EQALM annual report for 2018

The objective of the European Organisation for External Quality Assurance Providers in Laboratory Medicine (EQALM) is to provide a forum for co-operation and exchange of knowledge on quality-related matters, especially with regard to EQA programs in Europe.

Members of the Executive Board

The members of the EQALM Executive Board in 2018 are shown in table 1.

Table 1.

Executive Board members	First term / second term
Anne Stavelin, chairman (Norway)	2014-2016 / 2017-2019
Finlay MacKenzie, secretary (UK)	2014-2016 / 2017-2019
Stéphanie Albarède, treasurer (France)	2017-2019 /
Piet Meijer, member (Netherlands)	2016-2018 / 2019-2021
Christoph Buchta, member (Austria)	2018-2020 /

Piet Meijer was reelected for a second term at the General Assembly 2018.

Members of EQALM

EQALM has different types of membership. EQA organisations can apply to be a full member (European) or non-European member if they are an impartial and non-profit EQA provider, which organizes national, regional or international EQA schemes in laboratory medicine. Individuals with an interest in EQA can become an individual member. Commercial providers of EQA in laboratory medicine or other commercial companies with an interest in this field can support EQALM as associate members.

EQALM had 67 members in 2018, nine more than in 2017. The number and fees of the different types of memberships are shown in table 2.

Table 2.

Membership	Number	Annual fee
Full European member	43	175 €
Non-European member	4	175 €
Associate member	9	700 €
Individual member	7	80 €
Honorary member	4	-
Total	**67**	

Main activities of the Executive Board

The main activities of the Executive Board in 2018 are listed below.

- Monthly teleconferences and 2 face meetings.
- Preparation of EQALM Handbook (procedure manual).
- Services of the EQALM Office (optimizing internal routines).
- Establishing a common EQALM file sharing platform.
- Interaction with the Scientific Committee (Structure and functioning of the WGs, investigation of new WGs/TFGs).
- Preparation of the annual EQALM Symposium and General Assembly 2018.
- Cooperation with other organizations (meetings, working groups):

  EFLM (European Federation of Clinical Chemistry and Laboratory Medicine): Working Group on Pre- and Post-analytical phase (WG-PRE and WG-POST)

  EEE (Eurachem, EuroLab, European accreditation): Working Group on PT in Accreditation (EEE WG PT)

  JCTLM (Joint Committee for Traceability in Laboratory Medicine). Investigation of a possible joint project between JCTLM and EQALM.

  Investigation of possible liaison with ISO-CASCO.

  Stakeholder member of ICHCLR (International Consortium for Harmonization of Clinical Laboratory Results).

Annual EQALM Symposium

The 23rd annual EQALM Symposium and General Assembly was held in Zagreb, Croatia on 18-19th October 2018. The main sessions were: 1) Working group meetings (parallel sessions), 2) haematology, 3) ISO 17043, 4) Adam Uldall Award lecture, 5) traceability, 6) pre-analytcal EQAS, and 7) selected presentations from submitted abstracts. The full program is given in Appendix 1.

The Adam Uldall Award lecture was given by Professor Greg Miller (USA) with the title: *Future challenges in EQA, with special emphasis on harmonization and commutability.*

107 persons from 28 different countries attended the EQALM symposium which was organized by the Executive Board, the Scientific Program Committee and a local organizer:

Scientific Program Committee
Piet Meijer (ECAT, Netherlands)
Anne Stavelin (Noklus, Norway)
Stéphanie Albarède (CTBC, France)
Michael Noble (CMPT, Canada)
Istvan Juhos (QUALICONT, Hungary)

Local organiser
Jasna Lenicek Krleza (CROQALM, Croatia)
Ivana Calep (co-chair CROQALM, Croatia)
Ana-Maria Simundic (HDMBLM, Croatia)

Scientific Committee

The aim of the Scientific Committee is to improve the interaction between the Working Group (WG) chairs and the board, to stimulate the WGs to be more active throughout the year, and to produce more scientific papers. The SC advises the board on scientific matters.

The SC is chaired by a board member (Piet Meijer) and the Chairman of EQALM (Anne Stavelin) has participated at the meetings as an observer.

The members of the Scientific Committee for 2018 are shown in table 3.

Table 3.

Name	Function
Piet Meijer	Chair Scientific Committee
Wim Coucke	Frequency WG Chair
Joan-Lluis Vives Corrons	Hematology WG Chair
Ann Helen Kristoffersen	Hemostasis WG Chair
Gunnar Nordin	Nomenclature WG Chair
Michael Noble	Microbiology WG Chair
Istvan Juhos	Virtual Microscopy WG Chair

In 2018, the SC had two teleconferences and one face-to-face meeting prior to the annual symposium in Zagreb. The major topics which have been discussed in 2018 are:

1) A project proposal of the Joint Committee on Traceability in Laboratory Medicine (JCTLM) on EQA and traceability. EQALM is positive about their participation in this project but realises that the execution of such a project implies a substantial number of difficulties which have to be resolved before it can start.
2) The role of the Scientific Committee in EQALM publications. It was agreed that each report or publication should include an acknowledgement of EQALM. General rules for this acknowledgement should be included in the EQALM Procedure Manual.
3) The need for new Working Groups or Task-and-Finishing Groups (TFG). A new TFG on Immunehaematology was started. This group met for the first time at the EQALM meeting in Zagreb. Together with the board a questionnaire was prepared for suggestions on new WGs and TFGs. The most frequently given suggestion were ISO 17043 and Performance Specifications. Together with the board the SC will prepare the implementation of these new WGs / TFGs.

Furthermore, ongoing projects within the working groups were discussed.
Several members of the SC were involved in the Scientific Program Committee of the annual symposium in Zagreb.

A list of scientific publications from EQALM is shown in Appendix 2.

Working Groups

EQALM had 5 working groups in 2018:

1) Frequency
2) Hematology
3) Hemostasis
4) Microbiology
5) Virtual Microscopy

Short reports from each group are given in Appendix 3.

In addition to this five WGs, a Task-and-Finishing Group (TFG) in Immunohaematology was established in 2018. A TFG is a group with a specific goal which can be achieved in a relative short period of time (maximum 2 years). The goal for the TFG Immunohaematology is to compare rates of incorrect results reported by participants in different immunohematology EQA schemes and to investigate if there are correlations between error rates and legal requirements regarding EQA participation on the one hand, and services of the EQA providers on the other hand.

Accounts for 2017

The revenues and expenses for 2017 are shown in Table 4.

Table 4.

Accounts 2017	
Revenues	€ 36 883
Expenses	€ 40 750
Balance	€ -3867

The total revenues were lower than 2016 (46 761 €) because of a decrease of attendees at the annual meeting 2017 in Dublin, and of sponsorship revenues. However, we observed an increase of memberships.
The total expenses were lower than 2016 (47 470 €). There was an increase of activities expenses due to the promotion of EQALM at the Euromedlab congress in June 2017 in Athens (Eqalm booth).
The total loss is virtually increased because some requests for reimbursement of expenses for the 2013-2016 period were received at the EQALM office in 2017.

Cooperation with other organizations

EQALM is active in different networks and work together with other organizations. In the European Federation of Clinical Chemistry and Laboratory Medicine (EFLM), EQALM has representatives in the working group on pre-analytical phase (WG-PRE) and in the post-analytical phase (WG-POST). EQALM is an associate member of Eurachem and has representatives in the Eurachem, EuroLab and the European Accreditation (EEE) Working Group on Proficiency Testing in Accreditation (WG PT).

EQALM also co-operates with the Joint Committee for Traceability in Laboratory Medicine (JCTLM) which has one working group on traceability and one on reference materials, procedures and measurement laboratories (the JCTLM Database working group).

The list of people who has been the EQALM representatives in the different groups in 2018 are shown in table 5. Short reports from each group are given in Appendix 4.

Table 5.

Working Group	EQALM representative	Number of meetings this year
EFLM WG-PRE	Gunn Kristensen (Norway), Barbara De la Salle (UK)	2
EFLM WG-POST	Piet Meijer (Netherlands)	1
EEE WG PT	Erika Sarkany (Hungary)	2

EQALM Office / Secretariat

The registered office is in Geneva with the following addresses:

EQALM
c/o CSCQ
Chemin du Petit-Bel-Air 2
CH-1225 Chêne-Bourg
Switzerland

Web page: www.eqalm.org
e-mail: office@eqalm.org

During 2018, Xavier Albe has been the EQALM Office liaison.

On behalf of the Executive Board,

Bergen, 23th January 2019

Anne Stavelin
EQALM Chairman

Appendix 1: Program annual EQALM Symposium 2018
Appendix 2: EQALM scientific publications list
Appendix 3: Reports from EQALM Working Groups
Appendix 4: Reports from Working Groups in other organizations

Appendix 1: Program annual EQALM Symposium 2018

EQALM symposium 2018

October 18 – 19, Zagreb, Croatia

Program

Thursday 18 October 2018

8.00 – 14.00	**Registration**		
Working Group Meeting (parallel sessions)			
8.30 – 9.55	Haemostasis	TFG Immunohaematology	
10.00 – 11.25	Haematology	Microbiology	
11.30 – 12.55	Frequency	Virtual Microscopy	
13.00 – 14.00	**Lunch**		
Symposium			
14.00 – 14.10	**Opening**		Anne Stavelin
Haematology	**Moderator: Stephanie Albarede**		
14.10 – 14.40	EQA in haematology: current developments		Barbara De la Salle
14.40 – 15.10	EQA in hemoglobinopathies		Kees Harteveld
ISO 17043	**Moderator: Stephanie Albarede**		
15.10 – 15.30	A need for revision of the ISO 17043 standard		Michael Noble
Interactive session	**Moderator: Finlay MacKenzie**		
15.30 – 16.10	Homogeneity and Stability testing: practices by EQA organisations / each sample, each parameter? / alternative approaches		
16.10 – 16.40	**Break with refreshments**		
Adam Uldall Lecture	**Moderator: Anne Stavelin**		
16.40 – 17.30	Future challenges in EQA, with special emphasis on harmonization and commutability		Greg Miller
18.30 – 23.00	**Social Event**		

EQALM symposium 2018

October 18 – 19, Zagreb, Croatia

Program

Friday 19 October 2018

Traceability	**Moderator: Piet Meijer**	
9.00 – 9.30	Traceability in laboratory medicine	Graham Beastall
Analytical Quality	**Moderator: Piet Meijer**	
9.30 – 10.00	Global efforts in quality improvement (IFCC WG on Analytical Quality): what does it mean for EQA?	Annette Thomas
10.00 – 10.30	**Break with refreshments**	
Pre-Analytical EQAS	**Moderator: Christoph Buchta**	
10.30 – 10.55	Quality Assurance of the pre-analytical phase	Ana-Maria Simundic
10.55 – 11.15	The CSCQ pre-analytical EQA scheme	Pierre-Alain Morandi
Abstract presentations	**Moderator: Christoph Buchta**	
11.15 – 11.30	EQA in Croatia: organisation and strategy	Jasna Lenicek Krleza
11.30 – 11.45	FMEA as a tool for risk management and quality improvement of the EQA process	Vanessa Ghislain
11.45 – 12.00	One-year follow-up study of serum indices in Equalis pre-analytical external quality assessment scheme	Anna Norling
12.00 – 12.15	Comparing different approaches for multi-sample evaluation in laboratory EQA	Sanne Senders-Daniëls
12.15 – 12.30	Externalized internal quality control in Bacteriology: Antimicrobial susceptibility testing	Jean Louis Galinier
12.30 – 13.30	**Lunch**	
EQALM General Assembly		
13.30 – 15.30	General Assembly	
15.30	Close of the meeting	

Appendix 2: EQALM scientific publications list

Table 6. Scientific publications from the EQALM Working Groups

Working Group	Publication	Year
Microbiology	Noble MA, Rennie R. Combined international external quality assessment results of medical laboratory performance and reporting of samples with known antimicrobial resistance. Diagnosis (Berl) 2018 Sep 25;5(3):161-166.	2018
Hemostasis	Meijer P, Kynde K, van den Besselaar, Van Blerk M, Woods TAL. International normalized ratio (INR) testing in Europe: between-laboratory comparability of test results obtained by Quick and Owren reagents. Clin Chem Lab Med 2018; epub ahead of print	2018
Hematology	Soumali MR, Van Blerk M, Akharif A, Albarède S, Kesseler D, Gutierrez G, de la Salle B, Plum I, Guyard A, Favia AP, Coucke W. A new approach to define acceptance limits for hematology in external quality assessment schemes. Clin Chem Lab Med 2017; 55(12):1936-1942.	2017
Executive Board	Stavelin A, Albe X, Meijer P, Sarkany E, MacKenzie F. An overview of the European Organization for External Quality Assurance Providers in Laboratory Medicine (EQALM). Biochem Med (Zagreb) 2017;27:30-6.	2017
Hemostasis EFLM WG-POST	Kristoffersen AH, Ajzner E, Rogic D, Sozmen EY, Carraro P, Faria AP, Watine J, Meijer P, Sandberg S. Is D-dimer used according to clinical algorithms in the diagnostic work-up of patients with suspicion of venous thromboembolism? A study in six European countries. Thromb Res 2016;142:1-7.	2016
Hemostasis EFLM WG-POST	Ajzner E, Rogic D, Meijer P, Kristoffersen AH, Carraro P, Sozmen E, Faria AP, Sandberg S. An international study of how laboratories handle and evaluate patient samples after detecting an unexpected APTT prolongation. Clin Chem Lab Med 2015;53:1593-603.	2015
Hemostasis	Stavelin A, Meijer P, Kitchen D, Sandberg S. External quality assessment of point-of-care International Normalized Ratio (INR) testing in Europe. Clin Chem Lab Med 2012;50:81-8.	2012
Frequency	Thomas A. External Quality Assessment in laboratory medicine: is there a rationale to determine frequency of surveys? Accred Qual Assur 2009;14:439–444.	2009
Hematology	Van Blerk M, Albarède S, Deom A, Gutiérrez G, Heller S. Comparison of evaluation procedures used by European external quality assessment scheme organizers for haemoglobin concentration and leukocyte concentration. Accred Qual Assur 2008;13:145-8.	2008

Microbiology	Vernelen K, Noble MA, Libeer JC. External quality assessment in microbiology: comparison of results from Belgian and Canadian laboratories with regard to their ability to identify Streptococcus pyogenes. Accred Qual Assur 2008;13:501-4.	2008
Hematology	Vives Corrons JL, Van Blerk M, Albarede S, Gutierrez G, Heller S, Nordin G, Skitek M, Deom A, Horvath K, de la Salle B, Libeer JC. Guidelines for setting up an external quality assessment scheme for blood smear interpretation. Part II: survey preparation, statistical evaluation and reporting. Clin Chem Lab Med 2006;44:1039-43.	2006
Hematology	Vives Corrons JL, Albarede S, Flandrin G, Heller S, Horvath K, Houwen B, Nordin G, Sarkani E, Skitek M, Van Blerk M, Libeer JC. Guidelines for blood smear preparation and staining procedure for setting up an external quality assessment scheme for blood smear interpretation. Part I: Control material. Clin Chem Lab Med 2004;42:922-6.	2004

Appendix 3: Reports from EQALM Working Groups

WG Frequency

Chair: Wim Coucke (Belgium), since 2017

The main objective of the WG Frequency is to review existing data from EQA providers to provide guidance on the frequency of EQA surveys. There is little published evidence of an optimal model for determining frequency of EQA surveys both in terms of distributions per year and number of samples per distribution, or on the relationship between frequency and outcomes.

The work of the frequency working group can be summarised briefly as follows:

- Extension of a study comparing laboratory performance between various EQA organisers, taking into account other possibly interfering parameters, like degree of accreditation and punitive or educational character of the EQA scheme.
- Collection of evaluation techniques involving multiple samples

On the shelf of 2019 is:

- Finishing the study that compares laboratory performance between various EQA organisers;
- Testing for reliability of results of evaluation techniques involving multiple samples;
- Setting up recommended frequency according to ranking of EQA schemes

WG Hematology

Chair: Joan-Lluis Vives Corrons (Spania), since 1998

- Work on an article on the analysis of the variations in the way of marking blood cells differentiation on smear observed after the results collection from the surveys performed in previous years. The preparation of this article will continue in 2019.

- Creation of a steering committee for Haematology WG (JL Vives, S Albarede, B De la Salle, E Sarkani) for the preparation of WG activities. In 2018, it has been decided to create a joint EQALM-EuroBloodNet task force to define the best way to score the leukocyte differential count (LDC), i.e. the differentiation of WBCs on the stained peripheral blood smear taking into account their clinical impact.

- Promote External Quality Assessment for rare hematological tests (used for the diagnosis of rare anemias)

- Review UK NEQAS data for analytical performance specifications for Hb A2 in depth, as a preliminary step for taking a decision about the survey performance to be decided by the WG. Since in this project, other Groups (ICSH and IFCC), working in quality assurance have also been involved, more time than expected has been necessary to assess the availability of current Hb A2 standard. These preliminary results have been presented at the EQALM 2018 annual WG meeting and the whole activity has been divided into two main steps:

    - 2018: Review UK NEQAS data for Hb A2 to design the European Scheme (2017-2018) that have been matter of discussion during the last Haematology WG
    - 2019: to undertake a survey on the analytical performance specifications for Hb A2

- Starting the Pyruvate kinase deficiency (PKD) EQAS pilot study in Europe:

    - 2018: a clinician was found for providing patients' material
    - 2019: A pilot survey will start with 6 pilot sites in the UK, Italy, The Netherlands and Spain. After validation of the pilot survey, other interested sites will be invited to join the work.

- In rare diseases laboratory diagnosis, physicians need to know that the results of the tests performed are accurate and precise. Often clinical decisions about the use of very expensive, and sometimes toxic, drugs are solely based on these results, and physicians need an evidence of their quality and reliability. Due to the high cost of external quality assessment schemes (EQAS) when performed by each individual country (at local level), a pan European EQAS becomes necessary to assess that the European laboratories dealing with the diagnosis of rare anemias are using standard procedures for measuring and reporting results.

WG Hemostasis

Chair: Ann Helen Kristoffersen (Norway), since 2017

Short overview of projects and responsible person:

- INR project: Paper published. “International normalized ratio (INR) testing in Europe: between-laboratory comparability of test results obtained by Quick and Owren reagents.” Meijer P, Kynde K, van den Besselaar AMHP, Van Blerk M, Woods TAL. Clin Chem Lab Med 2018.

- EQA Survey result evaluation project/Data trial: Data evaluation performed. Presented in Zagreb. Manuscript in preparation – submit 2019. Responsible: Piet Meijer

- Pre-analytical variables in haemostasis: Questionnaire sent to European laboratories about current pre-analytical practices in routine haemostasis tests. The feedback report was sent to the participating laboratories in 2016. The manuscript for publication has been in preparation during 2018. Submit early 2019. Responsible: Ann Helen Kristoffersen

- New pre-analytical questionnaire in preparation in 2018. Routine coagulation tests. Issues: interferences; clot, hemolysis, icterus, bilirubinemia, haematocrit. Plan to send questionnaire to laboratories in 2019. Responsible: Ann Helen Kristoffersen

- APTT post-analytical project: Joint project with EFLM WG post-analytical. Samples with prolonged APTT results were sent to laboratories performing APTT mixing in 2018. Data evaluation ongoing. Plan to submit manuscript 2019/2020. Responsible: Piet Meijer

- Inventory of the current EQA POCT practice in haemostasis: Questionnaire sent in 2017 to EQA organisations to ask for the type of POCT programmes in haemostasis. Based on results, started to make a questionnaire on POCT D-dimer in 2018, to be finished and distributed to EQA organisers in 2019. Responsible: Dianne Kitchen/Piet Meijer

- WG Haemostasis meeting Zagreb 2018: A new project discussed, APTT/PT performance evaluation. Will start planning the questionnaire to EQA organisers when some of the tasks above are finished. Responsible: Piet Meijer

WG Microbiology

Chair: Michael Noble (Canada), since 2016

Following the on-line survey on antimicrobial resistance testing in medical laboratories which was performed in 2016, the results of the study were presented at the working group meeting in Dublin in 2017. The final manuscript was developed and published in September 2018 [*Combined international external quality assessment results of medical laboratory performance and reporting of samples with known antimicrobial resistance. Noble MA, Rennie R. Diagnosis (Berl). 2018 Sep 25;5(3):161-166.*]

In October 2018, the Microbiology Working Group met at the Annual Conference in Zagreb.

Prior to the meeting a survey was sent out to all people who had participated in the EQALM Microbiology Working Group over the last 5 years. The survey indicated that only 22 percent regularly participated while 66 percent had only participated in 1 or 2 (with almost 70 percent of that group this was their first meeting). While it is encouraging that the meetings are always well attended, the number showing up on a recurrent basis is low, with the primary reason being lack of funding by their home programs. This makes creating a core group of active members very difficult.

During 2017 a similar on-line survey was performed to examine the detection of enteric pathogenic bacteria as measured by EQA. This survey was completed in 2018 and was reported during the annual 2018 meeting. A small writing team was developed to create a manuscript from the results of the study, with the view to having it published, perhaps in 2019.

Also at the annual meeting a plan was made to develop a new on-line survey to look at laboratory detection of viral pathogens as measured by EQA. A small team was created to develop the survey to have it released early in 2019.

At the annual meeting there was an invited presentation given by Oneworld Accuracy on the topic of *In-Nation EQA for Lower and Middle Income Countries*. The presentation was well received and led to considerable discussions.

Our goals for 2019 are to complete the manuscript and prepare the survey, hopefully with both being completed well before the next annal WG meeting in October 2019.

WG Virtual Microscopy

Chair: Istvan Juhos (Hungary), since 2016

Projects

This working group has since 2016 been investigating the possibilities to create a common sharing platform for virtual microscopy (VM). A survey among WG members confirmed the necessity of such sharing platform in order to support each other and to use it for standardisation besides its other practical benefits.

In 2018, the University of Szeged, Hungary, offered an initiate version of an opensource EQALM WG VM Platform. The WG VM Steering Committee supported the initiation, and one member from Brazil (PNCQ) offered finding support for the development and pilot of this project. During the annual WG meeting, this project was extensively discussed with the WG members who supported the initiative. The discussion was about the design of the online survey about pilot issues of the VM Sharing Platform, data protection in general EQALM pilots and the need for EQALM actions.

Steering Committee

The EQALM WG VM Steering Committee has 8 members from Brazil (PNCQ), Hungary (QualiCont), India (CMCEQAS), Sweden (Equalis), Switzerland (CSCQ) and UK (NEQAS).

At the annual meeting in 2018, 4 members were present (Brazil, Hungary, Switzerland, UK) and discussed the ongoing sharing platform project and prepared the WG session.

Presentations at the annual WG meeting

At the EQALM WG VM meeting in Zagreb 2018, 5 members from Canada (Oneworld Accuracy), France (CTCB), Hungary (QualiCont), Switzerland (CSCQ) and UK (NEQAS) gave valuable presentations.

Appendix 4: Reports from WGs in other organizations

EFLM Working Group on Preanalytical phase

This Working Group was officially established in 2013, with the aim of improving harmonization in the preanalytical phase across European member societies. Barbara Delasalle and Gunn BB Kristensen are EQALM's representatives in this group with the aim to develop a means of improving the coordination and collaboration between the EFLM and EQALM on mutually important issues to improve the quality of laboratory medicine in Europe.

So far there has been one joint project:

EFLM – European Preanalytical Survey
The objective of this survey was to assess the way laboratories in Europe handle preanalytical issues such as detecting and managing hemolysed/lipemic/icteric samples. The survey consists of an electronic questionnaire distributed via EQALM's network to medical laboratories in Europe during October 2017. Forty-six European countries responded to the questionnaire with a total of 1416 responses. However, only 26 countries had more than 10 responses. The ultimate goal with the project is to produce EFLM recommendation on how to detect and manage hemolytic/lipemic/icteric samples to facilitate standardization and harmonization of this important preanalytical issue.

Two coherent papers are submitted for publication (Biochemia Medica):

1. European survey on preanalytical sample handling – Part 1: How do European laboratories monitor the preanalytical phase? On behalf of the European Federation of Clinical Chemistry and Laboratory Medicine (EFLM) Working Group for the Preanalytical Phase (WG-PRE)
2. European survey on preanalytical sample handling – Part 2: Practices of European laboratories on monitoring and processing hemolytic, icteric and lipemic samples. On behalf of the European Federation of Clinical Chemistry and Laboratory Medicine (EFLM) Working Group for the Preanalytical Phase (WG-PRE)

A future joint project is aiming to develop a pilot European Type 2 EQA scheme based on preanalytical case scenarios (i.e. circulation of samples simulating errors).

In addition, the EFLM WG-PRE has had several finalized and ongoing projects:

Finalized projects

- Harmonization of fasting status
- Harmonization of patient and blood tubes identification
- Harmonization of color-coding of blood collection tubes
- Harmonization of the sequence of blood tubes to be followed during blood drawing
- Harmonization of preanalytical quality indicators
- Guidance on local validation of blood collection tubes
- Performance and publication of two European surveys on blood sampling procedures
- 6 webinars for harmonizing preanalytical activities
- Joint EFLM-COLABIOCLI Recommendation for venous blood sampling v1.1, June 2018
- Organization of four international meetings (EFLM Conference on Preanalytical Phase).

Ongoing projects

– Development and validation of an EQA scheme on preanalytical variables
– Release of EFLM phlebotomy guidelines
– Organization of webinars for harmonizing preanalytical activities
– Organization of the 5th EFLM Conference on Preanalytical Phase 2019 in Zagreb, Croatia

EFLM Working Group on Postanalytical phase

The Working Group for the Postanalytical Phase (WG-POST) is a joint working group of the European Federation of Clinical Chemistry and Laboratory Medicine (EFLM) and EQALM.

Background
Clinical knowledge and skills combined with laboratory expertise are needed for optimal interpretation of laboratory results in the setting of the individual patient. Increasing number of studies emphasise the need for improving the clinical utilisation of laboratory tests and that laboratory professionals should play a more prominent in this optimization process. A spectrum of activities has been identified that assist clinicians in translating a certain laboratory result to diagnostic information but all too little is known about how these activities are practiced in laboratories.

Terms of reference

1. To promote the importance of those activities that can improve clinical utilisation of laboratory tests in the postanalytical and post-postanalytical phases including assisted test requesting.
2. To support laboratories in taking an active, prominent role in the above activities when they assist clinicians in finding the appropriate laboratory tests to meet their clinical needs and in translating the laboratory results to diagnostic information.
3. To develop and organise surveys and external quality assurance (EQA) programmes focusing on laboratory and/or clinical aspects of the above activities in European laboratories.
4. To provide a scientific paper and a feedback report summarising the main findings of each survey and updating the recent literature of the investigated practice on each project.

Member on behalf of EQALM
Piet Meijer (ECAT Foundation, Voorschoten, The Netherlands)

Working Group activities

In 2018, there was one meeting of the working group in conjunction with the EFLM strategic conference in Mannheim. In addition, members of the working group activity in specific projects have been frequently in contact by e-mails and telephone calls.

The major focus in 2018 was on a new APTT study in which it was investigate whether methodological diversity has any impact on the APTT mixing test results and also upon the interpretation of the results in European laboratories. Also, the evaluation of interpretative comments given by the laboratory to the physician was evaluated. This study was executed in the first half of 2018. The evaluation of the results and interpretative comments is still ongoing and will be finalised in the first quarter of 2019.

EEE Working Group Proficiency Testing in Accreditation

Membership of EEE WG-PT
Altogether 19 members from European co-operation for Accreditation (EA), Eurachem, Eurolab, EQALM.
International Guests: ILAC, APLAC.

Main activities
Preparation of EEE-PT Documents

- Guidelines for the application of ISO/IEC 17043 for the organisation of proficiency testing for sampling
- Rapid performance evaluation schemes
- Revision of EA-4/18 (Guidance on the level and frequency of proficiency testing participation)
- Revision of Eurachem PT guide (Selection, Use and Interpretation of PT Schemes)

Discussion of Subjects and Documents

- Review of EA-3/04 (Use of proficiency testing as a tool for accreditation in testing)
- ISO/IEC 17043 – the process of revision, sub-contracting within the same entity.
- Update on the revision of ISO/IEC 17025
- Review of EPTIS

Main Results

- Rapid performance evaluation schemes – Are they really proficiency testing?
  At the 44th EEE-WG meeting a paper 'Quick Response Events' was discussed to consider further, at the request of the EA Laboratory Committee, whether rapid performance evaluation schemes could be considered as PTs, whether they could substitute for traditional PTs in the accreditation process and whether they could be accredited to ISO/IEC 17043. On the 46th meeting the WG agreed on an answer in which all agreed that it is recommended that this issue be addressed by ILAC through the revision of ILAC P9.
- A technical network working on the rapid performance scheme and sub-contracting within the same entity.
- Selection, Use and Interpretation of PT Schemes (Eurachem PT Guide) – most of the suggestions of EQALM have been accepted.
- A sub-group was formed with the aim of more efficient work of the revision of EA-4/18, and EQALM jointed into this sub group.

The work and discussions on the other topics (and new ones) are going in the year of 2019.