




The Benefits of Proficiency Testing

Issued: August 2010 **Amended and reissued:** February 2012, March 2013, March 2016



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The Benefits of Proficiency Testing

In the complex process of assessing a facility's competence, reviewing performance in proficiency testing (PT) has a significant place as a meaningful and helpful indicator. Proficiency testing supplements the internal quality control system of a facility, providing a means of external assessment of its testing or measurement capabilities. It is a valuable tool for facilities to compare their performance with that of the other participants in the same program. This in turn provides the opportunity to investigate any outlier results, identify the root cause(s) of the problem and improve the performance where needed.

The benefits of proficiency testing are widely recognised. These include:

- Comparison of a facility's performance with that of other participating (peer) facilities
- Monitoring of a long-term facility performance
- Improvement in the performance of tests/calibrations following investigation and identification of the cause(s) of unsatisfactory PT performance, and the introduction of corrective action to prevent re-occurrence
- Staff education, training and competence monitoring
- Evaluation of methods, including the establishment of method precision and accuracy
- Estimation of measurement uncertainty
- Contribution to the facility's overall risk management system
- Confidence building with interested parties, e.g. customers, accreditation bodies, regulators, specifiers

NATA's PT Policy requires that facilities participate in proficiency testing where available, ideally at least once every two years for each major area of test, measurement or related activity relevant to their Scope of Accreditation.

There is a number of accredited proficiency testing scheme providers that operate from Australia. Where possible, NATA-accredited and applicant facilities are expected to select PT programs provided by accredited PT providers that are appropriate to their Scope of Accreditation.

Proficiency testing providers that are not yet accredited are expected to comply with the requirements of ISO/IEC 17043.

The information available as a feedback from proficiency testing scheme providers increasingly includes a lot more than a simple 'pass' or 'fail' statement. Some offer assistance to the participants in a form of online tutoring related to the evaluation of results, while some provide information about the common issues identified.

NATA has a clear role to foster the proficiency testing infrastructure in Australia. Clearly there are a number of areas that are not covered by appropriate PT programs. NATA tries to facilitate the provision of programs by identifying those areas through discussions with members of its technical committees and making the need for the provision of programs publicly known.

NATA strongly encourages all testing and measurement facilities to engage in a comprehensive program of proficiency testing that covers the full range of testing/measurement activities.