

FSC Training Consortium

Conceptual outline and kick-off proposal

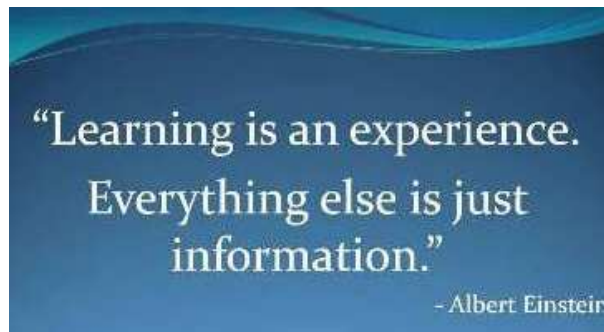
drafted by

Stephan Clauss
FSC Training Manager
FSC Global Development GmbH

and

Liviu Amariei
ASTRA Academy

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1. BACKGROUND - THE IDEA OF AN FSC TRAINING CONSORTIUM

The idea of a FSC Training Consortium (TC) was developed jointly by ASTRA Academy and FSC. It relates to the creation of an organizational framework - open to all relevant professionals in the FSC system engaged in developing and delivering FSC training - with the aim to provide robust training services worldwide. Relevant actors in the context of FSC training are FSC-accredited Certification Bodies (practical experience with certification/regional expertise + comprehensive training programs in place, e.g. NEPCon), training organization(s) (didactical experience – foremost Astra Academy, possibly others with focus on expert topics such as ProForest), FSC IC/GD (PSU: developers of the FSC normative system and its interpretation, QAU: quality assurance/overall training management), and (eligible) FSC Network Partners (National Standards/regional expertise). The number of organizations participating in the TC should be limited for the pilot phase (between 12 and 15 members), but could be opened up for a wider membership once the concept is tested and the proposed model refined and fine-tuned.

ASI is supposed to have a certain role within the TC as well, while this would probably be more an associative role rather than a full membership – details will need to be discussed.

2. OVERALL OBJECTIVE AND BENEFITS OF THE FSC TRAINING CONSORTIUM

Overall Objective:

The overall objective of a FSC Training Consortium (TC) is to develop and provide high quality initial and continuous training. At least in the pilot phase the primary target group are auditors.

The indicators for quality of such training would be:

- ☒ consistency in terms of content and interpretation of FSC's normative requirements,
- ☒ local adaptation of training content as necessary (especially for FM),
- ☒ continuous and timely integration of all developments, changes and revisions in FSC's normative system,
- ☒ frequent delivery of training courses and convenient accessibility (= local proximity) for trainees in each region of the world relevant to FSC certification,
- ☒ specific expertise and individual strength of the various stakeholders (standard setting/interpretation, implementation of normative requirements, auditing, training delivery, forestry industry competence) are bundled and channeled into the design and the delivery of training.

Expected benefits of the TC are:

- ☒ lower costs for (initial and continuous) qualification of auditors through avoiding duplication of training efforts on the same topics by different actors,

- ☒ revenues through training fees – at minimum in order to cover running costs, while also aiming at creating financial benefits,
- ☒ training material developed for auditors can (partly) be used (or adapted) for other target groups (e.g. applicants/CH, staff of FSC and NP, consultants, members etc.),
- ☒ an organizational structure for exchange of lessons learnt, mutual feedback, calibration and information,
- ☒ creating an even-playing field with a consistent level of understanding of FSC requirements and a comparable set of skills for evaluating compliance with standards,
- ☒ considerable support for CBs with complying to revised/new normative training requirements to become effective early in 2016 (FSC-STD-20-001 V 4.0 + FSC-PRO-20-004 V 1.0).

3. PROVISION OF HIGH QUALITY TRAINING: SCOPE

The FSC normative framework has evolved constantly over the last 20 years, and it has become very complex. However, during this time there was no learning framework in place in the FSC system to accompany and support this growth process. This might be one of the root causes of the issues the FSC system has been facing with regards to the quality of the assurance processes at different levels.

Due to the complexity of the FSC system, and based on existing experience with FSC training, the TC will use a wide range of options when it comes to training design and delivery. This will include:

- ☒ Blended learning for auditor training:
 - e-learning for generating knowledge, where trainee and qualified auditors take the responsibility for assimilating the theoretical knowledge relating to standard content,
 - face-to-face training for developing skills in the application of normative requirements.
- ☒ Online training/e-learning/webinars as a means to inform, deliver content and generate knowledge (e.g. industry, FSC network, training updates for auditors).
- ☒ Face-to-face training, as needed (e.g. courses on demand, relating to specific topics or punctual issues requiring the physical presence of the trainees and interaction with a tutor).

Provision of high quality training encompasses the following scope:

a) Development of training material and guidance:

The development of training programs and guidance will be based on FSC requirements relating to auditor qualification, and on the identified needs for training among TC members. This will include:

- ☒ design of online training courses covering all relevant topic around FSC's normative framework (initial and continuous training),
- ☒ elaboration of face to face FM and COC template courses with schedule suggestions (length of overall training, arrangement of content in various modules),
- ☒ sample case studies and suggestions for training activities for the delivery of interactive, practice-orientated face to face courses.
- ☒ design of exams for testing the learning success of trainees.

b) Delivery of training:

- ☒ provision of initial and continuous online training courses through an eLearningPlatform including online tutoring,
- ☒ delivery of face-to-face FM and COC training programs (complementary to online courses),
- ☒ testing of trainees (exam) as condition for continuing the “auditor-in-training” process and subsequently signing them off as auditors for FM and COC and for registration as auditor with ASI (“FSC auditor and training registry”)¹.

4. ORGANIZATIONAL MODEL OF THE TRAINING CONSORTIUM

All interested stakeholders – including the organizations who initiated the process, FSC and ASTRA Academy – are organized in an entity with joint rights and responsibilities. In principle the members agree to contribute to the development and delivery of training, while specific roles and responsibilities are determined by a written agreement. Thus there is a common ownership of all training material and a shared right for the delivery of training either online or face to face. Other actors not organized in this entity could be allowed to use the training material against the payment of a fee (training license agreement).

The organizational model of the TC will be discussed by the organizations and individuals potentially interested in membership in the TC at the upcoming meeting on the 15th of December 2015 in Bonn (for details see below). Ideally, the organizational model will ensure:

- ☒ prompt decision-making by TC members or their designated representatives,
- ☒ prompt reaction to identified training needs in the FSC system and to identified opportunities for training and capacity building,

¹ In the context of the revision of FSC STD 20-001 ASI will update and upgrade its existing list of auditors. The current excel file will be extended to a database in order to become a more formal registry for auditors and training providers. Details are currently in the course of development.

- ☑ independence from other organizational and operational aspects relating to the FSC system (e.g. multi-stakeholder policy and standard-setting processes, “politics” within the wider FSC community, etc.).

FSC could offer to become the organizational hub for the overall coordination of the TC – e.g. located in the Quality Assurance Unit with the Training Program. ASTRA Academy could offer to take the responsibility of the technical coordination and support, as well as program development.

5. SWOT ANALYSIS OF THE TRAINING CONSORTIUM

STRENGTHS

- strong collaborative character pull together resources (expertise, finance, time)
- potentially financially beneficial or break even
- timely delivery due to shared organizational responsibilities
- globally consistent training coverage with local adaptation

WEAKNESSES

- defining roles and responsibilities, revenue sharing, and decision-making can be complicated due to the collaborative character
- organizational model not clear yet, needs negotiation and agreement
- shared ownership limits opportunities to steer and use an FSC Training Program

OPPORTUNITIES

- TC becomes a strong entity with strong commitment to high quality training
- TC could cover other identified gaps in the system (e.g. exchange of lessons learnt, direct channeling of feedback, knowledge management, calibration)
- TC could expand the model to the wider ISEAL community

THREATS

- common ownership a potential source of conflict
- misuse of TC as lobbying platform
- competition among members
- sustained funding or financial viability not clear yet



6. PROPOSAL FOR KICK OFF AND PILOT

Announcement, Invitation and Selection of Members

FSC and ASTRA Academy jointly invite for becoming a member of the TC among the Certification Body community, Training Providers and Network Partners. The TC should not be larger than 15 members.

FSC and ASTRA Academy reserve the right of selection among interested parties in order to assure the creation of a balanced membership in the TC which is partly basis of achieving the above stated objective. Selection Criteria will include aspects such as:

- ☒ formal representation of an FSC-accredited Certification Body,
- ☒ qualification and experience as an FSC Auditor and Trainer (for CB representatives),
- ☒ formal representation of an FSC Network Partner,
- ☒ proven qualification and track record of training relating to the implementation of FSC requirements (for other training providers).

Founding meeting in December 2015

In order to kick off and start developing the TC, Astra Academy and FSC invite for founding meeting on December 15th, 2015 in Bonn/Germany.

The aim of the first meeting is to verify the extent and terms of a first pilot (as described below) in order to achieve a first step towards the above mentioned overall objective. During the first meeting it would also be highly important to identify critical questions and – time and resources allowing - clarify them. Such crucial questions might include:

- organizational arrangement of TC,
- possible alternative names for the TC (as “training consortium” is already used by various other similar initiatives),
- joining and leaving the TC; membership conditions and arrangements,
- define roles, responsibilities and commitment,
- practical approach to the development and delivery of training,
- intellectual property right, copy right and common ownership of training material,
- generating revenues through training fees and how to share markets/revenues.

Organizations and individuals who will participate in the kick-off meeting on the 15th of December will be asked to provide input to the final agenda of the meeting.

At the end of the meeting or soon afterwards (after internal consultation) the participating organizations are expected to commit to the continuous involvement in the TC – ideally for the long term, but at least for the duration of the pilot phase until the end of 2016.

Pilot throughout 2016

In the course of 2016 a training pilot should be implemented covering both FSC scopes (Forest Management / FM and Chain of Custody / COC). This pilot is to include the development and delivery (online + face to face) of an initial training program for qualifying FSC auditor candidates. This training program and its implementation will comply with the requirements of the new FSC PRO-20-004 V 1.0 and the revised accreditation standard FSC STD-20-001 V 4.0 (both to be effective starting from April 2016). Additionally, during 2016, further training needs and opportunities will be explored, which could help expand the scope of the TC to other groups, such as Network Partners and other user categories of FSC standards and systems (e.g. forestry and forest-based industry).

The pilot would involve (at least) two 2-day workshops (February + July) and two face to face training courses (FM+COC, November + December). Additional (desk) work resources would be certainly be needed (material + schedule development, preparation for training courses). 2016 would close with an overall evaluation and lessons learnt for the following years in order to work on towards achieving the above mentioned overall objective with the next 2 to 3 years.

Expected commitments by TC members

The proposed model of a TC requires a common impetus with equal commitment by all stakeholders involved. Further, this approach presumes an existing willingness among them for initial voluntary contribution of their resources. Ideally, members commit resources in equal shares to the TC. In the pilot phase these resources are most certainly expected to be an investment – with no or little opportunity of financial return. However, a long term perspective of a break even or a minor return on investment should be aimed for. A draft business plan for the TC will be developed and shared with TC members in early 2016.

The resources to be contributed are of “intellectual nature” such as relevant competence, expertise, know-how / experience around training and the FSC (normative system). Of more “materialistic nature” is a contribution through working time (e.g. workshop meetings, common development and delivery of training), through sharing of existing training material that can be built on and through covering expenses for travel and accommodation. Further costs during the pilot will arise to cover certain external services such as the development of online training modules and legal advice (copyright issues, organizational arrangement of TC, advice about revenue sharing etc.).

In 2016, FSC IC/GD intends to contribute to the TC with coordination, general work resources and content input (foremost with FSC’s Training Manager but also with input from FSC’s Policy and Standard Unit PSU). Further, FSC will probably be able to help covering some of the upcoming expenses around the workshop meetings and training courses – depending on general budget decisions and funding opportunities for 2016.

Similarly, ASTRA Academy will commit time and resources relating to the technical aspects of training program development, meetings and travel, as well as the use of online tools (e-learning platform) for training development and delivery during the pilot phase, as needed.

For details and more information please contact:

Stephan Clauss
Training Manager

FSC International
FSC Global Development GmbH
Charles de Gaulle Straße 5
53113 Bonn Deutschland/ Germany
Phone: +49 (0)228 367 66- 48
Fax: +49 (0)228 367 66-65
E-Mail: s.clauss@fsc.org
Skype: s.clauss.fsc

Liviu Amariei

ASTRAcademy
+39 329 5728473
liviu@astracademy.net
www.astracademy.net
Skype: liviuamariei