



Veterinary Laboratories Accreditation Scheme (VLAS)

Background

The SADCAS Veterinary Laboratories Accreditation Scheme (VLAS) was established in October 2009 as part of the Testing Laboratories Accreditation Scheme. VLAS is operated in accordance with ISO/IEC 17011: Conformity assessment – General requirements for accreditation bodies accrediting conformity assessment bodies.

The Need for Accreditation

Valid laboratory results are essential for diagnosis, surveillance, trade and customer confidence. Accurate results may be achieved by the use of good management practices, valid test and calibration methods, proper techniques, quality control, quality assurance, all working together within a sound quality system. Accreditation which is a process of providing recognition to a conformity assessment body for its competence in performing specific tasks, is a strategy for veterinary laboratories to achieve consistently accurate and reliable results. For veterinary laboratories, demonstrating competence underpinned by a quality system that addresses the requirements of the International Standard ISO/IEC 17025, and the applicable national and international regulations and guidelines such as the Office International des Epizooties (OIE), is important. Throughout the world many countries now rely on accreditation as a means of independently evaluating competence of veterinary laboratories.

With the launch of the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) Agreement, accreditation is poised to play a key role in facilitating trade enhancing the protection of consumers and the environment, and improve the competitiveness of SADC products and services in both the voluntary and regulatory areas.

Accreditation of Veterinary Laboratories 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 facilitates trade and economic growth.

Requirements for Accreditation

Accreditation is tied to competence and this is significant as it means much more than having and following documented procedures. Having competence also means that the laboratory:

- Has technically valid and validated test methods, procedures, and specifications that are documented in accordance with the requirements of the selected standard(s) and/or guidelines;
- Has adequate qualified personnel who understand the science behind the procedures;
- Has suitable and adequate equipment;
- Has adequate facilities and environmental control;
- Has procedures and specifications that ensure accurate and reliable results;
- Can foresee technical needs and problems;
- Can cope with and prevent technical problems that may arise;
- Can accurately estimate and control the uncertainty in testing; and
- Can demonstrate proficiency to conduct the test methods used.

Fields of Testing

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

- Microbiology
- Serology
- Virology
- Chemical
- Histology
- Cytology
- Toxicology
- Molecular Biology
- Pathology

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

Accreditation Criteria

Veterinary laboratories seeking to be accredited on the SADCAS VLAS need to comply with the International Standard ISO/IEC 17025: General





requirements for the competence of testing and calibration laboratories, Accreditation requirements, applicable national and international regulations and guidelines i.e. Office International des Epizooties (OIE) requirements.

The Accreditation Process

A Veterinary 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 nonconformities, institutes corrective action. If the quality manual addresses all the requirements of the standard then the applicant notifies SADCAS and 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 applicant's readiness of 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 Leader and at least one Technical Assessor with expertise in the scope of assessment. The assessment team makes **recommendations for accreditation**.

Accreditation Certificate

Accreditation decision is made by an independent team, 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 VLAS.

Periodic On-site Assessment and Re-assessment

In order to maintain accreditation **periodical on-site assessments** are conducted not more than 12 months after the date of accreditation thereafter annually or not more than 24 months from the date of the previous assessment for the duration of the accreditation cycle of 5 years.

Re-assessments are conducted at least 6 months before the end of the assessment 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.

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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