**BACKGROUND INFORMATION ON THE NHS ENGLAND DOWNS SYNDROME SCREENING QUALITY ASSURANCE SUPPORT SERVICE (DQASS)**

This background document explains:

* the current arrangements for the Fetal Anomaly Screening Programme in England **(Section 1: Background)**
* the requirements and purpose of the future contract for DQASS **(Section 2: Current service model)**

1. **Section1: Background**

The Vaccination and Screening directorate (V&S) forms part of NHS England and exists to protect and improve the nation’s health and wellbeing and reduce health inequalities. This is achieved through world-leading science, knowledge and intelligence, advocacy, partnerships, and the delivery of specialist public health services.

V&S includes many programme areas, one of which is the NHS Fetal Anomaly Screening Programme.

The aim of the NHS Fetal Anomaly Screening Programme is to ensure there is equal access to uniform and quality-assured screening to all eligible pregnant women in England. The Programme ensures that services provide women with high quality information, so they can make a personal informed choice about their screening and pregnancy options.

All eligible pregnant women in England are offered screening to assess the chance of having a baby with Down’s syndrome, Edwards’ syndrome and Patau’s syndrome. Screening is offered to both singleton and twin pregnancies.

The recommended method of screening is first trimester screening, combining maternal age, biochemistry markers and ultrasound measurement of crown rump length (CRL) and nuchal translucency (NT) to provide a pregnant woman with her chance of having a baby with Down’s syndrome, Edwards’ syndrome and Patau’s syndrome.

Second trimester biochemical screening is available for women who are too late to have the combined test or in cases where it is not possible to measure the NT.

Women who receive a higher chance screening result are offered further information and different options including prenatal diagnosis. The decision to have a prenatal diagnostic procedure can be a difficult for many pregnant women as 1 out of 200 women (0.5%) who have a diagnostic test will miscarry because of the test.

1. **Section 2: Current Service Model and Purpose of the RFI**

The Down’s Syndrome Screening Quality Assurance Support Service (DQASS) is in place to monitor and support the quality and effectiveness of the screening tests for Down’s syndrome (T21), Edwards’ syndrome (T18) and Patau’s syndrome (T13) in England.

The DQASS service supports the NHS Fetal Anomaly Programme by providing statistical services that delivers independent clinical audit data and feedback to screening laboratories and ultrasound practitioners to enable quality assurance and continuous quality improvement.

The analysis undertaken by the service checks the baseline median values, risk algorithm parameter values and population measures, such as age adjusted follow-up rates. Through meta-analyses, DQASS provides information on effects of factors such as smoking that is used to improve screening performance.

The analyses provided by DQASS is used by the [Screening Quality Assurance Service (SQAS)](https://www.gov.uk/topic/population-screening-programmes/population-screening-quality-assurance) to improve the screening programme through feedback on all aspects of the test to laboratories, ultrasound departments and commercial.

DQASS provides independent audits of screening laboratory and ultrasound data in a standardised and statistically valid format.

The service model includes statisticians who are experts in Down’s, Edwards’ and Patau’s syndromes.

The current service requirements are:

* Collating data from 22 screening laboratories in the UK that screen for Down’s, Edwards’ and Patau’s syndromes
* Providing data and reports back to the labs and screening support sonographers to support consistency and improvements in practice
* Making recommendations to the V&S directorate including quality and assurance
* Engaging with software suppliers
* Informing national guidance
* Providing support and training to lab staff and ultrasound practitioners and screening staff working in the V&S directorate

For more detailed information about the DQASS, including reporting, please visit: <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/downs-syndrome-screening-quality-assurance-support-service>