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CLIENT GUIDE

Getting Ready for FSC Accreditation

The WHS Accreditation Scheme application process, and how to prepare your business

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Why this guide matters

If you are starting from scratch, plan on several months to become accredited under the Australian Government Work Health and Safety (WHS) Accreditation Scheme. The application form is not what takes the time. The time goes into building a WHS management system (WHSMS) that meets the Office of the Federal Safety Commissioner (OFSC) audit criteria, training your people to use it, and producing site records that show it is working on a live project.

The OFSC notes that timeframes vary from company to company, and some applicants need several audits before they are accredited. So the best time to start is before a government-funded project is on your radar.

This guide covers who needs accreditation, how the process works, why preparation takes months, and what you can do now to get ready.

Who needs accreditation

Head contractor builders engaged on building work funded by the Australian Government (including Housing Australia) must be accredited, subject to funding thresholds and exemptions. Subcontractors do not need accreditation, but the head contractor must manage their WHS.

Funding type	When the Scheme applies
Direct funding	A project valued at $4 million or more
Indirect funding (e.g. a grant to a developer or housing provider who engages the builder)	A building contract of at least $4 million (GST inclusive), AND the Australian Government contribution is either at least $6 million and at least 50% of total project funding, or at least $10 million regardless of its share

Work below these thresholds is not covered. For Housing Australia funded projects, the OFSC also lists exemptions for single dwelling houses, certain joint venture arrangements, and funding that does not involve building work (such as buying completed dwellings). If you are unsure whether your project is covered, contact the OFSC on 1800 652 500 or ofsc@dewr.gov.au.

Two points that often surprise builders:

- **Accreditation covers all your projects.** Once accredited, the Scheme applies to every project where you are principal contractor, not just government-funded ones. You must use substantially the same WHSMS on all sites.
- **It is ongoing.** Accredited builders are audited regularly (typically every 6 to 12 months) and must lodge a Scheme Biannual Report every six months.

The accreditation process, step by step

Accreditation has two parts: the preparation you do before applying, and the three OFSC stages after you apply. There are no OFSC fees to apply for or maintain accreditation.

Before you apply (your preparation)

1. **Readiness check.** A gap analysis of your current WHSMS against the FSC Audit Criteria shows what complies, what is missing, and how much work it will take to close the gaps.
2. **Build or align your WHSMS.** Develop or update policies, procedures, forms and registers so every relevant criterion is addressed.
3. **Train your people.** Managers, supervisors and site teams need to understand the system and their role in it.
4. **Implement it on a live project.** Run the system on a project where you are the head (principal) contractor and keep the records that prove it.

Stage 1: Complete the application

5. Register for an FSC Online account and submit your application. You will provide details of your previous WHS performance, a gap analysis of your WHSMS, your company's operations, and current head contractor projects that could be audited.
6. The OFSC checks the application, follows up any gaps, and asks you to sign a declaration that you will comply with the National Construction Code. A Federal Safety Officer (FSO) is then allocated.

Stage 2: Systems validation audit

7. The FSO carries out a desktop review of your documented WHSMS against the FSC Audit Criteria, either virtually or at your premises. A report follows in about 10 business days.
8. The OFSC then advises whether you can proceed to the on-site audit or need a further systems validation audit to close the gaps. (Residential builders on Housing Australia projects may instead get a "rolling" systems validation audit with up to 40 hours of free FSO support. Even then, FSOs cannot write or draft your system for you.)

Stage 3: On-site accreditation audit

9. The FSO audits a live project where you are principal contractor and your WHSMS is in place. They check documentary evidence that your procedures are being followed on site, including selected hazard criteria such as working at heights, mobile plant, electrical and excavation.
10. A report follows in about 10 business days. Any non-conformances (corrective action reports) must be closed out, and some builders need a follow-up audit.

Accreditation and beyond

11. The Federal Safety Commissioner decides whether to grant accreditation. First-time accreditation lasts up to 3 years; reaccreditation can be granted for up to 6 years.
12. Ongoing audits, biannual reporting and reporting of notifiable safety incidents continue for as long as you are accredited.

Why it can take several months

There is no fixed timeframe. How long accreditation takes depends on several variables, and the biggest is how much work is needed to get your WHSMS to a point where it is ready for audit. The OFSC's case studies (composites of residential builders on Housing Australia projects) show the range: one builder with a mature system was accredited in about 2 months, while another starting with significant gaps took just over 8 months.

The variables that set your timeframe

- **How much work your system needs before audit.** A builder with an established system may need only minor changes. A builder starting from scratch, or with a generic system that does not address the FSC Audit Criteria, may need several months of development. In the OFSC's slower example, 45 criteria were only partly addressed and 7 not at all, and fixing them took just over 4 months.
- **Training your people.** A documented system is not enough. Managers, supervisors and workers must understand it and use it. Training needs to be planned, delivered and recorded, and competencies (licences, tickets, inductions) verified and kept on file.
- **Producing implementation records.** The on-site audit checks evidence that the system is actually being followed. That evidence builds up over time on a live project: SWMS reviews, site inspections, toolbox talks, WHS committee or consultation records, subcontractor prequalification and monitoring, plant and equipment checks, incident reports and corrective actions. A few weeks of records will not show the system is working.
- **Having a suitable project to audit.** The on-site audit must be on a project where you are principal contractor, your WHSMS is in use and there is enough work under way to be audited. In the OFSC's slower example, finding a suitable project added more than 2 months.
- **How quickly you respond.** Cancelled sessions, slow replies to the FSO, and delays closing corrective actions all add time.
- **Audit results.** Major non-conformances at the on-site audit can mean a follow-up audit before accreditation is granted.

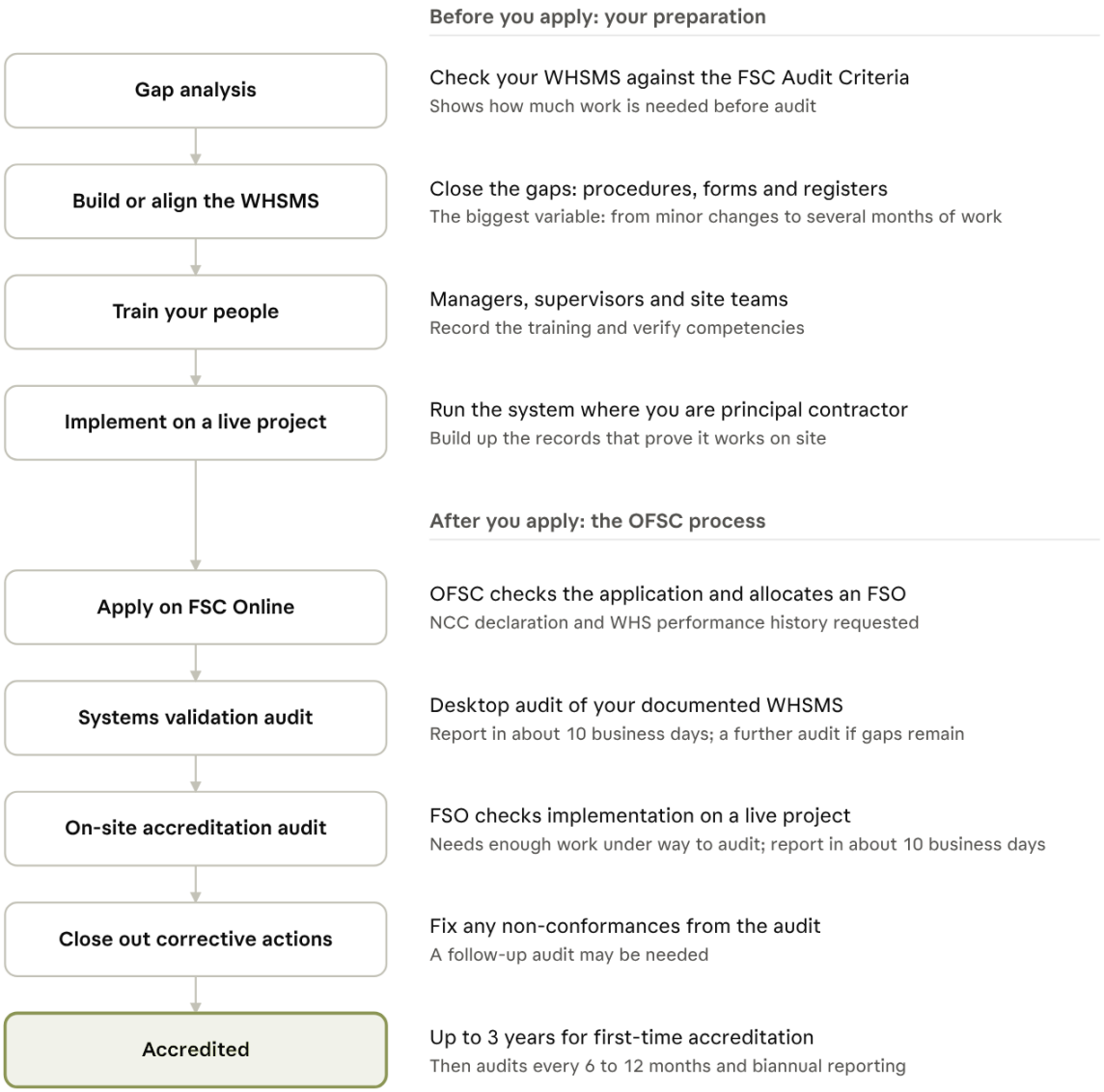
What this means for you

If you are aiming for a specific government project or tender, work backwards from the likely contract date. Allow time to prepare the system, train your people and build up site records **before** you apply, then allow time for the OFSC stages. Timeframes vary and depend heavily on your readiness, so start early.

The path at a glance

Time to accreditation depends most on how ready your system is

Phases in order, not to scale. Durations vary from builder to builder.



The four preparation phases happen before you apply. The more complete they are, the faster the OFSC stages are likely to go. The OFSC says timeframes vary from company to company, and the process is faster when a builder is prepared for the on-site audit, has an active project available, and fixes any non-conformances quickly.

Readiness checklist

Use this list to judge how close you are to applying. Every unticked item adds time.

System

- ☐ A documented WHSMS that addresses each relevant FSC Audit Criterion
- ☐ A gap analysis against the FSC Audit Criteria, with gaps closed or a plan to close them
- ☐ Procedures for the high-risk hazards in your work (e.g. working at heights, mobile plant, electrical, excavation, temporary structures)
- ☐ Subcontractor WHS management: prequalification, SWMS review, induction and monitoring
- ☐ Safe design, consultation, and WHS performance measurement processes

People

- ☐ Senior management commitment documented and visible (policy, objectives, site visits, reviews)
- ☐ Managers and supervisors trained in the WHSMS and their responsibilities
- ☐ A training needs analysis, training register and verified licences and competencies
- ☐ Site inductions and toolbox talks delivered and recorded

Records and projects

- ☐ The WHSMS has been running on a live project for long enough to produce a solid set of records
- ☐ Site inspections, SWMS reviews, consultation, plant checks, incident reports and corrective actions on file
- ☐ An internal audit or mock audit of a project against the FSC criteria, with findings closed out
- ☐ A current or upcoming project where you are principal contractor, with enough work under way for the on-site audit
- ☐ WHS performance data ready for the application (injury rates, notices, incidents)

How Greg Moss OHS can help

Greg Moss is a current Federal Safety Officer with 18 years' experience auditing builders and reporting to the OFSC. We can manage the whole accreditation process with you, or help with the parts you need.

Service	What you get
FSC gap analysis	A desktop review against the FSC Audit Criteria, with a report on what complies, what is missing and the effort to close the gaps

Service	What you get
WHSMS development	A system built to the FSC criteria, with practical procedures your site teams will use
Mock audits and audit preparation	FSC-focused audits of your active sites, so issues are found and fixed before the FSO arrives
Hazard criteria reviews	Targeted reviews of controls for high-risk hazards such as working at heights and mobile plant
Post-audit support	Help understanding and closing out corrective actions, and preparing for follow-up audits
Ongoing compliance	Annual internal audits and advice on interpreting the criteria once you are accredited

Fees depend on your starting point, so we start with a conversation about where your system is now. Based in Brisbane, we work with builders Australia-wide.

Contact: 0475 102 442 · greg@gregmossohs.com.au · gregmossohs.com.au/fsc-assistance

Useful links

- What is the accreditation process? (OFSC, including timeframes and case studies)
- How to apply for accreditation (OFSC)
- What is accreditation? Is it for me? (OFSC)
- Does the Scheme apply to me and my project? and funding thresholds (OFSC)
- Scheme criteria guidance for head contractor builders (OFSC, including the Residential Builders' Guide)
- FSC Audit Criteria Guidelines (OFSC, PDF)
- FSC accreditation assistance (Greg Moss OHS)
- OFSC Assist Line: 1800 652 500 · ofsc@dewr.gov.au

OFSC information current as at November 2026. Check the OFSC website for the latest requirements before applying.