WORKING MATERIAL 2.15 · CHAPTER 2 — THE OPERATIONAL PERSPECTIVE (SECTIONS B, C AND D) · SETTING: MONTEVERDE, COSTA RICA

From Criteria to Proof: Continual Improvement and the Road to Certification

Source: Francesco Dore, The Helm and the Lens, Volume 7a — GSTC Hotel Standard v4.0, subchapter 2.15 (book page 381)

GUIDING QUESTION

Two years after a questionnaire showed that its sustainability was real but invisible, a small lodge has a system, two annual reports and a binder for every section of the standard. What remains between practice and certification is no longer a question of documents. It is whether the system improves itself year after year, and whether every claim can be read at the level of an indicator by someone who has never visited before.

1 · Verification Pact: market claims against the standard

Copied from the book. The last column is for your property: what holds here, and how you know it.

What is claimed	Binding?	What actually holds	In our property
A v3.0 certificate remains valid until its own expiry date	No	Certifications under Industry Standard v3.0 are no longer valid after 30 December 2028	
Transition to v4.0 is a matter of renumbering	Only partially true	Much carries over, but B6 is new, several criteria moved or merged, and audits are based on the v4.0 indicators	
The GSTC will audit and certify the lodge	No	The GSTC accredits certification bodies and recognises standards; an accredited body audits and certifies	
Once certified, the review can wait until recertification	No	A1.5 and A1.8 require targets and implementation to be reviewed annually	
Every indicator applies in full to every hotel	Only partially true	Criteria apply to the fullest extent possible, but several indicators are conditional; the condition should be documented	
Unfavourable results should be left out of the evidence	No	A1 asks for continuous improvement, which only recorded problems and their correction can show	

2 · Common mistakes — a self-check

Tick each mistake you recognise in your own property, and note where it shows.

☐ Treating certification as the end of the system rather than one point in its cycle.

☐ Holding the annual review as a formality that changes no target.

☐ Removing unfavourable results from the evidence to look ready for the audit.

☐ Filing evidence by criterion when the audit reads it by indicator.

☐ Declaring indicators not applicable without documenting the reason.

☐ Assuming a v3.0 certificate is valid until its printed expiry date.

☐ Renumbering v3 files instead of remapping them against the v4.0 indicators.

☐ Approaching a certification body without checking that it is GSTC-Accredited.

3 · A Checklist for the Year Before an Audit

The book's checklist, with a column for your own answer.

Question	Why it matters	Our answer
Has the plan been reviewed annually with the staff, and do the minutes show decisions?	A1.5 and A1.8 require annual review and updates on findings	
Can every indicator be traced to a document, record, test or decision in our files?	Audits are based on indicators, not on criteria alone	
Have we documented why any conditional indicator does not apply to us?	Criteria apply to the fullest extent possible	
Are unfavourable results recorded together with the actions taken?	Continuous improvement can only be shown by problems found and solved	
If certified under v3.0, have we remapped against v4.0 before 30 December 2028?	Certifications under v3.0 lose validity after that date	
Is our certification body accredited by the GSTC, and our standard recognised?	The GSTC accredits bodies and recognises standards; it does not certify hotels	

4 · What would show this is working

Questions drawn from the subchapter's reading of the standard and its practical application. Indicator references point to the GSTC Hotel Standard v4.0; where the evidence lives is this book's practice, not a requirement of the standard.

Question	Where the evidence lives	Seen?
Has the annual review been held with the people responsible, and targets reviewed (A1.5, A1.8)?	Review minutes as the decision trail	☐
Is evidence filed by indicator, with an index pointing to each document or record?	Indicator index of the evidence binder	☐
Where a conditional indicator does not apply, is the reason documented?	Gap map column "Reason if not applicable"	☐
Are the annual data series running long enough to show a year of tracking against targets?	Monthly indicator log	☐
If certified under v3.0, is the transition audit planned well before 30 December 2028?	Transition checklist; correspondence with the certification body	☐

> *What this sheet is not: the GSTC Hotel Standard does not prescribe this form. It is a working aid drawn from the book; the standard's criteria, indicators and guidelines govern the real case. Independent material; not affiliated with or endorsed by the GSTC. The standard's own text at www.gstc.org prevails.*