



General Accreditation Criteria

Proficiency Testing Policy

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Proficiency testing policy

Accredited and applicant facilities are required to participate in appropriate Proficiency Testing (PT) activities.

Note: Measurement audits are considered a form of PT activity.

Additional PT criteria supplementing this policy can be found in the relevant NATA Accreditation Criteria (NAC) packages applicable to the activities covered by a facility's scope of accreditation.

Additional criteria may not be available where standards or regulatory requirements currently prescribe PT participation.

Benefits of Proficiency Testing

PT serves to supplement existing procedures adopted by facilities to ensure the validity of results for activities for which they are accredited or seek accreditation.

The benefits of PT include, but are not limited to, the following:

- comparison of a facility's performance with that of other participating (peer) facilities;
- monitoring of a facility's long-term performance;
- improvement in the performance of tests/calibrations following investigation and identification of the cause(s) of unsatisfactory PT performance to prevent re-occurrence;
- contribution to a facility's overall risk management process;
- staff education, training and competence monitoring;
- evaluation of methods, including the establishment of method precision and accuracy;
- contributing to estimation of measurement uncertainty;
- confidence building with interested parties e.g. customers, accreditation bodies, regulators, specifiers.

Participation in Proficiency Testing

Facilities are encouraged to participate in as broad a range of PT activities as practicable, but at least once every two years (different frequencies may be stated in the various NAC packages) for each major area of test, measurement or related activity covered by the scope of accreditation, where such programs are available.

Participation in PT may also be required, as follows:

- prior to gaining accreditation with NATA;
- when requesting significant extensions or variations to the Scope of Accreditation.

Through consultation with its technical committees, NATA identifies the areas of activity where PT participation is required by accredited and applicant facilities.

NATA requires applicant and accredited facilities (including inspection bodies if relevant) to formulate PT participation plans covering the activities they offer (for each major area as noted above), unless participation is already covered by regulation or other specifications. These plans must be regularly reviewed to reflect any changes e.g. in the Scope of Accreditation, methodologies, instrumentations etc.

It is the responsibility of facilities to check the availability of appropriate PT programs which best match their activities and to select the programs in which to participate.

Facilities may also choose to participate in selected PT programs for the purposes of staff education and as a risk management tool.

Selection of Proficiency Testing programs

Facilities must consider the accreditation status of PT providers i.e. accredited to ISO/IEC 17043, and are advised to choose accredited providers wherever possible.

In cases where programs provided by accredited PT providers do not match the activities offered by a facility, programs provided by non-accredited providers may be considered. In such cases, where possible, the compliance of these providers with the requirements of ISO/IEC 17043 should be established.

Further assistance with the selection of PT programs is available from the *Selection of PT Providers – Checklist* included in the various NAC packages.

Facilities may also be offered the opportunity to participate in the Asia Pacific Laboratory Accreditation Cooperation (APLAC) proficiency testing programs from time to time. These programs are run to support the APLAC Mutual Recognition Arrangement (MRA).

Where formal PT programs are not available for any activities or do not provide sufficient coverage, facilities must investigate other means of assuring the quality and performance of the activities for which they seek or hold accreditation.

Review of Proficiency Testing participation and performance

The selection of PT programs, performance in these and any follow-up action taken in response to PT results are reviewed by NATA during on-site visits e.g. re-assessments and surveillance visits.

For specific programs e.g. as specified by regulators, or in other cases such as complaint investigation, NATA may review a facility's PT performance at the time reports are issued by PT providers. This review will include any associated follow-up action taken in response to results by the facility.

Proficiency Testing providers

To promote the availability of PT programs, NATA's technical committees may define particular features for identified PT needs which are publicised on the NATA website in the document *PT programs needed - requirements identified by NATA*.

Details of available PT providers and the programs they offer, together with the accreditation status of the PT providers, are available from the EPTIS database <http://www.eptis.org>.

Amendment Table

The table below provides a summary of changes made to the document with this issue.

Section or Clause	Amendment
Whole document	<p>This policy has been editorially updated and replaces the January 2018 version.</p> <p>The section on Confidentiality in the previous version has been removed as this information is already covered in the <i>NATA Procedures for accreditation</i>.</p> <p>The policy now also includes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• information on the benefits of proficiency testing which was previously included in the withdrawn document <i>Benefits of Proficiency Testing</i>.• reference and link to the EPTIS PT database.