

INDUCTION OF NEW STAFF MEMBERS

Background

Laboratory accreditation according to ISO 17025:2017 is a third-party formal recognition of a laboratory's competence to perform specific tasks within a defined scope of activities. Qualified and skilled staff are key for ensuring the correctness and reliability of tests and/or calibrations performed by a laboratory.

ISO 17025:2017 stipulates requirements for the competence of personnel; induction training is not explicitly mentioned. It is, however, in the interest of a laboratory to offer comprehensive and purposefully designed induction to new staff in order to ensure that newcomers are swiftly integrated in the work environment and that their performance meets the requirements for quality which are set by the laboratory.

1. Purpose and objective of induction training

During the induction phase the new colleague obtains information needed

- i) to perform the tasks in a way satisfying the laboratory's standard of service,
- ii) to understand the organisational and operational structure of the laboratory and his position therein and how to contribute to the fulfilment of the laboratory's mission, its policies and objectives
- iii) to interact with colleagues, and
- iv) to gain the knowledge and skills and/or to identify further training needs for performing specific tasks within his new job, if so required

Induction training aims at introducing the jobholder to his job. It may result in formal authorisations for the operation of equipment and the performance of test and calibration methods and thus could be related to the probationary period report.

2. Content and duration of induction training

The content, duration and practical realisation of induction training depend on the complexity and type of the laboratory and, if applicable, its parent organisation, as well as on the job and the qualification held by the new staff.

Induction training typically consists of two distinct parts: the general part covers aspects ranging from an introduction to the organisational environment, its processes and administrative procedures, security and informatics to social aspects and welfare; the individual part is tailored to job specific requirements and takes the profile of the new recruit into account.

An indicative list of relevant induction elements is annexed for consideration.

3. Documentation and record keeping

Provisions for the induction of new staff should be laid down as part of the procedure on staff training and career development, or equivalent.

General information handed out in the form of an up-to-date handbook serves newcomers when familiarising themselves with internal procedures and rules.

It proves useful to create a set of forms covering the various topics of the induction training. A practical approach could be to dedicate an individual form to each of the five thematic areas that are detailed in the annexed list of induction elements. The individual induction needs - derived from the job description, the workplace assignment and the profile of the jobholder - are documented in a dedicated form. Limiting the forms to one sheet per thematic area is practical and combats inflation of documents.

It is useful to design the forms in such a way that they may serve at the same time as checklists and records. The newcomer and trainer(s) subsequently complete the forms as induction proceeds. Different forms related to different thematic areas may be used in parallel by different trainers. Each form is signed by the trainer and trainee. The trainer attests with his signature the successful completion; the jobholder's signature confirms his understanding of the topic. If applicable, formal authorisations are issued and further training needs are identified and documented according to the laboratory's procedures.

The forms, duly filled and signed, are filed e.g. in the personal file or training map of the jobholder and serve as record for the completion of the induction and, if applicable, as justification for authorisations. Such formal authorisations given for e.g. operating instrumentation, performing tests and/or specific tasks, and including any pertinent limitations, should be kept accessible in daily work.

4. Effectiveness of induction training

The effectiveness of the induction training should be assessed and recorded according to the laboratory's procedures.

Should further training or expert training be needed, a training plan is established at the end of the induction. This is especially important when a laboratory plans training needs on an annual basis and newcomers would otherwise not receive adequate training based on their individually assessed needs.

It may prove useful in the frame of induction to establish coaching or a feedback mechanism during the first months. Sufficient time should also be allocated for regular discussions with line management. The value is two-fold. Firstly, new staff is better integrated in the daily work and adapts more easily to the new environment and policies of the organisation. Secondly, a laboratory benefits from a new staff member's knowledge, experience and fresh ideas. Each new staff member presents an opportunity for organisational learning and improvement that a laboratory should not miss.

5. Conclusion

Well organised induction training targeted to the needs of the new jobholder is a pro-active effort worth spending. It pays off with the newcomer's rapid integration, prevents or reduces the occurrence of deviations and non-conforming work due to a lack of awareness or understanding of relevant provisions and procedures, and it strengthens the new staff member's ability to efficiently and effectively contributing to the laboratory's performance, quality objectives and improvement, right from the start.

ANNEX - Indicative list of elements that could be part of staff induction

Induction should be planned well in advance. The preparatory activities include the internal communication of the name of the newcomer, date of arrival, workplace, names of the supervisor/line manager and relevant colleague(s), the preparation of a personalised welcome package, office assignment, installation of desk, telephone, PC, access rights, user profile, e-mail account, internal mail service, update of organisation chart and internal phone list, etc.

In general, the main elements of induction training focus on the following thematic areas:

1. Management and general administration

- Mission, vision, values, policies, corporate identity, organisation chart, core processes
- Personal data protection, code of good administrative behaviour, non-disclosure and conflict of interest statements
- Security, access to premises, service badge, internal phone number and telephone usage, working time registration
- Working hours, leave and sick leave, business trip rules, stationary supply
- Training and career development, appraisal, objectives, training catalogue
- Correspondence, standard templates, e-mail usage and policy, meetings, visitors
- Purchase procedure, work request procedure
- Library, conferences and seminars

2. Quality Management System

- Outline of the Quality Management System and responsible functions
- Document and record management, initials and signatures
- Explanation of internal auditing procedure, non-conforming work procedure,
- Work instructions and requirements for the use of analytical equipment, pipettes, balances, instrument manuals and user logbooks
- Test method work instructions, provisions for the approval and release of test results

3. Information technology, security and data protection

- Information security, access rights, user name and password, usage of network, intranet, video conferences, wireless facilities
- Explanation of software applications used for the administration of staff data
- Laboratory software (LIMS), data treatment and evaluation, storage and backup of laboratory data, approval and authorisation mechanism
- Provisions for data protection and confidentiality

4. Laboratory work, housekeeping, occupational health & safety, environment

- Quality control measures
- Safety instructions (Manual), responsible staff for laboratories and buildings
- Laboratory tour and access rules, explanation of safety rules and equipment (lab coats, gloves, goggles, eye showers, body showers, first aid kits, first-aider phone, spill kits)
- Alarm & emergency instructions, emergency calls and phone numbers, fire brigade, fire extinguisher, emergency exits, meeting point (fire, evacuation)
- Laboratory housekeeping procedure, handling of hazardous substances, chemicals cabinets and chemical storage room, explanation of gas storage and use, chemical waste collection and disposal
- General store, workshop, drawing office
- Ergonomics, smoking restriction

NB: Laboratories operating in ISO 14001 and/or OHSAS 18001 certified organisations should evidence the related aspects in the provisions laid down for the protection of the environment and the occupational health and safety.

5. Social and welfare

- Staff committee, union representation
- Medical service, social assistance
- Coffee/tea and lunch breaks, cafeteria opening hours
- Staff club and events, day-care