



Quality – It's everybody's business

ACCREDITATION PROGRAMME FOR PUBLIC LABORATORIES

PROJECT BRIEF

1.0 Introduction

Cabinet approved the National Quality Policy of Trinidad and Tobago (NQP-TT) for the period 2018 – 2030 on 2018-Apr-12. Amongst other priorities, the NQP-TT Implementation Plan included a programme to get public laboratories accredited in support of the national development strategies outlined in the Vision 2030 National Development Strategy for Trinidad and Tobago.

The NQP-TT identified the lack of accredited laboratories as a major gap in the National Quality Infrastructure in Trinidad and Tobago and its ability to realise the goals of the National Development Strategy, Vision 2030.¹ This accreditation of public laboratories will assist in the improvement of governance and service excellence for these organisations and, by extension, will assist in the achievement of the objectives under the following themes in Vision 2030.

- Theme II – Delivering Good Governance and Service Excellence;
- Theme IV – Building Globally Competitive Businesses; and
- Theme V – Placing the Environment at the Centre of Social and Economic Development

The impact of this project upon completion includes:

- (1) the support of innovation through research and development of locally manufactured products that would be able to demonstrate compliance with export market requirements through the availability of accredited local testing services;
- (2) an increased probability of the acceptance of the accredited test reports for local products in the export markets;
- (3) an increased probability of the acceptance of the accredited test reports from local health institutions in local, regional and international fora; and
- (4) an improvement of the competitiveness of locally manufactured products both on the local and export markets.

The evidence of successful diversification of an economy is measured by the percentage of export revenue obtained from the non-primary sector.

The Government of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago has identified the following non-petroleum sectors for increased foreign exchange generation as a result of the economic diversification:

- Food and Beverage
- Commercial Maritime

¹ Ministry of Trade and Industry “National Quality Policy 2018 – 2030 for Trinidad and Tobago: The Link to Competitiveness and Sustainable Development” November 2017 p.6



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- Leisure Maritime
- Tourism
- Creative Industries
- Light manufacturing

These sectors are reflected in the National Quality Policy.

Laboratory accreditation is critical to support activities within all of these sectors. For example with respect to the Food and Beverage industry, when our exporters attempt to access external markets, there are very strict rules for traceability as it relates on food safety. This includes the General Food Law Regulation from the European Union, the Safe Food for Canadians Act, and the US FDA Food Safety Modernization Act (FSMA). Having the tests results from accredited laboratories would allow for increased acceptance by the regulators in these markets.

Further, the accreditation process is an independent third party attestation to the overall confidence in and competence of the personnel, resources and management system to provide a valid test result, subsequently issuing its formal approval to the laboratory's management through its accreditation scope.

The process of Accreditation generally involves auditing of the laboratory by assessment teams including experts in the organizational aspects such as management systems and in the technical activities (*inclusive of: personnel, facilities and environmental conditions, **equipment, metrological traceability (calibration of test equipment), externally provided products & services, review of requests & contracts, selection & validation of methods, sampling, handling of test items as well as technical records i.e. test reports***) of the laboratory.

Within the Trinidad and Tobago Trade Facilitation Roadmap, it was identified that, under Article 5 of the World Trade Organization (WTO) Trade Facilitation Agreement (TFA), Trinidad and Tobago would publish a list of approved laboratories for secondary testing and that within the first three years have at least one (1) laboratory accredited to serve this Agreement. This is necessary as Article 3 of the WTO TFA under Advance Rulings. This project will *interalia* assist in providing a list of laboratories that can support the process for trade facilitation.

With the advent of the COVID-19 pandemic, the competence of medical laboratories has become more critical in providing results to inform decision making. According to International Laboratory Accreditation Cooperation (ILAC) publication "Specifying accreditation for COVID-19 (SARS-CoV-2) testing", "There is significant activity for the testing of humans for a variety of purposes including the diagnosis and treatment of symptomatic patients, mass screening of populations, employment screening and testing to enable people to travel between countries and reduce quarantine periods. Testing is also being conducted on animals, environmental swabs, sewage and food products which is helping to prevent the spread of the virus. Specifying accreditation for the wide range of testing that is being conducted is a vital way for regulators to ensure the reliability of tests and help reduce the impact on health, trade and the economy."



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2.0 The Project

The objectives of this project are to:

1. gather information on the state of readiness for accreditation of the public laboratories;
2. prioritize the public laboratories that are most ready to become accredited;
3. build the capacity of the public laboratories to become accredited through training in the requirements of the appropriate international standard(s), and mentoring through the process of development, implementation and maintenance of the management system; and
4. advance the initial accreditation application and assessment of the selected laboratories

The programme will provide the following:

- A suitably qualified consultant to assist the organization in developing its management system to one of the above standards indicated as well as prepare for the accreditation process
- An Accreditation assessment by the Trinidad and Tobago Accreditation Laboratory Service (TTLABS) or its successor organization.

The programme does **not** include any of the following and, as such, it will be the responsibility of the organization to treat with:

- Recruitment of its staff;
- Technical training to build the competency of its staff;
- Infrastructural works related to the laboratory;
- Procurement of equipment and calibration of equipment;
- Quality assurance programmes such as proficiency testing protocols or inter-laboratory comparisons.

The output will be measured by the laboratory's progress based on the approved plan and the application and assessment of the laboratories for accreditation.

The Trinidad and Tobago Bureau of Standards (TTBS) will be facilitating this programme on behalf of the Ministry of Trade and Industry (MTI).

NOTE: Public laboratories which are currently accredited for at least one scope are ineligible for this programme.

Prepared by: Trinidad and Tobago Bureau of Standards