

## STRAIGHT FROM THE LAB

## New system of comparative inspections

An age-old question asks “who watches the watchers?” The answer with regard to accredited calibration laboratories is to compare them with other laboratories at the same level. It is now also possible for non-accredited laboratories to participate in these comparisons.

This procedure is termed an “audit”. It involves sending a device such as a temperature sensor around to a number of laboratories for calibration. The results are then compared and form part of the supervisory authority’s assessment of the participating laboratories’ individual performance.

Audits were previously organised by the national calibration laboratories. A voluntary system has now been introduced, under which

an individual laboratory can request an audit. The system is called Centre for Intercomparisons (CFI) and is operated by SP Technical Research Institute of Sweden in collaboration with the institute’s Finnish counterpart the Centre For Metrology and Accreditation (MIKES) and the British Measurement and Testing Association (BMTA) in the UK.

“If we decide that we need to compare ourselves with other labs, we submit an audit request to the database that is the hub of the system,” explains Lars Grönlund, manager of Pentronic’s accredited calibration laboratory. “Then other labs can sign up for the audit.”

In 2010 Pentronic is participating in two audits. One is for a Pt100 sensor with monitoring instrumentation and the other is for a pyrometer.

Both audits are being done under accreditation but it is possible to compare a laboratory’s performance outside the accreditation system or for other magnitudes.

In theory, unaccredited laboratories can take part in these comparative audits but in practice there are obstacles.

“The measuring range of an audit is often greater than what an industrial lab can handle,” Lars explains.

More information about CFI is available at [www.intercomparison.org](http://www.intercomparison.org).

