

Results of the December 2018 Participant Feedback Survey

Background

To maintain accreditation to ISO17043, it is important that we continue to improve the service that we offer to participants. A way of recording participant satisfaction is to carry out feedback gathering exercises. This is the fifth survey that we have conducted. Details of the previous surveys are available on the PT section of the HSL website (<http://www.hsl.gov.uk/proficiency-testing-schemes/participant-feedback>).

Survey

The survey was emailed to all asbestos Proficiency Testing participants, including (AIMS), Asbestos in Soils Scheme (AISS), Low Asbestos Content Scheme (LACS), Regular Inter-laboratory Counting Exchange (RICE) and Scanning Electron Microscopy Fibre Counting Scheme (SEM). In total 550 participants were emailed the survey and 137 responded (25% response rate).

Results

- Q1. From the 137 responses – 39% participate in AIMS, 10% in AISS, 13% in LACS, 25% in RICE, 13% in SEM.
- Q2. 45% of the responses were from the UK, 48% from Europe and 7% from ROW.
- Q3. 94% of participants find their samples/ slides to be of a suitable standard.
- Q4. 98% of participants receive their samples in a timely manner.
- Q5. 98% of participants find our answers to queries useful & informative.
- Q6. 96% of participants are aware that they can find our scheme schedule, information books & FAQ's on our website.
- Q7. 97% of participants are happy with the timescales for submitting results.
- Q8. 98% of participants that receive a group report find them informative.
- Q9. Participants were given the opportunity to make suggestions for improvements to the PT Online Data Entry System.
- Q10. Participants were given the opportunity to comment/make suggestions for the schemes.

Customer Comments

Participants were given the opportunity to comment further on a few of the questions. Below are a few examples of the responses:

- Q3. Are the samples/ slides provided as part of your scheme of a suitable standard?
- A few comments regarding the RICE slides;
 - not like true slides
 - *it is important to have a range of different densities within each batch of slides to assess analysts abilities*
 - some are deemed uncountable by participants
 - *slides are assessed before they enter the scheme as a candidate slide. The data is extracted once the slide has been counted at least 12 times by category 1 laboratories. Each round participants are able to query any slide which they deem to be unsuitable. Our analysts will investigate the slide and make an informed decision on whether it should remain in the scheme.*
 - fibres at the edge of the filter
 - *only the countable area is considered when observing the suitability of the slide.*

If participants have any concerns regarding the condition/ suitability of a slide, they should advise the PT Team. All slides within a batch should be counted; however, the slide could be withdrawn following an investigation.

- Participants have asked for more 'real-life', challenging samples for AIMS, AISS & SEMs.
- our analysts have adapted their sample production plans.

Q8. If you receive a group report for your scheme, do you find this informative?

- LACS - more information on how the z-score is calculated & suggestions for the group report.
The full z score calculation can be found in the LACS Information Book for Participants (available on our website page). LACS is a relatively new scheme and we are looking at ways in which we can improve the group report.
- RICE - summary of laboratory results are not on the certificate.
These are now available on the Online Data Entry System, along with the laboratory performance graph.
- ALL - laboratory performance compared to other participants, over a period of time, illustrated by a graph.
This is something that we can look in to providing.

Q10. Comments/ Suggestions regarding the Schemes.

- AIMS
 - Participants have requested textile/ rope and more 'real-life' samples.
Our analysts are continually looking at new and different types of samples to include within the scheme. We don't have access to a large number of commercial samples, so we try and make the manufactured ones as challenging as we can.
 - Comments regarding the asbestos content have been raised.
Rare asbestos types are normally included at least once or twice throughout the subscription year. The amount of asbestos within each sample varies, however we have to maintain a balance between making the samples like 'real-life' and making them challenging enough for a PT scheme.
- AISS
 - A request for a rule book for assigned asbestos content for component ACMs in soil. *The SCA Blue Book method states the asbestos content for ACMs.*
- LACS
 - A suggestion of an anonymised discussion between participants. *We have considered this in the past, but we currently don't have the facilities to offer a forum. We will keep in mind for the future.*
- RICE
 - Damaged slides. *Unfortunately RICE slides do get damaged during a round. We have added foam in to the top of our slide boxes and try to ensure the slides are packaged effectively to prevent damage. Most damage reported is from accidental damage by participants.*
 - Variety of fibre types in RICE batches. *Over the past year we have been adding MMMF slides to batches, we're almost at the point where every batch contains at least one of these slides. With our new online system we can easily identify amphibole and/ or chrysotile slides, over the next year we will reduce the number of chrysotile slides in each batch.*
- General
 - Finance - *we are aware of issues some participants experienced, mainly invoices not received. Generally, invoices are sent by post in*

March (or throughout the year, as requested). If payment hasn't been received before the first round is despatched (April/ May) then an email will be sent by the PT Team letting the participant know. If a participant has a report on hold due to non-payment of a scheme, they should contact the PT Team as soon as the payment has been made so that we're able to check with our accounts team and issue the report.

- *Satisfaction - some positive comments made by our participants include; the online submissions is a huge improvement, schemes are professionally run and queries are dealt with in a timely and efficient manner, well planned, schemes run well.*

Discussion

This is the sixth feedback gathering exercise and the response rate remains high. The main aim of this survey was to determine if the schemes, and the process, are of an acceptable standard for our participants.

Participants have made very positive comments regarding the quality of the schemes and how they are administered. They have also provided valuable constructive feedback where they feel improvement could be made. Although not all answers to comments/ suggestions has been provided in this report, the survey has been collated and distributed within the team so that we're all aware of where we are doing well and where we could improve.

If anyone has raised a concern/ query on the questionnaire which hasn't been answered, please email the PT team who will be happy to provide further feedback.

We are continually striving to improve the quality of the schemes so this exercise will be carried out annually. Participants are reminded that they are welcome to provide constructive feedback at any time by emailing the PT administration team.

Outcome

The results, comments and feedback have been passed to the HSL PT team, PT Management Team and findings will be discussed at the next FPTSC meeting in June 2019.