



Testing Laboratories Accreditation Scheme (TLAS)

Background

The SADCAS Testing Laboratories Accreditation Scheme (TLAS) was established in October 2009. The TLAS is multi disciplinary accreditation scheme operated in accordance with ISO/IEC 17011: Conformity assessment – General requirements for accreditation bodies accrediting conformity assessment bodies.

The Need for Accreditation

All testing laboratories need to have sound business processes to enable them to deliver technically accurate test results to their clients. Accreditation which is the process of providing recognition to a conformity assessment body for its competence in performing specific tasks is the strategy for a testing laboratory to achieve this. For laboratories concerned with demonstrating competence underpinned by a quality system, the appropriate International Standard is ISO/IEC 17025 which specifies the requirements of testing laboratories. Throughout the world many countries now rely on accreditation as a means of independently evaluating laboratory competence. With the launches of the Southern African Development Community (SADC) Free Trade Areas in 2008, the Continental Free Trade Area (CFTA) in March 2018 and the Tripartite Free Trade Area in August 2018, accreditation is poised to play a key role in facilitating trade.

Accreditation of a testing laboratory in accordance with ISO/IEC 17025 provides a number of benefits:

- It is a means of demonstrating competence to clients both internal and external;
- It is a guarantee for reliable test results;
- It increases reliability of products;
- It reduces costs associated with repetitive testing and lost time is minimized;
- It is a global market requirement;
- It improves acceptance of goods internationally thus facilitates trade and economic growth.

Fields of Testing

The current fields of testing offered on the SADCAS TLAS are:

- Chemical;
- Microbiology;
- Biological;
- Construction/Civil Engineering;
- Electrical;
- Mechanical;
- Optics and Radiometry;
- Environmental;
- Non Destructive Testing (NDT).

The fields of testing are listed in SADCAS TG 03: Area of accreditation.

Accreditation Criteria

Testing laboratories seeking to be accredited on the SADCAS TLAS need to comply with the International Standard ISO/IEC 17025: General requirements for the competence of testing and calibration laboratories.

The Accreditation Process

A testing laboratory wishing to be accredited:

- Submits directly to SADCAS duly completed SADCAS F 43 (b): Application for accreditation of testing laboratory together with the laboratory quality manual, and duly completed SADCAS F 43 (f): Application for approval of personnel i.e. nominated representative and technical signatory in the case of testing laboratories and SADCAS F 44 : SADCAS accreditation agreement.
- Upon receipt, SADCAS undertakes a **completeness check** of the application documents.





- SADCAS provides the applicant with a detailed quotation based on the scope of application. If acceptable, the applicant signs and returns the duly signed quotation to SADCAS.
- SADCAS undertakes a **documentation review** of the applicant's quality manual and provides feedback to the applicant who, if there are non conformities, institutes corrective action. If the quality manual addresses all the requirements of the standard then the application proceeds to the assessment stage.
- **Pre-assessments** are optional but may be compulsory depending on the regulator's condition for acceptance where required. Pre-assessment is an on-site visit to check the readiness of applicant for accreditation.
- An **initial assessment** of the organization's competence is undertaken on-site and involves an opening meeting, assessment, witnessing of select technical activities and a closing meeting. Findings from the assessment are recorded as non conformities where the laboratory needs to institute corrective action.

Assessors

Assessors are experts from the public and private sectors as well as from technical institutions/associations in the SADC region who have been trained, qualified and registered as assessors by SADCAS. Assessors trained and qualified by other accreditation bodies and evaluated for competence can also undertake assessments on behalf of SADCAS. An assessment is undertaken by an assessment team consisting of a Team Lead and at least one Technical Assessor/Technical Expert with expertise in the scope of assessment. The assessment team makes **recommendations for accreditation**.

Accreditation Certificate

Accreditation decision is made by the Accreditation Approvals Committee based mainly on the information gathered during an assessment. The accreditation certificate is valid for 5 years and renewed subject to terms and conditions of the TLAS.

Periodic On-site Assessment and Re-assessment

In order to maintain accreditation **periodic assessments** are conducted on-site. The first periodic on-site assessment is undertaken not more than 12 months after accreditation thereafter annually throughout the accreditation cycle of 5 years. The intervals between periodic on-site visits can be extended depending on the risks associated but must not exceed two years.

Re-assessments are conducted at least 6 months prior to the end of the accreditation cycle of 5 years.

Appeals

Appeals from laboratories on an accreditation decision shall be in writing and shall be forwarded to the Chief Executive Officer within 3 months of the cause of appeal. Appeals are handled in accordance with SADCAS AP 08: Customer feedback handling procedure which maintains independency and impartiality.

Complaints

Complaints concerning SADCAS services, personnel and assessors/experts can be received by any member of staff who shall complete SADCAS F 85 and direct the complaint to the Quality Manager.

Accreditation Fees

SADCAS accreditation fees are contained in SADCAS AP 02: SADCAS service fees. The fees contained therein are estimates. Individual quotations are provided based on the fee estimates contained therein. SADCAS accreditation fees are reviewed annually.

Accreditation Documents

SADCAS accreditation documents are available from the SADCAS website: www.sadcas.org



For further information, please contact:

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