

# A Survey of Continuing Professional Development Programs in Biomedical Laboratory Science in Europe

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## Introduction

An EU-funded partnership within EU's *Lifelong Learning Programme (LLP)*, The EucoLABS partnership, has been established between 10 institutions involved in Biomedical Laboratory Scientist (BLS) education and post-graduate training in six countries.

The aims of the partnership is 1) to map existing Continuing Professional Development Programmes (CPD) for BLSs and how they are assessed and evaluated, and 2) to develop an European monitoring system for CPD.

CPD is defined as how members of a profession maintain, improve and broaden their knowledge and skills, and it is part of the general process of life-long learning. Three essential characteristics of CPD are:

- It is **continuous** – starts after the initial attainment of professional qualifications and is constantly sustained throughout a career.
- It is **professional** – the learning activities relate to the practice of a specific profession.
- It involves **development**.

## Materials and methods

The project was funded for a period of two years. A questionnaire on existing CPD-programmes developed by The EucoLABS-network was distributed to national BLS associations and professional bodies throughout Europe in the Spring of 2012.

## Results

The questionnaire was distributed to 24 national BLS-associations and professional bodies, 19 replied. (Response rate 79%).

### Need for national license/authorisation/registration?

Some sort of registration is needed to practice as a BLS in 12 of 19 countries (64%).

In 44% both an academic degree and a license is required. Others require either a secondary or post-secondary diploma, only an academic degree, or a diploma plus a license (Fig. 1).

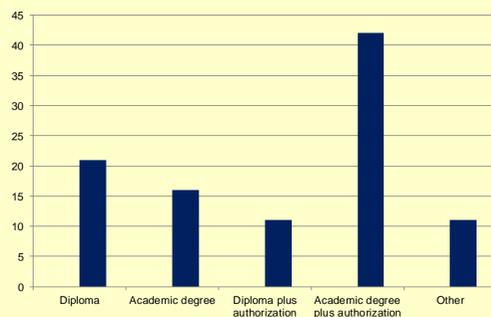


Fig.1. Need for national license, registration or authorization (in %).

### Who issues the license/authorization/registration?

For countries requiring a license this is issued by a national authority or the government in 73% of the countries.

A small number of licenses are issued by either the national association/body, by both a governmental institution and a national association/body, or by "others" (e.g. the university awarding the academic degree) (Fig. 2).

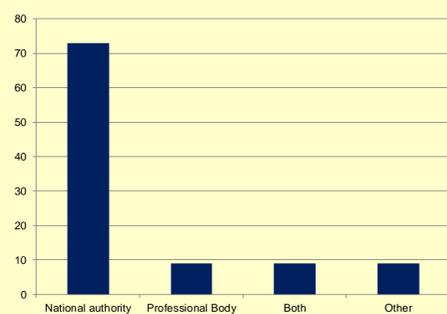


Fig.2. Body issuing national license, authorization or registration (in %).

## What CPD-activities are provided?

Most professional bodies and national associations provide a wide range of post-graduate education and training.

This varies from professional activities to educational activities, lecturing and teaching, publishing, vocational activities, non-accredited scientific activities, theory sessions, and "others", which includes one professional body that does not offer and CPD-activity for their members (Fig. 3).

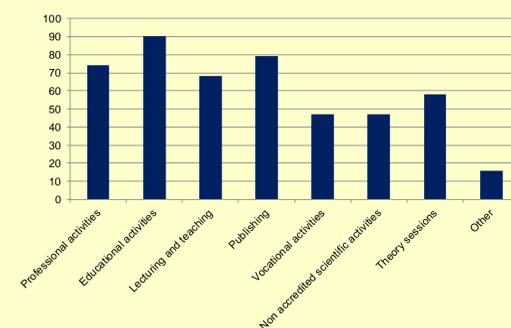


Fig.3. CPD-activities provided by the various national associations or professional bodies (in %).

## Is it necessary to take part in CPD to keep or renew the BLS-license?

In those countries requiring a licence, or similar, in order to practice as a BLS, taking part in a CPD-programme is optional in 56%, recommended in 31%, and mandatory in 13% of the countries.

## Is CPD validated?

The questionnaire included a section on validation, e.g. whether there is any authority approving that a given activity is considered to be CPD or not.

71% of the responders confirmed the existence of this, while 29% stated that there is no such authority in their country.

## Any consequences for employers if CPD requirements are not met?

Not meeting the CPD requirements might have consequences like loss of ISO-certification, problems charging lab-services against health insurance etc.

53% denied such consequences, 12% confirmed them, and 35% answered "possibly".

## Would your association/professional body recommend implementation of an European CPD-monitoring system?

72% confirmed they would implement such a system, 11% might, and 17% replied "don't know". No one said they definitely not would implement it.

## Conclusions

- All national associations state that a well-established CPD-program is important to the development of a BLS's career.
- Most respondents would like to implement an European CPD-monitoring system if this is developed and disseminated.
- Education systems are harmonized in Europe, but CPD is poorly regulated, varying from well organised and mandatory to more or less non-exciting.
- With increasing number of BLSs seeking employment across Europe, common European guidelines for assessing CPD might be beneficial to both employer and employee.

