IAF Informative Document

Principles on Remote Assessment

Issue 1

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The International Accreditation Forum, Inc. (IAF) facilitates trade and supports regulators by operating a worldwide mutual recognition arrangement among Accreditation Bodies (ABs) in order that the results issued by Conformity Assessment Bodies (CABs) accredited by IAF AB Members are accepted globally.

Accreditation reduces risk for business and its customers by assuring that accredited CABs are competent to carry out the work they undertake within their scope of accreditation. ABs that are members of IAF and the CABs they accredit are required to comply with appropriate international standards and the applicable IAF application documents for the consistent application of those standards.

ABs that are signatories to the IAF Multilateral Recognition Arrangement (MLA) are evaluated regularly by an appointed team of peers to provide confidence in the operation of their accreditation programs. The structure and scope of the IAF MLA is detailed in IAF PR 4 - Structure of IAF MLA and Endorsed Normative Documents.

The IAF MLA is structured in five levels: Level 1 specifies mandatory criteria that apply to all ABs, ISO/IEC 17011. The combination of a Level 2 activity(ies) and the corresponding Level 3 normative document(s) is called the main scope of the MLA, and the combination of Level 4 (if applicable) and Level 5 relevant normative documents is called a sub-scope of the MLA.

- The main scope of the MLA includes activities e.g. product certification and associated mandatory documents e.g. ISO/IEC 17065. The attestations made by CABs at the main scope level are considered to be equally reliable.
- The sub-scope of the MLA includes conformity assessment requirements e.g. ISO 9001 and scheme specific requirements, where applicable, e.g. ISO TS 22003. The attestations made by CABs at the sub scope level are considered to be equivalent.

The IAF MLA delivers the confidence needed for market acceptance of conformity assessment outcomes. An attestation issued, within the scope of the IAF MLA, by a body that is accredited by an IAF MLA signatory AB can be recognized worldwide, thereby facilitating international trade.

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INTRODUCTION TO IAF INFORMATIVE DOCUMENTS

This IAF Informative Document reflects the consensus of IAF members on this subject and is intended to support the consistent application of requirements. However, being a document for information purposes only, IAF Accreditation Body Members, and the Conformity Assessment Bodies they accredit, are not under any obligation to use or comply with anything in this document.

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PRINCIPLES ON REMOTE ASSESSMENT

1. INTRODUCTION

The traditional methodology used for assessment of Conformity Assessment Bodies (CABs), based on ISO/IEC 17011 has involved physical office assessments of the CAB.

There have been growing reasons, needs and capabilities in recent years that challenge the effectiveness of this traditional methodology. As a result of CABs carrying out work on a global scale, at a multitude of locations and with the advent of significant technological advances, these CABs are more ubiquitous but remain operating on fairly centralized networks, quality management systems, and conformity assessment operations that are replicated from one place to the next.

CABs today are able to create virtual sites that allow persons from different physical locations to execute processes. It is an on-line environment in which processes are executed, where demonstration of evidence, conformity or traceability can be confirmed via electronic means.

Consistent with the philosophy of IAF MD 4, remote assessments provide the Accreditation Body (AB) a vehicle to facilitate the same amount of assessment of CABs or even more. Further, the remote assessment vehicle permits the AB to witness and assess more locations and capability with the approximately same amount of resources it utilizes for on-site assessments.

This IAF principles document provides suggestions about how to plan, manage, and facilitate remote assessments used by Accreditation Bodies in order to complement traditional oversight techniques. In the context of accreditation, this is consistent with Clause 7.11.2 of ISO/IEC 17011:2004 which states: “The accreditation body shall establish procedures and plans for carrying out [whole or portions thereof (e.g. auditor interviews, etc.)] periodic surveillance onsite assessments, other surveillance activities and reassessments at sufficiently close intervals to monitor the continued fulfilment by the accredited CAB of the requirements for accreditation”. It is recognized that some Accreditation Bodies already conduct such visits to CABs, and whilst the objective of the current document is not to make such visits mandatory, it is hoped that it will provide a common platform and methodology for such visits if and when they are deemed to be appropriate.

It is important to emphasize that the adoption of the methodology described in this principles document should not necessarily increase the cost of the accreditation process. On the contrary – the objective is to make the accreditation process more effective and efficient.

Although the methodology described in this document is for information only, it is hoped that some CABs and their respective ABs might see the advantages of

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adopting such remote assessments on a pilot (voluntary) basis, to complement traditional assessment techniques. In these cases, it is recommended that the experiences obtained from such initiatives (including a cost/benefit analysis) be reported to the IAF Technical Committee for subsequent improvement of this principles document.

2. SCOPE

This principles document is applicable to remote assessments used by Accreditation Bodies in order to complement traditional oversight techniques.

3. DEFINITIONS

3.1 Remote Assessment

The facilitation of assessment of a Conformity Assessment Body from a location other than that being physically present.

3.2 Virtual Site

An online environment allowing persons from different physical locations to execute processes.

4. OBJECTIVES

The objective of a remote assessment is to establish the level of confidence in the Conformity Assessment Body's certification process by direct observations carried out through an electronic medium. Remote assessments provide the opportunity for increased efficiency, increased safety, better timing, inclusion of CAB personnel that may not be easily accessible, and avoidance of travel delays and restrictions.

5. CRITERIA FOR INITIATING A REMOTE ASSESSMENT

5.1 The use of remote assessments by ABs of CABs may be on a voluntary basis, by mutual agreement, or may be initiated by the AB for its assessment needs (surveillance, investigations, verifications, etc.).

5.2 When possible, the scope, planning, assessment process and documentation of the assessment should follow ISO 19011.

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5.3 Remote assessments may be considered for use when:

i. Travel to a CAB or specific location is not reasonable (i.e., for safety reasons, travel restrictions, etc.).

ii. There are unavoidable changes in scheduling for the Assessor or CAB (i.e., personal issues, change in business priorities, etc.).

iii. The number of sites to be assessed is difficult for the AB to completely fulfill within its timeframe.

iv. The CAB has systematic implementation of its management system where records, data, etc. can be reviewed at any site, despite where the work is being performed.

v. The assessment is for a minor extension to scope of accreditation.

vi. The CAB has a proven track record of conformance at the location of the remote assessment.

vii. The risk level of the assessment is of low concern to the AB.

viii. An activity or activities planned for the on-site assessment could not be completed and extending the on-site assessment is not the best resolution.

ix. The situation requires the assessment team to come back for a follow up assessment, but another visit is not easily achievable within a short time frame.

x. The Assessment Body has an assessor (or team of assessors) already familiar with the Management System and its practices and who have visited the CAB's headquarters.

5.4 Remote assessments may be less favorable in the following scenarios:

i. When the CAB has a history of nonconformance at the location being assessed.

ii. During initial assessment activity of a new CAB facility, scope, or significant change.

iii. When no on-site assessment has taken place for an extended period of time.

6. PLANNING AND SCHEDULING OF REMOTE ASSESSMENTS

6.1 It is beneficial for the AB to determine whether or not the CAB is a viable candidate for remote assessment. The AB should define qualification criteria for determining when it is appropriate to perform an assessment remotely, such as:

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i. The acceptable period to perform a remote assessment (surveillance, extensions of accreditation, extraordinary assessment, follow-up, partial assessment which could not be completed on-site, investigations, etc.).

ii. The criteria for appropriate use of remote assessment.

iii. The eligibility of the CAB for remote assessment (i.e., the facility may be contractually obligated or the scheme required to be assessed on-site).

iv. Whether there is a conflict of interest with the parties being assessed remotely.

v. Whether the AB permits and accommodates remote assessment activity (i.e., availability of records in electronic format or document reader).

vi. Whether the CAB is able to provide a representative that is capable of communicating in the same language as the assessor.

vii. Whether the AB has the capability and aptitude to conduct the remote assessment in the chosen medium/forum of the remote assessment.

viii. Whether a list of activities, areas, information and personnel to be involved in the remote assessment is available.

6.2 Before initiating a remote assessment, it is important to define:

i. The agenda for the planned remote assessment with pre-defined records and documentation to be available during remote assessment.

ii. The desired scope of review.

iii. The list of activities, areas, information and personnel to be involved in the remote assessment.

iv. The list of items to be assessed.

v. The timeframe for conducting the remote assessment (i.e. 4 hr/day for 3 days).

Note: timing should adhere to the rules/guidance defined for duration. Permit time for breaks and individual review by the Assessor. Assessment days should be calculated using prescribed methods, Scheme rules, etc.

vi. A plan on how to review information that cannot be shared remotely (i.e. due to confidentiality or access issues). The AB should define or express how this will be dealt with (i.e., follow-up, issuance of a nonconformance, etc.).

Note: personnel facilitating remote assessment may not be permitted to share certain confidential information or there may be an existing corporate policy on how certain mediums can be used to provide such information.

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6.3 The Conformity Assessment Body should provide to the Accreditation Body:

i. Designated individual(s) that will facilitate, manage and coordinate the arrangements of the assessment on behalf of the CAB. This should include translators, when necessary.

ii. Applicable files, projects, reports, etc.

iii. CAB procedure(s) and documents for process(es) being assessed. Some information, such as project report files, may need to be sent to the Assessor for review prior to the remote assessment.

iv. Other evidence deemed essential and necessary.

6.4 Forum and technology planning should include:

i. Determining the platform (i.e., Go-To-Meeting, WebEx, Microsoft Lync, etc.) for hosting the assessment, to be agreed upon between the AB and the CAB.

ii. Granting security and/or profile access to the Assessor.

iii. Testing platform compatibility between the Assessor and CAB prior to assessment.

iv. Encouraging and considering the use of web-cams, cameras, etc. when physical evaluation of an event is desired or necessary.

6.5 Scheduling requires the following to be carefully considered:

i. Time zone acknowledgement and management to coordinate reasonable and mutually agreeable convening times.

ii. A trial meeting using the same media platforms agreed upon should be conducted to ensure the scheduled assessment will perform as planned.

iii. Proper security measures should be taken, when applicable, to protect confidential information.

7. CONDUCTING REMOTE ASSESSMENTS

7.1 Should an item not be able to be reviewed or complete determination not be able to be made, a record should be made.

7.2 The assessment should be facilitated in quiet environments whenever possible to avoid interference and background noise (i.e., speakerphones).

7.3 Facilitation of the assessment should follow normal assessment plans and processes.

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7.4 Both parties should make their best effort to confirm what was heard, stated and read throughout the assessment.

7.5 All remote assessments should be concluded with a summary, review of the day(s)'s events, issues of concern, clarification of issues, nonconformances and expectations.

7.6 There should be allowance for the Assessor to terminate the assessment prior to schedule due to an inability to maintain satisfactory connections or conditions during the scheduled time. This should be recorded in the assessment report.

7.7 Both parties need to take appropriate measures to safeguard confidentially of data in any format.

8. POST ASSESSMENT ACTIVITIES

8.1 Findings (Nonconformances, corrective actions, Opportunities for Improvement, etc.) need to be drafted by the Remote Assessment team members and passed on to the CAB in a timely manner for each session for review and acknowledgement, prior to closure of nonconformances.

8.2 The findings must be posted in writing (as per the AB's policies and procedures) and the CAB needs to be encouraged to provide additional information to be included in the text of its response.

8.3 The assessment report should include the details of the records reviewed and any findings. Both parties should make their best efforts to confirm what was heard, stated and read throughout the assessment.

8.4 Communication between the Assessor and CAB for sending documents or clarification on issues and corrective action management shall be pre-defined and communicated.

8.5 The Assessor should confirm deletion of any confidential documents, images, recordings, etc..

8.6 The treatment of nonconformances, renewing/continuing approval of accreditation should follow the same processes that are utilized for on-site assessments.

End of IAF Informative Document Principles of Remote Assessment

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Further Information:

For further Information on this document or other IAF documents, contact any member of IAF or the IAF Secretariat.

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