Frequently Asked Questions

Technology Assisted Assessments with HDAA

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

The requirements for "Computer Assisted Auditing Techniques" have been in operation since 2008, and under the IAF system, MD4 (the use of Information and Communication Technology for third party assessment) was developed to accredited conformity assessment bodies. Over the intervening years the rapid global advancements in technology hardware and systems has created the opportunities for some types of audit and assessment to be robustly conducted without physically visiting the auditee's sites or locations.

HDAA achieved MD4 accreditation in 2019, and as a improvement focused and dynamic organisation our people embrace a technology assisted methodology to work with service providers and practices in new ways. Our experience with TAA positioned us well when the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic hit and enabled us to continue assessments for our client services with minimal disruption to timeframes or existing certification cycles.

While regulations remain that constrain the use of TA Assessments, 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.

TA Assessments 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 assessors embark on journeys to clients and in the process contribute to global warming through their use of fossil fuels. Not only do assessors 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.

One key point, our experience has shown that while planning for any assessment is essential, planning for a TA Assessments needs to be more detailed if the assessment is to proceed effectively and assure a positive assessment experience for all participants.

The table below shows a summary of how HDAA conduct TA Assessments. The following FAQ show greater detail of how each aspect of the assessment is planned and delivered.

We use **Zoom** for conducting assessments. Our assessors are all trained in the use of Zoom and our processes reflect best practices for privacy and confidentiality using this specific technology.

Zoom can be used on any computer or smart device with a microphone and camera.

For more information: https://zoom.us/meetings

Assessment Activity	Technology Used
Face to face meetings [e.g. managers, staff,]	• Zoom
Face to face meetings [participants]	• Zoom • Telephone (usually preferred by Participants.).
Document review [e.g. Policy and procedures]	• HDAA Client Gateway

Record review [e.g. incident registers, financial reports etc]	• Zoom screenshare • HDAA Client Gateway
Participant and staff files	• Zoom screenshare
Site inspection [use of a device that can be "walked through" to show the assessor the site]	• Zoom • Facetime (if available and Zoom cannot be used)

1. Are HDAA Assessors trained and experienced with TA Assessment?

In 2019 HDAA was accredited to a specific standard to enable us to provide TA Assessments using information and communication technologies (IAF MD4). Over the years we have provided many TA Assessments across a wide range of standards and often for "bundled" assessments (assessments of more than on set of Standards at a time). Our TAA systems are fully developed our resources comprehensive and our people skilled and competent with this methodology.

Technological skill (and willingness and ability to adapt to new systems) are criteria for selection as an HDAA assessor. HDAA assessors have significant experience working with our electronic assessment systems. Initial training and instruction are provided through various formats including one-to-one sessions with the Director Assessor Performance prior to each assessor participating in TAA's. As is our usual practice, expert advice and coaching is available to assessors prior and during the assessment.

In addition, skilled and knowledgeable program support teams are on hand to assist with technological or logistical issues as they arise.

2. 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. TA Assessments 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 with the service providing names and emails for people anticipated to attend and providing these to the Assessor.

The Lead Assessor will email the specific meeting link to each attendee at the time of the relevant meeting – clicking the link enables the attendee to enter the Assessor's Waiting Room. The Assessor will then let invitees in and lock the room to ensure the meeting is not interrupted by an uninvited attendee. If the service decides to invite other people or substitute people who are not available at short notice the name must be shared with the Assessor to enable that person entry to the Zoom meeting.

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

3. How are policies and procedures accessed and or reviewed?

HDAA provides you with access to your own Client Gateway. The Gateway provides a secure place for organisations to upload evidence documents for the assessment.

A fresh HDAA Gateway is set up for each assessment 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 only if required.

The Gateway closes at the end of the assessment and once your assessment report is completed the Assessor is automatically disconnected from the Gateway.

Documents in the Gateway are automatically and fully deleted from the system at one month from the end of the assessment.

4. 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 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.

5. 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 such as client files 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.

6. 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.

Note, phone calls from assessors will appear as "unknown caller" as ID is withheld. Services should check participants understand this.

7. 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.*"

No filming is recorded, this is purely a "live" walk through. This virtual visit works very well for both service providers, people at the sites as is less disruptive or intrusive and still meets the needs of the assessment activity.

8. 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.

9. How are TA Assessments paced to support people's wellness?

Each assessment plan is individually created for 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. The assessment is planned to cover requirements of 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 video conferencing 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 TA Assessments. On the converse, the cost of TAA is often reduced to the extent that the direct cost of travel is not incurred such as for vehicle use, flights and airport parking, accommodation, meals and other incidental expenses. This can be substantial for rural and remote providers, or providers with multiple, disperse sites.

The cost of administration may also reduce as time taken to book travel is removed.

11. Do assessment documents 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 as TAA (Technology Assisted Assessment) or on site. On site assessments may incorporate activities that are assessed using aspects of TAA, such as phone calls with your clients, video conference with some mangers or staff groups, or virtual visits of some sites.

The assessment plan shows what is to be on site in person and where and how technology is to be used for each assessment activity.

The assessment Report 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 TAAs?

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. We have adopted standard practices recommended for the mitigation of risks to video conferences and have never experienced a security breach. Our video protocols include:

    (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.

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.

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

HDAA's information management systems are maintained wholly on Australian based cloud servers. HDAA's Client Gateway is launched for each assessment for a limited time for the purpose of sharing of evidence documentation prior to and during assessments between the client organisation and the assessor team.

14.   How do we ensure people can use the relevant technology?

During the planning of the assessment our program team works with you to identify what types of technology the service use, how to use the particular systems HDAA 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.

Services can share this FAQ with staff or others who will be involved in the assessment via TAA.

15.   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).

Post-assessment responses from organisations and assessors have been 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.

16.   Do Technology Assisted Assessment work well?

Not only do TAA's reduce direct and indirect costs, it can results in a greater level of satisfaction for service providers and assessors when compared to on-site only methods of assessment, as demonstrated by feedback on our website from clients we have worked this way with.

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…. We look forward to working with you again"*.