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	Guideline on the Principles of Remote Accreditation Assessment	Date of Issue:	16.06.2020
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1. OBJECTIVE AND SCOPE

The objective of this guideline is to define the implementation principles for remote accreditation assessments. The remote assessments include procedures that are usually covered during on-site assessments- an integral part of Halal Accreditation Agency’s (HAK) halal accreditation activities.

This Guideline also includes the remote assessment techniques available to employ in accreditation assessments towards Halal Conformity Assessment Bodies (HCAB) as well as the special conditions for employing these techniques.

2. TERMS, DESCRIPTIONS AND DEFINITIONS

Below the definitions are applicable in addition to the terms, descriptions, and definitions in the latest version of the “Guideline for Halal Conformity Assessment Bodies (AKR-Rh-001)”.

Virtual site: The field through which conformity assessment processes are managed via internet or other electronic means of communications

Platform: An online connection interface to conduct remote assessments processes

Remote assessment: The off-site assessment of HCAB’s virtual sites or premises via online connection interfaces

Third party: A firm certified by the HCAB

3. IMPLEMENTATION

HAK’s primary principle is to conduct halal accreditation assessments on-site. However, when it is not possible to conduct on-site assessments due to force majeure (such as natural disasters, pandemics, and security weaknesses etc.) HAK may employ remote assessment techniques to reach the objectives of the on-site assessments.

Remote assessments are conducted via proper use of technical infrastructure.


The HCAB shall not record (video or audio) the remote assessment fully or partially in any circumstances.

The HCAB shall provide the documentation that the HAK’s assessment team must review, allow access to its virtual site in the related interfaces of the platform and submit the documentation before, during and after the remote assessment electronically.

In addition, HAK Assessment Team may take the screenshot of the specific documents (e.g., image of machinery etc.) that are deemed necessary to include in assessment report as an objective evidence. Nevertheless, HAK shall act pursuant to the confidentially requirements of the national legislation and the relevant international standards.

Information on the technologic infrastructure to be used for the remote assessment is shared with the HCAB and HAK Assessment Team by the Project Coordinator before remote assessment.

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The Project Coordinator gets the confirmation of both sides (the HCAB and the Assessment Team) on the accessibility and availability of the documents.

The HCAB to be assessed remotely shall submit the duly signed “Remote Assessment Information Declaration and Commitment Form” to Project Coordinator.

Both HAK Assessment Team and the personnel of the HCAB shall have internet access for all routine stages of the halal accreditation assessment (e.g., opening and closing meetings, witness assessments, document control and review etc.).

Video tape or live broadcast are viable options for witness assessments as well. On this matter, considering the options, HAK takes the final decision in coordination with the HCAB.

Prior to the assessment, the HCAB’s and HAK assessment team’s access to platform, availability and the convenience of connection status shall be confirmed via test connection by the Project Coordinator.

The personnel of the HCAB can attend to the meeting by using single screen from same place or multiple screens from different places, depending on the technical infrastructure.

During the remote assessment, HAK Assessment Team can have breaks to discuss among themselves or review the documents/records. The personnel of the HCAB can be dropped out the meeting or the meeting can completely be paused for a certain while during those breaks.

In such breaks, re-access of the HCAB’s personnel to the platform shall be provided same as the initial access procedures to the platform.

If the HCAB fails to sustain the necessary processes specific to remote assessment or HAK Assessment Team cannot perform the remote assessment effectively due to HCAB-originated issues:

- Remote assessment can be re-performed,
- A new remote assessment can be performed for the unchecked areas or
- A new on-site assessment can be performed in due course.


3.1. Preparations by HCAB Prior to Remote Assessment

To serve predefined objectives and obtain the targeted outputs, necessary arrangements shall be made before the remote assessment, same as to on-site accreditation assessments.

In addition to the arrangements for on-site accreditation assessments, the following shall be made available for remote assessments:

- Keeping relevant records and documents ready in electronic format,
- Keeping the required technical/technological infrastructure ready for use,
- Keeping the technical and IT personnel of HCAB available during the remote assessment

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Like on-site accreditation assessments, HCAB's personnel to provide support for HAK Assessment Team must participate in the remote assessment and be available for the relevant parts of it. Top management and personnel with administrative responsibilities need to be available for the relevant parts of the assessment, if necessary, upon request.

Where arrangements for the activities to be witnessed (e.g., certification audit, arrangements for products etc.) is requested by HAK's assessment team, those arrangements shall be finalised prior to the start of the assessment.

Information on the records and documents to be reviewed during the remote assessment shall be conveyed to the HCAB prior to the assessment. In this context, the HCAB shall provide the following -not limited to- records and documents and keep the digital copies for screen-sharing.

- Documents and records on Impartiality
- Documents and records on Confidentiality
- Records identifying the legal status of HCAB
- Personnel records within the context of the requirements of the standards and legislations
- Outsourcing
- Records on certification
- Records on committee meetings
- Halal certification program(s)
- Samples of halal conformity certificates
- Records on handling complaints and appeals
- Control lists for documents and records, as well as the records on document reviews and the minutes of archives/extermination reports
- Records on corrective actions
- Records on internal audits and management reviews


3.2. Stages of Assessment

3.2.1. Opening Meeting

To hinder any possible problem and meet efficiency, the HCAB shall attend the opening meeting with sufficient personnel relevant to the assessment.

The opening meeting shall be conducted by the lead assessor as in the routine halal accreditation assessments. In opening meeting, the lead assessor shall inform the HCAB of HAK's procedures and principles related to remote assessment.

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“Assessment Participation List” signed by the personnel attending the meeting shall be submitted to the Project Coordinator prior to the opening meeting.

3.2.2. Closing Meeting

Closing meeting shall be conducted by the lead assessor in the final day of the assessment or in any days during the assessment, if necessary. Prior to the start of closing meeting, “Assessment Participation List” signed by the personnel attending the meeting shall be submitted to the Project Coordinator.

Observations and nonconformities identified during the assessment shall be filled in “Nonconformities and Corrective Action Notification Form” and conveyed to the authorised personnel of HCAB. The form, signed by the authorised personnel, shall be scanned and conveyed to HAK Assessment team or Project Coordinator back.

Resolving non-conformities identified during the assessment and control of the corrective actions for these non-conformities shall be implemented pursuant to the latest version of “Guideline on Procedures and Principles of Accreditation Assessment (AKR-Pr01-Rh-003)”

3.2.3. Witness Assessment


The HCAB’s actual certification activities shall be witnessed during the halal accreditation assessments and in this context its audits towards client firms will be examined.

HAK performs witness assessments remotely by using one or more of the tools such as live broadcast, video tapes, interview, or document review. Therefore, it is essential for the HCAB to check the connection availability in the site of the third party on which witness assessment shall be performed.

When HAK Assessment Team requests to evaluate the certification audit via video tape, it is essential to agree with the HCAB on the employment of this technique, as well as the specific activities within the scope of the video tape, prior to the assessment. Video tape shall be clear and audible.

HCAB’s authorized personnel who records the video shall explain the details of the activities recorded in the video tape. HCAB’s personnel can contact HAK Assessment Team during the recording, if necessary.

4. Information Regarding Technological Infrastructure for Conducting Remote Assessments

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Sufficient connection quality shall be confirmed in order to conduct the remote assessment. The equipment to be used for performing ‘remote’ interviews, meetings and inspections must have sufficient quality to effectively perform the remote assessment.

4.1. Technical Infrastructure (Microphone, Headphone, Online Connectivity etc.)

Technical infrastructure should cover the following:

- Internet access (proper bandwidth)
- Remote access to database and management system
- Sufficient number of proper computers
- Equipment for audio-video transfer (e.g., headphones with microphone for preventing echo formation, camera with proper resolution etc.)

The HCAB shall ensure that all its competent personnel to be available during the remote assessment process (including logistics and technical aspects), if requested by HAK Assessment Team.

4.2. Testing Technical Infrastructure and Detecting Interview Quality

If deemed necessary, the HCAB shall provide information and evidence to Project Coordinator and HAK Assessment Team verifying its ability to perform remote assessment beforehand. This may include verification of internet bandwidth, availability of existing technology, access to information systems and access to web conference tools.

To conduct an efficient assessment, a test meeting shall be performed via test link in a reasonable time at least one day before the remote assessment in coordination with Project Coordinator. Availability of the technical infrastructure, as well as the audio-video quality and convenience of the connection, shall be confirmed during the test meeting¹.

Environment(s) with controlled entrance and exits and minimum background noises are preferable to maintain the video quality of the meeting at desired levels.

In case of a disconnection, re-access to the platform shall be provided. If the HCAB fails to provide re-access properly, the accreditation assessment can be conducted via alternative platforms or delayed for a certain date depending on the decision of HAK’s assessment team.

¹ For the test meeting, the access to the platform shall be available through the connection link as described above.