

FAQs – remote visits

1. Why are you making this change?

We want to make sure that the impact of the assessment process on applicants is proportionate, and we want to introduce some flexibility to take into account circumstances when the inspector feels a site visit is unnecessary to make a decision. HSE successfully uses remote inspections for some other aspects of its business and remote inspections were previously adopted by AALA during the Covid19 lockdown period. They were found to be effective and efficient.

2. Will the savings mean a reduction in the licence fee?

No, the fee will not be reduced. AALA is subsidised. The licence fee has remained unchanged since 2008, and has not kept pace with inflation. Any savings made by this change in policy are small and with increasing costs, will not significantly reduce the subsidy AALA receives.

3. Can you provide examples of what could trigger a site visit?

Things that could trigger a site visit include:

- **First time application**
- **Significant change since last application, e.g. use of a new and unfamiliar location, changes to key staff or staffing arrangements, a radical change to the type of activities being offered.**
- **A serious accident or justified complaint since last application**
- **Inspector requires information that cannot be obtained remotely**
- **Inspector has reason to doubt information provided, e.g. conflicting or unreliable accounts from different people interviewed during the process or inconsistencies in submitted documents.**
- **Information supplied, e.g. about operating or emergency procedures that are unusual, unfamiliar or unclear.**

4. Under what circumstances wouldn't you carry out a visit for a first applicant, and why if a visit was deemed of no material value for a first time applicant, would it offer value at the first renewal (assuming no changes are made to the application)?

First-time applicants cannot offer licensable activities until the licence is granted, so there may be nothing to observe. Some first-time applicants have no other (non-licensable) activities to observe as a comparison, and some have no activity centre. Occasionally it may not be a good use of inspector's time to travel to someone's home, or to an office for conversations that can be conducted online. In these circumstances a visit will take place when renewal comes around, once activities are up and running and venues confirmed.

5. Can you explain what "where appropriate" means, e.g. would high staff turnover be a consideration, or level of risk such as grade 4 white water or multi pitch versus single pitch climbing?

HSE has proposed that “remote inspections will be used where appropriate”. This means that remote inspections will not be used unless the inspector is confident that a decision can reliably be made without going onsite. Remote inspections may be appropriate in the following scenarios

- The provider has had a site visit recently for another reason, e.g. a complaint investigation or a licence variation.
- The inspector is familiar with the applicants provision and is satisfied that there have been no material changes since the last inspection.
- The centre is closed/no activities occurring and there is no added benefit to going onsite.

Ultimately it is for the inspector to decide whether a site visit is necessary to make a decision.

6. Will there be a maximum period of time between site visits?

No, there is no one size fits all programme of visits. Site visits will occur where necessary, but they will not be imposed where there is no value to the decision making process.