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The EC4 European Register of Specialists in Clinical Chemistry and Laboratory Medicine

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ABSTRACT

The European Register of Specialists in Clinical Chemistry and Laboratory Medicine was established by the European Communities Confederation of Clinical Chemistry and Laboratory Medicine (EC4) in 1997. The main aims of the Register are to ensure a high quality of professional standards and practice in the European Union (EU) countries, and to assist free movement of professionals within the EU, in accordance with European Directives. We report here the latest developments on the structure of the register, a description of the application process and data about the number of registered members, and the relationship between the Register and the European Commission Directive of Professional Qualifications.

1. Introduction

The European Communities Confederation of Clinical Chemistry and Laboratory Medicine (EC4) was founded in 1993 and within the activities planned by the Confederation it was decided to promote recognition of the profession by establishing a Register for Clinical Chemists. The first Guide to the Register was published in 1997 [1] and reports the minimum standards of clinical chemistry education, organizes the operation of the Register and defines the procedures for registration. According to the Guide, a Register Committee (EC4RC) was formed including delegates from each member state of the European Union.

EC4RC started to work in 1998. EC4RC set up the internal institutions, organized the workflow and judged the incoming application forms. The registration process itself started in September 1998, when the first European Clinical Chemists were accepted. During the operation of the Register it became necessary to develop procedures and to add some definitions. These changes had no influence on the level of evaluation but optimized the work of EC4RC. These alterations are part of the updated Guide to the Register [1] and the title of the Guide now includes the term Laboratory Medicine. This is in agreement with the syllabus and the practice of clinical chemistry in the EU [2,3] and is also expressed by the name of EC4 (European Communities Confederation of Clinical Chemistry and Laboratory Medicine). The title has changed to "European Specialist in Clinical Chemistry and Laboratory Medicine", the abbreviation EurClinChem remains unchanged.

Since then, some important developments have taken place and here we report these changes that have affected the structure of EC4, the establishment of the Foundation of the Register and the activities of the EC4RC to meet the EU Directive on Recognition of Professional Qualifications that are being undertaken.

2. Structure of EC4

When EC4 was founded, in 1993, its role was to coordinate the activities of the national societies affiliated to the International Federation of Clinical Chemistry and Laboratory Medicine (IFCC) and to its European branch (the Forum of the European Societies of Clinical Chemistry: FESCC) within the European Union (see Fig. 1). EC4 has several active Working Groups (WG) which have published many articles in European journals that are listed on the EC4 website [1]. Several publications are related to the activities of the EC4RC and include: the Syllabus [2], the Code of Conduct [3] and the Guide to the Register [4]. The Syllabus describes the scientific content of the training and the knowledge that a professional must acquire to be a

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Fig. 1. Relationship of EC4 to IFCC.

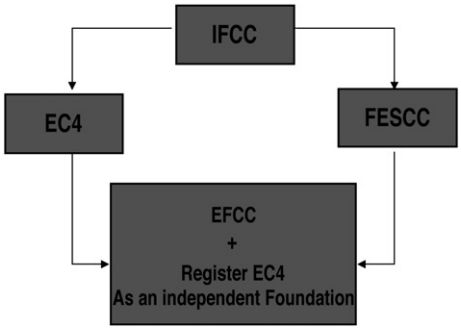

Fig. 2. EC4/FESCC merger.

Specialist in Clinical Chemistry and Laboratory Medicine, and to be eligible for inclusion on the Register. The Syllabus is in accordance with the European Directive on Professional Qualifications, 2005 [5]. The Code of Conduct represents the ethical values required for correct professional behavior. The Guide to the Register gives the minimum standards of clinical chemistry education, organizes the operation of the Register and defines the procedures.

3. EC4-FESCC merger

With the expansion of the European Union from 15 countries to 27 countries, proposals were made in 2006 to merge EC4 and FESCC as their respective constituencies became more similar. With the approval of the National societies, the merger was agreed in Amsterdam in June 2007, resulting in a new organisation, the European Federation of Clinical Chemistry and Laboratory Medicine (EFCC). EC4 remains as a Foundation within the new EFCC structure with the sole remit of maintaining the European Register of Specialists in Clinical Chemistry and Laboratory Medicine, covering the EU countries (Fig. 2).

4. EC4 Register Commission

The EC4 Register Commission (EC4RC) works through the National Clinical Chemistry Register Committees (NCCRCs). One member from each NCCRC represents his/her country on the EC4 Register Commission. EC4 has established standards to recognise a high level of education and professional training in the EU which include: a) university degree in medicine, biochemistry, chemistry, biology, pharmacy; b) 9 years university and postgraduate study; c) 4 years specialist training after 1st degree; d) multidiscipline or single discipline; e) registered in country of origin (if applicable). Each country submits an Equivalence of Standards (EoS) declaration

EOS

Equivalence

Of Standard

ITALY

EUROPEAN COMMUNITIES CONFEDERATION OF CLINICAL CHEMISTRY (EC4)

European Clinical Chemist (EurClinChem)
Relativity of EC4 and National Standard

Country: ITALY
For MD or PhD

EC4 REGISTER STANDARD	EQUIVALENT NATIONAL STANDARD
University Degree and	University Degree in Medicine Biology Chemistry and
Minimum of 8 years Undergraduate and Postgraduate Study and	Minimum of 9 years Undergraduate and Postgraduate Study and
Minimum of 4 years specialist training in an approved Clinical laboratory	Minimum of 4 years specialist training in an approved Clinical Laboratory Or (for an University Degree obtained before 1990) Minimum of 10 years specialist training in an approved Clinical Laboratory

Approved by the Advisory Board of SIBIOC, June 15, 1998

Fig. 3. An example of an Equivalence of Standards declaration: ITALY.

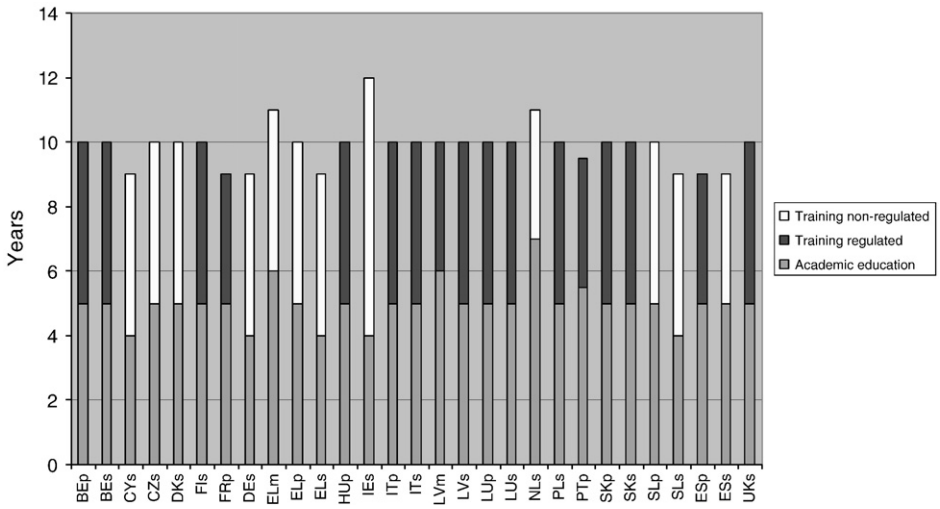

Fig. 4. Level of training.

through its NCCRC, whereby its national standards are compared to those of EC4. The EC4 Register Commission (EC4RC) must approve the EoS (e.g., Fig. 3). By the end of 2007, 18 countries had their EoS approved.

5. Application process

Individuals first submit their applications for registration to the relevant NCCRC for recommendation, and these are then forwarded to the EC4 Register Commission for approval. The registration fee is €50 which covers 5 years. Following approval, a certificate is issued which is valid for 5 years and the registrant is entitled to use the designation EurClinChem. At the end of 2007, there were >2000 registrants from 17 countries.

6. Re-registration

Application for re-registration must be made every 5 years, based on continuing equivalence of standards, continuing registration with the NCCRC, continuing in active practice, continuing professional development, continued observation of the Code of Conduct and payment of the re-registration fee of €40 for a further 5 years.

7. Committee of Appeal

Five independent experts from the EU Member States adjudicate on applicants who appeal against a negative decision by the Register Commission.

8. The EU Directive on recognition of professional qualifications

This EU Directive was published in the EU Official Journal in September 2005 [5]. A Directive is applicable, and should be transposed, in all EU countries 2 years after publication. Thus this Directive should have been transposed in each EU country by October 2007. This Directive applies to all liberal professions and states that EU countries should give equal treatment to professionals moving from one Member State to another and should have mechanisms in place to recognize their qualifications.

For Specialists in Clinical Chemistry and Laboratory Medicine, these are the relevant sections: Chapters I and II relate to the professions which did not have a Sectoral Directive (training, length of studies and practice are not harmonised at EU level) and do not have automatic recognition, whereas Chapter III relates to the professions which previously had a Sectoral Directive (for example

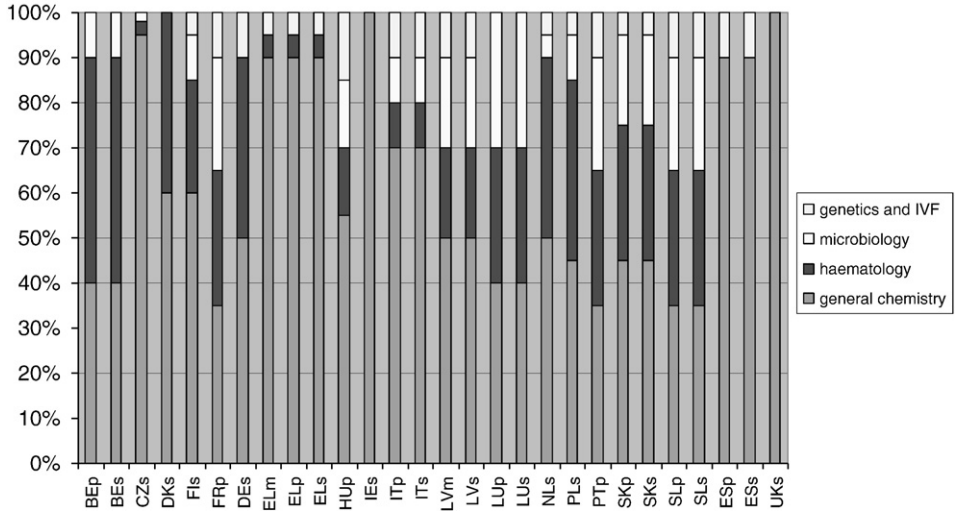

Fig. 5. Training content/areas of activity.

Pharmacists, Medical Doctors, Midwives) and have automatic recognition.

In addition an important chapter concerns a new concept of *Common Platforms*. A Common Platform is a set of criteria concerning professional qualifications, certifying an adequate level of competence to practice a particular profession. The qualifications acquired in the Member States are then accredited according to those criteria. Each liberal profession should secure its regulation, focused on the protection of the customer, by harmonizing the competence of professionals at a high level. All countries must meet the minimum standards of the countries which are regulated for a given profession. When minimum standards are not met, compensatory measures must be defined. The Common Platform of the EU Directive is based on three separate stages and EC4 has already fulfilled the first two [see 6–8].

The first stage (the Inventory) requires the acquisition of the following data: a) Which Member States regulate the profession?; b) What levels of qualifications are required?; c) What are the areas of activity and the training requirements? The results of this Inventory are reported in Fig. 4.

The second stage (Establishing the Platform) is focused on determining the content with percentage of each activity. In the case of the Register of Specialists in Clinical Chemistry and Laboratory Medicine, the Platform was defined on the basis of the scientific content and training activities described in the Syllabus [2]. The results of this survey are reported in Fig. 5.

The EC4RC then started to discuss a proposition for a Common Platform with the relevant department of the European Commission in 2005 and further amendments have been made as suggested by the European Commission. As this was the first profession to propose a Platform in Europe it could be used as an example for others, consequently the discussion and improvements were lengthy. During this activity EC4 has been efficiently assisted and strongly supported by CEPLIS (Conseil Europeen des Professions Liberales). Recently however, as the Common Platform will probably take some time to be accepted and applied, it has been proposed that a “soft law” (a recommendation) may be applied. Additionally, the Single Market Observatory (SMO) of the European Economic and Social Committee (EESC) has developed a Self- and Co-Regulation database and website with information about initiatives in this area, and EC4 is on this database [9].

9. Conclusions

EC4 has accomplished a large amount of work in agreement with the European Commission about transposing the Directives that are under development with the final goal to enable the free movement of professionals at a high level of education. Applications to join the EC4 Register can be made on the website [1].

Acknowledgements

MP is member of the EFCC Executive Board, JMM is Secretary of the EC4 Register Commission and SZ is the President of the EC4 Register Commission.

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