GUIDELINES ON REMOTE ASSESSMENTS
FOR THE ACCREDITATION OF CONFORMITY ASSESSMENT BODIES

A. Introduction

A remote management system assessment is when electronic means are used to collect assessment evidence by utilizing electronic communication tools. A remote assessment means assessing from a remote location. According to IAF ID 12:2015 remote assessment is defined as *"…the facilitation of assessment of a Conformity Assessment Body from a location other than that being physically present".*

The methods used to converse from a remote location may include one or a combination of technologies such as telephone communication, videoconferencing, e-mailing, online chat rooms etc.   The new ISO 19011:2018 *"Guidelines for auditing management systems"* has already incorporated   language to address remote management system audits.

The obvious benefit of remote assessments is more efficient use of resources. Remote assessment techniques can save assessor travel time and expenses. It will also facilitate situations where a site is not   easily accessible, or when there is an urgent need for assessment and in extraordinary situations such as   medical emergencies-quarantines, pandemics, etc.

B. Collecting data, information

It is IAS primary concern that when performing remote management system assessments, it is ensured   that whatever means are used, the credibility of the assessment results is maintained. The   outcomes/deliverables of the remote assessment should be the same as the ones expected by an   assessment in which on-site or direct means are used to collect evidence. The same agenda assessment   report and checklist documents should be completed by IAS assessors and submitted to IAS for review.

During the remote assessment appropriate data must be collected to verify conformity to the assessment criteria. The data must be sufficient to verify conformity, free of bias and representative of   the current status of the area/activity being assessed.

During remote assessments and in order to achieve assessment efficiency by recording and analyzing   information provided electronically the client should be required to provide more information in   advance of the assessment. For example, the client can complete checklists or submit specific records,   before the assessment, reporting on the controls in place or recent changes in their system or process.

Three elements of an assessment are affected when the assessment is performed remotely:

a. Interviewing

This can be conducted remotely using teleconference technology. The mechanics of remote interviewing   will require the previous communication between Lead assessor with interviewees in order to agree on

the arrangements, including software to be utilized, dates, time etc. Time difference should be considered. When the assessor is planning to perform the interview from his home then arrangements   must be made to avoid possible distractions.

The assessor must check in advance that himself and the client have access to compatible operational   instrumentation, software/apps, microphones, speakers, video camera etc.

Assessors can also submit questions for the client to answer prior to the interview. Based on the   answers to the pre-interview questions, the assessor can prepare interview questions to determine the   need and the tools needed to collect assessment evidence.

Remote assessing issues to be taken under consideration by the assessment team members:

- Preparation needs to ensure that interviews are punctual

- The room to be used for the interview is suitable.

- Become familiar with the communication equipment/software/app.

- Beware of weak or unstable internet connection. (Assessor and client should be prepared to use   telephone if internet connection is not stable)

- Considerations regarding usage of cameras and video equipment that could be banned due to   security issues. (Assessor must be sure beforehand that the client will agree to use video image   capturing technologies).

b. Inspecting and verifying documents and records.

This can be done off site as long as the assessor has access to any kind of electronic document control   system. Records can be forwarded to the assessor as requested using different methods like email,   skype, WebEx etc. The electronic document control system/app to be used must be agreed with the   client before conducting the remote assessment.

The assessor will need to be prepared and able to select records to be verified during the interview, such   as test reports, inspection reports or calibration reports, certificates, personnel files etc. In this way, off-   site verification of documents and records could be as effective as on-site assessment and could save   assessing time.

The potential issues to be considered and resolved before the remote assessment are the need for   scanning equipment for paper copies -if any-, gaining remote access to the documents used by the   client, and the time it takes to be trained on accessing and navigating the document control   software/app.

c. Witnessing

Remote assessment practices for actual witnessing (of a process such as a test, or inspection, or audit) can be used to collect data online. Collecting data remotely for such processes is more demanding when done electronically in it is expected to be performed in real time. It is possible to use a camcorder or digital camera to view the evidence. Surveillance cameras could be used, but they should be avoided because their quality or functionality could be inadequate.

Each situation should be evaluated based on data access and importance of the process or assessment risk. For some remote assessments, data collection may need to be skipped or verified during a later on- site assessment.

For remote assessments, observing specific processes may not be important for certain areas. For example, setting up cameras to watch the HR or purchasing department is not going to yield new information than asking it directly by the auditee. But watching the lab's specimen conditioning area or observing the testing area surroundings could be important because there may be physical signs effecting testing implementation.

Similar to collection of physical data, collecting data remotely from processes involving instrumentation or equipment effecting the testing/inspection process. If process implementation, ongoing process controls or process outputs need to be observed, appropriate real-time video surveillance may be needed.

d. Remote assessment considerations

The following elements should be taken under consideration when planning remote assessments:

- **Assessment scope and objectives or purpose.**

  Does the remote assessment can be performed during an initial accreditation, a surveillance, a reassessment and/or scope expansion?

  Consult IAS program manager for instructions for each case.

- **Nature of the processes to be assessed.**

  Does the process to be assessed involve oral communication or documentation, retrieval of records and document control?

  Be prepared and try to understand the client processes before conducting the remote assessment (Use checklist part 1 for TL/CL, or client's Quality Manual, depending the IAS relevant program). For inspection agency assessment, the same process applies.

- **Type of instrumentation, equipment and materials involved in the process to be assessed.**

  Which parts of the (testing/calibration/inspection) process should be demonstrated?

  Define which parts of the operation, that need to be observed, are critical for verification of conformity.

  For example, if between two testing steps, there is requirement to "condition the specimen for 4 hours", you can ask the client to have available an already conditioned specimen to proceed in testing without having to wait for 4 hours.

- **Number of client facility areas that the IAS assessor wishes to observe.**

  Which areas should be covered?

  IAS lead assessor must define and agree with the client, in advance, the areas to observe, i.e. incoming specimen area, conditioning rooms, calibration areas, storage areas etc.

- **Scheduling**

  What is the preferable time to schedule the remote assessment?

  IAS lead assessor must acknowledge and manage Time zone issues and try to coordinate reasonable and mutually agreeable convening times.

- **Time management**

  How long does the remote assessment is going to take?

  IAS has performed a series of pilot remote assessments in the past. It was found that additional time is required to perform a remote assessment to the same level of quality to a regular assessment.

  Therefore, it is recommended to schedule for 20%-30% additional time and be prepared well, before the on-site assessment, addressing the issues noted above.

- **Communication tools**

  Will the communication tools be adequate?

  IAS lead assessor should consider the availability of appropriate electronic communication equipment, the capability of the IAS team assessors and client to operate electronic communication equipment and address any applicable security requirements.

  A trial meeting with the client using the same media platforms agreed upon could be conducted to ensure that the scheduled assessment will perform as planned.

Bibliography:

- IAS SOP 28, Conducting Remote Assessments, October 2019
- IAF Informative Document Principles on Remote Assessment Issue 1 (IAF ID 12:2015)
- ISO 19011:2018 "Guidelines for auditing management systems"
- IPC Guidance Document BD-04-006, Performing A Management System Audit – Auditing   Techniques, 2015
- Remote Control, is e-auditing the next logical step? by J.P. Russell
- Remote Audit: Out of Sight but Not Out of Mind, by David Ade