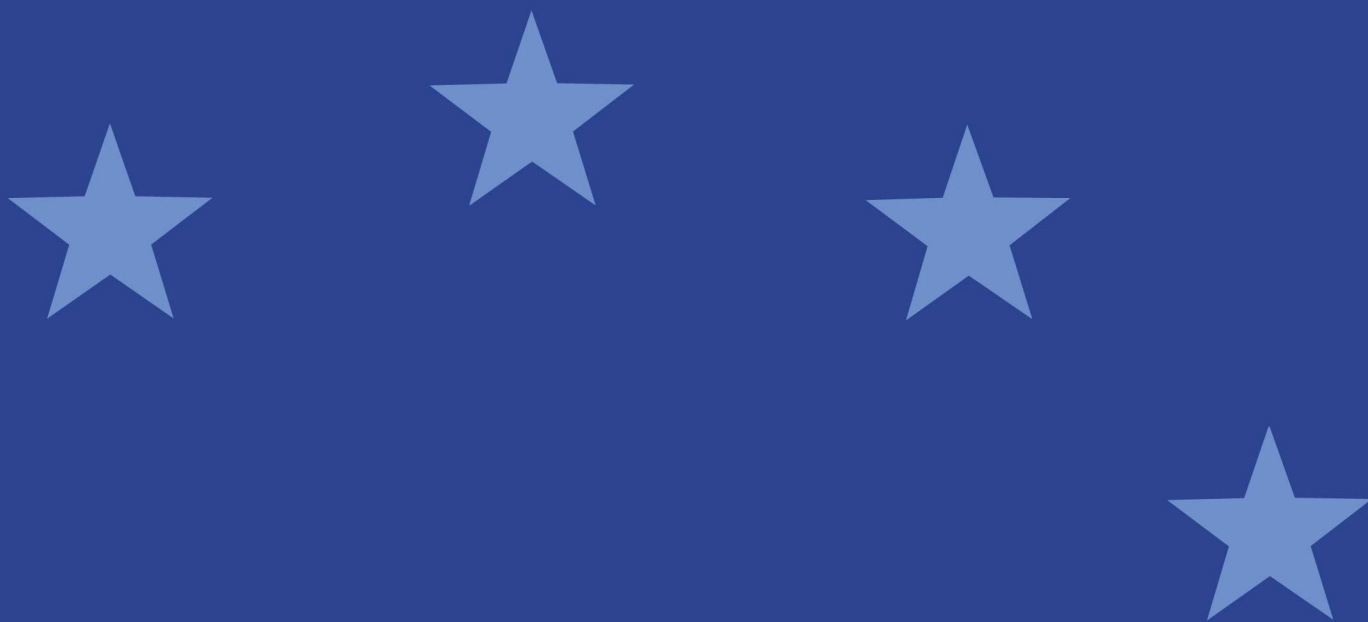




European Securities and  
Markets Authority

# Questions and answers

**ESMA Guidelines on Alternative Performance Measures (APMs)**





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## **I. Background**

1. ESMA issued Guidelines on Alternative Performance Measures (Guidelines on APMs) aimed at promoting the usefulness and transparency of APMs included in prospectuses and/or regulated information. Adherence to the guidelines should improve the comparability, reliability and/or comprehensibility of APMs. Issuers or persons responsible for the prospectus which comply with these guidelines will provide a faithful representation of the financial information disclosed to the market.
2. The Guidelines on APMs were issued based on the Transparency Directive's objective of providing equivalent investor protection at EU level and the underlying principle of providing a true and fair view of an issuer's assets, liabilities, financial position and profit or loss pursued by the provisions. At the same time, ESMA considered that a common approach to APMs was necessary to ensure consistent, efficient and effective supervisory practices and a uniform and consistent application of the Transparency Directive (and by extension the Market Abuse Regulation).
3. In line with its aim of promoting protection of actual and potential investors, Article 5 of the Prospectus Directive sets out the principle that all information included in a prospectus shall be presented in an easily analysable and comprehensible form. Therefore, where persons responsible for the prospectus decide to include APMs in a prospectus, this principle of comprehensibility dictates that such APMs should be defined, provided with meaningful labels and reconciled to financial statements and their relevance and reliability should be explained.
4. ESMA plays an active role in building a common supervisory culture by promoting common supervisory approaches and practices. In this regard, ESMA develops Q&As as when appropriate to elaborate on the provisions of certain EU legislation or ESMA guidelines.
5. This document is expected to be updated and developed as and when appropriate.

## **II. Purpose**

6. The purpose of this document is to promote common supervisory approaches and practices in the application of the ESMA Guidelines on APMs. It does this by providing responses to questions posed by the general public and competent authorities in relation to the practical application of the ESMA guidelines.
7. The content of this document is aimed at competent authorities under TD, MAR and Prospectuses to ensure that in their supervisory activities their actions are converging along the lines of the responses adopted by ESMA. However, these responses are also meant to help and give issuers and persons responsible for the prospectus indications as to correct implementation of ESMA Guidelines principles, rather than creating an extra layer of requirements on them.

### III. Status

8. The Q&A mechanism is a practical convergence tool used to promote common supervisory approaches and practices under Article 29(2) of the ESMA Regulation.<sup>1</sup>
9. Therefore, due to the nature of Q&As, formal consultation on the draft answers is considered unnecessary. However, even if they are not formally consulted on, ESMA may check them with representatives of ESMA's Securities and Markets Stakeholder Group, the relevant Standing Committees' Consultative Working Group or, where specific expertise is needed, with other external parties.
10. ESMA will review these questions and answers to identify if, in a certain area, there is a need to convert some of the material into ESMA guidelines and recommendations. In such cases, the procedures foreseen under Article 16 of the ESMA Regulation will be followed.

### IV. Questions and answers

11. This document is intended to be continually edited and updated as and when new questions are received. The date each question was last amended is included after each question for ease of reference. Where questions relate to the interaction of the APM Guidelines with the prospectus regime, these are also included in the Questions and Answers Prospectuses.
12. ESMA will welcome feedback from market participants on these or other questions with a view to update, where necessary, the document.
13. Questions on the practical application of any of the ESMA Guidelines on APMs may be sent to the following email address at ESMA: [info@esma.europa.eu](mailto:info@esma.europa.eu).

### V. Legislative references & Abbreviations

|                                      |  |
|--------------------------------------|--|
| <i>ESMA Regulation</i>               | Regulation (EU) No 1095/2010 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 24 November 2010 establishing a European Supervisory Authority (European Securities and Markets Authority), amending Decision No 716/2009/EC and repealing Commission Decision 2009/77/EC. |
| <i>Market Abuse Regulation (MAR)</i> | Regulation (EU) No 596/2014 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 16 April 2014 on market abuse (market abuse regulation).  |

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<sup>1</sup> Regulation (EU) No 1095/2010 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 24 November 2010 establishing a European Supervisory Authority (European Securities and Markets Authority), amending Decision No 716/2009/EC and repealing Commission Decision 2009/77/EC Regulation, 15.12.2010, L331/84.

|  |   |
|--|---|
| <i>Transparency Directive (TD)</i>                       | Directive 2004/109/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 15 December 2004, as last amended by Directive 2013/50/EU, on the harmonisation of transparency requirements in relation to information about issuers whose securities are traded on a regulated market and amending Directive 2001/34/EC. |
| <i>Directive implementing the Transparency Directive</i> | Directive 2007/14/EC, of 8 March 2007, laying down detailed rules for the implementation of certain provisions of Directive 2004/109/EC on the harmonisation of transparency requirements in relation to information about issuers whose securities are admitted to trading on a regulated market.                |
| <i>Prospectus Directive</i>                              | Directive 2003/71/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 4 November 2003 on the prospectus to be published when securities are offered to the public or admitted to trading.   |

### **Abbreviations**

|             |   |
|-------------|---|
| <i>APM</i>  | Alternative Performance Measure             |
| <i>EEA</i>  | European Economic Area                      |
| <i>ESMA</i> | European Securities and Markets Authority   |
| <i>GAAP</i> | Generally Accepted Accounting Principles    |
| <i>IASB</i> | International Accounting Standards Board    |
| <i>IFRS</i> | International Financial Reporting Standards |
| <i>CAs</i>  | Competent Authorities                       |

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## Question 1 Applicability of ESMA's Guidelines on Alternative Performance Measures (APMs) to prospectuses comprising documents published before and on/after 3 July 2016

Date last updated: December 2016

This Q&A relates to Question 101 of the ESMA Questions and Answers on Prospectuses.<sup>2</sup>

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**Question:** ESMA's Guidelines on Alternative Performance Measures (ESMA/2015/1415) apply to APM's disclosed by issuers or persons responsible for the prospectus when publishing regulated information or prospectuses on or after 3 July 2016, cf. paragraph 5 of the Guidelines. Given that a prospectus can be formed by a combination of a registration document and a securities note, and a summary where applicable, and that prospectuses or base prospectuses can incorporate by reference the information contained in a previously approved registration document, do the Guidelines apply:

- to a registration document containing APMs which was published before 3 July when that registration document is combined with a securities note published on/after 3 July?
- to a registration document (or prospectus) containing APMs which was published before 3 July when the information contained in that registration document is incorporated by reference into a prospectus or base prospectus published on/after 3 July?
- to a supplement containing APMs published on/after 3 July when the prospectus or registration document was published before 3 July?

**Answer:** As set out in paragraph 5 of the Guidelines (cited above), the applicability of the Guidelines is determined with reference to the publication date of the prospectus.

As such, where a registration document containing APMs was published before 3 July and that registration document is combined with a securities note published on/after 3 July, the Guidelines do not apply to the registration document but only to the securities note and the summary, where applicable. Equally, where the information contained in such a registration document is incorporated by reference into a prospectus or a base prospectus published on/after 3 July, the Guidelines do not apply to the registration document but only to the remainder of the prospectus or base prospectus.

Where a registration document containing APMs was approved but not published before 3 July and that registration document is combined with a securities note published on/after 3 July, or the information contained in that registration document is incorporated by reference into a prospectus or a base prospectus published on/after 3 July, the Guidelines apply to the registration document as well as to the securities note and the summary, where applicable, or to the prospectus/base

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<sup>2</sup> [https://www.esma.europa.eu/sites/default/files/library/2016-1674\\_qa\\_on\\_prospectus\\_related\\_topics.pdf](https://www.esma.europa.eu/sites/default/files/library/2016-1674_qa_on_prospectus_related_topics.pdf)

prospectus. In these instances, the registration document should be updated through the mechanism set out in Article 12(2) of the Prospectus Directive.

Where a prospectus or registration document published before 3 July is supplemented on/after 3 July and the supplement contains APMs, the Guidelines apply to the supplement.

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**Question 2: Measures presented simultaneously inside and outside financial statements; Paragraphs 4, 17 and 19 of APMs Guidelines.**

Date last updated: **January 2017**

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**Question:** Paragraph 4 of the APMs Guidelines excludes from its scope the APMs disclosed in the financial statements (as defined in section II). Do the APMs Guidelines apply to APMs simultaneously presented inside and outside financial statements?

**Answer:** Yes. The APMs Guidelines apply to all financial measures which fall within the definition set out in paragraphs 17 to 19 of the APM Guidelines and are disclosed outside financial statements but in documents within the scope of regulated information.

The definition of an APM excludes from its scope financial measures defined or specified in the applicable financial reporting framework. Therefore, financial measures (e.g. subtotals or totals) which are not defined or specified in the applicable financial reporting framework fall under the scope of application of the APMs Guidelines irrespective of whether these financial measures are also disclosed in financial statements.

Where APMs directly identifiable from financial statements are also disclosed outside financial statements, the issuer or the persons responsible for the prospectus:

- (i) Do not need to provide a reconciliation between the APM used and the most directly reconcilable line item, total or subtotal presented in financial statements (paragraph 29);
- (ii) Where applicable, may use the compliance by reference principle (paragraphs 45 to 48 of the APMs Guidelines) and refer to the specific page or section in the financial statements, where this information is readily and easily accessible to users.

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**Question 3: Financial measures calculated using exclusively figures stemming from financial statements; Paragraphs 4, 17 to 19 of the APMs Guidelines.**

Date last updated: **January 2017**

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**Question:** Do the APMs Guidelines apply to financial measures such as financial ratios calculated using exclusively figures directly stemming from financial statements?

**Answer:** Yes. The APMs Guidelines apply to financial measures including financial ratios calculated using exclusively figures directly stemming from the financial statements (e.g. IFRS figures) unless:

- a) these measures are defined or specified by the applicable financial reporting framework (paragraph 17 of the APMs Guidelines).
- b) financial measures fall within the exception provided in paragraph 4 (i.e. they are disclosed in accordance with applicable legislation, other than the applicable financial reporting framework),

Unless the figures included in the financial measures fall within the definition of an APM, the APMs Guidelines apply to the measures (e.g. financial ratio) and not the figures. Otherwise, the APMs Guidelines apply to both.

In case such APMs are presented inside and outside financial statements please refer to question 2.

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#### **Question 4: Interim financial reports; Paragraphs 3 and 4 of the APMs Guidelines.**

Date last updated: **January 2017**

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**Question:** Do the APMs Guidelines apply to interim financial reporting?

**Answer:** The APMs Guidelines apply to interim financial reporting if it falls under the definition of regulated information set out in the TD. Therefore, the APMs Guidelines apply to: (i) additional periodic financial information, when this information is published in accordance with article 3 (1a) of the TD; (ii) half yearly financial reports, as required by article 5 of the TD; or (iii) any financial information published in accordance with article 17 of MAR (such as ad-hoc disclosures).

Where interim financial reports or the additional periodic financial information are regulated information, the APMs Guidelines only apply to the information accompanying financial statements (e.g. interim management report) as the APMs Guidelines exclude from their scope the financial statements (paragraph 4).

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#### **Question 5: Segment information; Paragraphs 17 to 19 of the APMs Guidelines.**

Date last updated: **January 2017**

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**Question:** Do the APMs Guidelines apply to measures presented in segment information?

**Answer:** Unless the measures presented in segment information are defined or specified in the applicable financial reporting framework, the APMs Guidelines apply to these measures if they are presented outside financial statements (e.g. management report).



As paragraph 4 of the APMs Guidelines excludes APMs disclosed in financial statements, they do not apply to APMs included in the segment information within financial statements (paragraph 4 of the APMs Guidelines).

In case such APMs are presented inside and outside financial statements please refer to question 2.

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### **Question 6: Labels used on APMs; Paragraphs 22 and 25 of the APMs Guidelines.**

Date last updated: **January 2017**

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**Question:** Do the APMs Guidelines apply to other labels than “non-recurring”, “infrequent” or “unusual” which are specifically referred to in paragraph 25 of the guidelines?

**Answer:** Yes, the APMs Guidelines apply to all labels of APMs used by issuers or the persons responsible for prospectus.

Although the APMs Guidelines do not prescribe which labels can or cannot be used, the labels used should (i) be meaningful; (ii) not be misleading; and (iii) reflect the content and the basis of calculation of the APMs.

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### **Question 7: Concept of “corresponding previous periods”; Paragraph 37 of the APMs Guidelines.**

Date last updated: **January 2017**

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**Question:** How should the concept of "corresponding previous periods" in relation to financial reports, ad-hoc disclosures or prospectuses be applied by issuers or the persons responsible for the prospectus?

**Answer:** Issuers or the persons responsible for the prospectus should disclose figures for all periods presented i.e. where the financial reports or prospectuses have more than one comparative period, comparatives on the APMs should be provided for all prior periods presented.

When APMs are included in ad-hoc disclosures, the “corresponding previous periods” should usually refer to the comparatives required by the interim/ annual financial statements as required by the applicable financial reporting framework.

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**Question 8: Interim financial statements; Paragraph 31 and 32 of the APMs Guidelines.**

Date last updated: **July 2017**

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**Questions:** Does paragraph 31 of the APMs Guidelines apply to quarterly financial figures included in ad-hoc disclosures published by issuers in accordance with article 17 of MAR when there is no requirement under the Transparency Directive (TD) to publish interim financial statements (e.g. quarterly financial statements)?

How should issuers comply with paragraphs 31 and 32 of the APMs Guidelines?

**Answer:** Yes. Paragraph 31 of the APMs Guidelines applies to APMs related to quarterly financial figures included in ad-hoc disclosures published in accordance with article 17 of MAR even when the issuer is not required to publish quarterly financial statements in accordance with the TD. Please refer to question 4.

The following example illustrates how issuers may comply with provisions included in paragraph 31 and 32 of the APMs Guidelines:

An issuer publishes in ad-hoc disclosures in accordance with article 17 of MAR an 'adjusted EBITDA' for Q3 and the subtotal published historically in its financial statements is an EBITDA (most directly reconcilable line item included in the financial statement). As the Q3 'adjusted EBITDA' is an APM, the issuer should define and reconcile the Q3 'adjusted EBITDA' to the Q3 EBITDA as if that figure had been included in financial statements.

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**Question 9: Concept of Prominence; Paragraph 35 and 36 of the APM Guidelines.**

Date last updated: **July 2017**

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**Question:** How should an issuer apply the principle of "prominence" as included in the APMs Guidelines?

**Answer:** As the APMs Guidelines do not define the concept of prominence, issuers should use their judgment when complying with this principle. This judgement should be made on a case-by-case basis depending on the documents where the APMs are included.

The notion of prominence is, in essence, qualitative and not merely quantitative. Therefore, counting the number of APMs and measures directly stemming from financial statements may not suffice. When applying its judgement, the issuer should ensure that the measures stemming from financial statements are not displayed with less prominence, emphasis or authority than APMs.

The following factors, among others, could help issuers when exercising their judgement:

- Attention paid to APMs in comparison with measures directly stemming from financial statements ;
- Location of APMs within the document;
- Frequency of use;
- Use of bold letters, font size, italic;
- Length of analysis of APMs.

The following illustrative examples may help understand disclosure of APMs being more prominent than disclosure of measures stemming directly from financial statements:

- Presenting an analysis of the income statement only with APMs;
- Omitting comparable measures stemming directly from financial statements in an earnings result release headline or in their key messages;
- Presenting an APM using a style of presentation (e.g. bold, font size) that overly emphasises the APM used over the comparable measure stemming directly from financial statements;
- Presenting an APM significantly before the most directly comparable measure directly stemming from financial statements (e.g. including the APM in the 1st page of a document and the comparable measure/figure directly stemming from financial statements in the last page);
- Describing an APM as, for example, "record performance" or "exceptional" without at least an equally prominent descriptive characterisation of the comparable measure directly stemming from financial statements;
- Providing tabular disclosure of APMs without (i) preceding/accompanying it with an equally prominent tabular disclosure of the comparable measures stemming from financial statements or (ii) including the comparable measures stemming from financial statements in the same table;
- Providing a discussion and/or analysis of an APM without any reference to the comparable measure/figure stemming directly from financial statements.

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**Question 10: Compliance by reference; Paragraph 45 and 46 of the APMs Guidelines (not applicable to prospectuses which are covered by a separate regime).**

Date last updated: **July 2017**

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**Question:** What are the limits for the compliance by reference principle included in paragraph 45 of the APMs Guidelines?

**Answer:** Paragraphs 45 and 46 provide a practical relief to issuers who may comply with the principles included in the APMs Guidelines if they include a direct reference to other documents previously published which contain the disclosures required by the APMs Guidelines.

Issuers may use the compliance by reference in order to avoid repetition of information in regulated information documents (e.g. ad-hoc disclosures presented in accordance with article 17 of MAR). However, the reference principle cannot be used when complying with the following requirements:

- Comparatives (paragraph 46 of the APMs Guidelines)
- Meaningful labels to the APMs used (paragraph 22 of the APMs Guidelines)
- Prominence and presentation of APMs (paragraph 35 and 36 of the APMs Guidelines)
- Consistency (paragraph 41 of the APMs Guidelines – however, the explanations required therein may be complied with by reference);

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**Question 11: Definition of an APM; Paragraph 17 to 19 of the APMs Guidelines.**

Date last updated: **July 2017**

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**Question:** Is ‘result of operating activities’ an APM for the purpose of the APMs Guidelines?

**Answer:** Unless the applicable financial reporting framework defines or specifies “result of operating activities”, this measure is an APM for the purpose of the APMs Guidelines.

Despite the fact that there is a reference in paragraph 55 of the Basis for Conclusion of IAS 1 Presentation of Financial Statements to ‘results of operating activities’, operating results or results from operating activities are not defined or specified in IFRS.

Therefore, under the IFRS framework, measures labelled as ‘operating results’, ‘results of operating activities’ or other similar labels are within the scope of the APMs Guidelines when presented outside financial statements.



In case such APMs are presented inside and outside financial statements please refer to question 2.

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