



QUALITY COUNCIL OF INDIA (QCI)

Policy
for
Conducting Remote Assessment
Under
QCI Voluntary Schemes



PAD Division 03. Rev 02 : 21 July 2020



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0. INTRODUCTION:

The unusual circumstances of a pandemic outbreak such as novel COVID-19 infection caused by coronavirus are not limited to congregation of large groups for meetings and conferences, but may also impact other activities that typically require in-country or global travel, such as assessments and on-site monitoring/surveillance. Amid these unique and special conditions, it is imperative to consider individuals' health and safety while indulging in any sort of onsite assessments. It is always advisable for assessors to abstain themselves from travel to the maximum extent possible and search for alternatives for assessment procedures & practices during such exceptional circumstances.

A remote audit/assessment is the one that is conducted partially or completely off-site covering the usual elements of a management system audit/assessment and also the additional Scheme requirements of the respective Schemes with the help of Information Technology marking an assessor's virtual presence during the same.

This mandatory document provides for the consistent application in auditing/assessment, for the use of information and communication technology as part of the methodology.

This document is prepared in line with ID3:2011, IAF MD 4 and IAF Statement on COVID-19.

1. SCOPE:

The scope of this document is for the auditing /assessment of management systems, personnel, services and product and is applicable to conformity assessment bodies. The use of ICT is not mandatory and may be used for other types of conformity assessment activities, but if used as part of the audit/assessment methodology, it is mandatory to conform to this document.

This document provides the requirements to plan, manage, and facilitate remote assessments used by PAD Division, QCI in order to complement traditional oversight techniques. Moreover, this document is applicable for carrying out Remote Assessments by PAD Division in order to complement traditional oversight techniques (On-site assessment of CBs). This document is applicable for the office assessment of CBs for Schemes under PAD Division as established from time to time unless otherwise specified



2. OBJECTIVE:

The objective of this document is to provide guidelines that are applicable for carrying out [whole or portions thereof (e.g. auditor interviews, etc.)] onsite assessments, other surveillance activities and reassessments at sufficiently close intervals to monitor the continued fulfilment by the Provisionally Approved CB of the requirements for provisional approval, and will provide a common platform and methodology for such visits if and when they are deemed to be appropriate.

3. DEFINITION OF TERMS:

Following are the definitions of the key term(s), often used in this document, to bring out clarity in understanding related practices /procedures.

These definitions are taken from ISO/ IEC 17011 Conformity assessment – Requirements for provisional approval bodies accrediting conformity assessment bodies and IAF MD4: 2018 - IAF mandatory document for the use of information and communication technology (ICT) for auditing/assessment purposes:

- 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
- 3.3 Information and Communication Technology (ICT) - It is the use of technology for gathering, storing, retrieving, processing, analyzing and transmitting information. It includes software and hardware such as smartphones, handheld devices, laptop computers, desktop computers, drones, video cameras, wearable technology, artificial intelligence, and others. The use of ICT may be appropriate for auditing/assessment both locally and remotely

The use of remote assessments by PAD Division, QCI and CBs shall be on a voluntary basis, by mutual agreement, or can be initiated by the QCI for its assessment needs (office assessment, surveillance, investigations, verifications, etc.).

Up to extent possible, the scope, planning, assessment process and documentation of the assessment shall follow ISO 19011 guidelines.



4. ELIGIBILITY CRITERIA FOR REMOTE ASSESSMENT:

The acceptability of and the extent of remote assessment techniques will vary from organization to organization and will depend on circumstances such as level of technology available to the organization, the organization's assessment preference, resources, etc.

The use of remote assessment by PAD Division, QCI will be on voluntary basis, by mutual agreement, or may be initiated by the PAD Division, QCI as per assessment needs (initial office assessment for new scheme / standard within the same provisional approval scheme, surveillance, investigations, verifications, etc.).

PAD Division will carry out the remote assessment after review of the need on case by case basis. The decision on use of remote assessment methodology would be taken by PAD Division Scheme secretariat depending on the complexities involved.

Remote assessment is permitted under one or more of the following conditions: When a QCI approved CB is seeking provisional approval for a new scheme / standard within the same provisional approval scheme.

- 4.1 The number of sites to be assessed is difficult for PAD Division, QCI to completely fulfil within its timeframe
- 4.2 The assessment may be carried out from a minor extension to an entire scope of approval.
- 4.3 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
- 4.4 Office assessment of another location of a CB for the currently accredited scope.
- 4.5 Complaint investigation
- 4.6 Verification of corrective action implementation
- 4.7 When timing of the assessment does not support the travel, logistics required to conduct the assessment on site
- 4.8 Travel to a CB or specific location is not reasonable (i.e., for safety reasons, travel restrictions, etc.)
- 4.9 Onsite office assessment is not possible due to a circumstance beyond the control of the organization, commonly referred to as "Force Majeure" or "Act of God" as defined in IAF ID 3.



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- 4.10 The CAB has a proven track record of conformance at the location of the remote assessment and PAD Division, QCI has determined the activity as low risk level.
- 4.11 An activity planned for the on-site assessment could not be completed and extending the on-site assessment is not the best resolution.
- 4.12 Unavoidable changes in scheduling for the assessment team/assessor or CB (i.e., personal issues, change in business priorities, etc.)
- 4.13 PAD Division, QCI is confident that the assessment objectives can be achieved via remote assessment activities.
- 4.14 An on-site assessment is not required for the relevant standard or scheme.

5. REMOTE ASSESSMENT SHALL NOT BE PERMITTED IN FOLLOWING CONDITIONS:

- 5.1 When the CB has a history of non-conformance at the location being assessed.
- 5.2 Where the scope and/or the competence of personnel is critical, and requires an on-site assessment
- 5.3 The CB has changed location and/or address
- 5.4 Another AB is conducting an assessment on PAD Division, QCI's behalf at a location outside India.
- 5.5 When no on-site assessment has taken place for more than 15 months' time.

6. PLANNING AND SCHEDULING OF REMOTE ASSESSMENTS:

- 6.1 QCI shall determine whether or not the CB is a viable candidate for remote assessment on the basis of last assessment findings and any other related risk associated with CBs competence.
- 6.2 Whether there is a conflict of interest with the parties being assessed remotely.
- 6.3 Availability of records in electronic format or document reader
- 6.4 Whether the CB has the capability and aptitude to conduct the remote assessment in the chosen medium/forum of the remote assessment.
- 6.5 Whether a list of activities, areas, information and personnel to be involved in the remote assessment is available.

7. DEFINITIONS AS PREREQUISITES BEFORE INITIATING A REMOTE ASSESSMENT BY QCI:

- 7.1 The agenda for the planned remote assessment with pre-defined records and documentation to be made available during remote assessment.
- 7.2 The applicable scope of review.
- 7.3 The list of activities, areas, information and personnel to be involved in the remote



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assessment.

7.4 The list of items to be assessed.

7.5 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.

7.6 A plan on how to review information that cannot be shared remotely (if any, due to confidentiality or access issues), follow-up actions shall be taken to address is required information is not shared by CB during remote assessment.

7.7 Forum and technology planning shall include:

7.7.1 Determining the platform (i.e., Go-To-Meeting, Life Zone, WebEx, Microsoft Lync, or the current application chosen by QCI etc.) for hosting the assessment, to be agreed upon between the PAD Division, QCI and the CB

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

7.7.3 Testing platform compatibility between the Assessor and CB prior to assessment.

7.7.4 Encouraging and considering the use of webcams, cameras, etc. when physical evaluation of an event is desired or necessary.

7.8 Scheduling requires the following to be carefully considered:

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

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

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

8. CONDUCTING REMOTE ASSESSMENTS:

8.1 If an item not be able to be reviewed or complete determination not be able to be made, a record shall be made.

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

8.3 Facilitation of the assessment should follow normal assessment plans and processes

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

8.5 All remote assessments should be concluded with a summary, review of the day(s)'s



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events, issues of concern, clarification of issues, non-conformances and expectations.

8.6 In case Assessor has to terminate the assessment prior to schedule due to an inability to maintain satisfactory connections or conditions during the scheduled time, this shall be recorded in the assessment report.

8.7 Both parties need to take appropriate measures to safeguard confidentiality and security of data in any format.

9. POST ASSESSMENT ACTIVITIES:

9.1 Findings (Non-conformances, corrective actions, Opportunities for Improvement, etc.) need to be drafted by the Remote Assessment team members and passed on to the CB in a timely manner for each session for review and acknowledgement, prior to closure of non-conformances.

9.2 The findings must be posted in writing (as per the PAD Division, QCI's policies and procedures) and the CB needs to be encouraged to provide additional information to be included in the text of its response.

9.3 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.

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

9.5 The Assessor/Assessor Team shall confirm deletion of any confidential documents, images, recordings, etc.

9.6 PAD Division, QCI may record the remote assessment process and produce it as an evidence as and when required.

10. REMOTE ASSESSMENT REQUIREMENTS FOR QCI APPROVED CBs FOR THEIR CLIENTS:

In case Approved (Provisionally approved or Accredited CB) takes remote audit/assessment of their client for QCI schemes, CB need to take following in consideration:

10.1 Risk associated with remote audits/assessments and their impact on CBs capability to provide consistent and effective certification services to its clients as per defined approval requirements.

10.2 Competence of audit team and required man-days shall not be compromised while conducting remote audits/assessments.

10.3 Entity subject to remote assessment should be operational at the time of remote audit, to be conducted by CB

10.4 Requirements for confidentiality and information security shall be ensured during



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conduct of Remote audits/assessments.

10.5 In case of extraordinary events Approved CB may conduct remote assessment of new clients, subject to following-

- a) Adequate risk-assessment in terms of clients infrastructure, management system and its capability to effectively operate certification systems from the applicable premises
- b) 1st surveillance need to be conducted on-site within a duration of 6 months from the date of certification

10.6 In case of extraordinary events approved CB can conduct unannounced audit in part or full, subject to following

- a) A window of min. 1 month can be given to client for conduct of unannounced audit remotely.
- b) Client needs to be informed about remote audit, on the same day of the audit.
- c) Recordings of remote audit to be kept by Certification Body for the purpose of records.
- d) QCI may observe the audit process remotely as its discretion.

10.7 In case of extraordinary events, surveillance can be postponed max by 6 months subject to risk assessment by CB. Extended periods between surveillance visits may result in a need for additional surveillance activities during the certification cycle. The CABs should consider other means of monitoring that may be available such as telephonic interactions, internet based assessments and desktop reviews of submitted documentation. If the CAB is unable to gain confidence in the system for which the extension would be granted, the CAB must follow its own process, including suspension if appropriate.

10.8 Accredited CBs shall adhere to Accreditation Body's policies, procedures and guidelines in conducting the remote audits/assessments.

11. PADD, QCI can conduct remote assessment of new CBs for the purpose of provisional approval, subject to following:

- a) CB is already assessed on-site by QCI//IAF signatory Accreditation Body during last 1 year for any other scheme and there is no change in address after that or
- b) If CB is not assessed onsite- for a duration of 1 year by QCI//IAF signatory Accreditation Body, a special on-site assessment need to be conducted within 120 days from the date of Provisional approval.
- c) PADD, QCI may decide to conduct Provisional approval with combination of remote assessment and on-site assessment



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12. CB shall submit the list of key activities to be undertaken for remote assessment to PAD Division QCI prior to 3 workings days from the date of remote audit.

13. PADD, QCI can conduct the witness of CBs audit of their clients remotely

14. Other Concern(s)

14.1 Any other concern(s) identified/observed during the entire process of remote assessment shall be dealt with PAD Division, QCI in consultation with CB.



Amendment Record

<u>Date</u>	<u>Auth. by</u>	<u>Description of Amendment</u>
29 May 2020	HoD PAD Division	Revision in Clause no. 10
21 July 2020	HoD PAD Division	Revisions in Clause 10 Additions of Clause 11 & 12

