



Research Committee Minutes

A meeting of the Research Committee was held on Thursday 3 July 2025
at 11:00m- 13:00pm via MS Teams

Professor Sarah Coupland
Registrar

Present:	Professor Keith Hunter, Chair Professor Roberto La Ragione, Veterinary Pathology SAC representative Dr Owen Driskell, Lead of Laboratory Medicine, NIHR Clinical Research Network Professor Dimitris Grammatopoulos, Clinical Biochemistry SAC representative Dr Newton Wong, Cellular Pathology SAC representative
In attendance:	Shelaine Kissoon, Governance & Committee Services Officer (<i>minutes</i>) Penny Fletcher, RCPATH Corporate and Public Engagement Manager (<i>item 4.1</i>)
Apologies:	Ms Joanne Brinklow, RCPATH Director of Learning and International Professor Peter Johnston, RCPATH Vice President for Workforce and Corporate Engagement
Absent	Professor Roland Fleck, Healthcare Science Committee representative Dr Marnix Jansen, Chair of Pathological Society Research Subcommittee Dr Wiaam Al-Hasani, Trainee representative

- Rea.11/25**
- 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:
 - Professor Dimitris Grammatopoulos, Clinical Biochemistry representative
 - Dr Newton Wong, Cellular Pathology SAC representative
 - Professor Roland Fleck, Healthcare Science Committee representative
 - Professor Peter Johnston, RCPATH Vice President for Workforce and Corporate Engagement
 - 1.2 Apologies for absence were received and noted above.
 - 1.3 There were no declarations of conflict of interests.
- Rea.12/25**
- 2. Minutes of the previous meeting**
 - 2.1 The minutes of the meeting held on 29 January 2025 were approved as an accurate record subject to the following amendments:



Rea.6/25 (6.3, point 3): the text to be revised to state:

“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.”

Rea.5/25 (paragraph 1): to be amended so that Dr La Ragione is referred to as Professor La Ragione.

2.2 There were no matters arising not already covered on the agenda.

2.3 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 in progress**

Rea.21//24: Trainee Research Medal Awards guidance and information

Covered under agenda item 3.

Rea.26/24: Webinar on ‘how to do research’

The Committee recognised that webinars would be valuable to support researchers in engaging with NHS Trust R&D departments, where practices are inconsistent and confusion often arises between governance, ethics, and sponsorship. It was agreed that the webinars should aim to provide practical guidance, improve understanding of frameworks, and support effective engagement with R&D.

The following webinar topics were proposed:

- *Webinar 1:* Covers research governance, frameworks, terminology, and practical guidance; includes input from experienced researchers and potentially an R&D director; supported by a slide deck.
- *Webinar 2:* Focuses on research sponsorship, finance, portfolio studies, and strategies for negotiation with R&D.

Action: Chair and Dr Driskell to draft a plan for the first webinar

Rea.4/24: Research Fellowship Start-up Grant reports (first round of awardees)

Covered under agenda item 4.2.

Rea.13/25 3. Trainees’ Research Medal Awards 2025

The Committee received and noted the guidance information, application form, timelines and publicity plan for the 2025 Trainee’s Research Medal Awards. The Chair informed that the application and guidance documents were reviewed to ensure clarity regarding eligible publication types and the applicant’s role in each submission. The proposed process and timeline for the award was confirmed, encompassing submission, assessment, adjudication, and ratification. The scoring criteria was outlined, focusing on research quality, robustness, and applicability. The opportunity to involve additional reviewers to broaden evaluation perspectives was noted.

The Committee agreed with the following timelines:

- The award to launch on 8 August with a six-week submission window

- Collation of applications and panel assessment in October–November
- Scores submitted by the end of November
- Final adjudication in December–early January 2026
- List of winners to be submitted to College Council for ratification by end of January 2026

Rea.14/25 4. Research Fellowship Start-up Grants

4.1 Sponsorship options

The Committee received and noted the paper prepared by Penny Fletcher outlining potential opportunities for securing sponsorship funding for the Research Fellowship Start-up Grant. The Chair reported that the initial fund of approximately £15,000 per year has largely been utilised, with an additional £24,000 available for the 2025 and 2026 rounds. Two rounds of the Fellowship Start-up Grant have been completed to date. The Chair emphasised the importance of securing sustainable funding beyond 2026.

Penny Fletcher joined the meeting to provide an overview of her role and outline the corporate engagement strategy. She explained that sponsorship agreements are ideally set for three years with a one-year break clause. Grants will remain broad in scope, and sponsors will not be involved in project selection; and sponsor acknowledgment will be reflected on the College website.

The Committee had a detailed discussion, and the following feedback and considerations were noted:

- The importance of clearly defining intellectual property (IP) ownership for all grants, particularly project-specific funding, noting that even smaller grants could contribute to larger research projects.
- The need to review grant amounts, with a suggested range of £1,500–£5,000 to better reflect research costs, and the explicit inclusion of microbiology alongside pathology to clarify eligibility and cover all relevant disciplines.
- The requirement for clear guidance on sponsor acknowledgements, distinguishing between financial contributions and other forms of support such as technical advice or provision of samples.
- The establishment of a formal approvals process, allowing companies 30–60 days to review materials for specific projects before announcements or submissions.
- Support for maintaining a general funding pot contributed by all sponsors to simplify IP and acknowledgement considerations, while allowing optional project-specific funding, with clarity that contributions to the general pot do not grant IP rights.
- Recognition that corporate sponsors may wish to raise their profile and link funding to areas aligned with their portfolios, requiring a balance between general pot contributions and optional project-specific funding to accommodate both large and small companies.
- Exploration of partnerships with UK-based specialist societies (e.g., The Pathological Society, Association of Medical Microbiology, British Society for Toxicological Pathology) for project-specific support, while avoiding engagement with international organisations to reduce administrative complications.
- The necessity of an administratively manageable funding framework, capable of handling multiple streams, including general pot, corporate project-specific, and society-aligned grants, without placing undue burden on staff.

Actions:

- **Members to identify and suggest potential UK based societies to approach for collaboration.**
- **Penny Fletcher to redraft corporate sponsorship packages based on feedback.**

4.2 Reports from funded researchers

The Committee received and considered reports from two researchers awarded funding in the first round of the Research Fellowship Start-up Grants. The following was noted:

a) Dr Louise Duval (Clinical Biochemist, Portsmouth)

- Award: £1,000
- Project: Investigation of checkpoint inhibitors and adverse outcomes.
- Progress: A literature review has been completed and published. The funding has also enabled method development, which is expected to lead to further publications.
- Decision: The Committee agreed the report fulfilled the requirements of the grant and accepted it.

b) Dr. Chris Rooney (Medical Microbiology, Leeds)

- Award: £4,000
- Project: Untargeted mass spectrometry analysis of stool samples.
- Progress: Mass spectrometry has been completed, with bioinformatics analysis underway. A detailed expenditure breakdown was provided.
- Decision: The Committee agreed this represented an appropriate use of funds and noted the potential for results to support future grant applications and publications.

The Committee expressed satisfaction with the outcomes reported to date. It was agreed that recipients should be formally thanked for their reports and asked to keep the Committee informed of any resulting publications. Members noted this provided evidence of the funding cycle working effectively and reaffirmed support for continuing the current approach.

4.3 Next Round of the Research Fellowship Start-up Grant

The committee considered the timing of the next funding round. While Penny Fletcher's paper had proposed early 2026, The Chair noted that sufficient funds exist to support a 2025 call, with an initial plan to launch in July and assess applications later in the year. Revised eligibility criteria, encompassing trainees across medical, veterinary, scientific and biomedical science disciplines as well as undergraduates, were presented for ratification.

The Committee had a discussion which focused particularly on undergraduates, who have not yet been represented in the first two rounds. Professor Grammatopoulos emphasised that medical students tend to select projects early in the calendar year, and that aligning the call with this schedule, or with the summer URSS programme, would encourage greater participation. It was acknowledged that postgraduate, veterinary and BMS trainees have more flexible timelines, but undergraduate projects are fixed within the academic calendar. The committee therefore agreed that a January 2026 launch, with a ten-week submission period closing in March 2026, would better serve undergraduates while still accommodating other groups. This approach would also avoid the administrative pressures of running a 2025 round.

The committee reached a provisional consensus to adopt the January 2026 timeline, with the decision to be reviewed and confirmed at the September meeting.

Rea.15/25 5. Fellowship by Published Works

The Committee noted that the applications for the Fellowship by Published Works are under active review, led by The Chair, Professor La Ragione, Dr Jansen, with the assessment process expected to conclude by September 2025. A meeting with the College administrator is scheduled for late August or early September to address any outstanding issues prior to final recommendations. It was noted that most applications have been assessed, with a few remaining. The Committee acknowledged that the process is progressing on schedule.

Rea.16/25 6. Other Committee updates

6.1 Veterinary Pathology SAC

Prof La Ragione provided an update on several ongoing and planned initiatives by the Veterinary Pathology SAC. He reported that planning for a Summer School is actively underway, led by Dr Pamela Kelly, himself and colleagues. Two research-focused articles are planned for publication in the College Bulletin, covering artificial avian influenza and diagnostics, with support from College Fellows. The recent webinar series was highly successful, covering both diagnostics and research topics; all recordings have now been uploaded, and planning is in progress for a future series following a similar structure. The veterinary pathology tissue retention guidelines have been finalised, though not yet published; they address compliance with the Human Tissue Act and cover experimental and diagnostic use of tissues, images, and data. It was noted that a comparable human tissue retention guideline may exist, although following a different template. Work is ongoing to streamline the number and process of veterinary pathology examinations.

The committee also acknowledged the recent passing of Dr Donald Kelly, who played a major role in establishing veterinary pathology within the College.

6.2 Clinical Biochemistry

Professor Grammatopoulos stated that there is nothing specific to report at present but noted that the research agenda had been removed from the Clinical Biochemistry SAC. He intends to reinstate it and plans to report back to the SAC on ongoing research, emphasising the importance of raising the profile and awareness of research activities.

6.3 Clinical Scientist

Dr Driskell shared that the Higher Specialist Scientist Training Programme recently celebrated its 10-year anniversary with a celebration day in Manchester, followed by a research day where trainees showcased their projects, with significant input from life scientists. The NSHCS plans to survey trainees to gather information on their research projects and impacts, building a database similar to what NIHR does.

Rea.17/25 7. Society updates

7.1 Pathological Society

No update – representative not present.

7.2 British Society of Haematology

No update – representative yet to be appointed.

- Rea.18/25** **8. Trainees' report**
No update – representative not present.
- Rea.19/25** **9. Any other business**
None.
- Rea.20/25** **10. Date of next meeting**
The next meeting is scheduled for 23 September 2025 at 11:00am for a duration of 2 hours.