General Accreditation Criteria

ISO/IEC 17020 Standard Application Document

Issued: September 2026

Effective: October 2026

[PUBLIC]

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Purpose

This document provides interpretative criteria and recommendations for the application of ISO/IEC 17020 covering inspection activities for both applicant and accredited facilities.

Facilities must comply with all documents in the *NATA Accreditation Criteria* (NAC) package for inspection (refer to *NATA Procedures for Accreditation)*.

The clause numbers in this document follow those of ISO/IEC 17020, however, as not all clauses require interpretation the numbering may not be consecutive.

4 General Requirements

4.1 Impartiality

4.1.7 The requirements relating to impartiality are also applicable to externally provided products and services (see clause 6.3).

5 Structural Requirements

5.1 Independence

Assignment of independence Type, as per Annex A of ISO/IEC 17020, will be confirmed during the assessment process. The assigned independence Type can be amended at any time if the inspection body's independence arrangements change, provided the inspection body formally notifies NATA and can demonstrate that it meets the criteria of the different independence Type.

5.2 Legal entity and liabilities

5.2.1 Where the inspection body is part of a larger legal entity, the structure of the entire legal entity may be subject to assessment to determine the relationships and any effect on independence or impartiality.

5.2.3 Facility documentation must include or reference the scope of accreditation and the policy on the use of the NATA endorsement.

5.2.4 Facilities are required to assess the risks and potential liabilities arising from their inspection activities and demonstrate that insurance cover or financial reserves are adequate and proportionate to those liabilities.

5.2.5 Facilities must have documented arrangements for all inspection services, including contractual conditions for services provided to external clients and documented internal agreements for services provided within the inspection body's own legal entity.

5.3 Organization and management

5.3.2 Facilities must have technical management that holds overall authority and responsibility for inspection methods and processes, monitoring activities, resource allocation, personnel competence, the technical aspects of contractual arrangements, and the performance of inspection activities.

6 Resource requirements

6.1 Personnel

6.1.2 The competence of inspectors is understood to encompass both theoretical knowledge and practical ability. Depending on the industry, competence may require familiarity with relevant regulations, standards, codes, materials, products, technologies, processes and practices.

The competence requirements also apply to externally provided products and services that may influence the inspection activities performed.

Where there is a regulatory framework, a Deed of Agreement, Memorandum of Understanding or other binding agreement with a third party, NATA will formally acknowledge individuals in the report on assessment who have been nominated and authorised by the inspection body to release results.

6.1.5 Inspection bodies must implement a monitoring program for personnel involved in inspection activities. The program must define both the frequency and method of monitoring and ensure it is carried out by authorised and competent personnel, in order to verify ongoing competence and consistent application of inspection processes. The frequency of observing each inspector on-site must be at least once during the accreditation cycle (i.e. every three years).

6.2 Facilities and equipment

6.2.4 Refer to NATA's *General Accreditation Criteria: Metrological traceability policy*.

Guidance on the frequency of in-service checks on common equipment is provided in NATA's *General Accreditation Guidance: General equipment table*.

<u>In-house calibration</u>

A facility performing its own calibrations will also be subject to technical assessment of these calibrations against ISO/IEC 17025. The assessment team will determine if the in-house calibrations are fit for the purpose for which they are being used and that a reasonable estimate of the associated measurement uncertainty has been made. Fees will be charged where significant additional assessment effort is required (i.e. time or additional assessors). Specialist calibration assessors may be used when either the calibration is outside the area of expertise of the technical assessor(s) who would normally conduct the assessment, or if a non-standardised calibration method is adopted, or if it would be more time or cost effective.

A facility performing its own calibrations may also be subject to proficiency testing or measurement audits where non-standard calibration methods are used.

For addition information, refer to NATA's *General Accreditation Criteria: Equipment assurance, in-house calibration and equipment verification*.

6.2.7 Refer to NATA's *General Accreditation Criteria: Metrological traceability policy*.

6.2.8 Refer to NATA's *General Accreditation Criteria: Metrological traceability policy*.

6.2.9 Facilities are responsible for any technology used in inspections including computers, automated equipment, data processing, AI, augmented reality, or remote inspection techniques. They must ensure such technology is suitable and adequate, that data integrity and security procedures are in place, and that hardware and software are properly maintained. This applies regardless of how novel the technology is and must be revisited whenever changes could affect inspection outcomes.

6.3 Externally provided products and services

6.3.1 Inspection bodies remain responsible for ensuring that externally provided products and services affecting inspection activities are suitable and fit for purpose. This includes reviewing and controlling externally provided results, data and information before they are used in inspection activities or inspection reports. Where excerpts from external reports or certificates are reproduced, they should be accurately represented, not taken out of context, and not be misleading.

6.3.2 A competent external provider is for example, but not limited to, an accredited NATA facility or a facility accredited by a signatory to a Mutual Recognition Arrangement.

The accreditation status of external providers must be regularly reviewed to ensure currency.

Note: Information on accreditation status and scope of accreditation may be found at NATA's website or by contacting one of NATA's offices.

7 Process Requirements

7.1 Review of requests, tenders and contracts

7.1.1 The inspection body must have a documented process for reviewing inspection requests, tenders and contracts before accepting work. This review must confirm that:

- the inspection activity, the item to be inspected, and the applicable requirements are clearly defined, documented and understood;
- the inspection body has the necessary competence, personnel, equipment and other resources to perform the work;
- suitable inspection methods are available, or can be developed, to meet the client's requirements;
- client requirements, including any special conditions, are clearly understood so that accurate instructions can be provided to personnel performing the inspection; and
- the requirements specified in the request, tender, contract or work order can be met.

Note: For routine or recurring inspection activities, the review process may be simplified, provided the relevant requirements continue to be adequately addressed.

7.1.2 The inspection body must evaluate the suitability of requested inspection activities and notify the client where the requested inspection is considered inappropriate, impractical, or technically unjustified.

7.1.3 Any variations, inconsistencies or conflicts between the request, tender and contractual arrangements must be documented and resolved before undertaking inspection activities, ensuring a clear and agreed basis for the work to be performed.

7.1.4 The inspection body must ensure that each contract is acceptable to both parties. Any client-requested deviations must be evaluated to confirm that they do not affect the validity of the results.

7.1.5 Records demonstrating the review of requests, tenders and contracts must be retained. This includes documentation of any significant changes made to the requirements, scope, terms, or agreed arrangements following the review.

7.2 Inspection methods and procedures

7.2.3 Where standard methods are used, the current version must be adopted. In such cases, the date of publication is not included in the scope of accreditation.

Where a superseded or withdrawn version of a standard method is used at the client's request or due to regulatory or scheme requirements, the year of issue will be included in the scope of accreditation.

Inspection bodies accredited to standard methods must maintain records of all interpretive decisions which they may make as a response to ambiguities in the methods or specifications contained in standards.

Non-standard methods and procedures which may be used must be appropriately validated to ensure they satisfy the intended purpose of the inspection activity.

Proficiency testing

Global ACI-TECH-1-008 Policy for Proficiency Testing and/or Interlaboratory Comparisons Other Than Proficiency Testing notes that proficiency testing (PT) may be used in some types of inspection where available and justified by the inclusion of testing activities that directly affect and determine the inspection result, or when required by law or by regulators. It is, however, recognised that proficiency testing is not a usual and expected element in the accreditation of most types of inspections. Where proficiency testing is available and relevant for the testing activities that affect and/or determine inspection results and as detailed in NATA's *General Accreditation Criteria: Proficiency testing policy*, participation in PT must be at least once every two years.

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

Where formal PT programs are not available for any activities or do not provide sufficient coverage, inspection bodies must investigate other means of assuring the quality and performance of testing activities.

7.2.5 Inspection bodies may perform sampling activities as part of their services, either as a standalone activity or as part of a wider inspection activity.

Where relevant, the procedures covering sampling require the development of job specific sampling plans.

While it is the practice in some industries to base an evaluation upon limited sample sizes, inspection bodies should refer to appropriate standards where these exist and are reminded of the risks associated with extending results from a sample to a wider population of items. Where assumptions of homogeneity have been made, these must be brought to the attention of the customer.

Where acceptance/rejection criteria are nominated in contracts or specification documents, the criteria must be included, as appropriate, in the worksheets and/or checklists used by the inspection body.

7.4 Inspection records

Records include, but are not limited to the following:

- customer requests for inspection services;
- work instructions (with all verbal instructions from the customer included);
- location, date and time of the inspection activity;
- all original observations (including photographs), notes and calculations made during an inspection;
- the identity of the staff undertaking part(s) or the whole of the inspection;

Note: It is recognised that a number of staff may be involved in activities. It is the inspection body's responsibility to identify the critical steps(s) and that the identities of the staff concerned are recorded.

- computer data files and/or software programs; results of sampling, testing and/or measurements, including copies of reports on sub-contracted work, which form part of the inspection process;
- records relating to equipment which have a significant influence on the result of the inspection activity;
- the inspection report;
- records of all discussions with customers during or after the inspection relevant to the preparation of the inspection report.

As far as practicable, all records must be indelible/permanent, and data or observations recorded in such a manner that prevents amendment or loss of the original. Where corrections are necessary, the date this occurs and the responsible person must be traceable, and the original data must not be lost.

7.5 Control of data and information

7.5.1 The inspection body must establish and maintain controls to validate information management systems used in inspection activities. Validation must demonstrate the suitability of the system for its intended purpose. Any software changes, configuration amendments or system updates must be subjected to change control, including authorisation, documentation and validation, before implementation.

Note: Commercial off-the-shelf software may be considered pre-validated when used within its specified application range.

7.6 Inspection report and inspection certificate

7.6.1 For use of the NATA endorsement refer to the NATA *General Accreditation Criteria: Use of the NATA emblem, NATA endorsement and references to accreditation.*

All inspection results including reports issued electronically (including from a site other than the accredited facility) must be authorised prior to the report or certificate being released.

The inspection body must be able to demonstrate appropriate controls over the electronic generation, access, storage and back-up of results and reports and program controls such as password protection. If the report is to be accessed from a website by the customer there must be appropriate controls in place to ensure the report can only be accessed and downloaded in a protected format.

Any information normally included in a hardcopy report must be included on the electronically transmitted version and appear in any hardcopy printed by the recipient. Flexible pagination to accommodate formatting changes when printed by the recipient may also be required. It must be ensured that any handwritten comments included on issued reports are also included in the copy of the reports retained by the facility.

7.6.2 Reporting professional judgement, including inspector's notes and calculations based on published formulas applied in reporting the current status of an inspected item, is considered normal inspection reporting practice.

Regulatory authorities or customers may place additional requirements on the reporting of inspection results. Where a customer form is used for reporting, the inspection body issuing the completed form (report) must be clearly identified.

Progress reports issued over an extended period in relation to fabrication, installation, commissioning and/or any other time-dependent inspection activity, must each comply with the reporting requirements.

8 Management system requirements

8.1 General

8.1.1 Unless otherwise prescribed by legislation or contractual obligation, retention times for records shall not be less than 4 years or, in the case of equipment records, the maximum recalibration interval of equipment (whichever is the longer period).

It is recognised that inspection bodies have different organisational structures. Accordingly, various items covered by management review may be considered at different times and at different organisational meetings.

8.1.3 The requirements of 8.1.2 may be met by establishing, implementing and maintaining a management system e.g., in accordance with ISO 9001. This system needs to support and demonstrate fulfillment of ISO/IEC 17020.

Certified ISO 9001 management system

A facility seeking accreditation to ISO/IEC 17020 may establish a management system in accordance with ISO 9001. In such a case, the system may not be assessed in full by NATA subject to:

- the management system being certified by a certification body accredited by JAS-ANZ, or by another signatory to the Global ACI Multilateral Recognition Agreement (MRA). The certification body must be accredited to certify management system schemes to ISO 9001. NATA may request the facility to provide evidence of the certification body's scope of accreditation; and

- copies of the most recent certification audit reports being made available to NATA for review, including confirmation from the certification body of the close out of any non-conformities raised; and

- the management system supports and demonstrates the consistent fulfillment of the requirements of clauses 4 to 7 and the requirements specified in 8.2 to 8.7 of ISO/IEC 17020 for the activities covered by the facility's NATA scope of accreditation.

The required extent of assessment will depend on the evidence provided.

Where nonconformities are identified with the management system, these will be reported against the relevant clause (i.e. 8.2 to 8.7).

The facility shall notify NATA within 14 days when a change occurs in its ISO 9001 certification status.

<u>Non-certified ISO 9001 management system</u>

NATA will assess the management system in full against the requirements of clauses 8.2 to 8.7 when the facility has adopted an ISO 9001 system which has not been independently certified by a certification body recognised under the MRA.

Annex A: Independence requirements for inspection bodies

Requirements for inspection bodies (Type A)

An inspection body may have links to other legal entities, for example, common owners and common owners' appointees on boards or equivalent. These are only considered acceptable if such persons do not have the possibility to influence the outcome of the inspection body's services.

There exists a possibility to affect the outcome of an inspection activity if a person has the ability to, for example:

- influence the selection of inspectors for specific assignments or customers; or
- influence decisions on conformity in specific inspection assignments; or
- influence remuneration for individual inspectors; or
- influence remuneration for specific assignments or customers; or
- initiate the use of alternative work practices for specific assignments.

Requirements for inspection bodies (Type non-A)

'Explicitly' is understood to mean 'clearly'. Often Australian regulations do not identify independence requirements for inspection activities. In situations where the same person may inspect and be asked to put right, make safe or oversee the rectification of any deficiencies that are identified, the client must be advised of and accept the proposed arrangements. The safeguards the inspection body should consider protecting against possible future claims of bias or over-servicing could include photographic records, client acceptance of findings, retention of replaced items etc.

References

This section lists publications referenced in this document. The year of publication is not included as it is expected that only current versions of the references shall be used.

Standards

ISO 9001	*Quality management systems - Requirements*
ISO/IEC 17020	*Conformity assessment – Requirements for the operation of various types of bodies performing inspection*

NATA Publications

NATA Rules

General Accreditation Criteria	*Metrological traceability policy*
General Accreditation Criteria	*Equipment assurance, in-house calibration and equipment verification*
General Accreditation Criteria	*Use of the NATA emblem, NATA endorsement and references to accreditation*
General Accreditation Criteria	*Proficiency testing policy*
General Accreditation Guidance	*General equipment table*

Other Publications

Global ACI-TECH-1-008	*Policy for Proficiency Testing and/or Interlaboratory Comparisons Other Than Proficiency Testing*

Amendment Table

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

Section or clause	Amendment
Whole document	This document has been revised to align with the requirements of ISO/IEC 17020:2026.