

The European Federation of Organisations for Medical Physics
Policy Statement Nr. 6

Recommended guidelines of National Registration Schemes for Medical Physicists

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1. Introduction

When the European Federation of Organisations of Medical Physics (EFOMP) was inaugurated in May 1980, its principal objective was to harmonise and promote the best practice of medical physics in Europe. In pursuing this objective, one of the long term aims of EFOMP is to achieve uniformly high standards of training and performance of medical physicists in the countries of all member organisations. Furthermore EFOMP wishes to see some form of recognition when these standards are achieved.

This has three advantages. First, it demonstrates that patients are receiving the same level of medical physics support, no matter where they are being treated. Second, it greatly facilitates the movement of physicists from one country to another. Finally, EFOMP should be seen as the competent body to decide how the recently established qualification of European Physicist [1] will be applied in the context of medical physics.

Within the European Community, the direct application of the Council Directive on "Mutual Recognition of Higher Education Diplomas" 89/48/EEC [2] has not proved a very successful mechanism for ensuring the freedom of movement and the maintenance of appropriate standards of medical physicists. A major reason for this is that the current level of legalised regulation of the Profession in Europe is low. However, the European Commission is clearly sympathetic to self-regulation by the professions and in response to an enquiry from FEANI (Fédération Européenne d'Associations Nationales d'Ingénieurs) on the Eur Ing qualification replied "The Commission considers that the FEANI scheme is an excellent example of self-regulation by a profession at the European level". (The full text of the question posed by FEANI and the Commission's response is given in Appendix 1).

Therefore this policy statement provides the necessary guidelines that will enable EFOMP to take the lead in establishing a mechanism for the proper recognition of medical physics by means of approved National Registration Schemes.

2. Aims and Objectives

The two principal objectives of a Registration Scheme for medical physicists are:

1. To advance the physical sciences in their application to the prevention, diagnosis and control of illness, disease and disability.
2. To promote standards of qualifications, competence and conduct of scientists practising in this sphere of activity.

With regard to the second objective, it is in the public interest, and especially that of patients, that there should be an authoritative means of identifying those persons who have been recognised as competent to practice the application of physical sciences in healthcare. They should also have accepted a continuing obligation to adhere strictly to a high standard of integrity in performing their duties.

EPOMP does not have the resources to set up and run a single centralised registration scheme. Nor would this accommodate the rather varied local circumstances in the different countries. Therefore member organisations are encouraged to set up their own Registration Schemes. They can be either Statutory or Indicative (i.e. voluntary) but must satisfy general criteria laid down by EFOMP if they are to be recognised by EFOMP.

3. The Recommended Guidelines

The criteria that EFOMP will look at before accepting a national Registration Scheme are:

1. A clear statement of the aims of the scheme.
2. A properly constituted Registration Council. Smaller societies should consider having an EFOMP representative on the Council, at least for the first few years, to ensure harmonisation of standards.
3. A clear statement of criteria of scientific knowledge and practical competencies for inclusion on the Register.
4. Evidence that there is a training programme that is consistent with the EFOMP policy statement on training.
5. A mechanism for identifying specialist areas of registrants.
Fairly broad categories are envisaged - for example, ionising radiations, non-ionising radiations, electronics and physiological measurement, bioengineering.
6. A regular renewal mechanism with a requirement for evidence of continuing activity in relevant areas. This could be introduced in a very limited way in the first instance, but the principle that a 30 year old cannot automatically be kept on the Register for the next 35 years should be recognised.
7. Agreed rules of Professional Conduct.
These would be very open to local interpretation but some typical issues are that a physicist should: always act in the best interests of patients; collaborate with other health care professionals; undertake only those responsibilities that are within his or her competence; respect confidential information obtained in the course of professional practice; avoid behaving in any manner which may be derogatory to the dignity of the profession.
This list is not intended to be comprehensive.
8. Interpretation of Professional Misconduct and procedures for disciplinary action. Agreement in principle to investigate reported cases of professional misconduct, without necessarily providing any detail of the procedure to be adopted, would be acceptable in the first instance.

EFOMP does not wish to be over prescriptive in deciding the nature of Registration Schemes. However, it recognises that some additional guidance may be helpful. Therefore, readers may wish to know that Registration Schemes have already been introduced in some countries; for example - in the UK by the Institute of Physical Sciences in Medicine in collaboration with other organisations working in clinical sciences, by the Dutch Society for Clinical Physics and by the Association of Physical Scientists in Medicine (Ireland). Details of these schemes will be provided by the relevant organisations on request (refs. [3,4,5]).

4. Benefits of a Recognised Registration Scheme

There are benefits of a recognised Registration Scheme for all parties:

1. For patients, as stated previously, the major benefit is the knowledge that support is being provided by a medical physicist whose competence has been fully endorsed.
2. For the medical physicist, freedom of movement is facilitated since EFOMP can confirm that the necessary training and practical experience have been acquired.
3. For the National Medical Physics Organisations, numbers on the register will help in discussions on training requirements and staffing levels in their own countries.
4. For EFOMP, the overall picture will be of value in discussions with the European Commission, IAEA and other International Organisations on harmonisation of standards and on the necessary standards to be achieved. EFOMP will also be in a position to press for formal regulated recognition of the profession, if necessary, in the future.

5. Applications procedure

National Organisations that have formulated Registration Schemes which they believe to be in accordance with the above guidelines are invited to submit details to the EFOMP Registrar of Registration Schemes at the York Office (4 Campleshon Road, York YO2 1PE, UK).

A list of Registration Schemes, that have been recognised by EFOMP will be published from time to time. EFOMP will give the fullest possible support to promoting recognised schemes and to any individual registered on such a scheme.

REFERENCES

[1] Boswell PG. Recognising Fundamentals. *Europhys News* 1994: 25; 46-47.

[2] 89/48 EEC. Council Directive of 21 December 1988 on a general system for the recognition of higher education diplomas awarded on completion of professional education and training of at least three years duration. *Official Journal of the European Communities* 1989: 32; 16-23.

[3] Register of Scientists in Health Care. Published by the Registration Council of Scientists in Health Care in the UK, Registrar Dr SJ Meldrum, 2 Carlton House Terrace, London SW1Y 5AF, 1995.

[4] Registration Council for Physical Scientists in Medicine (Ireland). Registrar, Mr PA Kenny, Dept of Radiology, Mater Misericordiae Hospital, Eccles Street, Dublin 7.

[5] Registration Scheme of the Dutch Society for Clinical Physics. Secretary to the Concilium, Dr RL Kamman, Dept of Radiodiagnosics, Academic Hospital Groningen, Oostersingel 59, P.O. Box 30001, 9700 RB Groningen.

Appendix 1

The following question has been officially asked to the European Commission by a Member of the European Parliament on 29 October 1993:

"Does the Commission feel that the initiative of FEANI, the only one so far among the professions concerned in the general directive, may facilitate the free circulation of professionals in the EEC Countries, and to what extent could the FEANI Title facilitate the recognition of national diplomas among Member States".

The question was given the following answer:

The Commission has followed the work of the FEANI (the European Federation of European Engineering Associations) and in particular, ie creation of the Eur Ing register with great interest over the years. The Commission considers that the FEANI scheme is an excellent example of self-regulation by a profession at European level and it is providing a model for other professional groups in the technical and scientific section, such as chemists and physicists.

The FEANI register recognises and builds upon the diversity of forms of engineering education which exist in the Community and can adapt to any changes which may be decided upon at national level. The procedures for dealing with applications for registration also provide a good example for national and European bodies harnessing their respective expertise.

Although the Eur Ing title cannot itself be considered as a "diploma" within the meaning of Article 1 (a) of Council Directive 89/48/EEC of 21 December 1988 on a general system for the recognition of higher education diplomas, it may nevertheless be of assistance to the competent national authorities when they examine a request for recognition under Article 3 of the Directive. Registration on the FEANI register indicates that, whatever the duration or content of his or her initial training, the engineer has reached a certain level of professional competence, certified by his or her peers both at national and European level. Bearing in mind that Member States are required by the caseload of the

Court to take into consideration when reaching their decision of recognition post-diploma professional experience, the Commission considers that an engineer who has obtained the title Eur Ing should not normally be required to undertake an adaptation period or sit an aptitude test, as provided for in Article 4 of Directive 89/48/EEC.

Appendix 2

Other policy statements issued by EFOMP:

1. The Roles, Responsibilities and Status of the Clinical Medical Physicist
2. Medical Physics Education and Training: The present European level and recommanations for its future development
3. Radiation protection of the patient in Europe: The training of the Medical Physicist as a Qualified Expert in Radiophysics
4. Criteria for the number of physicists in a Medical Physics department
5. Departments of Medical Physics - advantages, organisation and management.

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