

4 March 2021
Report for Period to February 2021
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Purpose of the report

To inform the Committee of the work of the Joint Metrology Laboratory for the period and operational duties to present in these difficult times of a pandemic.

Metrology Laboratory
Operational

1. The laboratory has continued to provide a service throughout the pandemic and has not lost any time or productivity. Social distancing has been maintained and full risk assessments applied along with modified practices to achieve this aim. There are no opportunities to work from home and all staff have been working through the pandemic at the laboratory which is a credit to their dedication and professionalism.
2. The submissions to the laboratory have not reduced in quantity in comparison with this time last year, as a predominance of the laboratory's clients are in the pharmaceutical and food production industries and need a continuity of service to maintain their production levels. In some months the submissions have increased greatly.
3. Submissions in January 2021 were up by 474 with a total of 918 submissions this year.

Submissions		Weights
59	UKAS M1	422
10	UKAS F2	36
99	UKAS F1	345
11	UKAS E2	67
Total UKAS Submissions		870
3	Sec 74(4)	6
0	NAWI	0
3	Traders	42
0	Verification	0
Total Submissions		918
UKAC Certificates		179
Non UKAS Certificates		6

4. Turnaround times in giving completed work back to clients, even with a staff member down due to retirement, for the duration of the pandemic and increased workloads for all staff to cover this absence, have not been degraded by any more than three days but as submissions increase this may cause longer turnaround times which is one of our unique abilities in the calibration market..

Aid and Advice to Industry

5. Local weighing machine repairers, chemical, food manufacturers, pharmaceutical and aeronautical companies continue to submit their test weights, scales and measures in for calibration and many have expressed their gratitude that we are still providing a service as their businesses would suffer if we did not. The laboratory has just quoted for submissions from an offshore renewable energy company, although not a large contract, it is representing a new market sector for the laboratory.
6. The laboratory has been giving advice on practical issues facing local companies with regards to calibrations and more onerously on Brexit implications to their business and in particular conformity assessment procedures. UK Companies are no longer able to CE mark goods and have to appoint a European Notified body within the EU27 to be able to place their goods on the EU Market. Goods to be placed on the GB Market must be marked UKCA by a British Approved Body and if goods are to be placed onto the market in Northern Ireland, they must be marked UKNI with the CE mark. These Northern Ireland marks will not be recognised in the EU. This advice has been given to the metrology and product safety sectors. At present there is no divergence from European requirements, but it is anticipated that in the future advice to industry will become more complicated explaining if the business wants to place goods on the European market as well as the British market. The laboratory was asked by a Japanese Standards Board on how to apply the UKCA mark on some of their client's manufactured goods.
7. The laboratory does offer the facility to companies to hire some of our test weights and there have been a number of hires of several tonnes of weights over the last few months, currently there is one tonne on hire up at Morpeth and one tonne out on hire down in Barnard Castle.
8. The Public Weighbridge is still being utilised by our clients and providing an essential service to hauliers and road haulage operators, especially those sending ISO containers through the ports in line with the Safety of Live at Sea Regulations (SOLAS). Unfortunately, we can only accept cash for payment or invoice as a card reader was prohibitively expensive to utilise. The use of cash had to be risk assessed and control measures put in place. The weighbridge makes a contribution not only to the local economy but also to road safety in preventing overloaded vehicles using our road infrastructure and the inherent dangers they present and several companies have been asking for advice on safe loading of vehicles, this includes Gateshead Council Fleet vehicles.

EC Verifications

9. There will be no EC Verifications after 1st January 2021 as we are no longer a Notified Body recognised by the EU due to the finality of Brexit. The UK Government has transferred us to an Approved Body for the purposes of attesting to the UKCA requirements. This transfer is beholden upon us being audited in line with the Local Authority Auditing Protocol before the deadline of March 31st, 2021. If the Approved Body continues after successful audits then a shortfall in Authorised Officers needs to be addressed sooner rather than later, due to the retirement of the officers covering Northumberland who also covered the expertise of the Laboratory Manager if he was unable to attend, such as the Automatic Rail Weighbridges on Tyne Dock.
10. A submitter of Capacity Serving Measures for verification, due to Brexit and lockdown repercussions has relocated his production away from the North East region to Wales but has confirmed that due to the good relationship with the laboratory they will continue to use the laboratory's services in the future.

UKAS Calibrations

11. As can be seen from paragraph 3 above the laboratory has worked tirelessly through an extremely difficult period. All weights submitted have been subjected to disinfection where possible and a quarantine period and that all public areas disinfected after clients have delivered and collected their submissions. As social distancing measures preclude any double up working in a single laboratory consideration will need to be given to splitting the work into shifts, a day shift and a night shift if the volume of submissions continues to increase, this may prove to be difficult to achieve due to the low numbers of staff currently at the laboratory.
12. The laboratory underwent its annual audit by UKAS in February 2021. This audit is to be conducted remotely and all materials sent to the auditing team in advance. Due to the timeframe of report submission a verbal update on the findings will be provided at the meeting.
13. The laboratory has successfully had an Extension to Scope of Accredited activities granted by UKAS to extend the weight range up to 50 kg. To have accreditation for the calibration of weighing instruments up to 150 kg in capacity and allows for calibrations here at the laboratory or on site of the client. A further extension allows for the calibration of volumetric flasks up to 5 litres in capacity. All these extensions were achievable utilising existing equipment, procedures and skills that the laboratory possesses.

Product Safety

14. As was reported previously the laboratory has been appointed by Office of Product Safety and Standards as the product safety laboratory and sample hub for the North East, Yorkshire and Humberside regions and as such have been organising the testing of products on behalf of the Local Authorities that we represent, we are currently awaiting the results of those tests and the laboratory is presently looking at accredited test house to provide flammability testing of mattresses.

15. Cigarette testing, although with fewer samples coming in due to the repurposing of many trading standards personnel in authorities, is still being undertaken, with the Manager having been put on notice of potential Court attendances in Norfolk, Barnsley, Dorset and South Wales to give Expert testimony in cases where samples failed Reduced Ignition Propensity testing and posed a risk to life and property due to fire.

National Agenda

16. The laboratory has once again been contracted to run professional training by the Chartered Trading Standards Institute for the Practical and Oral Examinations in Metrology. Due to the pandemic it was felt that face to face training here at the metrology laboratory was not sensible, an alternative method of delivery was devised. Five candidates wished to proceed whilst three preferred to defer their examinations until such time that a normal face to face training system could be re-introduced.

17. The laboratory has developed a new Advanced Metrology Module as part of the Chartered Trading Standards Institute's qualification framework, and this goes live later this year with candidates predominately from Northern Ireland already enrolled. The manager is the appointed examiner and training provider for the new module.

18. The T Level qualification developed by NCFE with major contributions by the laboratory has been submitted for the approval stage with their professional Institute.

19. The laboratory has been involved with a quality assurance audit of calibrations with the National Standards Institute of Iceland. Results of the interlaboratory audit will be presented orally at the meeting.

20. The manager, as a Lead Officer for Metrology for the Chartered Trading Standards Institute, has been contributing to National debates and advice, all being conducted remotely presently, where Brexit issues dominated as well as technical and training issues being dealt with. The Manager, in this capacity also sits on the Legal Metrology Expert Panel where remote meetings have been held to discuss various issues affecting the Weights and Measures profession in the UK.

21. The laboratory was asked for advice by the Northern Ireland Trading Standards Service, who are part of the Civil Service rather than Local Authority, on expanding their service delivery to cater for the unique position they are in as a member of the United Kingdom and the European Union after Brexit.

22. World Metrology Day held annually on May 20th; this year focuses on Measurement for Health. The theme was chosen by the International metrology community to highlight the extremely important role metrology plays in the health and wellbeing of our society. There is a dedicated website for the promotion of the day and events and metrology service providers are free to publicise their own role in this event. This may present itself as an ideal opportunity for the Committee to highlight the laboratory's contribution in the metrology community.

Environmental

23. The laboratory has decided to restrict the amount of plastics involved in providing the calibration and testing certificates to clients. Historically, all certificates have been issued in plastic wallets to protect them. Once stocks are exhausted no replacements will be purchased. The aim is to reduce the use of single use plastics where practicable to zero by the end of the year.
24. All packaging materials are recycled and reused to send submissions back to clients to avoid being sent to landfill.
25. The amount of paper use by reason of printing has been reduced as auditing by UKAS is currently, due to the restrictions of social distancing, being conducted remotely so the 'paper trail' is currently electronic and this will continue leaving the production of certificates and test reports as the largest use of paper. It is proposed that the laboratory consults with its client base if they will accept electronic copies of certificates and reports in the future instead of the paper copies they currently ask for.

Recommendation

26. The Committee is asked to note the information.