

External Quality Control: a new decade

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The ECAT Foundation started in 1992 with the organisation of an external quality assessment EQA programme for thrombophilia markers. Since that time not only has the programme expanded to almost all haemostatic parameters but also the number of participants has increased significantly. Today more than 1000 laboratories worldwide participate at least in one of the modules of the ECAT EQA programme.

What has not been changed since the beginning is the scope for being an educational EQA programme assessing the analytical laboratory performance by inter-laboratory comparison.

This means that the ECAT programme focuses on quality assessment of the analytical phase.

However, the diagnostic services provided by medical laboratories also cover the pre- and post-analytical phase. Therefore there is a challenge for EQA providers to include also the pre- and post-analytical phase in their services. These new areas need to be explored in the near future. Here also new tools need to be developed and introduced such as electronic surveys, case-based EQA etc. The ECAT is working on this together with some of their partner organisations (NASCOLA, INSTAND).

The new decade opens new perspectives in the field of external quality assessment in laboratory medicine.