

UK NEQAS Code of Practice adopted at the UK NEQAS Consortium AGM & Conference, 8th and 9th December 2009

A. Definitions and Responsibilities

A1. The Association is the legal entity known as United Kingdom National External Quality Assessment Service - a company limited by guarantee and a registered UK Charity.

A2. Members of the Association are defined as EQA Schemes or groups of EQA Schemes which have been accepted for membership of the Association.

A3. The UK NEQAS Consortium is a term used to describe all member Schemes.

A4. The UK NEQAS Executive Committee means those persons appointed to perform the duties of the Executive Committee as defined in the Memorandum and Articles of the Association.

A5. The Executive Committee is accountable to the Consortium for implementation of the strategy for member Schemes, as agreed by the Consortium at its General Meetings.

A6. As appointed Directors and Trustees of the UK NEQAS Association, members of the Executive Committee are responsible for complying with UK Company law and UK Charity law.

A7. The term Organiser means the individual designated by the Executive Committee as being responsible for the design and direction of the member Scheme and accountable to the Executive Committee for its compliance with the UK NEQAS Code of Practice. The term 'Director' may be used by member Schemes to mean Organiser if this is their tradition, provided that there is no confusion in understanding. For example, the distinction must be clear between the Director (head of service) of a department which hosts a Scheme, and the designated Director (Organiser) of the member Scheme, if they are separate individuals.

A8. Scheme Participants may be laboratories or individuals.

B. Membership Procedures

B1. Schemes shall be admitted to membership of the Association by the Executive Committee in accordance with the Memorandum and Articles of Association. Applications for membership shall be made to the Executive Committee on an application form available from the UK NEQAS Company Secretary and shall be accompanied by a signed statement from the Organiser that the Scheme or Schemes complies with this Code of Practice.

B2. Pilot Schemes intended to become member Schemes shall be admitted to Associate membership in accordance with the Memorandum and Articles of Association and will comply with all relevant conditions of this Code of Practice, including E3 where a subscription is charged.

B3. Only those Schemes admitted to full or associate membership of the Association by the Executive Committee shall be entitled to use the service mark UK NEQAS and associated logo. Use of the UK NEQAS service mark and logo by member Schemes and third parties is regulated according to Appendix 1.

B4. A Scheme that fails to comply with this Code of Practice shall be reminded by the Executive Committee of its obligation as a member of the Association and be required to rectify the non-compliance. Where a Scheme still fails to comply with this Code of Practice, the Executive Committee may prepare a written case for that Scheme to cease to be a member of the Association. In response, the member shall be offered three months in which to prepare a written case for remaining as a member of the Association. The documents shall be circulated to all members, who will determine, by a majority vote of the Association in General Meeting, whether

the member should be expelled from the Association, provided that any member to be so expelled shall also have the opportunity to make representation to the meeting at which the decision is to be made. Any decision to expel a member shall have immediate effect.

C. Member Scheme Management

C1. The Scheme shall be open to all UK providers offering a clinical service for investigations covered by the Scheme. Other participants may be accepted by agreement with the Scheme Organiser.

C2. The investigations covered by the Scheme shall be selected on the basis of their clinical relevance.

C3. Schemes shall be independent of any manufacturing and marketing interests in equipment and reagents in the field in which they operate, and any interests in the provision of analytical or other services shall be declared.

C4. The staff involved in directing and operating the Scheme shall be appropriately qualified.

C5. The conditions of participation for UK providers of direct or indirect clinical service shall be those currently defined by the Joint Working Group for Quality Assurance.

C6. The Organiser of the Scheme shall liaise with a UK NEQAS Steering Committee and/or Specialist Advisory Group comprising appropriate experts, participants and clinical advisers approved by the Executive Committee. Agendas, Minutes and lists of attendees at Steering Committee/Specialist Advisory Group Meetings shall be copied to the UK NEQAS Office.

C7. The Organiser shall monitor those participants failing to maintain acceptable levels of performance and present reports as required to the appropriate division's National Quality Assurance Advisory Panel (NQAAP) which is recognised by the Joint Working Group for Quality Assurance.

C8. The full, realistically calculated costs of operating the Scheme shall be fully recovered from participants' subscriptions. Schemes shall be non-profit making and any operating surplus shall be reinvested in the Schemes.

C9. Management arrangements shall enable continuity of the EQA service to participants.

D. Member Scheme Design

D1. The Scheme's aim shall be to promote optimal patient care by facilitating the availability of reliable laboratory investigations, through provision of objective information on participant performance and professional advice and assistance where appropriate.

D2. Schemes shall enable the detection of inadequate performance by participants. Participants with apparent performance difficulties should be encouraged to improve by education rather than penalty.

D3. Material for investigation shall be distributed regularly at an appropriate frequency and in appropriate numbers, guided by advice from Steering Committee or Specialist Advisory Group.

D4. Evidence shall be available to demonstrate the appropriateness, stability and uniformity (homogeneity) of the material distributed.

D5. The Scheme shall provide rapid turnaround of results and performance data to participants.

D6. Target results should be identified and an appropriate (usually quantitative) evaluation of

results be presented to allow comparison of individual participants' results with overall results.

D7. The Scheme shall conform to relevant safety standards and transport regulations.

D8. Confidentiality of individual participants' results and performance data shall be maintained except under circumstances specified in the Joint Working Group for Quality Assurance Conditions of Participation for UK clinical laboratories.

E. Obligations and Responsibilities of Member Schemes and their Organisers

E1. Organisers of member schemes shall keep the UK NEQAS Office informed of changes in Schemes' details and activities. This shall include completion of an Annual Return and mid-year update as required. Changes to Scheme details and other information for publication (eg enhancement of services and notice of participants meetings) shall be made promptly to the UK NEQAS Office and these amendments checked by Schemes after publication.

E2. Financial returns including annual accounts shall be submitted as required to the Executive Committee. These shall be in a standard format and validated by appropriate supporting documentation indicating agreement and acknowledgement by the budget holder. Full disclosure of all sources of UK NEQAS Scheme income shall be made. In addition, any additional income which supports the viability of the Scheme shall also be stated.

E3. The Scheme shall share a common participant identification code with other UK NEQASs and co-operate fully with the development and maintenance of the unified participant identification code database. Information in the database shall not be used by member Schemes to the detriment of other member Schemes.

E4. The Scheme shall contribute to the operating costs of the Association's Office and the costs of the services provided by the Office, as determined by the Association and administered by the Executive Committee.

E5. The Organiser of the Scheme shall uphold, support and promote the underlying principles of the Association as embodied in the Memorandum of Association, Code of Practice and policies agreed by the Consortium at Annual General Meetings and Conferences. Organisers shall play a full part in ensuring UK NEQAS is a harmonised, participant-responsive service and shall not damage the reputation of the UK NEQAS organisation as a whole through inappropriate action or inaction.

E6. Organisers shall achieve appropriate accreditation for their Schemes.

E7. All aspects of the work of a member Scheme shall be open to audit conducted by or on behalf of the Association. The purpose of any such audit shall be to assess the management of the Scheme in its ability to provide a service that complies with the stated aims and Code of Practice of the Association.

E8. Where Organisers of member Schemes also operate other services including non-member Schemes, other than pilot Schemes intended to become member Schemes, the other services shall be financially independent of the member Schemes.

E9. Organisers and staff of member Schemes and members of Steering Committees or Specialist Advisory Groups shall neither operate nor advise any EQA schemes which are in competition with member Schemes.