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The Accreditation of e-Learning Materials by the EACCME

Introduction

1) Since its establishment by the UEMS in January 2000, the European Accreditation Council for Continuing Medical Education (EACCME) has provided the means for accrediting CME events, thereby providing for international harmonisation, and encouraging improvement in the quality of continuing medical education.

2) In its policy paper, from 2001, the Basel Declaration on Continuing Professional Development (CPD), the UEMS defines CPD as “the educative means of updating, developing and enhancing how doctors apply the knowledge, skills and attitudes required in their working lives”.

3) The UEMS recognises that CPD incorporates and goes beyond CME, but acknowledges the need for CME credits as a simple means of confirming involvement in CME/CPD, and as a common “CME currency”. The UEMS has harmonised its CME accreditation around the European CME Credit (ECMEC) that can be used throughout Europe and, via a mutual recognition agreement with the American Medical Association, also in North America.

4) The UEMS recognises that considerable advances are being made in the methodologies by which CME and CPD can be provided, and by which these educational opportunities are accessed by doctors. For this reason, the UEMS provides for the accreditation by the EACCME of new media for the delivery of CME/CPD, that go beyond traditional lectures, symposia and conferences.

5) The UEMS draws attention to its policy, stated in the Basel Declaration, that doctors should employ a range of educational methods, and not rely solely on “e-CPD” for their continuing education.

Scope of this paper

6) In this paper, these new media are referred to as “e-Learning materials”, and should be taken as covering the delivery of CME/CPD by methods including: recorded audio, recorded visual, recorded on Compact Disc (CD), recorded on Digital Versatile Disc (DVD), available on Personal Digital Assistant (PDA), available online via an educational website, or any mixture or technological development of the preceding. This list should not be considered as complete. While other terms used for these new media include “distance-learning” and “enduring materials”, these terms are not used in this paper.

7) This paper does not cover printed materials, the accreditation of which will be dealt with in a separate document. Nor does it deal with the accreditation of “live” educational events, and the broadcast and webcast of these, which also will be dealt with in a separate paper, that will revise and update existing EACCME documents.

8) The UEMS recognises that some technologies straddle areas of definition. The EACCME will consider hybrid systems on the basis of:

- the primary form of presentation, and;
- the potential for the learner to engage, as an active learner, with the material.

As an example, streamed video normally will be considered as a “live” educational event, but could be considered as “e-Learning” if an appropriate assessment component were to be incorporated as part of the educational material. The EACCME reserves the right to determine which, if any, of its procedures should be applied to determine the eligibility for accreditation of any material.

9) The UEMS draws attention to differences in national recognition arrangements for CME/CPD credits obtained by working with these new media, and emphasises that doctors must refer to these when providing a record of their CME/CPD activities.

10) In this paper the EACCME describes the criteria and mechanisms for its accreditation of e-Learning materials. This accreditation can be applied to all countries and specialities, throughout Europe, that have a recognition agreement with the EACCME. It states what criteria will be applied for the accreditation of e-Learning materials (henceforth referred to as “Materials”, and how the e-CME or e-CPD Provider (henceforth referred to as “Provider” – see appendix 5) should apply for EACCME accreditation of these Materials.

11) This document represents the updated criteria that will be applied by the EACCME when considering applications for the accreditation of e-learning materials as of (date of adoption). This document supersedes all previous versions, originally UEMS 2008/20.

Educational Objectives and Fulfilment of Learning Needs

12) *The Provider must state, in a readily-accessible manner, that the Material has been prepared in order to fulfil stated educational needs, and indicate how this will be achieved.*

This confirmation must demonstrate that a “needs assessment” process has been performed, that these educational needs have been defined, and will be fulfilled.

(Essential criterion)

13) *The Provider must state in a readily-accessible manner, the expected educational outcome(s) of the Materials.* These must be explained in terms of the knowledge, skills, attitudinal or behavioural, or ethical lessons that can be learned, and whether these are clinical or non-clinical.

(Essential criterion)

14) *The Provider must clearly define, and state in a readily-accessible manner, the “target audience” for whom the Materials are most likely to be suitable.*

This must be explained in terms of the speciality/ies and seniority of doctor (henceforth referred to as the “Learner”) most likely to benefit.

(Essential criterion)

Description of Material

15) *The Provider must clearly explain, and state in a readily-accessible manner, in a brief summary, the content of the Material.*

(Essential criterion)

16) *The Provider must respect and confirm the privacy and confidentiality of the Learner, and confirm that any information provided by the Learner will only be utilised for the specific purposes of completing the Material.*

This is particularly relevant in the case of interactive Material (such as online websites). The only permitted exception to this will be with the valid consent of the Learner.

(Essential criterion)

17) *The Provider must clearly state, in a readily-accessible manner, the likely duration that the Learner will need to engage with the Material in order to fulfil the educational objective(s).*

This must be a minimum of one educational hour, with each hour of educational time expected to count as one ECMEC. The scale used by the EACCME to define the number of ECMECs that will be allocated is set out in Appendix 3.

(Essential criterion)

18) *The Provider must clearly state, in a readily-accessible manner, compliance of the Materials with all relevant ethical, medico-legal and legal requirements.*

Where applicable, these must include: consent by patients and other participants to inclusion in the Material, confirmation of confidentiality for patients and other participants, compliance with research ethics requirements, compliance with data-protection legislation, and copyright arrangements for the Material. It is essential to ensure that patients are not, and cannot be identified in any of the materials presented.

(Essential criterion)

19) *The Provider must clearly state, in a readily-accessible manner, the date of preparation of the Material, any substantial revisions to its content, and expiry date.*

(Essential criterion)

20) *The Provider must clearly state, in a readily-accessible manner, the required format for use of the Material, (eg. Windows/MacOS; DVD region), and must provide contact details for the provision of assistance.*

(Essential criterion)

Nature of Material

21) *All content within the Material must be evidence-based, with notes on the level of evidence (where applicable), and suitable references.*

This must be to the standard required for a publication in a scientific journal.

(Essential criterion)

22) *The Material must encourage the Learner to employ methods of active, adult learning to achieve the educational objective(s).*

These may include: problem-orientated learning, task-based learning, case-based learning, reflective learning, and performance improvement CME. The EACCME also strongly recommends feedback be provided on the learner's engagement with the material, such as an explanation of why a response to the self-assessment component was incorrect.

(Essential criterion)

23) *The Material must include a means of confirming Learner engagement, and achievement of the educational objective(s).*

This must be of quality, duration and content appropriate to the Material and the educational objective(s), and it must be integral to the Material. It may be based on multiple-choice questionnaire or other self-assessment methodologies, but must have clearly stated assessment criteria (eg. pass mark). This should be set by the provider of the educational content (as distinct from the provider of the product). This self-assessment component must comprise a minimum of 10 minutes within the duration expected for the accreditation of each educational hour (1 ECMEC).

(Essential criterion)

24) *All content must be free from any commercial or other forms of bias (see appendix 5).*

Where there is a valid evidence base for a specific therapy or agent, this may be stated, but must be referenced in a manner that is appropriate for a scientific journal. The EACCME will reject any application that, in its opinion, includes biased information.

(Essential criterion)

25) *All content must be free of any form of advertising.*

The EACCME will reject any application that, in its opinion, includes advertising of any product or company.

(Essential criterion)

26) *All content should be suitable for an international audience.*

This refers to the use of international terminology for procedures and therapeutic agents.

(Essential criterion)

27) All content should be easy to use.

(Desirable criterion)

Details of the Provider

28) *The Provider must provide, in a readily-accessible manner, a short description of the Provider organisation.*

While the use of the Provider's logo(s) will be permitted, there must not be any attempt at using this description for advertisement.

(Essential criterion)

29) *The Material must state, in a readily-accessible manner, the names and qualifications of the individual(s) involved in preparing the content.*

The EACCME requires that all individuals who have contributed to the preparation and presentation of the material(s) are identified.

(Essential criterion)

30) *The Material must provide the name and title of a medical practitioner who will take responsibility for its content. This doctor must be registered with a Medical Regulatory Authority, and his/her registration details must be provided.*

(Essential criterion)

31) *There must be a full declaration of actual or potential conflict of interest of the individual(s) involved in preparing the content of the Material.*

It is essential that the medical practitioner who will take responsibility for the material provides a full declaration of actual or potential conflict of interest. Earnings from the sale or marketing of the Material itself will not be considered a conflict of interest.

(Essential criterion)

32) *The source of all funding provided for the preparation of the Material must be declared, and stated in a readily-accessible manner.*

If an educational grant or other financial support has been obtained by the developers of the Material, the source and nature of this must be declared.

(Essential criterion)

33) The Material should provide “hot-links” to further relevant information.

Where these links are to commercial sites, this must be made clearly identifiable.

(Desirable criterion)

Quality Assurance by the Provider

34) *The Provider must provide confirmation that it has had the Material quality-assured prior to application to the EACCME for accreditation.*

As a minimum, the EACCME requires the provider to have assessed its material using the criteria set out in this document.

(Essential criterion)

35) *The Provider must provide a reliable and effective means for the Learner to provide feedback on the Material, and must make available to the EACCME a report on this feedback and on its responses to this.*

In order to maintain accreditation, this feedback must be submitted to the EACCME within 12 months of accreditation having been granted.

(Essential criterion)

36) *The Provider’s evaluation record for previous or on-going modules or programmes must be satisfactory or, where not, reasons for unsatisfactory ratings must have been addressed.*

(Essential criterion)

37) The Provider should make available for the Learner technical support related to the Material.
(Desirable criterion)

Mechanism of Application

38) *On application for accreditation by the EACCME, the Provider (in this section known as the “Applicant”) will provide:*

- *the complete Material;*
- *a fully completed EACCME application form, confirmed by the medical practitioner who is taking responsibility for the Material (see paragraph 27);*
- *full payment of the application fee.*

(Essential criterion)

39) The Applicant will not, in any manner, attempt to influence the decision of the EACCME. Any such attempt will cause automatic rejection of the application and forfeiture of the fee.

40) In dealing with the application, the EACCME commits to:

- providing, on its website, an EACCME application form, based on the criteria (essential and desirable) set out in this paper;
- ensuring confidentiality regarding the Material submitted;
- confirming for the Applicant the following dates:
 - a) on which the Material was received,
 - b) on which the application fee cleared, and
 - c) the “starting date”;
- choosing, from a pool of suitably-trained specialists, two assessors who have expertise appropriate to the Material submitted;
- providing, via the EACCME part of the UEMS website, a progress record that is accessible by the Applicant;
- ensuring that a decision is provided to the Applicant within eight weeks of the starting date or, at seven weeks, if this cannot be achieved, providing an explanation, and an offer of a full refund of the application fee.

Criteria and Decision-Making for Accreditation

41) The Material and the application form will be reviewed by the two designated EACCME assessors.

42) For a positive decision to be made by the EACCME assessor, in favour of accreditation, all essential criteria, and at least one desirable criterion must be confirmed as achieved by the submitted Material. As a specific point, the assessor also will be required to confirm whether, according to their use of the Material, the stated learning objectives have been fulfilled.

43) In order for the EACCME to accredit the Material, both assessors must support the application.

Amendment Procedure

44) The EACCME recognises that some applications may fulfil almost all the criteria needed for accreditation but be lacking in a small number. In accordance with its remit to encourage the improvement of the quality of CME/CPD, the EACCME will provide feedback and recommendations for amendments to the material submitted by the Applicant.

45) The EACCME will permit the Applicant one opportunity, at no additional charge, to submit a revised version of the material for accreditation. This amended submission must be provided within three weeks of the EACCME's request for amendment or the EACCME reserves the right to reject the application without further assessment.

46) The EACCME commits to providing a decision within two weeks of receipt of the amended submission. Other than through the mechanism of appeal (see below), this decision by the EACCME shall be final.

Appeal

47) Automatic appeal – should the two designated EACCME assessors differ in their assessment, an automatic appeal will be triggered, and the Applicant will be informed that this has occurred. A further two weeks will be permitted for the processing of the application (viz. a total of ten weeks from the starting date). This automatic appeal will be performed at no further cost to the Applicant.

48) Appeal by the Applicant – should both designated EACCME assessors reject the application, the Applicant may appeal. This will require a further two weeks from the date that the appeal, and the clearance of the appeal fee, is confirmed as having been received by the EACCME. The appeal fee will be 375 €.

49) Mechanism of appeal – in either case (automatic appeal, or appeal by Applicant) the mechanism will be:

- the Secretary-General of the UEMS (or his/her nominee) will review the Material and the application form, and will discuss these with the two designated EACCME assessors;
- the three will vote on the Application, with a majority (2:1) decision being permitted to confirm accreditation;
- the appeal decision will be final.

Outcomes

50) Confirmation of accreditation of the Material by the EACCME will permit the Provider to use a statement to this effect (prepared by the EACCME) on and within the Material. This will be confirmed on the EACCME section of the UEMS website, and the number of ECMECs (as one ECMEC per hour of education) will be stated.

51) EACCME accreditation of e-CME and e-CPD Materials will be time-limited for a period of two years from the date of confirmation of accreditation. This date, and the expiry date, will be displayed on the EACCME section of the UEMS website, and the confirmation of accreditation will be removed from the website after this period has elapsed.

52) The EACCME will permit, on request by the Provider, the accreditation of translated versions of the originally accredited material as long as this does not involve any alteration of the content. This extension of accreditation will be permitted at no extra charge.

53) Accreditation of this Material will not be transferable, and will only be permitted for the defined Material, in the particular format, by the specified Provider. Any breach of this rule will lead to the withdrawal of accreditation.

54) An application shall be limited to a single process of assessment for accreditation. As indicated in this document, this process normally will incorporate the assessment by assessors, one opportunity for improvement if deemed appropriate (amendment procedure), and the potential for one appeal. Beyond these steps, and the timescales set out above, should the EACCME reject the application, no further opportunity for re-assessment will be offered, other than by a new application.

Fees

55) The fee for an application to the EACCME for its accreditation of e-Learning material will be:

750 € to be paid when submitting the materials to be considered for accreditation.

This amount will be fully refundable, at the request of the Provider, if the EACCME cannot provide the applicant with a decision within eight weeks of the submission of the application.

If the application is granted more than 1 ECMEC, the Provider will be liable for an additional fee of 750 € for each additional educational hour accredited.

- 1 ECMEC: 750 €
- 2 ECMECs: 1500 €
- 3 ECMECs: 2250 €

56) Should an Applicant appeal, in accordance with the procedure set out in this document, the EACCME will charge an additional fee of 375 €.

57) The EACCME reserves the right, in its sole discretion, to change its fees at any time. An application already submitted will be charged at the rate applicable at the time that it was made.

58) The EACCME currently only accredits individual applications for e-learning materials and live educational events and does not provide for the accreditation of Providers. An extended statement on this matter is provided as Appendix 4.

59) This policy supersedes all previous versions of this document as of 1st May 2011, and will be revised within two years of that date.

Check-list of criteria to be fulfilled by the Provider

Appendix 1

Essential criteria

The Provider must state, in a readily-accessible manner, that the Material has been prepared in order to fulfil stated educational needs, and indicate how this will be achieved.

The Provider must state in a readily-accessible manner, the expected educational outcome(s) of the Materials.

The Provider must clearly define, and state in a readily-accessible manner, the “target audience” for whom the Materials are most likely to be suitable.

The Provider must clearly explain, and state in a readily-accessible manner, in a brief summary, the content of the Material.

The Provider must respect and confirm the privacy and confidentiality of the Learner, and confirm that any information provided by the Learner will only be utilised for the specific purposes of completing the Material.

The Provider must clearly state, in a readily-accessible manner, the likely duration that the Learner will need to engage with the Material in order to fulfil the educational objective(s).

The Provider must clearly state, in a readily-accessible manner, compliance of the Materials with all relevant ethical, medico-legal and legal requirements.

The Provider must clearly state, in a readily-accessible manner, the date of preparation of the Material, any substantial revisions to its content, and expiry date.

The Provider must clearly state, in a readily-accessible manner, the required format for use of the Material, and must provide contact details for the provision of assistance.

All content within the Material must be evidence-based, with notes on the level of evidence (where applicable), and suitable references.

The Material must encourage the Learner to employ methods of active, adult learning to achieve the educational objective(s).

The Material must include a means of confirming Learner engagement, and achievement of the educational objective(s).

All content must be free from any commercial or other forms of bias.

All content must be free of any form of advertising.

All content should be suitable for an international audience.

The Provider must provide, in a readily-accessible manner, a short description of the Provider organisation.

The Material must state, in a readily-accessible manner, the names and qualifications of the individual(s) involved in preparing the content.

There must be a full declaration of potential conflict of interest of the individual(s) involved in preparing the content of the Material.

The source of all funding provided for the preparation of the Material must be declared, and stated in a readily-accessible manner.

The Material must provide the name and title of a medical practitioner who will take responsibility for its content. This doctor must be registered with a Medical Regulatory Authority, and his/her registration details must be provided.

The Provider must provide confirmation that it has had the Material quality-assured prior to application to the EACCME for accreditation.

The Provider must provide a reliable and effective means for the Learner to provide feedback on the Material, and must make available to the EACCME a report on the feedback and on its responses to this.

The Provider's evaluation record for previous or on-going modules or programmes must be satisfactory or, where not, reasons for unsatisfactory ratings must have been addressed.

On application for accreditation by the EACCME, the Provider (in this section known as the "Applicant") will provide:

- the Material;
- a fully completed EACCME application form, confirmed by the medical practitioner who is taking responsibility for the Material;
- full payment of the application fee.

Desirable criteria

All content should be easy to use.

The Material should provide "hot-links" to further relevant information.

The Provider should make available for the Learner technical support related to the Material.

Check-list of criteria to be confirmed by the EACCME Assessor

Appendix 2

- 1) Have all the essential criteria been fulfilled?
- 2) Has at least one of the desirable criteria been fulfilled?
- 3) Have the stated learning objectives been fulfilled?

Allocation of European CME Credits (ECMECs) for e-learning materials

Appendix 3

45 – 90 minutes	1 ECMEC
91 – 150 minutes	2 ECMECs
151 – 210 minutes	3 ECMECs

The EACCME does not award half credits.

The EACCME will not award more than 3 ECMECs for an individual module as it considers that a doctor is unlikely to derive additional benefit if engaged in e-learning for more than 210 minutes.

Providers are advised to link shorter educational materials to ensure that the 1-ECMEC minimum requirement is fulfilled and to divide longer educational materials to ensure that they do not last longer than the 3-ECMEC maximum.

Potential for Provider Accreditation

Appendix 4

The EACCME provides a system of accreditation that is based on considering applications related to individual educational live events and individual e-learning materials.

With the increase in applications that has occurred over the last decade, it has become apparent that some providers submit many CME/CPD materials or meetings for accreditation. When such a provider consistently has such applications approved as fulfilling the EACCME's criteria for accreditation, this confirms the quality of the provider and their CME/CPD materials.

Accordingly, the EACCME is exploring the potential for a system of "Provider Accreditation" that may be suitable for such providers. In doing so, the EACCME is considering the suitability of such a system within the European context, noting the experience of such systems in the USA. It is important to emphasise that, until a policy decision is made by the UEMS Council, such work does not commit the EACCME to such a system, nor does it exclude the potential for this.

Providers are encouraged to submit applications for the accreditation of individual e-learning materials which, if accredited, will continue to strengthen their reputation as a high-quality provider.

Definitions

Appendix 5

Bias

Bias is a term used to describe a tendency or preference towards a particular perspective, ideology or result, especially when the tendency interferes with the ability to be impartial, unprejudiced or objective. Bias may be scientific, political, religious, gender-related, ethnic, racial, cultural or geographical. Bias may occur in relation to a particular industry or commercial product such as a mechanical device or pharmaceutical agent, or in relation to a particular intellectual, political or other view, in situations where a range of products or views may be equally useful or valid.

Continuing Professional Development

The educative means of updating, developing and enhancing how doctors apply the knowledge, skills, attitudes (and behaviours, and the ethical standards) required in their working lives.

(e-Learning) Material

Includes recorded audio, recorded visual, recorded on Compact Disc (CD), recorded on Digital Versatile Disc (DVD), available on Personal Digital Assistant (PDA), available online via an educational website, or any mixture of the preceding.

Provider

A distinction should be noted, between the “developer” of the content of the e-learning material, and the “producer” of the product. While, on occasion, these may be the same individual(s), the Provider must state clearly who has been responsible for each aspect.