

Government Chemist Programme Expert Group Meeting

Thursday 8 October 2020

Via MS Teams

Attendees:

PEG Alex McKinlay (<i>dep. for Sophie Rollinson</i>) Robbie Beattie Andrew Damant David Franklin David Pickering Diane Turner Jonathon Griffin Chelvi Leonard Andrew Millman Brenda McRory Paul Berryman (<i>Chair</i>) Simon Branch Kasia Kazimierczak Will Munro Helen Munday Declan Naughton Eli Johnson	BEIS Merton Murrell Sarah Davies Maria Turner LGC Julian Braybrook (<i>Government Chemist</i>) John Black Malcolm Burns Chris Hopley Selvarani Elahi Kirstin Gray Michael Walker Paul Hancock Bob Oswald (<i>Minutes</i>)
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Apologies: Lucy Foster, Sophie Rollinson, Roger Wood, John Collins, Paula Domann

1. Minutes/Actions

- 1.1 The Chair welcomed all attendees, in particular Paul Hancock who joined LGC in July 2020 as referee analyst and was attending his first PEG meeting.
- 1.2 The Chair reminded all those present of the usual housekeeping rules and reminded PEG members to make any necessary declarations of interest in relation to particular topics discussed.
- 1.3 Minutes from previous meeting (April 2020) were approved with no corrections. **ACTION 1: Bob Oswald** to upload the non-attributive version of those minutes to the GC website.
- 1.4 All actions from the previous meeting were completed and closed:
 - **Actions 1 & 2** re: *work on CBD*. A presentation on the GC project on CBD was given under item 6 below.
 - **Action 3** re: *reported completion rate of the 2017-20 programme's RF3 project (Rapid and point-of-test devices for food testing)*. Malcolm Burns reported that this had been discussed with the PEG member who raised it. The action point arose from some confusion between the GC project (which was completed at the time of the last meeting) and the FSA project (where the final report had not, at that time, been submitted). Since then, the FSA project report has been submitted.
 - **Action 4** re: *induction for new PEG members*. Julian Braybrook reported that, although there had been no 'formal' induction, there had been correspondence with

the PEG members in question and he re-iterated that PEG members could approach him or John Black with any questions. The Chair added that he was also happy to answer questions from PEG members.

- **Action 5:** re: Doodle poll for Autumn 2020 meeting. Action completed and closed.

2. BEIS Update (Maria Turner)

2.1 Maria gave a presentation summarising the following:

- Current priorities for BEIS.
- The process for developing the next UK Measurement Strategy. This included a set of long-term aims arising from recent foresighting work, which considered how the pace of technological advancement would continue to accelerate within the context of key future drivers of wellbeing, sustainability and enterprise.
- An outline of the cross NMS data programme (including its aims and progress made so far).

2.2 The slides were circulated with these minutes. There were no comments or questions from PEG members on the update.

3. Government Chemist Update (Julian Braybrook)

Julian explained that in his capacity as Government Chemist, he has the annual duty to report on his activities to the Board of LGC Limited. At this year's meeting (30 July) the following reports were made:

- 3.1 A brief overview of the Government Chemist Annual Review was given, noting that 2019 had been a busy year with a substantial increase in the number of referee cases and advice sought. The Annual Review 2019 had been laid before Parliament, approved, published and laid in the respective libraries of the different Devolved Nations.
- 3.2 The GC Conference needs to be postponed until 2021 – the detailed agenda is being re-visited to adapt it to a virtual format.
- 3.3 A forward-looking strategy and work programme for the period 2020-23 had been established to prepare for the future challenge of national compliance and international trade deals post EU Exit (although contracting had only been for 1 year due to CSR postponement).
- 3.4 BEIS reported that they had again received positive feedback from their PEG and it had been another good year for the programme. BEIS remained confident in the capabilities and competence of LGC in supporting the Government Chemist function and to deliver the associated work programme.
- 3.5 In summarising, BEIS noted that:
- the Government Chemist Annual Review was a fair reflection of the work undertaken by the Government Chemist;

- both the statutory and advisory functions of the Government Chemist had been performed to a high standard and LGC had responded well in the work carried out;
 - the Government Chemist function had been discharged effectively; and
 - the Government Chemist function continued to be an important source of independent analysis, advice and information for Government, industry, the analytical science community and the public.
- 3.6 There had been a recent flurry of enhanced engagement with the statutory and advisory functions of the GC. The GC has reached agreement with the incumbent service provider on the approach to re-establishing the GC as 'authorised analyst' under the Hydrocarbon Oils Duties Act, 1979.
- 3.7 Discussion continues between the Office for Product Safety and Standards (OPSS) and the National Measurement System (NMS) Programmes team within BEIS about expansion of the GC role to embrace chemical safety and standards.
- 3.8 The NHS Test and Trace Team within DHSC has also sought the GC to act as an advisory panel member overseeing mass spectrometry pilot projects as part of the Government 'Moonshot' project to expand SARS-CoV-2 testing capacity. This adds another opportunity to our already on-going provision of underpinning measurement science in support of current and future molecular testing technologies for SARS-CoV-2.

4. Referee Cases Update (Michael Walker)

- 4.1 The Chair congratulated Michael on his recent award of an honorary professorship from Queen's University Belfast.
- 4.2 Michael's presentation summarised a number of referee cases, covering GMO in rice and rice products, antibiotic residues in honey and food supplement labelling and composition (slides were circulated with these minutes).
- 4.3 The GMO in rice cases highlighted instances where the methods given in the EU-RL GMFF guidance have not been followed. Because of this confusion, Michael authored a guidance note entitled 'Detection of genetically modified rice at the UK border', which is available on the GC website.
- 4.4 Concerning the streptomycin in honey case, Michael noted his thanks to Kirstin Gray and Simon Cowen for developing the mathematic approach given on slide 13 of his presentation.
- 4.5 Michael noted that referee cases remain active, the complexity remains high and we are dealing with cases despite COVID-19.
- 4.6 Michael pointed out two particular conclusions drawn from the experience of these cases:
- UK capacity to carry out tests for Cry1Ab/Ac sits solely with Malcolm Burns and his team.

- The difficulties of proving 'zero'
- 4.7 Malcolm Burns pointed out that for the GMO rice case, the turnaround time for 2 samples was just 17 days, even with the distancing required in the lab, so he noted his congratulations to the staff involved.
 - 4.8 Michael was asked if he thought it likely that we would see more cases of antibiotic residue in honey. Michael replied that he couldn't say, but it was possible there could be further cases from the importer in question. Michael also confirmed that the importer was using an accredited method, but not the same method as the GC.
 - 4.9 Another PEG member asked if the peculiar results in the honey case could be a result of a similar homogeneity issues as with aflatoxin cases – i.e. there are 'hotspots'.
 - 4.10 A number of PEG members and GC staff took the opportunity to thank Michael for his hard work, and for his advice and comradeship over the years, and wished him all the best for the future.

5. Programme Update (John Black)

- 5.1 John's presentation (circulated with these minutes) summarised the current status of the programme as a whole and examined some of the highlights in the progress of each project so far.
- 5.2 Responding to a question about the glycidal esters mini-project (Slide 16), Selvarani Elahi explained that these were potentially carcinogenic substances but also the legislative limit has been reduced to a very low level, so analytically it is a huge challenge.
- 5.3 In the meeting chat, Malcolm Burns elaborated on the parliamentary report on food fraud mentioned by John as a contributory output from the current CB5 project. Key GC staff including Julian Braybrook and Selvarani Elahi were interviewed and contributed to this publication. For those that are interested, the full report can be found at <https://post.parliament.uk/research-briefings/post-pn-0624/>.
- 5.4 The PEG also noted that it was good to see a number of papers had been published in the last 2 quarters.

6. CBD Presentation (Selvarani Elahi and Chris Hopley)

- 6.1 The presentation (circulated with these minutes) summarised the background and need for this project and went on to outline LC-MS/MS methods for CBD, the challenges and some conclusions.
- 6.2 Chris explained that the team were working on two questions:
 - What does the HO limit of 1 mg/pack mean on a practical basis? (Chris's working assumption was 1 mg of the *total sum* of any controlled material detected in the product).
 - Laboratory based method development for Determination of CBD and controlled cannabinoids in Novel Foods.

- 6.3 Chris commented that the team had looked at vape products but haven't tested them – the focus here is on food products.
- 6.4 Concerning the proposed ring trial, Chris was asked if this would be a full ring trial of the LGC method or something more like a PT exercise? Chris replied that the aim was to release the method before Christmas with the hope that labs that currently have no method will take it up for the ring trial. At the same time, he didn't want to exclude labs that do have their own method, so it will be mix of the two approaches. A PEG member added that it might be useful to ensure expertise and advice from the LGC Proficiency Testing folk are consulted at some stage.
- 6.5 There was a comment in the meeting chat about the ACI providing some free training for officers on CBD before next March, noting that it was interesting to hear that Selvarani and Chris had been in contact with them as well. The PEG member who raised this point thought there was a general expectation of appropriate enforcement action in April.

7. Feedback and Questions (Paul Berryman)

- 7.1 In response to a comment regarding recent changes to Food Contact Materials regulations legislation, Michael Walker confirmed that the GC would be monitoring this closely.

8. Next meeting

- 8.1 **ACTION 2: Bob Oswald** to send a Doodle Poll for the Spring 2021 meeting.