UK NEQAS

International Quality Expertise

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)

New participants

Q. What areas of microbiology are covered?

The schemes cover bacteriology, mycology, parasitology and virology for a range of technologies including molecular, serology, culture and microscopy.

Q. What type of specimens are covered by the schemes?

The majority of the simulated specimens are straightforward and comparative to those most likely to be found in clinical practice. Occasionally, more challenging specimens may be distributed for educational purposes or where recognition of an unusual/emerging pathogen may be of importance to the patient or community. New specimen types are introduced into the repertoire from time to time and participants are notified when these become available. Specimen format includes freeze-dried, serum, plasma, liquid suspensions and slides.

Q. How does the service work?

Specimens are prepared and distributed to participants worldwide. Approximately 12 dispatches are made each year and participants receive samples for whatever EQA schemes they are registered for. The frequency of distribution types range from once to 12 times a year. Participants examine the specimens in their laboratory and report their findings to UK NEQAS for Microbiology through the secure webpage (or fax if necessary). Replies are analysed and participants receive an individual report which include the overall results for the distribution.

Q. How reliable are the specimens?

The specimens are subjected to rigorous quality control in the UK NEQAS for Microbiology laboratory (including homogeneity and stability testing). Stringent manufacturing practices, past experience with the stability of the specimens and sampling of the batch within UK NEQAS provide good assurance that a participant will not receive an unrepresentative specimen.

Q. How long do I have for testing? What is the timescale for reporting?

Time for testing varies between two to four weeks. For the majority of schemes, three weeks are allocated between the UK dispatch date and the return of results.

Q. What is the period covered by the subscription charge?

Participation in the scheme starts 1st April each year and continues until 31st March in the next year. If a participant joins part way through the annual period, a reduced fee may be payable reflecting the number of samples to be supplied for that part year.

Q. What liability do participants of the schemes have?

Participants of the scheme have entire responsibility for all samples distributed to them under the scheme and all activities carried out by them or any third party in relation to the samples from the time of delivery of the samples.

Q. Are the schemes accredited?

UK NEQAS for Microbiology, operated by Public Health England, and Public Health England, operating UK NEQAS for Parasitology are UKAS accredited Proficiency Testing Providers, No.4715 and No. 7512 respectively.

Q. What benefits can participants expect?

In the event of EQA failure, repeat specimens are available on request (up to 3 months after the close of the distribution) and are free of charge, allowing participants to monitor current and recurring problems. http://uknegasmicro.org.uk/menu/order-repeat-specimens

- Country specific performance is provided when more than 10 laboratories participate, therefore participants can benchmark against their national standard.
- The quality and frequency of distributions (especially in general bacteriology, blood borne viruses/blood donor screen and parasitology) consolidates quality practice. Participants receive homogeneous material, as specimens are subject to extensive characterisation and a series of quality control checks prior to distribution.
- Publication of intended results via the secure website, allows participants to investigate problems (if any) immediately.
- A wide range of advice is provided by an external Advisory Panel and a Steering Committee, both consisting of experienced microbiologists representing the interests of the laboratory community.

Reporting results/ web entry

Q. What is the secure area of the website?

The secure area of the website is accessed by entering your unique laboratory identifier code and password. This area is used for result entry, to access reports and for other information specific to your laboratory. For additional guidance please see http://ukneqasmicro.org.uk/images/pdf/W032.pdf

Q. How can I return my results?

Results can be returned electronically using a web form on the secure area of the website. For guidance please see http://ukneqasmicro.org.uk/images/pdf/W032.pdf

Q. We had a technical issue and I could not send the results on time. Can you please accept our results?

If you are experiencing problems accessing our web page to enter results, please submit them by email or fax and they will be accepted providing we receive them within the closing date of the distribution.

Q. The staff member who normally handles the EQA result submissions is away and we realised we missed the closing date. We have proof of when we did the testing, could you accept the results if I email/fax it through now?

According to our policy as well as UKAS and ISO recommendations, we cannot accept late results.

Q. I am trying to enter results but I keep getting an error message of invalid code that a valid value is required for another field?

There are some mandatory fields built into the web reply form for the schemes to ensure that certain fields which are associated with the scoring of the specimen are completed and to ensure the final report displays correctly. General rules to follow:

- always provide an overall report if one is requested, and
- if you only report one set of results always enter it under the first option, even if it means having to update the kit details (add details of kit under 'Kit change details' column on the 'Method' page)
- If the web issue persists, enter 'please see comments below' in the results field and enter your result in the comments field, located on the final page.

Q. I am trying to enter quantitative results but keep getting an error message that the values I am entering are invalid?

For some of the quantitative schemes you need to select the correct unit type i.e. copies/mL or IU/mL AND have to select the format of the value i.e. log value or non-log value. For example if you are trying to enter a non-log value i.e. 1000 copies/mL when the website is set to receive 'log copies/mL' the error message would come up. You can change/select your units on the 'Method' page of the web entry screen.

Q. I am unable to choose the organism name from the dropdown list?

This could be due to a browser incompatibility issue - consult the 'Guidance on use of secure site' provided on the 'Registered Participants' page. If you are unable to resolve the issue then please get in contact with us.

Q. The organism I wish to report is not in the drop down menu

Please enter in the report field 'see comments below' and enter the organism you wish to report in the comments field on the final page of the web entry form

Q. I am not able to change my method details on the web entry form.

Add the details under the 'Kit change detail' column, this will not update in real time. The new method details are collected in the system and we will update it before releasing the prospective report. At the subsequent distribution your new details will then display under the 'Kit details' column.

Reports & performance

Q. How can I see my reports?

Electronic copies of reports are accessible for viewing on the secure area of the UK NEQAS website.

Q. What information is provided on a report?

To view sample reports and see what is included in a UK NEQAS report, please go to https://ukneqasmicro.org.uk/participant-info/specimen-sample-reports/

Q. When will I find out how well I performed?

Intended results are usually available on the day following the close of the distribution and accessed through the secure area of the website. Reports are usually available within 20 working days of the close of the distribution. The reports containing expert comments, are usually available within 30 working days.

Q. What support is offered by UK NEQAS to aid with EQA failure investigations?

Repeat samples (free of charge) are provided on request.
http://ukneqasmicro.org.uk/menu/order-repeat-specimens
Participants are encouraged to contact us for advice by emailing organiser@ukneqasmicro.org.uk
Participants from the UK and Republic of Ireland are requested to complete an incident review form to explain what actions have been taken
http://ukneqasmicro.org.uk/registered-participants/incident-review-form

Q. How is my performance rating calculated?

For full information on performance please see https://ukneqasmicro.org.uk/images/pdf/W008.pdf

Q. Why has my performance rating gone down even though I achieved a full score for this distribution?

The performance rating is calculated relative to the performance of other participants. Therefore if the mean score for the other participants has gone up your performance rating will go down.

Reports

Q. My report for a distribution states 'Not returned' but I have evidence, screen shot of web page, showing submission status as submitted with date and time it was done.

This generally happens because the results were accessed after the successful initial submission and were not resubmitted prior to exiting the web results page. Each time you revisit the web entry page before the closing date you must ensure to re-submit your results even if you don't change anything. If this is a recurring situation we will not be able to correct/accept your results. Please inform all staff accessing the web entry pages of the requirement to re-submit results prior to exiting the page. This is also highlighted on the Info sheet of all the web entry pages. We are able to provide you with details on what was changed and when, should you require details for your internal investigation.

Q. From our report we can see we made a transcription error. In our laboratory results are handled electronically and it is automatically uploaded therefore there is no risk of result transcription with patient results.

We encourage participants to treat the simulated UK NEQAS specimens as they would clinical samples and therefore transcription errors from the clinical report onto entering onto the web cannot be redeemed and so unfortunately your scores will still stand. We strongly recommend all participants print a copy of their results after submission and have them checked by another staff member. This is generally in line with reporting in a clinical laboratory when results are manually authorised before release.

Q. I am performing a validation study because we are changing to a different kit/method/analyser/platform and we need some historical specimens?

UK NEQAS for Microbiology do not routinely provide samples for validation of new tests kits and methodologies. Please see https://ukneqasmicro.org.uk/participant-info/order-repeat-specimens/ for further de

Please contact us if you need more information or have any other queries about UK NEQAS for Microbiology.

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