

UK NEQAS for H&I Newsletter May 2020

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1. News

This Newsletter contains important information about registration and changes to schemes for 2020-21. Please make sure you make all staff involved in testing EQA samples aware of the changes. Full details of all schemes are available in the 2020-21 Participant Manual which is available to download from our website www.uknegashandi.org.uk.

The NEQAS Consortium has issued a statement on BREXIT. Please visit <https://uknegas.org.uk/news/uk-negas-brexite-update-2/> to view the full response. The Consortium will also continue to update their response to the COVID-19 situation, the latest information can be viewed at <https://uknegas.org.uk/>.

Financial Year Operation in 2020-21

UK NEQAS for H&I moved scheme operations to a financial year (April – March) last year. The change was made to align our services with Participant's Finance Departments and to allow us to improve our invoicing service to Participants.

2020-21 Registration Now Open

After a brief suspension to opening registration and starting sample distribution due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the registration process can now be completed online using the Participant's Portal. Please log on to the system and complete your registration for 2020-21 as soon as possible. The first distribution in 2020-21 will be Schemes 5A, 7 and 9 on the 2nd June 2020.



UK NEQAS for H&I

Director: Dr Tracey Rees

Deputy Director: Deborah Pritchard

Operations Manager: Amy De'Ath

Deputy Manager: Melanie Bartley

Healthcare Scientist Practitioner: Geraint Clarke

QA Officer: Luke Gardner



Pictured above (left to right): Luke Gardner, Geraint Clarke, Melanie Bartley, Amy De'Ath, and Deborah Pritchard

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Scheme Fees for 2020-21

Scheme fees (bar 1) have been held at 2019-20 prices. A slight increase in the fee for Scheme 10 has been made in line with an increase in operating costs for this scheme. We would like to reiterate to our customers that we operate on a not-for profit basis, and as such will always provide our services at the lowest price we can offer to maintain operations. We have also appointed a new courier provider, and are pleased to announce lower courier delivery fees (see page 3 for full details)

Please remember that all invoices must be paid in **UK STERLING (GBP - £) AND FREE OF ALL BANK CHARGES.** We are experiencing more invoices being paid in a foreign currency resulting in outstanding balances being left on accounts. Please also ensure that if your laboratory is not subject to UK VAT, that a valid VAT number is recorded during the registration process. Registrations without this information will be charged UK VAT as standard. An administration fee will be payable if invoices have to be re-issued. Outstanding balances will result in suspension from all services until your account balance is cleared.

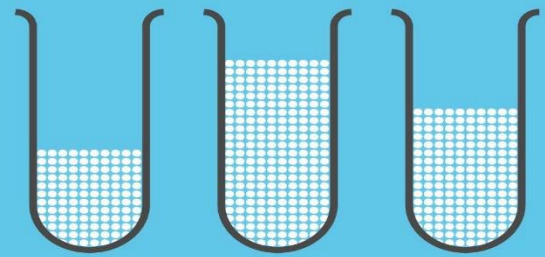
Distribution Timetables 2020-21

Distribution and result deadline timetables are available in the Participant Manual and on the UK NEQAS for H&I Website.

Personnel

The UK NEQAS for H&I Manager, Deborah Pritchard has moved into a position as Deputy Director and Amy De'Ath has returned as Operations Manager. Dr Tracey Rees remains as Director.

We would like to welcome Sylvia McConnell and Katy Derbyshire who will be joining the Steering Committee in 2020. They will replace Ruhena Sergeant and Patrick Flynn who have both sat on the Committee for many years and UK NEQAS for H&I would like to thank them for their contribution to the successful running and development of the service.



EFI/BSHI Conference 2020

Tracey Rees, Deborah Pritchard, Amy De'Ath, Geraint Clarke, and Luke Gardner were due to attend this year's joint BSHI and EFI Conference in Glasgow, Scotland, as exhibitors to promote the service.



The conference has been re-scheduled for the **22nd to 25th April 2021** and we look forward to seeing you there.



2. Scheme Updates for 2020-21

Scheme 5A, 7 and 8 Sample Distribution Frequency

The frequency of sample distribution for Scheme 5A – HFE Typing, Scheme 7 – HLA*B57:01 Typing for Drug Hypersensitivity and Scheme 8 – HLA Genotyping for Coeliac and Other HLA Diseases will be changed for the 2020-21 distribution year. Samples will now be distributed for assessment three times a year. The total number of samples assessed for each of the schemes will remain at ten samples per year, where the first distribution will contain three samples, the second distribution will contain four samples and the final distribution will contain three samples. This change has been made to ensure EQA samples are more representative of laboratory performance by sampling laboratory testing more regularly.

Scheme 4A1 – HLA Typing at 1st Field Resolution

Participants are encouraged to submit HLA-DQA1* results beyond 1st field to low-intermediate resolution.

Scheme 4A1 DQA1* results will be assessed against a reference DQA1* type, allowing participants to report results at the resolution that is applicable to their clinical need e.g. for solid organ transplant antibody assessment.

Scheme 8 – HLA Genotyping for Coeliac and Other HLA Diseases

Scheme 8 sample material will continue to be whole blood which may have been previously stored in a freezer. However, new for 2020-21, participants may select to receive pre-prepared DNA instead of a whole blood sample. There will be an additional charge of £50 for this service to reflect the increased costs of preparing the sample.

Also new for 2020-21, participants may select to be assessed for the detection of Cw6 for Psoriasis.

We will continue to collect interpretative comments for Scheme 8, but these will not be assessed in 2020-21.

Change in Courier

UK NEQAS for H&I will be employing a new courier company, Priority Express, to distribute samples worldwide in 2020-21. This change in service provider has allowed us to secure more competitive fees and these savings will be passed directly on to users. Please see the updated prices for 2020-21 by logging on to the Participant's Portal.

3. The Participant's Portal

The UK NEQAS for H&I Participant Portal allows users to manage their EQA Scheme participation.

A link to the system can be found on the UK NEQAS for H&I webpage <https://neqas.welsh-blood.org.uk/> or by typing <https://ukneqashandi.nagoda.cloud> into an internet browser.



User guides are available for laboratory users and agents to guide you through the system and the functionality it offers. These guides appear on our website, and as links in the footer at the bottom of the Participant's Portal site.

Please register for the 2020-21 distribution year by logging on to the website and selecting **Registration>Scheme Registration**.

We would like to invite your comments. Please email all comments to ukneqashandi@wales.nhs.uk

4. Questions and Answers

The 125 user responses from the 2019 Participant Survey have been reviewed in a Steering Committee meeting. A summary of responses to some of the queries it raised are included below:

R: The timely delivery of sample is an issue which can affect our ability to test as the quality of the samples is affected.

A: UK NEQAS for H&I have secured a new courier for the 2020-21 distribution year. As well as significantly lowering the costs of courier delivery we hope the service will be more efficient, and in turn improve the quality of the samples on delivery. As the cost of courier delivery will be lower for most destinations, some participants may like to take advantage of this to ensure swift delivery of samples compared to standard postage. We are also performing ongoing investigations regarding our cell preparation methodology and shipping media to ensure we can deliver the best quality samples.

R: It takes time to become familiar with using the Participant's Portal and access reports.

A: UK NEQAS for H&I have provided a number of user guides and quick guides which are available on the NEQAS website and as links at the footer of the Portal site to assist users in navigating the system. The office is also happy to take phone calls and emails to direct users and we always welcome your feedback on any issues so we can direct ongoing improvements.

R: The format of reports is cumbersome and could be more informative.

A: UK NEQAS for H&I have secured resources for further development of the Participant's Portal, specifically to improve the reports and summaries available to participants - especially when exporting data to excel.

R: The Portal sends out too many automated reminders.

A: The Portal is automated to send result reminders to those participants who have not submitted results. The system sends out an email per sample, not per scheme so it is possible that users may get multiple notices. The system was designed this way as samples are entered on an individual basis for each scheme.

R: Participants are unaware of the role of the NEQAS for H&I Steering Committee

A: The Steering Committee meets three times a year and is made up of a panel of experts in the field of H&I with the specific aim to advise on the design and running of existing or new schemes, provide opinions on any appeals raised by participants, and provide expert knowledge to assist unsatisfactory performers (if required).

Those users that requested a personal response from comments made in the survey will be contacted directly by the NEQAS team in the upcoming weeks.

Annual Participants Meeting

Please make a note in your diaries that the UK NEQAS for H&I Annual Participant Meeting, reviewing both 2019-20 and 2020-21 scheme results, will be held on **12th May 2021**. The meeting will once again be held at the Conference Aston Centre in Birmingham.

Participants who register for 4 or more UK NEQAS for H&I Schemes will receive 1 free delegate place for the meeting (covering registration fees, but not including travel).


Conference Aston

