

# General Conditions of Contract for Audits of Annual Accounts (AAB 2011)

Laid down by the Working Group for Fees and Conditions of Contract of the Chamber of Public Accountants and Tax Advisors, recommended for use by the Board of the Chamber of Public Accountants and Tax Advisors in its decision of March 8, 2000, and revised by the Working Group for Fees and Conditions of Contract on May 23, 2002, on October 21, 2004, on December 18, 2006, on August 31, 2007, on February 26, 2008, on June 30, 2009, on March 22, 2010, as well as on February 21, 2011

## Preamble and General Points

(1) The General Conditions of Contract for the professions in the field of public accounting are divided into four sections: Section I deals with contracts for services, excluding contracts concerning bookkeeping, payroll accounting and administration and assessment of payroll-related taxes and contributions; Section II deals with contracts for rendering services in the field of bookkeeping, payroll accounting and administration and assessment of taxes and contributions; Section III covers contracts not regarded as contracts for the rendering of services, while Section IV is devoted to consumer business covered by the Austrian Consumer Act.

(2) In the event that individual provisions of these General Conditions of Contract are void, this shall not affect the validity of the remaining provisions. The invalid provision shall be replaced by a valid provision that is as close as possible to the desired objective.

(3) The person entitled to exercise profession in the field of public accounting shall be obliged to render the services negotiated in accordance with the principles of due professional care and conduct. He/she shall have the right to engage suitable staff for the execution of the contract. This shall apply to all sections of The General Conditions of Contract.

(4) Finally, foreign law shall only be taken into account by the person entitled to exercise the profession, if this has been explicitly agreed upon in writing. This shall apply to all sections of the General Conditions of Contract.

(5) The work prepared in the offices of the person entitled to exercise the profession may, at the discretion of the person entitled to exercise the profession, be carried out with or without using electronic data processing. In case electronic data processing is used, the client – not the person entitled to exercise the profession – is obliged to effect the registrations or notifications required under the relevant provisions of the Data Protection Act.

(6) The client undertakes not to employ staff of the person entitled to exercise the profession during and within one year after termination of the contractual relationship, either in his/her company or in an associated company, failing which he/she shall be obliged to pay the person entitled to exercise the profession the amount of the annual salary of the employee taken over.

## SECTION I

### 1. Scope

(1) The General Conditions of Contract in Section I shall apply to contracts concerning (statutory and voluntary) audits with or without auditor's certificate, expert opinions, court expert opinions, preparation of annual financial statements and other financial statements, tax consultancy and other services to be rendered within the framework of a contract for the rendering of services, excluding bookkeeping, payroll accounting and the administration and assessment of payroll-related taxes and contributions.

(2) The General Conditions of Contract shall apply, if their use has been explicitly or tacitly agreed upon. Furthermore, in the absence of another agreement, they shall be used for reference to facilitate interpretation.

(3) Point 8 shall also apply to third parties whose services, in certain cases, may be enlisted by the contractor for the execution of the contract.

## 2. Scope and Execution of Contract

(1) Reference shall be made to Items 3 and 4 of the Preamble.

(2) Should the legal situation change subsequent to delivering a final professional statement passed on by the client orally or in writing, the person entitled to exercise the profession shall not be obliged to inform the client of changes or of the consequences thereof. This shall also apply to the completed parts of a contract.

(3) An application submitted by the person entitled to exercise the profession to an authority (e.g. tax office, social security institution) by electronic means, shall be regarded as neither signed by the person entitled to exercise the profession nor by the person authorized to submit such an application.

## 3. Client's Obligation to Provide Information and Submit Complete Set of Documents

(1) The client shall make sure that all documents required for the execution of the contract be placed in good time and without special request at the disposal of the person entitled to exercise the profession and that he/she be informed of all events and circumstances which may be of significance for the execution of the contract. This shall also apply to documents, events and circumstances which become known only after the person entitled to exercise the profession has commenced his/her work.

(2) The client shall confirm in writing that all documents submitted, all information provided and explanations given in the context of audits, expert opinions and expert services are complete. This statement may be made on the forms specifically designed for this purpose.

(3) If the client fails to disclose considerable risks in connection with the preparation of annual financial statements and other statements, the contractor shall not be obliged to render any compensation in this respect.

## 4. Maintenance of Independence

(1) The client shall be obliged to take all measures to make sure that the independence of the employees of the person entitled to exercise the profession be maintained and shall refrain from jeopardizing their independence in any way. In particular, this shall apply to offers of employment and to offers to accept contracts on their own account.

(2) **The client consents that their personal details, meaning their name and the type and scope of the services, including the performance period, agreed between the professional practitioner and the client (both audit and non-audit services), shall be handled within the information network (network), to which the professional practitioner belongs, and for this purpose transferred to the other members of the information network (network) including abroad (a list of all recipients of communications shall be sent to the client at their request by the commissioned professional practitioner) for the purpose of examination of the existence of grounds of bias or grounds for exclusion within the meaning of Sections 271 et seq. of the Company Code (Commercial Code, UGB). For this purpose the client expressly releases the professional practitioner in accordance with the Data Protection Act and in accordance with Section 91 Subsection 4 Clause 2 of the Auditing, Tax Advising and Related Professions Act (WTBG) from their obligation to maintain secrecy. Moreover, the client acknowledges in this regard that in states which are not EU members a lower level of data protection than in the EU may prevail. The client can revoke this consent at any time in writing to the professional practitioner.**

## 5. Reporting Requirements

(1) In the absence of an agreement to the contrary, a written report shall be drawn up in the case of audits and expert opinions.

(2) All information and opinions of the person entitled to exercise the profession and his employees shall only be binding provided they are set down or confirmed in writing. Written opinions shall only be those on which there is a company signature. Written opinions shall in no circumstances be information sent electronically, specifically not via e-mail.

(3) Transmission errors cannot be excluded when information and data is transmitted electronically. The person entitled to exercise the profession and his employees shall not be liable for losses which arise as a result of electronic transmission. Electronic transmission shall be exclusively at the client's risk. The client is aware that confidentiality is not guaranteed when the Internet is used. Furthermore, amendments or supplements to documents transmitted shall only be permissible subject to explicit approval.

(4) Receipt and forwarding of information to the person entitled to exercise the profession and his employees are not always guaranteed when the telephone is used, in particular in conjunction with automatic telephone answering systems, fax, e-mail and other electronic means of communication. As a result, instructions and important information shall only be deemed to have been received by the person entitled to exercise the profession provided they are also received in writing, unless explicit confirmation of receipt is provided in individual instances. Automatic confirmation that items have been transmitted and read shall not as such constitute explicit confirmations of receipt. This shall apply in particular to the transmission of decisions and other information relating to deadlines. As a result, critical and important notifications must be sent to the person entitled to exercise the profession by post or courier. Delivery of documents to employees outside the firm's offices shall not count as delivery.

(5) The client agrees to being sent recurrent general tax law and general commercial law information by the person entitled to exercise the profession via electronic means. This shall not apply to unsolicited information in accordance with § 107 of the Austrian Telecommunications Act (TKG).

## 6. Protection of Intellectual Property of the Person Entitled to Exercise the Profession

(1) The client shall be obliged to ensure that reports, expert opinions, organizational plans, drafts, drawings, calculations and the like, issued by the person entitled to exercise the profession, be used only for the purpose specified in the contract (e.g. pursuant to Section 44 Para. 3 Austrian Income Tax Act 1988). Furthermore, professional statements passed on by the client orally or in writing made by the person entitled to exercise the profession may be passed on to a third party for use only with the written consent of the person entitled to exercise the profession.

(2) The use of professional statements passed on by the client orally or in writing made by the person entitled to exercise the profession for promotional purposes shall not be permitted; a violation of this provision shall give the person entitled to exercise the profession the right to terminate without notice to the client all contracts not yet executed.

(3) The person entitled to exercise the profession shall retain the copyright on his/her work. Permission to use the work shall be subject to the written consent by the person entitled to exercise the profession.

## 7. Correction of Errors

(1) The person entitled to exercise the profession shall have the right and shall be obliged to correct all errors and inaccuracies in his/her professional statement passed on by the client orally or in writing which subsequently come to light and shall be obliged to inform the client thereof without delay. He/she shall also have the right to inform a third party acquainted with the original statement of the change.

(2) The client has the right to have all errors corrected free of charge, if the contractor can be held responsible for them; this right will expire six months after completion of the services rendered by the person entitled to exercise the profession and/or – in cases where a written statement has not been delivered – six months after the person entitled to exercise the profession has completed the work that gives cause to complaint.

(3) If the contractor fails to correct errors which have come to light, the client shall have the right to demand a reduction in price. The extent to which additional claims for damages can be asserted is stipulated under Point 8.

## 8. Liability

(1) The person entitled to exercise the profession shall only be liable for violating intentionally or by gross negligence the contractual duties and obligations entered into.

(2) In cases of gross negligence, the maximum liability for damages due from the appointed person entitled to exercise the profession is tenfold the minimum insurance sum of the professional liability insurance according to Section 11 of the Act on Professions in the Field of Public Accounting (WTBG) in the currently valid version.

(3) Any action for damages may only be brought within six months after those entitled to assert a claim have gained knowledge of the damage, but not later than three years after the occurrence of the (primary) loss following the incident upon which the claim is based, unless other statutory limitation periods are laid down in other legal provisions.

(4) Should Section 275 of the Company Code (Commercial Code, UGB) be mandatorily applicable, the liability provisions pursuant to Section 275 shall apply where these represent mandatory law, even in cases where several persons have participated in the execution of the contract or where several activities requiring compensation have taken place, irrespective of whether other participants have acted with intent.

(5) In cases where a formal audit certificate is issued, the applicable limitation period shall commence at the latest at the time of issue of said audit certificate.

(6) If activities are carried out by enlisting the services of a third party, e.g. a data-processing company, and the client is informed thereof, any warranty claims and claims for damages which arise against the third party according to law and in accordance with the conditions of the third party, shall be deemed as having been passed on to the client. The person entitled to exercise the profession shall only be liable for fault in choosing the third party.

(7) The person entitled to exercise the profession shall not be liable to a third party, if his/her professional statements are passed on by the client orally or in writing without the approval or knowledge of the person entitled to exercise the profession.

(8) The above provisions shall apply not only vis-à-vis the client but also vis-à-vis third parties, if the person entitled to exercise the profession, in exceptional cases, should be liable for his/her work. In any case, a third party cannot raise any claims that go beyond any claim raised by the client. The maximum sum of liability shall be valid only once for all parties injured, including the compensation claims of the client, even if several persons (the client and a third party or several third parties) have been wronged; the claims of the aggrieved parties shall be satisfied in the order in which the claims have been raised.

## 9. Secrecy, Data Protection

(1) According to Section 91 WTBG the person entitled to exercise the profession shall be obliged to maintain secrecy in all matters that become known to him/her in connection with his work for the client, unless the client releases him/her from this duty or he/she is bound by law to deliver a statement.

(2) The person entitled to exercise the profession shall be permitted to hand on reports, expert opinions and other written statements pertaining to the results of his/her services to third parties only with the permission of the client, unless he/she is required to do so by law.

(3) The person entitled to exercise the profession is authorized to process personal data entrusted to him/her within the framework of the purpose of the contract or to have them processed by a third party according to Point 8 Item 5. The person entitled to exercise the profession shall guarantee that according to Section 15 of the Data Protection Act secrecy be maintained. According to Section 11 of the Data Protection Act the material made available to the person entitled to exercise the profession (data carrier, data, control numbers, analyses and programs) as well as all results obtained as a result of the work provided shall be returned to the client, unless the client has requested in writing that the material and/or results be transferred to a third party. The person entitled to exercise the profession shall be obliged to take measures to ensure that the client can meet his/her obligation to provide information according to Section 26 of the Data Protection Act. The client's instructions required for this purpose shall be given in writing to the person entitled to exercise the profession. Unless a fee has been negotiated for providing such information, the client shall be charged only the actual efforts undertaken. The client shall meet his/her obligation to provide information to those concerned and/or to register in the data processing register, unless the contrary has been explicitly agreed in writing.

## 10. Termination

(1) Unless otherwise agreed in writing or stipulated by force of law, either contractual partner shall have the right to terminate the contract at any time with immediate effect. The fee shall be calculated according to Point 12.

(2) However, a continuing agreement (even with a flat fee) – always to be presumed in case of doubt – may, without good reason (cf. Section 88 Item 4 WTBG), only be terminated at the end of the calendar month by observing a period of notice of three months, unless otherwise agreed in writing.

(3) Except for cases listed in Item 5, in case of termination of a continuing agreement only those tasks shall be part of the list of jobs to be completed and finished that can be completed fully or to the largest part within the period of notice, with financial statements and annual income tax returns being deemed to be subject to successful completion within two months calculated from the balance sheet date. In this case the above-mentioned jobs actually have to be completed within a reasonable period of time, if all documents and records required are provided without delay and if no good reason within the meaning of Section 88 Paragraph 4 WTBG is cited.

(4) In case of a termination according to Item 2 the client shall be informed in writing within one month which assignments at the time of termination are considered to be part of the work to be completed.

(5) If the client is not informed within this period about the assignments still to be carried out, the continuing agreement shall be deemed terminated upon completion of the tasks under way at the date when the notice of termination is served.

(6) Should it happen that in case of a continuing agreement as defined under Items 2 and 3 – for whatever reason – more than two similar jobs which are usually completed only once a year (e.g. financial statements or annual tax returns etc.) are to be completed, any such jobs exceeding this number shall be regarded as assignments to be completed only with the client's explicit consent. If applicable, the client shall be informed of this explicitly in the statement pursuant to Item 4.

### 11. Default in Acceptance and Failure to Cooperate on the part of the Client

If the client defaults on acceptance of the services rendered by the person entitled to exercise the profession or fails to carry out a task incumbent on him/her either according to Point 3 or imposed on him/her in another way, the person entitled to exercise the profession shall have the right to terminate the contract without prior notice. His/her fees shall be calculated according to Point 12. Default in acceptance or failure to cooperate on the part of the client shall also justify a claim for compensation made by the person entitled to exercise the profession for the extra time and labor hereby expended as well as for the damage caused, if the person entitled to exercise the profession does not invoke his/her right to terminate the contract.

### 12. Entitlement to Fee

(1) If the contract fails to be executed (e.g. due to termination), the person entitled to exercise the profession shall be entitled to the negotiated fee, provided he/she was prepared to render the services and was prevented from so doing by circumstances caused by the client (Section 1168 of the Civil Code (ABGB)); in this case the person entitled to exercise the profession need not deduct the amount he/she obtained or could have obtained through alternative use of his/her own professional services or those of his/her employees.

(2) If the client fails to cooperate and the assignment cannot be carried out because of lack of cooperation, person entitled to exercise the profession shall also have the right to set a reasonable grace period on the understanding that, if this grace period expires without results, the contract shall be deemed cancelled and the consequences indicated in Item 1) shall apply.

(3) If the person entitled to exercise the profession terminates the contract without good reason and at an inopportune moment, he/she shall compensate the client for the damage caused according to Point 8.

(4) If the client – having been made aware of the legal situation – agrees that the person entitled to exercise the profession duly completes the task, the work shall be completed accordingly.

### 13. Fee

(1) Unless the parties agreed that the services would be rendered free of charge or unless explicitly stipulated otherwise, an appropriate remuneration in accordance with Sections 1004 and 1152 of the Austrian Civil Code (ABGB) is due. Unless a different agreement has demonstrably been reached, payments by the client shall in all cases be

credited against the oldest debt. The claim for remuneration by the person entitled to exercise the profession is based upon an agreement concluded between him/her and the principal involved.

(2) Proper understanding between the person entitled to exercise the profession and their principals is most effectively achieved by clearly expressed remuneration agreements.

(3) The smallest service unit which may be charged is a quarter of an hour.

(4) Travel time to the extent required is also charged in most cases.

(5) Study of documents which, in terms of their nature and extent, may prove necessary for preparation of the person entitled to exercise the profession in his/her own office may also be charged as a special item

(6) Should a remuneration already agreed upon prove inadequate as a result of the subsequent occurrence of special circumstances or special requirements of the principal, additional negotiations for the agreement of a more suitable remuneration are usual. This also usually applies where inadequate fixed sum remunerations are concerned.

(7) Persons entitled to exercise the profession also include charges for supplementary costs and value-added (turnover) tax in addition to the above.

(8) Supplementary costs also include documented or flatrate cash expenses, travelling expenses (first class for train journeys, sleeping car (wagon lits) if necessary, dietary requirements, mileage allowance, photocopy costs and similar supplementary costs.

(9) Should particular third party liabilities be involved, the necessary insurance premiums also count as supplementary costs.

(10) Personnel and material expenses for the preparation of reports, expertises and similar documents are also viewed as supplementary costs.

(11) For the execution of a commission wherein mutual conclusion involves several persons entitled to exercise the profession, each of the latter will charge his/her own remuneration.

(12) Remunerations and advance payments required are due immediately after receipt of their written claim should no other agreements exist. Where payments of remuneration are made later than 14 days after the due date, default interest may be charged. Where mutual business transactions are concerned, a default interest rate of 8% above the base rate is agreed upon (Cf. Section 352 of the Company Code (Commercial Code, UGB)).

(13) Time limitation is in accordance with Section 1486 of the Austrian Civil Code (ABGB), starting at the time of conclusion of the service involved or a later rendering of accounts after an appropriate time-limit.

(14) An objection may be raised in writing against bills presented by the appointed trustee up to 4 weeks after the date of presentation. Otherwise the bill is considered as accepted. Filing of a bill in the accounting system of the recipient is also considered as acceptance.

(15) Application of § 934 ABGB (Austrian Civil Code) within the meaning of § 351 Company Code (Commercial Code, UGB), i.e. rescission for *laesio enormis* (lesion beyond moiety) among entrepreneurs, is hereby renounced.

### 14. Other Provisions

(1) In addition to the reasonable rate or fee charged, the person entitled to exercise the profession shall have the right to claim reimbursement of expenses. He/she can ask for advance payments and can make delivery of the results of his/her (continued) work dependent on satisfactory fulfillment of his/her demands. In this context reference shall be made to the legal right of retention (Section 471 of the Civil Code (ABGB), Section 369 of the Company Code (Commercial Code, UGB)). If the right of retention is wrongfully exercised, the person entitled to exercise the profession shall be liable only in case of gross negligence up to the outstanding amount of his/her fee. As regards standing orders, the provision of further services may be denied until payment of previous services has been effected. This shall analogously apply if services are rendered in installments and fee installments are outstanding.

(2) After all the data to be archived, which has been prepared by the public accountant and tax advisor, has been delivered to the client or to the succeeding public accountant and tax advisor, the person entitled to exercise the profession shall be entitled to delete the data in question.

(3) With the exception of obvious essential errors, a complaint concerning the work of the person entitled to exercise the profession shall not justify the retention of remuneration owed in accordance with Item 1.

(4) Offsetting the remuneration claims made by the person entitled to exercise the profession in accordance with Item 1 shall only be permitted, if the demands are uncontested and legally valid.

(5) At the request and expense of the client, the person entitled to exercise the profession shall hand over all documents received from the client within the scope of his/her activities. However, this shall not apply to correspondence between the person entitled to exercise the profession and his/her client, to original documents in his/her possession or to documents which have to be kept in accordance with the directive on money laundering. The person entitled to exercise the profession may make or retain copies or duplicates of the documents to be returned to the client. The client shall be obliged to bear these expenses in so far as these copies or duplicates may be required as a proof of the orderly execution of all professional duties by the person entitled to exercise the profession.

(6) In the event of termination of the contract, the contractor shall be entitled to charge an appropriate fee for further queries after termination of the contract and for granting access to the relevant information about the audited company.

(7) The client shall fetch the documents handed over to the person entitled to exercise the profession within three months after the work has been completed. If the client fails to do so, the person entitled to exercise the profession shall have the right to return them to the client at the cost of the client or to charge safe custody charges, if the person entitled to exercise the profession can prove that he/she has asked the client twice to pick up the documents handed over.

(8) The person entitled to exercise the profession shall have the right to compensation of any fees that are due by use of any available deposited funds, clearing balances, trust funds or other liquid resources at his/her disposal even if these funds are explicitly intended for safe keeping, if the client had to reckon with a counterclaim of the person entitled to exercise the profession.

(9) To safeguard an existing or future fee payable, the person entitled to exercise the profession shall have the right to transfer a balance held by the client with the tax office or another balance held by the client in connection with charges and contributions, to a trust account. In this case the client shall be informed about the transfer. Subsequently, the amount secured may be collected either after agreement has been reached with the client or after enforceability by execution has been declared.

#### **15. Applicable Law, Place of Performance, Jurisdiction**

(1) The contract, its execution and the claims resulting from it shall be exclusively governed by Austrian law.

(2) The place of performance shall be the place of business of the person entitled to exercise the profession.

(3) In case of disputes, the court of the place of performance shall be the competent court.

#### **16. Supplementary Provisions for Audits**

(1) For statutory audits of financial statements which are carried out in order to issue a formal audit certificate (e.g. Section 268 and the following sections of the Company Code (Commercial Code, UGB)), the purpose of the contract, unless otherwise agreed to in writing, shall not be to investigate whether regulations concerning tax laws or specific regulations, e.g. price fixing, restriction of competition and foreign exchange regulations have been adhered to. Neither shall the purpose of the statutory audit of financial statements be to investigate whether the business is run in an economical, efficient and expedient manner. Within the framework of a statutory audit of a financial statement there shall be no obligation to detect the falsification of accounts or other irregularities.

(2) When a qualified or unqualified audit certificate is issued within the scope of a statutory audit of the annual financial statement, the audit certificate issued shall be appropriate for the respective type of business organization.

(3) If financial statements are published together with the audit certificate, they shall only be published in the form confirmed or explicitly permitted by the auditor.

(4) If the auditor revokes his/her audit certificate, the further use thereof shall no longer be permitted. If the financial statements have been published with the audit certificate, the revocation thereof shall also be published.

(5) For other statutory and voluntary audits of financial statements as well as for other audits, the above principles shall apply accordingly.