



NAB-MALTA

National Accreditation Board - Malta,
Mizzi House,
1st Floor,
National Road,
Blata I-Bajda HMR9010,
MALTA.

Tel.: 23952510
Email: info@nabmalta.org.mt

NAB-MALTA

TECHNICAL GUIDE

ATG09 - Remote Assessments

Guidance Document

Revision 1

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Remote Assessments

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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 which 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 drawn up to give guidance 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.

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1. Purpose

This publication outlines guidance about remote assessments.


2. Definitions

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 is the sole prerogative of the NAB-MALTA to decide in which cases remote assessments are feasible and can be carried out. Remote assessment will not eliminate the need for on-site assessments during an accreditation cycle.
- 3.2 The feasibility of remote audit activities can depend on several factors for e.g. the level of risk to achieving the assessment objectives, the level of confidence between assessor and CAB's personnel and regulatory requirements.
- 3.3 Normally, it shall not be possible to carry out initial assessments and extensions remotely. This will be reviewed on a case-by-case basis as remote assessment could be possible for certain technical areas such as online gaming.
- 3.4 The NAB-MALTA shall still accept extensions to scope which the assessment team deems can be performed solely by a desk review, in cases where no additional technical competences are required by the CAB.
- 3.5 **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. Once the extraordinary events have ended, an on-site assessment shall be carried out as necessary.

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4. Remote assessment process requirements

4.1 Infrastructure requirements

4.1.1 The use of ICT for remote auditing will only be successful if the right conditions are in place. The fundamental ones are that technology is available and that both assessors and the CAB representatives are competent and at ease with its operation. This should be checked prior to the decision to use remote techniques. The first step to ensure feasibility is determining what technology may be used, if the assessor and auditees have competencies and that resources are available. Feasibility also depends on the online connection quality. A weak bandwidth or limited hardware capability may slow the process to the point of inefficiency. The assessment process may be affected by the speed at which the auditee access and shows evidence by video, or through a tablet or computer.


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

4.1.3 The CAB is expected to have an IT system which will allow access to an online web-conferencing solution, such as Microsoft Teams which will be the preferred platform. The CAB shall not be requested to purchase any licence or software but is strongly recommended to install the Microsoft Teams app which is free of charge and which provides further flexibility.

4.1.4 The CAB should also ensure that it is familiar with the technology, particularly the management of the audio and screen sharing prior to the assessment, in order to avoid unnecessary delays.

4.1.5 The following infrastructure shall be available for a remote assessment:

- Computer 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, should be 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 should be available;

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- 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 Personnel availability

- 4.2.1 Key personnel who normally support the on-site assessment need to be available for web-conferences and to answer ad-hoc queries from the assessment team.
- 4.2.2 Personnel with specific technical or administrative responsibilities shall be available as necessary.
- 4.2.3 Representatives of the management team shall be available for relevant parts of the assessment as well as the opening and closing meetings.


4.3 Confidentiality, Security and Data Protection

- 4.3.1 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.
- 4.3.2 In general, there will be no recording of sound and images, or authorizations to using people's images, unless these are necessary to be retained as objective evidence by the NAB-MALTA. In such a case, the NAB-MALTA will inform the CAB about any screenshots during the assessment.
- 4.3.3. In some situations' security requirements will not allow for the use of ICT. In such case an appropriate alternative may be found.
- 4.3.4 The NAB-MALTA and the CAB will agree on the use of ICT during the planning of the assessment.

5. Implementation of remote assessments

5.1 General Points

- 5.1.1 The structure of the remote assessment will be similar to the on-site assessment. There will be an opening and closing meeting and review of information to ensure on-going competence. There will be changes how such reviews are carried out and it is likely that more time will be required. The duration of a remote assessment may differ to that of an on-site assessment, depending on what

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aspects are planned to be covered. In addition, it is also likely that the assessment may be fragmented with individual activities happening over the course of a longer period. The CAB may not necessarily need to be available at all times when the assessment is occurring, but a schedule of planned web-conferencing may be agreed.

5.1.2 When assessments are conducted via web-conference technology it is recommended that both parties use screen sharing and web-cam functionality. This reduces the amount of data and information that has to be transferred between the CAB and the NAB-MALTA. However, it is also likely that the assessors will ask for documentation to be submitted for them to review offline because this is often done more efficiently with large amounts of information. The CAB may be asked to email documents or use file sharing sites to provide the documentation to the Assessor. Any information submitted in this manner will be securely managed in accordance with our existing confidentiality and data privacy policies.

5.2 Preparation for the remote assessment

5.2.1 Prior to the remote assessment, a meeting between the Team Leader 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 Team Leader 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.


5.2.3 The Team Leader will communicate with the CAB on the logistics of the remote assessment by means of Calendar appointment which will contain a link for the virtual room in which the remote assessment will occur.

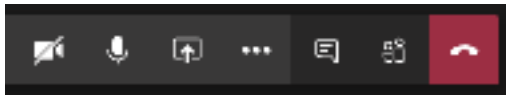
5.2.4 The remote assessment process will be split up in different parts in order to ensure that the Team Leader, or another permanent member of the NAB-MALTA staff, is participating in the remote assessment with the CAB.

5.3 The remote assessment

5.3.1 On clicking on the appointment sent by the Team Leader, 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 below are the main controls which are available on the MS Teams conferencing tools:

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These include the following main functionalities which will be used during the assessment:

- Switching the camera on and off
- Switching the audio on and off
- Sharing the screen
- Accessing other options and setting

- 5.3.3 During the video conference, the camera and microphone settings may to be adjusted so that the MS Teams platform has access to these devices.
- 5.3.4 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.
- 5.3.5 The CAB will be expected to share the screen with the assessment team as and when necessary, especially to show evidence.
- 5.3.6 During the remote assessment the CAB may be required to submit evidences to the assessment team by email. All such correspondence is to be directed to the Team Leader.
- 5.3.7 Should it become apparent that the remote assessment cannot yield adequate results in the allotted time, a follow-up assessment will be necessary and will be discussed by the parties involved.
- 5.3.8 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 remote assessment.
- 5.3.9 Any nonconformities that are identified during the remote assessment will be documented as per the normal procedures and explained as usual during the closing meeting. The timeframes for the closure of the nonconformities will be as per the normal procedures.

5.4 Witnessing of technical activities

- 5.4.1 It is acknowledged that this 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 should 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.

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5.4.3 For recordings, these need to be agreed with the Team Leader in advance. The CAB will ensure that the recording is of suitable clarity for both visual and audio. The personnel conducting the activity should narrate what they are doing and why.

5.4.4 The technical personnel will need to be available for discussions with the assessment team to explain elements of the recording when this is assessed.

5.4.5 In case of connection issues:

- The client will 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.

END

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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.

Address:

National Accreditation Board (NAB-MALTA),
 1st Floor,
 Mizzi House,
 National Road,
 Blata I-Bajda HMR9010,
 Malta

Telephone: (+356) 23952510

E-mail: info@nabmalta.org.mt