



The Royal College of Pathologists

The Conversion Fellowship Scheme: guidance for pathologists and NHS Trusts in England

1 BACKGROUND

The conversion fellowship is an intensive, focussed, sub-specialty conversion programme in paediatric pathology or neuropathology, not exceeding one year. It is intended to enable doctors on the specialist register in histopathology, who are probably already NHS consultants, to become appointable as consultant paediatric pathologists or neuropathologists after satisfactory completion of the sub-specialty conversion programme. Because consultant vacancies are often slanted towards particular aspects of a specialty or sub-specialty (e.g. perinatal pathology, paediatric surgical pathology), the conversion programme will be configured individually for each post.

The Department of Health (England) is funding five conversion fellowships in 2004–2005 and nine in 2005–2006. The funding, amounting to a full-time consultant's salary at the appropriate scale point for a period of one year, will be provided to NHS Trusts seeking to fill consultant vacancies in paediatric pathology or in neuropathology in 2004–2005. In 2005–2006, the scheme may be broadened to include other pathology sub-specialties.

The Royal College of Pathologists will oversee and evaluate the conversion fellowship programme in paediatric pathology and neuropathology. The Department of Health will allocate and distribute funding.

2 THE CONVERSION PROGRAMME

The programme and assessment has been developed by the College leads in paediatric pathology and neuropathology. It is consistent with the sub-specialty training programme for trainee doctors, which is based on a matrix of competencies in the form of knowledge, skills and attitudes.

The satisfactory completion of the conversion programme does not lead to either a sub-specialty entry on the Specialist Register or a sub-specialty qualification awarded by The Royal College of Pathologists. However, the College will confirm satisfactory completion of the conversion programme.

Normally, it is expected that the conversion fellowship programme will take place full-time over one year. If part-time opportunities are offered, an application for approval should be made to the College's Postgraduate Education Department.

2.1 Education programme

The programme for paediatric pathology has been approved by the Specialty Advisory Committee on Paediatric Pathology (Appendix 1, available shortly).

The programme for neuropathology is currently being drafted (Appendix 2, available shortly).

2.2 Delivery

Details of the individual conversion programme must be agreed by the Trust and by The Royal College of Pathologists before appointment.

The Trust will be expected to arrange the place of conversion training, which may involve more than one centre, after seeking advice from the College.

Ideally, the conversion programme should be delivered in a College accredited training centre or centres in the relevant sub-specialty. Where this is not the case, a Trust wishing to appoint under the conversion fellowship scheme must submit an educational job description (in the College format) to the Postgraduate Education Department for a one-year approval.

Any training centre involved in a conversion programme must be capable of providing the requisite degree of supervision and guidance without compromising the educational experience of any senior house officers, specialist registrars or the diagnostic service.

The location of the conversion programme and educational opportunities offered should, where possible, be compatible with the domestic and professional needs of the individual.

The converting pathologist must have a named College educational supervisor. The supervisor will be responsible for the converting pathologist's continuous assessment, conducting regular appraisals and for undertaking the 12-month review, which will determine the outcome of the conversion programme.

2.3 Assessment of progress

Throughout the conversion programme, the pathologist's progress will be assessed by three-monthly assessments with the educational supervisor.

At the beginning of the conversion programme an educational plan will be drawn up.

Progress will be reviewed against this plan at each assessment.

The converting pathologist will be required to keep a log book to provide evidence of the acquisition of the knowledge, skills and attitudes described in the conversion programme. This will also be reviewed at each assessment.

The final review at the 12-month point should be conducted like a Record of In-service Training Assessment (RITA) and will consider the evidence for the whole year.

Assessment of progress through the conversion fellowship programme is separate from and independent of the consultant's annual appraisal.

3 COMPLETION OF CONVERSION PROGRAMME

Upon completion of the conversion programme, the consultant's progress will be reviewed by the educational supervisor. It will indicate one of two outcomes: satisfactory completion or failure to progress. It will result in both parties signing an outcome sheet, which is sent to both the employer and the College. Subject to satisfactory completion of the conversion fellowship, the College will confirm that the consultant has acquired the agreed competencies.

3.1 Satisfactory completion

Upon satisfactory completion of the conversion programme, the Trust should extend the pathologist's contract. The pathologist may now commence work as outlined in the job description for the consultant post to which they were appointed.

The College recommends that the satisfactory completion of the one-year conversion fellowship programme be followed with a further year of continuing professional development (CPD) to achieve objectives identified at the end of the conversion fellowship, as determined at assessment with the educational supervisor. The employing Trust must support such CPD activity.

The College does not endorse single-handed practice and the College would not expect a consultant to work single-handedly in the sub-specialty (paediatric pathology or neuropathology) after satisfactorily completing a one-year conversion fellowship.

3.2 Failure to progress

If the post-holder does not satisfactorily complete the conversion programme, the Trust may not wish to extend the pathologist's contract after the one-year period. The three-monthly appraisals are designed to identify and address any potential problems before the end of the conversion programme. The provision of further training after the one-year conversion programme is at the discretion of the employing Trust.

In the event of ill health, maternity leave or other extenuating circumstances, the necessary arrangements should be made by the Trust to allow the pathologist to continue with the programme at a later date.

If a histopathologist appointed to a conversion fellowship post decides not to continue the conversion programme, the Trust must notify the Department of Health and the College immediately.

4 PROCESS FOR APPOINTMENT TO A CONSULTANT PAEDIATRIC PATHOLOGY OR NEUROPATHOLOGY POST THROUGH THE CONVERSION FELLOWSHIP SCHEME

NHS Trusts wishing to offer the option of a conversion fellowship when advertising a consultant vacancy should:

- contact the Department of Health to confirm that the necessary funding is available and is then set aside for their use
- contact Stella Macaskill, Head of Educational and Professional Standards at The Royal College of Pathologists, to confirm that a conversion fellowship programme can be configured.

It is recommended that preliminary enquires should be made by the Trust to The Royal College of Pathologists at least three months before advertisement.

4.1 Job description

The job description must be based on the College template and checklist and be approved by The Royal College of Pathologists. Please contact Reshma Patel, the College's Medical Workforce Coordinator, to organise central approval. Please also refer to the Workforce section of the College website (www.rcpath.org) for further information.

Job descriptions for posts offered with the option of a conversion fellowship must contain an appendix outlining the proposed conversion programme.

4.2 The advertisement

Consultant appointment regulations state that the NHS Trust must affirm both in the advertisement and job description that the post is suitable for *“existing [paediatric pathologists or neuropathologists] or for suitably qualified consultants in histopathology who can demonstrate the potential to fulfil this role following a conversion programme”*.

4.3 The recruitment and appointment procedure

Applicants must be selected and interviewed under normal consultant appointment procedures. All appointments will require an advisory appointment committee (AAC). Relevant guidelines can be found on the Workforce section of the College website (www.rcpath.org).

The recruitment procedure may identify a candidate whose training and experience is already sufficient for the post, in which case this candidate must be short-listed for interview.

Where no candidate is identified whose training and competence in the sub-specialty is already sufficient, the Trust may wish to short-list applications from suitably qualified consultant histopathologists who are willing and able to pursue a conversion fellowship programme.

When a candidate for conversion fellowship is appointed to a consultant vacancy, subject to eventual satisfactory completion of the conversion fellowship, the NHS Trust must offer them a consultant's contract of employment.

The College recommends that the appointment be made on a consultant contract with a 364-day probationary period. Satisfactory completion of the conversion programme will result in the confirmation of the post.

Upon appointment to a conversion fellowship, the NHS Trust must:

- inform the College that an appointment under the conversion fellowship programme has been made so that the conversion programme for appointee can be finalised
- inform the Department of Health that the appointment has been made so that the funding can be released.

4.4 Redeployment of an existing consultant

An NHS Trust may also apply for conversion fellowship funding if it wishes to redeploy a consultant histopathologist to take up consultant responsibilities in paediatric pathology or in neuropathology. The individual must be agreeable to the redeployment.

5 MONITORING AND EVALUATION OF THE SCHEME

The Professional Standards Unit and the Postgraduate Education Department of The Royal College of Pathologists will monitor and evaluate the scheme to ensure that it fulfils its objectives, to disseminate lessons learnt from the fellowship programme and to identify potential improvements.

6 CONTACT DETAILS

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