IRIS Certification™

IRIS (International Railway Industry Standard) Certification™ promotes high quality throughout the rail supply industry through the implementation of a global system for the evaluation of companies supplying the rail sector.

IRIS Certification™ aims to improve the quality and reliability of the rail products, to implement and further develop a global system for the evaluation of companies supplying the rail sector, and to instil a culture of quality throughout the sector.

The IRIS Certification™ rev. 03 system was developed by rail sector stakeholders and is managed by the IRIS Management Centre.

UNIFE

UNIFE represents the European Rail Supply Industry in Brussels since 1992. The Association gathers around 100 of Europe’s leading large and medium-sized rail supply companies active in the design, manufacture, maintenance and refurbishment of rail transport systems, subsystems and related equipment. UNIFE also brings together 13 national rail industry associations of European countries. UNIFE Members have an 84% market share in Europe and supply 46% of the worldwide production of rail equipment and services.

Rail is an enormously attractive means of transportation, and I’m convinced its appeal will continue to grow, driven by the public’s increasing interest in sustainable transportation. Our goal, of course, is to fuel this appeal, in particular by using digital technologies. One fundamental behind all these efforts is the quality of our products – the products we as supplier manufacture, the products operators have in service, the products their customers use, and the products we are supplied with.

To guarantee this quality, it is crucial that we all – suppliers, operators, and our suppliers – agree on a set of common quality standards. And when I say common, I in fact mean global, for our industry is a global industry and we can’t get by with different quality standards in different parts of the world.

The problem is that quality standards in the past weren’t truly global. We had global standards that weren’t adequate, and adequate standards that weren’t global. To remedy this, we got together prior to last year’s InnoTrans and launched a consortium with the goal of defining standards that are both adequate and global. The consortium is called the IRQB – the “International Rail Quality Board” – and brings together leading companies in rail operations, systems integration and equipment manufacturing with the goal of fostering a global culture of quality across the entire rail sector.

Notably, the consortium will be promoting the worldwide use of the IRIS Certification™ system since it guarantees the highest product quality.

I am really, really happy that we now have this consortium, and I’m excited about the progress it promises. With it, it will be so much easier to reach our highest quality goals! A lot of work is going into these efforts, and I know many of you are taking considerable interest in this work. So I’m happy to inform you that we will now be posting a number of FAQs on the IRQB webpage (www.irqb.org). They will appear monthly and provide some interesting insights into the work that’s going on and the purpose behind it. So stay tuned!
UNIFE Director General
Philippe Citroën

The UNIFE General Assembly is the perfect occasion to come back on past achievements, analyze the current situation and prepare for future decisions and developments. IRIS Certification™ had a tremendous activity in 2018 with the transition of all existing certificates to the new rev. 03 system, this was a challenge for the companies and sites to align the organization to the new requirements of both references: ISO/TS 22163 and IRIS rules for certification.

After 13 years of implementation in the rail sector, IRIS Certification™ is recognized as a strong system, enabling companies to be well structured and to deliver good products to their customers. With the rev. 03 system, in addition to mandatory performing business processes, we are now seeking for the evidence of performance. I strongly believe that this evolution is necessary to maintain the rail industry in the leading field of the European industries and therefore, be in line with our customers.

We see, not only in Europe, a high demand of products and services which precisely meet the requirements and expectations of all rail stakeholders. Quality of the goods will gain more importance in trade within our sector. We know that the supplier base of the big players is global, and this is particularly perceived in the Asian region, where the number of IRIS Certification™ certificates shows that they understood the potential benefits of our certification scheme: improvement, visibility and recognition.

This is exactly what UNIFE is willing to advocate within the European rail industry. Our companies have experience, knowledge and trust, which can be maximized with an IRIS Certification™ certificate. The efforts to reach the certification must be seen as an investment for the future, for the flexibility of the organizations, competing in the international market. UNIFE, via other activities, promotes fair trade through bilateral agreements and supports EU initiatives such as Industry4Europe - which aims to pave the way to our industry in an easier way.

The performance evaluation of IRIS rev. 03, performed by the Certification Bodies can help the sites to show the level achieved and to convince their customers about their dedication to quality — under condition that the product delivered confirm this evaluation results.

In addition of promoting the certification, UNIFE and its IRIS Management Centre, commit to help UNIFE Members to better understand the scheme, allowing them to prove their high performance, to their customers. We are willing to increase the communication to highlight the benefits of our scheme jointly with the International Rail Quality Board, to comply with a common statement on quality in rail.

I am convinced that we are trustful partners and wish us all to commit in the expansion of IRIS Certification™ worldwide.

All committed in quality for Europe

IRIS Chairman
Stefan Siegler

Why IRIS Certification™?

There are several certification standards and systems for quality available on the market, e.g. ISO 9001, EN 9100 for aerospace, IATF 16949 for automotive.

Why is there a need for a rail specific quality management system? The rail sector identified the need for a reliable certificate indicating the quality performance of the certified organization, with rail specific requirements. The rail sector aims to reduce the volume of second party audits, which is still too high as of today. Since there is not enough trust in current certificates, second party audits are still performed. It should be realistic to expect a company that’s ISO 9001 certified, having a better quality performance than a non-certified one. As it was not possible to demonstrate this correlation between the certification and the quality performance, the rail sector is still performing a lot of second party audits.

What is the next level provided by IRIS Certification™? On the one hand, the certified organization has to provide evidence of current quality performance, based on a transparent track record out of operative business. Therefore the audited organization has to present its quality records and the customer feedback on their quality performance to the auditor. Quality performance is recognized with an additional bronze, silver or gold status.

On the other hand, the certified organization must prove that its business processes are stable, so it can be anticipated that quality performance can be ensured by the certified organization also in future. Both factors are essential to be made transparent to interested parties, e.g. customers, by the certificate. In addition, IRIS Certification™ requires an enhanced set of requirements compared to other standards. The requirements in which IRIS Certification™ is reflecting, are laid down in ISO/TS 22163. This standard is based on ISO 9001, and rail specific requirements are added such as project management, RAMS/LCC and other elements, being vital for successful business in rail. This way, the rail sector is confident to being able to reduce second party audits based on a reliable quality certificate.
After an intense transition period in 2018, the IRIS Certification™ rev. 3 scheme is currently undergoing a surveillance audit period. These audits are usually perceived by the companies as "routine" to maintain the certificate awarded after the initial audit. These audits have a huge importance within the IRIS Certification™ process, this is why we concentrate the auditors' focus on the most impacting aspects for the customers: design & development, project management and performance evaluation.

In fact, performance evaluation is requested by requirements within the clause 9 of the ISO 9001:2015 standard, but only clearly defined with a complete assessment methodology by the IRIS rules. From now on, this is an essential part of the trust put in an IRIS Certification™ Certificate. In addition to the standard "bronze level", the auditors will soon be able to assess the "silver level", based on criteria concentrating on the companies' transparency. It is a unique chance, each year, during the surveillance audit, to show the improvement of the performance indicators to the IRIS auditors, highlighting the efforts made by the organization, to better focus on targets and expectations of its customers.

While the IRIS Certification™ rev. 3 further develops and welcomes new certified industrial sites (currently 1750 certificates worldwide), we are also preparing the mid-term evolution of the requirements. As the technical requirements to be implemented by the organizations are now in the ISO/TS 22163, the ISO rail committee (ISO/TC 269) has launched a Working Group 5, to revise the standard until 2022, and to switch it into a full ISO 22163. As representative of UNIFE, in my role of ISO Convenor, I am in charge of driving the works with 50 international experts.

After a formal and global feedback request, the group has started the analysis of more than 400 proposals of evolutions. The first approach is to analyse, correct and improve requirements which are wrongly understood or perceived. The Working Group 5 will also focus on the added value for the companies and customers. The objective is to bring the rail sector at the needed level of quality by 2030.

Recently, on request of the ISO/TC 269, an investigation group has started to check the necessity to standardise the conformity assessment in the rail sector. Several UNIFE Member company representatives are involved and committed to convince the experts that the current way of management under the sector responsibility, is the most adequate for the near future. The IRIS Certification™ system, under the joint responsibility of UNIFE and the IRQB, is very close to conformity assessments in comparable industries such as automotive (IATF) and aerospace (IAQG).

Even after, and surely because of our 13 years’ experience, we aim to pursue the improvement of the IRIS scheme, for the benefit of the entire rail supply chain. This worldwide quality scheme shall confirm the sustainability and reliability of our organizations.