

Special Advisory Committee on Clinical Biochemistry

Minutes

A meeting of the Clinical Biochemistry SAC was held on Thursday 8 May 2025
at 10:00am – 12:00pm via Microsoft Teams conferencing

Professor Sarah Coupland
Registrar

Minutes

Present:	Dr Ian Godber	Chair
	Dr Bernie Croal	RCPATH President
	Dr Kevin Deans	Chair, Panel of Examiners
	Prof Dimitris Grammatopoulos	Genomics and Reproductive Science SAC
	Dr Agnieszka Jakubowska	RCPATH trainee representative
	Dr Vinisha Mishra	Senior Examiner, CSCT Panel of Examiners
	Dr Martin Myers	GIRFT (Get it right first time) representative
	Dr W S Wassif	Chair, ALM National Audit Committee
	Dr Emma Miller	Chair, ALM Trainee Committee
	Dr Claire Meek	Chair, ACP Chemical Pathology Committee
In attendance	Shelaine Kissoon	Governance and Committee Services Officer (<i>minutes</i>)
Apologies:	Dr Katherine Hayden	ALM President

CB.1/25

1. Welcome, declaration of conflict of interests and apologies for absence

- 1.1 The Chair welcomed all members to the meeting and invited members to introduce themselves. He informed the SAC that this would be his final meeting as Chair, following his recent appointment as President for the Association of Laboratory Medicine. He expressed his gratitude to the College and to the wider pathology community for the opportunity to serve in the role over the past two years. The Chair confirmed that he would continue to serve on the SAC in a new capacity, succeeding Dr Hayden in that role. Members of the SAC, or any other suitable colleagues, were encouraged to consider applying for the position of Chair.

President, Dr Croal joined the meeting and provided an update on key issues affecting pathology. He highlighted the importance of the SAC Chair role and encouraged involvement from individuals with time and enthusiasm. Dr Croal discussed the ongoing restructuring of NHS England following its abolition, explaining that it would impact the entire UK, though essential services like organisation of medical training and the academy of healthcare science are expected to continue. He emphasised pathology's role in the NHSE 10-year plan, particularly in areas like digital diagnostics, demand optimisation, and diagnostic stewardship. He also addressed workforce challenges, particularly in paediatric pathology, and noted that the government has no plans to increase training numbers, which presents a significant challenge.

Dr Croal stressed the importance of collaboration across pathology organisations to strengthen the professions voice and highlighted the College's role in advocating within government circles. He also announced a review of pathology curricula and training to align with future needs, including emerging roles in IT and AI. Lastly, he



discussed the College's strategic plan focused on training, retention, reform, and workforce planning, calling for SAC involvement and data-driven support for workforce needs.

Dr Croal concluded by thanking volunteers for recent examinations.

- 1.2 Apologies for absence had been noted and listed above.
- 1.3 There were no declarations of conflict of interest.

CB.2/25

2. Minutes of the previous meeting

- 2.1 The minutes of the meeting held on 19 November 2024 were reviewed and approved as a correct record.
- 2.2 There were no matters arising not already covered on the agenda.
- 2.3 The action log had been reviewed, and the following updates were noted:

CB.01/24: Committee membership recruitment

The process to recruit a new Chair had commenced, with an initial application deadline of 12 May 2025. As of the meeting date, no applications had been received. The SAC agreed to extend the application deadline to June 2025 to allow additional time for expressions of interest.

CB.09/24: Genomics Training Academy (GTAC)

Professor Grammatopoulos reported that there has been limited communication on this matter, and the issue was scheduled to be raised at the Genomics and Reproductive Science SAC meeting, which was recently cancelled. The next meeting is expected to take place in June 2025. In light of the ongoing review of the School, the GTAC, and the absence of any new developments, it was agreed that this item should be temporarily removed from the agenda and revisited following the conclusion of the review.

CB.16/23: Communication to incoming trainees'

Update covered under agenda item 3.1.

CB.3/25

3. Learning Updates

3.1 Training

The SAC received and noted the CSTECH training report, which was presented by Dr Vinita Mishra based on developments since the last CSTECH meeting in January 2025.

The following highlights had been noted:

- CSTECH meetings will now occur three times per year, with the first held in January 2025, the second in May 2025 (hybrid format), and the third in Autumn 2025.
- The national Inborn Metabolic Disorders (IMD) Task Group for adults had been convened, and it is focused on raising awareness and standardising IMD training, especially in the first three years of specialty training. Further experience may be pursued post-CCT. A webpage for information is under development.
- There is a Cardiometabolic Medicine Task Group which is led by Dr. Kegler. This initiative aims to create a Cardiometabolic Medicine programme in partnership with the Royal College of Physicians. The group is in early development, and discussions are ongoing with the GMC regarding governance and subspecialty status.
- In relation to the Chemical Pathology CCT Programme name change, a survey about renaming the Chemical Pathology CCT programme was conducted, and the results will be discussed at the May 2025 CSTECH meeting.
- Trainees and trainers are encouraged to upload educational materials to the Pathology Portal.

- The College Chemical Pathology webpage is outdated, and a working group has been set up to revise the content in alignment with the wider website redevelopment project.
- Trainee feedback shows a general satisfaction with the training programme.

3.2 Examinations

Dr Deans provided a verbal report on the Autumn 2024 examination results, which included the following key points:

Part 1 Examination:

- *Standard Setting:* Angoff method.
- *Pass Mark:* 59%
- *Pass Rate:* 71% (25 out of 35 candidates passed).
- *Post-exam Review:*
 - Newly appointed psychometrician reviewed exam statistics.
 - Analysis included question difficulty, correct answer frequency, and performance predictiveness.
 - Robust quality assurance procedures confirmed.

Part 2 Module 1 (OSPE and Practical):

- *Double Marking:* All assessments double marked.
- *Marking Scheme:* College's closed marking scheme.
- *Pass Rate:* 69% (22 out of 32 candidates passed).
- *Moderation:*
 - Review of discrepancies between markers.
 - Special attention to borderline and failing candidates.
 - Results scrutinised before ratification by Examination Committee.

Part 2 Module 2 (Critical Appraisal and Cases paper):

- *Pass Rate:* 81% (29 out of 36 candidates passed).
- *Remarks:*
 - High pass rate considered appropriate given candidates' prior progression and readiness at this stage.
 - *Same moderation procedures* applied for quality assurance.

The SAC had a discussion and the following was noted:

- Dr Mishra expressed appreciation for the well-run examination process and facilities. She suggested rotating examiner roles more to avoid monotony during OSPEs. Dr Dean acknowledged the feedback and stated that rotation is encouraged but logistical challenges and last-minute changes may affect allocations. The suggestion will be considered for future sittings.
- Dr Jakubowska requested clearer public information on how exams are marked (in light of MRCP controversy). Dr Deans agreed to develop transparent resources on exam marking for publication on the College website.
- Dr Miller raised concern that the Spring 2025 Part 2 Module 1 exam felt unexpectedly difficult, particularly in the afternoon session. Dr Dean acknowledged that the paper was demanding but stated that it was within an acceptable range. He emphasised the use of a closed marking scheme which allows examiners to award marks based on approach and reasoning, particularly for complex scenarios. He mentioned that future considerations include adopting workplace-based assessments for elements like method verification to improve realism and relevance.

It was noted that the Spring 2025 results are currently under review and a formal report will be provided at the next SAC meeting.

In relation to transparency & development, Dr Dean stated that further efforts will be made to improve communication with candidates regarding marking, moderation, and the examination structure. The SAC extended appreciation to Dr Deans and the Examination Team for their diligence, transparency, and ongoing improvements to examination processes.

CB.4/25

4. Trainees' update

4.1 ALM Trainees' report

Dr Miller delivered the following update on behalf of the ALM Trainees Committee:

- Dr Jankute has concluded her tenure as Chair of the ALM Trainees' Committee, having served in the role for several years. The Committee formally extended its thanks and appreciation for her dedicated service and significant contributions.
- Dr Miller has been appointed as Interim Chair of the Committee. Dr Annie Cook will continue in her position as Vice Chair until November 2025, and a successful recruitment process has led to the appointment of Dr Larissa Pays as the incoming Vice Chair, who will succeed Dr Cook upon completion of her term.
- The ALM Trainees Committee continues to face challenges in recruiting for several vacant positions, and it was noted that the difficulty in recruiting to the posts may reflect a wider issue affecting other committees.
- Approximately 27 STP microbiology trainees are approaching the end of their training without confirmed employment. This concern has been escalated to the Microbiology Professional Committee for further consideration.
- Planning is underway for the [LabMed Trainees/Freddie Flynn Day 2025](#) event scheduled for 27 November 2025.
- A range of resources are available through the Learning Academy, including podcasts and online educational content, and encouraged promotion of these resources to trainees.

4.1 RCPATH Trainees' report

Dr Jakubowska reported positive feedback from trainees on available resources, notably the *Imperial Analytical Series lectures*. A management lecture series is being developed to address knowledge gaps. A potential training programme name change is under review, with survey results to be considered at the next CSTE meeting. The most recent recruitment round attracted over 40 applicants for 14 posts, reflecting a positive shift in both volume and quality.

Concerns were raised regarding the lack of structured induction and delayed access to essential systems, notably MyPortfolio and College registration for new ST3 pathology trainees. A discussion with the SAC identified inconsistencies across Deaneries, with some Training Programme Directors (TPDs) having limited recent experience in onboarding processes. It was noted that the College is unable to communicate directly with trainees until registration is complete, contributing to delays in the provision of key information.

Proposed actions included:

- Encouraging earlier College communication with trainees.
- Recommending that each Deanery implement a formal induction plan and maintain an up-to-date website.
- Raising the issue at the CSTE meeting on 16 May 2025.
- Reviewing internal College procedures to expedite the registration process.
- Gathering trainee feedback to inform improvements to the College training day in September 2025.

These proposals were endorsed by Dr Mishra and Dr Deans, with follow-up actions assigned to support improvements at both College and Deanery levels.

5. Best practice recommendations**5.1 G158 The communication of critical and unexpected pathology results**

The Chair reported that the draft document had been developed with input from relevant stakeholders and formatted by the Publications Team in line with College guidelines. Following circulation to the College membership, approximately 90 responses were received; specialty specific feedback was forwarded to the respective SAC Chairs for review. A final draft will be submitted to a Vice President for review, with publication expected within six weeks.

Dr Wassif raised concerns about the categorisation of certain results (e.g., severe hypophosphatemia, hypercalcemia, thyroid abnormalities) as Category B and advocated for their inclusion in Category A, due to the risk of clinical harm from delayed reporting. The Chair welcomed further feedback via email. Dr Myers praised the document's practical value and recommended the inclusion of thresholds for rapid biochemical changes, such as delta sodium, in future versions.

5.2 G027 Code of practice for clinical biochemists/chemical pathologists and clinical biochemistry services

It was noted that the revised guidance document previously circulated to the SAC had received no additional comments. The document has now been passed to the College Publication Team for formatting and the following that, the document will be issued to the College membership for consultation.

6. Activities**6.1 Academic Activities**

The Committee noted that Dr Cleary had stepped down from her role and agreed that recruitment for the vacancy should proceed. The Chair reported on a successful trainee event held in November 2024, supported by the Freddie Flynn Fund and delivered in collaboration with the ALM. Building on this success, the College has committed to funding a follow-up event in the next calendar year, to be scheduled alongside National Audit Day as part of two consecutive days of academic activities. The Committee welcomed this initiative and endorsed the continued focus on academic development.

6.2 E-Learning – Pathology Portal

Mr Thrower provided an update on the Pathology Portal, highlighting the publication of 60–70 resources with an additional 20 in development. Portal usage continues to grow both nationally and internationally. Outreach efforts, including emails to professionals and engagement at Trainee Days, have contributed to increased interaction. Mr Thrower called for further contributions, particularly from trainees, to develop relevant resources and provide feedback. The portal aligns with broader digital education initiatives, including NHS England's efforts.

7. External representative update**7.1 Association for Laboratory Medicine (ALM)**

In the absence of Dr Hayden, the Chair who serves on both the ALM Executive Committee and Council provided the following update.

- The ALM, in collaboration with the IBMS and College, is finalising two key guidance documents. One addresses the provision of EQA and quality control, specifically actions to take when issues arise within the manufacturer's recommended limits. This guidance is now in the publication phase. The second document focuses on the lack of CPD funding for healthcare scientists, highlighting the inequalities when compared to other healthcare professions, and is directed to NHS England.
- The ALM has also been awarded the role of host for EuroMedLab 2027, which will take place in London. Promotional activities for the event will be carried out at EuroMedLab 2025 in Brussels.

- The ALM Learning Academy continues to expand, having successfully delivered lectures and educational resources, reinforcing its commitment to advancing education in laboratory medicine.
- A new podcast series has been launched to promote the role and value of laboratory medicine within the healthcare sector.
- The management course for trainees, initially scheduled for 2025, has been postponed to 2026 due to organisational constraints.

7.2 Association for Laboratory Medicine (ALM) Audits

Dr. Wassif provided an update on the forthcoming National Audit Day scheduled for 28 November 2025. The event will include a focus on the recent audit carried out with Prosthetic Cancer UK. The audit will centre around clinical presentations and recent advances in treatment. Additionally, the audit will be complemented by a session on tumour markers, specifically PSA, with the data currently under analysis.

Dr. Wassif highlighted that an expert on CAR T therapy is being sought for a talk. The SAC were encouraged to provide recommendations from their hospitals to assist with this. The overall tumour marker audit is being coordinated by Dr Cassie Sturgeon and other members of the audit team, with a clinical presentation from an oncologist planned. A further audit on testosterone is being planned, with a specific focus on androgen deprivation therapy and surveillance. This will align with the PSA audit and provide coverage on both male and female health. It was noted that the audits on tumour markers and testosterone are expected to be completed soon.

The success of the previous National Audit Day was acknowledged, with positive feedback received from approximately 120 delegates from across the country. The event was praised for its strong lineup of international experts who presented in their areas of specialisation.

The SAC members were encouraged to email suggestions or questions about future audits or any other aspects of the meeting.

7.3 Association of Clinical Pathologists (ACP)

Dr Meek provided the following update:

- The next meeting of the Chemical Pathology Committee is scheduled to take place within the next week or two. No immediate updates from this meeting were provided.
- The ACP has been working with the Journal of Clinical Pathology to release several best practice articles aimed at enhancing the field.
- The ACP has been collaborating with Dr Wassif and his team to support national audit work, contributing to the improvement of practices within the specialty.
- There are ongoing discussions within the ACP regarding the renaming of the specialty. A survey had been circulated among the members to gather their opinions on the matter, emphasising the importance of member input.
- The ACP is making significant changes to its educational offerings within the field of chemical pathology. She indicated that a new initiative is planned for launch later in the year, which is expected to provide new opportunities and further enhance the specialty.

7.4 Get it Right First Time (GIRFT)

Dr Myers provided the following an update on several key issues:

- Faulty calibrators in the Menarini haemoglobin A1C device caused a positive bias in results, leading to incorrect diagnoses for thousands of patients across multiple laboratories in England. The issue was identified by Luton, escalated to NHS

England's Performance and Quality Board, and a recall process for affected laboratories is set to begin.

- Dr Myers proposed the development of analytical performance specifications for key diagnostic tests such as haemoglobin A1C, PSA, and CA-125. He invited the SAC to participate in developing these standards, which may be endorsed by the College.
- Concerns were raised about the management of insulin assays in laboratories, particularly in relation to investigations of hypoglycaemia. Dr Myers is developing a national guidance document on insulin assay handling, which he plans to submit to the College for endorsement once finalised.
- It was reported that a company called Labacus is improperly using College guidelines to market its device without permission. The Chair requested Dr Myers to forward the relevant information, which he will then pass on to the College for investigation.
- Dr Sue Hill has initiated a fragile services group to address the risks posed to specialised services, including pathology, due to underfunding and limited support.

CB.8/25

8. Professionalism

8.1 Workforce & Recruitment

Update covered under item CB.1/25 above.

CB.9/25

9. Representation from other College Committees

9.1 Update from Genomics and Reproductive Science SAC

Professor Grammatopoulos informed that the Genomics and Reproductive Science SAC meeting had been postponed and therefore he had no specific updates.

He mentioned that there has been increased discussion about Non-Invasive Prenatal Testing (NIPT) and suggested the possibility of exploring how to combine fetal anomaly screening with NIPT.

9.2 Update from Prenatal, Perinatal and Paediatric Pathology SAC

No update received – representative yet to be appointed.

9.3 College Council

Update covered under item CB.1/25 above.

CB.10/25

10. Regional update reports

10.1 Scotland

None – no representative.

10.2 Northern Ireland

None – no representative.

10.3 Wales

None – no representative.

CB.11/25

11. Professor Freddy Flynn Bursary

It was reported that the Freddie Flynn Bursary will be awarded to five applicants to participate in LabMedUK25. Thanks were given to those who volunteered to review and judge the applications. It was noted that while some strong applications were received, it was requested that more applications, particularly from trainees, be encouraged for the next round. The timing for this year's bursaries was improved, ensuring recipients are notified well in advance of the event.

CB.12/25

12. Government launches call for evidence on men's health

It was noted that a document from the College has been circulated regarding a government initiative focusing on men's health. The College is seeking input on which topics should be prioritised, with both individual and organisational responses encouraged. The Chair requested Shelaine Kissoon to circulate the document to the SAC for comments, with a suggested deadline for responses by the end of May 2025. The College aims to submit its response to the document by 20 June 2025.

CB.13/25 13. Any other business
None.

CB.14/25 14. Date of the next meeting
The date of the next meeting will be confirmed once a new Chair is appointed.