

## **How to use EQA results within the laboratory**

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EQA is an essential element of the overall quality assurance process of a laboratory. What a laboratory can gain from EQA is dependent on a number of factors, and the choice of EQA scheme can play a significant role in this.

The IFCC distinguishes between Proficiency Testing (PT), EQA Scheme (EQAS) and EQA Programme (EQAP), with EQAP providing the greater “added value”. EQAPs will provide schemes which are likely to meet a laboratory’s requirements in terms of frequency and range of samples, provision of challenging samples along with education and supportive elements.

Laboratories may have a limited choice of EQA programmes for a test, but where choice exists, what factors should influence that choice, or conversely, what should EQA providers be aiming to provide?

Having chosen an appropriate EQA programme, how the samples are handled within the laboratory will also influence the value the laboratory will derive from its participation, but what does “treat as if a patient sample” really mean within a modern laboratory?

Eventually, a report is received back detailing the laboratory’s performance. In an ideal world, the report will inform on analytical performance, including bias, imprecision and linearity. The benefits should not be restricted to checking analyser performance, but can be a powerful tool in reinforcing a culture of quality across the laboratory.