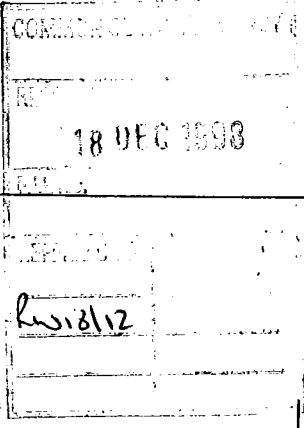
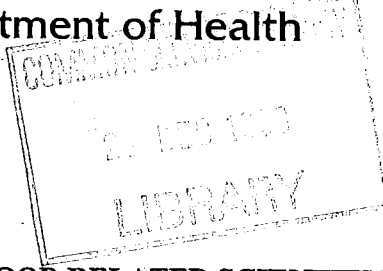


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THE SCOTTISH OFFICE

Department of Health



NHS
MEL (1998) 79

NHS Management Executive
St. Andrew's House
Edinburgh EH1 3DG
17th December 1998

Dear Colleague

**REVIEW OF FOOD RELATED SCIENTIFIC SERVICES:
LABORATORY SERVICES**

Summary

1. In the White Paper "The Food Standards Agency - Force for Change" published in January 1998, the Government gave a commitment to undertake a comprehensive Review of Food Related Scientific Services in Scotland. This Review has now been completed by an independent group set up in May 1998 under the Chairmanship of Professor Morag Timbury and its report was submitted to Ministers on 23 October.

2. The Review has concluded that direct access to medical microbiological expertise in food testing is a crucial factor in protecting public health in a food related emergency. To ensure that this expertise is available, the Review Group recommends that Health Boards either enter into partnership arrangements with non-NHS food microbiology laboratories, or, where it is efficient and cost effective to do so, that local NHS microbiology laboratories are encouraged to become UKAS accredited to handle routine food samples. The Annex gives more information about the background.

Action

3. Health Boards should reassure themselves in the context of their Health Improvement Programme that laboratory services which they access are not only able to provide an adequate routine service but are **sufficiently resourced and flexible to cope with unexpected out of hours and surge requirements that may occur during a food poisoning or similar outbreak.** Where appropriate, Health Boards and NHS Trusts should support NHS laboratories in their area which have previously undertaken food testing, and wish to obtain UKAS accreditation, in their efforts to achieve this status.

Yours sincerely

for **KEVIN WOODS**
Director of Strategy and Performance Management

Addressees

For action:

- General Managers, Health Boards
- Chief Executives, NHS Trusts

For information:

- General Manager, State Hospital
- General Manager, Health Education Board for Scotland
- General Manager, Common Services Agency
- Executive Director, SCPDME
- Chief Executives, Local Authorities

Enquiries

(Laboratory Accreditation)
to:

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(General information about the Review)
to:

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EDINBURGH EH14 1TY

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FOOD TESTING LABORATORIES

In the White Paper "The Food Standards Agency - A Force for Change" published in January 1998, the Government gave a commitment to undertake a comprehensive review of food related scientific services in Scotland. This review has been undertaken by an independent group, set up in May 1998, under the chairmanship of Professor Morag Timbury. Its report was published on 5 November 1998. The report is available on The Scottish Office web site at www.Scotland.gov.uk and copies are also available from The Scottish Office Agriculture, Environment and Fisheries Department, Room 345A, Pentland House, Robbs Loan, Edinburgh EH14 1TW.

In the course of its work, the review group has identified the background to the reduction of microbiological food testing in NHS laboratories. Historically microbiological examination of the majority of local authority food samples was carried out within the NHS laboratories which also provided the clinical service for patient samples. This service was provided at no charge to local authorities at point of use, and funded by central government through NHS resources. In 1992 funds for the routine microbiological examination of food were transferred from the NHS to local authorities, and provided through revenue support grant in the same way as chemical analysis of food samples. NHS microbiological testing of food samples then became a direct charge to local authorities, and as a result the Public Analyst laboratories increasingly and successfully competed for this work. Currently very few NHS laboratories undertake microbiological food testing.

An additional factor contributing to the reduction in NHS involvement in this area is that from 1 November 1998 all laboratories undertaking official food testing are required to be accredited through the UK Accreditation Scheme (UKAS), in order to comply with an EU Directive. This has significant resource implications for laboratories, and as a result a number of NHS labs which previously undertook routine food examination work have withdrawn from such work, while others are only just beginning the lengthy process of accreditation. Only Aberdeen Royal Infirmary is currently UKAS accredited, with Dumfries and Galloway Royal Infirmary aiming to achieve accreditation early in 1999.

SODoH agrees with the Review Group's view that direct access to medical microbiological expertise in the area of food testing is a crucial factor in protecting the public health in food related emergencies. Such expertise is not currently available in the public analyst laboratories. It is therefore desirable that, where possible, partnerships are developed between consultant medical microbiologists in the NHS and non-NHS laboratories undertaking food testing within the network proposed by the Review Group. Alternatively, consideration should be given to encouraging NHS laboratories which are interested in obtaining UKAS accreditation to pursue this, where it is efficient and cost effective to do so. A number of NHS laboratories in addition to Aberdeen and Dumfries have expressed an interest in achieving UKAS accreditation. The Review Group noted the particular importance of ensuring that rural areas such as the Highlands and south west of Scotland have access to an adequate food testing service.

Paragraph 2.3 of the recently issued Priorities and Planning Guidance for the NHS in Scotland highlights the need for Health Improvement Programmes to incorporate proposals to safeguard the public health from communicable- including foodborne - disease. In this regard Health Boards will wish to reassure themselves that the laboratory services which they access are not only able to provide an adequate routine service, but are sufficiently resourced and flexible to cope with the unexpected out-of-hours and surge requirements that may occur during an outbreak situation. Where appropriate, Health Boards should support NHS laboratories in their area which have previously undertaken food testing, and wish to obtain UKAS accreditation, in their efforts to achieve this status.



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THE SCOTTISH OFFICE

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Telephone 0131-244 6427
Fax 0131-244 6445

Heads of Environmental Health Departments

Copy to: The Scottish Food Co-ordinating Committee
The Royal Environmental Health Institute for Scotland

17 December 1998

Dear Colleague

REVIEW OF SCIENTIFIC SERVICES IN SCOTLAND USE OF ACCREDITED LABORATORIES

1. European Council Directive 14 June 1989 on the Official Control of Foodstuffs (89/397/EEC) requires that control samples are analysed or examined within official laboratories. The European Council Directive of 29 October 1993 on the subject of additional measures concerning the Official Control of Foodstuffs (93/99/EEC) requires that these laboratories comply with Article 3 of that Directive which stipulates that laboratories are required to be accredited. In the UK this is achieved by accreditation from the United Kingdom Accreditation Service (UKAS). The requirement to comply with the 1993 Directive took effect from 1 November 1998. Since that date laboratories which do not meet the set criteria cannot be considered official laboratories and cannot therefore produce results which will be valid for European Commission (EC) control purposes.
2. The Review of Food Related Scientific Services in Scotland identified those laboratories undertaking food testing for local authorities as at 14 May 1998, plus those laboratories which anticipated being UKAS accredited by 1 November 1998. The final report of the Review Group was circulated to all food authorities and other interested parties on 5 November 1998.
3. The Directives require central Government to satisfy themselves that necessary measures to implement the Directives have taken place. Given the time that has elapsed since the last questionnaire from the Scottish Office, I am seeking your assistance in updating our records.

4. I would therefore be obliged if you could let me have the following information as soon as reasonably practicable:-

Name of Local Authority

Name of Accredited Laboratory/ies used to test for Chemical Analysis of Food

Name of Accredited Laboratory/ies used for Microbiological Examination of Food

Name of any other Laboratory/ies used for food purposes and use of results

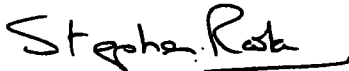
Whether the authority can meet the requirements of Code of Practice 7, in relation to the requirements on transportation and storing of food samples for microbiological examination, with particular reference to the time constraints set out in paragraph 29 of the Code.

5. The Review Group recognised that in certain areas there was a potential shortfall of provision in relation to microbiological laboratories. The Review Group recommended that Local Authorities and Health Boards should work together in partnership to ensure the adequacy of microbiological examination facilities in their area, in order to meet both the requirements for routine food samples and emergency situations, such as outbreaks. As a consequence of the recommendations of the Review Group colleagues in the Management Executive of the NHS have issued a Management Executive Letter (MEL) to General Managers of Health Boards and Chief Executives of NHS Trusts, copied to Chief Executives of Local Authorities. A copy of the MEL is attached for your information.

6. In addition to the specific information requested at paragraph 4 above, I would be obliged if you could advise me of any other associated problems that you may be facing in obtaining adequate access to chemical analysis or microbiological examination for food samples.

7. I would like to thank you in advance for co-operating and providing the above information, and would ask if at all possible that the information is returned by **11 January 1999**.

Yours sincerely



STEPHEN ROOKE
Chief Food and Dairy Officer