

Guidance on the appointment of Consultant Clinical Scientists in microbiology and virology to employing bodies in the UK

1 Introduction and purpose

- 1.1 This document has been constructed with the collaborative effort of the Royal College of Pathologists (RCPATH), the Association for Laboratory Medicine (LabMed) and the British Infection Association (BIA). It is intended to provide advice to assist employing bodies when making appointments to consultant Clinical Scientist level posts in microbiology and virology. It is based on a similar guidance document that the College has produced for the appointment of medically qualified pathologists and the appointment of consultant Clinical Scientists across all specialties.
- 1.2 It provides an overview of the appointment process recommended by the College – from preparing a job description to interview – and includes the services offered by the College to facilitate it. The overriding aim of an interview panel is to ensure that the best candidate for the job is appointed and that the process of the appointment is open, fair and consistent.



1.3 The process described is for the appointment to consultant level posts. The RCPATH Workforce team will also assist in identifying an assessor to support the appointment of other senior Clinical Scientists.

2 Background

2.1 The procedures for the appointment of consultant Clinical Scientists in the UK are governed by the NHS [Terms and conditions of service for Agenda for Change \(AfC\)](#).

2.2 The job description review and appointment process recommended and offered by the College that are described in this document are available to all NHS employing bodies, including foundation trusts, and are free of charge (see Appendix 1). The job description should also align with [National profiles for healthcare science](#).

2.3 'Clinical Scientist' is a protected title and all Clinical Scientists are required to be registered with the [Health and Care Professionals Council](#) before they can take up an appointment.

2.4 The NHS Employment Check Standards, last updated in July 2013, outline the employment checks that employers carry out before appointing staff into NHS positions across the UK. See Appendix 2 for full details of these checks.

3 Vacancy and establishment of the post

3.1 Employing bodies should normally begin planning for appointments well before the post is to be advertised or filled.

3.2 For consultant posts, the employing body should determine in advance whether there is a specific service need to appoint either a medical consultant or a consultant Clinical Scientist. Such circumstances may include the provision of direct, ward-based care or the hosting of clinics, which might necessitate the appointment of a medical consultant. If there is no such consideration, then advertising the post as an 'either/or' will increase the appeal to a wider range of suitable candidates.

3.3 Employing bodies should consider, with relevant professional advice:

- service needs



- continuing educational requirements
- teaching
- training and supervision of junior staff
- research
- infection prevention and control.

3.4 If an appointing department has not employed a consultant Clinical Scientist previously, generic advice on their training, skills and experience can be obtained from the [Microbiology Professional Committee of LabMed](#).

4 Preparation of the job description, person specification, job plan and selection criteria

4.1 It is the responsibility of the employing body to prepare the job description, person specification, job plan and selection criteria. It is important that the job description includes all information relevant to the post and that the document is as informative as possible for potential applicants.

4.2 Model job descriptions for consultant microbiologists and virologists are useful resources that can be adapted, as is the generic model job description for consultant Clinical Scientists:

- [Model job description: Consultant medical microbiologist](#)
- [Model job description: Consultant virologist](#)
- [Model job description: Consultant Clinical Scientist \(generic\)](#).

4.3 The job description, person specification and job plan should be reviewed and endorsed by the College.

4.4 The selection criteria should outline the minimum qualifications, skills and experience required to perform the job. Essential and desirable criteria should be identified. The criteria should avoid unfair discrimination.

4.5 Applicants will use the job description to find out details of the post, including:



- the work programme and fixed commitments, together with information on the employing body
- information about its hospitals, units and clinics and the range of services provided by the department in which the applicant will work
- information about associated undergraduate or medical/dental teaching work.

The job description should form part of a general information package, which should include a list of the relevant terms and conditions of service, including pay and any local terms of service. Details of local attractions and places of interest could also be included in the job description.

4.6 When appointing a consultant Clinical Scientist, there are several aspects related to job planning and terms and conditions that require consideration. These are detailed in Appendix 3.

5 Job description review

5.1 The College's Workforce team is the single point of contact for employing bodies seeking review and endorsement for pathology job descriptions.

5.2 The employing body should submit the job description to the Workforce team for review.

5.3 An experienced College staff member will review the draft job description against the relevant model job description. These model job descriptions have been created by the College in conjunction with the relevant Specialty Advisory Committee.

5.4 The draft job description will be sent for comment by a selected College assessor, when required.

5.5 The Workforce team or the College assessor will provide suggestions for modifications, if necessary, and inform the employing body of endorsement if the job description is approved.



6 Advertisement and preliminary visits

- 6.1 Employing bodies should advertise internally and externally, using the most relevant outlets for all new consultant Clinical Scientist posts. Based on current AfC job profiles, consultant Clinical Scientist posts should be banded as 8d, or 9 as per [National profiles for healthcare science](#).
- 6.2 For upgraded posts, it is recommended that employing bodies should also consider advertising to potential external candidates, as well as considering internal candidates.
- 6.3 Internal regrading of an existing post to a consultant post should be done by appropriate changes to the job description followed by evaluation in accordance with AfC job evaluation scheme rules. Advertisement is not required, but the job description should be reviewed by the College and the candidate should be interviewed.
- 6.4 The advertisement should include the closing date and date of interview where possible.
- 6.5 Applicants or prospective applicants should feel able and be encouraged to visit the relevant unit and meet some of their prospective colleagues before the appointment committee selects its shortlist and holds interviews.

7 Appointment committee

- 7.1 The employer should convene an appointment committee to select the appropriate candidate for the post.
- 7.2 The employer should contact the College Workforce team to source a College assessor with the date, time and venue of the appointment committee, as well as any other relevant information.
- 7.3 The employer must provide at least 8–12 weeks' notice of the appointment committee date to the Workforce team to source a College assessor. The College cannot guarantee sourcing a College assessor if less than 8 weeks' notice is given.
- 7.4 The College assessor's role at an appointment committee is to advise on the suitability of the candidates for appointment to a specific post. The assessor is also important in



guiding questioning to gain an effective picture of a candidate's expertise, especially in specialised areas. The College assessor does not vote.

7.5 It is not mandatory that the College assessor participates in the shortlisting exercise, but the College recommends that they should, where possible. The assessor should be consulted on the shortlist before candidates are invited for interview, to confirm that all candidates are suitable for interview.

8 Composition of the appointment committee

8.1 While there is no legislation governing these appointments, it is recommended that the composition of the committee be similar to that for a medical consultant appointment and include:

- a lay member
- an external assessor from the College
- the chief executive or nominated deputy
- the medical/clinical director of the employing body or nominated deputy
- a professional member nominated after consultation with the relevant university, in the case of appointments to departments that have substantial teaching and/or research commitments
- a consultant from the employing body from the relevant specialty
- a representative from human resources.

Employing bodies may include additional members in the panel; particular care needs to be taken when appointing to posts across 2 or more employing bodies.

Consider panel members with expertise relevant to the required job role (e.g. IPC, water and estates, research and innovation).

9 The interview

9.1 The appointment committee must consider all the candidates against objective selection criteria. This should include assessing the previous experience of the candidate to undertake the job description.



9.2 A decision on the suitability of a candidate should relate to the agreed selection criteria and be based on facts, rather than impressions.

9.3 The chair is responsible for the procedure and ordering of the interview questions. However, it is customary and helpful to the appointment committee if the College assessor opens the questioning with questions related to training, experience and qualifications necessary for the post.

9.4 The chair is responsible for ensuring that principles of equal opportunities are adhered to.

9.5 The chair must ensure that candidates are not questioned on the following areas:

- the type of contract for which the applicant would opt
- matters relating to terms and conditions of service, including salary.

10 Post-interview process

10.1 A brief report of the appointment committee should be prepared by the chair and kept as a record by the employing body.

10.2 All records and documents in connection with the shortlisting and interviewing, including records of decisions and notes taken by members, should be retained by the employing body according to their data protection policy.

10.3 The successful candidate should be formally offered the post, in writing, within 2 working days of the decision to appoint.

10.4 The employing body should not appoint a candidate who has not been found suitable and recommended by the appointment committee.

10.5 The employing body is not required to make an appointment and may decide to re-advertise the post.

10.6 The College assessor should complete, and return to the College, the Advisory Appointments Committee [feedback form](#).

10.7 It is not the College assessor's role to provide feedback to unsuccessful candidates.



10.8 Any member of the appointment committee may express concern to the employing body if they are unhappy with the conduct of the committee, including decisions made. This can include disputes over appointments or equal opportunities.

11 Expenses

11.1 The employing body should determine arrangements for the payment of expenses to candidates, whether for pre-visits or for interview, subject to the provisions of their terms and conditions of service, if applicable.

11.2 Members of the appointment committee will be reimbursed their actual expenses, including travel, hotel accommodation and other subsistence allowances.

11.3 College assessors attending appointment committees are entitled to fees according to NHS employers guidance pay circulars. Employing bodies are asked to make every effort to facilitate these fees. [See page 27 of Pay and conditions circulars for medical and dental staff.](#)

12 Further information

For further information on consultant Clinical Scientist appointments or to request a job description review and College assessor, please contact the College Workforce team at 020 7451 6725 or workforce@rcpath.org, or visit the College page on [employing consultant Clinical Scientists](#).



Appendix 1 Process for job description review and appointment

- Employing body sends job description for a consultant Clinical Scientist post to the RCPATH Workforce team with a request to review.
The employer should allow 15 working days for the job description to be approved.
- RCPATH reviews the draft job description against the relevant model job description and sends to a selected College assessor when required.
- RCPATH will provide suggestions for modifications to the job description if necessary.
This step is repeated until the job description meets the requirements.
- Once the job description meets the requirements, the RCPATH will inform the employing body of endorsement and the job description is approved.

Job description is endorsed by the RCPATH and is ready to use by the employer.

- Employing body requests a College assessor to attend the appointment committee, providing the date, time and venue of the committee to the Workforce team.
At least 8 weeks' notice of the appointment committee is required to ensure a College assessor can be sourced in time.
- RCPATH identifies a College assessor in the relevant specialty for the appointment committee and provides their details to the employing body.
- RCPATH provides the College assessor with an assessor pack (including guidance, model job description and feedback form).

Appointment committee held.

- Employing body offers post to successful candidate and completes the appointment process.
- RCPATH assessor completes the appointment committee feedback form and sends the information to the College Workforce team after the appointment is made.
- RCPATH includes successful applicant's name in the College Bulletin, if consented.



Appendix 2 NHS employment check standards

England

NHS Employers. Employment standards and regulation. Available at:

<http://www.nhsemployers.org/your-workforce/recruit/employment-checks>

Scotland

Scottish Government. Pre and post-employment checks: NHSScotland PIN policy.

Available at: <http://www.gov.scot/Publications/2014/03/7176/0>

Wales

<http://www.wales.nhs.uk/governance-emanual/standard-25-workforce-recruitment-and-em>

Welsh Assembly Government. National minimum standards for independent health care services in Wales. Available at: <https://www.gov.wales/sites/default/files/publications/2019-07/the-national-minimum-standards-for-independent-health-care-services-in-wales-2011-no-16.pdf>

Northern Ireland

Invest Northern Ireland. Employment checks. Available at:

<https://www.nibusinessinfo.co.uk/content/employment-checks>



Appendix 3 Considerations when hiring a consultant Clinical Scientist

- Banding.
 - As per 6.1, the post should be advertised at a minimum of Agenda for Change (AfC) band 8d.
 - Mechanisms should be in place to support supplementary payments for additional roles, responsibilities, or job plan amendments as per medical consultants.
- On-call payments.
 - If clinical on call is a requirement of the post, this should be remunerated in a way that payments are broadly comparable to the equivalent medical consultant banding.
 - Any local arrangements for time-off in-lieu for on-call should be comparable to those in place for medical consultants.
- Working hours.
 - The standard full-time equivalent (FTE) AfC working week is 37.5 hours, compared to 40 hours for medical consultants.
 - Provision should be made to ensure that any consultant Clinical Scientist job plan that exceeds the contracted FTE AfC hours be compensated via additional payments or appropriate time off in lieu.
- Job planning.
 - Consultant Clinical Scientists should be entitled to supporting professional activities (SPA) time equivalent to medical consultants.
 - An indicative job plan should be included in the job advertisement, taking into account the difference with contracted hours and including the SPA time.
- Study leave and funding.
 - Clinical Scientists are required to undertake continual professional development and, as such, must have access to study leave equivalent to medical consultants.



- Ensure that consultant Clinical Scientists can access relevant study budgets to undertake CPD and that this support is comparable to that provided for medical consultants.
- Leadership and career development.
 - Consider how consultant Clinical Scientists will be supported to develop their careers, e.g. Trust ‘new consultants’ course, post-graduate teaching qualifications, educational supervisor training.
 - Consider how consultant Clinical Scientists will be supported to take up senior leadership roles within the organisation, e.g. clinical lead, divisional director.
- What opportunities for research, innovation and development are there in the department?
 - One strength of Clinical Scientists is often a sound background in R&D. Consider how this might be utilised.
- If the appointing organisation has not employed consultant Clinical Scientists in microbiology or virology before, consider inviting potential applicants for an informal discussion about the role. This might provide an opportunity for the department to understand what a consultant Clinical Scientist can offer in terms of clinical service delivery and beyond.
- If the appointing trust has not employed a consultant Clinical Scientist in microbiology or virology previously, they can consider seeking advice from another trust with experience or [discuss this with the Microbiology Professional Committee of LabMed](#).



Appendix 4 Guidance notes on the ‘either/or’ appointment of medical consultants and consultant Clinical Scientists

The view of the College is that the employing body should determine in advance whether it wishes to appoint a medical consultant or a consultant Clinical Scientist. Such a decision should be informed both by the duties to be undertaken by the consultant appointed and by the balance of senior staffing within the department or network. A post that requires direct patient-care sessions will necessitate the appointment of a medical consultant.

If there is no specific aspect of the job role that requires the appointment of a medical consultant or a Clinical Scientist, the employing body may not be able to decide whether it has a preference for a medical consultant or a consultant Clinical Scientist. In such circumstances, the employing body may wish to seek the best candidate, irrespective of their background and training route.

The ‘either/or’ appointment process

When an employing body chooses to proceed with an ‘either/or’ appointment, the following procedure is recommended.

- Separate job descriptions for the medical and clinical posts should be prepared.
- The job description for the consultant Clinical Scientist post needs to be processed through the Agenda for Change job evaluation system.
- It is recognised that there will be considerable overlap in the content of these job descriptions, but there will be differences in the eligibility criteria and the scrutiny process.

Both job descriptions should be submitted simultaneously for the appropriate RCPATH review.

- The post should be advertised simultaneously through the channels most likely to be read by prospective candidates. Medical consultant posts should be advertised both electronically and in print in an appropriate journal.



- The eligibility of all applicants should be assessed by suitable RCPATH assessors as part of the appointment committee process.
- The eligibility of all applicants for the medical consultant post should be determined by a College assessor, who will recommend to the employing authority the candidates suitable for the shortlist and advise the appointment committee. A parallel process will take place for applicants for the consultant Clinical Scientist post and an appropriate College assessor will be identified by the College Workforce team.
- If the shortlist for the appointment includes candidates for both the medical consultant and consultant Clinical Scientist posts, a single joint appointment committee should be established. All assessors should participate in the interview process by questioning all candidates.
- At the conclusion of the interview process, the College assessors will recommend which of the appropriately qualified candidates is suitable for appointment. The final decision will rest with the employing body.

