



# The Royal College of Pathologists

*Pathology: the science behind the cure*

## **Guidelines for the appointment of career grade locum pathologists (2<sup>nd</sup> edition)**

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# Guidelines for the appointment of career grade locum pathologists

## (2<sup>nd</sup> edition)

A doctor in *locum tenens* stands in for an absent doctor, or temporarily covers a vacancy in an established post. Experience has shown that the appointment of a locum in any pathology specialty (histopathology, haematology, medical microbiology, chemical pathology and immunology) may more commonly cause concerns about substandard performance and be associated with higher error rates than would normally be expected. The workforce crisis currently affecting all pathology specialties means that locums are frequently employed in the NHS.

Locums come from a variety of sources:

- specialist registrars (SpRs) in UK training schemes who have been awarded a Certificate of Completion of Specialist Training (CCST) or Certificate of Completion of Training (CCT)
- consultants already in substantive posts doing locum work in their own time
- recently retired consultants
- other locums, including those from overseas.

In 1997, all Health Authorities and Trusts in England and Wales were sent a code of practice for the employment of locum doctors.<sup>1</sup> This states that employers should be satisfied with a locum doctor's credentials before offering employment. This guidance has been reiterated in recent advice, which reminds those employing locum doctors to check that such doctors are not subject to proceedings about their fitness to practise or criminal investigation.<sup>2</sup> It is now compulsory for NHS employers to take up clinical references, but this is not always adhered to. Despite the production of detailed guidelines, it appears difficult for employers to follow them for a variety of reasons, especially in pathology specialties where the need for locums is pressing and time is often short.

In order to ensure the safety and welfare of patients, the Professional Standards Unit has drawn up guidelines and recommendations that support both the *Code of practice in HCHS (Hospital Community Health Services) locum doctor appointment and employment*,<sup>1</sup> *Assuring the quality of medical practice*<sup>2</sup> and *The National Health Service (Appointment of Consultants) Regulations. Good Practice Guidance*.<sup>3</sup>

- 1) The Royal College of Pathologists recommends adherence to this code of practice at all times.**
- 2) The Royal College of Pathologists recommends that employing organisations provide all locums with adequate facilities and equipment,<sup>4</sup> and that individual workloads should not exceed that recommended by the College in *Medical and Scientific Staffing of National Health Service Pathology Departments*<sup>5</sup> and other specialty-specific guidance issued or approved by the College.<sup>6, 7, 8</sup>**
- 3) Pathology services should check with employer personnel departments that all necessary information and documentation (listed below) has been sought and checked:**
  - identity (preferably with a photograph, such as a passport)
  - General Medical Council (GMC) registration
  - qualifications
  - appropriate arrangements for medical defence cover
  - previous and current health

- criminal convictions or pending proceedings on fitness to practise
- previous relevant experience including current *curriculum vitae* and career history
- details of previous employment
- references, preferably structured according to headings in *Good Medical Practice*, should normally be obtained, with at least one from the most recent employer.

**4) The College recommends that all career grade locum pathologists should:**

- have an appropriate induction to the pathology service
- have a person specification, job description and job plan, including specified areas of practice, and an annual appraisal
- be able to provide evidence of satisfactory participation in the Continuing Professional Development (CPD) scheme of The Royal College of Pathologists, or other Royal College if appropriate
- participate in multidisciplinary team meetings with clinical colleagues as specified in the job plan
- have access to and funding for CPD activities if covering duties for more than two weeks
- be included in clinical audit and performance monitoring programmes if covering duties for more than two weeks
- complete a post-placement assessment form.<sup>4</sup>

**Consultant locums should also:**

- be registered as a specialist with the GMC in an appropriate specialty
- be adequately experienced to undertake unsupervised clinical practice, i.e. have held a substantive NHS consultant post or equivalent honorary post in a relevant specialty for at least one year, have been awarded a CCST/CCT or have had equivalent experience overseas.

**Associate specialist locums should also:**

- be sufficiently experienced (ten years' medical work since obtaining primary qualification)
- have full, limited or temporary registration with the GMC
- have spent four years in registrar/SpR/staff grade appointment, two years of which must be in the relevant specialty.<sup>9</sup>

**Staff grade locums should also:**

- have full registration with the GMC
- have completed three years' full-time regular hospital service in the senior house officer (SHO) or higher grade (including adequate experience in a relevant specialty) or have relevant equivalent experience that may include longer periods of part-time service.<sup>10</sup>

**5) Consultants who have recently retired and intend to do locum work will be subject to GMC revalidation procedures and should therefore maintain participation in an appropriate CPD scheme.**

**6) Specialist registrars (SpRs) holding a trainee employment contract and who have been awarded a CCST/CCT may apply and be considered for a locum consultant appointment in accordance with the recommendations detailed in point 3, above. SpRs who do not have a CCST/CCT are not eligible to apply for nor may undertake a locum consultant post. Please refer to JCHPT Handbook for further information on employing SpRs in 'acting up' posts.<sup>11</sup>**

## References

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