

1st International Workshop on European Registered Toxicologist

Group 1 - Authorities

(By Pierre Nord, Swedish Chemicals Agency)

1. *What are the strengths with the current ERT system in general and in perspective of authorities?*

Managers that wish to hire a Toxicologist where they themselves are not in the field can trust the ERT certification for use as a screening tool although it doesn't show performance level.

ERT certification can encourage/motivate an employer to send employees to courses with the thought of keeping track of improvement and professional development.

Motivates the toxicologist for continued self-development and stay up to date by re-registration requirements.

Toxicology is a broad term many people call themselves Toxicologist; maybe the ERT certification can guarantee that the candidates have the core knowledge about toxicology.

2. *What are the negative aspects of the current ERT system in general and in perspective of authorities?*

There seems to be a lack of confidence among some stakeholders in the harmonization of the system between countries.

Possibly subject to bias due to national registration processes as there are differences in requirements in between countries some being very stringent while some others are not.

The requirement of two "eminent Toxicologists" which should closely know the candidate and further recommend for certification personally and the fact that there could be some differences between countries in the National registration process could be subject to conflict of interest.

It doesn't guarantee better performance capacity of the individual over the other non-ERT toxicologist.

How can an employer be certain that one ET candidate has the same background skills as the next one, especially between countries?

3. *What are the opportunities if ERT is spread throughout Europe and further developed in general and in perspective of authorities?*

Harmonies even further between countries, perhaps create a step between National registration process and EUROTOX that will at some level evaluate candidates up for registration from countries.

Take away the mandatory requirement of involving the two eminent Toxicologists (ERT certified) which should know the candidate also should evaluate the candidate. This requirement can be

unfair and in extreme cases might all depend on who you know to get certified, it also can open a loop hole for conflict of interest.

4. *What are the threats/challenges if ERT is spread throughout Europe and further developed in general and in perspective of authorities?*

Non ERT toxicologist will be competing in the European market with ERT certified ones

There is a risk of Inflation in the concept if quality control on the candidates fails and too many get certified.

For example in Sweden many craftsmen like plumber etc. are certified but that doesn't guarantees that the job you employ them for is well performed.

5. *What questions/issues need to be solved in the short/longer term perspective in order to introduce ERT in new countries and further develop ERT, in perspective of authorities?*

A National registration board ought to be represented by as many stakeholders in the field as possible:

Authorities, academia, Industry etc...

Make sure that ERT courses mandatory for renewal of registration are being held entertaining all areas of toxicology and available for disposal to ERT registered toxicologist.

Group 2 – Private sector

(by Marie Haag Grönlund, Astrazeneca):

1. *Did you have any personal experience of ERT before this workshop?*

None of the participants had any personal experience and no one is an ERT (all are from Sweden where no ERT system is in place). Helen and Marie have been involved in ERT discussions as members of the SFT board and Eurotox ERT sub- committee.

2. *What are the strengths with the current ERT system?*

Helps international job applications, since it is an accepted and well-known concept in some European countries.

Some employers have experienced that job applicants claim that they have competences that they don't actually have. ERT would be an objective quality measure to avoid recruitment based on wrong assumptions.

The demands for renewal of the ERT status requires toxicologists to continuously develop their skills, and is a motivation for both the individual and their manager to ensure training and development is supported and funded.

Toxicologists trained on the job, without a formal educational background, could use the ERT status as a proof that they have the appropriate competence.

The objective quality stamp is a way to identify and avoid non-serious, non-trained “toxicology” support and recruitment.

Likely to improve the status of the national Toxicology organization.

3. What are the negative aspects of the current ERT system.

It is important that criteria are well harmonized between countries and that the quality is high and reliable wherever an ERT is approved. A transparent quality assurance system and process needs to be put in place.

Potentially difficult to engage competent experts to evaluate application, potentially time-consuming.

4. What questions/issues need to be resolved in the short/longer term perspective in order to introduce ERT in new countries and further develop ERT

For the renewal of the ERT status, we could see potential problems in agreeing what would be acceptable in terms of further training. Would additional work experience be accepted? Individual development by reading books /articles? Training on the job? We recognized the challenge to evaluate and judge the appropriate additional training.

Quality assurance and consistency of requirements between countries.

Understand how certification of risk assessors link to ERT. Would risk assessment be one branch on the ERT tree?

We recognized that the approval committee may (at least initially) need to spend much time and resource to evaluate new applications. One possible way to reduce the workload is to collaborate with other countries, for example the Nordic countries could possibly work together to make the process more effective.

Marketing of the ERT concept is important for acceptance and this work should not be underestimated, in particular for countries where the concept is new or about to be introduced. The national toxicology organization (eg SFT) needs to create engagement, inform about the advantages of the concept, discuss in meetings, send out guidelines etc.

Employers need to know what this is and need to be convinced to require ERT in their job adverts.

Group 3 – education

(By Johanna Zilliacus, Institute of Environmental Medicine)

The group compared their experience from their home countries (Austria, Denmark, Italy, Sweden, Switzerland). Austria, Italy, Switzerland have ERT, and Denmark and Sweden are looking into the possibility to establish ERT. Austria and Switzerland have programmes at Master level in toxicology that have been designed to match the ERT requirements. Italy has currently no Master programme in toxicology but will probably start a programme again. Sweden has a Master programme in toxicology that need to be checked how well it matches the ERT requirements.

Denmark has no Master programme in toxicology but a number of individual courses that need to be matched to the ERT criteria. Denmark is interested in starting a Master programme in the future, possibly in collaboration with other countries.

The group discussed that it is important to define the learning outcomes and content for the ERT courses listed in the ERT guidelines. This will help both current and future course providers to match their education to the ERT requirements. This will be the topic for the second ERT workshop planned for 2013.

It was recognised that the ERT courses should be harmonised as far as possible since this will allow participants to choose courses from different course providers.

It was agreed that the education in English is preferable, since this is the working language in toxicology and it will be easier for participants to take courses in other countries.

The group discussed that countries and course providers should collaborate and organise joint courses and training programmes. It is not feasible that every country can provide all ERT courses.

Group 4 - management of a national ERT system

(By Charles Bodar, RIVM)

We defined ERT management in our discussions as the management of a national registration system under the umbrella of ERT. The main focus was on management issues when setting up a system from scratch.

A practical way forward is 'copy and paste' the management system from another 'experienced' country. Simply take over the main structure and investigate if changes/deviations would be necessary because of specific issues in a country.

If there are questions about the critical mass of candidates for registration (small country) or too large administrative efforts to be expected, then it may be optional to set up a system jointly with some other starting countries. Alternatively, cooperation could be found in joining an already experienced country.

Some background data were exchanged about the number of candidates to be expected per year, the number of days members of the registration committee actually spend on their activities (3-4 days per annum) and how the administrative work can be most efficiently be executed. The importance of a solid and continuous administration registration archive was emphasised. In NL the main part of the registration fee (125 Euro) goes to the salaries of such an administrator (part-time job, 2 hours per week). Members of the committee are volunteers.

An interesting survey was conducted in Portugal about the needs, etc. of a national system. This could be done in other 'virgin' countries as well. On the other hand, one may speculate if there would be plausible reasons why there would be less interest in registration in one country compared to the other. If there is a good national structure people will find their way in the registration process, and will start seeing the benefits.

Besides a proper management system, it may be even more crucial to stimulate toxicology departments of national universities to promote the registration process for themselves, their staff, PhD students, etc. Get as much professors in toxicology on board, but do not wait until the last one supports your system. Let us hope that he or she will be convinced at a later stage.

Finally, we spend time on some other initial hurdles to be taken. Which toxicologists should be registered at $t=0$? The message was to be both pragmatic and transparent. Don't expect from an established professor in immunotoxicology that (s)he has to follow a one week course on ecotoxicology before registering. Registration criteria for the initial 'batch' are accepted to be different from those at a later stage. Bring together a registration committee of national people that are well-recognised as being toxicologists. They should guide the further process. This all should be communicated openly and with clear deadlines, etc. Don't forget: any system does need mass to get the momentum!