

UK NEQAS Services from Birmingham Quality:

Celebrating the Good Bits of 2020 and giving notice of Pricelist and Re-registration for 2021-2022

Dear Participant

Prices for next year

Nobody likes a price increase. We are an NHS Department working from within an NHS Hospital where the principles of "Price = Cost" apply. Consequently we have a legal and moral duty, as well as following good business practice, to keep costs down. Crucially, at the same time, we need to ensure that we bring in sufficient income to pay for our services.

I have mentioned many times before that our only source of income is from you, the paying customer. We get no top-sliced money from the UK's Department of Health and Social Care nor do we get bankrolled from our host Trust. We pay for everything. Premises, salaries, serum, consumables, postage, the lot. We are not a private company or a corporation. We are part of the NHS.

We have absorbed many price increases over the last few years by cutting our own costs and 'leaning' our processes and we have not passed on these price increases on to you. We are only too well aware of the extreme pressures that you, the front line laboratories, are under in terms of money, staff and lack of investment.

Exciting innovations that we have rolled-out and will continue to roll out

As the innovators of EQA returns via NPEX some 4 years ago, I am pleased to report that this project is going from strength to strength. I think I am right in saying that we remain the only EQA Centre doing this live in 2020. Once you have tried it, you will never go back! We have 65 analysers registered and have had over 250,000 results sent back without human intervention. The saving in man hours for you is staggering.

Our Network reports have been around for over 10 years and will be having a re-launch in 2021. If you are part of an informal, one site network or a full regional network, this is for you. Building on this we will be launching our Dashboards, now that the Pilot testing has been successful. We already use Sigma scores as part of the pan-UK NEQAS PrepQ Scheme and we will be launching the Sigma Symmetrical Stealth Bomber Plot™ [*working title* ☺] as yet another addition to the growing number of indispensable data presentation graphs. At our Roadshows in 2019 the Seismograph and Rainbow Trout Plots were so successful and appreciated by the audience, we listened to customer feedback and immediately modified our reports to accommodate them in the regular reports.

We will be continuing with innovative value-added initiatives like Project QIBL. The whole participation base will benefit from the final report/publication, but obviously the first to benefit from its findings in January 2021 will be the volunteers who took part (*our sincere thanks to all volunteers*). We have contributed to two of the Pan-UK NEQAS Webinars in 2020 as well as a Webinar for the IBMS 2020 interim on-line Congress where we showcased our Serum Indices, Fluids, Vitamin D and POCT work. Keep an eye out for our very own BQ and UK NEQAS Chemistry Webinars in 2021.

I am bound to have missed out things from the list in my enthusiasm. I just want to let you know that our science and interaction/feedback with participants allows us to offer tangible solutions to everyday problems. If you want more details on any of this, please contact us.

However, as I'm sure you will be well aware, there are two big monsters that will impact on our charges for 2021-2022. Covid-19 and Brexit.

Covid has changed the way we have had to work. It is bound to have changed the way you work, too. It has changed where our staff work from and it has changed the lay-out of our offices and laboratory. It has caused havoc with supply chains both in terms of availability and of increased costs. It has changed the way we have to package things for post and Couriers. These were non-negotiables.

As you will be aware, Royal Mail is increasing its prices by 10% and this will be the second increase within a calendar year. Couriers are set to impose a hefty surcharge on a packet-by-packet basis.

Unfortunately these extra costs necessitate us passing on price rises on to our customers. We will be further reviewing our logistics over the coming months.

Brexit. Where do I start? This will cause major grief in getting specimens out of Birmingham, let alone ensuring that they arrive in one piece, on time and without an enormous tariff bill to be paid (in Euros or Swiss francs or US Dollars or whatever).

Pricelist and Re-Reg

We operate on a financial year and the 2021-2022 figures will be published in January 2021. This is later than we would have preferred, but we are reacting to real-time changes. Once we set our prices we cannot change them. We will be launching our on-line renewals in January.

Season's Greetings from All at Birmingham Quality

At the end of this terrible year, I hope you are coping as well as to be expected in terms of the Covid-19 pandemic. In wishing you a happy and prosperous new year, I can only hope that 2021 won't be as challenging as 2020. We thank you for your custom through 2020 and we hope that the added value of our services has helped you improve your own service. We intend to do our utmost in providing you with an excellent service throughout 2021.

Merry Christmas

Finlay

Kind regards

Finlay MacKenzie, Director of Birmingham Quality, December 2020

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