




General Accreditation Criteria Proficiency Testing

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Proficiency testing

Proficiency testing (PT) serves to supplement existing procedures adopted by facilities to assure the quality and evaluation of performance of the activities for which they are accredited or seek accreditation. A facility's participation and performance in proficiency testing are reviewed by NATA at assessment.

Activity type/program specific PT criteria supplementing this document can be found in activity type/program appendix and annexes available from the NATA website. Specific policies may not be available where accreditation standards or regulator requirements currently articulate PT participation needs.

1. Participation

Each applicant or accredited facility is required to participate in appropriate PT activities.

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

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 activity type/program criteria) 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:

- a) prior to gaining accreditation with NATA;
- b) when requesting significant extensions or variations to scope of accreditation;
- c) when requesting additional signatory approvals (where relevant).

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 specification. These plans must be regularly reviewed to reflect any changes in staff, methodology, instrumentation etc.

It is the responsibility of facilities to check the availability of appropriate PT programs which best match their day-to-day work 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.

Facilities must consider the accreditation status of PT providers and are advised to choose accredited providers wherever possible.

In cases where programs provided by accredited PT providers do not match the activities of a facility, programs provided by non-accredited providers should be considered; where possible the compliance of those providers with the requirements of ISO/IEC 17043: 2010 should be established.

Further assistance with the selection of PT programs is available from the documents *Proficiency Testing Guide for the Facilities* and *Selection of PT Providers – Checklist* available from the NATA website.

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.

2. Performance

The selection of PT programs, performance in these and any corrective action taken in response to PT results are reviewed by NATA generally during on-site visits e.g. reassessments 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 associated any follow-up action taken in response to results by the facility.

3. Proficiency Testing providers

To promote the availability of PT programs, NATA's technical committees are encouraged to define particular features for identified PT needs which are publicised in the document *PT programs needed - requirements identified by NATA* (available on the NATA website). PT providers are invited to express their interest in providing PT programs in the identified areas.

The details of PT programs and/or providers are available from the NATA PT Directory on the NATA website, under Accreditation Information > Proficiency Testing (PT) Guidance and Information.

4. Confidentiality

As with NATA's assessment activities all information received regarding a facility's participation in a proficiency testing program is treated as confidential. This information may be made available to relevant NATA assessors, Accreditation Advisory Committee members and members of international evaluation teams. All have signed confidentiality agreements.

5. Further information

Further information on proficiency testing may be obtained from the NATA website. If you have any queries about NATA's Proficiency Testing policy please contact:

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AMENDMENTS

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

| Section | Amendment |
|-----------------|--|
| Entire document | This document replaces the former Policy Circular 2. The document has been reviewed and updated to reflect the new accreditation criteria documentation structure and replace field with activity type. |