ECLAM 2015-2019 Strategy

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Introduction

In 2014, ECLAM Council identified the need to develop a strategic plan to provide direction and focus for the next phase of its development. It was recognized that ECLAM remains a small College and that its activities therefore need to be carefully prioritized in order to ensure sustainable growth and development.

This paper provides a short presentation of the methodology used, a synopsis of the current situation and a description of the four main focus areas that have been identified as key strategic objectives for the next five years: (i) Modernisation of the training framework, (ii) Increased access to exam, (iii) Enhanced communications and, (iv) Optimisation of resources. It also presents a high level implementation plan along with key metrics that will be used to measure success.

Background

ECLAM\(^1\) is one of 23 European Colleges of Veterinary Specialisation and was founded in 2000 following an initiative of the European Society of Laboratory Animal Veterinarians. It was awarded full recognition by the European Board of Veterinary Specialisation (EBVS\(^2\)) in 2008. ECLAM counts over 80 Diplomates of which 76 are actively working as European Specialists in Laboratory Animal Medicine in 7 EU countries, Israel as well as the USA.

\(^1\) [http://eslav-eclam.org/](http://eslav-eclam.org/)

\(^2\) [http://www.ebvs.eu/](http://www.ebvs.eu/)
ECLAM strongly believes that research using laboratory animals continues to be a critical enabler of medical and scientific progress with ultimate benefits to humans, animals and the environment. It also recognises the 3Rs principles of Replacement, Reduction and Refinement and is committed to promoting their application through high quality supervised training in Laboratory Animal Medicine. Veterinarians play a key role in ensuring the best possible care, health and welfare of animals and the veterinary profession is highly trusted by the public in this activity. In the context of animal research, veterinarians have been providing advice on animal health and welfare for many years and their role has recently been recognised and formalised in European Directive 2010/63/EU on the protection of animals used for scientific purposes.

The mission of ECLAM is to promote high standards of Laboratory Animal Medicine, to provide leadership for the advancement of veterinary and research practices and thus to benefit laboratory animals. This is achieved through certification of professional competence and through continuing education.

Laboratory Animal Medicine is a branch of veterinary practice that includes the provision of a comprehensive veterinary care programme for all animal species bred or used for experimental purposes. The expertise of laboratory animal veterinarians includes:

- Management of disease, pain and distress
- Consultation and advice on compliance with laws, regulations and standards, including health and safety
- Making a contribution towards implementing the 3Rs thus helping to promote the welfare and quality of life of research animals
- Advising on the preparation of animal use protocols and playing a pivotal role in their scientific and ethical review
- Provision of research support, information and services (e.g. advising on comparative and normative biology and nomenclature; providing advice on and/or

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support with animal research techniques, pre- and post-operative care, critical care, anaesthesia and analgesia, and euthanasia)

- Development and management of animal husbandry programmes, including genetic and microbiological standardisation procedures, control of the environment, and breeding and selection of animals for research
- Animal research facility design and operations including training of staff

**Methodology**

In order to better understand the current state of the organisation, its environment, the challenges it is facing and the areas of opportunities available, feedback and insights were sought from members of both ECLAM and ESLAV through a survey that was completed in May 2014 by 94 members. Additional information was canvassed from ECLAM Council and Committee members, ECLAM trainees and external stakeholders through discussions and a SWOT analysis (identification of strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats) was conducted. The data collected was reviewed and prioritised at an ECLAM Council strategic planning meeting that took place in Barcelona on 30 May 2014.

**Current situation**

- **ECLAM growth is too low to ensure its sustainability**
- ECLAM geographical distribution is inconsistent
- Return on investment for gaining an ECLAM Diploma is not clearly understood or openly demonstrated
- Dip. ECLAM status is not widely recognised as ‘career progression’
- Current legislation does not advocate Dip. ECLAM status
- Other training opportunities in Laboratory Animal Medicine are emerging
- Stakeholders/sponsors perceptions and expectations are not clearly understood
- Stakeholder population is vast with multiple players
- Communication strategy is not clearly defined
- Credentials assessment appears to be complex
- High volume of *de-facto* compared to non-*de-facto* ECLAM Diplomates
- Current training infrastructure and delivery mechanisms do not support agile learning
- Publication requirements are stringent
- Not maximising on Dip. ECLAM community to build and sustain advocacy
- Resources do not suitably serve the outreach we require

**Vision**

ECLAM will be the leading and widely respected veterinary voice of laboratory animals across Europe, and will be recognised for its leadership in the advancement of Laboratory Animal Medicine and for providing excellent services that balance animal welfare and scientific progress responsibly.

**Strategic objectives**

In order to become a sustainable organisation and to be a recognised leader across Europe, ECLAM will need to increase its critical mass of European Specialists in Laboratory Animal Medicine by 15% by 2019 (3% growth per year) and to widen its presence across European countries where animal research is a predominant activity. This will be achieved through 4 main strategic objectives:

- Modernise the training framework
- Increase access to the exam
- Enhance communications
- Optimise resources

1. **Modernise the training framework**

It will be critical for ECLAM to transform its training framework to make it more flexible, more accessible and more aligned with current and future leadership needs in Laboratory Animal Medicine.
A new ECLAM didactic and practical training framework will be developed on the basis of a combination of modules, pitched at the European Qualification Framework level 8\(^5\) and aligned with the EBVS requirements for European Veterinary Specialist training programmes. A key component of this framework will be the recognition of a mid-tier level of expertise.

To achieve this, ECLAM will continue to work with ESLAV and EVERI to develop VETCEE\(^6\) standards in Laboratory Animal Medicine and Science (LAMS). Overall, this will provide a step-wise approach to training in Laboratory Animal Medicine, will make training plans more flexible, and will facilitate transfer of knowledge, skills and competencies across Europe. This approach will also provide veterinarians whose circumstances are not compatible with a standard residency programme with a more transparent and efficient way to gain ECLAM credentials through the Alternative Training route. It will also facilitate the adoption of e-learning methods in training opportunities and therefore promote the development of collaborative pan-European training programmes.

The ECLAM curriculum is currently based on the FELASA D guidelines\(^7\) and was developed 15 years ago. Since then, the role of European Specialists in Laboratory Animal Medicine, and the methodology to describe a training programme, have both evolved. ECLAM training standards and publication requirements will therefore be reviewed and updated to reflect current and future needs, and the quality assurance programme will be strengthened.

Training supervision is, and will remain, a key element of the quality assurance of ECLAM training programme. However, recognising the need to develop residency programmes in countries where there are currently no ECLAM Diplomates, ECLAM will promote the use of National Specialists and veterinary experts in laboratory animal medicine at similar level in training programmes under conditions defined by EBVS.

\(^{5}\) [https://ec.europa.eu/ploteus/content/descriptors-page](https://ec.europa.eu/ploteus/content/descriptors-page)


Finally, in order to provide greater and wider practical and supervised training opportunities to trainees on less frequently encountered species and to increase the number of research opportunities, ECLAM will work with its membership and encourage in every possible way a process for **short term placements of potential candidates for the exam with colleagues with relevant expertise**.

### 2. Increase access to the exam

The poor application rate for credentials to gain access to the exam is a significant limiting factor for ECLAM’s growth. This is a complex issue with root causes in the training framework (see requirements on publications above), the way ECLAM demonstrates its value, and the level of support ECLAM offers to trainees in preparation for the exam. ECLAM will increase support by developing a **resource package** consisting of a recommended reading list and a sample set of exam questions. In addition, a **mentorship programme** will be developed and offered to ECLAM trainees alongside the supervisors’ role. The mentorship programme will be specifically aimed at providing guidance for career development, network support and feedback, and at helping trainees develop leadership skills from the start of their training period through the early stages of their career. Finally, in the longer term, a **Summer School** may be considered (e.g. workshops at annual Congress or meetings) to help both trainees and Diplomates increase and continually develop their knowledge.

### 3. Enhance communications

To fulfill its mission and achieve its vision, ECLAM will need to widen and raise awareness about the organisation, explain how to become an ECLAM Diplomate, establish links with key communication partners and, importantly, demonstrate the value of European Specialists in Laboratory Animal Medicine to its external stakeholders. Because of the importance of this strategic pillar and the need for consistency, a **Communications Committee** reporting to ECLAM Council will be formed with specific responsibilities to develop, implement and regularly review a communications plan.
4. Optimise resources

Modernising the options for access to training programmes, facilitating access to the exam and enhancing communications will require a significant amount of resources, including financial as well as individual contributions from the membership.

Financial sustainability will be critical for the delivery of the strategic plan and also for the long term development of ECLAM. The funding strategy will include the identification of grants and the development of a process to attract and manage sponsorships in the short and medium term. In the longer term, the establishment of an ECLAM Foundation may provide additional means for ECLAM to further the advancement of Laboratory Animal Medicine.

As a College, ECLAM’s existence, growth and development would not have happened without the exceptional participation of dedicated members. In order to ensure the sustainability of ECLAM, and to take it to its next chapter, the College will need and rely on the significant engagement from its members. In the spirit of recognition of the work, ECLAM will develop an Excellence Award for major contributions of individuals to the College.

Deliverables and Metrics

1. Overall Metric

The primary metric for the delivery of the strategy will be the increase in the number of European Specialists in Laboratory Animal Medicine. Based on an average of 1.5-2 Diplomates retiring per year between 2015 and 2019, ECLAM will need to add 20 new Diplomates over those 5 years. The table below shows the annual metrics needed to achieve this goal.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number of residents, exam candidates &amp; new Diplomates needed to achieve goal</th>
<th>2015</th>
<th>2016</th>
<th>2017</th>
<th>2018</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>New ECLAM Diplomates</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Candidates taking the exam</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trainees in first year residency</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Values based on 75% of candidates passing the exam
Values based on 75% of trainees completing their training and taking the exam (this figure is an estimate. It needs to be ascertained based on current stats)
2. 2015-2017 Deliverables

**Modernise Training Framework**
- VETCEE standards
- Publication requirements & non-EBVS Dips
- ECLAM Modular framework
- E-Learning / Pan European training
- Short term placements

**Increase Access to the Exam**
- Reading list
- Question samples
- Mentorship Programme
- Summer School

**Enhance Communications**
- Statement, report & publications
- Comm plan
- Online Credential review process
- Website information streamlined

**Optimise Resources**
- Grant opportunity Info
- Sponsorship process
- Reward Excellence