

Policy on Proficiency Testing

PS1

1) Purpose

ISO/IEC 17025 Clause 5.9 "Assuring the quality of test and calibration results" requires laboratories to have quality control procedures for monitoring the validity of tests and calibrations undertaken. This monitoring may include the participation in inter-laboratory comparisons or proficiency testing programmes, but also other means including e.g. the regular use of certified reference materials or replicate tests or calibrations using the same or different methods. These methods provide a mechanism for the laboratory to demonstrate its competence to its clients and the accreditation body (Clause 4.1.2 of ISO/IEC 17025 refers).

ISO 15189 Clause 5.6.4 requires laboratories to participate in interlaboratory comparisons such as those organised by external quality assurance schemes.

Accordingly the Irish National Accreditation Board (INAB) considers the participation of laboratories in external proficiency testing / inter-laboratory comparisons an important mechanism for monitoring the integrity of test / calibration results. This Statement sets out the policy of the Irish National Accreditation Board with respect to participation in proficiency testing / inter-laboratory comparisons.

2) Policy

It is the policy of the Irish National Accreditation Board that all accredited laboratories participate in proficiency testing / inter-laboratory comparisons where such schemes are available and relevant to their scope of accreditation. The specific fields of accreditation for which participation in a proficiency testing/ inter-laboratory scheme are required are as follows:

- Metrology;
- Construction materials testing;
- Electrical testing;
- Optics and radiometry;
- Heat and temperature measurement;
- Non-destructive testing;
- Chemical testing;
- Biological testing;
- Acoustic and vibration measurement;
- Medical testing; and
- Mechanical testing

It is the policy of the Irish National Accreditation Board to accept all proficiency testing / inter-laboratory comparisons recognised by the signatories to the EA and ILAC Multilateral Agreements.

3) Terminology

- 3.1) *Proficiency testing* (PT) is the determination of the calibration or testing performance of a laboratory by means of inter-laboratory comparison.
- 3.2) *Inter Laboratory comparison* (ILC) is the organisation, performance and evaluation of calibrations/tests on the same or similar calibration / test items by two or more laboratories in accordance with predetermined conditions.

4) Statement

- 4.1) Accredited laboratories are required to participate and achieve satisfactory performance on an annual basis for each round in an appropriate proficiency testing scheme or inter-laboratory comparison where such schemes are available and relevant to their scope of accreditation. Accredited laboratories must participate in, at a minimum, at least one activity for each parameter within the laboratory's scope of accreditation, between periods of re-assessment.
- 4.2) Laboratories preparing for accreditation are required to participate and achieve satisfactory performance in a proficiency testing or inter-laboratory comparison where such schemes are available and relevant to their scope of accreditation before a recommendation for accreditation can be considered.
- 4.3) Where no appropriate proficiency testing or inter-laboratory comparison is available, the laboratory will be required to demonstrate the validity of its tests and calibrations by other means such as replicate tests or calibrations using the same or a different method.
- 4.4) The INAB assessment team will review at each surveillance visit the laboratory's performance in proficiency testing / inter-laboratory comparisons. Where no measurement audit is possible the INAB assessment team may allocate extra time for witnessing the laboratory carrying out measurements in order to give the same level of confidence.
- 4.5) Laboratories are required to have appropriate acceptance criteria and a procedure for investigating the cause of problems and for implementing corrective actions when these acceptance criteria are not met. A written record of these activities must be maintained. The laboratory must ensure that it does not claim accreditation for any tests that could be affected by the events that caused "out of specification" proficiency testing / inter-laboratory comparison results until it is satisfied that the investigation into the anomalous result has fully resolved the issue.

4.6) If at any time the laboratory's performance in proficiency testing / inter-laboratory comparisons in the opinion of INAB, casts doubt on the integrity of test results, INAB may suspend the relevant tests from the laboratory's scope of accreditation. The laboratory will be required to provide INAB with written evidence that the problem has been identified and satisfactorily rectified (which may include demonstrated satisfactory performance in subsequent proficiency testing / inter-laboratory comparisons) before re-instatement of accreditation can be considered.

Note:

Please refer to the INAB website (www.inab.ie) for a list of proficiency testing providers.

Laboratories may also refer to the EPTIS database for availability of proficiency testing schemes. EPTIS is the European Proficiency Testing Information System which is supported by the European co-operation for Accreditation (EA),EUROLAB and Eurachem and sponsored by the European Commission.

EPTIS Website: www.eptis.bam.de

Proficiency testing may also be used in many types of inspection. This policy statement should be read in this sense.

5) Contact

For further information about this statement please contact an INAB officer at **The Irish National Accreditation Board**.

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