

General conditions about the participation in ielab's Proficiency Testing Schemes

Registration

The easiest and safest way to register in our Proficiency Testing Schemes (PTS) is through **ielab's** website (www.ielab.es). By this way the confidentiality and agility on the information and data transmission is assured. Alternatively, you can also register by contacting us by email (comercial@ielab.es).

The current prices can be consulted in the specific rates document and also when you make your registration through the website. The registration fee includes sample preparation, access to the website for data submission and for downloading results reports and any other document related to the rounds such as the certificate of participation. Any additional tax or fee will be added before the confirmation of the purchase order, whenever necessary.

The participating laboratory may request the cancellation of its participation in a round of the PTS, as long as it is properly notified to the organization with enough time prior to its completion.

By another hand, in case that the calendar, planning or any of the previously agreed terms cannot be fulfilled, the participants will be informed in writing with the adopted solutions. If the number of registrations for a PTS round does not reach the minimum required to carry it out, the organization may cancel or delay this round, refunding or replacing the registration to the participants

Frequency of participation

The frequency of participation in the PTS depends on several specific factors related to the characteristics of each laboratory, as well as other aspects of quality control. The number of samples tested, and the risk associated with the tests are very important issues to be considered. Therefore, each laboratory should establish its own frequency of participation.

Accreditation bodies often offer guidelines about frequency of participation, such as in the documents 'NT-03-Política de ENAC sobre intercomparaciones' and the guide 'Guía sobre la participación en programas de Intercomparaciones G-ENAC-14' or in EURACHEM Guide 'Selection, use and interpretation of Proficiency Testing Schemes'.

Confidentiality

To guarantee confidentiality, the participation codes of each laboratory are automatically assigned by the software at the time of registration. Each participant has a 4-digit code that can be changed and that allows them to identify their results in the round report. In this way, their identity is protected against the rest of the participants and from the organization itself.

The results and other technical information submitted by participants and related to the assays will be associated with the participation code in the results report. In the results report only this code is mentioned neither including the name or other information of the participant, nor the data included in the observations field of the results bulletin.

ielab is responsible for the management of all information obtained or created during the performance of PT activities directly or through a third party. If ielab was required by law to release confidential information, the client concerned shall be notified of the information released, unless prohibited by law.

Payment

PTS payment can be made via:

BANK TRANSFER:

Bank: Banco Bilbao Vizcaya Argentaria, S.A. (BBVA)

Address: Plaza Antoni Maura, 6, 2ª PLANTA. Barcelona. Spain

Bank Account: 01823994050201548997

Swift: BBVAESMMXXX

IBAN: ES9101823994050201548997

CREDIT CARD (only online registrations):

For other options, please contact to our email address comercial@ielab.es.

Sample preparation and verification

ielab will prepare natural samples if possible. If any element or microorganism is not present in the natural sample, the appropriate analytes or microorganisms relevant to investigation will be added/spiked, or a synthetic sample will be prepared. This information is detailed in the round instructions and is available to customers upon request.

The corresponding homogeneity and stability studies of the samples will be performed according to IUPAC (International Union of Pure and Applied Chemistry) and to the ISO 13528 standard.

Packaging and shipping of samples

Samples will be sent to participants by express courier according to the previously established calendar, being preferably sent on Monday.

The materials used in the PTS are packaged complying with the legal requirements regarding transport and under conditions that allow preserving their content. In general, most of the samples from **ielab**'s PTS are sent at room temperature. If any sample must be kept refrigerated after reception, it will be detailed in the round instructions document for each round.

Express courier systems are used, and the samples are accompanied by all transport documentation required by international regulations. However, in some countries, we recommend participants to obtain information in advance about the import documents or taxes that may be needed.

It is recommended that the final participant be informed of possible import procedures and notify **ielab** any additional instruction or document required in their country regarding these procedures.

ielab declines the responsibility of the shipment status if it has been retained at the customs office of the destination country.

Handling and storage of samples

Prior to sending the samples, **ielab** provides detailed instructions to the participants that clearly specify how each sample should be preserved and/or handled. **ielab** has designed and planned its rounds so that the handling of the samples is a quick and easy process. Sometimes, it is also included a workflow diagram in the instructions to make handling easier. This information is also available on our website.

The samples are preserved to maintain their optimal analytical properties under the usual shipping conditions and transport times. Stability tests are carried out simulating shipping conditions and during the established test period. In addition, there is a transport control in the samples of the microbiology rounds consisting on sending to one of the participants a duplicate of the samples to be tested, which are returned to the organization for verification.

For the microbiological rounds, the samples can begin to be analyzed even up to a week after being sent, although it is advisable to do it as soon as they are received.

For physical-chemical parameters, the recommended analysis period is extended until the results submission deadline. Nevertheless, if any parameter must be analyzed before this period, all the complementary information necessary to perform the analysis is specified in the instructions.

Volumes and analytical methodology

The volume of sample sent by **ielab** is considered enough to analyze any parameter in triplicate according to the most commonly used methodologies.

It may happen that your laboratory requires more sample volume. In this case, **ielab** can provide you with an 'extra sample' under request for an additional charge. Contact by e-mail to comercial@ielab.es to know this rate.

As a PTS provider, **ielab** does neither requires nor recommends any method of analysis. One of the objectives of proficiency testing is to determine the effectiveness of a laboratory in terms of tests or measurements that are usually performed, so that participants can analyze PTS samples using the method they wish. It is important that the participants report the

method used and the technical specifications requested, since we often also assess the results based on the methods used.

Therefore, the participating laboratories will be able to analyse the samples according to their usual method, and for the parameters that interest them.

Deadline and how to submit the results

Deadline of each round is detailed in the instructions provided and all details are also available on our website. Usually, the deadline to submit results is 3 weeks after samples are dispatched. Please consider that after the established deadline, results cannot be recorded in the website anymore.

To report results, you must access the private client area of our website www.ielab.es with your usual username and password, and select the 'Open Proficiency Tests/ Results submission' section from the menu. The results bulletin will open automatically. In case you are participating in several rounds in progress, a drop-down will appear where you must choose the desired round. After filling the bulletin, you must press the 'Save' button and check that you receive a confirmation email at the email address that appears in the database.

Once the results are saved, they will be available if you re-enter with your username and password. You can add or modify them as many times as you wish. If you make any changes, you should 'save' again, and you will receive a confirmation email again.

The results bulletin will be available for editing until the established deadline of the round. Once this period is expired, the bulletin of results will be blocked, and no modifications can be made. Alternatively, there are other options to submit results and you can acquire this service when you register by selecting ('Paper Management Service'). By submitting the results, the participant authorizes **ielab** to use those results for the commercialization of reference materials.

Expression of results

The results reported should be expressed in the units indicated in the PT Schemes' round instructions for each parameter and following their guidelines. Decimal numbers must be typed according to the settings of each participant's computer, without using any symbol to separate thousands positions. In some cases, the instructions of each round indicate the maximum number of decimal places that should be used to express the results.

Each participant can analyze the parameters he/she considers. For any analysed parameter it is necessary to submit the number of replicates detailed in the round instructions, as well as any other requested information. Please follow carefully the detailed guidelines included in the instructions of each round.

Statistical treatment

The technical and statistical study is carried out according to the IUPAC criteria and to the ISO 13528 Standard. The results are therefore subjected to a broad and robust statistical study to obtain the assigned value.

For each parameter, its consensus value, standard deviation and uncertainty is calculated (without outliers or statistically failed results). In addition, for added analytes, the known value and the uncertainty may be indicated in the report.

Each laboratory will be evaluated by means of the z score criteria, using the values of the applicable legislation as criteria for calculating the 'Standard Deviation for Proficiency Assessment (SDPA)'. If it does not exist, it will be calculated based on international standards, or using the Horwitz function modified by Thompson.

For microbiology, the SDPA will be obtained based on historical rounds results. The SDPA value can also be fixed by **ielab**.

The SDPA calculation criteria for each parameter is available to customers who request it and on our website.

Reports

The reports produced by **ielab** include detailed information on all aspects of the round and its results.

For each round, a detailed report is prepared that includes information on the design of the round, the preparation of the samples, homogeneity and stability, tables with the results of all the participants, the methods used (identified with the method number), the complete statistical study and graphs of distribution of results, and with the results of the evaluation of the participants, among others. Additionally, a personalized report is prepared for the comparison of results. At the request of the clients, additional reports can be prepared under agreed specifications, and will have an additional charge.

The reports of results are sent to the participants by email in pdf file and within 15 working days after the closing date of the round. There is the option to request reports printed. Check the current charges for this way of report shipment ('Paper Management Service').

If the number of results for a parameter does not reach the minimum required (10 available results to perform the statistical study), this parameter will be identified as 'out of scope of ENAC Accreditation' in the results report.

In case of doubt regarding any result or your evaluation in the round report, you can contact **ielab** by phone or email and we will assist you in a personalized way, studying your query to give you the answer that best suits the circumstances.

ielab accredited provider

ielab is a company committed to quality and efficiency. The ISO 9001 certification of all our activities and the accreditation according to the ISO/IEC 17043 standard as a provider of PTS guarantee this commitment.

The accreditation document, as well as its scope (No. 2/ PPI007), can be consulted on the **ielab** website (www.ielab.es) and on the ENAC website (www.enac.es).

Subcontracted activities

The activities related to the analytical processes for homogeneity and stability verification of the samples are subcontracted with a laboratory accredited under ISO 17025. Therefore, the requirements of ISO 17043 for PTS providers are fulfilled. The preparation of nematode samples is also subcontracted to a Public Entity with recognized experience in this field.

Claims and appeals

ielab counts with a process addressed to facilitate the appeal of the participants against the assessment of their performance in a proficiency test, which is available to the participants. In

case that a laboratory does not agree with the evaluation of its results, or with any other aspect of the services provided, it may request clarification or make a claim through the usual channels of contacting with **ielab**, preferably by email.

Likewise, **ielab** has a complaint management procedure in accordance with our quality system and which is available to our clients upon request.

Confabulation, connivance and falsification of results

ielab pays special attention to avoid situations of collusion between participants and treats confidentially both the identity of the participants and their results. **ielab** neither publishes the names of the laboratories nor transfers any type of information from one participant to another, in order to minimize opportunities for connivance and falsification of results.

In the case that **ielab** had well-founded suspicions and evidence about the connivance or falsification of results, it will eliminate the results of the participants involved in the statistical study and these results will not be evaluated with a Z-score. **ielab** considers that the participants themselves are responsible for avoiding this type of situations of collusion, connivance and / or falsification of results.