

Proficiency Testing and Interlaboratory Comparisons as a Tool for Accreditation

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Laboratories accredited under the ISO/IEC 17025 and ISO 15189 standards are under obligation to routinely monitor and ensure the validity of the results reported. When referring to proficiency testing (PT) and interlaboratory comparisons (ILC) as tools for fulfilling this demand It is stated in the ISO/IEC 17025 standard for example (clause 7.7) that "The laboratory shall monitor its performance by comparison with results of other laboratories". However, it conditions this demand by stating that this step will be carried out "where available and appropriate". This reservation from the rule, while important, poses a challenge for the organization as well as the authority responsible for its accreditation under said standards. The conditions under which the laboratory can declare that such activities are not "available and appropriate" are vague and up for interpretation. In this presentation I will go over the purpose of PT and ILC, the differences between them, their role in quality management and the factors that should be taken into account when deciding on the frequency and level of participation in them as described in several informative and policy documents published by the International Laboratory Accreditation Cooperation (ILAC) and the European co-operation for Accreditation (EA). Furthermore, an emphasis will be made on presenting problems that arose from the above-mentioned reservation in the process of lab accreditation, where the laboratory under consideration declared that PT and/or ILC are either not available or inappropriate. Examples of instances where ISRAC accepted this statement and examples of such cases where it did not will be presented, as well as the conclusion to these issues. Understanding these limitations and problems will shed light on important aspects of laboratory quality assurance, the accreditation process and the way ISRAC addresses these issues when considering laboratories operating in Israel today.