

On 19th January 2010, the cytology laboratory of Unilabs Ltd was visited by The East of England Quality Assurance team. The purpose of this quality assurance (QA) visit was to assure the quality of the NHS cervical screening programme by:

1. Assessing compliance with minimum standards for each discipline and interrelationships within the whole programme
- 2 identifying and promoting good practice
- 3 identifying areas for improvement and making any recommendations to achieve this.

The team of 6 followed the same protocol as that used for any NHS service provider and examined:

Cytology reporting

The environment & physical aspects of laboratory services provision

Turnaround time for smears

Staffing and recruitment

Training

Internal quality control procedures

Protocols

Information Technology

Communication

Failsafe

Management arrangements.

The team made only one general recommendation and the report stated

“This is a well-organised and highly focused commercial service providing an excellent quality of diagnostic cytopathology to a wide range of clients. The facilities are secure and comparable to those found in the NHS; the Policies and Procedures are equivalent to those that would be seen in the NHS Cervical Screening Programme. Staff are trained in both Surepath and ThinPrep (Cytyc) liquid based cytology technologies.

Appropriate external and internal quality assurance methods and monitoring are in place to ensure that staff work to a high level of competence in both methodologies. Data on staff screening performance, inadequate and abnormality detection rates are entirely consistent with the range of performance in the NHS Cervical Screening Programme”

This is an important step in fully equipping IHS to secure additional cytology work not only in the private but important public sector.