



Special Advisory Committee on Clinical Biochemistry (SAC)

Minutes

A meeting of the Clinical Biochemistry SAC was held on Wednesday 8 October 2025
at 11:00am – 13:00pm via Microsoft Teams conferencing

Professor Sarah Coupland
Registrar

Minutes

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

- CB.15/25**
- 1. Welcome, declaration of conflict of interests and apologies for absence**
 - 1.1 The Chair welcomed all members to the meeting and expressed his appreciation for the opportunity to assume the role of chair. He thanked members for their support and acknowledged the significant contributions of Dr Godber, who had served as SAC Chair over the past two years. The Chair congratulated Dr Godber on his appointment as President of the ALM and noted that his continued involvement with the committee would be highly valued.

The Chair outlined his intention for the SAC to remain output focused, emphasising the importance of achieving tangible results. He stated that the SAC's effectiveness would be measured by its outputs and expressed confidence in achieving these goals through collaborative effort.
 - 1.2 Apologies for absence had been received and noted above.
 - 1.3 There were no declarations of conflict of interest.
- CB.16/25**
- 2. Minutes of the previous meeting**
 - 2.1 The minutes of the meeting held on 8 May 2025 were reviewed and approved as a correct record.
 - 2.2 There were no matters arising not already covered on the agenda.



- 2.3 There were no actions arising from the previous meeting.

CB.17/25

3. Learning Updates

3.1 Training

No report – representative not present.

3.2 Examinations

Dr Kevin Deans provided a verbal report on the examinations, and the following was highlighted:

Spring 2025 Examinations:

- *Part 1 Exam:* The pass rate was 87.5 percent, consistent with higher-end expectations. Standard quality control procedures were applied using the Angoff method, both before and after the examination, to review any questions where candidate performance differed from expectations.
- *Part 2 Module 1 OSPE and Practical:* The overall pass rate was 68.1 percent, with 32 of 47 candidates passing, consistent with previous sittings. The standard Angoff setting and marking procedures were followed.
- *Part 2 Module 2 (Cases, Critical Appraisal, and Viva Paper):* The overall pass rate was 73 percent, broadly comparable with historical outcomes. No concerns were reported.

Autumn 2025 Examinations

- Results are not yet released.
- Technical difficulties were reported with the Part 1 online exams due to a new provider, primarily affecting candidates on the first day. Clinical Biochemistry, held on the second day, was less affected, although minor issues occurred.
- A high-level review is being conducted by the College, including immediate actions for affected candidates and preventive measures to reduce the risk of recurrence.

Part 2 Clinical Biochemistry – Proposed Simplification

- Discussions had begun regarding structural simplification to reduce duplication between workplace based and exam-based assessments.
- Initial consultation with the Examiner Panel has taken place, with proposals next to be considered by the Chemical Pathology College Specialty Training Committee (CSCT) meeting.
- Any changes will require GMC approval and will include a transition period of at least 12 months.
- Trainees advised to continue to prepare for the current exam format until formal changes are approved and communicated.

President, Dr Croal provided a detailed report on the recent disruptions to the online Part 1 and some Part 2 examinations. He noted that the College delivers a complex programme of specialist examinations each year (67 in total), and despite the dedication and organisation of a highly skilled team, occasional issues do arise, many of which are beyond the College's control. Dr Croal explained that, although the new online examination system had undergone thorough testing with the new provider, an unforeseeable technical problem occurred. While the issue affected only a proportion of candidates, the experience fell short of the College's usual high standards. He advised that potential remedial options for affected candidates are currently under consideration, with no final decisions yet made, as all measures require GMC approval.

The College extends its sincere apologies to affected candidates for the disruption and the impact on their examination experience. Dr Croal acknowledged the exceptional

efforts of staff, who responded promptly and effectively to manage the situation and ensure exams could continue wherever possible.

Trainee representatives, Dr Miller and Dr Jakubowska, raised questions regarding the reliability of the exam platform, fairness, support for affected candidates, and the financial implications of potential remedial measures. In response, Dr Croal and Dr Deans reiterated the College's commitment to maintaining high standards, fairness, and confidence in the examination process.

Suggestions were made to enhance communication with trainees, including the use of webinars or formal updates, to improve understanding of the examination process, the causes of disruption, and the College's ongoing response. Dr Deans emphasised the importance of transparency, clarity, and proactive communication as essential to rebuilding and maintaining trainee and candidate confidence in the examination process.

CB.18/25

4. Trainees' update

4.1 ALM Trainees' report

Dr Miller delivered an update on behalf of the ALM Trainees' Committee and the following was noted:

- This was Dr. Miller's final meeting on the SAC; and expressed her gratitude to the team for their support.
- A new Chair for the ALM Trainees' Committee is expected to join soon. Interviews were conducted recently, though the final selection had not yet been confirmed.
- The new Vice Chair, Larissa Pays, will commence her role in the coming week. She is a second year STP, highly enthusiastic, and keen to engage with the programme and its activities.
- All available training resources for ALM trainees had been identified and listed, providing clarity on the support and development opportunities available.
- Recruitment challenges continue, particularly in consultant posts, and this remains an ongoing issue for the team.
- Freddie Flynn Day is approaching, and ALM trainees are expected to be involved in the planned activities.

4.1 RCPATH Trainees' report

Dr Jakubowska reported that recent recruitment rounds were highly successful, with all training positions filled and the programme significantly oversubscribed. She outlined several educational initiatives that had recently expanded, including regular RCPATH masterclasses and analytical series lectures, now accessible via the Pathology Portal. Monthly journal clubs had been established, and bi-monthly metabolic focused training days are planned to improve structured clinical exposure. Future developments include the introduction of a management lecture series. Overall, these initiatives have improved accessibility to both laboratory based and clinical training, marking a positive progression for the programme.

Professor Grammatopoulos raised concern regarding the lack of applicants from Chemical Pathology for Academic Clinical Fellowships (ACFs), noting that while other specialties, such as Orthopaedics, had successfully recruited several fellows, Chemical Pathology had none. In response, Dr Jakubowska explained that the specialty is inherently highly academic, with many trainees already holding or pursuing PhDs, but that formal ACF posts remain very limited. She noted awareness of only one post in Oxford and another scheme at Imperial. She added that trainees often pursue research opportunities outside national schemes such as the NIHR, which may contribute to the perceived lack of engagement. Both Dr Jakubowska and Professor Grammatopoulos agreed on the importance of raising awareness of the specialty, highlighting its

academic opportunities, and exploring ways to expand ACF or clinical lectureship posts within Chemical Pathology.

CB.19/25 5. Best practice recommendations

5.1 The following updates were noted on the progress of the guidelines.

G158 The communication of critical and unexpected pathology results

- The guidance for biochemistry is largely complete.
- Expansion to other specialty adds complexity due to requiring engagement from other SACs.
- The guidance serves as a baseline and is advisory; local departments decide how to implement, and deviations are expected and acceptable.
- Paediatric sodium limits updated following serious incidents in Northern Ireland.
- Finalising the guidance requires follow-up with remaining SAC members before publication.

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

- Consultation had been completed, and stakeholder feedback received.
- A medically qualified co-author has been appointed to support final revisions.
- Revisions are underway to incorporate consultation comments, with publication anticipated once complete.

CB.20/25 6. Activities

6.1 Academic Activities

Professor Grammatopoulos informed that he had joined the College Research Committee representing biochemistry and highlighted research opportunities for trainees and those pursuing higher degrees. He noted that he would provide more detailed feedback at the next SAC meeting. Members of the SAC emphasised the importance of research within the discipline and encouraged updates on these activities.

6.2 E-Learning – Pathology Portal

No update – representative yet to be appointed.

CB.21/25 7. External representative update

7.1 Association for Laboratory Medicine (ALM)

Dr Godber provided an update on behalf of the ALM and reported the following:

- In 2024, the ALM collaborated with the College to utilise the Freddie Flynn Bursary funds to create a trainee led meeting, organised by trainees for trainees, with the College providing the venue. This meeting is scheduled for 27th November 2025, with organisation led by Dr Annie Cook and supported by Dr Miller. Invitations have been circulated to trainees.
- As part of this event, the Freddie Flynn Award will be presented to Dr Gwen Walk, whose nomination was approved by the SAC. Dr Walk will deliver a presentation during the meeting.
- A National Audit Meeting is planned for 28th November 2025, immediately following the Freddie Flynn meeting, to enable attendees, particularly those travelling from a distance to attend both events. Dr Wassif will coordinate and oversee the presentation of selected audit applications for this meeting.
- Dr Godber also reported that Dr Croal had proposed exploring the establishment of joint committees at the College Council. This proposal was considered by the AI and Informatics Group of Lab Med, which expressed support for pursuing the opportunity, recognising the potential benefits of closer collaboration between the organisations.

7.2 Association for Laboratory Medicine (ALM) Audits

Dr Wassif provided an update on the National Audit Meeting, highlighting the following:

- *Abstracts:* 22 abstracts were received, including 7 from non-pathology disciplines (surgery, cardiology, radiology, haematology). All abstracts will be published in the *Annals*.
- *Presentations:* Abstracts are scored anonymously; top submissions will be allocated 15-minute presentations.
- *Meeting Themes:*
 - Prostatic Cancer - Audit in collaboration with Prostate Cancer UK, including testosterone audits and updates on androgen deprivation therapy.
 - Cancer and Laboratory Services - Tumor marker audits, laboratory service updates, and research-focused presentations.
- *Speakers:* Professor Caroline Moore (UCL), a consultant from Newcastle, Professor Mike Duffy (Dublin), Dr Catherine (Barts), and a patient perspective from a prostate cancer survivor.
- *Attendance:* Last year, approximately 120 participants attended online and 80 attended face-to-face. Concern was raised regarding a 50% increase in registration fees for this year's meeting.
- *Future Themes:* Cardiovascular/dyslipidaemia audits (covering both laboratory and clinical perspectives) and a potential audit on poisoning.
- *Venue:* London is the preferred location for the National Audit meetings due to the concentration of clinical scientists; a questionnaire will be circulated to explore alternative locations (Manchester, Birmingham, Brighton).

7.3 Association of Clinical Pathologists (ACP)

No report – representative not present.

7.4 Get it Right First Time (GIRFT)

No report – representative not present.

The Chair noted GIRFT's previous request for College support and acknowledged that no further developments had been reported.

Dr Godber reported that Dr Myers and colleagues are coordinating a webinar in November 2025 focused on HbA1c. He added that on behalf of Lab Med, a group led by Dr Patel had been commissioned to develop a position paper addressing HbA1c performance issues, including challenges with the Menarini Trinity assay, other diagnostic and monitoring questions, and the impact of haemoglobinopathies on assay accuracy. This work is being undertaken under the Lab Med Scientific Committee and includes members from the relevant Colleges, covering chemical pathology, biochemistry, and related specialties.

CB.22/25

8. Professionalism

8.1 Workforce & Recruitment

Dr Croal provided an update on workforce and the following highlights noted:

- Workforce pressures in pathology are severe, with no national workforce planning. Data is highly unreliable, particularly ESR, which apparently under-reports staff numbers and misclassifies roles. Consultant vacancy rates are high in paediatric and perinatal pathology and immunology, reaching around 40%, causing service closures. Training numbers are declining because trusts are often unwilling to fund trainee salaries. Clinical biochemistry and chemical pathology are also under pressure, though they are less immediately dependent on full staffing.

- The College is actively advocating for recognition and investment in the workforce. Through the College Workforce Strategy, it is manually collecting data, developing metrics to demonstrate the value of clinical scientists and chemical pathology staff, and using this evidence to influence government policy and the new Carter Review.
- Innovations such as AI, digital pathology, IT automation, and advanced roles are being promoted to support workforce pressures, but these measures alone cannot address fundamental shortages.
- Discipline specific Leads are needed to liaise with the College, to help collate workforce data on trainees, consultants, and academics, and to ensure accurate information for planning and advocacy.

Regarding the new Carter Review, Dr Croal explained that it is focusing on productivity, supply, and workforce. He cautioned that poor quality data could lead to misguided recommendations, such as consolidation or cost cutting, without considering the potential impacts on quality or patient care. The College is actively working to influence the review by providing accurate data and highlighting workforce challenges, particularly in disciplines already under significant pressure.

CB.23/25 9. Representation from other College Committees

9.1 Update from Genomics and Reproductive Science SAC

Professor Grammatopoulos stated that there was no specific update from the last Genomics and Reproductive Science SAC meeting.

He noted that in September 2025, the College circulated a 2025 Pathology Plan questionnaire regarding areas of expertise, barriers, and the use of AI, and he provided input from a chemical pathology perspective on linking phenotype and genotype. Dr Croal added that there are ongoing discussions about genomics within the College, including engagement with Sue Hill, the formation of a subcommittee, and a November symposium focused on genomics and cancer.

9.2 Update from Prenatal, Perinatal and Paediatric Pathology SAC

No update received – representative yet to be appointed.

9.3 College Council

Update covered above under CB.17/25 and CB.22/25 by Dr Croal.

CB.24/25 10. Regional update reports

10.1 Scotland

None – no representative.

10.2 Northern Ireland

None – no representative.

10.3 Wales

None – no representative.

CB.25/25 11. Any other business

11.1 Patient Safety Steering Group Update

Mrs Retneswaran provided an update on the newly formed Patient Safety Steering Group and noted that it was launched in May 2025 under the College Professional Practice Directorate and is chaired by Dr Mike Eden. She highlighted that membership includes representatives from NHS England, UCAS, the NHS, lay members, and fellows across specialties. The group's work aligns with the Patient Safety and Quality Strategy 2024–2029 and currently focuses on identifying risks using national data to improve diagnostic accuracy, reviewing guidance on point of care testing, and developing safe staffing guidance. She also advised that an updated patient safety survey will be

redistributed to gather representative feedback from members. Looking ahead, the group plans to focus on pathologist wellbeing in coordination with workforce research as part of its next phase of activities.

11.2 Meeting frequency

The Chair raised the topic of meeting frequency, noting that meeting only once every six months can mean an absence from one meeting could lead to losing track of a year's progress. He proposed holding abbreviated meetings every three months between the main meetings to cover new important business and provide updates on ongoing matters. All SAC members agreed to the addition of an informal meeting.

11.3 Possible RCPATH-led initiatives

The following initiatives were raised and discussed:

- *National Analytical Performance Specifications for Common Tests*

The Chair highlighted the need for clear performance specifications in the UK, particularly following issues around haemoglobin A1C. Unlike some international systems, UK laboratories lack standardised targets for many tests, leading to inconsistent decision making. He proposed developing guidance on analytical performance specifications, including QC frequency and rules, with input from international experts and relevant stakeholders. Dr Godber supported the initiative, emphasising the importance of reference data, robust procedures for non-conformances, and collaboration among EQA providers, users, and professional bodies.

- *Managing Increasing Demand for Laboratory Result Interpretation*

The Chair noted that laboratory workload continues to increase by around 10% per year, creating challenges for ongoing provision of interpretative comments on reports. He suggested guidance to help laboratories manage this demand effectively. Dr Croal highlighted the potential role of AI in automating interpretative comments, standardising pathways, and ensuring that results are clinically impactful, allowing laboratories to cope with the rising demand efficiently.

- *Best Practice for Direct Laboratory Interaction with Patients*

The Chair raised the idea of laboratories interacting directly with patients as a potential area for guidance. He acknowledged it may be controversial and indicated that further work is needed before the topic is brought back to the SAC for discussion.

11.4 EQA Oversight

Dr Croal provided an update on EQA oversight, explaining that the College is pausing the current system from 1 January due to funding, volunteer, and governance challenges. He outlined plans for stakeholder meetings later in the year to address these issues and secure sustainable support.

CB.26/25

12. Meeting dates for 2026

Wednesday, 28 January (11:00am – 13:00pm)

Thursday, 28 May (11:00am – 13:00pm)

Wednesday, 18 November (11:00am-13:00pm)