



# **General Accreditation Criteria**

## **Proficiency Testing Policy**

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## Benefits of Proficiency Testing

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 other facilities;
- monitoring of a facility's long-term performance;
- 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;
- contribution to estimation of measurement uncertainty;
- confidence building with interested parties (e.g. customers, accreditation bodies, regulators, specifiers).

## Participation in Proficiency Testing

Accredited and applicant facilities (including inspection bodies conducting testing which directly affects the inspection results) are required to participate in suitable PT activities when available.

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

It is the responsibility of facilities to check the availability of appropriate PT programs which best matches their activities. In the case where suitable PT is not available, other means of ensuring the validity of results must be implemented (e.g. interlaboratory comparisons).

Additional PT criteria supplementing this policy may 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 also be prescribed in standards or regulator requirements applicable to a facility's scope of accreditation.

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.

Where appropriate and when available, applicant facilities and accredited facilities requesting additions to their scope of accreditation must demonstrate successful participation in PT prior to gaining accreditation.

**Note:** Facilities are encouraged to enrol in suitable PT programs as early as possible, or when not available, engage in interlaboratory comparisons, to ensure that the granting of accreditation is not delayed.

On a case-by-case basis, NATA may accept evidence of enrolment in PT as satisfying the intent of this policy. This is normally the case when the next scheduled round of a PT program will not occur during the accreditation process phase and the facility has demonstrated the validity of results through other quality measures.

NATA requires applicant and accredited facilities to formulate PT participation plans covering the activities they offer (for each major area as noted above). These plans must be regularly reviewed to reflect any changes (e.g. in the scope of accreditation, methodologies, instrumentations etc).

## **Selection of Proficiency Testing programs**

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

Programs provided by non-accredited providers may be considered where programs provided by accredited PT providers do not match the activities offered by a facility.

Where practicable, the compliance of non-accredited PT providers with the requirements of ISO/IEC 17043 should be established.

Facilities may also be offered the opportunity by NATA to participate in the Asia Pacific Metrology Program (APMP) and Asia Pacific Accreditation Cooperation (APAC) joint proficiency testing programs from time to time. These programs are run with the aim of enhancing the quality and traceability of measurements in various economies of the Asia-Pacific region and support the APAC Mutual Recognition Arrangement (MRA).

## **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 assessments.

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**

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.

<b>Section or Clause</b>	<b>Amendment</b>
Whole document	This policy has been editorially updated and replaces the August 2018 version.
Participation in Proficiency Testing	No additional criteria has been added however clarification regarding PT participation for applicant facilities and facilities requesting additions to their scope of accreditation has been included.