



Research Committee Minutes

A meeting of the Research Committee was held on Wednesday 29 January 2025
at 11:00m- 13:00pm via MS Teams

Professor Sarah Coupland
Registrar

- Present:** Prof Keith Hunter, Chair
Prof Roberto La Ragione, Veterinary Pathology SAC representative
Dr Owen Driskell, Lead of Laboratory Medicine, NIHR Clinical Research Network
Dr Marnix Jansen, Chair of Pathological Society Research Subcommittee
Dr Wiaam Al-Hasani, Trainee representative
Dr Noha Elsakka, RCPATH Vice President of Learning (*attended on behalf of Dr Bernie Croal*)
- In attendance:** Ms Joanne Brinklow, RCPATH Director of Learning and International
Shelaine Kissoon, Governance & Committee Services Officer (*minutes*)
- Apologies:** Dr Bernie Croal, RCPATH President
- Absent** Prof Marta Cohen, RCPATH Vice President of Learning

Rea.01/25 1. **Welcome, declarations of conflict of interests, and apologies for absence**

- 1.1 The Chair welcomed all members to the meeting; introductions took place, and the following had been noted:

New members on the Committee:

Dr Marnix Jansen, Chair of the Pathological Society Research Committee
Dr Wiaam Al-Hasani, RCPATH Trainee representative

- 1.2 Apologies for absence were received and noted above.
- 1.3 There were no declarations of conflict of interests.

Rea.2/25 2. **Minutes of the previous meeting**

- 2.1 The minutes of the meeting held on 17 September 2024 were reviewed and approved as a correct record.
- 2.2 There were no matters arising not already covered on the agenda.



The action log was reviewed, and the following updates were noted:

Rea.3/23 Fellowship by Published Works

Ms Brinklow to provide a list of current Fellows to include their specialty; thereafter the Chair to speak to the College Events Team about contacting these individuals about getting involved in College activities. **Action remains in progress**

Rea.21//24 Trainee Research Medal Awards

- a) It was noted that the applications for the 2024 Trainees' Research Medals Awards were reviewed, and a further update is covered under agenda item 3.
- b) The Chair informed that the guidance criteria for the Trainee Research Medal Awards would be updated once the current round of applications is complete. **Action remains in progress**

Rea.22/24 Research Fellowship Start-up Grant

It was noted that the guidance criteria for the Research Fellowship Startup Grant would be updated, and the latest version will be published on the College website when the next round for applications are advertised. A further update is covered under agenda item 5. **Action remains in progress**

Rea.26/24 Webinar on 'how to do research'

The Chair informed that no progress had been made in relation to organising a webinar and he would revisit the matter in due course. **Action remains in progress**

Rea.3/25 3. Trainee Research Medal Awards 2024

The Chair provided an update on the status of the 2024 Trainee Research Medal Awards and advised that following the deadline, 13 applications were received. All applications were reviewed and scored/ranked by the Chair, Prof Cohen and Prof La Ragione. Following the review, the three applicants listed below were selected and recommended for an award.

The Research Committee agreed with the recommendation to award the following trainees the 2024 Trainees' Research Medal Award, subject to ratification by College Council:

Name	Specialty	Paper	Award
Dr Yisu Gu (Ranked #1)	Clinical Haematology	Immune micro niches shape intestinal Treg function – <i>Nature</i> 2024	Gold
Dr Mehreen Datto (Ranked #2)	Infectious Diseases & Microbiology	Safety and efficacy of malaria vaccine candidate R21/Matrix-M in African children: a multicentre, double-blind, randomised, phase 3 trial – <i>Lancet</i> 2024	Silver
Dr Jordan Skittrall (Ranked #3)	Medical Virology (and Infectious Diseases)	Locations and structures of influenza A virus packaging- associated signals and other functional elements via an in- silico pipeline for predicting constrained features in RNA viruses - <i>PLOS COMPUTATIONAL BIOLOGY</i> - 22 April 2024	Silver

The Chair stated that the quality of papers received from all applicants were of an exceptional standard and ranged from various subspecialties within pathology; and he commended all applicants for the high quality of papers that were submitted. Members of the Research Committee discussed the publicity of the winners and of the overall applicants considering the high quality of applications that were received, and it was agreed that an article be published in the Presidents Bulletin, a news post be published on the College website and on social media in this regard. The Chair extended his thanks to Prof Cohen and Prof La Ragione for their work in reviewing the applications.

Post meeting note: The winners were ratified at the Council meeting held on 27 February 2025.

Rea.4/25 4. Research Fellowship Start-up Grants

Ms Brinklow advised that several years ago a sponsor had provided some funds to the College to undertake a histopathology MTI programme in London relating to cancer which had not progressed. The sponsor agreed for the funds to be used in another capacity provided it is related to pathology, and subsequently it was agreed that £24k of the total funds be used towards funding the Research Fellowship Start-up Grants.

Members had a discussion and the following was highlighted:

- The next round for applications would open in late Spring (May/June 2025).
- There is a possibility of funding a 2026 round of applications provided there are sufficient funds.
- In previous application rounds there had been no success in receiving applications from undergraduate trainees. To improve engagement of undergraduate trainees, it was suggested that the dissemination of the adverts be increased. The advert should be circulated to undergraduate pathology groups, Heads of School for Dental/Medical and Vet with a request for them to distribute it to the appropriate undergraduate trainees and be published on the Medical School Council website.
- Ongoing plans for funding would be discussed at the next Research Committee meeting, with the hope that Penny Fletcher would be able to contribute to in terms of approaching some industry partners for funding.
- If a long-term income stream is secured to sustain the funding of the Research Fellowship Start-up Grant, the Pathological Society would be approached about the possibility of co-badging.

Dr Marnix informed that he had a discussion with Professor Sarah Coupland and Dr Jan von der Thüsen (BDIAP President) about integrating research activities and joint co-badging; and asked members of the Research Committee if they would be supportive of the idea; all members agreed and were in support of the idea.

In relation to the first round of funding that was awarded, Shelaine Kissoon informed that the two trainees who were awarded funding were contacted about submitting a report on their research, and no response was received. She mentioned that a follow up email would be sent to them to request the reports. **Action: Shelaine Kissoon**

Rea.5/25 5. Fellowship by Published Works

It was noted that the guidance for the Fellowship by Published Works had recently been updated and members of the Research Committee were requested to review the updates and send their feedback and comments directly to the Examinations Team (Tia Goldring and Amy Spivey). Ms Brinklow stated that it would be helpful if some members of the Committee could be identified to help the team with any

queries they may have in relation to the confidential reports; the Chair and Prof La Ragione were happy to help.

The Chair reported that the process for assessing the last round of applications for Fellowship by Published Works had been complete, and he thanked Prof La Ragione and Dr Jansen for their help in assessing the applications. It was mentioned that there had been a reasonable number of applications, and members felt that the route to Fellowship by Published Works should continue to be encouraged. It was suggested that an article be written for the College Bulletin about the route to Fellowship, and it should highlight that the Research Committee are involved in the process of assessing the applications.

Members had a discussion in relation to the application form and it was felt there is a need for it to be tidied up. The Chair suggested that the structure and guidance of the applications be reviewed; the case reports be removed from the primary research; and a template be incorporated to collate the case reports.

Action: The Chair to have a discussion with Ms Brinklow about updating the application form.

Action: Shelaine Kissoon to enquire with the Examination Team whether a template exists which could be reviewed and used as part of the application.

Rea.6/25 6. Other Committee updates

6.1 Veterinary Pathology SAC
Prof La Ragione provided a brief report and stated that the SAC held several webinars recently which were successful. The SAC are currently working on a digital pathology guidance in relation to veterinary pathology which would include research and diagnostics, and the guidance would be circulated to members for consultation in due course.

6.2 Clinical Biochemistry
No update – representative yet to be appointed.

6.3 Clinical Scientist
The Chair felt it would be useful to have some clinical scientist input and asked that a standard item be added to future meeting agendas.

Dr Owen raised a matter in relation to the challenges faced by candidates who are doing research projects as part of their clinical scientist programme. He stated that some candidates had asked their local NHS Trust R&D Department to act as a sponsor, and were told by the Trust that their university should act as a sponsor; however the University stated that as they are geographically remote from the trainees Trust and its patients, they are unable to act as a sponsor. It was mentioned that the policy framework states that 'as the research project is part of an educational award, the University must act as a sponsor', and therefore the candidates are caught between the two.

Members had a discussion and the following had been highlighted:

- Suggestion to host a webinar to help address the matter.
- Members of the Committee recognised that there is an issues with funding within the NHS Trusts; and it is possible indication of how R&D Departments are funded, and the variation of structure and the funding mechanism for NHS Trusts.

- The NSHCS is considering whether to engage the HRA further to broker an exemption on the basis that the HCS training programmes directly contribute to the delivery of the NHS Long Term Workforce Plan.
- It was questioned whether a survey can be circulated to determine whether this is an issue that needs to be addressed at a national level. *The Chair stated that he would contact the HRA on behalf of the Research Committee to explore the matter.*
- It was questioned whether there is a possibility that the College can take some sort of advocacy in the area which might help the overall situation. *Dr Elsakka mentioned that the matter could be explored by the College and that a discussion should be held with Ms Brinklow and Prof Cohen.*

Rea.7/25 8. Society updates

7.1 Pathological Society

The Chair mentioned that he previously had a discussion with Tim Kendall in relation to the NCRI legacy and enquired if some elements in terms of pathology were taken by the Pathological Society. Dr Jansen responded, stating that Tim Kendall had recently started the Clinical Trials Sub-Committee, and he is yet to determine what the focus/placement of the Sub-committee would be.

Members had a discussion in relation to the demise of CM Path and it was felt that there needs to be a focal point for reinvigorating academic pathology. Dr Marnix stated that he would have a discussion regarding the matter with Prof Sarah Coupland and Dr Jan von der Thüsen and would feedback.

7.2 British Society of Haematology

No update – representative yet to be appointed.

Rea.8/25 8 Trainees' report

Dr Wiaam mentioned that as it was her first meeting, she did not have any specific matters to report in relation to trainees.

She enquired whether the Pathological Society would consider offering funding to other specialties such as chemical pathology and microbiology. Dr Marnix explained that the funds are restricted to histopathology trainees and consultants, and although it was previously considered, the Pathological Society's Research Committee felt that they did not have the full expertise to review applications for other specialties. He suggested that Dr Wiaam sends him an email in this regard, and he would take it forward to the Committee for discussion and consideration.

Rea.9/25 9. Any other business

9.1 Research Excellence Framework (REF) 2029

Ms Brinklow provided a brief overview of the Research Excellence Framework 2029 (REF 2029) and stated that in the past the College had recommended individuals for the process. She explained that this time round REF are moving to a process whereby individuals can put themselves forward for consideration, however, they had asked the College to complete a survey by 17 February 2025, about how it might be involved.

The purpose of the survey is twofold:

1. **To map your organisation's expertise to our Units of Assessment (UoAs):** This will help us identify areas where your organisation can contribute valuable insights and ensure alignment between your expertise and the relevant disciplines being assessed. (For more information about REF UoAs, please refer to the [REF 2021 Panel Criteria and Working Methods guidance](#), pages 9-29.)

2. **To gauge your interest in collaborating with the REF team in various roles:** We aim to harness your expertise effectively in the REF 2029 process, while ensuring that the level of involvement is proportionate for different sized organisations. This may include contributing to the selection of panel members, reviewing panel composition, or supporting the development of disciplinary taxonomies.

Ms Brinklow asked members of the Research Committee if they would like to be involved in the REF2029 process; Members had a brief discussion and were not keen to be involved and recognised that it is a huge commitment, and it was noted that there is a significant amount of work required in the run up to REF. It was suggested that an article about REF 2029 be published in the Presidents Bulletin to encourage members to apply if their expertise and time allows them to do so.

9.2 Committee membership

Shelaine Kissoon informed that there are currently four vacancies on the Research Committee and advised that she would start the process to recruit representatives to the roles. She enquired whether there is a need for a representative from the Cellular Pathology SAC; the Chair stated that although there are two cellular pathologists on the Committee, it would be useful to have a representative from the SAC.

9.3 Enquiry from an RCPATH member regarding being co-opted on the committee

The Chair informed that he had received representations from an RCPATH member regarding academic pathology, and the legacy of the NCRI CPATH initiative. This member had indicated a willingness to help the work of this committee and wished to explore the possibility of co-opted membership. The Chair raised the question of co-opting members to take on the role to address the various matters.

It was noted that the College policy states that co-opted members may be College members or subject experts required by the committee to carry out its work. Their role is to contribute knowledge or experience which is either not found from full committee members OR to contribute or deal with specific issues or projects which the committee wishes to carry out.

Members had a discussion, and Dr Noha Elsakka indicated that College policy should be applied, but that the issues raised by the member rests with different organisations and stakeholders, and there is no pressing need for a co-opted role on the Research Committee to address the various issues raised. It was agreed that once a concerted effort to fill the committee vacancies was complete, this issue could be revisited.

Rea.10/25 10. Date of next meeting

The next meeting is scheduled for 3 July 2025 at 11:00am for a duration of 2 hours.

