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NAB-MALTA

TECHNICAL GUIDE

ATG10 - Proficiency Testing Policy of the NAB-MALTA

Revision 3

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1. PURPOSE

- 1.1 MSA EN 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 for example, 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 to the NAB-MALTA (refer to Clause 4.1.2 of MSA EN ISO/IEC 17025).
- 1.2 Accordingly the NAB-MALTA considers the participation of laboratories in external proficiency testing / interlaboratory comparisons as an important mechanism for monitoring the integrity of test/calibration results. This document sets out the policy of the NAB-MALTA with respect to participation in proficiency testing and/or interlaboratory comparisons and relates to both applicant and accredited laboratories including those carrying out testing activities as part of an Inspection Body process.
- 1.3 There is significant added value to accredited laboratories, or those seeking accreditation, from participation in appropriate proficiency testing schemes. Appropriate and cost-effective use of PT scheme results by accreditation bodies may reduce the cost to laboratories of accreditation. Therefore, the perceived extra cost to a laboratory of PT scheme participation may result in an overall cost saving in respect of quality assurance measures, including accreditation with the NAB-MALTA.

2. DEFINITIONS

- 2.1 *Proficiency testing (PT)* is the determination of the calibration or testing performance of a laboratory or the testing performance of an inspection body means of interlaboratory comparison.
- 2.2 *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.


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3. POLICY

- 3.1 It is the policy of the NAB-MALTA that all accredited laboratories participate in proficiency testing / interlaboratory comparisons where such schemes are available and relevant to their scope of accreditation.
- 3.2 It is the policy of the NAB-MALTA to accept all proficiency testing / interlaboratory comparisons recognised by the signatories to the EA and ILAC Multilateral Agreements.

4. STATEMENT


- 4.1 Accredited laboratories shall be 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 shall participate at a minimum, in at least one activity for each parameter within the laboratory's scope of accreditation, between periods of reassessment. This is based on the current minimum participation recommended by EA/ILAC.
- 4.2 It is the responsibility of the laboratory to regularly check on available schemes and also determine which schemes are most appropriate to the laboratory's scope of accreditation.
- 4.3 The laboratory should be prepared to justify non-participation in readily available proficiency testing schemes, where one or more appropriate schemes exist. In most cases the frequency of participation is specified by the scheme. Laboratories would be required to justify less frequent participation.
- 4.4 Laboratories preparing for accreditation shall be 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.
- 4.5 Where no appropriate proficiency testing or interlaboratory comparison is available, the laboratory shall 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.
- 4.6 The laboratory is required to provide NAB-MALTA with a summary report on its participation in proficiency testing / interlaboratory comparisons prior to each visit by NAB-MALTA. This report shall be made available to NAB-MALTA not later than 1 month prior to the date of the visit. In case of an initial assessment this should be provided as

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an attachment to the accreditation application form. The summary report shall contain the following:

- a) date of proficiency testing / interlaboratory comparisons already carried out;
- b) organiser (where applicable);
- c) test materials / measured quantities / parameters;
- d) matrices;
- e) acceptable criteria;
- f) results (satisfactory / questionable / unsatisfactory);
- g) corrective actions (where applicable).

- 4.7 The NAB-MALTA assessment team shall review at each surveillance visit the laboratory's performance in proficiency testing / interlaboratory comparisons. Where no measurement audit is possible the NAB-MALTA assessment team may allocate extra time for witnessing the laboratory carrying out measurements in order to give the same level of confidence.
- 4.8 The laboratory policy for participation in proficiency tests as a form of external quality control should be adequately described in the Quality Manual or in other operational documents of the laboratory. This particularly concerns planning, performance/operation, evaluation, corrective action, documentation and its storage.
- 4.9 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.
- 4.10 If, in the opinion of NAB-MALTA, the laboratory's performance in proficiency testing / interlaboratory comparisons casts doubt on the integrity of test results, the NAB-MALTA may suspend the relevant tests from the laboratory's scope of accreditation. The laboratory shall be required to provide the NAB-MALTA 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.
- 4.11 The laboratory should satisfy itself of the competence of the providers of PT schemes in which they voluntarily participate.
- 4.12 In certain instances NAB-MALTA may require that a laboratory participates in a particular scheme or exercise especially when this participation would be a mandatory

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requirement for specific sector schemes or according to regulatory activities and/or where the scheme is deemed necessary to prove the technical competence of the laboratory.

Note 1: Laboratories may 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. Links to various schemes can be obtained from the NAB-MALTA website: http://www.nabmalta.org.mt/links/links_pt_ilc.htm.

Note 2: MSA EN ISO/IEC 17025 requires laboratories to evaluate suppliers including PT scheme providers. ISO/IEC Guide 43:1997 Part 1 and ILAC G13:2000 contain recommendations and guidance on the requirements for the operation of PT schemes. These documents should be used as a basis for such evaluation.

5. REFERENCES

Publication Ref.	Publication Title
EA-2/10	EA Policy for Participation in National and International Proficiency Testing Activities
EA-3/04	Use of Proficiency Testing as a Tool for Accreditation in Testing
ILAC-G22:2004	Use of Proficiency Testing as a Tool for Accreditation in Testing
ISO/IEC Guide 43-1	Proficiency Testing by Interlaboratory Comparisons – Part 1 : Development and Operation of Proficiency Testing Schemes
ISO/IEC Guide 43-2	Proficiency Testing by Interlaboratory Comparisons

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