

UK NEQAS for H&I Newsletter March 2025

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1. News

This Newsletter contains important information about registration and changes to schemes for 2025-26. Please make sure all staff involved in testing EQA samples are aware of relevant changes. Full details of all schemes are available in the 2025-26 Participant Manual which is available to download from our website www.uknegashandi.org.uk.

Annual Re-Registration is Open

The registration process can now be completed online using the Participants' Portal. Please log on to the system and complete your registration for 2025-26 as soon as possible. The first distribution in 2025-26 will be Scheme 1B on the 8th of April 2025. The distribution timetable is available on our website: <https://uknegas.org.uk/calendar>.

Service Improvement



The UK NEQAS team are proud of the service improvement initiatives they have made in the last year. Projects including making the service more sustainable (reducing cardboard use

by 41%), setting up a Quality Managers Forum, colour-coding sample labels and streamlining lab processes.



UK NEQAS for H&I

Director: Deborah Pritchard

Operations Manager: Amy De'Ath

Deputy Manager: Melanie Bartley

Healthcare Scientist Practitioner: Geraint Clarke

QA Officer: Jack Jefferies

MLA: Susan Davies



Pictured above (left to right): Jack Jefferies, Amy De'Ath, Deborah Pritchard, Geraint Clarke and Sue Davies

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Scheme Fees for 2025-26

There will be a slight increase in fees for this distribution cycle. We are facing higher inflation and increased costs. We strive to provide a high-quality service with additional benefits that participant's value, including free educational schemes, webinars and access to experts in the field whilst operating in economically challenging conditions. UK NEQAS for H&I has absorbed some price increasing costs by making savings elsewhere using various improvement initiatives and sourcing competitive pricing for consumables.

We would like to reiterate to our customers that *we operate on a not-for profit basis* and will always provide our services at the lowest price we can whilst maintaining operations.

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. An administration fee will be payable if invoices must be re-issued. Outstanding balances will result in suspension from all services until your account balance is cleared.



Courier Fees

Following a competitive tender process UK NEQAS for H&I are pleased to offer **significantly reduced courier fees in 2025-26**, typically offering a saving of 50% in price. All savings will be passed directly to participants.

We will no longer offer domestic or international postage. **We will use courier services for all domestic and international shipments.**

This has a number of benefits:

- Comparable costs to international postage
- Traceability of parcels
- Expedited delivery

A poster for the 38th European Immunogenetics & Histocompatibility Conference. The poster features a colorful illustration of a European cityscape with a large cathedral. Text on the poster includes: '38th European Immunogenetics & Histocompatibility Conference', 'Immunogenetics → Science and Clinical Applications → The Way Ahead', '16-17 May 2025', 'Prague, Czech Republic', 'Prague Congress Centre', and 'EFI 2025 PRAGUE'. There is also a logo for 'efi' (European Federation of Immunogenetics).

UK NEQAS for H&I will be attending the 38th EFI Conference from the 20th-23rd May 2025 in Prague, Czech Republic. The theme for the conference is the way ahead.

Amy will be available throughout the Conference, including at the Poster Presentation session.

Please come and say hello!

Sampling Handling Slips

This year we will be trialling a paperless approach by offering sampling handling slips as electronic copies only. These slips of paper were including in shipments with samples and offered information on sample conditions and numbers. The pdf copies will be available to download from our website. The link will be emailed in the sample dispatch notice.

Annual Participants' Meeting

This annual meeting allows us to feedback on performance, highlight issues or trends and inform participants of any changes for the upcoming year. We also encourage interaction so participants can raise concerns or give ideas for improvements.

Join us on the **29th April 2025 at Aston Conference Centre in Birmingham, UK.** We will also be providing a second meeting for rest of world-based labs using an online format (date to be confirmed). This meeting will be recorded and made available on our website.

2. Scheme Updates for 2025-26

Please refer to the Participant Manual for full scheme information. It is available to download from our website www.uknegashandi.org.uk.

New for 2025-26

Scheme 1B – pre-prepared cells will no longer be offered. All participants will receive whole blood.

Scheme 7 will be renamed ‘HLA-related Pharmacogenetics’. In addition to covering Abacavir Hypersensitivity the scheme will now also cover the following pharmacogenetic reactions at no additional cost:

- Abacavir Hypersensitivity - B*57:01
- Allopurinol Hypersensitivity - B*58:01
- Carbamazepine Hypersensitivity - A*31:01, B*15:02
- Oxcarbazepine Hypersensitivity - B*15:02
- Lamotrigine Hypersensitivity - B*15:02
- Flucloxacillin Hypersensitivity - HLA-B*57:01
- Phenytoin Hypersensitivity - B*15:02
- Tebentafusp Suitability - A*02:01

This scheme will now distribute previously frozen whole blood.

Scheme 8 – HLA Genotyping for Coeliac and other HLA Associated Diseases will now solely contain diseases associated with HLA: Coeliac Disease, Narcolepsy, Actinic Prurigo, Birdshot Retinopathy, Behcet's Disease, Rheumatoid Arthritis, Diabetes and Psoriasis.

Scheme 3 Reminder

Laboratories can report complement fixing antibodies in Scheme 3. There is a field titled “Complement Fixing Antibodies” in the results entry page. A small number of laboratories report in this manner which may allow you to perform a comparison.

If your laboratory uses extended testing panels you can report additional antibodies or allele-specific antibodies in the comments box.

Scheme 5A and 5B – Hereditary Haemochromatosis

Did you know we offer schemes to support testing for Haemochromatosis? Scheme 5A assesses participants ability to determine HFE mutations and Scheme 5B assesses participants ability to provide an accurate clinical report.

3. Pilot Schemes

UK NEQAS for H&I will be offering a number of new pilot schemes in 2025-26 **free of charge**.

Scheme 8 Coeliac Disease: Interpretative Comments – it is currently optional whether to include interpretative comments alongside the HLA type in Coeliac Disease (CD). In 2025-26 we will be performing a pilot assessment of these comments. All labs are encouraged to submit their clinical interpretation which should include an interpretation of the risk of susceptibility to CD and any diagnostic limitations. Participants will receive a summary of the pilot assessment.

NEW Scheme 12 – HNA Genotyping

Participants can register for genotyping at HNA-1,2,3,4 and/or 5. Participants will receive 4 samples of whole blood. You will not be formally assessed but will receive a summary of the pilot assessment.

NEW Scheme 13 – HNA Antibody Detection and Specification

Participants can register for antibody detection at HNA-1,2,3,4 and/or 5. Participants will receive 4 samples of 1.5ml serum/plasma. You will not be formally assessed but will receive a summary of the pilot assessment.

Follow us on social media for the latest updates and news!



www.linkedin.com/in/uk-negas-handi

4. Future Schemes and Developments

Future Schemes

Donor derived cell free DNA (dd-cfDNA)

Cell-free DNA are short, extracellular fragments of DNA released into the circulation. Dd-cfDNA can be used to detect potential rejection episodes post-transplant: during both cellular and antibody mediated rejection, a greater amount of dd-cfDNA is released in the blood from the damaged graft indicating organ rejection.

Apolipoprotein L1 (APOL1) Genotyping

The presence of high risk variants is associated with an increased risk of chronic kidney disease and kidney failure. These variants are found almost exclusively in people of African or Caribbean heritage: <https://bts.org.uk/apol1-testing-in-potential-living-kidney-donors/>

Register your interest here or tell us about other services you would like us to provide:

<https://forms.office.com/e/31aFbSFZpu>



Portal Development

UK NEQAS for H&I are excited to announce that we will be developing a bespoke new Portal which will be introduced for the 2026-27 distribution year.



5. News from UK NEQAS Consortium

UK NEQAS is a charitable consortium of external quality assessment laboratories, mostly evolved from NHS services England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. We have over 50 years experience in EQA and its clinical relevance across all the disciplines (Immunology and Allergy, Cellular Pathology, Clinical Biochemistry, Haematology, Transfusion and Transplantation, Genetics, Virology and Microbiology). The UK NEQAS Consortium <https://ukneqas.org.uk/> welcomes a new President, Dr Barbara De La Salle.



The UK NEQAS Consortium has written a number of articles on the work of UK NEQAS and the importance of external quality assessment. You can view the articles here:

<https://www.pathologyinpractice.com/features?tagId=76>