Association for Laboratory Medicine

130-132 Tooley Street,
London SE1 2TU
tel: 020 7403 8001
email: enquiries@labmed.org.uk

24th June 2026

Ms Helen Dent
Chief Executive
British In Vitro Diagnostics Association (BIVDA)
299 Oxford Street (5th Floor)
London, W1C 2DZ

Dear Ms Dent,

Re: Importance of Maintaining a Secure and Resilient Supply of Donor Animal Blood for Diagnostic Microbiology

The Association of Laboratory Medicine (LabMed) is pleased to provide this statement of support regarding the importance of maintaining a secure, resilient and sustainable supply of donor animal blood used in microbiological culture media within the United Kingdom.

Diagnostic microbiology remains a cornerstone of modern healthcare. The ability of NHS laboratories to identify bacterial pathogens rapidly and accurately is essential for the diagnosis and management of infectious diseases, the prevention of outbreaks, effective antimicrobial stewardship, and the wider national response to antimicrobial resistance (AMR).

Blood-containing agar media, prepared using donor animal blood, is fundamental to routine clinical microbiology practice. These media are used daily in NHS and UK laboratories to culture, isolate and identify clinically significant bacterial pathogens from patient specimens. Blood agar enables the growth of fastidious organisms, facilitates assessment of haemolytic activity, and supports phenotypic characterisation that remains critical for accurate diagnosis. In addition, culture-based methods are required to perform antimicrobial susceptibility testing, providing clinicians with the information necessary to select the most appropriate treatment for patients with bacterial infections.

While molecular diagnostic methods continue to develop and play an increasingly important role in healthcare, they do not replace the need for culture-based microbiology. Culture remains essential for the recovery of viable organisms, confirmation of infection, investigation of outbreaks, and surveillance of emerging antimicrobial resistance. Consequently, blood-containing culture media remain indispensable to the delivery of safe and effective microbiology services across the NHS.

Association for Laboratory Medicine

The UK microbiology service relies upon a continuous supply of high-quality donor animal blood to manufacture these culture media. The current supply chain is highly specialised, with only a very limited number of facilities capable of providing material that meets the stringent quality, regulatory and performance requirements necessary for clinical diagnostic use. Furthermore, the biological nature of these products means that continuity of supply is particularly important; resilience cannot be achieved simply through long-term stockpiling.

From a laboratory medicine perspective, any significant disruption affecting one of the few UK facilities that underpin this supply chain would be a matter of concern. A reduction in domestic production capacity could adversely affect service resilience and increase the risk of supply interruptions for microbiology laboratories. Given the absence of validated alternative materials and the practical challenges associated with importing equivalent products from overseas, maintaining a robust UK supply base is important for safeguarding diagnostic capability and supporting national health security.

LabMed therefore supports efforts to ensure that the infrastructure and facilities necessary for the ethical collection and supply of donor animal blood for diagnostic microbiology are appropriately recognised and considered when planning decisions are made. Protecting the resilience of this supply chain is important for the continued delivery of microbiology services, patient safety, antimicrobial stewardship, and the UK's ability to respond effectively to infectious disease threats.

LabMed is fundamentally committed to sustainable healthcare and that the supply of renewable energy is vital to achieve this, and therefore could consideration be given to modifications or mitigations that would allow the solar farm to proceed without it impacting on the supply of this vital diagnostic product?

Yours sincerely,

Dr Ian Godber
President
Association for Laboratory Medicine

Ms Victoria Logan
Chief Executive
Association for Laboratory Medicine

Dr David C Gaze
Director of Scientific Affairs
Association for Laboratory Medicine

Dr Rob Shorten
Chair of the Microbiology Professional Committee
Association for Laboratory Medicine