

News story: Civil news: change of Specialist Quality Mark administrator

From:

First published:

20 February 2017

New Specialist Quality Mark administration contract starts in tandem with small changes to audit process.

A new administrator will be responsible for delivering work for the Specialist Quality Mark (SQM) from 1 April 2017. The work will in future be carried out by Recognising Excellence and there will be a small number of changes to the audit process.

The current contract with SQM Delivery Partnership ends on 31 March 2017.

What does this mean for providers?

1. Starting 1 April 2017 audits should be booked by emailing: sqm@recognisingexcellence.co.uk.
2. Audit award process will have fewer stages.
3. Increase in requirements at the pre-quality mark stage.

More details are available on our 'quality standards' page on GOV.UK – see link below.

Requirement for contract-holders

It is a requirement for legal aid contract holders to hold either the SQM or the equivalent Lexcel accreditation. This will continue for anyone wanting to deliver services under the new civil contracts in 2018.

We confirmed this requirement would remain when we announced on 20 January 2017 that a procurement process for these contracts would start in April 2017.

Accreditation valid after 31 March 2017

All organisations with SQMs valid after 31 March 2017 should check they have a copy of their certificate.

If you are unable to find your current SQM certificate, you may request a copy from the outgoing audit provider, SQM Delivery Partnership. Such requests must be made before 31 March 2017.

Further information

[Legal Aid Agency quality standards](#) – to find out more about the standards and new administration arrangements

Rowley: We must use tax powers to make Scotland a fairer place

By Scottish Labour deputy leader Alex Rowley | February 20, 2017



By Scottish Labour deputy leader Alex Rowley

Tuesday will be a historic day in Scotland's devolution story.

For the first time, the Scottish Parliament will decide how to raise, as well as spend, money.

We have a chance to choose a different path from the Tories.

For Scottish Labour, that means turning our backs on austerity and delivering a progressive budget. We would use the new tax powers of the Scottish Parliament to make sure the richest in society pay their fair share.

That would mean raising the top rate of tax for those on £150,000 a year or more to 50p.

Scottish Labour would also change income tax levels by just 1p more than the Tory Chancellor Philip Hammond. With the extra money raised, we would invest in valued local services such as schools and care for the elderly that face being decimated under the SNP.

Nicola Sturgeon might have spent her career in politics arguing for more powers for the Scottish Parliament and against austerity – but in this historic vote she will show the only power she is really interested in is the power to pass-on Tory cuts. I believe that our Parliament here in Scotland must be about more than simply being a conveyor belt for Tory austerity and that is why we must use the powers of that parliament to defend communities and invest in the future of Scotland.

Many people have become more aware of the failure of the SNP to do anything about austerity, but progressive voters will rightly be even more disappointed in the Scottish Greens, who are propping-up SNP cuts. By supporting this budget, Patrick Harvie's party has sold out those who put their trust in them through the ballot box.

The SNP/Green budget will deliver £170million of cuts to our valued public services. On this historic day, Scottish Labour will choose a different path. We will vote against austerity and continue the fight to ensure the Scottish Parliament uses its new powers to improve the life-chances of our children and the most vulnerable in communities up and down Scotland.

China's H7N9 bird flu mutates, no immediate added threat to human

The H7N9 bird flu has mutated to a new strain in south China, which is proven more dangerous to poultry but poses no new threat to humans, the country's disease control and prevention authorities said Sunday on its website.

The mutation was found in January in two people who had contracted H7N9 bird flu in Guangdong Province. Chinese Center for Disease Control and Prevention (China CDC) has lately confirmed the finding and reported the case to the World Health Organization (WHO), according to China CDC's website.

The agricultural sector has also found the mutation in four poultry samples from Guangdong, China CDC said.

On the basis of joint study with experts from the agricultural sector, China CDC has concluded that the mutation "does not make the virus more infectious to human at the moment."

Chinese health and agricultural authorities will continue to study the mutated strain's source and its impact while intensifying monitoring to detect H7N9's further mutations, according to China CDC's website.

China has stepped up prevention of H7N9 avian flu transmission. It has been linked to at least 88 deaths since January. About 271 human infections cases were reported.

Most infected humans have had contact with poultry or dead birds. Among them were the two patients from Guangdong.

Bird flu is known to easily mutate. The public are concerned that a mutation might make it more infectious to humans, China CDC said on its website.

Press release: Planned roadworks in Devon and Cornwall: weekly summary for Monday 20 February to Sunday 26 February 2017

The following summary of planned new and ongoing road improvements over the coming week is correct as of 17 February but could be subject to change due to weather conditions or unforeseen circumstances. All our improvement work is carried out with the aim of causing as little disruption as possible.

Devon

A30 at Woodleigh, west of Exeter: survey work

Eastbound lane will be closed from 8pm to 6am overnight from Monday to Friday for survey work from Monday 20 February to Saturday 11 March 2017.

A38 at Smithaleigh, east of Plymouth: drainage work

Westbound lane will be closed from 8pm to 6am overnight from Monday 20 February 2017 to Saturday 4 March 2017.

A38 Voss Farm, east of Plymouth: carriageway work

Eastbound lane will be closed from 8pm to 6am overnight from Tuesday 21 February 2017 to Wednesday 22 February 2017.

A38 Smithaleigh, east of Plymouth: drainage work

Westbound lane will be closed between the exit and entry slip roads from 8pm to 6am overnight from Tuesday 21 February 2017 to Wednesday 22 February 2017.

A38 between Deep Lane and Smithaleigh, east of Plymouth: drainage work

Eastbound lane will be closed between the exit and entry slip roads from 8pm to 6am overnight from Wednesday 22 February 2017 to Friday 3 March 2017.

Cornwall

A30 Cornwall, between Temple and Higher Carblake, east of Bodmin: improvement scheme

There will be a 24-hour eastbound and westbound lane closures/contraflow and 40 mph speed limit until Tuesday 4 July 2017.

A30 Cornwall, Hayle Bypass, east of Penzance: drainage works

There will be a 24-hour lane closure and 40 mph speed limit until Saturday 25 February 2017.

A30 Cornwall, Callywith, Bodmin: junction improvements

There will be speed restrictions on slip roads for junction improvements until Monday 17 July 2017.

A30 Cornwall, Longrock Bypass, east of Penzance: vegetation clearance

There will be a westbound lane closure from 9am to 4pm from Monday 20 February 2017 to 24 February 2017.

A30 Cornwall, between St Erth roundabout and Loggans Moor roundabout, east of Penzance: drainage works

Eastbound and westbound carriageway will be closed overnight from 8pm to 6am from Monday 20 February 2017 to Saturday 25 February 2017.

A30 Cornwall, Blackwater, east of Redruth: drainage works

Westbound lane will be closed from 9am to 4pm from Tuesday 21 February 2017 to Thursday 23 February 2017.

A38 Cornwall, between Latchbrook and Saltash Tunnel, west of Plymouth: junction improvements

There will be 24-hour narrow lanes & 30mph speed limit for Carkeel roundabout junction improvements until Tuesday 28 February 2018.

A38 Cornwall, between Dobwalls & Turfdown, east of Bodmin: scheme work

There will be a 30 mph speed limit between Two Waters Foot and St Neot junction for slope stabilisation works. The work will take place until Wednesday 12 April. There will be a 24-hour westbound diversion via A390 and North Lane to rejoin the A38 west of Two Waters Foot. (Trago Mills accessed via A38 as normal). This is in place until Thursday 25 May 2017.

General enquiries

Members of the public should contact the Highways England customer contact centre on 0300 123 5000.

Media enquiries

Journalists should contact the Highways England press office on 0844 693 1448 and use the menu to speak to the most appropriate press officer.

Press release: South West Water fined for sewage pollution near shellfish beds

South West Water has been ordered to pay £205,000 in fines and costs for discharging sewage into the Fal estuary in Cornwall. The case was brought by the Environment Agency.

On 26 August 2013 untreated sewage overflowed from the water company's Newham sewage treatment works near Truro into the Fal, an internationally important shellfishery, Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) and Special Area of Conservation (SAC).

The illegal spill occurred after a piece of redundant grating fell and partially blocked an inlet at the works, causing sewage to back up and overflow into the estuary via a storm storage outfall. The spill continued for about 9.5 hours, during which time enough sewage escaped to fill 4,563 bath tubs (730,000 litres).

The discharge occurred close to mussel and oyster beds at Malpas and Grimes Bar. As a precaution, these shellfisheries were temporarily closed by Cornwall Port Health Authority because of the possible risk of contamination by harmful viruses and bacteria such as Norovirus and e.coli.

The decision to close the shellfish beds was taken just before the start of the commercial harvesting season (1 October). Although most harvesting is done during the commercial season, there is a risk small quantities of shellfish may be hand-picked by individuals outside of this time and there would have been a potential risk to those consumers.

Sewage at the Newham treatment works normally undergoes a high level of treatment (tertiary) including ultra violet (UV) that kills bacteria and disinfects effluent. An UV disinfection system is required at this site because of the Fal estuary's designation as a shellfishery.

The sewage discharged over a bank holiday on 26 August was settled and screened, but otherwise untreated and occurred outside of a storm event. This would have resulted in a significant increase in levels of bacteria in parts of the Fal estuary and meant the treatment works was in breach of its Environment Agency permit.

Mark Pilcher, team leader for the Environment Agency in west Cornwall, said:

It is essential large sewage works bordering estuaries with conservation designations and also containing shellfish beds are

operated and inspected to a high standard to prevent unpermitted sewage spills posing risks to public health and the environment.

In this case an inspection programme or removal of a redundant grating structure would have removed the risk of this grating falling into the sewage works and blocking it leading to the spill of sewage.

South West Water Limited was fined £185,000 plus £20,000 costs after pleading guilty to 2 offences under the Environmental Permitting Regulations 2010 including, on 26 August 2013, causing pollution of the Fal estuary through the illegal discharge of sewage and failing to maintain a saline tank valve at its Newham sewage treatment works. The water company was fined £175,000 for the first offence and £10,000 for the second. The case was heard at Truro Crown Court on 15 February 2017.