

Results of the December 2025 Asbestos Proficiency Testing Participant Feedback



Background

In order to maintain our ISO17043 accreditation for the AIMS Proficiency Testing (PT) scheme, it is important that we continue to improve the service that we offer to participants. One way of recording PT participant satisfaction is to carry out feedback gathering exercises. This is the eleventh survey of this type that we have conducted. Details of the previous surveys are available on the PT section of the website (<http://www.hsl.gov.uk/proficiency-testing-schemes/participant-feedback>).

Survey

The survey was emailed to all asbestos PT participants, including (AIMS), Asbestos in Soils Scheme (AISS), Low Asbestos Content Scheme (LACS), Regular Inter-laboratory Counting Exchange (RICE) and Scanning Electron Microscopy Fibre Counting Scheme (SEMS). In total, the survey was sent to 490 participants by email, with 141 responding (29% response rate). Five participants did not complete every question.

Results

From the 141 responses

- Q1. 88% participate in AIMS, 32% in AISS, 35% in LACS, 44% in RICE, 31% in SEMS.
- Q2. 30% of the responses were from the UK, 62% from Europe (ex UK) and 8% from Rest of World.
- Q3. 95% of responders find their samples/ slides to be of a suitable standard.
- Q4. 99% of responders found our answers to queries useful and informative.
- Q5. 95% of responders knew we have useful information available on the website, including the Information Book for Participants and Scheme Schedules.
- Q6. 98% of participants confirmed they receive their samples in a timely manner.
- Q7. 98% of responders are happy with the timescales for submitting results.
- Q8. 98% of responders find our group reports useful and informative.
- Q9. 90% of responders know that we have a wide range of quality control samples available to purchase.
- Q10. There was also an opportunity to comment/make suggestions for the schemes (the main points have been listed below).

Q8. Do you find your scheme's Group Report useful & informative?

The majority of participants find the Group Reports acceptable.

A selection of comments have been raised in this section, but they mainly concern the selection of samples supplied with the schemes:

- A participant required confirmation that the asbestos fibres used in AIMS & LACS are checked.
Our asbestos is checked to ensure they display the correct morphology and optical qualities before being used in any of our scheme samples
- A guarantee that during a subscription year, samples contain each of the six asbestos types.
*We produce 12 samples per scheme year, the team try to make the samples representative of the types of materials & asbestos types an analyst will see within their work.
Our Information Book for Participants states that 'at least once every 3 rounds, subject to availability, a sample will contain one of the more rare forms of asbestos'*

- Provision of various sample matrices with exact amounts of asbestos present.
AISS is the only quantitative scheme (sample 2 in each round). You are able to purchase quality control samples (PT042) – please see our AIMS QC Information, available on our website: [PT Quality Control Samples](#)
The PT Team are developing ways of accurately producing LACS samples for quantification analysis. All participants will be informed once available.
- A participant has commented that AIMS samples are not representative of actual samples.
Commercial samples are included in AIMS but for the samples manufactured at HSE, the challenge is to ensure homogeneity, to be fair but challenging and to include the rarer types on occasions. All these factors may help distinguish commercial samples from manufactured samples. However, all the matrices used in manufactured samples are the types of materials that may be found in typical samples that labs receive.

Q10. Comments/ Suggestions regarding the Schemes.

Thank you to all participants who provided positive & constructive feedback to our team.

- A request for a PT Scheme for naturally occurring asbestos in rocks.
Unfortunately, the team do not have access to the raw materials required for this type of scheme.
- A request to have the option to choose the language on the PT Online System or the results.
This is on our requests for improvements to our scheme, but currently no completion date has been set
- Inclusion of samples with multilayer mortars, plasters & paints within AIMS.
AIMS samples do include layered samples throughout the subscription year. The team are constantly trying to develop samples that are representative of what analysts see in their laboratories worldwide, while also ensuring a range of matrix and asbestos types are included to ensure competency.
- A participant is interested in receiving information on the size (diameter) distribution of the fibres within the SEMS samples.
This data isn't currently collected. If the team were to collect this data, or ask participants to collect the data, there would be a cost/ time implication. The PT team will discuss further.
- A participant commented that the PT Online System freezes when trying to purchase quality control samples – and information on the samples is lacking.
Improvements for the PT Online System are planned within the coming year, which will hopefully improve the useability – especially within the QC section.
Our QC Information is provided on our website page ([PT Quality Control Samples](#)) and the team are here to answer any further questions, or provide advice, where required.
- A couple of participants have mentioned that their shipments were held by customs, causing delays.
The PT Team provide all relevant information to our courier, including a detailed commercial invoice. It's important that the samples are highlighted that they may contain asbestos fibres. As they are samples for proficiency testing, we are not able to list everything that is in the sample. The majority of samples pass through customs without delay, unfortunately some officials will hold samples and request further information. The PT are always happy to help with any additional information that they may require. Please ensure actions raised by customs are answered as soon as possible to prevent further delays or samples being returned to HSE.

Discussion

This is the thirteenth feedback gathering exercise although the response from participants has declined slightly, the constructive feedback that has been received is greatly appreciated.

The main aim of this survey was to determine if the schemes, and the process, are of an acceptable standard for our participants.

Participants have made very positive comments regarding the quality of the schemes and how they are administered. They have also provided valuable constructive feedback where they feel improvement could be made. Although not all answers to comments/ suggestions have been provided in this report, the survey has been collated and distributed within the team so that we're all aware of where we are doing well and where we could improve.

If anyone has raised a concern/ query on the questionnaire which hasn't been answered, please email the PT team who will be happy to provide further feedback.

We are continually striving to improve the quality of the schemes so this exercise will be carried out annually. Participants are reminded that they are welcome to provide constructive feedback at any time by emailing the PT administration team.

Outcome

The results, comments and feedback have been passed to the HSE PT team, PT Management Team and findings will be discussed at the next FPTSC meeting in March/ April 2026