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The Accreditation of e-Learning Materials by the EACCME

Adopted by the UEMS Council in Copenhagen on 11th October 2008

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 therefore 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 has agreed in principle to 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”, 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 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 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.

9) 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 3) should apply for EACCME accreditation of these Materials.

Educational Objectives and Fulfilment of Learning Needs

10) *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)

11) *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)

12) *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

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

(Essential criterion)

14) *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)

15) *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 hour, with each hour of educational time expected to count as one ECMEC.

(Essential criterion)

16) *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.

(Essential criterion)

17) *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)

18) *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

19) *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)

20) *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.

(Essential criterion)

21) *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).

(Essential criterion)

22) *All content must be free from any commercial or other forms of bias (see appendix 3).*

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.

(Essential criterion)

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

(Essential criterion)

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

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

(Essential criterion)

25) All content should be easy to use.

(Desirable criterion)

Details of the Provider

26) *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)

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

(Essential criterion)

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

Earnings from the sale or marketing of the Material itself will not be considered a conflict of interest.

(Essential criterion)

29) *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)

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) The Material should provide “hot-links” to further relevant information, but these links must not be to commercial sites.

(Desirable criterion)

Quality Assurance by the Provider

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

(Essential criterion)

33) *This quality assurance must involve the confirmation, by at least one authoritative independent assessor, of the validity of the Material. The name(s), qualifications and contact details of this/these assessor(s) must be provided to the EACCME, as must all their comments on the Material.*

(Essential criterion)

34) *There must be a full declaration of potential conflict of interest of the independent assessors involved in quality-assuring the content of the Material.*

Reasonable remuneration for the assessment of the Material will not be considered to be a conflict of interest.

(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.*

(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)

Fees

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

- [to be determined].

Mechanism of Application

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

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

(Essential criterion)

40) 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.

41) In dealing with the application, the EACCME will:

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

Criteria and Decision-Making for Accreditation

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

43) For a positive decision by an individual assessor, all essential criteria, and at least one desirable criterion must be confirmed. The assessor will also be required to confirm whether, according to their use of the Material, the stated learning objectives have been fulfilled.

44) For a positive EACCME decision to accredit the Material both assessors must support the application.

Appeal

45) 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.

46) 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 [to be determined].

47) 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

48) 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.

49) 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.

50) 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.

Edwin Borman
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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.

This quality assurance must involve the confirmation, by at least one authoritative independent assessor, of the validity of the Material. The name(s), qualifications and contact details of this/these assessor(s) must be provided to the EACCME, as must all their comments on the Material.

There must be a full declaration of potential conflict of interest of the independent assessors involved in quality-assuring the content of the Material.

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

Desirable criteria

All content should be easy to use.

The Material should provide "hot-links" to further relevant information, but these links must not be to commercial sites.

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?

Definitions

Appendix 3

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.