

NATIONAL CONSIDERATIONS

DRUG CHECKING PROJECT
BRIEFING PAPER/001
JANUARY 2022

UNIVERSITY of
STIRLING



SCOTTISH
DRUG DEATHS
TASKFORCE

The Drug Checking Project is a research project to explore how best to establish drug checking in Scotland. This project aims to build an evidence base for, and facilitate the development of, drug checking services across three cities: **Glasgow, Aberdeen and Dundee**.

This paper sets out the considerations of **lab based** and **national components** of the project.

Related documents

Drug checking project briefing paper/002: Equipment considerations

WHY DO WE NEED LAB BASED TESTING?

CONFIRMATORY TESTING

Lab based (LB) testing is required to confirm the identity of compounds and quality check the results from point of care (POC) testing.

This will allow us to establish levels of accuracy and error margins, and assess limitations at POC testing.

EXAMPLE

LB results confirm the POC identification of the compound 95% of the time, or POC testing consistently fails to detect a particular drug.

CONSIDER

What is an acceptable level of error/variation in compound identity?
How we communicate the limitations of POC?

COMPREHENSIVE TESTING

LB testing will give more complete results, including quantitative information and data on cutting agents. It will also help to identify compounds not detectable at POC. This provides baseline data, a fuller surveillance picture and better identification of emerging trends and new drugs.

EXAMPLE

POC testing identifies etizolam, LB testing identifies etizolam at a conc. of 3mg/pill and trace amounts of clonazepam.

CONSIDER

How we communicate results of confirmatory testing if person is no longer at POC?
Email, text, website, notice board?

WHY DO WE NEED NATIONAL LAB BASED TESTING?

ECONOMIES OF SCALE

Having 1 national LB site (rather than LB testing in each of the 3 cities) keeps costs and demand on resources as low as possible.

EXAMPLE

POC in Aberdeen and Glasgow send samples to LB site in Dundee.

CONSIDER

Who manages this?
How is the cost split?

NATIONAL RESPONSE

There is a need to establish an accessible drug testing service to strengthen our early warning system and better respond to incidents.

EXAMPLE

There is a cluster of overdoses in Ayr. The local service can send sample for testing.

CONSIDER

Who manages and funds this?
What is the criteria for use?

NATIONAL SURVEILLANCE

Drug trends vary across the country. Giving the opportunity for all areas to use a service will strengthen our drugs intelligence and will help to detect potential threats early.

EXAMPLE

If capacity available, spot check drugs from different areas and compare to city results.

CONSIDER

Who manages and funds this?

WHO CAN PROVIDE NATIONAL TESTING?

Drug testing capacity in Scotland is limited. To initially scope potential national testing models, meetings were arranged separately with the University of Dundee and NHS Grampian.

The **University of Dundee** has the capability and experience to take on management of a national testing model, although costs and logistics have not yet been discussed. **NHS Grampian** can potentially contribute to the project, although this cannot be decided until contracts are confirmed in March 2022. The **University of Glasgow/Scottish Police Authority** may also be an option that is yet to be explored.

To investigate this further information is needed, such as the number of samples to be tested, the timescale required for turnaround and service opening hours.

OTHER CONSIDERATIONS

INCLUSION

What samples are sent for LB testing?

Consider this when costing.

- Will everyone be offered LB testing?
- Will it only be a means of confirming the accuracy of POC? What percentage of samples should be subject to 'confirmatory' testing?
- Does it depend on the drug? More potent drugs such as benzos are more difficult to detect and quantify accurately at POC.
- Does it depend on the result? For example, all 'inconclusive' results.

COST

Having a national facility may be more cost effective than each city having its own lab based testing service, however costs will still be significant.

See equipment briefing paper.

- What funding is available for a national service?
- As the initial financial, resourcing and staffing investment will be significant, national service providers will require assurance that the project will operate for several years.
- Is there a preferred costing model? For example, costs of equipment/staff may be covered up front or testing may be charged per sample. There are benefits to both models. Covering full costs (rather than by sample) increases capacity and costs will reduce overtime and be cheaper in the longer term. Paying per sample requires less initial investment but may be more expensive in the long run.
- Is there an option for people to make a voluntary donation towards the cost of testing?

TRANSPORT

Samples will potentially be transported from:

- the POC facility to the LB facility
- a service to the LB facility

- Facility will need to have a Home Office licence to 'possess' and 'supply' in order to hand over samples for transportation.
- Can Police Scotland transport samples? Pathways need to be established between sites and police. What other methods would be available within current laws?
- Can samples be sent by post to LB facility, from a site with a Home Office 'supply' licence, e.g. POC facility, pharmacy? What processes and paperwork would be required for this?
- Home Office paperwork requires information on drug being supplied. How would this work if it was an inconclusive result at POC?