

Results of the December 2014 Participant Feedback Survey

Background

The Proficiency Testing (PT) Team have now been granted accreditation for the Asbestos in Materials Scheme (AIMS). One element of the accreditation process is to establish feedback mechanisms and gather participant feedback. The PT team carried out the first AIMS survey using Survey Monkey in December 2013, details are available on the PT section of the HSL website.

Survey

This is the second feedback exercise which has been carried out for the HSL asbestos PT schemes. The survey was emailed to all asbestos participants, including AIMS, Asbestos in Soils Scheme (AISS), Regular Inter-laboratory Counting Exchange (RICE) and Scanning Electron Microscopy Fibre Counting Scheme (SEMS). In total 358 participants were emailed the survey and 119 responded (33% response rate).

Results

Q1. *Which of the PT scheme(s) offered by HSL do you participate in?*

From the 119 responses – 58% were from AIMS participants, 28% from RICE, 8% from SEMS & 6% from AISS.

Q2. *Where is your laboratory based?*

59% of responses were from UK, 39% from Europe and 2% from ROW.

Q3. *Are the samples/ slides provided as part of your scheme of a suitable standard?*

91% find our samples/ slides provided to be of a suitable standard.

Q4. *Are you aware of the range of Quality Control Samples that we have available to purchase?*

88% of participants are aware that Quality Control Samples are available to purchase.

Q5. *Please give your opinion on using the PT Online Data Entry System to submit results/ receive reports etc.*

38% of participants find the PT Online Data Entry System excellent to submit/ receive results, 48% found it good.

Q6. *If you receive a group report, do you find it useful and informative?*

39% found their group report very useful and informative, with 34% finding it quite useful and informative.

Q7. *Did you know that you can find the previous survey results on our website?*

59% of participants were aware that the survey results from December 2013 can be found on the website.

Q8. *Do you feel that the schemes have improved in 2014/15?*

50% of participants felt that the scheme had improved in 2014/15.

Q9. 93% found the Information Book(s) for Participants useful and informative.

Q10. *Please complete the box below with any comments/ suggestions which you may have regarding our scheme(s).*

Participants were given the opportunity to comment/make suggestions for the schemes.

Customer Comments

For the majority of the questions, participants were given the opportunity to comment further, if applicable. Below are a few examples of the answers submitted:

Q3. Are the Samples/ Slides of a Suitable Standard?

- Although 91% of participants found our samples/ slides to be of a suitable standard, the main comments received were regarding the condition of the RICE slides.

- the PT team strive to send suitable slides to participants, however some of these may include slides which have been damaged previously. All slides are assessed for suitability and withdrawn if deemed uncountable.

- amendments have been made to the information sent with the RICE slides, including a current photograph of the batch and a Slide Responsibilities & Breakages procedure. For 2015/16 a new pricing structure for damaged slides has been introduced.

Q4. Quality Control Samples

- Enquiries have been made regarding the purchasing of RICE slides at low, medium & high densities.
 - work is underway at HSL to produce slides of various densities which would be available to purchase. Further information will be available 2015/16.
- Other quality control sample suggestions have been made.
 - these have been passed on to the relevant Scheme Technical Manager to look further in to.

Q5. Submission of Results/ Receiving of Reports using PT Online Data Entry System

- Various comments made regarding ease of use, some participants found it easy and intuitive, others the opposite.
 - User guides are available, explaining processes required to submit results and print reports, including how to avoid errors when printing graphs.
- Participants would like the option to download individual reports as a pdf, rather than printing.
 - Improvements to the software are continually being identified and made, however it is unlikely that all options will be addressed until results for all schemes are submitted using the PT Online Data Entry System.

Q6. Is the Group Report Useful & Informative?

- Generally participants found the Group Report useful and informative, however more information has been requested on how to reduce laboratory errors/ analyse the samples correctly.
 - more information will be added to the group reports in future, where applicable. Details of customer requests have been passed to Scheme Technical Managers

Q8. Have the Schemes Improved?

- 50% of participants felt the scheme(s) had improved during 2014/15, with only 3% feeling that they had become worse.
 - The PT team feel that this is a positive result and will continue working with participants, through feedback gathering exercises, to continually improve the quality of service that we offer, striving to meet the requirements of the participants whilst maintaining the purpose of the scheme (proficiency testing) as far as is reasonably practicable.

Q9. Are the Information Book(s) for Participants Useful & Informative?

- 93% of participants confirmed that the Information Books are useful and informative.
 - Participants in the Asbestos In Materials Scheme (AIMS) have commented that the scoring system needs more clarity. Details have been passed to the Scheme Technical Manager.

Q10. Comments/ Suggestions regarding the Schemes.

- Participants are generally happy with the customer service provided by the PT team.
 - comments made include; a professional platform for proficiency testing, well organised, well run, very efficient, helpful administrators,
- There were a few comments made by participants concerning the RICE slides.
 - these have been passed on to the Scheme Technical Manager to review.

- EU participants would like to be able to join the Asbestos In Soils Scheme.
 - *For 2015/16 participants from overseas are now able to join the scheme, provided that they obtain the correct documentation to allow the soil samples through the relevant customs. This will be the responsibility of the participant.*
- Some overseas participants would like to receive their subscription form and invoice in euros.
 - *unfortunately we are unable to provide this service at the present time.*
- Scheme samples/ slides.
 - *participants would like more realistic samples/ slides to be included with the schemes. Scheme Technical Managers have been passed the feedback from participants to review.*
- Cost of schemes
 - *some participants have commented on the price of the schemes. The scheme costs are reviewed each year and are priced accordingly. For our RICE scheme we try and reduce costs for smaller laboratories by charging an amount per counter plus an administration fee.*
- Online Data Entry is now available for the Asbestos In Materials Scheme (AIMS), Asbestos in Soils Scheme (AISS) and the Scanning Electron Microscopy Scheme (SEMS).
 - *most participants are happy with the online data entry software, and feel that it is an improvement to the scheme.*
 - *participants would like the option of being able to download the individual reports.*
 - *participants would like to be able to enter the Regular Inter-Laboratory Counting Exchanges Scheme (RICE) counts online. This is currently being developed and will be available to participants in the near future.*
 - *all software related feedback has been passed to the HSL PT software provider.*

Discussion

This is the second feedback gathering exercise and the response rate remains high. The main aim of this survey was to determine if the information supplied by HSL is useful and informative for participants, and if the slides/ samples are of a suitable standard.

One of the main areas highlighted for improvement is the quality and suitability of our scheme samples/ slides. The majority of participants are happy with the samples/ slides supplied, however we take note of the issues raised and will endeavour to continue looking at ways in which to improve in this area. The issue of RICE slides was raised in the previous survey carried out in December 2013 feedback survey. The PT team regularly monitor the condition of the slides and withdraw any which are unsuitable from the scheme. New candidate slides are being introduced at regular intervals and slides which have received the appropriate number of counts are being promoted. Unfortunately the timescales involved in promoting the candidate slides can be lengthy; the PT team will monitor and promote slides as soon as they are available.

In the previous survey participants requested more information to be supplied in the AIMS report, this has been highlighted again this year. The Scheme Technical Manager has been passed all feedback and the PT team will endeavour to supply appropriate information/ feedback within the group reports in the future. Participants are reminded that if they have any queries which are not resolved in the group report they can email the PT team who will be happy to assist.

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.

The results, comments and feedback have been passed to the HSL PT team and will be discussed at the next FPTSC meeting in June 2015.