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NAB-MALTA

TECHNICAL GUIDE

ATG14- Policy on assessments carried out remotely


Revision 0 March 2024

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FOREWORD

Accreditation is the process which gives assurance to customers that Conformity Assessment Bodies (CABs) including laboratories, inspection bodies, certification bodies, validation and verification bodies, reference materials producers and providers of proficiency testing schemes, are competent to perform specific conformity assessment activities.

The National Accreditation Board - Malta (NAB-MALTA) is the single national accreditation body appointed as per Article 4 of Regulation (EC) 765/2008 with responsibility for accreditation in accordance with the relevant normative documents. It operates a management system that complies with the requirements established in EN ISO/IEC 17011.

International trade relies on certificates and reports issued by competent bodies. Confidence in certificates and reports is achieved by accreditation. Accreditation is based upon a series of confidence-building steps between accreditation bodies and CAB's, and the subsequent assurance given by NABs that the CABs continuously maintain and enhance their competence. This assurance is achieved through on-site assessments and regular accreditation activities.


The services of the NAB-MALTA are accessible to all applicants whose requests fall within the current activities offered by the NAB-MALTA. Access is not conditional upon the size of the applicant CAB or membership of any association or group.

For the scope of this guide, the masculine gender shall also refer to the feminine gender.

SCOPE OF PUBLICATION

This publication has been to define the NAB-MALTA's policy on remote assessments. It is based on the requirements of EN ISO/IEC 17011:2017 and the principles of IAF ID12:2015 and ISO/IEC 19011:2018.

This is a mandatory document and comes into effect from 25th March 2024.

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1. Purpose

This publication outlines requirements for assessments carried out remotely via a selected on-line collaboration software.

2. Definitions

Hybrid assessment – a combination of assessment techniques including remote and onsite (this can be also referred as “blended assessment”)


Information & Communication Technology (ICT) – Technology that serves gathering, storing, retrieving, processing, analysing, and transmitting information. It includes software and hardware such as smart phones, PDAs, laptops, desktop computers, drones, video cameras, transmission technology, artificial intelligence devices, etc.

Remote Assessment: The assessment of the physical location or virtual site of a conformity assessment body using electronic means. (ISO/IEC 17011:2017, 3.26)

Virtual Site: A virtual site is an online environment allowing persons to execute processes, e.g., in a cloud environment.

3. Applicability of remote assessments

3.1 It shall be the sole prerogative of the NAB-MALTA to decide in which cases remote assessments are

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feasible and can be carried out.

- 3.2 The feasibility of remote assessments depends on several factors for e.g., the level of risk to achieving the assessment objectives, the performance of the CAB, regulatory requirements, etc...
- 3.3 **Initial assessment** - Normally, it shall not be possible to carry out initial assessments remotely. This shall be reviewed on a case-by-case basis depending on the factors mentioned in 3.2.
- 3.4 **Surveillance activities** - The NAB-MALTA shall decide on a case-by-case basis whether a scheduled surveillance on-site assessment may be carried out in an alternative manner through a remote assessment which may include a comprehensive document review and tele-conferencing. Reference shall also be made to **ATG17**.
- 3.5 An on-site assessment shall normally be carried out at a minimum of once per accreditation cycle. The frequency of on-site assessments during an accreditation cycle, shall remain at the discretion of the NAB-MALTA, which shall be reviewed on a case-by-case basis and based on a risk-based approach.
- 3.6 Extensions to scope may be processed via a desk review for e.g., in cases where no additional technical competences are required by the CAB. Online interviewing may still be needed as part of this process.
- 3.7 If any of the requirements in this policy are not met prior to or during the assessment, then the NAB-MALTA will stop the assessment process. Rescheduling of assessments may lead to the suspension of accreditation.
- 3.8 The NAB-MALTA reserves the right to replace a remote assessment, where possible due to the accreditation cycle timeframe, with an on-site assessment at any time for a range of reasons, including but not limited to:
 - the criteria outlined in this document cannot be met before or during the assessment;
 - the assessment team cannot gather objective evidence to confirm that the facility is able to satisfy the accreditation criteria.

Where the rescheduling of an assessment is not possible, the accreditation may be suspended.

4. Remote assessment process requirements

- 4.1 The NAB-MALTA and the CAB shall agree on the use of ICT during the planning of the assessment.

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4.2 Infrastructure requirements

4.2.1 The use of ICT for remote assessments will only be successful if the right conditions are in place. The fundamental one is that technology is available and that both assessors and the CAB representatives are competent and at ease with its operation.

4.2.2 The CAB shall have the appropriate resources necessary to attend and provide evidence during the remote assessment.

4.2.3 The CAB shall have an IT system which allows access to an online web-conferencing solution, such as Microsoft Teams which shall be the preferred platform.


Note: It is strongly recommended for CABs to install the Microsoft Teams app which is free of charge, and which provides further flexibility.

4.2.4 The CAB shall ensure that it has a stable internet connection, the appropriate bandwidth capabilities and the necessary hardware and software. A connection check shall be made prior to the initiation of planning of a scheduled assessment and with CABs where there is potential for a remote assessment.

4.2.5 The CAB shall possess the following: :

- Computers installed with the latest version of Microsoft Teams;
- Camera, with at least a 720p video capability;
- Microphone and loudspeaker or headset;
- A stable internet connection with at least a bandwidth of 2 Mbps download and 2 Mbps upload;
- When a smartphone or a roaming camera connected to a computer, are used for live streaming during witnessing activities, it should be ensured that:
 - The smartphone or connected PC is preinstalled with MS Teams, and configured with an appropriately working MS Teams account;
 - The smartphone device used does not run out of battery during the assessment activity. For this reason, additional battery source such as a power bank shall be available;
 - When the smartphone is used for audio and video transmission, the user should be able to communicate with the assessment team through a wireless headset connected over a Bluetooth device;
 - When possible, a dual camera setup is strongly suggested.

4.2.6 The CAB shall ensure that its personnel is familiar with the technology, particularly the management of the audio and screen sharing prior to the assessment, in order to avoid unnecessary delays. The

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CAB shall ensure that its representatives can efficiently navigate through the system during the assessment.

- 4.2.7 An assessment shall be stopped if there are frequent disconnections or if the process is considered to be inefficient.
- 4.2.8 The CAB shall ensure that it has access to tablets or mobile phones should witnessing by the assessment team be needed in places other than the office.
- 4.2.9 Any additional expenses associated with the remote assessment such as the hiring of teleconference or audio/visual equipment, shall be borne by the CAB.

4.3 Personnel availability


- 4.3.1 Key personnel who normally support the on-site assessment shall be available to answer ad-hoc queries from the assessment team.
- 4.3.2 Personnel with specific technical or administrative responsibilities shall be available as necessary.
- 4.3.3 As with on-site assessments, representatives of the management team shall be available for relevant parts of the assessment as well as the opening and closing meetings.

4.4 Confidentiality, Security and Data Protection

- 4.4.1 Critical to the use of ICT are confidentiality and security issues, as well as data protection. Measures to ensure confidentiality and security should be confirmed during the opening meeting as is normally done during on-site assessment activities.
- 4.4.2 The recording of an assessment shall be strictly forbidden, and the recording of sound and images shall not be allowed. It may be necessary for the NAB-MALTA to take screen shots to be retained as assessment objective evidence. In such a case, the NAB-MALTA will inform the CAB about any screenshots which are required to be taken during the assessment.

5. Implementation of remote assessments

5.1 General Points

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5.1.1 The structure of the remote assessment shall be similar to the on-site assessment and an assessment plan shall be followed accordingly. There will be an opening and closing meeting and review of information to ensure on-going competence.

5.1.2 The webcam of the CAB personnel participating in the assessment shall be kept switched on during the assessment.

5.1.3 The CAB shall ensure that the assessment can be carried out smoothly, without any disturbances such as excessive background noise, which will interfere with the assessment. If it is not possible to stop the interferences, then the assessment may be stopped.

5.2 Preparation for the remote assessment

5.2.1 Prior to the remote assessment, a meeting between the Team Leader, the NAB-MALTA Officer and the CAB using the same media platforms agreed upon, will be conducted to ensure the remote assessment can be performed as planned.

5.2.2 Apart from the information requested as per the NAB-MALTA policy **ATG12**, the assessment team may need to request additional documents and records prior to or during the assessment. It is in the interest of the CAB to respond quickly to these requests by the stipulated deadlines. If the requested information is not received within the requested timeframes, then it will be highly likely that the assessment will be postponed.


5.2.3 The NAB-MALTA Officer shall communicate with the CAB on the dates of the remote assessment by means of Calendar appointments which will contain a link for the virtual room in which the remote assessment will occur.

5.2.4 The remote assessment process may be split up in different virtual rooms to allow simultaneous assessments of different areas of the CAB.

5.3 The remote assessment

5.3.1 On clicking on the appointment sent by the NAB-MALTA Officer, the CAB will be able to connect to the remote assessment. The CAB may either download MS Teams or alternatively connect using the internet browser.


5.3.2 The actual remote assessment is identical to an on-site assessment and is carried out according to the assessment plan drawn up by the Team Leader.

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- 5.3.3 The CAB shall share the screen as requested by the assessment team. When the CAB is requested to show evidence of documentation and witnessing, the screensharing shall be kept ongoing throughout the process. The use of pre-recorded videos for witnessing conformity assessment activities is generally not desirable.
- 5.3.4 During the remote assessment, the CAB may be required to submit evidence to the assessment team by email. All such correspondence shall be directed to the NAB-MALTA Officer responsible for the assessment.
- 5.3.5 Should it become apparent that the remote assessment cannot yield adequate results in the allotted time, a follow-up assessment shall be necessary and shall be discussed by the parties involved.
- 5.3.6 During the assessment, the assessment team may need to disconnect with the client in order to discuss privately. The client is expected to stay connected in the meeting room until the assessment team re-joins the “main” virtual room.
- 5.3.7 Any nonconformities that are identified during the remote assessment shall be documented as per the normal procedures and explained as necessary during the closing meeting. The timeframes for the closure of the nonconformities shall be as per the normal procedures.

5.4 Witnessing of technical activities

- 5.4.1 It is acknowledged that witnessing of technical activities is the most challenging part of the remote assessment. If well organised by the CAB, witnessing can be performed by the use of live streaming, recordings and/or technical interviews.
- 5.4.2 For live streaming, the CAB shall check prior to the remote assessment that the live streaming visual and audio at the location works correctly and to the satisfaction of the Team Leader.
- 5.4.3 In case of recordings, these shall be agreed with the Team Leader and NAB-MALTA Officer in advance. The CAB shall ensure that the recording is of suitable clarity for both visual and audio. The personnel conducting the activity shall narrate what they are doing and why.
- 5.4.4 The technical personnel shall be available for discussions with the assessment team to explain elements of the recording when this is being assessed.
- 5.4.5 In case of connection issues:
- The CAB shall be contacted in order to try and reconnect so as to continue with the assessment;
 - Should there be an inability to maintain satisfactory connections or conditions during the scheduled time, the assessment team may have to terminate the assessment prior to schedule. Another connection session may be required.

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DO YOU NEED FURTHER INFORMATION?

This publication, application forms and other information about accreditation including this document, are available for download from the NAB-MALTA website at <http://www.nabmalta.org.mt>.

The EA (European Co-operation for Accreditation) publications referred to in this document are available for free download from <http://www.european-accreditation.org>.

Should you need any further information we advise you to contact us.

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