

CoEPT PROJECT SUMMARY

Proficiency Testing is the assessment of the technical competence of the laboratories by the use of their results produced in interlaboratory comparisons. Proficiency testing represents, furthermore, a powerful tool to investigate and realise the comparability of testing results in Europe, which is part of the fundamental harmonisation concept of the European Commission.

In addition to often being a prerequisite for accreditation, participation in a proficiency testing schemes (PTS) is often used for endorsement as an authorised laboratory. Such practice leads to laboratories having to participate in multiple similar PTS if a particular laboratory wishes to operate in various regions or countries. Thus the mutual recognition of the results of equivalent proficiency tests by the authorities and the accreditation bodies would reduce the burden on laboratories and in turn improve their competitiveness. Therefore the fundamental aim of this project is to provide evidence that indicates the comparability of data between PTS and thereby encourage regulatory authorities, and other organisations specifying participation in particular PTS, to accept data from similar PTS operating in the same sector. This would be particularly beneficial to SMEs on whom the current practice of having to participate in multiple similar PTS places a large financial and technical burden. The project aims to underpin the measurement infrastructure within the EU by leading to improved organisation of PTS in Europe. A better PTS infrastructure will lead to benefits such as higher quality of European goods and services, and a resulting increase in competitiveness and customer satisfaction.

Two series of intercomparisons are planned, covering the chosen sectors of water, food, soil and occupational hygiene. Firstly, a series of intercomparisons will evaluate the statistical outputs of a number of equivalent PTS. This will be achieved by statistical evaluation, by each PTS provider, of a series of common data sets. Secondly, a series of intercomparisons will be conducted by distributing common samples (per sector) through a number of PTS. Reference values will be used for some determinands in each of the samples, which will have been assigned using appropriate methods, often being primary methods of analysis.

The reports from the intercomparisons will be made widely available, demonstrating where PTS are comparable, where there are differences and the reasons for these differences. These reports will also highlight areas where different PTS providers may consider moving towards greater harmonisation. Depending on the outcome of the intercomparisons, the project may result in some form of mutual recognition agreement of the participating PTS providers. The results of the project should be used to develop sectoral technical criteria for the sectors covered, which can be used by accreditation bodies and authorities for the acceptance, recommendation or accreditation of PTS. The results will provide valuable input into the work of international organisations such as ILAC, EA, EUROLAB, EURACHEM etc.

The project consortium consists of the national representatives of the European Information System on Proficiency Testing (EPTIS) which was developed as a result of a previous concerted action SMT-CT98-8002 "Information Network and Qualifying Criteria for Proficiency Testing Schemes". These are from all EU countries with the exception of Luxembourg, plus Norway. All these organisations and individuals have detailed knowledge of PTS activities in their countries. As part of the project the consortium members will work closely with a number of PTS providers who are collaborating in this project.

The detailed planning for, and dissemination of, these activities will be carried out using two primary mechanisms. The first involves annual meetings of the project consortium, and the second involves a series of three workshops involving all consortium members, the PTS providers collaborating in the project and other interested parties.