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The publication has been written by the EA Committee 2 “Technical Activities”.

Official language

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1 INTRODUCTION

- 1.1** Proficiency testing schemes are used by laboratory accreditation bodies as part of the accreditation and surveillance processes to assess the ability of laboratories to competently perform tasks for which accreditation has been applied for or is held respectively. Proficiency tests complement the traditional technique of on-site laboratory assessment by technical experts. In the context of this paper, proficiency testing is considered to cover both calibration and testing activities.
- 1.2** Laboratory accreditation bodies and their assessors might prefer to select such providers of proficiency testing schemes ("PT providers") for the above-mentioned purposes that demonstrated their competence by formal accreditation. Accreditation bodies might therefore wish to offer such services to PT providers in their country.
- 1.3** Such accreditation activities may, however, have considerable implications, e.g.
- accredited PT providers may offer their services to laboratories at higher prices to cover their own accreditation costs,
 - the question of cross-border recognition of PT providers' accreditation might come up and may easily result in additional and costly mutual evaluation activities,
 - non-commercial but competent providers (such as national metrology institutes and similar governmental or non-governmental institutes) might be rejected or might decide to withdraw their services,
 - accreditation bodies might see a conflict of interest, if they both grant accreditation for external PT providers and develop and operate their own proficiency testing schemes,
 - accreditation bodies, which develop and operate their own proficiency testing schemes might be forced to be accredited themselves for these activities.
- 1.4** EA should, therefore, enter with great care into this field. There should be a harmonized view on strategic aims and procedures. Therefore, EA members conclude the following policy.

2 EA POLICY

- 2.1** Each EA member is free to offer accreditation services to PT providers. Accreditation bodies which do not wish to offer such services and which may prefer other means of recognition of PT providers shall not be prohibited to do so.
- 2.2** If formal accreditation is granted by an EA member, ILAC-G13:2000, Guidelines for the Requirements for the Competence of Providers of Proficiency Testing Schemes shall be used as accreditation criteria.

- 2.3** EA does not intend to establish a specific mutual recognition agreement on accreditation of PT providers.

Note: It is the responsibility of the national accreditation body to establish confidence in the PT providers they accept for their own accreditation purposes.

- 2.4** The existence of accredited PT providers in some countries should not prevent EA from designating any non-accredited provider to organize an EA interlaboratory comparison if considered appropriate by the EA Laboratory Committee.

- 2.5** The existence of accredited PT providers should not prevent accreditation bodies from developing and operating their own proficiency testing for any of the following purposes

- to assess laboratories' performance before accreditation is granted
- to survey the performance of accredited laboratories
- to organize EA interlaboratory comparisons as a means to establish confidence among EA members.

- 2.6** Accreditation bodies which develop and operate their own proficiency testing schemes as mentioned under item 2.5 shall not be obliged to be accredited for these services.

Note: It is recommended to consider ILAC-G13:2000, Guidelines for the Requirements for the competence of Providers of Proficiency Testing Schemes, where appropriate.