

Industry Report

Seats at the table to shape the industry's future

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I've been thinking about history a lot recently. Not just because of the brilliant documentary, 'Can't get you out of my head' on BBC i-player, (if you primarily know the Gang of Four as pop stars rather than as revolutionaries it offers an eye-popping backstory) but also because GAMBICA is celebrating its 40th anniversary this year. While inevitably much of the celebrating will have to go on virtually at first, we hope to get together in the flesh later in the year for the GAMBICA awards and at other industry events - look out for more details in the next issue.



But history is also being made right now and those who have their eye on the ball have the opportunity to shape the way the future looks, not just for the industry in general, but for their particular company. Two big initiatives have hit the lab sector in the last month which will impact the shape of the industry for years to come... One concerns the energy use of lab equipment, and the other is seeking to become the core lab equipment language which companies will have to buy into if they want to avoid being blindsided as lab managers strive towards greater digitalisation.

Ecodesign hits lab chillers

The EU has timetabled a review of the ecodesign and energy labelling requirements for professional refrigeration and has included laboratory refrigerators and freezers in the scope. The initiative, which has the potential to set new lower standards for laboratory chillers' energy use, comes hard on the heels of a project by the UK Government to have energy efficient laboratory fridges and freezers added to its Energy Technology List (ETL). The ETL was the traditional gateway to enhanced capital allowances and with the recent budget announcements of increased incentives for investment, it's possible that the ETL may be rising to greater prominence again.

What does this mean for the lab industry? According to GAMBICA's German counterpart, Spectaris, the EU Commission seems to be gearing up for a major update of its sustainability requirements. This could affect a far wider range of laboratory equipment and set new industry norms which will take effort to meet. Simultaneously, customers' awareness of the part they should play in reducing climate change is being raised, and will especially be highlighted by the imminent COP26 summit in Glasgow this year.

The implementation of higher ecodesign limits and energy label class limits will inevitably mean increased costs for laboratory cooling equipment manufacturers, and the timing of such increases can be important. The initial report to the Commission will be submitted in September after a review of the available standards.

Front runners for adoption are the DIN 58345:2007-09 standard and the ENERGY STAR® Program Requirements Product Specification for Laboratory Grade Refrigerators and Freezers Eligibility Criteria Version 1.1. While the Energy Star methodology has its detractors, the GAMBICA group feeding into the ETL work has indicated its willingness for ENERGY STAR to be used for the ETL list.

Views are currently being sought on the most suitable time of the year to launch the new ETL criteria. If you would like to input, please send your thoughts to Jacqueline.balian@gambica.org.uk

Laboratory Agnostic Device Standard (LADS)

Manufacturers of lab equipment will be interested to hear about a new common language standard which has come out of left field (well out of Germany), and looks as if it might be set to occupy the centre ground in lab automation.

Funded by the German government, the Laboratory Agnostic Device Standard (LADS) aims to make an open specification available to facilitate the intra-operability of lab equipment by 2023.

Concerned at the slow progress on digitalisation of laboratory equipment, German trade association, Spectaris, has put together a working group on networked laboratory devices and set out to develop a cross-manufacturer open standard which meets the future requirements of digitalisation and automation.

According to Dr Matthias Arnold, technical lead for the LADS project, the development of a workable communications standard for laboratory and analytical devices is an essential foundation step for digitalisation of laboratories. The majority of the German lab manufacturers appear to be bought into the initiative.

The group is aiming for plug and play interoperability of laboratory and analytical devices which means no additional programming would be required. They have proposed the following use cases:

- Remote monitoring of alarms and notifications
- Remote control of equipment
- Programme management and orchestration (eg PCR or other analytical runs) unified view
- Results management
- Preventive and predictive maintenance
- Device and fleet management

The group has already carried out proof-of-concept modelling

The existing OPC UA (Open Platform Communications Unified Architecture) has been chosen as the basis for the development after a review of what was currently available. The working group claims that the foundations have been laid for partner networks with Allotrope, Biophorum, AniML and SILA although the actual level of involvement from those bodies is not yet clear.

While some might be surprised at the selection of an industrial automation language for a laboratory application, the OPC which operates as a foundation, is clearly a very big player. It has 35 existing working groups (of which the LADS project is the latest) and covers over 600 companies. They have already had considerable success in the machinery area and plan to get all developers involved in this project to harmonise OPC UA for machinery into the LADS group.

If you don't have a hand in the development of the standard, it can work to your disadvantage, so in order to get members a seat at the table GAMBICA has agreed to partner in the project. This means that we can propose members to sit on the working group and the user group developing the standard. If you would like to take part please drop me a line at Jacqueline.balian@gambica.org.uk.

What is clear is that with EU markets so important to UK manufacturers, we can't afford to ignore what is going on across the channel. Fortunately, GAMBICA still has a place in most of the forums where future-shaping decisions are made, so will be able to keep you abreast of developments, whether urgent or just important.



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