



## Assessor Information and Guide

PL 010-03

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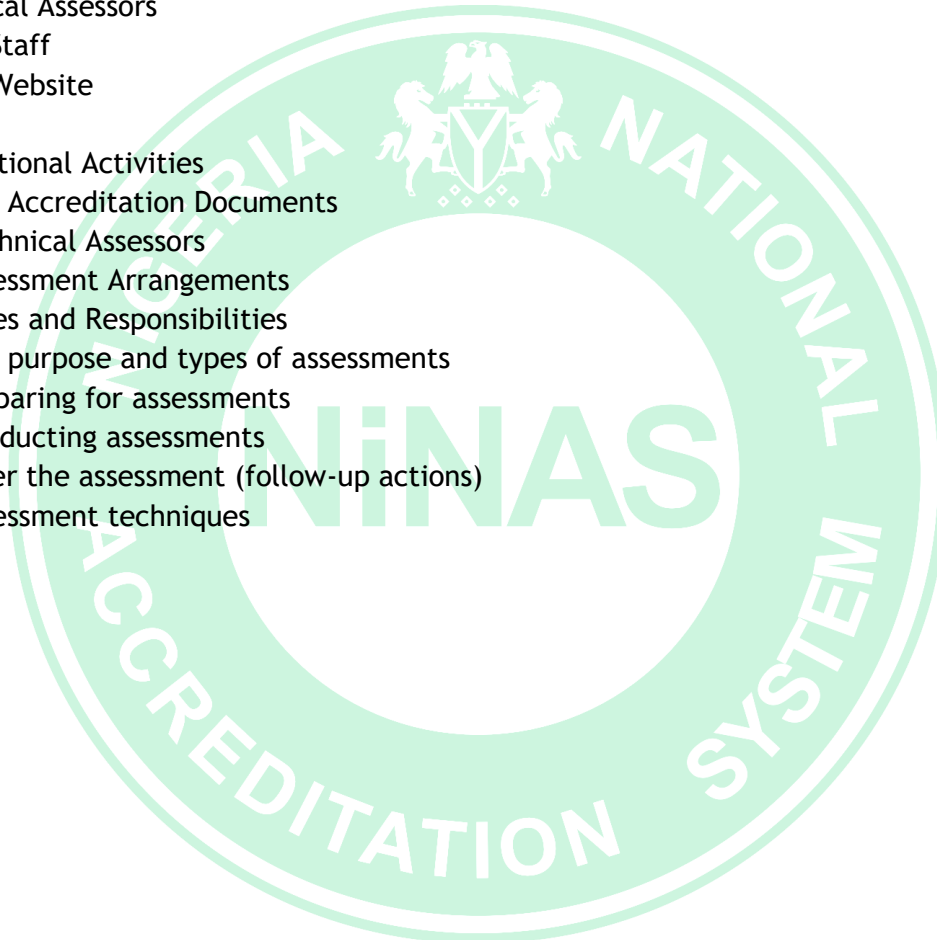
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### 1. Introduction to the Assessor Tool Kit (ATK)

The Assessor Tool Kit (ATK) has been developed for assessors (both Team Leaders and Technical Assessors) of the Nigeria National Accreditation Service (NiNAS). It is designed to provide information for Technical Assessors (as well as prospective technical assessors) involved in NiNAS' accreditation activities and programmes for laboratories (testing, medical testing & calibration), inspection bodies, verification and validation bodies, certification bodies, reference material producers and proficiency testing providers.

The Assessor Tool Kit is designed to:

- provide you with background information about NiNAS and its activities;
- provide you with information to assist you with the preparation for assessments and your role when participating in them; and
- present a detailed section covering assessment techniques that should guide you when conducting NiNAS assessments.

The ATK serves as both a training tool and a source of information. It should be used in conjunction with the attendance to training programmes designed for prospective NiNAS assessors.

### 2 About NiNAS

The Nigeria National Accreditation System (NiNAS) is the sole national accreditation body of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, formally recognised by the Federal Government and registered with the Corporate Affairs Commission (CAC). NiNAS is mandated to accredit Conformity Assessment Bodies (CABs) including testing, medical testing and calibration laboratories, inspection bodies, verification and validation and certification bodies in accordance with applicable ISO/IEC standards and international guidelines.

NiNAS accreditation provides authoritative assurance of the technical competence, impartiality, and consistency of accredited CABs in the delivery of conformity assessment services. This assurance enhances regulatory and market confidence and eliminates the need for repetitive testing, inspection, and certification of goods and services supplied by accredited organisations.

NiNAS is a signatory to Multilateral Recognition Arrangements (MRAs) under key international and regional accreditation organisations, including AFRAC, ILAC, and IAF. Through these MRAs, conformity assessment results issued by NiNAS-accredited bodies are internationally recognised, supporting trade facilitation and reducing technical barriers to trade.

As Nigeria's national accreditation authority, NiNAS continues to strengthen its international standing and is actively progressing towards participation within a global accreditation

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# Nigeria National Accreditation System

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framework, reinforcing global confidence in Nigerian-accredited conformity assessment results and supporting the country's integration into the global quality infrastructure.

Rewriting the Timeline of Success

While International experts projected a 15-20 year journey to reach this pinnacle of global trust, NiNAS achieved it in just seven years. Announced at the AFRAC General Assembly in September 2025, this rapid ascent stands as a testament to visionary leadership and an unwavering commitment to Nigerian excellence.



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### Structure of NiNAS

The organizational structure of NiNAS is as shown in the diagram below.

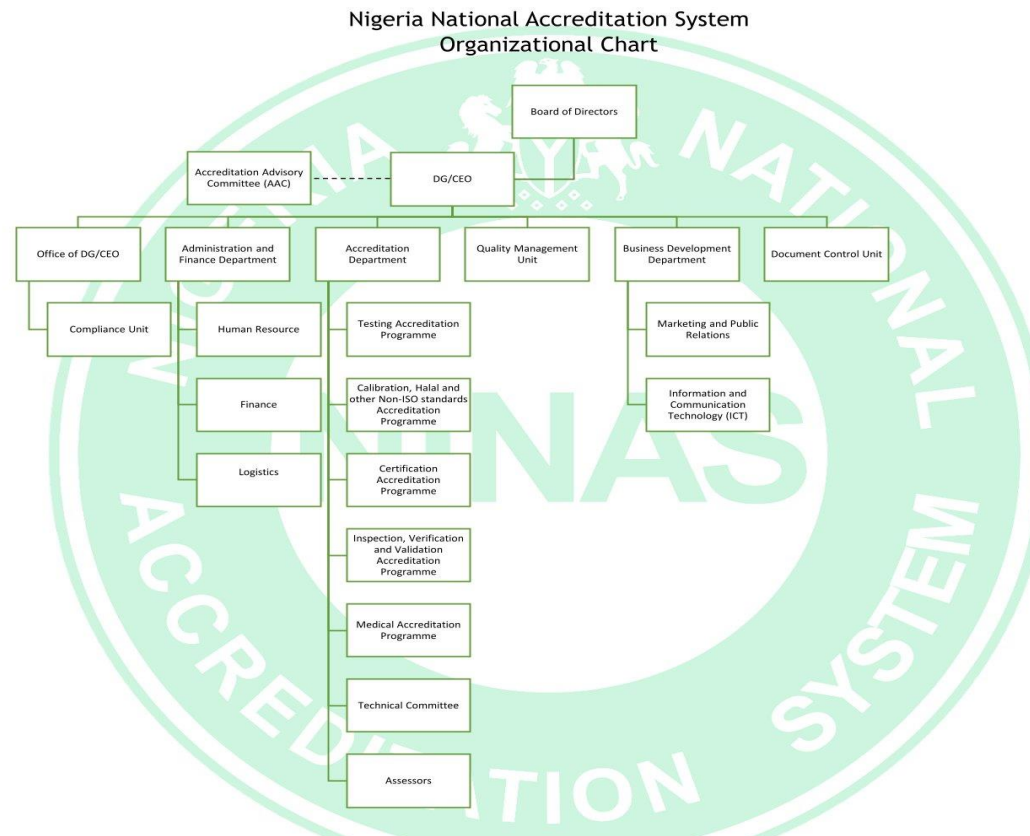


Figure 1: NiNAS Organisational Structure

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Website: [www.ninas.ng](http://www.ninas.ng)  
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Tel: +234 806 297 6149



### NiNAS Board

The NiNAS Governance Structure includes several committees comprising of a broad range of Nigerian stakeholders to ensure that NiNAS operated in a fair and unbiased manner assuring transparency and integrity. The structure which meets international requirements because of the balance of stakeholder involvement comprises of a Board of Directors and an Accreditation Advisory Committee.

The Board of Directors (BOD) was created by the legal incorporation of NiNAS by the Corporate Affairs Commission of Nigeria, under the Companies and Allied Matters Act1, 1990 Part C in October 2015 and a later re-incorporation in November, 2019. Its role is to oversee the organization is governed by the provisions contained in the Constitution. In addition, the BOD oversees Strategic Policy and help provide advice and direction to NiNAS, ensure that the organization remains in legal and financial compliance, and to oversee Implementation of Strategic Plans, including the performance evaluation of Executive. The Accreditation Advisory Committee is there to ensure impartiality and fairness in the operation of the accreditation programs, assisting in such things as accreditation decision making.

Reporting to the CEO is the Director of Accreditation, and other staff who are responsible for the overall management of the accreditation operations. In addition, there are a number of contract assessors that report to the Director of Accreditation. Assessment teams are made of up these assessors. Technical experts are added to the assessment teams as needed to ensure assessment teams have the appropriate competencies for the evaluations at hand.

### Accreditation Advisory Committee (AAC)

The **Accreditation Advisory Committee (AAC)** of Nigerian National Accreditation System (NiNAS) is a key governance and advisory structure established to safeguard the integrity, impartiality, and credibility of Nigeria's national accreditation system.

The AAC provides high-level policy guidance and technical advice to NiNAS in accordance with the requirements of International Organization for Standardization / International Electrotechnical Commission ISO/IEC 17011, ensuring the effective involvement of interested parties in accreditation activities.

The AAC acts strictly in an advisory capacity and makes recommendations to the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of NiNAS on matters relating on Accreditation policy development and review, Generic accreditation principles and operational frameworks, Safeguarding impartiality and independence, Approval of accreditation policy documents, Technical inputs to national, regional, and international accreditation initiatives, Contribution to work items of accreditation cooperation forums.

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### Technical Committees (TCs)

The Technical Committees (TCs) of the Nigerian National Accreditation System (NiNAS) are fundamental components established to provide specialized technical advice and safeguard the integrity of the national accreditation system in accordance with ISO/IEC 17011. Operating across all assessment schemes, including testing, calibration, and certification, these committees act in an advisory capacity to the Program Managers and the CEO to ensure the technical relevance of accreditation activities. They guide technical policy and provide critical support in matters such as the review of technical guidance documents, the resolution of inconsistent practices, and the provision of specialized input to national and international accreditation forums. By leveraging a diverse pool of experts and regulators, the TCs ensure that NiNAS maintains international competence while strictly safeguarding impartiality. These committees are responsible for evaluating technical aspects of ISO standards application, reviewing the impact of international documentation, and assisting in the ongoing improvement of conformity assessment activities within Nigeria. Through consensus-based recommendations on agenda items such as new methods and revised standards, the TCs play a vital role in maintaining the credibility and transparency of the accreditation process.

### Technical Assessors

NiNAS maintains a pool of technical assessors for each of the accreditation areas. Technical assessors are selected on the basis of educational qualifications, training, competence, technical knowledge and expertise. NiNAS has a procedure on the training of prospective lead assessors and technical assessors.

### NiNAS Staff

The staff strength of NiNAS is eight (25). The head office of NiNAS is located in House A07, Plot 32, Emerald Flower Estate, Lokogoma District, FCT - Abuja while the **Director General's Office is located at 4th floor, Churchgate Plaza, Plot 473 Constitution Avenue, Central Business District, Abuja.**

### About NiNAS Website ([www.ninas.ng](http://www.ninas.ng))

NiNAS maintains a strong presence on the World Wide Web through its website. The website is a major tool for communication with the conformity assessment bodies, assessors, regulatory agencies and the public. A section of the website contains useful resources for technical assessors. Assessors are advised to check this section regularly for updates on assessment activities and processes.

The website is updated regularly to meet the needs and expectations of CABs and assessors.

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### International Activities

NiNAS performs its accreditation activities in line with international best practices and the requirements of the International Standard ISO/IEC 17011:2017. It plays an active role in the activities of international accreditation cooperations through memberships and attendance to meetings.

NiNAS is:

- an MRA and MLA signatory of the International Laboratory Accreditation Cooperation (ILAC) and International Accreditation Forum (IAF)
- Full Member of the African Accreditation Cooperation (AFRAC);
- Affiliate Member of the International Halal Accreditation Cooperation (IHAF).

### The International Standard ISO/IEC 17011:2017

The international basis for signing the MRA (Mutual Recognition Arrangement) is the fulfillment of the requirements of the document ISO/IEC 17011 *Conformity assessment - General requirements for accreditation bodies accrediting conformity assessment bodies*. The accreditation activities of a participating accreditation body are evaluated against the principles outlined in ISO/IEC 17011 through peer evaluation. A team of trained evaluators from accreditation bodies within the MRA group perform the evaluations. The evaluation team reviews the administrative arrangements in place in the accreditation body, as well as the conduct of accreditation activities, including witnessing a selection of assessments and surveillance visits

NiNAS assessors involved in evaluation are given guidance, training and information about what to expect and the members of the evaluation team.

### 3. NiNAS Accreditation Documents

The criteria for accreditation of a conformity assessment body are articulated in various international and NiNAS documents like standards, policies, procedures and guidance. Criteria documents also include those issued by ILAC and IAF now Global Accreditation Cooperation Incorporated.

#### About NiNAS Accreditation

NiNAS accredits conformity assessment bodies to various International Standards. Accreditation programmes currently undertaken by NiNAS include:

- Testing and calibration laboratories (ISO/IEC 17025)
- Medical testing laboratories (ISO 15189)

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- Inspection bodies (ISO/IEC 17020)
- Management system certification bodies (ISO/IEC 17021-1)
- Personnel certification bodies (ISO/IEC 17024)
- Product certification (ISO/IEC 17065)
- Verification and Validation (ISO/IEC 17029)
- Proficiency Testing (ISO/IEC 17043)
- Reference Materials Producers (ISO 17034)

### 4. Technical Assessors

NiNAS maintains a pool of assessors for each of the accreditation activities it performs. Technical experts who have the professional and personal qualities are identified and made to undergo the requisite qualifying training towards qualifying as assessors. These prospective assessors must complete the mandatory four-phased training programme in order to qualify to take part in assessments.

Technical assessors are drawn from both the public and private sector organisations like:

- Academic institutions;
- Research establishments;
- Government department laboratories and inspection services;
- Regulatory agencies;
- Industrial laboratories and inspection services;
- Private laboratories and inspection services.

Prospective assessors are invited based on their:

- Professional expertise and experience;
- Knowledge of testing, calibration and measurement or inspection;
- Academic qualifications;
- Analytical approach;
- Ability to work as a member of a team;
- Communication skills; and
- Commitment to the accreditation process.

### Training Programme for Technical Assessors

In order to achieve an effective training programme, NiNAS has established criteria in its job description for qualifying each type of assessor. In general, NiNAS:

- Has designed a training process outlined in Procedure 2;
- Formally evaluates candidates after the finalization of the training process;

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- Formally classifies/qualifies assessors according to their position in the assessment team (i.e. Team Leader, Technical Assessor or Technical Expert), and the type of conformity assessment activity they are qualified to assess (e.g. testing, calibration, inspection etc.), and if applicable the technical area they will assess (e.g. food chemistry, mechanical testing, elevators etc.);
- Organizes periodic activities to update and harmonise assessors' skills; and
- Establishes criteria to monitor assessors (including, on-site monitoring).

The training programme for prospective NiNAS assessors are stipulated in Procedure 2 NiNAS *Personnel Training Requirements for Accreditation Staff, Assessors and Technical Experts*. All potential assessors are required to undergo appropriate internal and external training tailored to their background, experience and qualifications. These training courses will aim to familiarize the assessors with the accreditation criteria to be used, assessment techniques and the human aspects of assessment. The course provider may be NiNAS or a competent external trainer.

The content and structure of the courses for the various conformity assessment activities will follow as close as possible the requirements of ILAC and/or IAF documents.

At the end of the training course, successful participants shall be familiar with the specific requirements of the ISO standards or other requirements used by NiNAS, as well as understand how to apply these requirements to the specific type of conformity assessment activity that they are overseeing. In particular, they should have gained sufficient knowledge and experience from the course to enable them identify, record and classify non-conformities, and to develop effective information gathering techniques and interpersonal skills for use during assessment.

To qualify as a Team Leader (Lead Assessor), an individual must have participated in at least five assessments (2) assessments - observing a team leader in two (2) assessments and leading an assessment team under the supervision of a team leader in the other three (3).

### Conflicts of Interest

Potential conflicts of interests must be identified and brought to the knowledge of NiNAS by team leaders and technical assessors. Conflict of interest forms (and confidentiality forms) are completed by assessors invited to be on an assessment team. This is an opportunity for an assessor to declare any potential conflict of interest in an applicant CAB. Examples of conflicts of interest include:

- Company alliances and commercial interests in the facility to be assessed;
- Commercial arrangements, e.g. client/supplier relations;
- Intellectual property considerations;
- Consultancy arrangements (current and/or past); and

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- Close personal relationships (family and/or friends).

When assembling an assessment team, the Director of Accreditation carefully considers each suitable technical assessor available for the assessment. However, we are not aware of links you may have with the facility or other assessment team members, hence the need to make a declaration of potential conflicts of interest.

### Gifts and Meals

Assessors are to make arrangements for their meals during an assessment in line with the provisions of NiNAS policies. Under no circumstances should an assessor accept any gifts from facilities being assessed.

### Confidentiality

Assessment team members are in a position of privilege with respect to information about the facility under assessment. Confidentiality is essential and all assessors are expected to sign a declaration of confidentiality prior to participating in a NiNAS assessment. They are also expected to maintain strict confidentiality regarding all aspects of the facility's operations.

Information to keep confidential includes:

- All assessment arrangements including the name of the facility to be assessed and other technical assessors involved;
- Paperwork about the assessment, including briefing notes and reports;
- Any recommendations or discussions arising from the assessment; and
- Any information about the facility and its operations obtained during the course of an assessment that would otherwise not normally be available to you.

Breaches of confidentiality are viewed very seriously by NiNAS, and as a minimum will jeopardize an assessor's participation in any future assessment activity.

### Equity and Diversity Policy

NiNAS is committed to creating an environment that is free from discrimination and any form of harassment, including sexual harassment and workplace bullying. NiNAS is opposed to all kinds of discriminatory or harassing behaviours such as gestures, language and the display of materials that may offend, humiliate or intimidate another person.

## 5. Assessment Arrangements

NiNAS covers all reasonable costs associated with the conduct of assessment activities including accommodation and meals, and travels in line with relevant administrative and financial

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policies. NiNAS provides or arranges all transport involving flying. NiNAS pays a reasonable amount to cover the cost of accommodation, meals and other expenditure that an assessor may incur during an assessment. Assessors are responsible for their own hotel, local transport and meal arrangements.

### 6. Roles and Responsibilities of the Assessment Team

#### Programme Manager

Prior to the assessment, the Programme Manager is responsible for:

- Selecting the assessment team;
- Liaising with team leader, technical assessors and facility staff on activities to be witnessed as part of the visit;
- Clarifying potential conflicts of interest regarding assessor selection;
- Arrangement and confirmation of assessment logistics including date, time and duration;
- Providing assessors with background briefing, checklists, relevant system documentation and any other information as appropriate.

#### Roles and Responsibilities of the Team Leader (Lead Assessor)

Prior to the assessment, the team leader is responsible for:

- Preparing assessment plan;
- Conducting the document review.

At the assessment the team leader:

- Facilitates the team briefing, opening meeting, final team meeting and closing meeting;
- Coordinates the evaluation of technical competence and examination of the quality system;
- Examines the facility's quality systems to ensure that Management System Requirements and Resource Requirements are satisfied;
- Follows up on issues raised at previous assessments (where appropriate);
- Provides information and answers to questions regarding NiNAS policies and procedures;
- Supports and is available to assist the technical assessors;
- Prepares the report on assessment; and
- Presents the assessment team's findings to the facility staff at the closing meeting.

After the assessment, the lead assessor:

- Evaluates a facility's response to non-conformities.

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### Roles and Responsibilities of the Technical Assessor

Prior to the assessment:

- Advises the Programme Manager on any potential conflicts of interest; and
- Maintains confidentiality.

At assessments:

- Reviews the technical criteria;
- Collects objective evidence;
- Witnesses the performance of test, calibration etc.;
- Provides technical advice to the lead assessor.

After assessment:

- Maintains confidentiality;
- Provides the lead assessor with advice on follow up actions.

## 7. The Purpose and Types of Assessment

### Purpose

The purpose of an accreditation assessment is to:

- Evaluate a facility's documented management system to ensure compliance with the relevant requirements and criteria for accreditation;
- Evaluate and examine the technical competence of a facility to perform the tests and/or other services covered by the scope of accreditation;
- Seek confirmation that the activities being performed by the facility conform to those documented in the management system and other documentation.

The assessment is conducted to establish whether an applicant or accredited facility satisfies NiNAS' criteria for accreditation. It also serves to identify any requirements or criteria that are not satisfied such that the facility's management can take action to achieve compliance. This non-fulfillment of requirement is known as non-conformity or NC.

It is the role of lead assessor to provide guidance to technical assessors on the appropriateness of their conduct.

### Types of Assessment:

NiNAS may conduct the following types of assessments:

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- Pre-assessment (also known as advisory assessment) - an optional assessment visit normally conducted by the lead assessor and generally takes one day. The main purpose of the assessment is to review the applicant's quality systems and procedures in a general way with the management of the CAB. The lead assessor will complete a pre-assessment visit report to advise NiNAS on the readiness of an applicant facility for initial accreditation;
- Initial assessment - first on-site assessment of an applicant's facility by a lead assessor and one or more technical assessors.
- Surveillance visit - a scheduled surveillance visit to assess an accredited facility's continued compliance with management system requirements of the applicable standard;
- Reassessment - a scheduled surveillance visit by the lead assessor and one or more technical assessors to assess the facility for the technical requirements of the standard;

### 8. Preparing for assessments

#### The assessment team

The assessment team consists of at least a lead assessor and one or more technical assessors. A technical expert may be added to the team as the situation demands. The number of technical assessors will depend on the size of the facility being assessed and/or the scope of the facility's activities.

The programme manager is responsible for selecting the assessment team, and arranging and confirming assessment details.

The lead assessor is responsible for conducting document review, opening and closing meetings.

Technical assessors for each assessment are selected on the basis of:

- Technical expertise;
- The range of tests, inspections and/or other conformity assessment activities performed by the facility;
- The technical assessors background;
- The technical assessors experience;
- Avoidance of conflicts of interest;
- No commercial relationships;
- Previous employment of the technical assessor;

#### Document Review

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The lead assessor and the technical assessor conducts a document review in preparation for the assessment. This generally involves a thorough review of the facility's quality manual and relevant documents relating to the management system. The purpose of the document review is to confirm that the policies and procedures, documented by the facility, meet NiNAS accreditation criteria. It also provides the lead assessor with both an understanding of the facility's operation and an opportunity to identify any specific areas that will need review during the on-site assessment.

### Assessor Tool Kit

Once the technical assessor has accepted the assignment, they will receive a tool kit containing the facilities quality manual, procedures, completed application form, scope of accreditation and other relevant documentation.

### Things to Do Before an Assessment Visit

It is advisable to do the following before an assessment visit:

- Review the tool kit and fill out all necessary forms;
- Refresh your knowledge of relevant standards or test methods;
- Review the applicable sections of this document;
- Re-familiarise yourself with NiNAS' accreditation criteria;
- Review the scope of accreditation;
- Decide the tests, calibrations or inspections to be witnessed; and
- Undertake any other preparation that may be required.

### Cultural Issues

Sometimes you may be invited to participate in an assessment where cultural differences can be an issue, e.g.:

- Assessment in a foreign country;
- Assessments where staff are from another culture; and
- Assessments where the parent controlling company is based overseas.

In this situation, the lead assessor will provide you with advice on local manners and etiquette. Be sensitive to and respectful of the way of doing things especially:

- Introduction formalities;
- Title/name addressing protocol;
- Senior/subordinate staff relations;
- Dress code - business and casual;

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- Religious observances; and
- Working hours.

### 9. Conducting Assessments

Although each assessment is different, the overall flow of assessments follow a consistent pattern involving five sequential phases namely:

- i. Team briefing
- ii. Opening meeting
- iii. Examination of the quality management system and evaluation of the technical competence of the facility
- iv. Final team meeting
- v. Closing meeting

#### Team briefing

Before the assessment the lead assessor will normally brief the team either on the morning of the assessment or during the evening of the day before.

#### Purpose

- Introducing the team members to one another;
- Resolving any remaining queries among the technical assessors;
- Review of the assessment time table and allocation of tasks to each assessment team member; and
- Generating a spirit of teamwork within the group.

#### Opening meeting

The team meets with the relevant facility staff in an opening meeting led by the lead assessor. The purpose of this meeting is to explain the assessment process and ensure that all the arrangements for the assessment are satisfactorily in place.

During this meeting, the lead assessor will:

- Introduce the assessment team to the facility staff;
- Explain the purpose and scope of assessment;
- Outline the sequence and time table for the assessment including lunch and tea breaks;
- Outline the assessment approach;
- Reconfirm the existing scope of accreditation;
- Clarifies variations requested;

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- Confirm appropriate arrangements have been made for witnessing of tests/calibrations/inspection;
- Explain the classification of assessment findings;
- Assures those present of the confidentiality of the assessment;
- Answer any questions from the organisation's representatives about the assessment.

Once the opening meeting is concluded, the assessment can begin in accordance with the agreed assessment plan. Depending on the size of the facility, the range of tests/calibrations/inspections being performed, the experience of the technical assessors and the size of the assessment team, the lead assessor and technical assessor(s) will usually work independently for some period.

Typically, the lead assessor will review the management system documentation, while the technical assessor will commence the examination of technical operations.

### Evaluation of Technical Competence/Examination of the Quality System

The essential purpose of this on-site assessment is to establish that activities within the scope of the accreditation are being competently conducted at a technical level, and in accordance with the documented quality system. Throughout the on-site assessment process, it is important for the members of the team to limit their activities to work covered by the scope of facility's accreditation, and the criteria stipulated in NiNAS accreditation procedures/policies.

For each function or activity, the assessment team examines all the important features, and audits:

- Relevant (and up-to-date) documentation;
- Appropriateness of methods and procedures;
- Suitability of equipment, machinery and instruments (including their calibration status);
- Metrological traceability;
- Suitability of the environment and supporting services;
- Adequacy of personnel (number, training, skills, etc.);
- Monitoring of processes/quality control measures;
- Handling and identification of samples, specimens or test items; and
- Recording and reporting of results.

### Technical Criteria Audit

Where appropriate, the following criteria are examined by the technical assessor under the guidance of the lead assessor during an on-site assessment:

- a) Staff training and competence;

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- b) Testing/calibration/inspection environment;
- c) Management of equipment;
- d) Calibration and measurement traceability;
- e) Reference materials and metrological traceability;
- f) In-house calibration and performance checks;
- g) Method documentation and validation;
- h) Measurement uncertainty;
- i) Document control of methods;
- j) Sampling and handling of test/calibration/inspection items (or samples);
- k) Monitoring the validity and reliability of test results; and
- l) Records and reports (and records traceability).

### Management System Criteria Audit

The team leader (leader assessor) examines the adherence of the facility's management system to its own procedures. Sometimes the lead assessor may ask the technical assessor to review some aspects of the management system and records at a technical level.

The following are some of the specific issues specifically examined by the lead assessor:

- a) Organisational and management structures;
- b) Responsibilities, authorities, competence requirements and interrelationship of personnel;
- c) Requests, tenders and contracts;
- d) Externally provided products and services;
- e) Internal audits;
- f) Management reviews;
- g) Actions to address risks and opportunities;
- h) Complaints, corrective actions and non-conforming work;
- i) Control of data and information management;
- j) Training and competence records;
- k) Control of documents; and
- l) equipment.

### Clarifying Anomalies

Inevitably, the process of gathering information during the assessment will uncover events or activities which seem at variance with the management system, the designated work instruction or test/calibration method, or your expectations.

### Final Team Meeting

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After the examination of technical and management criteria is complete, the assessment team meets for the final Team Meeting. This meeting is an opportunity for the lead assessor to collate the findings of the assessment team into an interim report for presentation to the representatives of the facility being assessed at the Closing Meeting.

In this relatively short meeting, the following tasks must be accomplished:

- each member of the team must table the evidence they recorded in support of their observations during the assessment.
- the team must evaluate the significance of each of these observations and decide how to classify them.
- the team must review all other assessment findings to ensure that the facility meets NiNAS' accreditation criteria.

### Assessment Report

The lead assessor prepares an assessment report of the activities and findings for presentation to NiNAS. This report which is prepared after the team has left the site of the assessment will also be made available to the management of the facility being assessed.

### Classification of Non-conformities

One aspect of the assessment of a CAB is to ensure the management system is in conformance with the standard and that staff members are following the procedures. However, the key aspect of the assessment is the determination of competence and validity of technical operations. This assessment process requires the professional judgment of the technical assessors and/or experts. Where it is considered that aspects of technical activities are not in compliance with accreditation requirements that are based on the applicable standard(s) and/or regulation(s), one or more non-conformities will need to be raised either as minor or major NCs.

For accredited CABs there is another type of non-conformity to be considered. The AB will have rules and requirements that its accredited CABs follow, such as claims of accreditation status or use of the accreditation mark. When these rules are violated, the AB will also raise a non-conformity.

Thus for accreditation, the nature of a non-conformity may include:

- ❖ documentation not conforming with the requirements of accreditation criteria
- ❖ staff not following documented procedures
- ❖ operational procedures lacking technical validity
- ❖ a breakdown in the operation of the CAB
- ❖ the CAB not conforming to the rules of the AB.

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It is the responsibility of the AB to decide which non-conformities are so serious as to require immediate suspension of accreditation, which are serious enough to require prompt attention with the presentation of objective evidence to the AB, and which are minor and may be corrected by the next assessment. The AB will need to take into account the nature of those non-conformities in establishing its criteria for grading non-conformities.

Accreditation provides assurance to the customers of CABs that their management systems, operations and technical activities are competent and valid (based on compliance with requirements). Therefore the most serious non-conformities are:

- ✓ those related to technical activities suggesting incompetence or invalid practices;
- ✓ management non-conformities that jeopardize the whole quality management system; and
- ✓ in the case of medical laboratories, those that directly impact examination results and therefore pose an immediate threat to patient safety.

### Closing Meeting

Following the final team meeting, the assessment team and relevant facility staff go in for a Closing Meeting. The purpose of this meeting is to present a summary of the findings of the assessment team to the representatives of the facility and to allow discussion of the findings. The lead assessor conducts the Closing Meeting.

The sequence of the Closing Meeting is generally as follows:

- restate the purpose and scope of accreditation;
- re-affirmation of confidentiality;
- reporting sequence;
- presentation of summary;
- presentation of detailed non-conformance(s);
- conclusion with the effectiveness the organisation's management system; and
- explanation of root cause analysis.

### After the Assessment (follow-up action)

#### Corrective Action, CA

It is important that a facility takes immediate action to rectify the non-conformities. This corrective action or CA, is concerned with finding the cause (or causes) of the problem and taking appropriate action to ensure the problem will not occur again.

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Corrective action involves:

- fixing the initial problem and reviewing all work to determine what other work may have been affected;
- investigation to identify the real cause(s) of the problem(s);
- deciding what actions must be taken to eliminate the cause;
- taking the action and making whatever changes are needed in the facility's quality system and technical document; and
- continued monitoring to ensure that the action is taken and that it is effective.

### Verification of Corrective Action

Before can be granted (or continued), NiNAS needs to be satisfied that the non-conformities identified during the assessment have been effectively corrected. The nature and magnitude of the non-conformity determine the type of verification activity needed.

In the simplest case, documented evidence of the action taken may satisfy NiNAS criteria. In a serious situation, a follow-up visit may be required prior to the next surveillance visit (where applicable).

The lead assessor involved in the original assessment is directly involved in the review of the corrective action taken by the facility. Where appropriate, the lead assessor will seek advice (or confirmation of a satisfactory response) from the technical assessor involved in the assessment.

### 11. Assessment Techniques

The main objective of an assessment is to gather evidence about the facility's compliance (or otherwise) with NiNAS accreditation criteria.

During the course of the assessment, the assessment team must:

- all the information it needs about the facility;
- be constantly evaluating its findings against the facility's stated management system and operating procedures; and
- identify, through objective evidence, any breakdown in the management system or departures from operating procedures.

Doing all of this in the time available, the assessment team needs to gather the information as efficiently and effectively as possible. The assessment team must be thorough and objective in the way it gathers this information and conclusions must be based on objective evidence.



From your own professional background and experience as a technical assessor, you will know the critical aspects of procedures, and should pay special attention to these aspects in your examination of the facility.

### Effective Information Gathering

In every assessment situation there are several means of gathering information effectively including:

- asking questions;
- listening to the answers;
- observing activities;
- examining facilities; and
- reviewing records.

Each of these techniques will be used every assessment and will sometimes be used simultaneously. All are important tools for the assessment team in the quest for gathering information about the facility thoroughly, effectively and efficiently.

### Questioning

There is a range of techniques to be used when asking questions in order to obtain information.

- ✓ Open questions (help produce answers of substance, gather information effectively and efficiently and keep the dialogue flowing);
- ✓ Hypothetical questions;
- ✓ Clarifying questions;
- ✓ Talk through the topic;
- ✓ Confirm answers to questions;
- ✓ Periodically summarise;
- ✓ Vary your pattern;
- ✓ Show and tell;
- ✓ Use your quiet time effectively;

### Questions to Avoid:

- Self-answering questions;
- Trick questions;
- Ambiguous questions;
- Compound questions;
- Irrelevant questions;
- Questions directed to the wrong person;

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### Observing Activities

You will obtain a great of information from the questions you ask and the answers you receive. However, what is documented in the procedures or told to the assessment team may not be occurring in practice. This may be because:

- The answers given to the assessment may not be the truth. Deliberate deception happens occasionally, but not very often. Honest misunderstandings are far more common;
- There may be special variants of procedures which have not been documented in the manual and were not elicited during the discussions; and
- Unknown to the supervisors, staff may not be following the standard procedures through carelessness, ignorance or inadequacies in the system or the resources available to them.

In addition, there will be aspects of the implementation of the management system and the procedures which cannot be explored by discussion and can only be established by examination.

### Benefits of Observing Activities

Observing activities will help you to:

- see whether or not prescribed procedures are being followed;
- determine whether or not staff have the skills required to perform tasks;
- evaluate the effectiveness of the training and supervision provided;
- evaluate adequacy of resources available;
- detect defects in the equipment, for example, equipment instability; and
- confirm answers to questions asked earlier.

### What to Observe

#### Routine work

Observing the normal routine work of the facility is better than witnessing a special demonstration.

#### Special Demonstrations

Sometimes, the assessment team will want to witness work which is not a normal part of the daily routine. On these occasions, the facility will have to provide a special demonstration for the purpose. The facility should always be advised in advance of any requests of this nature.

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If a test or inspection is too lengthy to see from start to finish, it is acceptable to ask to see just the critical phases which are of special interest.

### Dealing with Tension

An assessment is a stressful experience for staff at every level in the organisation.

Tension during an assessment can lead to:

- ✓ defensive responses;
- ✓ reluctant communication;
- ✓ occasional aggression; and
- ✓ poor performance.

To reduce tension in an assessment situation:

- be human;
- put people at ease;
- project an appropriate image; and
- recognise your own tension.

### Maintaining a Professional Approach

It is important to maintain a professional approach throughout the assessment. Ensure your preparation is thorough and complete, and your appearance is appropriate and professional.

To project the right image, ensure you:

- are courteous and constructive;
- maintain an objective and unbiased approach;
- remain calm and self-controlled; and
- maintain a balanced perspective.

To maintain a professional approach, it is important that you stay on track during the assessment. To achieve this:

- avoid diversions, however interesting;
- follow your plan (as far as possible);
- manage your time; and
- keep control of your part of the assessment.

Throughout the assessment, ensure that you:

- are prepared to probe to find the information you need; and

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- are satisfied with the information you have obtained and your findings.

Note: An assessment is a fact-finding mission, not a fault-finding safari.

### Team Work

During an assessment, teamwork involves a common purpose the lead assessor and technical assessor(s). It involves a mutual understanding of team roles, and a willingness to surrender individuality to the team unit.

To work as a team:

- support one another;
- do not interrupt one another;
- do not undermine anyone in the team; and
- respect each technical assessor's approach.

In addition, be aware of the other team member's needs by allowing time for:

- ✓ everyone to collect their thoughts;
- ✓ clarifying questions; and
- ✓ technical support.

If you disagree with a comment or suggestion made by another technical assessor, or even the lead assessor:

- ascertain whether or not the issue is important enough to be raised;
- determine whether or not it can wait and be raised at another time;
- in consultation with the lead assessor, call a team meeting if necessary; and
- never have an argument with a fellow technical assessor or a lead assessor.

### Keeping the Assessment Flowing

It is important for all members of the assessment team to keep the assessment flowing. In order to achieve this:

- examine a systematic sequence of activities;
- avoid back-tracking unnecessarily;
- maintain an orderly flow of questions;
- avoid long unnecessary periods of silence; and
- project quiet confidence.

### When Things Seem Wrong

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# Nigeria National Accreditation System

House A07, Plot 32, Emerald Flower Estate, Lokogoma District, FCT - Abuja

## Assessor Information and Guide

PL 010-03

When you come across something that seems wrong during an assessment, it is important to clarify the situation.

To achieve this:

- be specific about the anomaly or inconsistency;
- challenge the specific issue, and not the person;
- avoid judgmental or dogmatic descriptions; and
- avoid absolutes (such as never, always, etc.).



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