

UK NEQAS United Kingdom National External Quality Assessment Scheme for General Haematology

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INTERNATIONAL EXTERNAL QUALITY ASSESSMENT SCHEME FOR HAEMATOLOGY

The UK NEQAS Unit is a self-financing unit within the West Hertfordshire Hospitals NHS Trust, based at the Watford General Hospital site. The unit is housed on the ground floor of the Pathology Block but is a separate entity from the hospital laboratory department. The UK NEQAS Unit comprises UK NEQA Scheme for General Haematology, Blood Transfusion Laboratory Practice and Feto-maternal Haemorrhage who share laboratory and office space as well as clerical staff and MLAs but each has dedicated scientific staff. IEQAS(H) is run from the NEQAS Unit, but is separate from the UK NEQAS(H).

The UK NEQAS for General Haematology provides a service for hospitals and laboratories within the UK but also offers surveys to laboratories abroad, at present 466 non-UK laboratories in 47 countries are included in distributions. Whole blood samples for full blood count are distributed twelve times per annum and accompanied by other surveys from the following: G6PD, Cytochemistry, Red Cell Volume, Vitamin B₁₂ Absorption test, Blood and Parasite films, Automated Differential Leucocyte Count, Reticulocytes, Abnormal haemoglobins and Newborn Sickle Screening. Laboratories are invoiced for each type of survey and may elect which they receive. Pilot surveys currently available include Rapid Diagnostic test for malaria and DNA diagnostics for haemoglobinopathies schemes.

All whole blood samples have been routinely tested for Hepatitis B surface antigen, Human Immunodeficiency virus antigen and antibodies to Hepatitis C virus and Human immunodeficiency virus.

Participants receive instruction sheets and result sheets printed with their laboratory's participant reference number with their survey samples or they can opt to enter their laboratory results for the automated schemes on the web. All surveys will eventually be set-up for web entry allowing for a paper-free system. All data received is computer analysed and reports for each survey sent to the participating laboratories and their named consultant.

UK NEQAS(H) holds an annual participants' symposium and, in conjunction with UK NEQAS for Parasitology, a parasite teaching day for participants in the UK and Republic of Ireland. Workshops in Abnormal Haemoglobins and their identification have also been arranged and it is hoped that in future years workshops in other subjects will be arranged.

The International External Quality Assessment Scheme for Haematology (IEQAS(H)) works along side the UK NEQAS(H). The 79 participants come from 58 countries in Asia, Europe, Africa and South America. The postal times between the UK and these countries mean that whole blood samples cannot be used due to their rapid deterioration. IEQAS(H) participants therefore receive specially prepared samples, which simulate whole blood comprising fixed human platelets and fixed chicken cells (pseudo white cells) suspended in haemolysate for haemoglobin estimation. Unfortunately, a suitable method for stabilising red cells for prolonged periods has not been perfected. The UK NEQAS(H) uses whole blood for the reticulocyte survey and as above this is unsuitable for IEQAS, therefore stained films are sent to participants for percentage estimation. Blood and parasite films used in the UK survey are suitable and comments from the UK participants are incorporated into the IEQAS reports.

The Unit is always pleased to receive visits from participants who wish to start an EQAS in their own country or enquires for teaching information on any relevant haematological subject.

Enquiries about any aspect of UK NEQAS(H) should be directed to Barbara De la Salle or for IEQAS(H) Dr Mary A West both found at:

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