



## Customers Comment on Vetgas PT Schemes

Vetgas is the independent, accredited, proficiency testing (PT) service provided by AHVLA Scientific through the Agency's Quality Assurance Unit (QAU), based at Sutton Bonington. The service we offer is a fast, simple and efficient system covering a wide range of PT schemes, which are principally directed towards farm animal and equine species but also include a small number of schemes for laboratories specialising in companion animals and fish diseases.

To augment the information available in the market for Vetgas services, interviews with two of our regular customers were carried out to ascertain their views on the service we offer, the range of PT schemes available and how they see the future for PT.



We spoke to Malcolm Phipps from the Lakeside Veterinary Centre in Huntingdon and Caroline Ball from the Central Veterinary Research Laboratory (CVRL) at the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine (DAFM) in County Kildare, Ireland.

**Malcolm Phipps has been involved in the field of poultry diagnostic testing for 37 years and works for the Poultry Health Services Ltd, Huntingdon, who have some of the world's largest poultry producers as clients.**

*Malcolm, would you like to outline the profile of Poultry Health Services Ltd with particular reference to the areas of work covered, animal groups treated and the range of customers you deal with?*

'The Lakeside Veterinary Centre of Poultry Health Services Ltd (PHS) offers diagnostic testing to the UK poultry industry, primarily chickens and to a lesser extent turkeys. It also includes abattoir and compost clients, who also use the services available. The main aims of Poultry Health Services (PHS) are to provide clients with a full range of high quality, cost-effective, veterinary services to maximise the health, welfare and productivity of their livestock, to help improve food quality and safety and to contribute to the profitability of their businesses. The team at Huntingdon comprises of scientists and support staff, who implement continual professional development and provide the equipment and laboratory facilities to achieve these objectives'.

'The laboratory is UKAS accredited and Defra approved under the requirements of The Trade in Animals and Related Products Regulation 2011, Regulation (EC) No.1069/2009 and Regulation (EU) No. 142/2011 and The Control of Salmonella in Poultry Order. The services the company offer include serological, parasitological and microbiological tests as well as post mortem examinations and diagnostic services to both farms and processing plants, farm visits, vaccination of poultry and high volume laboratory work, performed in-house using quality-assured methods'.



*What quality management systems do you use in your laboratory and how and where do you use Vetqas PT schemes?*

'The Veterinary Centre operates an ISO17025 compliant quality system independently assessed by UKAS and is also approved by Defra for a range of tests. We adhere to a quality manual to ensure that our Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) are regularly revised and updated and also have both EQA and IQA systems for all our accredited test methods using known positive and negative samples as controls, on a daily basis. We also carry out regular customer surveys to maintain the quality system and the laboratory uses five standard Vetqas PT Schemes and one bespoke Vetqas scheme for Salmonella in bulk eggs'.

*Why is PT considered so important and what are the benefits?*

'It is an essential part of our Quality Assurance programme and benefits both the business and the clients. One of the main benefits is that the schemes safeguard our methods and ensure that testing is carried out correctly and consistently and the required standards are maintained. On the other hand, the PT highlights any failures but our record is excellent and we have only had a couple of minor problems in the last 20 years! Results from the testing schemes are analysed by Vetqas and are of great benefit for the long term future.'

*Why do you use the Vetqas service and what is your opinion on the products on offer?*

'Actually there is no choice as the rules of accreditation demand it, but, having said that I am very happy with the service provided by Vetqas. The team I deal with are very helpful and when I have an enquiry they have an easy approach, which maintains a very good customer relationship. They provide a good, all round service and there have been no problems with the distribution of samples etc.'

*Looking to the future, how do you see PT evolving and what PT schemes would you like to see available with specific reference to your own perspectives?*

'Requirements alter due to changes in legislation so there will always be a need for new schemes to be developed. For example, changes to the EC rules on testing compost for *E.coli* rather than Enterobacteriaceae had necessitated a change of scheme. The trend is likely for testing to become more challenging and sample content will need to cover a wider range of organisms, making testing more difficult. But, if tests become too complex it is possible that the failure rate will increase, which could cause all sorts of problems within the industry. A balance is required as to the sensitivity of the tests. In general, we do not really require any new schemes at present but, if a requirement arises I will contact Vetqas to find out what is possible.'



*Are there any other comments you would like to make?*

'We have a very good working relationship and I have not heard a bad word said about Vetqas by other colleagues in the industry. Some years ago I had a minor issue about some of the test vials, provided by Vetqas, that were not maintaining their vacuum but this was rectified very quickly. We are very happy with the computerised system for submission of samples and the presentation of the



results. What is really useful is the opportunity to receive interpretation of the results by Vetqas experts and to see how other laboratories have fared. Obviously confidentiality is essential, but it is really useful to be able to compare your own results with others. It is all part of monitoring for improvement!’

**Caroline Ball is the Quality Manager and oversees all aspects of some of the quality systems at DAFM.**

*Caroline would you like to outline the role of DAFM and more specifically the laboratory services?*

‘The laboratory service consists of a central laboratory complex at Backweston, Celbridge, Co Kildare (opened in April 2007) together with a number of regional laboratories located throughout the country. The Backweston Complex has brought together a number of different laboratories including the Central Veterinary Research Laboratory (comprising the divisions of Bacteriology, Pathology, and Virology), the Veterinary Public Health Regulatory Laboratory (VPHRL), Pesticide Control Service, Dairy Science Laboratory and the Seed Testing and Plant Health Laboratories. The laboratory services are an essential component of the role of DAFM in leading the sustainable development of a competitive farming and consumer focused agri-food business, which contributes to a vibrant rural economy and society. The Complex has been developed to provide a laboratory infrastructure to support the diagnostic, regulatory and research and development functions necessary. The laboratories carry out work on a wide range of animal species and testing areas including livestock, poultry and TB supporting government departments, private veterinary practitioners and farmers. They also carry out collaborative research with universities.’

*How is your quality management structured, how do you use proficiency testing and what role does Vetqas plays in this?*

‘CVRL has a wide range of departments and are currently moving to an overall ISO17025 compliant quality system as well as running their own internal quality management system. They use a wide range of PT schemes from different sources, including 31 from Vetqas. In addition they have their own internal PT schemes, notably for TSE. Additional specialist PT suppliers are used for chemistry and specific viral parameters’.

*What is the rationale behind your PT activity, what are the benefits and how do you use the results?*

‘Our ISO17025 accreditation requires the use of PT schemes and we also have a strategy to use external PT schemes to provide an independent check on work. We find it useful to assist in preventing issues and the use of PT offers a continuous rolling check on laboratory procedures. The results are mostly used as a regular ‘stand-alone’ exercise, as confirmation of the validity of our testing and competence of staff.’





*As Quality Manager, what criteria do you and CVRL use when assessing the sourcing and supply of PT schemes?*

‘The key criteria are that the PT schemes are suitably accredited, have an appropriate frequency of circulation rounds and number of samples supplied. In addition, it is beneficial if the supplier offers a ‘one-stop-shop’ for a wide range of PT schemes as this makes the whole process easier to manage and limits the number of suppliers. We also like to work closely with our PT suppliers and be able to access specialist expertise, when needed.’

*Looking to the future, how do you see PT evolving and which PT schemes would you like to see available?*

‘From our perspective at DAFM, I see a continual expansion of ISO17025 accreditation and the subsequent requirement for PT. As new tests evolve and become routinely used in the market I would hope that suitable PT schemes become available. PT schemes that I would be interested in are Campylobacter enumeration and MIC antimicrobial resistance testing.’

AHVLA Scientific would like to thank both Caroline and Malcolm for their time and agreeing to be interviewed. Obtaining the views of our customers is important to help us improve the service and to provide information about the direction they feel PT is likely to take in the future.

***If you require any further information on the PT Schemes please contact:***

Quality Assurance Unit, College Road, Sutton Bonington, Loughborough,  
Leicestershire LE12 5RB, United Kingdom. Tel +44 (0)1509 670607 Fax +44 (0)1509 670206  
Email [vetqas@ahvla.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:vetqas@ahvla.gsi.gov.uk)