UK Health Security Agency

Terms of Reference

UK SMI Steering Committee

Purpose

The primary purpose of UK Standards for Microbiology Investigations (UK SMIs) is to provide comprehensive, evidence-based guidance for clinical microbiology laboratories and clinical users in the UK.

These standards aim to ensure high-quality practices, standardised procedures, and comparable diagnostic information across different laboratories. They also support the development of new methods and provide a reference point for method development.

Objectives

UK SMI objectives are:

- to provide good quality, evidence-based, standards for the investigation of infections for diagnostic and public health microbiology in the UK
- to develop overarching documents based on the investigation of syndromes which in turn are supported by more detailed guidance on the investigation of diseases and infections
- to develop, review and update UK SMIs through a wide consultation process where the views of all participants are considered and the resulting documents reflect the majority agreement of contributors
- to advise commissioners of microbiological services on the range and standard they should require in their contracts with microbiology laboratories
- to provide the UK SMIs electronically as a one stop shop for microbiology investigations

Authority

The development of UK SMIs is undertaken under the custodianship of UKHSA.

UKHSA is responsible for facilitating the development and hosting of UK SMIs but does not hold sole ownership. UK SMIs are developed in equal partnership with the devolved public health bodies and Partner Organisations, which include key professional bodies. These Partner Organisations, including UKHSA, whose logos appear on the documents where available, collectively hold authority for the UK SMI content.

Inclusion of a logo in a UK SMI indicates participation of the professional body in equal partnership and support for the objectives and process of preparing UK SMIs.

Nominees of professional bodies are members of the Steering Committee and Working Groups which develop UK SMIs. The views of nominees cannot be rigorously representative of the members of their nominating organisations nor the corporate views of their organisations. Nominees act as a conduit for two-way reporting and dialogue. Representative views are sought through a wide consultation process.

Partner Organisations

The authority for UK SMIs lies with the Partner Organisations that play a central role in the UK SMI development process.

The current constituent Partner Organisations of UK SMIs are listed in Appendix 1.

Policy for the display of organisation logos on UK SMI documents

Organisational logos are displayed on UK SMI document indicating the authority underpinning UK SMIs. For this reason, additional logos, such as those from stakeholder groups or professional bodies, are not added to UK SMI documents, even where collaborative work has taken place. Requests to display logos are regularly received and they are respectfully declined in keeping with this policy.

Candidate Partner Organisations

When assessing a candidate organisation for partnership, the Steering Committee should consider the following criteria:

- **Alignment of objectives**: Compatibility between the organisation's aims and those of the UK SMIs.
- **Scope of influence**: The organisation's involvement across the full specimen pathway, including engagement with users and patients.
- **Membership profile**: Size, diversity, professional disciplines, and relevance of the membership base.
- **Communication and engagement**: The organisation's capacity to actively communicate with its members (e.g. through mailing lists or discussion platforms).
- **Contribution to training and standards**: Evidence of the organisation's role in supporting education and professional development.
- **UK presence and influence**: National or devolved administration standing, and the organisation's reach within the UK.
- **Capacity to support UK SMI governance**: Willingness and ability to contribute to relevant UK SMI committees and working groups.
- **Impartiality**: Assurance that the organisation is not a single-issue pressure group and has no undue political or commercial affiliations.

The rationale for any decision regarding acceptance should be clearly documented in the minutes of the relevant Steering Committee meeting.

Legal liability

UKHSA holds legal responsibility for UK SMIs and operates under Crown immunity.

Whilst every care has been taken in the preparation of UK SMIs, UKHSA and the Partner Organisations, shall, to the greatest extent possible under any applicable law, exclude liability for all losses, costs, claims, damages or expenses arising out

of or connected with the use of an UK SMI or any information contained therein. If alterations are made by an end user to a UK SMI for local use, it must be made clear where in the document the alterations have been made and by whom such alterations have been made and also acknowledged that UKHSA and the Partner Organisations shall bear no liability for such alterations. For the further avoidance of doubt, as UK SMIs have been developed for application within the UK, any application outside the UK shall be at the user's risk.

The evidence base and microbial taxonomy for the UK SMI is as complete as possible at the date of issue. Any omissions and new material will be considered at the next review. These standards can only be superseded by revisions of the standard legislative action.

UK SMIs are Crown copyright which should be acknowledged where appropriate.

Accountability

The UK SMI Steering Committee is accountable to the Partner Organisations and is tasked with overseeing, advising, and guiding the work of the UK SMI Working Groups and the development of the standards.

The following Working Groups report to the Steering Committee:

- Joint Working Group for Syndromic documents (JWG)
- Working Group for Microbiology Standards in Clinical Bacteriology/Mycology/Parasitology (referred to as Bacteriology Working Group, BWG)
- Working Group for Microbiology Standards in Clinical Virology/Serology (referred to as Virology Working Group, VWG)

  Additional UK SMI Working Groups may be set up to develop UK SMIs on topics which are not covered by the listed working groups.

The Steering Committee collaborates with the Standards Unit. The role of Standards Unit is to review and develop UK Standard for Microbiology Investigations. This includes researching, developing/ editing flowcharts, writing/ reviewing other scientific documents written in conjunction with UK SMI Working Groups.

The Standards Unit manages and coordinates the document development process from draft, consultation through to issue within agreed deadlines.

Steering Committee composition

Membership is drawn from the relevant Partner Organisations and comprise:

a) Chair of Steering Committee (appointed from the Partner Organisations but serves independently of any organisational affiliation while acting as Chair)

b) Chairs of the Working Groups (BWG, VWG, JWG)

c) Scientific staff from the Standards Unit

d) Partner Organisation representatives are expected to be sitting on the council (or equivalent governing body) of their respective organisations and should reflect the collective views of that body and its wider membership. These representatives serve as key conduits for two-way communication between the committee and their organisations.

e) A guest is invited at the discretion of the Chair to a meeting or numerous meetings to discuss or present a subject of relevance to UK SMIs and Committee. The guest should possess recognised knowledge or expertise related to UK SMI documents or activities.

All Partner Organisations are invited to nominate a representative to serve on the Steering Committee. Committee members may also serve on multiple Working Groups or Committees, where appropriate.

At the Chair's discretion, more than one representative from a Partner Organisation may be invited to join the Steering Committee, where this is deemed necessary to ensure balanced representation and to support the Committee in effectively carrying out its responsibilities. The Chair retains authority to address and resolve any issues arising from this arrangement.

A committee member may represent an additional Partner Organisation if the nominated representatives are unable to attend. The covering member will have the same rights and responsibilities as the nominated representative and is responsible for ensuring effective two-way communication between the committee and the Partner Organisation.

Role of the Steering Committee

- To recommend and present microbiology standards
- Ensure a structured dialogue between Partner Organisations and the Steering Committee
- Direct the Working Groups on the following:

  i) Overall policy, strategy, and priorities

  ii) Liaison with stakeholders and ensure appropriate representation on the UK SMI Working Groups

  iii) Promoting awareness of UK SMIs amongst commissioners of services

  iv) Horizon scanning for new aspects of infectious agents and diseases that require inclusion in the UK SMIs

  v) New technologies and testing methods

  vi) Accreditation requirements for development of UK SMIs (Certification to ISO 9001)

  vii) Consistency and harmonisation across UK SMIs including coordination across UK government including devolved administrations

Duties

Duties of Members

All members are expected to:

1. Attend meetings via Microsoft Teams. In-person or hybrid meetings will be arranged upon request by members.
2. Facilitate the exchange of information regarding UK SMI activities within and across Working Groups.
3. Gather input from, and consult widely with, their respective Partner Organisations, relevant stakeholders, and subject matter experts as appropriate.
4. Distribute UK SMI annual reports and ensure effective two-way communication between the Steering Committee and their Partner Organisation.

5. Share their knowledge and expertise to support evidence-based consensus decision-making.
6. Stay informed about ongoing developments in the UK SMI programme.
7. Maintain professional competence in clinical microbiology.
8. Serve as advocates for UK SMIs within their Partner Organisations and promote their use where applicable
9. Declare any potential conflict of interest at meetings and annually submit a completed DOI form to the Standards Unit
10. Advise the Standards Unit of any changes to the Partner Organisation's logo and ensure the revised logo is shared with the Standards Unit.

Duties of Partner Organisations

All Partner Organisations are expected to:

1. Nominate suitable representatives to participate in UK SMI committees.
2. Cover travel expenses incurred by their nominated representatives.
3. Contribute actively to the development and review of UK SMIs.
4. Establish and maintain systems to ensure regular progress reporting to their governing councils.
5. Implement structured consultation processes for reviewing and commenting on UK SMI documents.
6. Support and reinforce their organisational commitment to, and ownership of, the UK SMI programme.

Term of Appointment

Members of the Steering Committee serve a term of five years. This term may be extended with the agreement of both the Committee Chair and the relevant Partner Organisation.

The Chair of the Steering Committee also serves a five-year term, which may be renewed for one additional term.

Appointment of a Chair

When the Chair role becomes vacant, the Steering Committee is responsible for managing the appointment of a new Chair.

The Partner Organisations are invited to submit nominations for the position of Chair. The candidates should forward a short CV and a letter of interest which is considered by a selection or interview panel.

Interview or Selection Panel

A panel of about 6 Steering Committee members will be convened to interview or select a Chair when the position becomes available. Ideally, the panel will comprise:

- The Head of the Standards Unit
- One representative from IBMS
- One representative from RCPath
- Up to three volunteers from the remaining Partner Organisations

The proposed panel should be ratified by the UK SMI Steering Committee members via email.

Note: The panel should be made up of current Steering Committee members unless they are applicants.

The Head of the Standards Unit will manage the appointment process.

Meeting Procedures

Frequency of Meetings

The Committee will meet biannually, with meeting dates agreed in advance and scheduled annually where possible.

Attendance at meetings

Committee members are expected to attend all scheduled meetings. Where absence is unavoidable, members should inform the Standards Unit in advance. Timely notification is important given the broad expertise required for document discussions and the implications of not meeting quorum.

Repeated non-attendance of individual members without reasonable explanation may result in the Chair initiating a review of the members' continuing involvement.

Following such a review, the Chair may request that the Partner Organisation nominates a replacement to ensure consistent engagement in Steering Committee activities.

Quorum

For meetings to be considered quorate, the Chair and representatives from at least half of the Partner Organisations must be present.

The quorum does not include Standard Unit staff and guests.

See Appendix 2 in the event that a meeting does not reach quorum.

Chairing of meetings

In the absence of the Chair, the meeting will be rescheduled. Alternatively, a member of the Steering Committee or a representative from the Standards Unit will assume the role of Chair for that meeting.

Agenda and Papers

The agenda will be prepared by the Standards Unit/Chair in consultation with members and distributed in advance. Members may propose items by notifying the Standards Unit/Chair prior to the meeting.

Members will receive relevant documentation (e.g. agenda, previous minutes) approx. 5-10 working days in advance of the meeting date.

Decision-Making

Where consensus cannot be reached, decisions will be made by majority vote of Partner Organisation members present. The Chair holds the casting vote in the event of a tie.

Recording of Minutes

Non-verbatim, contemporaneous minutes of each meeting will be maintained. The minutes will be written as a summary of key discussions and decisions, with actions clearly recorded and assigned where appropriate. Draft minutes will be circulated for review and formally approved at the subsequent meeting.

Confidentiality and Circulation

Minutes and documentation are to be circulated only to members of the Steering Committee and relevant executive bodies. They are not to be made available to the wider membership of Partner Organisations or uploaded to a public website. This is to ensure open discussion and to protect individuals' identities. Members should request a summary of the minutes if required for their wider membership.

An annual report is written as a summary of activities for members to circulate to their Partner Organisations.

Modified NICE domain/criteria for the development of UK SMIs

The following modification to the former NICE criteria was accepted as best practice by the Steering Committee for the future development of UK SMIs.

Scope and purpose – ensure the overall aim of the guidance and to whom the guidance applies is clear. Clear recommendations should be made in reference to specific clinical and healthcare settings where appropriate. The guidance should be available on an open access website along with the scope and purpose clearly stated.

Stakeholder involvement – ensure individuals from all relevant stakeholder groups are involved in developing the guidance. Public and patients' views and preferences in developing the guidance should be sought.

Rigour of development - ensure systematic methods to search for evidence is in place and search strategies are available. A method for the assessment of the strengths and limitations of the evidence should be conducted for individual documents.

Clarity and presentation – ensure the document is clear, specific and language is appropriate. A guidance should have a clear structure with use of template for consistency. The date of publication or last update and the proposed date for review should be clearly stated.

Applicability – Ensure a process for auditing and monitoring the guidance is in place.

Editorial independence – ensure the development is independent of any individual Partner Organisations or group. The decision-making body is the Steering Committee, and any queries or conflicts are forwarded to the Committee as the final arbiter. The guidance producer should ensure the final medical editing is independent of the decision-making Working Groups and Steering Committee. Ensure conflicts of interests are declared by all associated with the development of documents.

Miscellaneous

Citing unpublished references

Unpublished work is generally excluded from citation in UK SMIs for several reasons:

- Citing such work poses a reputational risk to UK SMIs if the material does not successfully pass peer review or is ultimately not published.
- Unpublished material would be assigned a low evidence grade under the established grading criteria.
- This type of work is often subject to embargo, meaning it cannot be shared with others if requested.

Acknowledgements

Individual contributors are not acknowledged for their involvement in the review, development, or support of UK SMIs. This reflects the Committee's position that UK SMIs are produced for the benefit of public health and the wider community, rather than for individual recognition. Accordingly, acknowledgements are limited to the Chairs, the Standards Unit, Partner Organisations, medical and clinical editors. The names of Committee and Working Group members are published on the relevant UK SMI pages of the RCPath website.

Commercial companies

Commercial companies are not involved in the development of UK SMIs in order to avoid conflicts of interest. Consequently, representatives from commercial organisations do not sit on UK SMI Working Groups or the Steering Committee, and references to commercial entities are avoided within UK SMI documents.

UK SMIs focus on methods that are well established, validated, and accredited for use in clinical and public health laboratories. Although novel technologies are considered, they are included only where there is sufficient independent evidence of performance. Individual commercial products are neither reviewed nor endorsed.

Review

The terms of reference, performance and appropriateness of the Steering Committee will be reviewed by the Chair and the Head of the Standards Unit, and outcomes proposed to the Steering Committee for consideration.

Appendix 1 – Partner Organisations

The current constituent Partner Organisations of UK SMIs are:

1) Association of Clinical Oral Microbiologists (ACOM)
2) Association for Laboratory Medicine (ALM)
3) Applied Microbiology International (AMI)
4) British Infection Association (BIA)
5) British Society for Antimicrobial Chemotherapy (BSAC)
6) British Society for Medical Mycology (BSMM)
7) British Society for Microbial Technology (BSMT)
8) British Society for Parasitology (BSP)
9) Healthcare Infection Society (HIS)
10) Institute of Biomedical Science (IBMS)
11) Microbiology Society (MS)
12) Northern Ireland Public Health Agency (NIHPA)
13) Northern Ireland Pathology Network (NIPN)
14) Public Health Scotland (PHS)
15) Public Health Wales (PHW)
16) Royal College of General Practitioners (RCGP)
17) Royal College of Pathologists (RCPath)
18) Society for Anaerobic Microbiology (SAM)
19) Scottish Microbiology and Virology Network (SMVF)
20) UK Accreditation Service (UKAS)
21) UK Clinical Virology Network (UKCVN)
22) UK Health Security Agency (UKHSA)
23) Welsh Microbiological Association (WMA)

Appendix 2 – Policy for non-quorate meetings

The Chair will call a meeting to order when a quorum is reached. If a meeting has not reached a quorum at the call to order or during a meeting (eg when a member leaves early), the Chair has a duty to declare the absence of a quorum. The following is a list of actions that may be taken at the discretion of the Chair in the absence of a quorum:

In the event that a meeting does not reach quorum:

- Proceed with discussion

  The Chair may wish to exercise their discretion to make a privileged motion to conduct the meeting with existing attendees putting aside actions that need a quorum.

  However, any decisions taken must be clearly noted as provisional and subject to ratification.
- Deal with and finalise the minutes and actions of the previous meeting
- Deal with non-substantive changes to UK SMIs eg grammatical and clerical points but ensure these are endorsed by a quorum of members electronically
- Continue or finalise business that has previously been considered and agreed at the last quorate meeting where appropriate