

## Frequently Asked Questions

### Technology Assisted Assessments with HDAA

Technology Assisted Assessment (TAA) provides an immediate, straightforward and effective assessment experience from a distance. In our experience, there is little by way of process to differentiate TAA from “on-site” assessment. The technology available today means this approach is equivalent to traditional methods of auditing with advantages far outweighing the very few downsides that exist.

The way auditing has been conducted until now has not changed much from the time of the introduction of standards. While requirements for “Computer Assisted Auditing Techniques” have been in operation since 2008, it is only now with the impact of a world-wide pandemic that global use of technology to complete audits has occurred.

While regulations remain that constrain the use of TAA, the need to implement this approach on a large scale has demonstrated that this methodology is successful and indeed is resulting in many benefits to stakeholders overall.

TAA has immediately reduced the cost of auditing through the reduction in time and cost of travel. This, in turn, demonstrates the potential for the auditing industry to demonstrate its commitment to functioning in a socially responsible manner. On any day, thousands of auditors embark on journeys to clients and in the process contribute to global warming through their use of fossil fuels. Not only do auditors burn fossil fuel, but the constant travel also burns auditors out. This new way of working saves the health and safety of the auditing workforce, results in lower costs to organisations being audited, and contributes significantly to lowering the use of carbon associated with travel. It is a case of win-win-win.

Tried and tested techniques need to be enhanced with TAA. For instance, while planning for any audit is mandatory, planning for a TAA audit needs to be more detailed if the audit is to proceed effectively and assure a positive assessment experience for clients and all participants.

Service providers who have been anxious prior to implementation consistently give positive feedback on the new approach; e.g., *“The entire team mentioned that you managed this ‘online process’ fantastic and were able to engage extremely effectively with everyone despite these circumstances. We look forward to working with you again.”*. You can see other feedback from clients we have worked with on [our website](#)

This is new territory but the fact that with almost no notice we have had to implement TAA and have done so with near universal success and satisfaction by organisations, assessors and staff attests to its potential. HDAA will continue to refine the TAA methodology, and we are committed to developing our process to continue providing measurable benefits as our own development progresses.

So, how do TA Assessments work?

#### 1. How opening and closing meetings occur

Despite the geographical distance, we have found that opening and closing meetings conducted using videoconferencing are as effective as those conducted “face-to-face”, or more so. TAA has improved opening meetings because opportunities for attendance by geographically-diverse people can occur.

Opening and closing meetings replicate the typical “face to face” opening and closing meetings. Arrangements for these Zoom meetings are made and confirmed with the organisation prior to the start date as part of the assessment planning and preparation.

In collaboration with the organisation, secure email invites are sent prior to each meeting being opened. The emails contain a password for the invitee to use to gain access to the TAA meeting.

To mitigate the risk of uninvited attendees, assessors use a “waiting room” arrangement and the host (the assessor) allows each person to enter, thereby controlling who participates and

avoiding uninvited persons. The host also uses the “lock” function during the meeting to ensure no uninvited parties enter.

In the very unusual event that it is required, a meeting can be terminated immediately by the lead assessor. Meetings are not recorded.

## **2. How are policies and procedures accessed and or reviewed?**

HDAA provides you with access to our secure Client Gateway which is maintained on HDAA’s proprietary technology system using Australian Assisted cloud servers. This Gateway provides a secure pathway for organisations to upload evidence documents.

An HDAA Gateway is set up for each organisation during the planning phase of your assessment. Access to your Gateway will be sent by email to the key contact person at your organisation and require an authentication activity to be completed prior to access being obtained.

Other than people you give access to (e.g. Managers at your organisation etc.) only the HDAA program team member supporting your organisation and the assessor/s completing the specific assessment have access to evidence documents you upload.

You will need to upload your evidence document prior to the assessment commencing. During the assessment the Gateway can be used as a secure means to provide additional evidence items if required. Once your assessment report is completed the Assessor is disconnected from the Gateway. The documents will be archived when all assessment activity is completed.

## **3. How are files reviewed?**

Where consent has been obtained (and is required) and records are electronic, the Video conferencing screen share function is used. This allows the organisation’s authorised representative to act as a “guide” and share and navigate the organisations system and relevant documentation (e.g. ATC, care plans) without transferring sensitive information. The assessor directs the guide who enables the files to be reviewed (when to scroll/what to click etc.) in the same way that would be applied on site.

Paper-Assisted records can be scanned and then screenshared, or a staff member of the organisation may be asked to read the file to the assessor and answer questions. Where there are limitations to the review of records (or to any aspect of the assessment), this will be clearly communicated in the Executive Summary of the assessment report.

## **4. Viewing documents that can’t be uploaded to HDAA Client Gateway**

During meetings, the organisation being assessed can share their screen, in the same way an assessor would look at the organisation’s screen when on site (e.g. to review an incident register).

Video screenshare (note this is not file sharing and documents are not saved) is used for more sensitive records or for logistical reasons.

The assessor guides the person sharing the screen e.g. when to start and stop scrolling, what to click on, enlarge or where to pause.

## **5. How are participant and staff discussions conducted?**

Participant and staff interviews are conducted via videoconference in the same manner as opening and closing meetings. The assessor ensures that organisations are aware of who should attend and the confidentiality provisions that apply, whether staff interviews are technology Assisted or face to face, including private rooms, disruptive or noisy environments, who can see a screen, when a support person may be relevant or chosen by the staff person.

Participants are offered a video meeting, one to one or by phone and in some situations (when pre-planned with the service) as a small group or group telephone call.

## **6. How are site visits replicated?**

During the planning of the assessment, the organisation provides contact details (organisational phones or video links) for each member of their organisation who will facilitate a video site inspection. The “virtual visit” is conducted as if the assessor were there in person.

The assessor provides instruction, for example *“please walk outside and show me the front door, please approach the vehicle and demonstrate that it is locked, please open the refrigerator and show me the label on the container, please show me how you lock and unlock the door, etc.”*

To date this has worked very well for both service providers, people at the sites and in meeting the needs of the assessment and Standards.

## **7. What measures taken to ensure the robustness of a “virtual visit”?**

Assessors follow the same process as they would when being physically on site. We have developed a guide sheet for virtual site visits to effectively manage this process.

As with an onsite visit, a virtual visit includes viewing staff rooms, lockable cabinets, safes for storage of sharps, medications etc. A tour of the house is directed by the assessor with relevant questions and further guidance (e.g. please show me the kitchen, show me the fire blanket, open the fridge, freezer, pantry, kitchen draw etc).

Site visits include all activities that would happen on site (e.g. looking outside – objects posing risks, asking staff to demonstrate that bathroom doors are lockable, in each bedroom, relevant safety review – evacuation plans, fire extinguishers).

A virtual visit is mindful of residents or people at the site and respectful of people’s privacy, such as timing of visits to suit all parties and are able to be conducted effectively and discreetly, reducing the potential for escalating behaviours or causing undue anxiety.

## **8. Are HDAA Assessors trained and experienced with TA Assessment?**

HDAA has provided a number of TA Assessment programs since its commencement. Over the years we have further developed our systems, resources and developed our assessor network. In 2019 HDAA was accredited to a specific standard to enable us to provide TAA using information and communication technologies (IAF MD4).

Technological skill (and willingness and ability to adapt to new systems) are criteria for selection as an HDAA assessor. HDAA assessors have years of experience working with our electronic assessment systems during on-site assessments. Initial training and instruction are provided through written advice and one-to-one sessions with the Director Assessor Performance or a Senior Lead Assessor prior to each assessor participating in Technology Assisted assessments. These continue as required.

As is our usual practice, expert advice and coaching is available to assessors prior and during the assessment.

Regular Assessor Newsletters communicate process improvements, emerging issues, advice from scheme owners (including the department) and other feedback and information as relevant. Assessor group meetings are held via Zoom to both provide and seek feedback on individuals experience.

Skilled program support teams are always on hand to assist with any technological or logistical issues.

## **9. How are TA Assessments paced to support people’s wellness?**

Each assessment plan is individually created for each client and each assessment by the Lead Assessor. This enables the assessor to consider the scope of the assessment and the structure of the organisation being assessed and plan the assessment in a way that covers all the requirements in the Standards and relevant scheme while the service continues to deliver care and support for participants.

Our thoughtful and practical approach to assessment planning supports the wellness of everyone involved through structuring activities in a way that reduces intensity and avoids videoconferencing overload.

Generally, meetings are limited to one hour and small breaks are built into the day to allow people to attend to other business, stand up from their desks, stretch their legs and even grab a much-needed coffee! Assessors also schedule activities that can be done without real-time involvement of an organisation's staff and managers (for example, review of policy and procedure) to enable people to be offline and away from screens at intervals during the day.

#### **10. How are TA Assessments priced as opposed to physical visits?**

No additional cost occurs for administration of TAA. On the converse, the cost of assessment is reduced.

Cost is reduced to the extent that the direct cost of travel is not incurred. This can be substantial for rural and remote providers, or providers with multiple, disperse sites. Costs are reduced for travel time and vehicle use, and where applicable, for flights and airport parking, accommodation, meals and other incidental expenses. The cost of administration is also reduced because the time taken to make travel arrangements is removed. This has resulted in cost reductions for assessments that were previously costed to be on-site.

#### **11. Do the assessment documents and report show the method of assessment?**

Yes. The Service Description form contains a tab documenting what steps are taken to determine where and how in the assessment information and communication technology may be used to facilitate the assessment.

The Assessment Plan clearly documents the methods of the assessment (Technology Assisted, "hybrid" part Technology Assisted and part on site, or fully on site) and shows what technology and how it is to be used for each assessment activity.

The assessment Report Executive Summary includes a statement about the assessment methodology and type and what types of information and communication technology were used where. In the assessment evidence the narrative provided by the assessor against indicators may also include some information where this is relevant to the indicator.

#### **12. How does HDAA ensure the security of video calls?**

Concerns have been voiced in the media regarding security of video calling. We have never experienced a security breach. Never-the-less we have adopted standard practices recommended for the mitigation of these risks; e.g.,

- (i) Not using permanent meeting rooms;
- (ii) Sending invitations to the nominated attendees only;
- (iii) Using the "waiting room" feature to admit only known attendees;
- (iv) Turning off the file sharing function (not screen share); and
- (v) Meetings are not recorded.

As the assessor is controlling the meetings, they have full view of meeting attendees and can immediately shut down any meeting in the unlikely event that an unauthorised person enters.

#### **13. Is information stored and backed up within Australian territory?**

HDAA's information management systems are maintained wholly within Australia. HDAA has developed a Client Gateway (to be implemented in May) which saves all documentation on servers based in Australia.

#### **14. How do we ensure people at organisations are comfortable and competent in the use of the chosen technology?**

During the planning of the assessment the program team works with the client to identify what types of technology the service use, how to use the particular systems HDAA will require (e.g. Zoom and HDAA Client Gateway) and how to support other parties who will participate in the assessment.

HDAA provides guidance in the planning of the assessment on how the different assessment activities will be conducted (i.e., document review, interviews, file reviews - all described above) and how the service providers operating systems will interact with HDAA's.

Security of data and privacy is paramount throughout the assessment so using and setting up the required technology is critical for everybody's safety and confidence.

### **15. How do individual assessors manage data security?**

All HDAA assessors maintain information security with password protected laptops and logins. Terms and conditions for confidentiality and security, conflict of interest is described in the Master Services Contract signed by each assessor that HDAA engages, and include clear instruction for purging any documentation from IT systems following an assessment.

### **16. What are the wider benefits of TA Assessments?**

The environmental cost savings through a direct reduction in carbon and congestion associated with vehicle and aircraft travel is achieved.

The significant personal physical demand of travel on assessors is removed and provides opportunity for a more diverse network of assessors as the role is more sustainable and achievable for people who are unable to consistently travel (e.g., younger people with family, people involved directly in their communities, more people with disabilities).

### **17. Have service providers provided feedback to the TA Assessment experience?**

Post-assessment responses from organisations and assessors have been universally positive. Overall, people find the process less intrusive, less stressful and more accessible and inclusive to staff and management (they can attend assessment meetings irrespective of geographical location). Assessors have found more time can be spent in high risk areas such as incident reviews and increasing sample sizes of staff files if needed.

### **18. Do Technology Assisted Assessment work well?**

HDAA is an advocate for Technology Assisted Assessment. Not only does TAA reduce direct and indirect costs, it has resulted in a greater level of satisfaction by service providers and assessors when compared to previous on-site only methods of assessment as demonstrated by feedback on [our website](#) from clients we have worked this way with.

HDAA is actively collecting feedback and using data to monitor the implementation of TAA. Feedback is actively sought for the purposes of evaluating our performance, developing tools and continuously improving our approach. We welcome [your feedback](#).