EFLM Paper

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The Academy of the European Federation of Clinical Chemistry and Laboratory Medicine and the European Register of Specialists in Laboratory Medicine: guide to the Academy and the Register, version 4 – 2020

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Abstract: The 4th version of the guide to the Register for European Specialists in Laboratory Medicine (EuSpLM) established by the European Communities Confederation of Clinical Chemistry and Laboratory Medicine describes the transfer of the register to the European Federation of Clinical Chemistry and Laboratory Medicine (EFLM) in 2016, the extension in 2018 of the Register beyond the European Union to Europe and the benefits of membership of the EFLM Academy to which the Register transferred on the Academy's launch in 2019. The Academy offers EuSpLM registrants access to benefits that include reduced registration rates at selected conferences and free subscription to *Clinical Chemistry and Laboratory Medicine*. With effect from 2020 eligibility was extended to anyone with an interest in laboratory medicine. The updated guide describes the electronically driven processes for individual membership and block enrolment from national societies/organisations, and the stepping stones to recognition as an EuSpLM within the Academy. Whilst eligibility for recognition as an EuSpLM remains largely unchanged new expectations across Europe in education, training,

professional regulation and qualifications are reflected in updated criteria. The continuing driver for establishing the Academy and growing the EFLM Register reflects the federation's leadership role in the harmonisation of high quality education and training for those with an interest in laboratory medicine as well as ongoing initiatives to establish a Common Training Framework for Specialists in Laboratory Medicine under EU Directive 2013/55/EC (The Recognition of Professional Qualifications).

Keywords: benefits; EFLM Academy; EFLM Register; eligibility; EuSpLM; guide; laboratory medicine; version 4.

Setting the scene

In 1998 the European Communities Confederation of Clinical Chemistry and Laboratory Medicine (EC4) established its EC4 Foundation as arbiter of the register of European Specialists in Clinical Chemistry and Laboratory Medicine [1]. To ensure continuity in the high standards it had set the Foundation continued to be supported by the European Societies of Clinical Chemistry and Laboratory Medicine (FESCC) and EC4 during their integration to form the European Federation of Clinical Chemistry and Laboratory Medicine (EFCC) in 2008, re-termed EFLM in 2013 to reflect its leadership role across the profession. At the same time the post-nominal term *EurClinChem* was updated to European Specialists in Laboratory Medicine (*EuSpLM*) as the title that identifies the European Specialist in Laboratory Medicine [2].

With the increasing maturity and growing influence of EFLM 23 of the 28 governors of the EC4 Foundation (the presidents of the European Union-based national society members within EFLM) voted in favour of its dissolution in 2016 and for the transfer of the Register to EFLM. Subsequently in 2018 eligibility to join the EFLM Register was

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extended from the 28 European Union member societies to all EFLM's member societies across Europe.

Management of the Register transferred to the EFLM office over 2016–2017. From a paper-based system an electronic system for submitting applications and receiving feedback was established in 2017. Setting the Register's Equivalence of Standards across Europe and assessing a country's ability to meet them now falls to EFLM's Profession Committee. Assessing the merits of applications against those standards now falls to the committee's Working Group: Register.

In acknowledging that registration as a specialist may not always provide immediate benefit to the individual EFLM launched its Academy at the start of 2020 with the aim of supporting education, training and continuous professional development (CPD) for those with an interest in laboratory medicine. The EFLM Register was incorporated into the Academy so that EuSpLM registrants were the first to enjoy benefits that include reduced participation rates at selected conferences/congresses and free access to EFLM's journal *Clinical Chemistry and Laboratory Medicine*. Reflecting EFLM's aims Academy membership was extended to anyone with an interest in laboratory medicine.

Version 4 of the guide builds on version 3 [3]. It describes the new ways of working for the EFLM Register and introduces the EFLM Academy. It includes an update on the drivers for establishing the Register and the criteria for joining it, the benefits of joining the Academy, the value to the individual and the profession in achieving recognition as a EuSpLM, and the processes that support individual and block registration from individual and European-based societies/organisations

competences required to assure patients that they receive safe and high quality care [4].

- Require specialists to be included in a professional register (if available) in their home country and to maintain their competence and knowledge base through participation in CPD activities.
- The Register provides a platform for recognition of specialist practice across Europe, particularly in the absence of a government register of specialists and/or an identified regulated profession.
- It supports EFLM's drive to achieve recognition of non-medical specialists through European Union (EU) Directive 2013/55/EC (The Recognition of Professional Qualifications). Under the Directive, professional organisations and/or competent authorities within the Union are invited to submit suggestions to the EU Commission for a Common Training Framework for a given profession. To be adopted the framework must combine the knowledge, skills and competences of at least one third of the Member States. Professionals who have gained their qualifications under a Common Training Framework will be able to have these recognised automatically across the Union. To date, EFLM's proposed Common Training Framework has attracted the support of professional organisations in 15 of the 27 EU Member States [5].
- It raises awareness of laboratory medicine's role and contribution to better health and best care, and supports EFLM's role as the leading representative professional organization for laboratory medicine across Europe.
- It offers registrants automatic membership of the Academy and access to the benefits described below.

The EFLM Register

The purpose of the Register

- Through setting an Equivalence of Standards the Register supports the delivery of high quality, equivalent laboratory medicine practice across Europe that in turn helps protect patients' safety. The Equivalence criteria:
 - Define 9 (preferably 10) years as minimum training period with a Master of Science (MSc or equivalent) qualification after an initial 4–5 year academic period followed by an EFLM-approved exit qualification/ certificate after a further 4–5 years vocational training.
 - Include expectations for education and training to follow the EFLM syllabus which also identifies the

Eligibility

- Meeting Equivalence of Standards is the cornerstone to eligibility. Applications to join the Register are open to medical, scientific and pharmacy trained individuals who are members of EFLM's national, affiliated and provisional societies and whose education/training has been balanced over 9 (preferably 10) years across the following disciplines:
 - General chemistry of at least 35%.
 - General chemistry plus haematology of at least 65%.
 - Flexibility as to the remaining 35%, including general chemistry, haematology, microbiology, genetics and *In Vitro* Fertilisation in a proportion consistent with the requirements in the country of

destination, consisting of work experience, accredited courses, relevant exams of the national training programs, traineeships.

- Key to the distinction between the specialist and the non-specialist is the ability to meet the competencies described in the EFLM syllabus [4] and version 3 of the guide to the Register [3]. Evidence is sought during applications.
- Evidence that education and training is commensurate with specialist practice includes submission of an EFLM-approved exit qualification. Ideally the qualification will be government recognised, exceptionally professional organisation and/or university qualifications/certificates may be considered.
- Registrants are expected to adhere to the code of conduct which behoves specialists to conduct themselves in a manner that does not bring Clinical Chemistry and Laboratory Medicine into disrepute [6]. Where a specialist is subject to disciplinary sanction (e.g. suspension, removal from their national and/or professional organisation register), EFLM applies the same outcome in relation to the EFLM Register.
- In the absence of a nationally recognised register and/or a regulated profession, indicative registers (for example from professional organisations) linked to competencies that identify specialist level practice may be appropriate.
- Eligibility is annually renewable and supported on the basis of maintenance of CPD and continued inclusion in a professional register (if available). Examples of CPD activities are described in version 3. Where there are established mechanisms for recording CPD these should be identified as part of the application process. In the absence of established mechanisms individual evidence will be sought that a minimum of 1 h per week is dedicated to CPD
- Meeting Equivalence of Standards of one European country whilst practising in another European country is not a barrier to recognition as a Specialist in Laboratory Medicine. Similarly, individuals practising beyond European borders may be eligible to be recognised as an EuSpLM if their training meets the accepted Equivalence of Standards of the country in which their education/training was undertaken.

Process for joining the EFLM Register

A first step to joining the Register is to join the Academy. Register applications are measured against the Equivalence of Standards of the country in which education/

training took place. Evidence that EFLM's standards can be met may be submitted by an EFLM member society to EFLM's Profession committee using the proforma on the 'EuSpLM Register' pages on the EFLM web site as a template. As much of the evidence cited in Section "Eligibility" above is welcomed. Both Equivalence and registration applications must be submitted in English.

Achieving block registration of specialists on the EFLM Register

Block registration of members of an EFLM national, affiliate or provisional society who meet Equivalence of Standards is the preferred route to registration of Specialists in Laboratory Medicine and may be initiated *via* the 'EuSpLM Register' pages on the EFLM web site. In this regard the member society/organisation is responsible and accountable for:

- Ensuring that only names of individuals meeting Equivalence of Standards who are willing to be recognised as a EuSpLM are submitted for registration.
- Requesting annual registration fees from registrants from individuals who continue to meet Equivalence of Standards.
- Submitting the annual registration fees for all registrants to EFLM.

Whilst a trust-based approach is taken to bona fide submission of colleagues' names a Memorandum of Understanding of the mutual responsibilities is retained between EFLM and the member society. For EFLM, responsibilities include:

- Provision of support and advice in use of electronic block registration processes.
- Conduct of occasional audit to ensure declared registrants meet the Equivalence standards.
- Issue of an annual EuSpLM registration certificate to each registrant.

Achieving individual registration on the EFLM Register

Individual registration follows a similar pathway to block registration in that applications are assessed against recognised Equivalence of Standards by EFLM Profession Committee's Working Group: Register. In the absence of Equivalence standards applications may be encouraged if these in turn act as a catalyst for the member society to achieve recognition of Equivalence. Applications may be submitted *via* the 'EuSpLM Register' pages on the EFLM web site. As well as submitting evidence that meets the

eligibility criteria applicants should submit a curriculum vita that includes the length and content of training.

Applications are assigned to a member of the working group who is not known to the applicant. In extremis advice/counsel on the validity of an application may be sought from corresponding and other members of the working group, and/or members of EFLM's Profession Committee. The EFLM Registrar acts as the final adjudicator on the merits of an application. Outcomes are relayed within two months of submission. Successful applicants are issued an annual certificate. Whilst there is no system for appeal on a rejected application opportunity to submit further evidence is typically offered.

Process for annual re-registration

Given the need for assurance that CPD and professional registration continue to be maintained registration as an EuSpLM is annually renewable. For block registrants an updated list of colleagues (new and ongoing registrants) is submitted to the EFLM office at the end of each calendar year. Assurance that registrants continue to maintain their competence is sought from the EFLM national representative or society president. For individual registrants assurance may be sought by request of evidence as part of regular audit to ensure only bona fide registrations. Registration certificates are re-issued on an annual basis on evidence of continued competence.

The EFLM Academy

The purpose of the Academy

The overriding purpose is to support the education, training and CPD of individuals with an interest in laboratory medicine. In turn the Academy helps raise the profile of EFLM by providing a web domain for information and communication. Membership is on an annual renewable basis for (currently) 15 Euros per annum and offers:

- Free online subscription to EFLM's journal *Clinical Chemistry and Laboratory Medicine*;
- Unlimited access to all documents (laboratory standards) of the CLSI (Clinical and Laboratory Standards Institute) database;
- Regular e-mail notifications of all EFLM activities, programmes and opportunities;
- Eligibility to apply for EFLM travel grants (subordinated to the application criteria of each specific EFLM initiative);

- Reduced registration fees to strategic conferences, symposia and courses organised solely by EFLM;
- Free access to EFLM webinars;
- Enrolment on to the EFLM Register of Specialists in Laboratory Medicine for individuals who meet Equivalence of Standards.

Eligibility

Eligibility extends to:

- All individuals who are interested in laboratory medicine.
- Representatives of diagnostics companies.

EuSpLM registrants whose registration pre-date the launch of the Academy automatically become members.

Process for joining the Academy

Achieving block membership

Block enrolment *via* a national society or organisation is the preferred route and may be initiated *via* the 'EFLM Academy' page on the EFLM web site. A Memorandum Understanding of mutual responsibilities is retained between the society/organisation and EFLM in which the society is responsible for:

- Ensuring that only names of individuals wishing to join the Academy are submitted for enrolment.
- Requesting annual membership fees from their members.
- Submitting the annual fees for all members to EFLM.

In turn, EFLM:

- Provides the society/organisation with all necessary supporting information and advice for accessing Academy benefits.
- Retains an electronic spreadsheet of Academy members.
- Provides an annual invoice to the society/organisation.
- Provides a membership certificate and personal credentials to allow access to the Academy.

Where an EFLM member society includes EuSpLM registrants these are individually identified in the submission and the Memorandum of Understanding is extended to include the responsibilities/accountabilities described in

Section “Achieving block registration of specialists on the EFLM Register” above.

Achieving individual membership

Individual applications to join the Academy may be submitted *via* the ‘EFLM Academy’ page on the EFLM web site.

Discussion

With its launch in 2020 the Academy provides hitherto unrealised benefits for the professional as well as the profession in joining the EFLM Register. In offering its members support in education, training and CPD it reflects EFLM’s leadership role in harmonising high quality laboratory medicine practice. Through providing access to EFLM’s infrastructure the Academy also provides a stepping stone to recognition as a European Specialist in Laboratory Medicine.

Updated criteria for joining the Register such as expectations to meet the competencies outlined in the EFLM syllabus, the stipulation of a recognised exit qualification, verification of participation in CPD reflects the need to provide evidence that specialist practice is distinguishable from non-specialist practice. Through its growing membership the Register adds weight to the argument for recognition of non-medical Specialists in Laboratory Medicine under EU Directive 2013/55/EC (The Recognition of Professional Qualifications). For those countries in whom the profession is not already recognised the Register may provide an ongoing/interim vehicle for national registers and/or professional regulation- longer term

potentially a single register of professional practice across country borders.

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