paragraph 57).
- 51** Reporting accountants also consider whether the engagement team collectively possess the necessary professional competencies having regard to the nature of the assignment. As a part of the engagement acceptance process reporting accountants also consider relevant ethical requirements.
- 52** In carrying out an assurance engagement, Chartered Accountants are subject to ethical guidance as laid down by the Institute in its ethical code. The requirements in the ethical code include, among other things, adherence to the Fundamental Principles set out in the introduction in all of their professional and business activities. When conducting an assurance engagement, there are additional requirements in Section 290 *Independence - Assurance Engagements* in the code. This applies to all assurance engagements outside the scope of audit and is in compliance with the Code of Ethics established by the International Federation of Accountants (IFAC).
- 53** The reporting accountants' adherence to the independence requirements involves an assessment of likely threats to independence and the application where necessary of safeguards. For example, the provision of assistance to a service organisation in preparing its report may result in a self-review threat if the impact of the assistance on the matter being reported on is highly subjective and material. The subjectivity of the report proposed to be issued will also be relevant. If other than insignificant threats are identified, safeguards need to be considered. These might include:
- the use of independent teams, where appropriate; or
 - an independent review of the key judgements on the engagement.
- 54** The assurance report on the outsourced provision of information services and information processing services may be received by a range of persons who are not party to the engagement. This may include current, and in some cases potential, customers. Reporting accountants do not intend to assume responsibility to persons who are not party to the engagement, but legal actions from such persons may nonetheless occur. Reporting accountants may wish to consider also referring to guidance on engagement acceptance in the Audit and Assurance Faculty Technical Release AAF 04/06 *Assurance Engagements: Management of risk and liability* (available from www.icaew.com). The section on engagement acceptance in the guidance illustrates examples of circumstances that may be relevant for the decision on whether and if so on what terms the engagement should be accepted and on which third parties receive copies of the report. When applying AAF 04/06 to this guidance, the reporting accountants replace the term 'client' by 'service organisation' and 'third parties' by 'customers'.

Reporting accountants therefore need to apply appropriate engagement acceptance procedures in order to assess the risks associated with taking on a particular engagement and accordingly whether to do so and, if so, on what terms. Where the reporting accountants do accept such an engagement, suitably rigorous internal risk management policies are applied to manage any increased level of risk.

Managing professional liability

56 As highlighted in paragraph 54 above, reporting accountants consider how to manage their professional risk when they receive requests from parties other than the client to access the assurance report. Depending on the engagement circumstances, reporting accountants can enter into one or a combination of arrangements involving themselves, the service organisation, customers and/or other third parties. Such third parties may include customers' auditors, potential customers, banks, other lenders or prospective purchasers of the client. Generic guidance on managing professional risk when performing an assurance engagement, including the application of arrangements to such parties, is available in AAF 04/06.

57 AAF04/06 provides guidance for reporting accountants on entering into one or a combination of the following engagement arrangements depending on the engagement circumstances, in summary:

- (a) A tri-partite or multi-partite engagement contract with the service organisation and the customers, accepting that they owe a duty of care not only to the service organisation but also to those customers, including provisions limiting liability if appropriate (recognising that such a contract may not be achievable where the customers are numerous).
- (b) An engagement with the service organisation with the facility for customers to enjoy a duty of care from the reporting accountants if they accept the relevant terms of the engagement letter previously agreed with the service organisation as if they had signed that letter when originally issued, including the same provisions limiting liability¹.
- (c) An engagement with the service organisation alone but before allowing the customers access to the assurance report, require the customers (i) to acknowledge in writing that the reporting accountants owe the customers no duty of care and (ii) to agree in writing that no claims may be brought against the reporting accountants by the customers in relation to the assurance report².
- (d) An engagement with the service organisation alone disclaiming any liability or duty to others (including customers) by notice in the assurance report. Reporting accountants also consider supporting this disclaimer with an indemnity from the service organisation to apply where a third party claim is made (recognising that such an indemnity may not be attractive commercially, may not be effective if the service organisation is not financially stable, and may not operate to prevent a claim: for further guidance see AAF 04/06)³.

It is also open to reporting accountants to consider with their legal advisers the use of the Contract (Rights of Third Parties) Act 1999 to manage the risk of liability to third parties. The above arrangements do not prevent customers taking legal action against the service organisation.

58 Reporting accountants refer to AAF 04/06 for guidance on the application of such engagement arrangements and seek legal advice where appropriate.

¹ This will require the consent of the service organisation/original addressees, ideally in the engagement letter. Also see footnote 12 and 14.

² Reporting accountants may wish to have regard to the principles outlined in Audit 04/03 *Access to working papers by investigating accountants*, issued by the Audit and Assurance Faculty, the ICAEW, bearing in mind that Audit 04/03 addresses different circumstances relating to third party issues, when developing a written form of such acknowledgment and agreement.

³ Reporting accountants consider the legal effectiveness of disclaiming liability and of the proposed disclaimer in light of the particular circumstances of their engagement (see for example, the guidance in Statement 1.311 on *Managing the professional liability of accountants*). Reporting accountants are advised to seek their own independent legal advice.

Agreeing on the terms of engagement

- 59 Prior to accepting the engagement, the reporting accountants establish that the directors of the service organisation acknowledge in writing their responsibility on behalf of the organisation for the design and operation of effective control procedures over its activities to achieve control objectives.
- 60 The reporting accountants agree on the terms of engagement with the parties to the engagement in accordance with the contractual relationship as discussed in AAF 04/06. To avoid misunderstandings, the agreed terms are recorded in writing in an engagement letter.
- 61 Example extracts from an engagement letter for an assurance report on control procedures of service organisations are given in Appendix 5 for illustrative purposes. Reporting accountants apply their own judgement to develop suitable wording for their engagement letters to reflect the guidance in this Technical Release, AAF 04/06 and their own particular circumstances. Where the engaging parties include customers, the nature and the content of an engagement letter may differ from the example extracts. AAF 04/06 provides an illustrative list of matters that may be included in the written terms of the reporting accountants' engagement letter. The example extracts in Appendix 5 are consistent with the list.

Planning

- 62 Where reports are referred to as being prepared in accordance with the framework for reporting set out in this Technical Release, the reporting accountants plan and perform their work so as to provide a reasonable basis for their conclusion. Professional judgement is needed to determine the required nature, timing and extent of the tests to be carried out and the reliance, if applicable, on the service organisation's internal audit department.
- 63 The reporting accountants' work is planned so as to have a reasonable expectation of detecting, at the time the work is undertaken, significant deficiencies in respect of the control procedures described by the directors and tested in accordance with the terms of the engagement. The work cannot, however, be expected to detect problems which may be considered significant from the point of view of a particular customer and the scope of the work may mean that all control procedures relevant to an individual customer may not have been tested.
- 64 Reporting accountants are not expected to assess the adequacy of the evaluation of controls performed by the directors as part of an engagement to report on the entity's control procedures.

Reporting accountants' procedures

Fairness of the description

- 65 The reporting accountants read the description of control procedures to gain an understanding of the representations made by the directors in the description. After reading the description, the reporting accountants perform procedures to determine whether the description presents fairly, in all material respects, the service organisation's control procedures that relate to the control objectives referred to by the directors which were in place as at the end of the relevant period.

- 66** To determine whether the description is fairly presented, the reporting accountants gain an understanding of the services provided by the service organisation. Procedures to gain this understanding may include:
- discussing aspects of the control framework and relevant control procedures with management and other personnel of the service organisation;
 - determining who the customers are and how the service provided by the service organisation are likely to affect the customers, for example, the predominant type of customers;
 - reviewing standard terms of contracts with the customers to gain an understanding of the service organisation's contractual obligations;
 - observing the procedures performed by service organisation personnel;
 - reviewing service organisation's policy and procedure manuals and other systems documentation, for example, flowcharts and narratives; and
 - performing walk-throughs of selected transactions and control procedures.
- 67** The reporting accountants compare their understanding of the services provided to the customers by the service organisation with the directors' representations made in their report to determine the fairness of the description. Fairly described control procedures do not omit or distort significant information that may affect the customers' assessments of control risk.
- 68** Fairly described control procedures include a complete set of associated control objectives that are developed by the service organisation based on the criteria suggested in Appendix 1. If there are omissions or misstatements with regard to the control objectives, the reporting accountants ask the directors to amend the description. If it is not amended the reporting accountants consider the need to report that fact in their report.

Design of control procedures

- 69** As part of their work, the reporting accountants determine whether the control procedures are suitably designed. A control procedure is suitably designed if individually, or in combination with other control procedures, it is likely to prevent or detect errors that could result in the non-achievement of specified control objectives when the described control procedures are complied with satisfactorily.
- 70** The reporting accountants' assessment of the suitability of control procedure design may include:
- considering the linkage between the control procedures and the associated control objectives;
 - considering the ability of the control procedures to prevent or detect errors related to the control objectives;
 - performing walk-throughs of selected transactions and control procedures; and
 - performing further procedures, such as enquiry of appropriate entity personnel, inspection of documents and reports and observation of the application of specific control procedures, to determine whether they are suitably designed to achieve the specified control objectives if they are operated as prescribed by appropriately qualified or experienced persons.

- 71 Where certain control procedures of the service organisation are reliant on generic control procedures executed by the customers in order to achieve control objectives, the reporting accountants consider whether such complementary control procedures are described in the directors' report. If they are not and the directors fail or refuse to amend the description, the reporting accountants consider adding an explanatory paragraph to describe the required complementary control procedures and consider the implication for the reporting accountants' conclusion on the fairness of the description (see paragraphs 81–86).

Operating effectiveness

- 72 Reporting accountants perform tests of the relevant control procedures to obtain evidence about the operating effectiveness of the control procedures during a specified reporting period. Operating effectiveness is concerned with how a control procedure is applied, the consistency with which it is applied, and by whom it is applied. Reporting accountants determine the nature, timing and extent of the tests to be performed to form their conclusion on the operating effectiveness of the control procedures. Reporting accountants may wish to provide the customers with further explanation of the tests they have performed in an appendix to their report.
- 73 Where reporting accountants are unable to test described control procedures, for example, it has not operated during the year, they state the fact that no tests have been carried out and the reason in their description of tests.

Nature, timing and extent of tests

- 74 Tests of control procedures over operating effectiveness might include a combination of enquiry of appropriate personnel, observation of the application of the control procedure, inspection of relevant documentation and re-performance of the control procedure. Enquiry alone does not generally provide sufficient evidence to support a conclusion about the operating effectiveness of a specific control procedure.
- 75 The period of time over which the reporting accountants perform tests of control procedures varies with the nature of the control procedures being tested and with the frequency of specific control procedures. Tests of operating effectiveness provide evidence that enables the reporting accountants to report on the entire period covered by the report. Certain control procedures may not have evidence of their operation that can be tested at a later date and accordingly, reporting accountants test the operating effectiveness of such control procedures at various times throughout the reporting period.
- 76 Where the service organisation implemented changes to its control procedures to improve them or to address deficiencies during the period covered, the reporting accountants evaluate the implication which the superseded control procedures had on the control objectives over the period covered. Where a change of control procedures occurs during the period, the reporting accountants agree with the directors whether it is possible for the control procedures to be tested before and after the change. The description of their tests clearly states which control procedures have been tested.
- 77 The number of control operations selected as a sample for testing depends on the frequency of performance (for example, quarterly, monthly, daily or multiple times a day), the nature (for example, manual or automated) of control procedures, and the reporting accountants' assessment of the system (including the risk of failure of the control procedure that is being tested). An example table for setting sample sizes is given in Appendix 6.

Describing tests of operating effectiveness and exception reporting

- 78** The reporting accountants describe the control procedures that were tested, the control objectives they were intended to achieve, the tests carried out and the results of the tests in the assurance report. This information is typically incorporated within the service organisation's description of control procedures or contained within an attachment to the assurance report. The reporting accountants describe tests of operating effectiveness that provide sufficient information to support their conclusion as to whether the service organisation has achieved the relevant control objectives during the period.
- 79** In describing the results of tests, the reporting accountants include details and other information where relevant to the customers and their auditors. Test results are also described whether or not the reporting accountants have concluded that the results constitute an exception.
- 80** To increase the clarity of the scope of engagement, the reporting accountants carefully describe in their report the work that they do and the nature, timing and extent of tests applied. In describing the nature of tests, the reporting accountants define the types of tests performed. It is also desirable to closely define what is meant by enquiry, inspection, observation and re-performance. Illustrative definitions of tests such as enquiry, inspection, observation and re-performance are provided in Appendix 7. In describing the extent of tests, the reporting accountants indicate whether the items tested represent a sample or all the items in the population. If sampling was used, it may be helpful to provide information on the sample size.

Reporting on description misstatements, design deficiencies or when control procedures are not operating effectively

- 81** The reporting accountants discuss with the directors when they become aware that the control objectives are incomplete or inappropriate in light of the criteria in this guidance so that the directors may amend the description to include the recommended control objective(s). If the directors refuse or fail to do so the reporting accountants add an explanation in the criteria and scope paragraph to the assurance report identifying the omitted or inappropriate control objective(s) to draw the attention of the customers and their auditors. In addition, the wording of the conclusion paragraph may also be modified. An example paragraph illustrating an exception to the fair description is provided in Appendix 4 (a).
- 82** Although the reporting accountants may qualify their conclusion on the fairness of the description of control procedures this does not necessarily affect the suitability of design or operating effectiveness of the control procedures because the reporting accountants' conclusion relates only to the control objectives that are included in the service organisation's description. Reporting accountants note that it is the responsibility of the directors and not the reporting accountants to ensure the completeness and the reasonableness of control procedures over the activities of the service organisation.
- 83** Where control procedures associated with stated control objectives are incomplete or inappropriate, reporting accountants also discuss this with the directors so that the directors may amend the description to include the associated control procedures. If the directors refuse or fail to amend the description the reporting accountants add an explanatory paragraph preceding the conclusion to the report identifying the omitted or inappropriate control procedures to draw the attention of the customers and their auditors. In addition, the wording of the conclusion paragraph may also be modified. An example paragraph illustrating an exception to the fair description is provided in Appendix 4 (a).

- 84** Where the reporting accountants conclude that a set of control procedures are not suitably designed in relation to a specified control objective, they consider the design deficiencies in their overall assessment of the control procedures. If the reporting accountants determine that control procedures are not suitably designed to achieve a specified control objective, they add an explanatory paragraph preceding the conclusion to the report identifying the design deficiencies and modify the conclusion. An example paragraph illustrating an exception to the fair description is provided in Appendix 4 (b).
- 85** Where the reporting accountants' tests identify exceptions to the operating effectiveness of the control procedures, the reporting accountants consider whether this exception means that a control objective has not been achieved. In some cases deficiencies may be so pervasive that the reporting accountants modify their conclusion on the achievement of one or more control objective or issue an adverse opinion. An example paragraph illustrating an exception to the fair description is provided in Appendix 4 (c).
- 86** Where significant changes are introduced during the period covered in the report, the directors report this fact. If the reporting accountants become aware that the description on changes is missing, they request the directors to amend the description. The omission of information related to changes in the service organisation's control procedure does not warrant a qualification of the conclusion on the fairness of the description however, provided that the directors' description of control procedures is fair as at the date of the description.

Elements of the service organisation report that are not covered by the assurance report

- 87** As discussed in paragraph 48, where the service organisation has included information other than that which constitutes a part of the description of control procedures in its report, this is outside the scope of the assurance report. The reporting accountants read such information for consistency with their understanding of the entity.

Using the work of internal auditors

- 88** A service organisation may have an internal audit department that performs tests of control procedures as part of its audit plan. The reporting accountants may determine that it might be effective and efficient to use the results of testing performed by internal auditors to alter the nature, timing or extent of the work they otherwise might have performed in forming their conclusion. Where using the work of internal auditors, however, the reporting accountants perform sufficient testing themselves which provides the principal evidence for their conclusion. The reporting accountants also make reference to the internal auditors in their report and attribute the performance of the tests and the results of tests to them where appropriate.

Considerations for uncorrected errors, fraud or illegal acts

- 89** In the course of performing procedures at a service organisation, reporting accountants may become aware of uncorrected errors, fraud or illegal acts attributable to the service organisation's systems, management or employees that may affect one or more customers.

90 Unless clearly inconsequential, the reporting accountants determine from the directors of the service organisation whether this information has been communicated to the affected customers. If the directors of the service organisation have not communicated this information and are unwilling to do so, the reporting accountants inform the service organisation's audit committee or other group of directors with equivalent authority. If the audit committee does not respond appropriately, the reporting accountants consider whether to resign from the engagement. The reporting accountants generally are not required to confirm with the customers that the service organisation has communicated such information.

Management representation letter

91 In all engagements, reporting accountants obtain written representations signed by the directors of the service organisation who the reporting accountants believe are responsible for and knowledgeable, directly or through others in the service organisation, about the matters covered in the representations. The refusal by the directors of the service organisation to provide the written representations considered necessary by the reporting accountants constitutes a limitation on the scope of the engagement and may be considered in forming the reporting accountants' conclusion. The representation letter is normally dated on the day the directors' report is dated.

APPENDICES

1. Control objectives

As stated in paragraph 13 to 16, assurance engagements require the reporting accountants to express an overall conclusion on the information assessed relative to certain criteria.

In relation to the provision of information services and information processing services, there is a number of standards and guidance that may be relevant to the assurance engagements of the outsourced provision of information services and information processing services. Such standards and guidance provide examples of control objectives around which the service organisation may have designed its control procedures. The directors of service organisations ensure that these control objectives meet the characteristics listed in paragraph 10 and consider if these are sufficient to meet the expectation of customers.

These suggestions are set out for guidance only and are not intended to be exhaustive. Directors should describe, as an integral and essential part of their report, a complete set of control objectives. It remains the responsibility of the directors to ensure that the described control objectives are sufficient to meet the expectations of customers.

Such standards and guidance include:

- *Guidance on Assurance reports on internal controls of service organisations made available to third parties* (AAF 01/06), published by the Audit and Assurance Faculty in 2006, replacing [FRAG 21/94 (revised) [AUDIT 4/97] – *Reports of Internal Controls of Investment Custodians Made Available to Third Parties*
- *Statement on Auditing Standards (SAS) No. 70, Service Organizations*: an auditing standard developed by the American Institute of Certified Public Accountants (AICPA).

An SAS 70 audit or service auditor's examination is the US standards equivalent of this guidance.

- *BS ISO/IEC 27001:2005 (BS 7799-2:2005) BS ISO/IEC 17799:2005*: international/British standards on information security management. (Part of ISO 9000:2000 series: international standards on quality management.) www.bsi-global.com
- The report from the Committee of Sponsoring Organizations of the Treadway Commission (COSO): *Enterprise Risk Management — Integrated Framework* (September 2004). www.coso.org
- ISACA (formerly Information Systems Audit & Control Association): *Control Objectives for Information and related Technology ("COBIT")*. www.isaca.org
- The IT Governance Institute (ITGI; part of ISACA): a reference guide, entitled *IT Control Objectives for Sarbanes-Oxley*, which maps many of the COBIT control objectives to the COSO framework for internal control. www.itgi.org
- Guidance from the International Federation of Accountants (IFAC): *E-Business and the Accountant: Risk Management for Accounting Systems in an E-Business Environment*, a discussion paper including comments on E-business assurance and advisory services. www.ifac.org/store.
- *Directive 2006/43/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 17 May 2006 on statutory audits of annual accounts and consolidated accounts, amending Council Directives 78/660/EEC and 83/349/EEC and repealing Council Directive 84/253/EEC*.
- The *ITIL (IT Infrastructure Library)*, forming the basis of the BS ISO/IEC 20000 (formerly BS 15000) standard. ITIL has been widely adopted across Europe as the standard for best practice in the provision of IT Service. Although the ITIL covers a number of areas, its main focus is on IT Service Management (ITSM). ITSM itself is divided into two main areas: Service Support and Service Delivery. www.itil.org.uk

- International Auditing and Assurance Standards Board (IAASB):

IAPS 1013 "Electronic Commerce: Effect on the Audit of Financial Statements"

IAPS 1008 "Risk Assessments and Internal Control–CIS Characteristics and Considerations"

IAPS 1002 "CIS Environments–Online Computer Systems"

APS 1003 "CIS Environments–Database Systems".

General headings of IT-related control objectives

Whereas all the standards and guidance above may be considered to be suitable criteria for information service and information processing services, the directors of service organisations assess whether the general nature of such control objectives would typically include:

<p>Restricting access to systems and data</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Physical access to computer networks, equipment, storage media and program documentation is restricted to authorised individuals 2. Logical access to computer systems, programs, master data, transaction data and parameters, including access by administrators to applications, databases, systems and networks, is restricted to authorised individuals via information security tools and techniques 3. Segregation of incompatible duties is defined, implemented and enforced by logical security controls in accordance with job roles
<p>Providing integrity and resilience to the information processing environment, commensurate with the value of the information held, information processing performed and external threats</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 4. IT processing is authorised and scheduled appropriately and exceptions are identified and resolved in a timely manner 5. Data transmissions between the service organisation and its counterparties are complete, accurate, timely and secure 6. Appropriate measures are implemented to counter the threat from malicious electronic attack (e.g. firewalls, anti-virus etc.) 7. The physical IT equipment is maintained in a controlled environment
<p>Maintaining and developing systems hardware and software</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 8. Development and implementation of new systems, applications and software, and changes to existing systems, applications and software, are authorised, tested, approved and implemented 9. Data migration or modification is authorised, tested and, once performed, reconciled back to the source data
<p>Recovering from processing interruptions</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 10. Data and systems are backed up regularly, retained offsite and regularly tested for recoverability 11. IT hardware and software issues are monitored and resolved in a timely manner 12. Business and information systems recovery plans are documented, approved, tested and maintained
<p>Monitoring compliance</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 13. Outsourced activities are properly managed and monitored

2. Example paragraphs from the report by the directors

As directors we are responsible for the identification of control objectives relating to the provision of [information services or information processing services]⁴ and the design, implementation and operation of the control procedures of [name of entity] to provide reasonable assurance that the control objectives are achieved.

In carrying out those responsibilities we have regard not only to the interest of customers but also to those of the owners of the business and the general effectiveness and efficiency of the relevant operations.

We have evaluated the effectiveness of the [name of entity]'s control procedures having regard to the Institute of Chartered Accountants in England and Wales Technical Release ITF 01/07 and the criteria for [information services or information processing services] set out therein.

We set out in this report a description of the relevant control procedures together with the related control objectives which operated during [x] to [y] and confirm that:

- (i) the report describes fairly the control procedures that relate to the control objectives referred to above which were in place as at [date];
- (ii) the control procedures described are suitably designed such that there is reasonable assurance that the specified control objectives would be achieved if the described control procedures were complied with satisfactorily [and customers applied the control procedures contemplated⁵]; and
- (iii) the control procedures described were operating with sufficient effectiveness to provide reasonable assurance that the related control objectives were achieved during the specified period.

Director

Date

Signed on behalf of the Board of Directors

⁴ Refer to relevant information services or information processing services.

⁵ This additional wording may be considered appropriate in circumstances described in paragraph 43.

3. Pro forma reporting accountants' assurance reports

(i) Engagement formed between the reporting accountant and the service organisation and to which customers of the service organisation are party

Reporting accountants' assurance report, made available to third parties, on control procedures of service organisations⁶ providing information services [/ information processing services]

To the directors of [name of entity] and [customers party to the engagement]

Use of report,⁷

This report is made solely for the use of the directors, as a body, of [name of entity] and [customers party to the engagement], and solely for the purpose of reporting on the control procedures of [name of entity], in accordance with the terms of our engagement letter dated [date] [and attached⁸ as appendix []].

Our work has been undertaken so that we might report to the directors and [customers party to the engagement] those matters that we have agreed to state to them in this report and for no other purpose. Our report must not be recited or referred to in whole or in part in any other document nor made available, copied or recited to any other party, in any circumstances, without our express prior written permission.

To the fullest extent permitted by law, we do not accept or assume responsibility to anyone other than the directors as a body, [name of entity] and [customers party to the engagement] for our work, for this report or for the conclusions we have formed.

Subject matter

This report covers solely the control procedures of [name of entity] as described in the directors' report as at [date]. Control procedures are designed to provide reasonable assurance regarding the level of control over the information services [/ information processing services] provided by [name of entity].

Respective responsibilities

The directors' responsibilities and assertions are set out on page [] of the directors' report. Our responsibility is to form an independent conclusion, based on the work carried out in relation to the control procedures of [name of entity]'s information services [/ information processing services] carried out at the specified business units of [name of entity] [located at []] as described in the directors' report and report this to the directors of [name of entity] and [customers party to the engagement].

⁶ Reporting accountants consider a suitable form of report in accordance with the specific engagement as described in paragraph 57. This report provides an example for an engagement to which customers of the service organisation are party (see paragraph 57(a)).

⁷ The two last paragraphs in "Use of report" provide example wording, disclaiming reporting accountants' liability or duty to the customers that are not party to the engagement. Reporting accountants consider the legal effectiveness of disclaiming liability in the particular circumstances of their engagement.

⁸ Reporting accountants that do not attach the engagement letter consider including relevant extracts.

Criteria and scope

We conducted our engagement in accordance with International Standard on Assurance Engagement 3000 and the Institute of Chartered Accountants in England and Wales Technical Release ITF 01/07. The criteria against which the control procedures were evaluated are the control objectives developed for the service organisation in reference to the control objectives as set out within ITF 01/07 and identified by the directors as relevant control objectives relating to the level of control over the information services [/ information processing services] provided by [name of entity] [as outsourced activities]. Our work was based upon obtaining an understanding of the control procedures as described on page [] to [] in the report by the directors, and evaluating the directors' assertions as described on page [] to [] in the same report to obtain reasonable assurance so as to form our conclusion. [Our work also included tests of specific control procedures, to obtain evidence about their effectiveness in meeting the related control objectives. The nature, timing and extent of the tests we applied are detailed on pages [] to [].]⁹

Our tests are related to [name of entity] as a whole rather than performed to meet the needs of any particular user.

Inherent limitations

Control procedures designed to address specified control objectives are subject to inherent limitations and, accordingly, errors or irregularities may occur and not be detected. Such control procedures cannot guarantee protection against (among other things) fraudulent collusion especially on the part of those holding positions of authority or trust. Furthermore, our conclusion is based on historical information and the projection of any information or conclusions in the attached report to any future periods would be inappropriate.

Conclusion

In our opinion, in all material respects:

1. the accompanying report by the directors describes fairly the control procedures that relate to the control objectives referred to above which were in place as at [date];
2. the control procedures described on pages [] to [] were suitably designed such that there is reasonable, but not absolute, assurance that the specified control objectives would have been achieved if the described control procedures were complied with satisfactorily [and customers applied the control procedures contemplated]; and
- [3. the control procedures that were tested, as set out in the attachment to this report, were operating with sufficient effectiveness for us to obtain reasonable, but not absolute, assurance that the related control objectives were achieved in the period [x] to [y].]¹⁰

Name of firm

Chartered Accountants

Location

Date

⁹ Not applicable where reporting accountants are engaged to perform type (a) reporting.

¹⁰ Not applicable where reporting accountants are engaged to perform type (a) reporting.

(ii) Engagement formed between the reporting accountant and the service organisation only

Reporting accountants' assurance report on control procedures of service organisations¹¹ providing information services [/ information processing services]

To the directors of [name of entity]

Use of report,¹²

This report is made solely for the use of the directors, as a body, of [name of entity], and solely for the purpose of reporting on the control procedures of [name of entity], in accordance with the terms of our engagement letter dated [date] [and attached¹³ as appendix []].

Our work has been undertaken so that we might report to the directors those matters that we have agreed to state to them in this report and for no other purpose. Our report must not be recited or referred to in whole or in part in any other document nor made available, copied or recited to any other party, in any circumstances, without our express prior written permission.

We permit the disclosure of this report, in full only, by the directors at their discretion to customers [of [name of entity] using [name of entity]'s information services [or information processing services] ("customers"),] and to the auditors of such customers, to enable customers and their auditors to verify that a report by reporting accountants has been commissioned by the directors of [name of entity] and issued in connection with the control procedures of [name of entity], and without assuming or accepting any responsibility or liability to them on our part.

To the fullest extent permitted by law, we do not accept or assume responsibility to anyone other than the directors as a body and [name of entity] for our work, for this report or for the conclusions we have formed.¹⁴

Subject matter

This report covers solely the control procedures of [name of entity] as described in your report as at [date]. Control procedures are designed to provide reasonable assurance regarding the level of control over the information services [/ information processing services] provided by [name of entity].

Respective responsibilities

The directors' responsibilities and assertions are set out on page [] of your report. Our responsibility is to form an independent conclusion, based on the work carried out in relation to the control procedures of [name of entity]'s information services [/ information processing services] carried out at the specified business units of [name of entity] [located at []] as described in your report and report this to you as the directors of [name of entity].

¹¹ Reporting accountants consider a suitable form of report in accordance with the specific engagement as described in AAF04/06. This report provides an example for an engagement formed between the reporting accountants and the service organisation only (applicable to the arrangements described in paragraphs 57(c) and (d)). The sentence beginning "we permit" is adapted where paragraph 57(c) is applied i.e. reporting accountants allow customers access the assurance report provided that the customers (i) acknowledge in writing that the reporting accountants owe them no duty of care and (ii) agree in writing that no claims may be brought against the reporting accountants by them in relation to the assurance report.

¹² The three last paragraphs in "Use of report" provide example wording, disclaiming reporting accountants' liability or duty to the customers that are not party to the engagement. Reporting accountants consider the legal effectiveness of disclaiming liability in the particular circumstances of their engagement.

¹³ Reporting accountants that do not attach the engagement letter consider including relevant extracts.

¹⁴ If the reporting accountants engage with the client, with a facility for customers to enjoy a duty of care from the accountants if they accept the relevant terms of the engagement letter previously agreed with the service organisation as if they had signed that letter when originally issued including the same provisions limiting liability (as described in paragraph 57(b)), then accountants consider including reference to that facility for customers. . Wording that might be used (in particular in place of the paragraphs shown above and beginning "We permit" and "To the fullest extent" is as follows: "Subject as follows, we are prepared to extend our assumption of responsibility to those customers who first accept in writing (in a form provided to us and confirmed by us to be acceptable to us) the relevant terms of the engagement letter agreed previously with [name of entity] as if the customer had signed that letter when originally issued, and including the provisions limiting liability contained in that letter. This extension will not apply to a customer where we inform that customer, whether before or after the customer accepts the relevant terms of the engagement letter, that they do not meet our client acceptance criteria. To the fullest extent permitted by law, we do not accept or assume responsibility to anyone other than the directors as a body, the organisation and any customer to whom the extension does apply, for our work, for this report or for the conclusions we have formed."

Criteria and scope

We conducted our engagement in accordance with International Standard on Assurance Engagement 3000 and the Institute of Chartered Accountants in England and Wales Technical Release ITF 01/07. The criteria against which the control procedures were evaluated are the control objectives developed for the service organisation in reference to the control objectives as set out within ITF 01/07 and identified by the directors as relevant control objectives relating to the level of control over the information services [/ information processing services] provided by [name of entity] [as outsourced activities]. Our work was based upon obtaining an understanding of the control procedures as described on page [] to [] in the report by the directors, and evaluating the directors' assertions as described on page [] to [] in the same report to obtain reasonable assurance so as to form our conclusion. [Our work also included tests of specific control procedures, to obtain evidence about their effectiveness in meeting the related control objectives. The nature, timing and extent of the tests we applied are detailed on pages [] to [].]¹⁵

Our tests are related to [name of entity] as a whole rather than performed to meet the needs of any particular user.

Inherent limitations

Control procedures designed to address specified control objectives are subject to inherent limitations and, accordingly, errors or irregularities may occur and not be detected. Such control procedures cannot guarantee protection against (among other things) fraudulent collusion especially on the part of those holding positions of authority or trust. Furthermore, our conclusion is based on historical information and the projection of any information or conclusions in the attached report to any future periods would be inappropriate.

Conclusion

In our opinion, in all material respects:

1. the accompanying report by the directors describes fairly the control procedures that relate to the control objectives referred to above which were in place as at [date];
2. the control procedures described on pages [] to [] were suitably designed such that there is reasonable, but not absolute, assurance that the specified control objectives would have been achieved if the described control procedures were complied with satisfactorily [and customers applied the control procedures contemplated]; and
- [3. the control procedures that were tested, as set out in the attachment to this report, were operating with sufficient effectiveness for us to obtain reasonable, but not absolute, assurance that the related control objectives were achieved in the period [x] to [y].]¹⁶

Name of firm

Chartered Accountants

Location

Date

¹⁵ Not applicable where reporting accountants are engaged to perform type (a) reporting.

¹⁶ Not applicable where reporting accountants are engaged to perform type (a) reporting.

4. Examples of explanatory paragraphs and qualification wording

(a) Description misstatements

Appendix 1 provides examples of control objectives for inclusion in the directors' reports. In the event that the directors exclude a particular control objective in their report then their report explains the fact and the reasons for the omission. Where directors fail or refuse to disclose the omission, or the reporting accountants consider the justification being unsatisfactory, the reporting accountants disclose the fact and qualify their opinion.

We draw attention to page [x] of the report by the directors which sets out the control objectives. One of the control objectives, [specify], in [applicable standard or guidance], is not included in the directors' report and no reason for the omission is explained.

Except for the matter referred to above concerning the fairness of the description of control procedures, in our opinion,...

The refusal or failure of the directors to amend incomplete or inappropriate descriptions of control procedures or control objectives, may lead to the description of control procedures being considered not fair. Where the reporting accountants consider that this merits qualification, this might be phrased as follows:

The report by the directors states, on page [x],...

Except for the matter referred to above concerning the fairness of the description of control procedures, in our opinion,...

(b) Design deficiencies

Design deficiencies may, for example, result either from a key control being absent or from control procedures that do not prevent or detect errors as described. The following is an example of wording that may be appropriate where reporting accountants qualify their opinion on the control design due to the absence of a key control.

As explained on page [x] of the report by the directors...

Except for the matter referred to above concerning the control design, in our opinion,...

(c) Exceptions to operating effectiveness

Tests of operating effectiveness carried out by reporting accountants in relation to specific control procedures are detailed either (a) adjacent to the relevant control procedures in the report by the directors or (b) in an appendix to the assurance report. Where the results of the tests identify an exception to the control procedures, this is reported after the test, and the reporting accountants consider whether the exceptions affect the achievement of the control objective. Where the achievement of the control objective deserves qualification the reporting accountants insert an explanatory paragraph with appropriate reference and modify their opinion.

On page [x] of the report by the directors it is stated that...

Except for the matter referred to above concerning the operating effectiveness of the control procedures, in our opinion,...

Where the results of the reporting accountants' tests of operational effectiveness and the deficiency have been integrated and fully explained into the report by the directors the reporting accountants may alternatively consider cross-referring their qualification to where these details may be found. For example:

Except for the matter explained on page [z] concerning ... as set out [on pages [x] to [y] of the report by the directors/ in the attachment to this report], in our opinion,...

5. Example extracts from an engagement letter

These extracts are provided for illustrative purposes only. Reporting accountants apply their own judgement to develop suitable wording for their engagement letters to reflect the guidance in this Technical Release and their own particular circumstances.¹⁷

Responsibilities of directors

The board of directors (“the Directors”) of [name of entity] in relation to which the reporting accountants’ assurance report is to be provided (“the Organisation”) are and shall be responsible for the design, implementation and operation of control procedures that provide adequate level of control over [the information services or information processing services]. The Directors’ responsibilities are and shall include:

- acceptance of responsibility for control procedures;
- evaluation of the effectiveness of the service organisation’s control procedures using suitable criteria;
- supporting their evaluation with sufficient evidence, including documentation; and
- providing a written report (“Directors’ Report”) of the effectiveness of the service organisation’s control procedures for the relevant financial period.

In drafting this report the Directors have regard to, as a minimum, the criteria specified within the Technical Release ITF 01/07 issued by the Institute of Chartered Accountants in England and Wales (the ICAEW) but they may add to these to the extent that this is considered appropriate in order to meet customer’s expectations.

Responsibilities of reporting accountants

It is our responsibility to form an independent conclusion, based on the work carried out in relation to the control procedures of the Organisation’s information services [/information processing services] carried out at the specified business units of the Organisation [located at []] as described in the Directors’ report and report this to the Directors.

Scope of the reporting accountants’ work

We conduct our work in accordance with the procedures set out in ITF 01/07, issued by the ICAEW. Our work will include enquiries of management, together with tests of certain specific control procedures which will be set out in an appendix to our report.

In reaching our conclusion, the criteria against which the control procedures are to be evaluated are control objectives developed for the Organisation by the Directors in accordance with the guidance set out within the ITF 01/07 issued by the ICAEW.

Any work already performed in connection with this engagement before the date of this letter will also be governed by the terms and conditions of this letter.

We may seek written representations from the Directors in relation to matters on which independent corroboration is not available. We shall seek confirmation from the Directors that any significant matters of which we should be aware have been brought to our attention.

¹⁷ The above extracts may be appropriate illustrations only for an engagement formed between the reporting accountants and the service organisation. Where a multi-party engagement is formed in line with paragraph 57(a) and footnote 6 above, wording should be revised and additional clauses should be inserted as appropriate. Where a customer agrees to sign up to the engagement terms at a later date, additional wording may be inserted in line with paragraph 57(b) and footnote 14 above to clarify the basis on which the customer signs up and to secure the consent of the service organisation/original addressees. The wording will include adjustment of the section on “Use of Report” and the addition of wording in the section on Liability Provisions to refer to the provisions applying to “the Directors as a body, the Organisation (and customers who are or become, by signature, a party to the engagement letter)” and to losses suffered by, and aggregate liability to, “the Directors as a body, the Organisation (and any customers who are or become, by signature, a party to the engagement letter)”.

Inherent limitations

The Directors acknowledge that control procedures designed to address specified control objectives are subject to inherent limitations and, accordingly, errors or irregularities may occur and not be detected. Such procedures cannot guarantee protection against fraudulent collusion especially on the part of those holding positions of authority or trust. Furthermore, the opinion set out in our report will be based on historical information and the projection of any information or conclusions in our report to any future periods will be inappropriate.

Use of our report

Our report will, subject to the permitted disclosures set out in this letter, be made solely for the use of the Directors of the Organisation, and solely for the purpose of reporting on the control procedures of the Organisation, in accordance with these terms of our engagement.

Our work will be undertaken so that we might report to the Directors those matters that we have agreed to state to them in or report and for no other purpose.

Our report will be issued on the basis that it must not be recited or referred to or disclosed, in whole or in part, in any other document or to any other party, without the express prior written permission of the reporting accountants. We permit the disclosure of our report, in full only, to customers [of the Organisation using the Organisation's [information or information processing services] ("customers")] [(as defined in appendix [] to this letter),] and to the auditors of such customers, to enable customers and their auditors to verify that a report by reporting accountants has been commissioned by the Directors of the Organisation and issued in connection with the control procedures of the Organisation without assuming or accepting any responsibility or liability to them on our part.

To the fullest extent permitted by law, we do not and will not accept or assume responsibility to anyone other than the Directors as a body and the Organisation for our work, for our report or for the opinions we will have formed¹⁸.

Liability provisions¹⁹

We will perform the engagement with reasonable skill and care and acknowledge that we will be liable to the Directors as a body and the Organisation for losses, damages, costs or expenses ("losses") suffered by the Directors as a body and the Organisation as a result of our breach of contract, negligence, fraud or other deliberate breach of duty. Our liability shall be subject to the following provisions:

- We will not be so liable if such losses are due to the provision of false, misleading or incomplete information or documentation or due to the acts or omissions of any person other than us, except where, on the basis of the enquiries normally undertaken by us within the scope set out in these terms of engagement, it would have been reasonable for us to discover such defects;
- We accept liability without limit for the consequences of our own fraud or other deliberate breach of duty and for any other liability which it is not permitted by law to limit or exclude;
- Subject to the previous provisions of this Liability paragraph, our total aggregate liability whether in contract, tort (including negligence) or otherwise, to the Directors as a body and the Organisation, arising from or in connection with the work which is the subject of these terms (including any addition or variation to the work), shall not exceed the amount of *[To be discussed and negotiated]*;

¹⁸ See footnote 14.

¹⁹ Reporting accountants may wish to seek independent legal advice on language that addresses both the matters covered in the illustrative wording set out in this Liability section together with any related matters such as provisions indicating that liability does not extend to consequential losses. Accountants may also consider any applicable independence requirements.

To the fullest extent permitted by law, the Organisation agrees to indemnify and hold harmless [name of reporting accountants] and its partners and staff against all actions, proceedings and claims brought or threatened against [name of reporting accountants] or against any of its partners and staff by any persons other than the Directors as a body and the Organisation, and all loss, damage and expense (including legal expenses) relating thereto, where any such action, proceeding or claim in any way relates to or concerns or is connected with any of [name of reporting accountants]'s work under this engagement letter.

The Directors as a body and the Organisation agree that they will not bring any claims or proceedings against any of our individual partners, members, directors or employees. This clause is intended to benefit such partners, members, directors and employees who may enforce this clause pursuant to the Contracts (Rights of Third Parties) Act 1999 ("the Act"). Notwithstanding any benefits or rights conferred by this agreement on such partners, members, directors or employees by virtue of the Act, we and the Directors as a body may together agree in writing to vary or rescind the agreement set out in this letter without the consent of any such partners, members, directors or employees. Other than as expressly provided in this paragraph, the provisions of the Act are excluded;

Any claims, whether in contract, negligence or otherwise, must be formally commenced within [years] after the party bringing the claim becomes aware (or ought reasonably to have become aware) of the facts which give rise to the action and in any event no later than [years] after any alleged breach of contract, negligence or other cause of action. This expressly overrides any statutory provision which would otherwise apply.

This engagement is separate from, and unrelated to, our audit work on the financial statements of the Organisation for the purposes of the Companies Act 1985 (or its successor) or other legislation and nothing herein creates obligations or liabilities regarding our statutory audit work, which would not otherwise exist. [Equivalent paragraphs where the Organisation is other than a Companies Act entity].

[Appendix

The list of customers to whom the assurance report may be made available. N.B. A list of customers may not be practical where they are multiple.]

6. Example sample size table

In determining the number of items to be tested the reporting accountant needs to consider the factors referred to in this guidance. Although the extent of testing is a matter of judgement on the part of the reporting accountants the table set out below illustrates a range of possible sample sizes which may assist in making such judgements.

Frequency of Control	Number of items tested
Annual	1
Quarterly	1, 2, 3
Monthly	2, 3, 4, 5
Weekly	5, 10, 15
Daily	15, 20, 30, 40
Multiple times per day	25, 30, 45, 60

7. Illustrative definition of enquiry, inspection, observation and re-performance

In describing the nature of tests carried out, it is desirable for the reporting accountants to define in their report what is meant by such procedures as enquiry, inspection, observation and re-performance (see paragraph 83). Illustrative definitions which may assist reporting accountants in this regard are set out below.

Enquiry:

Enquired of appropriate [name of entity] personnel. Enquiries seeking relevant information or representation from personnel were performed to obtain, among other things:

- knowledge, additional information and affirmation regarding the control of procedures; and
- corroborating evidence of the control procedures.

Inspection:

Inspected documents and records indicating performance of the control procedures.

Observation:

Observed the application or existence of specific control procedures as represented.

Re-performance:

Re-performed the control or processing application of the control procedures to check the accuracy of their operation.

ASSURANCE REPORTS ON THE OUTSOURCED PROVISION OF INFORMATION SERVICES AND INFORMATION PROCESSING SERVICES

ITF 01/07

[Update FIT 1/94 Revised]

This guidance is issued by the Information Technology Faculty of the Institute of Chartered Accountants in England and Wales in April 2007. The technical release does not constitute an auditing standard. Professional judgement should be used in its application, and where appropriate, professional legal assistance should be sought.