

# Accreditation vs Certification: Why the Distinction Matters

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From the perspective of the [Safety Schemes in Procurement \(SSIP\)](#), it's important to help organisations, contractors and clients clearly understand a distinction that is often blurred in practice: the difference between accreditation and certification and where SSIP sits within that landscape.

In the UK construction and built environment sectors, “accreditation” and “certification” are frequently used interchangeably. However, they describe fundamentally different types of assurance and using the terms accurately helps maintain clarity across procurement, compliance and assurance systems.

**Accreditation:** recognition of conformity assessment bodies

Accreditation is typically carried out by a national accreditation body such as UKAS. It is formal, independent recognition that a conformity assessment body (for example, a certification body, inspection body or testing laboratory) is competent to perform specific tasks.

In other words, accreditation is not about assessing individual contractors or suppliers directly. Instead, it assesses the organisations that carry out assessments and issue certificates.

Accreditation therefore operates one level above certification, providing confidence that certification bodies themselves are competent, consistent and operating to internationally recognised standards.

**Certification:** assessment of organisations against defined standards

Certification, by contrast, is the process of evaluating an organisation against a defined set of requirements and issuing a formal statement of conformity when those requirements are met.

This is where Safety Schemes in Procurement (SSIP) plays a central role.

SSIP operates as a mutual recognition framework for occupational health and safety pre-qualification assessments. Within this framework, member assessment schemes review contractors' health and safety capabilities against agreed core criteria and issue certification of compliance.

This certification demonstrates that an organisation has met the required health and safety standards at the point of assessment, supporting streamlined procurement decisions and reducing duplication across the supply chain.

SSIP's role in the assurance domain

SSIP does not function as an accreditation body. Instead, it operates as a collaborative umbrella framework that enables recognition of certification between member schemes.

This distinction is important:

- SSIP does not accredit certification bodies
- SSIP does not provide occupational health and safety accreditation
- SSIP facilitates recognition of certification outcomes between trusted assessment schemes
- SSIP does not provide assessments or certificate suppliers

By focusing on certification, SSIP helps create a more efficient and consistent approach to contractor health and safety pre-qualification. Organisations that achieve certification through an SSIP member scheme can have that certification recognised by other members, reducing unnecessary repetition of assessments.

Why getting the terminology right matters

Clear use of terminology is not just a technical detail – it supports better decision-making across procurement and compliance processes.

When accreditation and certification are used as interchangeable terms, it can lead to:

- Misunderstanding of the level at which assurance is being provided
- Overstatement or misrepresentation of compliance status
- Inefficiencies in procurement due to duplicated expectations

By maintaining a clear distinction, the industry can better understand where assurance is generated, how it is validated and what it represents.

A shared commitment to clarity and confidence

The UK assurance landscape relies on a structured system:

- Accreditation provides confidence in the organisations that assess
- Certification provides evidence of compliance by organisations
- SSIP provides mutual recognition of certification within a trusted framework

Together, these elements support a more consistent, efficient, and proportionate approach to health and safety pre-qualification across UK supply chains.

By reinforcing the correct use of “certification” within its framework, SSIP continues to support clarity, reduce duplication and strengthen trust in contractor assessment processes.

“It’s important that our industry clearly understands the difference between accreditation and certification, as the two terms are often confused,” explains Eleanor Eaton, Chair of SSIP. “This article explains that distinction in a clear and practical way, while also highlighting the role SSIP plays in supporting health and safety assessment across the supply chain.

“SSIP is not an accreditation body, and neither are our member schemes. Instead, SSIP provides a trusted framework that brings member schemes together to assess and certify contractors against agreed health and safety standards, with those certification results recognised across the wider SSIP community.

“This approach helps reduce unnecessary duplication for contractors, supports more consistent procurement practices, and gives clients greater confidence in the assessment process.

“By improving understanding and using the correct terminology, we can continue to simplify pre-qualification, strengthen trust across the industry, and support higher standards throughout the built environment.”