



The Royal College of Pathologists

Pathology: the science behind the cure

RCPATH – Clinical Scientist response to HEE’s Strategic Framework Call for Evidence 2021

This response to be read in conjunction with the ACB response.

The Higher Specialist Scientific Training (HSST) programme is a five-year work-based programme supported by an underpinning part-time doctoral level programme. In Life Science specialisms and pathology, HSSTs are required to gain Fellowship of the Royal College of Pathologists by undertaking their specialist RCPATH examinations. Gaining FRCPath is essential, alongside the research, leadership and high-level clinical competence requirements in order to complete the programme.

Numbers of HSST trainees have steadily increased since its establishment in 2014. Many of the initial cohorts of trainees have now completed their training programme and have become Consultant Clinical Scientists, Clinical Leads and Heads of Departments, providing leadership and direction across a range of pathology specialisms

It is possible for individuals to undertake the FRCPath exams independently and achieve Fellowship of the RCPATH and Consultant Clinical Scientist status outside of the HSST programme. However, it is difficult to identify the numbers of these individuals until they register to take the exams with the College. In addition, those outside of the HSST programme are often self-funded with limited or no protected time for training. Therefore, it is unlikely that large numbers of Consultant Clinical Scientists will continue to enter the workforce via this alternative route.

As the ACB response, which includes workforce data, demonstrates, there are significant gaps between the workforce need at Consultant Clinical Scientist level and the current numbers of trainees in the system. As the HSST is a 5-year programme it is important to increase numbers and to invest in new trainees now in order to fill future gaps.