

Authorship

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1 Introduction

According to ISO/IEC 17025 [1] a laboratory shall have quality control procedures for monitoring the validity of tests and calibrations undertaken. This monitoring may include the participation in interlaboratory comparisons or proficiency testing programmes, but also other means e.g. the regular use of certified reference materials or replicate tests or calibrations using the same or different methods. By these means a laboratory can provide evidence of its competence to its clients and the accreditation body.

2 Scope

This policy sets out the requirements for and gives guidance to the accreditation bodies on the use of proficiency testing activities in the accreditation process and as a tool in the process of harmonization for multilateral and bilateral agreements [2,3,4,5].

3 Terminology

- 3.1 *Proficiency testing (PT)* is the determination of the calibration or testing performance of a laboratory or the testing performance of an inspection body by means of interlaboratory comparison.
- 3.2 *Interlaboratory comparison (ILC)* is the organization, performance and evaluation of calibrations/tests on the same or similar calibrations/tests items by two or more laboratories in accordance with predetermined conditions.

4 EA policy

- 4.1 Accreditation bodies seeking to join or to maintain the EA multilateral agreement or corresponding bilateral agreements need to demonstrate the technical competence of their accredited calibration and testing laboratories by appropriate means, preferably by satisfactory participation in PT activities where such activities are available (see Note 1). Where applicable, this holds as well for accredited inspection bodies with regard to their testing activities.

Note 1: It is recognized that there are particular areas where proficiency testing is just not practical. Proficiency testing activities are considered to be a powerful and effective tool to determine the performance of individual laboratories for specific tests or measurements and to monitor laboratories' continuing performance.

The accreditation bodies shall have a policy on such activities, taking into account the economic impact on laboratories. Good performance in PT activities shall especially be considered when fixing other surveillance measures, as specified in EA-3/09 [6].

If requested to participate in suitable PT activities the laboratory may select the appropriate PT programme or ILC in consultation with its accreditation body.

The recommended minimum amount of appropriate PT activities (see Note 2) per laboratory is:

- one activity prior to gaining accreditation (see Note 3);
- one activity relating to each major sub discipline of a laboratory's scope of accreditation (see Note 4) within the period between two subsequent assessments (e.g. four years) (see Note 5).

Note 2: Appropriate PT activities include any ILC or measurement audit which monitors the laboratory's performance, for example those conducted by national or regional accreditation bodies or co-operations, government, industry or commercial providers of formal PT schemes.

Note 3: National accreditation bodies should identify those areas in the accreditation scope which are suitable to demonstrate the competence of a laboratory for the main field of activities by PT prior to accreditation.

Note 4: Examples of major sub disciplines are given below:

- environmental analysis: soil (including solid waste, sludge, compost);
- environmental analysis: water (waste water, ground water, drinking water);
- environmental analysis: air (emission and immission);
- materials testing: chemical parameters;
- materials testing: physical quantities;
- materials testing: non destructive testing;
- microbiology.

Note 5: If there are significant changes to laboratory's staff or scope of accreditation, accreditation bodies may shorten that interval.

- 4.2 Accreditation bodies need to fully document their policies and procedures in relation to PT activities (see Note 6). In particular, they must be able to evaluate, through the accreditation process, that the participation in PT activities of laboratories accredited by them is effective and that corrective actions are carried out when necessary (see Note 7).

Note 6: Accreditation bodies should support the use of appropriate PT programmes which meet the essential recommendations of ISO/IEC Guide 43-1 [7] or ILAC-G13 [8], where applicable. For further information reference is made to EA-2/09 [9].

Note 7: Relevant guidance is given in ISO/IEC Guide 43-2 [10].

5 References

1	ISO/IEC 17025:1999	General Requirements for the Competence of Testing and Calibration Laboratories
2	EN45003:1995	Calibration and Testing Laboratory Accreditation Systems – General Requirements for Operation and Recognition (ISO/IEC Guide 58 :1993)
3	ILAC-P1:2001	ILAC Mutual Recognition Arrangement : Requirements for Evaluation of Accreditation Bodies
4	EA-2/07:1997	EAL Strategy to Achieve Comparability of results in Calibration and Testing
5	EA-3/04 :2001	Use of Proficiency Testing as a Tool for Accreditation in Testing
6	EA-3/09:1999	Surveillance and Reassessment of Accredited Organisations
7	ISO/IEC Guide 43-1:1997	Proficiency Testing by Interlaboratory Comparisons-Part 1 : Development and Operation of Proficiency Testing Schemes.
8	ILAC-G13:2000	Guidelines for the Requirements for the Competence of Providers of Proficiency Testing Schemes
9	EA-2/09: 2000	EA Policy on the Accreditation of Providers of Proficiency Testing Schemes
10	ISO/IEC Guide 43-2:1997	Proficiency Testing by Interlaboratory Comparisons