UK NEQAS
Leucocyte Immunophenotyping

Sheffield Teaching Hospitals NHS
NHS Foundation Trust

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Dear Participant

As we come to the end of the financial year, and enter reregistration for next year, we felt it was time to review our service delivery in 2020/21 and outline our plans moving forward.

This year we have faced the dual challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic and Brexit.

COVID-19 Pandemic

During the period of the pandemic, UK NEQAS LI staff have split into two teams, alternating weekly between being in the office/laboratory and working-from-home to improve social distancing. As such we have had a reduced technical capacity but were still able to maintain our service.

Following consultation with UK NEQAS LI's steering committee and specialist advisory group, we made the decision to adhere to the trial schedule as planned for 2020-2021. It is our belief that it was important to provide an uninterrupted external quality assessment (EQA) service to laboratories, especially given the global nature of our operations and the role EQA plays in supporting the delivery of diagnostic services.

Despite the challenges, we are on course to issue the correct number of trials in all ISO 17043 accredited programmes. A lack of patient donations has led to a deficit of material in two pilot programmes (Minimal Residual Disease for Plasma Cell Myeloma by Flow Cytometry and Cerebrospinal Fluid (CSF) Immunophenotyping). In the Minimal Residual Disease for Plasma Cell Myeloma by Flow Cytometry programme we will make up this shortfall with an electronic 'in silico' round of EQA. We are planning to change the format of the Cerebrospinal Fluid (CSF) Immunophenotyping programme to bring it into line with current guidelines (1) and as such will reduce the number of trial issues this year to two to allow time for this development.

Throughout the pandemic we have been working closely with participants and offering extended trial deadlines when needed. Only a small proportion of laboratories have accepted this offer with return rates in all our trials now returning to pre-pandemic levels. Furthermore, we are not performance monitoring laboratories who have suspended testing due to the impact of COVID-19 on their services. Acknowledging the ongoing impact of the pandemic globally we will continue to offer extensions to trial deadlines for participants whose services remained impacted by COVID-19 pandemic as we begin our 2021/22 trial schedule. Please go to our website if you wish to request an extension (http://www.ukneqasli.co.uk/contact-us/request-late-results-extension/). However, please note it is the responsibility of participants to ensure EQA results are returned; UK NEQAS LI will not be chasing results if they are not returned and a request for an extension is not received.

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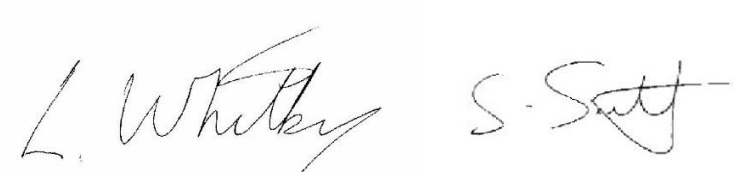
In the UK, a roadmap for out of lockdown was published on 22nd February 2021. If this plan is adhered to, we intend to deliver our full ranges of services in 2021/22, whilst continuing to improve our current programmes and develop EQA in new areas. If this changes, and we envisage any alterations to our services, we will of course communicate this as soon as possible.

Withdrawal of the United Kingdom from the European Union (Brexit)

Assessing and mitigating the impact of Brexit has also been a major focus for us this year. Having developed a close working relationship with our European collaborators over many years, and greatly valuing their contribution to our programmes, we were keen to ensure that we were able to carry on delivering our services to our European participants. We are pleased to say that with support from our suppliers, couriers, the UK NEQAS logistics working group and our participants, the consequences have been minimal. We have now issued several trials under the new rules and have experienced shipping difficulties in only a small number of territories, all of which have now been satisfactorily resolved. We look forward to future collaborations with our European partners.

Finally, we would like to say a thank you to our participants for their help and support during this difficult time.

Yours sincerely



Liam Whitby — Director

Stuart Scott — Centre Manager

1. Del Principe, MI, Gatti, A, Johansson, U, Buccisano, F, Brando, B. ESCCA/ISCCA protocol for the analysis of cerebrospinal fluid by multiparametric flow-cytometry in hematological malignancies. Cytometry. 2020; 1–13. https://doi.org/10.1002/cyto.b.21981