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## Re: UK NEQAS for Leucocyte Immunophenotyping and Brexit

Since 1991 UK NEQAS for Leucocyte Immunophenotyping has provided External Quality Assessment (EQA) to laboratories within the UK and Internationally. The findings from our programmes ensure that clinical laboratory tests on patients are robust, accurate, precise and therefore clinically of value, regardless of the location they are performed. Furthermore, they contribute towards the production of international and national guidelines and underpin the generation of local clinical laboratory results for use in the diagnosis and monitoring of patients throughout their treatment journeys. The services provided by UK NEQAS for Leucocyte Immunophenotyping are operated on a global scale, with laboratories participating from over 80 countries and we are proud of the high number of international participants that are enrolled in our EQA programmes.

As a result of a referendum held in June 2016 the UK will be leaving the European Union on the 29<sup>th</sup> March 2019. We understand that many participants will have questions and possibly even concerns regarding the services we provide because of this change. Whilst the outcome is still not known we do expect significant changes within the UK and with how we trade internationally.

UK NEQAS for Leucocyte Immunophenotyping would like to reassure all our participants that we have taken all possible steps to prevent disruption to the EQA services we provide. Over the last two years we have performed extensive work in preparation for leaving the EU based on both 'deal' and 'no-deal' scenarios.

Briefly, to ensure the continued provision of EQA services we have

- Updated our international shipping systems to use DHL/Deutsche Post air freight. This means that all EQA shipments will be flown from a local airport into Europe for onward delivery. The use of air freight ensures that packages will not be delayed as the International Air Transport Association (IATA) has stated that air traffic will not be disrupted. As such, any problems on UK road, rail networks or at UK ports will be avoided.
- Implemented paperless commercial invoices. By working closely with our shipping companies, we have enrolled in paperless trade systems to facilitate smoother customs clearance of EQA materials issued by UK NEQAS for Leucocyte Immunophenotyping.
- Undertaken stockpiling of critical supplies. Due to the large number of suppliers we use in the production of EQA materials it is likely that there may be some disruption to our own purchasing systems. Therefore, we have performed a series of internal audits to identify goods that may be affected and have increased purchasing of these products to ensure enough stock for our continued operations.

In addition to EQA services, UK NEQAS for Leucocyte Immunophenotyping has also worked closely with many international organisations over recent years e.g. World Health Organisation (WHO), National Institutes of Health (NIH), International Clinical Cytometry Society (ICCS), European Society for Clinical Cell Analysis (ESCCA) and others. These working relationships will continue and will develop uninterrupted for the benefit of all.

We believe that services we provide, whilst tested in the laboratory, are to improve patient care. Therefore, irrespective of the final agreement we believe that we have an obligation not just to our participants but to the patients, to ensure that our services continue uninterrupted. Therefore, we would like to assure all our participants that UK NEQAS for Leucocyte Immunophenotyping will continue to:

- provide uninterrupted EQA services that are
  - Appropriate to clinical practice
  - Responsive to laboratory needs
  - Accredited to ISO 17043
- support education of clinical laboratory scientists
- provide laboratories with information on the relative performance of different methods
- assist laboratories to achieve good EQA performance
- support laboratories in attaining ISO 15189 accreditation
- present findings of EQA programmes at national and international conferences
- publish findings from EQA programmes in international peer reviewed journals
- collaborate with international bodies and groups

Thank you for your continued support of our EQA programmes and we are sorry for any concerns or distress that the current political situation may have caused. We are happy to discuss these issues further and would encourage any participant with additional questions or concerns to contact us directly.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'L. Whitby', written in a cursive style.

Mr Liam Whitby  
Director  
UK NEQAS for Leucocyte Immunophenotyping