

Results of the December 2017 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), Regular Inter-laboratory Counting Exchange (RICE) and Scanning Electron Microscopy Fibre Counting Scheme (SEM). In total 548 participants were emailed the survey and 153 responded (28% response rate).

Results

- Q1. From the 153 responses – 45% participate in AIMS, 10% in AISS, 30% in RICE, 15% in SEM.
- Q2. 46% of the responses were from the UK, 48% from Europe and 6% from ROW.
- Q3. 95% of participants find their samples/ slides to be of a suitable standard.
- Q4. 97% of participants receive their samples in a timely manner.
- Q5. 99% of participants find the process for submitting results easy to follow.
- Q6. 95% 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. 97% of participants that receive a group report find them informative.
- Q9. 80% of participants found using the PT Online Data Entry System to subscribe to the scheme easy to use.
- 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?
- *Samples/ slides are not representative of routine samples received by the laboratory.*
 - *if participants have any concerns regarding the condition/ suitability of a slide, they should advise the HSL PT administrator. All slides within a batch should be counted; however, the slide could be withdrawn by HSL following their investigation.*
 - *- we try to produce samples to accommodate a range of different laboratory needs, over a scheme year there will be a number of challenging samples and a variety of asbestos types and matrices. All our samples are screened by internal analysts then sent to external validators to assess suitability for the scheme. One of the main criteria is homogeneity; if the samples are not homogenous they will not be used in the AIMS round.*
- Q8. If you receive a group report for your scheme, do you find this informative?
- *an individual report for SEMS has been requested - this is something that we hope to have available for R8.*
 - *a laboratory commented that GLMM results were no longer on the SEMS report, this is due to the time required to produce this data. We hope to be able to offer this information in the future.*

- an overseas laboratory would like to receive a Laboratory Classification Report. These reports are requested by the accreditation body - if laboratories would like a list for their country, please contact your accreditation body and ask them to email the PT Team directly.

Q10. Comments/ Suggestions regarding the Schemes.

- Communication

For RICE, participants are emailed to advise when the slides will be received, this is not always clear for participants who are the contact for multiple laboratories - *PT team will endeavour to send separate email to those participants affected.*

Length of time to receive a reply to a query - *emails are generally answered within 24 hours, technical queries may take a little longer, however the PT team will endeavour to keep you informed. Please ensure emails are sent to the Proficiency Testing email address as this is continually monitored.*

- Accounts

At the start of 2017/18 the accounting system within HSL changed. This led to a number of delays with issuing invoices for our schemes. It has also become apparent that some participants chose the option to pay by credit/ debit card or by BACS on the subscription form, but actually required an invoice - *for 2018/19 subscriptions an email is being sent to laboratories choosing card payment/ BACS to advise no invoice will be issued.*

- Reports

Participants not receiving their individual report or certificate - *this may be due to an outstanding payment (either scheme subscription or damaged slide). An email is usually sent to notify participants if payment is required.*

Participants using VDI 3492 report in the amphibole group, e.g. actinolite/ tremolite would be correct but in AIMS there is a penalty score - *our schemes require that participants shall identify the asbestos type.*

- PT Online Data Entry System (PT ODES)

RICE online submission - *this is now in place for R108. All laboratories participating in RICE will enter their counts and receive provisional reports/ certificates via the PT ODES.*

Overview of results before entry is confirmed - *AIMS, AISS, LACS & SEMS offer a summary page where results can be viewed. Entries can be amended up until the deadline date of the round. RICE entries can be viewed in Stage 3 of the process. Results are not submitted until the submit button has been pressed or the deadline date has been reached.*

- Timescales

Some participants have requested that samples should not be sent so close to each other - *this is very difficult to manage as we need to ensure all rounds are completed with the specified year and this ultimately means they are despatched around the same time. As our processes become more efficient, it may be possible to amend the timescales, but this isn't a possibility at present.*

- Samples

Size of sample to be larger/ quantity of asbestos / type of sample - *the samples produced are adequate size for bulk analysis - the samples are made to challenge analysts with regard to the quantity of asbestos. Most samples are produced at HSL, although a range of commercial samples are also used within the scheme.*

Request for a range of non-asbestos fibres with similar properties to asbestos - *wollastonite has been included recently, sample plan for future samples will include a wider variety.*

RICE slides - glass thin - *slide quality/ measurements has been checked and confirmed suitable against requirements highlighted in HSG248 (0.8-1mm thick).*

RICE slides - not typical of those encountered in industry - *the scheme is designed to test the analysts ability to use the counting rules specified in HSG248 (WHO Rules) correctly, therefore the slides must contain a variety of densities of different fibre types. Bundles, split fibres, fibres attached to particles and various widths of fibres will all test the participant and ensure competence for any eventuality on real samples.*

AISS samples to have a large amount of distributed fibres, rather than ACMs and/ or fibre bundles - *the aim of free fibres is for the individual fibres to spread throughout the soil, but due to moisture it does occasionally clump. The production team are currently looking in to a better system to refine the mixing process.*

Labelling of AIMS Samples - *only the outer bag is labelled as the samples are used for Quality Control samples once the round has completed. Participants should ensure only one sample is analysed in the fume cupboard at any time, which would reduce the risk of contamination and mixing the samples up.*

Discussion

This is the fifth 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 2018.