



The Royal College of Pathologists

Pathology: the science behind the cure

RCPATH – Forensic Pathology response to HEE's Strategic Framework Call for Evidence 2021

Training Needs and Retention Issues for Forensic pathology in the UK

There are special considerations that need apply to service provision for forensic pathology in the United Kingdom which is currently almost completely out with the Health Service planning process, although there is a possibility (see below) that this may change in the future. The number of Consultants required to provide the service depends mainly on the workload i.e. the number of suspicious deaths each year. Whilst this number fluctuates it does not change greatly with time but equally is unpredictable and to a degree cannot be planned for.

In Scotland, the forensic pathology and medico-legal autopsy services are funded by the Crown Office and provided almost completely by consultant forensic pathologists employed by the Universities of Glasgow (6 with two posts vacant), Edinburgh (5 with one vacancy), Dundee (2 but possibly only 1.5 in post) and Aberdeen (2 in post). The workload remains generally stable but has been high this year especially in Glasgow. There are 3 Specialty Trainees currently in post in Scotland (1 Glasgow, 1 Edinburgh, 1 Aberdeen/Dundee). The situation in Scotland both in terms of funding of training and of consultant posts appears stable.

In Northern Ireland, the forensic pathology and medico-legal services are funded by the Department of Justice and provided by 4 consultant forensic pathologists working in the State Pathologist's Office in Belfast. There is one vacant consultant post. There is one vacant trainee post. The post has been left vacant deliberately. The situation is again considered.

The situation in England and Wales is less clear for a number of reasons not least because of the variable employment status. The large majority of the 35 consultant forensic pathologists on the Home Office Registrar are now independent and self employed. 2.5 pathologists are employed by the NHS and 8 by the Universities of Cardiff, Leicester and Newcastle (all posts now filled). The consultants are directly, indirectly, or partially funded by the Police. Specialty training occurs in 4 centres (Newcastle, Liverpool, Leicester and Cardiff) and currently there are 2 trainees in post in Liverpool, 2 in Leicester, 2 in Newcastle and 1 vacant post in Cardiff which has not been advertised recently. All but one (it is believed) of the posts are fully funded and one partly funded by the Home Office who also provide additional funding to the centres to support the training. The trainee numbers are considered sufficient to meet likely consultant openings based on current workload demands.

Potential Issues:

There is in general little trouble in recruiting and retaining Forensic Pathology Trainees or indeed retaining qualified Forensic Pathologists. Every trainee advert attracts a good field of suitable candidates. Once qualified a small proportion will leave the country for Australia or

Canada typically where there are well-paid salaried positions. This occurs because a minority of Forensic Pathologists are not attracted to self-employment and sometimes there are no vacant posts in England and Wales.

Recently a review of Forensic Pathology (The Hutton Report) recommended a significant shift in national non-forensic autopsy arrangements which would mean a necessary and rapid increase in numbers of forensic pathologists. There is very little prospect of this model being adopted nationally although it may be locally.

Trainees in Forensic Pathology are drawn from run-through training in Cellular Pathology, either part of the way through, or at the end of, their cellular pathology training. In some areas, the transfer of trainees from cellular to forensic pathology curricula has impacted on planned progression in cellular pathology. The future needs of Forensic pathology are usually not but should be integrated into general workforce planning for cellular pathology.