

TSE EURL Workplan 2014

1.0 Creation and maintenance of reference materials

1.1 *Storage and release of reference tissues from UK field suspects*

Background for this subactivity

Storage of infected tissues from suspects in the UK will continue in order to maintain (as far as possible) a supply of reference materials, on request, to National Reference Laboratories (or at least sufficient to enable each NRL to undertake appropriate characterisation of internal reference material). This collection of frozen tissues is currently managed by the AHVLA Biological Archive Group (BAG)¹, and all release of tissues from this collection to the EURL (or any other user) is subject to the approval of Defra's Independent Archive Advisory Group (IAAG) and charges may be made² (<http://www.defra.gov.uk/corporate/vla/science/science-tse-arc-intro.htm>).

Fixed material is not managed through the BAG, and is released on request by the EURL directly.

Deliverables for this subactivity

	Planned	Achieved
Number of requests for reference tissues	15 ³	

1.2 *Production of reference panels for EQA and NRL batch testing.*

Background for this subactivity

Standardised reference panels are necessary to facilitate EQA and batch testing activities. The material needs to be obtained from AHVLA BAG or EURL tissue production activities, and the panels of samples created.

Deliverables for this subactivity

	Planned	Achieved
Number of reference panels for EQA	5	
Number of reference panels for batch testing	2	

1.3 *Experimental production of atypical scrapie material for reference and EQA purposes*

Background for this subactivity

Some reference materials, specifically for EURL use, need to be generated through experimental challenge of animals. Field case atypical material tends to be limited in quantity and frequently compromised in quality. Experimental challenge makes sufficient volume available for multiple aliquots of equivalent tissue to be included in EQA and test evaluation exercises.

Experimental challenge of animals with 'atypical' scrapie was started in 2006, with further

¹ This activity is currently marginally costed, with only the staff time required to assess requests and select the appropriate material. This is dependent on Defra's continuing support of the staffing and equipment infrastructure of the AHVLA BAG

² At present, the BAG does not charge the EURL for any materials provided, but it does charge commercial companies, and (depending on the request) other NRLs may be charged. The charging policy is regularly reviewed and may be subject to change.

³ This assumes that not every NRL will need tissue in the forthcoming year, and if they do, they will only make one request.

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	<p><i>animals challenged subsequently, to provide a bank of material exclusively for EU QA purposes.</i></p> <p><i>To date, 17 sheep have succumbed, and we have a stock of approx 1500g of positive brain material. Two goats challenged in 2005 remain alive and are currently healthy. At our current rate of usage, existing stock will meet our requirements for the foreseeable future (approx 10 years). This situation will be kept under review, particularly in the context of the possible future requirement for scrapie-related batch testing. No further challenges are proposed for 2014⁴.</i></p> <p><u><i>Deliverables for this subactivity</i></u></p> <table border="1" style="width: 100%; border-collapse: collapse;"> <thead> <tr> <th style="width: 70%;"></th> <th style="width: 15%; text-align: center;"><i>Planned</i></th> <th style="width: 15%; text-align: center;"><i>Achieved</i></th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td><i>Maintenance and clinical monitoring of animals previously challenged (at least part of the year)</i></td> <td style="text-align: center;"><i>2 animals</i></td> <td></td> </tr> <tr> <td><i>Postmortem collection, confirmation of disease status and storage of material from animals reaching clinical disease (should this happen in 2014)</i></td> <td style="text-align: center;"><i>2 animals</i></td> <td></td> </tr> </tbody> </table>			<i>Planned</i>	<i>Achieved</i>	<i>Maintenance and clinical monitoring of animals previously challenged (at least part of the year)</i>	<i>2 animals</i>		<i>Postmortem collection, confirmation of disease status and storage of material from animals reaching clinical disease (should this happen in 2014)</i>	<i>2 animals</i>	
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1.4	<p><i>Experimental production of small ruminant BSE material for reference and EQA purposes</i></p> <p><u><i>Background for this subactivity</i></u></p> <p><i>In the absence of relevant field case material, and while the statutory requirement for discriminatory testing remains, it is necessary for the EURL to maintain stocks of small ruminant BSE for the provision of EQA and QC material, and positive reference material for any further investigation of unusual or suspicious isolates.</i></p> <p><i>- Sheep:</i></p> <p><i>To date, 20 sheep (of 3 different genotypes – ALRQ homozygous, AFRQ homozygous and heterozygous, and AHQ homozygous) have succumbed, and we have a stock of approx 1400g of positive brain material. At our current rate of usage, existing stock will meet our requirements for the foreseeable future (approx 10 years). No further challenges are proposed at this time.</i></p> <p><i>Some of the first sheep challenged (2005/6) did not succumb as expected, and were subsequently found to have the polymorphism T112, which has now been linked with resistance to BSE. Three of these sheep remain alive. They offer an excellent opportunity to establish whether this polymorphism confers absolute resistance, or merely prolongs incubation period, and it is proposed that they are kept alive to address this question, and to provide material from a different genotype (for characterisation purposes - see above) in the event of them succumbing after a very prolonged incubation period.</i></p> <p><i>- Goats:</i></p> <p><i>We also have 270g of material remaining from the initial 5 experimentally-challenged goats, enough for 5 EQAs. Evidence from the Cypriot project indicates that caprine samples may be more difficult to classify than ovine samples using current methods, all of which were evaluated and approved for use in SR based entirely on ovine data. In anticipation of caprine samples having to be independently represented in future EQA</i></p>										

⁴ Should alternative presentation of disease occur in field cases, it will be necessary to review the adequacy of current stocks (based entirely on AHQ/AHQ sheep) if genotype or phenotype is shown to have a bearing on disease detection. Further caprine challenges may also be required in the future, if differences between testing efficiencies in sheep and goats are identified which might lead to separate testing panels

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	<p>panels for detection and discrimination, a further 5 goats were challenged in 2013 to replenish the EURL stock of positive control material. These animals are currently all alive and healthy, and are predicted to survive until late 2014 or early 2015.</p> <p><u>Deliverables for this subactivity</u></p>		
		<i>Planned</i>	<i>Achieved</i>
	Maintenance and clinical monitoring of animals previously challenged (5 goats for a full year, 2 sheep for a full year, and 1 sheep for at least part of the year)	3 sheep 5 goats	
	Postmortem collection, confirmation of disease status and storage of material from animals reaching clinical disease (assuming one sheep in 2014)	1 sheep or goat	
1.5	<p><i>Experimental production of bovine H- and L-BSE material for reference and EQA purposes</i></p> <p><u>Background for this subactivity</u> <i>In the absence of relevant field case material, and while the statutory requirement for classification of bovine positive samples remains, it is necessary for the EURL to maintain stocks of atypical BSE for the provision of EQA and QC material, and positive reference material for any further investigation of unusual or suspicious isolates.</i> <i>To date, we have successfully challenged 4 animals with H-BSE, 4 with L-BSE and, in 2013, subpassage from 4 of these animals (2 H-BSE and 2 L-BSE) resulted in disease with retention of all phenotypic characteristics. This establishes that H and L are stable on experimental subpassage, and augments the stock of material. At our current rate of usage, existing stock will meet our requirements for the foreseeable future (approx 8 years). No further challenges are proposed at this time.</i></p> <p><u>Deliverables for this subactivity</u> <i>None in 2014</i></p>		

2.0 External Quality Assurance (EQA) (see also appended timetable)

2.1	<p><i>Immunohistochemistry and histopathology EQA</i></p> <p><u>Background for this subactivity</u> <i>The EURL will organise two EQA rounds for the interpretation of histopathology and immunohistochemistry (IHC), and one technical IHC EQA round, covering BSE in bovines, and scrapie in sheep.</i> <i>- The 2 interpretation EQA rounds will be based on a web-based EQA system which enables timely completion of distributions, and greater flexibility to include examples of unusual cases, challenging artefacts and different IHC protocols (Some examples might be drawn from the technical EQA round). This system will be administered through a sub-contract with 'SlidePath', an external company which specialises in web-based imaging and the hosting of EQA.</i> <i>- The technical IHC EQA will take the form of a comparative test on unstained sections</i></p>		
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	<p>supplied by the EURL. Following staining and initial interpretation by the National Reference Laboratories, the stained sections will be read by the EURL technical experts and pathologists⁵.</p> <p>The previous rounds have raised a number of issues in relation to method optimisation for different species and tissues, so it is intended to keep the round at its current size, including bovine and ovine brain, and ovine lymphoid tissue.</p> <p><u>Deliverables for this subactivity</u></p>		
		<i>Planned</i>	<i>Achieved</i>
	Organisation of an EQA for the interpretation of histopathology and IHC	2: March, October	
	Organisation of a technical EQA for IHC	1: March/April	
	Provide a copy of the outcomes to the Commission as appendices to the annual EURL report (see 4.2)	1	
2.2	<i>Rapid and confirmatory testing EQA for bovine, ovine and caprine samples</i>		
	<p><u>Background for this subactivity</u></p> <p>The EURL will organise both bovine and small ruminant EQA rounds for rapid screening and confirmatory Western blotting methods.</p> <p>Overall, the panels will comprise ovine classical scrapie, caprine classical scrapie, ovine atypical scrapie and classical BSE of varying signal intensity (to assess local operational testing sensitivity), and some negative samples (to assess specificity). Some samples will be duplicates, to look at robustness/reproducibility of testing.</p> <p>- Goat tissues are of limited availability in the UK, and will not necessarily be included routinely in subsequent years unless goat scrapie material can be sourced from outside the UK.</p> <p><u>Deliverables for this subactivity</u></p>		
		<i>Planned</i>	<i>Achieved</i>
	Organisation of an EQA for rapid diagnostic methods to assess PrP detection in bovine brain tissue	1: July	
	Organisation of an EQA for confirmatory blotting methods to assess PrP detection in bovine brain tissue	1: July	
	Organisation of an EQA for rapid diagnostic methods to assess PrP detection in ovine/caprine brain tissue	1: November	
	Organisation of an EQA for confirmatory blotting methods to assess PrP detection in ovine/caprine brain tissue	1: November	
	Provide an electronic copy of the outcomes to the Commission as rounds take place, and as appendices to the annual EURL report (see 4.2).	5	

⁵ The technical EQA has to be sent out from the EURL laboratory in Weybridge directly to participants, and the sections returned to the EURL. It does not therefore come under the direct management of the VETQAS team at AHVLA Sutton Bonington like all the other EQA activities. However, the protocols and practices involved are subject to audit by UKAS when inspecting AHVLA for compliance with ISO17025.

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2.3	<p><i>TSE classification/discrimination EQA</i></p> <p><u><i>Background for this subactivity</i></u> <i>EU regulations require the classification/discrimination of small ruminant TSE as classical scrapie, atypical scrapie or BSE-like, with prescribed further investigation and analysis of any isolate which has BSE-like characteristics. This process starts with a discriminatory WB in the NRL of each MS, with referral of unusual samples for ring trial coordinated by the EURL. We undertake one EQA round each year to assess this discriminatory blotting procedure. Until 2012, bovine BSE was used as a proxy for ovine BSE (based on initial test evaluation ring trial data), but ovine BSE is now available in sufficient quantity, and is routinely included.</i></p> <p><i>In 2013 this panel included caprine material; representative caprine material will be included in future EQA exercises when available to the EURL.</i></p> <p><i>In recent years, two atypical forms of bovine TSE (H- and L-BSE) have been identified, and it is now a regulatory requirement for all bovine isolates to be classified. These cases are very rare, with fewer than 50 cases of each variant so far identified globally. Field case material is therefore unavailable for test evaluation or EQA purposes. Following successful transmission of H & L type BSE to cattle [see subactivity 1.5], an initial EQA round involving a limited number of NRLs was conducted in 2012 and a validation EQA round was distributed in 2013. From 2014 this will become a standard EQA round, restricted to laboratory selection based on expressions of interest, with preference being given to those laboratories which had already demonstrated competence in identification of such variants. NRLs which did not anticipate any bovine positive submissions or have a very low throughput of TSE samples were encouraged to plan referral of any bovine samples which might require classification. This allows us to preserve the material we have available to support this exercise, and reduces the cost for the NRLs and for the EURL</i></p> <p><u><i>Deliverables for this subactivity</i></u></p> <table border="1" style="width: 100%; border-collapse: collapse; margin-top: 10px;"> <thead> <tr> <th style="width: 70%;"></th> <th style="width: 15%; text-align: center;"><i>Planned</i></th> <th style="width: 15%; text-align: center;"><i>Achieved</i></th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td><i>Organisation of an EQA for BSE / scrapie discriminatory Western blots in small ruminants (ovine and caprine brain tissue) in those NRLs which are operating such methods</i></td> <td style="text-align: center;"><i>1: September</i></td> <td></td> </tr> <tr> <td><i>Organisation of an EQA for H- L- and C-BSE classification</i></td> <td style="text-align: center;"><i>1: July</i></td> <td></td> </tr> <tr> <td><i>Provide an electronic copy of the outcomes to the Commission as rounds take place, and as appendices to the annual EURL report (see 4.2).</i></td> <td style="text-align: center;"><i>3</i></td> <td></td> </tr> </tbody> </table>		<i>Planned</i>	<i>Achieved</i>	<i>Organisation of an EQA for BSE / scrapie discriminatory Western blots in small ruminants (ovine and caprine brain tissue) in those NRLs which are operating such methods</i>	<i>1: September</i>		<i>Organisation of an EQA for H- L- and C-BSE classification</i>	<i>1: July</i>		<i>Provide an electronic copy of the outcomes to the Commission as rounds take place, and as appendices to the annual EURL report (see 4.2).</i>	<i>3</i>	
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2.5	<p><i>Genotyping EQA</i></p> <p><u><i>Background for this subactivity</i></u> <i>A proficiency test panel of ovine blood samples will be provided for the QA of NRLs undertaking genotyping for statutory purposes (all Member States with the exception of Malta). Information will be requested about the methods used in each country. Reporting on 4 codons (136, 141, 154 and 171) of the ovine PrP gene will be required from all labs.</i></p>												

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	<u>Deliverables for this subactivity</u>		
		<i>Planned</i>	<i>Achieved</i>
	<i>Organisation of an EQA for ovine 4 codon genotyping</i>	<i>1: February</i>	
	<i>Provide an electronic copy of the outcomes to the Commission as rounds take place, and as appendices to the annual EURL report (see 4.2).</i>	<i>2</i>	

3.0 Strain typing/discrimination

3.1 *Strain Typing Expert Group*

Background for this subactivity

The EURL has established a working group of experts in the field of strain differentiation. It is responsible for:

- the evaluation of any unusual results arising from TSE testing in small ruminants within Europe,
- agreeing the criteria on which strains will be classified 'BSE-like' (and what that means).
- coordinating the provision of material for the ring trial of any new potential discriminatory method not presented with sufficient supporting data to be approved by the group without further assessment.

Advice will be provided on appropriate further investigation and interpretation, to enable the submitting NRL to appropriately and competently brief the relevant National authorities. The panel is drawn partly from experts within the EURL and NRLs, and partly from other sources.

This group plans to meet once a year. Discussion will continue to focus on the validation/interpretation of the increasing range of Tg bioassay methodologies, and how to interpret complex data. Definition of interpretational limits will also be a key topic for this group.

The group will review ring-trial and bioassay data for any isolate referred to this group under regulation 36/2005, and reach a final conclusion of BSE-like or non-BSE-like which will be reported to the Commission.

Deliverables for this subactivity

	<i>Planned</i>	<i>Achieved</i>
<i>Organisation of one STEG meeting</i>	<i>1</i>	
<i>Organisation of a ring trial of any new potential discriminatory method needing further assessment</i>	<i>0</i>	
<i>Number of new referrals requiring ring trial/bioassay</i>	<i>1</i>	
<i>Final reports on current STEG referral bioassay cases</i>	<i>0</i>	

3.2 *Bioassay of unusual/BSE-like isolates*

Background for this subactivity

Any submitted isolate considered BSE-like following ring trial will be forwarded for bioassay in mice.

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<p><i>Historically, only conventional mice were sufficiently evaluated and defined for this purpose, and interpretation was based on a full panel (i.e. RIII, VM and C57Bl6). However, the choice of mouse strains has been reviewed, and the current STEG recommendation proposes Tg338 (VRQ ovine), Tg110 (bovine) and TgShpXI (ARQ ovine) as the most appropriate of the available well characterised lines. A major advantage of these Tg lines over the wild-type lines is their enhanced susceptibility to certain TSE isolates e.g. transgenic mouse lines are susceptible to atypical scrapie when conventional lines are not.</i></p> <p><i>In August 2013, two goat isolates (one Polish, one French) were submitted to STEG, and are under active discussion. It is likely that they will be recommended for bioassay. Much of the present debate centres around the difficulties of differentiating BSE from CH1641. While we have bioassay reference data for ovine CH1641, there is no equivalent caprine data, although some material may be available from the Roslin research group. Provision is therefore proposed for appropriate positive control assays if the group deem this necessary.</i></p> <p><u><i>Deliverables for this subactivity</i></u></p>										
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4.0 Advice, training, assistance and communication											
4.1	<i>Annual workshop</i>	<p><u><i>Background for this subactivity</i></u> <i>A workshop for National experts will be arranged in the first half of 2014. This workshop will cover all aspects of NRL functions, and provide updates on areas of science relevant to TSE surveillance and testing. Feedback will be provided and training needs identified following the outcome of the QA assessments.</i></p> <p><u><i>Deliverables for this subactivity</i></u></p>									
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4.2	<i>Communications</i>	<p><u><i>Background for this subactivity</i></u> <i>Formal communications between the EURL and NRLs and the COM take several forms. In addition to the information disseminated at the workshop and through EQA comment, the EURL maintains two websites. The first is a public, open access, website on which reference material, links to relevant regulations, NRL contact details, protocols and STEG reports are placed. Secondly, there is the password protected limited access TSE-LAB-NET</i></p>									

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which hosts discussion fora, batch testing/ batch release data and presentations from the annual workshops.

The EURL will monitor national quality assurance practices to ensure that they remain relevant, through discussion at the EURL meeting. We will attempt⁶ to maintain an up-to-date internal database of information from NRLs, regarding the methods currently in use, the NRL applications of such tests (e.g. rapid, confirmatory, discriminatory, research, etc.) national QC and QA approaches etc. to enable the effective provision of relevant and targeted advice. As the EURL does not at present undertake inspections of NRLs, this is necessary for maintaining some understanding of current practices. It will also advise on any necessary changes to the EURL proficiency testing programme, monitoring of trend data from routine testing or general QA advice as the need is identified. A list of which NRLs are currently performing which tests will be maintained on the TSE-LAB-NET to facilitate referral of samples between NRLs in the event of specific testing being stopped, or temporarily suspended for technical reasons.

The EURL will maintain an up-to-date database of all relevant NRL principal contacts and contact details with access through the public website. The EURL will also maintain a database of current NRL contacts by activity for internal use, and to facilitate communications.

A formal annual report on EURL activities and financial summaries is sent to the COM each year.

Deliverables for this subactivity

	<i>Planned</i>	<i>Achieved</i>
<i>All documents on the public website will be updated as required, with a baseline of one annual review within 2014, including: Protocols to reflect best practice Batch testing guidelines Guidelines on making changes to IFU (Instructions for use/kit inserts)</i>	<i>1: December</i>	
<i>Maintenance of a table of current NRL testing competences on TSE LAB NET, updated after each EQA exercise</i>	<i>1</i>	
<i>A snapshot of the internal databases of NRL contacts and testing information will be provided to the COM as appendices to the annual technical report (see below)</i>	<i>1</i>	
<i>Provision of 2013 final technical and financial report to COM</i>	<i>1: March</i>	
<i>Provision of full 2015 technical and financial workplan proposal to COM</i>	<i>1: August</i>	
<i>Provide the automatic weblink for all VETQAS-coordinated EQA results for participating laboratories and COM</i>		<i>Already in place for all relevant bodies</i>

⁶ The quality and completeness of this information relies totally on the responses we receive from the NRLs. Historically this varies considerably.

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<p>4.3</p>	<p><i>Atypical scrapie – testing sensitivity</i></p> <p><u><i>Background for this subactivity</i></u> <i>It has become apparent in 2013 that NRLs are identifying sensitivity issues relating to atypical scrapie cases that we cannot fully explain. Previously, EQA has proved problematic for atypical scrapie samples due to the difficulties in retaining appropriate signal levels in homogenate/macerate samples following freezer storage. The aim of this activity is to build on the information and data being collected in 2013 and to collate and review it, with test manufacturer involvement and if necessary test hypotheses regarding method sensitivity.</i></p> <p><u><i>Deliverables for this subactivity</i></u></p> <table border="1"> <thead> <tr> <th></th> <th><i>Planned</i></th> <th><i>Achieved</i></th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td><i>Provide a report detailing the issues relating to atypical scrapie and test sensitivity, and indicating possible future approaches to EQA, test evaluation and trend monitoring</i></td> <td><i>1</i></td> <td></td> </tr> </tbody> </table>		<i>Planned</i>	<i>Achieved</i>	<i>Provide a report detailing the issues relating to atypical scrapie and test sensitivity, and indicating possible future approaches to EQA, test evaluation and trend monitoring</i>	<i>1</i>	
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<i>Provide a report detailing the issues relating to atypical scrapie and test sensitivity, and indicating possible future approaches to EQA, test evaluation and trend monitoring</i>	<i>1</i>						
<p>4.4</p>	<p><i>Approval of minor testing kit changes and batch testing. Regular communication with manufacturers.</i></p> <p><u><i>Background for this subactivity</i></u> <i>The EURL has an ongoing commitment to assess changes to approved rapid test kits or sampling methods, which are proposed by manufacturers. This involves discussion with companies, input into protocol design, assessment of evaluation data and consideration of the impact of proposed changes. If changes to production are necessary as a part of kit changes, Quality Control data may need to be provided by the manufacturer and assessed by the EURL to confirm adherence to the manufacturer’s Quality System. The proposals are then either accepted, further work requested or they are rejected. If proposals are accepted the company is required to update kit inserts or SOPs as appropriate. If changes are made to kit instructions, NRLs and the Commission are notified. In addition, an annual statement will be sent to the COM confirming which manufacturers continue to comply with the requirement to keep the EURL advised of all relevant changes to their systems and products, so that the listing in the regulation is kept up to date. Test manufacturers are also approached annually by the EURL to provide confirmation that all relevant quality systems are up to date.</i></p> <p><i>Batch testing of approved rapid tests for the detection of BSE in bovine samples was introduced in 2008. Nominated NRLs are responsible for testing to an agreed protocol and the EURL approves batches for release and communicates this information to NRLs for cascade to testing labs throughout the EU.</i></p> <p><i>Batch testing of approved rapid tests for the detection of Scrapie in ovine and caprine samples is under debate. The main limiting factor for implementing batch testing of approved small ruminant tests is the relative paucity of atypical scrapie material. Discussion between the EURL and the Commission is planned within 2013. The outcomes of this discussion will inform further plans for 2014 and successive years.</i></p>						

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<u>Deliverables for this subactivity</u>		
	<i>Planned</i>	<i>Achieved</i>
<i>Number of minor testing kit changes assessments (approval is sent to NRLs and COM, provision of annual summary to COM in final technical report)</i>	3	
<i>Number of batch testings (publication on TSE_LAB-NET of batch release authorisations)</i>	20	
<i>Annual statement sent to the COM confirming details of IFU (Instructions for use/kit inserts) changes and which manufacturers continue to comply with requirements</i>	<i>1: December</i>	
<i>Annual review of manufacturers' quality systems</i>	<i>1: June</i>	
4.5 Referral diagnostics, EQA troubleshooting, provision of advice and training		
<p><u>Background for this subactivity</u></p> <p><i>EQA troubleshooting: Assistance and guidance will be provided to those laboratories experiencing difficulties. Initial support will be provided through telephone and/or email contact, and discussion with the COM and manufacturers may also be initiated if a more widespread problem is identified with any particular test.</i></p> <p><i>Ad hoc requests for training: Provision of training at AHVLA may be offered if a need is identified (with relevant NRL bearing all travel and subsistence costs). Provision is made for one mission to provide local technical troubleshooting and training for NRLs with difficulties that are not due solely to resource issues. TSE-LAB-NET also offers the opportunity for NRLs to raise issues and solve problems through discussion fora.</i></p> <p><i>2nd opinion referral cases: The demand for diagnostic testing will depend on individual countries. Most Member States have adequate arrangements and do not require significant help with routine diagnostic testing. However, confirmation of results may be an important task for EURL, which does not anticipate having to conduct many confirmatory tests but the service will be available on an ad hoc basis for difficult or perplexing cases. These tests will include HE sections, IHC sections and Western Blotting on unfixed material. The EURL will continue to attempt to collect data on cases which are in some way 'unusual', to enable comprehensive cross-referencing and collation of information on such cases for the Commission. (The success of any such system is dependent on the willingness of MS to comply with a request if our diagnostic opinion is not sought initially, and experience to date indicates that there are very differing views in the various MS on what and whether to refer.)</i></p> <p><i>Specialist input to Commission fora, by request, on an ad hoc basis. Provision has been made in 2014 for four people to travel to Brussels.</i></p> <p><i>The EURL will contribute actively (on an ad hoc basis) to the continual assessment of existing rapid tests by contribution to relevant discussion fora, laboratory visits and comparative trials.</i></p> <p><i>The EURL will provide expert advice on the clinical manifestations of BSE and scrapie. In 2014 this will include clinical data generated from the Defra-funded experimental challenges of sheep with H- and L-type BSE. The EURL will also continue to provide epidemiological advice on an ad hoc basis.</i></p>		

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Please note that training in rapid diagnostic techniques will not be provided. All the evaluated tests are commercially available and it is assumed that the manufacturers will provide training/guidance on the use of the tests. Similarly, should problems be encountered then it is appropriate that the manufacturers address these directly with the test users. Feedback from the national laboratories will alert EURL to any problems and the EURL will liaise closely with the national laboratory and the test manufacturer. General advice and information will be posted (where relevant) on the website. Rapid test manufacturers are invited to participate in a specific session at the EURL workshop each year where issues can be discussed directly with NRL representatives. This was well-supported initially, but all manufacturers have declined since 2012.

Deliverables for this subactivity

	<i>Planned</i>	<i>Achieved</i>
<i>Assistance missions to NRLs</i>	<i>1</i>	
<i>Provision of diagnostic reports on 2nd opinion referral cases as required</i>	<i>10</i>	
<i>EURL specialist input to Commission fora, travel to Brussels</i>	<i>4</i>	
<i>Number of significant follow-up/troubleshooting dossiers generated through EQA activities</i>	<i>3</i>	

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PROVISIONAL TIMETABLE FOR TSE EURL QA EXERCISES IN 2014

Intended Start Date ⁷	QA activity
February 2014	Ovine genotyping
March 2014	Immuno-histochemical technique
April 2014	Histopathology and immunohistochemistry interpretation (round 1)
October 2014	Histopathology and immunohistochemistry interpretation (round 2)
July 2014	Bovine rapid testing
July 2014	Bovine confirmatory blotting
July 2014	Bovine BSE classification
November 2014	Ovine rapid testing
November 2014	Ovine confirmatory blotting
March 2014	Ovine discriminatory Western blotting

⁷ Some QA exercises (such as the technical and slide interpretation) take several weeks or months to complete. Any follow-up activities will also lengthen the duration. It is not therefore possible to accurately predict *completion* dates for these activities.