

## Guideline

Subject: **Selection of Pathology Trainees**  
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## Preamble

The following are guidelines for the selection and appointment of Pathology Trainees, developed in accordance with the principles set out in the Report of the Medical Training Review Panel, *Trainee Selection in Australian Medical Colleges*, 1998 (the “Brennan Report”).

These Guidelines are not a formal rotation or training program but are designed to facilitate and simplify the process of the appointment of Pathology Trainees at a State or Regional level. It must be noted that the RCPA is not the employer of any Trainee appointed in a rotation. The purpose of these Guidelines is to alert State and Regional Committees to act as a facilitator for employers in coordinating the training positions of various health services so that the specific needs of the organisations and the individual Trainees are optimally met. The Health Service or private laboratory to which the Trainee is allocated will be the employer. All participating institutions must be equal opportunity employers.

Of note, the College is supportive of any arrangements that provide leave from rotation for maternity leave and for part time training.

## Definitions

“**Appointments Working Party**” means a Working Party brought together for the appointment of Trainees.

“**Scheme**” refers to the centrally coordinated appointment system of Pathology Trainees.

## Principles of selection

- The RCPA believes that excellence in the practice of pathology is multifaceted and includes, amongst other attributes: an enquiring mind; the commitment to lifelong learning; academic achievement; a depth of clinical understanding; and the ability to effectively communicate the interpretation and significance of pathological findings to the treating clinician in the context of the individual patient or health care system. The selection of Trainees therefore must take such attributes into account.
- The selection process must comply with the legislative requirements of the jurisdiction within which it operates, in particular equal opportunity of employment and anti-discrimination legislation and the relevant College policies. The process must adhere to the principles of natural justice.
- The selection process must be fair and objective, giving applicants the best possible assessment of their suitability within the constraints of time and resources

- Providing that the Trainee is progressing appropriately in training it is an expectation that Trainees should be offered continuing posts for the duration of training prior to the appointment of new Trainees to the program
- Applicants must have recourse to an appropriate appeals process.

Where there is a selection process which is formally endorsed by the College, training time for the position will only be accredited by the College if the employer participates in this process and appoints the selected trainee resulting from this process. If the appointment to the training program is outside the routine selection process, the employer must notify the coordinator of the selection process where applicable, to ensure that the trainee participates in the next available selection round. The interview panel should consist of the coordinator, the head (or suitable representative) of the appointing Department, and at least two (2) other outside department heads (or suitable representatives). The most suitable candidate will be appointed as part of this process.

### **Eligibility for application**

To be eligible to apply for selection an applicant must meet one of the following requirements:

Either:

- A. Qualifies for registration as a Trainee with the RCPA (See Policy for Admission to College Training Programs)

i.e. The applicant must:

1. Have a Medical degree recognised for registration purposes in Australia (or New Zealand, Hong Kong, Singapore, Malaysia, Saudi Arabia). In Australia, medical graduates of universities outside of Australia and New Zealand must satisfactorily complete requirements of the Australian Medical Council for the AMC Certificate (including the mandatory clinical year) and have obtained General Medical registration with the Australian Health Practitioner Regulation Agency (AHPRA) before commencing specialist training.
2. Be registrable as a Medical Practitioner in the country of domicile.
3. Have completed at least two year's clinical experience post primary medical degree. In exceptional circumstances, applicants who do not have at least two years clinical experience may be considered if they can demonstrate alternative relevant experience of a similar level

OR

- B. Be an Overseas Trained Specialist assessed by the College as requiring no more than 2 years additional assessment/training.

Residential qualification: although the College does not have any specific residential requirements for trainee registration, selection committees should note that employing Health Service(s) may have citizenship/residency requirements that need consideration in appointment decisions.

### **Advertising**

- Advertising for applicants is placed on the appropriate websites in each jurisdiction and on the RCPA website.
- Eligibility and selection criteria should be made known to the applicants.
- The advertisement should contain reference to the College website for relevant information.

## **Application process**

- Applications should be submitted on a standard proforma. The Working Party may specify if it wishes to receive all applications electronically.
- The proforma should include a list of available positions, for which applicants should allocate their preferences.
- The applicant should provide the contact details of at least two referees, who should be sent standardised proformas for completion. Sample forms are available from the College.
- Applicants should be notified of the receipt of their application, the date of interviews and the anticipated date of advice of the result.

## **The selection committee**

- The Appointments Working Party should form an Interview Panel that will consist of Heads, or their nominees, of all participating Pathology Departments/Laboratories involved in the rotation, or an agreed subgroup of those Departments/Laboratories where the size of the panel would prove unworkable. In addition, in accordance with Australian Medical Council requirements, there will be an RCPA representative on the Panel who will report back to the RCPA on the process and outcome of the interviews. If an RCPA nominee is not on the panel, training time will not be able to be approved.
- Where appropriate, jurisdictional representatives or other stakeholders, such as treating clinicians, may be included on the Panel.
- Members of the Panel should be made aware prior to the commencement of the process of the criteria for selection, the proposed format of the interview, and their responsibilities for documentation.
- All those who have participated in the deliberations of the committee and who partake in the selection of candidates will be required to abide by the decisions made by the Appointments Working Party.
- Members of the Panel should be made aware prior to the commencement, of the process of the appeals mechanisms and their accountability for the decision of the Panel.

## **Selection methods and criteria for initial trainees**

The Working Party should select and adopt evidence-based selection methods specifically designed to assess the selection criteria. The methods should include a structured interview conducted by a representative panel for the state/region.

The table below sets out recommended criteria and possible assessment methods for initial trainees. It is recommended that strong weighting be given to professionalism and communication skills.

Criteria	Evidence/assessment methods	Notes
Identification as Aboriginal, Torres Strait Islander or Māori	Self-declared on application	All should be interviewed provided that they meet registration and clinical experience criteria
Professionalism and ethics	Scenario-based questions in structured interview Satisfactory referees' reports	If conflicting referees' reports have been received, additional references may be sought, and/or applicants may be invited to respond to any adverse comments made
Communication and interpersonal skills	Verbal communication in interview Written communication in application Satisfactory referees' reports	
Commitment to and understanding about pathology as a career	Structured interview questions relating to interest, knowledge and reason(s) for application Pass in Basic Pathological Sciences or similar exam Work experience in pathology	
Enquiring mind; analytical and clinical reasoning ability	Scenario-based questions in structured interview Evidence of projects involving scientific enquiry	
Academic achievement	Evidence from CV of higher degrees, publications, honours, awards and scholarships, research and teaching and/or presentation experience	
Breadth of clinical experience	Clinical experience relevant to pathology Success in postgraduate examinations in other clinical specialties, e.g. Part 1 FACD, FRACP, FRACS	
Flexibility	Willingness to work in all areas on rotation, including outer metropolitan and regional areas Willingness to work hours as required by the workplace	Ensure that equal employment opportunity principles are upheld

### **Ranking and allocation of postings for continuing/rotating Trainees**

Postings should be prioritised according to evidence of:

1. Satisfactory progress in Pathology, as documented in relevant progress reports
2. Success in post-graduate examinations in Pathology
  - Pathological Sciences
  - Part 1 Pathology examinations
3. Evidence of presentations at either internal (hospital) or external (symposia) meetings, or publications in peer reviewed journals.

When there are several applicants for a position, the Working Group may also choose to take into consideration the following:

1. Multiple failures:
  - Pathological Sciences
2. RCPA Part I and Part II Pathology examinations
3. Evidence of unsatisfactory progress in routine Pathology, as documented in network progress reports

Note that postings should support trainees who are experiencing difficulty.

### **Conduct of the interview**

- The format and duration of the interview should be the same for all candidates applying for the same positions
- A standard set of questions should be used for all candidates applying for the same positions. Different questions may be used for new and continuing Trainees, if required
- Members of the panel must act in accordance with anti-discrimination principles
- Each applicant should have an equal opportunity to ask questions of the panel.

### **Selection**

- Applicants must satisfy all qualifications, Medical Board registration and immigration requirements that are set out under Eligibility for Application, above
- The appointment of a Trainee is based on merit, as assessed by the selection panel in relation to ranking criteria that are set out by the Working Party
- Following the interviews, a list ranking all applicants should be made. There should be an eligibility list of appointable applicants and a list of applicants who are deemed unappointable based on the selection criteria and performance at the interview.
- Candidates ranked sufficiently high to match the number of available positions should be offered those positions.
- Any position not filled by the preferred applicant should be offered to the next highest ranked applicant. An applicant who is offered a position should be asked to notify the Coordinator/Chair whether they wish to accept by a specified time and day after the offer is made. The latter is to allow the Coordinator/Chair to make the offer of a position to the next highest ranked applicant should the initial applicant decline the offer.

- The final decision on the offer of a position to a specific hospital, Health Service or private laboratory is based on the requirements of the organisation, the organisation preference and the applicant's preference.
- Once an applicant is appointed to the Scheme, he or she can apply to transfer to any other participating laboratory in future selection interviews, but this should be subjected to the guidelines for the transfer of a Trainee previously appointed to the Scheme to another participating laboratory (see below).
- If a position becomes vacant and a candidate in the eligibility list fills it, then that candidate should be considered to be in the Scheme/training network. The length of time for which the eligibility list remains valid will be determined by the relevant Working Party
- If there is a need to appoint a Trainee outside the scheme, eg mid-year, the laboratory should liaise with the State-wide Training Coordinator.

### **Documentation of the process**

- The Working Party should determine the form in which to keep a record of proceedings and safekeeping arrangements.
- Documentation should be kept for as long as required under relevant state/region/organisational employment policies.
- Documentation must be sufficient to enable the conduct of a fair and equitable appeal in the absence of all members of the original interview panel, should the necessity arise.
- Where feasible, the Working Party should develop a process to evaluate the selection process by following the progress of Trainees in the state/region.
- The RCPA nominee will report back the outcome to RCPA

### **Feedback**

- Unappointable applicants should be notified as soon as possible following the interviews. The Coordinator/Chair should be available to provide feedback on their failure to meet the criteria if requested.

### **Appeals**

Unsuccessful applicants have the right to have employment decisions reviewed and the Working Group should establish a formal appeals process. This should include the availability of a review mechanism external to the original Panel.

When developing the appeals mechanism, the Working Group should consider the following principles:

- Seeking review of the process should not disadvantage the applicant in any future decisions.
- If review by the Working Group proves insufficient, the applicant should have recourse to an external appeals process.
- Applicants should be advised in advance of any costs associated with the process. Where the review is successful, the Working Group should have arrangements in place to bear the cost. If unsuccessful, the applicant should bear the costs.

## **Guidelines for the transfer of a Trainee previously appointed to the Scheme/Training network to another Pathology Department**

1. A Trainee who wishes to transfer to another hospital or private laboratory is required to submit an application on a standardised proforma (an example is available from the College).
2. The Trainee may be required to provide a ranking list of the Departments that he or she wishes to transfer to.
3. Laboratories should be given a list of all Trainees who wish to transfer. The selection panel will allocate positions according to the rankings of both individual Trainee and department.
4. The allocation of positions to Trainees who are already in the Scheme and are progressing satisfactorily should take precedence to that of applicants who are new to the Scheme.
5. A Trainee who has not performed satisfactorily during the course of training may not necessarily be offered a position in the Scheme. The definition of unsatisfactory performance is noted below.

## **Guidelines for applications from Pathology Trainees who are not in the Scheme/Training Network**

1. Applicants who fall into this category would include Pathology Trainees from interstate, or Trainees who had been appointed to temporary positions external to the Scheme. A practitioner who accepts a position external to the Scheme should be made aware that they have not been formally appointed to a position in the Scheme/Training network.
2. The applicant should satisfy all qualifications, Medical Board registration and immigration requirements set out in eligibility for application, above
3. The applicant should be assessed according to the same procedures as per **new applicants**, and appointment based on the same interview and ranking criteria.

## **Definition of unsatisfactory performance of a Pathology Trainee occupying a position in the Scheme/Training Network**

1. A Trainee who has failed their examinations in either the Pathological Sciences, Parts 1 or 2 on two or more occasions or has elected to not attempt examinations **plus** criterion 2 below
2. Unsatisfactory progress report/s. To obtain an adequate assessment of a Trainee, reports from all other specialists in the same department in which the Trainee works should be sought if an unsatisfactory progress report is received by the Appointments Working Party, plus poor examination performance noted in point 1 above. Please also refer to the Policy 15/2001 "Training Limitation."

## **Associated Documentation**

Sample application forms for new and rotating Trainees.