

Veterinary European Endocrine External Quality Assurance Scheme (VEEEQAS)

Directed by the European Society of Veterinary Endocrinology in partnership with NationWide Specialist Laboratories and University of Nottingham

Information for Potential Participants

What are the benefits of the scheme to participating laboratories?

External Quality Assessment (proficiency testing) is an essential part of any clinical pathology service. Participation in this external scheme will be in addition to Internal Quality Control (IQC) schemes already in place, and will provide an extra level of confidence in the data generated from individual centres.

External Quality Assessment ⁽¹⁾:

- provides staff with an insight into their laboratory's performance
- provides a comparison of performance with that of other laboratories, nationally and internationally
- improves the standard of examinations
- identifies areas where there may be problems
- demonstrates to clients, colleagues and accreditation bodies that there is a commitment to quality
- educates staff, providing a better understanding of the impact of incorrect results

Laboratories participating in the VEEEQAS scheme will be listed on the ESVE website and publically demonstrate their commitment to enabling correct patient management decisions in veterinary endocrinology.

How will the scheme work?

Each participating laboratory will receive test samples in lyophilised form for reconstitution and evaluation of specific endocrine assays. Samples will be shipped to all registered laboratories on the same pre-arranged day. NationWide Specialist Laboratory Services will be responsible for overseeing preparation and shipping of these samples.

The assays will be specified in advance and samples will be selected to provide a range of values within the assays under evaluation.

Which laboratories are eligible to participate?

Any laboratory routinely running endocrine assays is eligible to participate as long as at least one member of the laboratory is an ESVE or SCE (Society for Comparative Endocrinology)

member. Where it is impractical for any member of the lab to become an ESVE/SCE member, laboratories can nominate a client who is an ESVE/SCE member. The nominated member will receive copies of the laboratory's result EQA reports and must be willing to liaise between the ESVE and the laboratory on technical issues if they arise.

How much will it cost?

The VEEEQAS is not being run for profit and initial costs have been covered by ESVE and by NationWide Specialist Laboratories' Sponsorship. There is currently no cost to participate in the scheme, although no reimbursement can be provided for the cost to each laboratory of running the assays on each set of test samples. Depending on the availability of subsequent sponsorship it is possible that a nominal charge for each 'release' of samples may be required to cover costs in future.

How often will samples be sent to participating labs?

At present it is expected that there will be two sets of samples sent to laboratories each year, in approximately November and May.

How long will I have to undertake the assays after I have received them?

All registered laboratories will have the samples shipped to them on the same pre-arranged date and all assays should be completed and data returned within 2 weeks.

Which analytes will be tested?

Analytes will be limited in number at first and as the scheme progresses, additional analytes will be added and may vary depending on each sample release. A range of assays will be covered, with typical assays including T4, TSH, cortisol, fructosamine.

Will the results be made public?

All laboratories will submit their results using a unique identification code through a form available on a website. All results will remain confidential and individual results will be seen only by the scheme co-ordinator (Peter Graham, University of Nottingham), the submitting laboratory and the laboratory nominated ESVE/SCE member if there is one. Anonymised summary data will be collated by Peter Graham and will be shared amongst ESVE members and participants once the data from each 'release' of samples has been analysed. Any laboratory whose values for any assay fall far from the expected values may be contacted directly to investigate the reasons for any discrepancies.

What happens if my results do not match those of other labs?

Any laboratory whose values for any assay fall far outside the expected values will be contacted directly to investigate the reasons for any discrepancies (e.g., typography, unit

conversions etc.). Details of which laboratories are contacted will remain confidential. The ESVE is committed to improving quality control by working in partnership with laboratories with discordant results to determine the reasons for these issues. If a laboratory wishes to seek technical assistance from the ESVE, their results may be shared with their permission with one or more members of the ESVE Quality Committee.

Is there a minimum duration of participation?

Laboratories are expected to register for participation in advance, but may leave the scheme at any time. Re-registration will be required every 5 years. Notice of resignation from the scheme may be given at any time, but due to the cost of lyophilising and shipping the samples, if resignation occurs within one month of sample shipment the laboratory will still be expected to participate in the analysis of this batch of samples.

Who can I ask if I have more questions?

Please contact Peter Graham at School of Veterinary Medicine and Science, University of Nottingham in the first instance (ega.esve@gmail.com). If you wish to discuss this scheme with a member of the ESVE, please contact Lucy Davison (ldavison@well.ox.ac.uk)

- (1) Public Health England (2015) Proficiency testing: the process and benefits;
<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/external-quality-assessment-ega-and-proficiency-testing-pt-the-process-and-benefits> (accessed 25 November 2015)