Background
Laboratory errors in transfusion practice continue to put patients at risk. The United Kingdom Transfusion Laboratory Collaborative (UKTLC) was formed in 2006. Following national surveys it published recommended minimum standards for hospital transfusion laboratories in 2009. These recommendations encouraged adequate staffing levels, particular levels of knowledge and skills, and wider use of computer information systems to reduce manual interventions which are known to increase the risk of errors. The intention was to promote improved practice resulting in a reduction in laboratory errors reported to the national haemovigilance scheme, Serious Hazards of Transfusion (SHOT) by 50% by 2012.

Survey Results
Results from responding laboratories in both surveys (162/322 responding, 50%, in 2011 and 188/304, 62%, in 2013) revealed many ‘lead scientists’ did not have the appropriate qualifications as recommended by the UKTLC (i.e. those qualifications either developed by or accredited by the Institute of Biomedical Science) - only 63/144, 44% in 2011, and 71/151, 47% in 2013), Figure A. Lack of sufficient funding may have adversely affected full implementation of automation. Funding for education and training was also reduced compared with 2011, Figure B, resulting in fewer staff with current competency assessments.

Aim
To examine current laboratory practice to determine if the implementation of the UKTLC recommendations has reduced the rate of laboratory errors reported to SHOT.

Method
All transfusion laboratories registered with the national external quality assessment scheme (NEQAS) were invited to participate in new surveys (SurveyMonkey) in 2011 and 2013. These were to be completed by the lead scientist on specified working days. Annual SHOT data were reviewed to see if there had been a reduction in the number of errors originating in the laboratory.

Conclusions
The 50% target for reduction in laboratory errors was not achieved. The 2013 survey showed that implementation of the UKTLC recommendations was incomplete. The UKTLC has revised the recommendations and deliberately defined them as ‘standards’ to encourage implementation. Clinical Pathology Accreditation (CPA UK) has agreed to use the new standards to evidence compliance with its own standards and the Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency (MHRA) have also indicated that they will look at UKTLC standards when examining laboratory compliance against the appropriate sections within the Blood Safety and Quality Regulations 2005. The 2013 British Committee for Standards in Haematology (BCSH) guidelines for pre-transfusion compatibility procedures in blood transfusion laboratories are formulated from expert opinion including the original UKTLC recommendations.

SHOT strongly recommends that all blood transfusion laboratories should be familiar with and comply with the revised UKTLC standards 2014 (to be published summer 2014)