

Joint APESB – AUASB Roundtable Summary – 16 April 2026

Question 1: Strategic Positioning (2028–2031)

The roundtable discussion highlighted several themes relevant to the international boards' (IESBA and IAASB) strategic positioning for the 2028–2031 period.

1. Broadening stakeholder perspectives and strengthening public interest input

Participants emphasised the importance of incorporating perspectives from stakeholders who do not typically engage in standard-setting processes. It was noted that users, preparers and investors are often underrepresented and participants discussed the recently formed joint IAASB–IESBA user group as a mechanism intended to help address this gap. Several participants linked this issue to the boards' responsibility to serve the public interest, noting that a broader range of perspectives is essential to understanding what the public interest requires.

2. Re-emphasising principles-based foundations

A consistent theme was the importance of ensuring that standards remain grounded in strong principles. Participants observed that when the underlying principles are clear and robust, there is less need for extensive, detailed requirements. This was raised as a foundational consideration for the boards' future strategy.

3. Improving coordination between the IAASB and IESBA

Participants highlighted the need for closer alignment between the two boards, particularly in relation to the timing and sequencing of projects. It was suggested that where changes to the Code have implications for auditing standards, stakeholders should be able to consider and comment on both sets of proposals concurrently. Participants viewed early coordination and joint planning as in the public interest and essential to ensuring coherent, usable standards.

4. Agility, project prioritisation and stakeholder fatigue

Participants recognised the need to respond quickly to emerging issues while avoiding stakeholder fatigue. In the near term, they suggested the boards focus on adoption, implementation and non-authoritative guidance rather than launching major new standard-setting projects. They also noted that non-authoritative guidance can usually be developed more quickly and may offer a more agile response when full standard-setting is not needed.

5. Public sector considerations

Participants noted that the public sector should not be overlooked in future strategic planning. It was emphasised that standard-setting across both boards should continue to take into account the needs and contexts of public sector assurance.

6. Broader economic shifts affecting reporting and assurance

One participant raised the issue of broader changes in capitalism and their implications for reporting. It was observed that sustainability standards are contributing to the internalisation of risks and costs that were previously externalised, fundamentally affecting reporting models and organisational behaviour. Participants noted that these developments may influence how organisations operate, how investment decisions are made and how financial resources are allocated.

7. Coordination with accounting standard setters

Finally, participants noted the importance of coordination not only between the IAASB and IESBA but also with accounting standard setters. Digital assets were cited as an example in which alignment between reporting requirements and auditability is essential. Participants expressed concern that auditors may be required to perform additional work in areas where

reporting frameworks have not yet evolved to support the necessary disclosures or evidence requirements.

Question 2: Digital Transformation

The roundtable discussion reflected broad agreement that digital transformation is a significant trend for both boards to consider in their future work plans. Participants emphasised that all breakout groups had identified digital transformation as a priority area requiring attention.

1. Increasing use of emerging technologies, particularly AI

Participants highlighted the rapid growth of emerging technologies and the need for the boards to remain ahead of developments. One participant stressed that getting ahead in AI is incredibly important, noting that the pace of technological change requires proactive rather than reactive standard-setting. Participants also observed that AI is increasingly embedded in business processes and assurance activities, raising questions about how existing principles apply in technology-enabled environments.

2. Ethical considerations and the role of guidance

Participants discussed the differing levels of progress between the ethics and auditing standards in addressing technology. It was observed that, on the ethics side, much of the work has already been done in terms of guidance, while the IAASB may need to consider additional non-authoritative guidance to support practitioners ahead of the next strategy period. Participants reiterated that principles remain central and should continue to underpin any future work in this area.

3. Technology-enabled financial crime and jurisdictional variation

Participants discussed the increasing prevalence of financial crimes enabled by technology. It was noted that this issue is highly jurisdiction-specific, influenced by local legislation and enforcement frameworks. Some participants questioned what additional work in this area would achieve beyond the existing NOCLAR provisions, suggesting that the Code already contains principles relevant to illegal acts. Others emphasised the growing complexity of financial crime, including the potential for AI-generated documentation to facilitate cross-jurisdictional misconduct.

4. Implications for audit evidence and authenticity

Participants raised concerns about the impact of emerging technologies on the reliability of audit evidence. It was noted that falsified or AI-generated documents may challenge existing assumptions about when auditors must question the authenticity of evidence. One participant observed that while current standards require auditors to challenge evidence only when there is reason to doubt it, this principle may need to be reconsidered in an environment where falsification is becoming easier and more sophisticated.

5. AI as a tool and the need for conceptual clarity

Participants discussed the need for clarity about the nature of AI within the standards. Some questioned whether AI should be treated as a tool, a resource or something else, noting that conceptual clarity is necessary before determining how standards should respond. Participants also suggested that non-authoritative guidance may be needed to address new types of investment vehicles and technology-enabled business models.

6. Ongoing standard-setting initiatives and future guidance

Participants noted that the IAASB already has a significant technology project underway, including work on non-authoritative guidance. It was observed that forthcoming evidence standards will address issues such as the authenticity of documentation, although these developments will not resolve all challenges arising from emerging technologies. Participants emphasised the importance of ensuring that guidance supports auditors in both using technology and understanding its associated risks.

Question 3: Geopolitical and Regulatory Landscape

The roundtable discussion highlighted several themes relevant to the boards' consideration of geopolitical and regulatory developments and their implications for global standard-setting.

1. Regulatory change and fragmentation risks

Participants acknowledged that regulatory changes and the risk of fragmentation across jurisdictions are persistent and unavoidable features of the global environment. It was noted that while the boards cannot control these developments, they must be prepared for them and recognise the implications for the consistency and usability of standards. Participants emphasised that fragmentation would continue to pose challenges and that the boards' strategic planning should reflect this reality.

2. Agility and diversity of input

Participants reiterated the need for agility in standard-setting, noting that this theme had emerged across multiple discussion areas. They also emphasised the importance of ensuring diverse perspectives in the standard-setting process, including voices from emerging economies. Asia was specifically mentioned as a region where additional outreach and consultation would be valuable.

3. Public sector considerations

The need to focus on the public sector was raised. Participants noted that public-sector issues had surfaced across multiple parts of the discussion and should be explicitly considered in the boards' future work. This included ensuring that public-sector perspectives are incorporated into consultations and that standards remain relevant in both private and public-sector contexts.

4. Outreach, consultation and balance of influence

Participants highlighted the importance of broad outreach and consultation, including with small and medium practices. Concerns were raised about the balance of influence in standard setting, including perceptions that regulators may have a disproportionate voice in some forums. Participants noted that while channels exist for certain stakeholder groups, continued attention to balanced representation remains important.

5. Scalability and complexity of standards

Participants observed that standards continue to be perceived as complex, despite being principles-based. They emphasised the ongoing need to ensure scalability, particularly for smaller practices and jurisdictions with varying levels of regulatory maturity. This was identified as a continuing challenge that the boards should keep in mind when revising standards.

6. Examples of global alignment and cohesion

Participants pointed to recent developments in sustainability reporting as an example of successful global alignment. It was noted that the rapid international adoption of sustainability standards, including recent decisions in Europe, demonstrates that coherent frameworks can achieve broad global uptake.

Question 4: Sustainability Expectations

The discussion highlighted several themes relevant to how the boards should respond to evolving expectations for sustainability information.

1. Continuing demand for sustainability reporting and assurance, alongside regulatory variability

Participants acknowledged that demand for sustainability reporting and assurance continues to grow, with stakeholders expecting credible information to be available to the market. At the same time, participants noted that some jurisdictions are scaling back or reconsidering the extent of mandated sustainability reporting and assurance. This divergence is beginning to influence expectations regarding the role of standard-setters in this area.

2. Early stage of global implementation and need for stability

Participants emphasised that sustainability reporting and assurance remain in the early stages of implementation. Many jurisdictions and stakeholders are still adjusting to new requirements and the landscape is evolving rapidly. While agility in standard-setting has been a recurring theme, participants noted that, in the sustainability context, stability is also important at this stage to allow practices and expectations to settle.

3. Fragmentation risks due to differing legislative and reporting frameworks

Participants highlighted the significant variation in global adoption of sustainability reporting frameworks. Differences in legislation, reporting requirements and sustainability frameworks across jurisdictions create a complex environment for standard setters. This variability increases the risk of fragmentation and makes it challenging to develop globally consistent standards or guidance.

4. Interactions with ethics and assurance standards

Participants noted that developments in sustainability reporting and assurance will inevitably affect ethical requirements. As sustainability reporting evolves, the ethical implications for practitioners, particularly regarding independence, judgement and professional behaviour, will need to be considered alongside assurance implications.

5. Disruptive nature of sustainability reporting and shift toward financially grounded objectives

Participants observed that sustainability reporting has been disruptive and continues to mature. They noted a shift from aspirational objectives toward more commercially grounded, financially aligned approaches. Participants suggested that maintaining agility remains important until sustainability standards achieve greater alignment with financial reporting frameworks.

6. Global alignment efforts and the role of IFRS sustainability standards

Participants cited recent developments, including alignment efforts in Europe, as evidence of growing global cohesion on sustainability standards. They noted that IFRS sustainability standards are contributing to this alignment and that stabilising standards around these frameworks may support consistency and comparability.

7. Broader implications for financial reporting and organisational behaviour

Participants discussed the broader impact of sustainability reporting on financial reporting and organisational behaviour. They noted that sustainability standards are contributing to the internalisation of risks and opportunities that were previously externalised, representing a significant shift in how organisations operate and how financial standards function within the broader economic system.

8. Need to revisit auditor responsibilities for “other information”

Participants raised concerns about the absence of certain standards, specifically the standard addressing auditor responsibilities for other information, from current work plans. They noted that sustainability reporting increases the importance of this area and highlighted practical challenges arising when sustainability reports are presented alongside financial statements. Participants suggested that reviewing and updating the relevant standard should be a priority, given the implications of sustainability reporting for auditor responsibilities.

Question 5: Changes in Firm Structures and Business Models

The roundtable discussion identified several developments in firm structures and business models that participants considered relevant to the boards' future strategic focus.

1. Alternative ownership structures and implications for audit and ethics Participants noted that alternative ownership structures, including private equity investment, are becoming more common in some jurisdictions. The discussion emphasised that ethics and quality management must remain central to audit practice regardless of ownership model. Participants highlighted the potential tension between investor profit motives and the need to maintain audit quality and observed that both firms and potential investors must understand the importance of ethical and quality frameworks in preserving the value of the audit function. It was also noted that external investment may provide firms with opportunities to fund necessary technological and operational improvements, but that this must be balanced with maintaining trust in the profession.

2. Increasing involvement of non-professional accountants Participants discussed the growing involvement of non-professional accountants, particularly in the context of sustainability reporting and assurance. The discussion emphasised the importance of outreach to relevant industry bodies and preparers to understand the standards and expectations applied to professionals who contribute to assurance engagements but are not professional accountants. Participants noted that once such individuals join an audit firm, they become subject to the firm's structures and requirements, but that broader communication is needed to ensure consistent understanding of the Code and related standards among external experts and other contributors.

3. Talent attraction and retention challenges Participants acknowledged that challenges in attracting and retaining talent have long been recognised and remain relevant. These challenges were noted as part of the broader context in which firms are diversifying service lines and responding to new demands, including sustainability assurance.

4. Growth of non-assurance service lines Participants observed that non-assurance service lines continue to grow as firms expand into new areas. This trend was identified as part of the evolving business model landscape that the boards should consider when assessing future standard-setting priorities.

6. Need for coordination across standard-setting bodies Participants emphasised that developments in firm structures and business models have implications across multiple standard-setting domains. It was noted that coordination and collaboration between the IAASB and IESBA will be essential, particularly where changes affect both assurance and ethics. Participants also highlighted that the implications extend beyond these two boards, touching on education standards, reporting standards and the work of professional accounting bodies. The discussion underscored the need for a coherent, cross-cutting approach to ensure that standards remain aligned and responsive to changes in the profession.

Question 6: Areas of Common Interest and Joint or Parallel Work

Participants were invited to identify any additional trends not captured in the four themes outlined in the survey.

1. Continued emphasis on public sector considerations

Participants reiterated that the public sector warrants greater attention in the boards' strategic planning. It was noted that while public sector issues arise in both ethics and assurance, they are often left to jurisdictional standard-setters to address. Participants expressed concern that this approach may not be sufficient given the size and importance of the public sector in many economies.

2. Lack of global public sector focus on assurance and ethics

Participants observed that, unlike the reporting side, which has a dedicated public sector reporting board, there is no equivalent global structure for assurance or ethics. While participants did not advocate for a separate assurance board, they highlighted that the lack of a coordinated global approach leads to inconsistent treatment of public-sector issues. They noted that generic public sector considerations included in standards often lack practical relevance.

3. Importance of the public sector to national economies and governance

Participants highlighted the scale of the public sector in some jurisdictions, noting that it accounts for a significant share of national economic activity. They emphasised that the boards' strategies should reflect the public sector's importance to global governance, reporting and assurance systems.

4. Opportunity to re-engage existing public sector working groups

Participants suggested that previously established working groups focused on public sector issues could be reconvened. They noted that such groups could help explore how standards apply in government contexts and support more consistent treatment of public sector considerations across jurisdictions.