Reading Your Own Programme Across the Years

GUIDING QUESTION *Lay your audit programme for the past decade beside a list of everything that has changed about your property in the same period. How many times did the second list move the first one?*

Property: _____ Completed by: _____ Date: _____

How to use this sheet: work through the four parts with the people who own the process. The left-hand text comes from the book; the empty columns are for what is true in our property.

1. Verification Pact: what the market says, what actually holds, and your property

What the market says	What actually holds	In our property
Audit records must be retained for three years.	No. ISO 9001 does not prescribe a three-year retention period for internal-audit records.	
The audit programme must be reviewed annually.	No fixed annual review interval is prescribed; the programme should be monitored and reviewed at intervals appropriate to its operation and changes.	
A programme that has been followed cannot be nonconforming.	Incorrect. A completed programme can still fail the requirements or be ineffective.	
Programme review means checking the schedule was completed.	No. Review also considers results, trends, changes, programme risks/opportunities and lessons learned.	
Audit records are evidence for the certification body.	Yes, they can be evidence examined by a certification auditor, but that is not their only purpose.	
Changes to the organisation are considered at the management review.	Changes are relevant to management review and also explicitly to establishing the internal-audit programme; one does not replace the other.	
A stable audit programme indicates a stable management system.	Not necessarily. A programme that never changes despite changes in processes, results or risk can indicate the opposite.	

2. Objective evidence: what an auditor would examine

Line	What to examine	Found? (Yes / Partly / No)	Notes and location
Document	The audit programme for as many years as the property retains it, examined for whether its structure has ever changed, and any record of the programme having been reviewed against anything other than its own completion.		
Record	The property's own history of change over the same period, assembled from capital approvals, contracts, system records and organisation charts.		
Read	The criteria used in each period. An audit conducted against a procedure written before the process it describes was replaced is the finding this reading exists to produce.		
Told	Ask why a particular audit is in the programme. Where nobody can say, and where the audit has been there for a decade, the programme is being inherited rather than designed.		
Seen	The archive itself. Whether it is a set of files somebody has opened or a box nobody has opened is visible, and the second is more common.		
Absence	There will be no record anywhere of the audit programme having changed in response to a change in the property. In most hotels the structure		

Line	What to examine	Found? (Yes / Partly / No)	Notes and location
	of the programme is older than most of the people in the building.		

3. Common mistakes: self-check

Mistake	Why it matters	Present here? (Yes / Partly / No)
Storing the archive instead of reading it.	A programme that has never read what it wrote has a filing cabinet where its design input should be.	
Reviewing the programme by checking the schedule was completed.	Completion is a fact about diligence and says nothing about design.	
Never asking whether the programme followed a change.	It is the most change-resistant document in a hotel, because departments are stable names and quarters recur.	
Overlooking the criteria question.	Audits continue cleanly against documents describing a property that no longer exists, and clean is exactly what they will be.	
Losing the criteria when an affiliation ends.	Brand standards leave with the brand, nothing replaces them, and the programme quietly reverts to auditing the property against itself.	
Writing a manual on departure.	What transfers is not what the departing person knows but what they decided, and a decade of an audit archive is precisely that.	
Leaving the programme unaudited.	It is a process like any other, it can be nonconforming, and it is rarely audited in this industry.	
Waiting for the newest person to do the reading.	The other moment is the departure of whoever has run it longest, and that moment has a deadline.	

4. Action plan

Position from the book / gap found	Action in our property	Owner	Deadline
The archive is read, not stored.			
The reading is selective, because a quality archive is too large to read whole.			
Every change is tested against the programme twice: did an audit move, and did the criteria follow.			
A clean audit against obsolete criteria is the characteristic failure.			
The reading is done by the newest competent person, or by the person about to leave.			

In brief

An audit programme is established by considering the importance of processes, the results of previous audits and the changes affecting the organisation, and reading the archive is how a property discovers whether that third input has ever operated. To the three readings established in Volume 1b (coverage, recurrence by cause, and the robustness of what was done), a quality programme adds a fourth: lay the property's own history of change beside the programme, year by year, and ask of every change whether an audit moved and whether the criteria followed.

Source: The Helm and the Lens, Volume 2b: The Lens, subchapter 3.15. This sheet does not reproduce the text of any standard; work with your own copy of ISO 9001:2026 from an authorised source.