



Skipton House
London Road
London
SE1 6LH

Website: www.mmc.nhs.uk

20 December 2007

Dear Doctor,

Specialty Training Recruitment in 2008

On 7th December we wrote to you to describe the process for recruitment to specialty training posts in 2008. We promised to write to you again with further details and the final forecast of posts which will be available across England.

1. 'Uncoupling' in 2008

In 2007 a large proportion of specialist training places were offered on a 'run-through' basis which meant that, providing they were judged to have made adequate clinical and professional progress at the Annual Review of Competence Progression (ARCP), doctors would not need to re-apply for posts as they moved through their training years, up to the award of a CCT. However, alongside arguments that run-through training offers security and a clear career pathway for trainees, there is a clear case that it disadvantages some of them by making them make too early a choice about their chosen specialty; something which is also an important feature of the interim report of the Tooke Review, and an integral principle of the original MMC review

The MMC Programme Board have agreed that run-through training should be applied to selected specialties in 2008. Those specialties who feel it is of benefit to them can retain it, while those specialties who feel their trainees would benefit from greater flexibility can choose to 'uncouple'. In other words if you apply for a post in an 'uncoupled' specialty, you will get the benefit of greater freedom to reconsider your chosen specialty, but at the cost of having to re-apply for a training post in the future.

This means that in 2008 some specialties will offer run-through training and other specialties will 'uncouple' by offering specialty training entrants two or three years of specialty core training followed by open competition for ST3 or ST4.

Following consultation with Royal Colleges and others, the change for specialty training in England in 2008 is that there will be different training offers for different specialties, to fit the particular needs of that specialty. Some specialties will continue

to offer run-through training, while others will 'uncouple' and offer a two-year core training programme (three years for psychiatry and emergency medicine), followed by an open competition to enter specialty training at ST3 onwards (ST4 for psychiatry and emergency medicine).

For those specialties uncoupling and making core training offers to a larger pool of trainees at ST1 in 2008, the terminology for core training is CT1, CT2 (and CT3 for psychiatry and emergency medicine), as agreed with the Postgraduate Medical Education and Training Board (PMETB). These terms refer to one of the following approved training programmes:

- Core medical training
- Acute care common stem
- Core surgical training
- Core psychiatric training

The table below sets out those specialties offering run-through training and which will be uncoupled.

Offer of run-through training in 2008	Offer with Uncoupling in 2008
Obstetrics and Gynaecology	General Medicine
Ophthalmology	Anaesthesia
Paediatrics and Child Health	Psychiatry
General Practice	Occupational Medicine
Public Health Medicine	Emergency Medicine
Neurosurgery	Cardiothoracic surgery
	General surgery
Histopathology	Oral and Maxillofacial Surgery
Chemical Pathology	Otolaryngology (ENT)
Medical Microbiology	Paediatric surgery
	Plastic surgery
Clinical Radiology	Trauma & orthopaedic surgery
	Urology

Please note that part of the eligibility criteria for application to ST1 posts is that applicants should have 12 months or less whole time equivalent training, not including Foundation modules, in the specialty they are applying for. However, this does not rule out those with a greater degree of experience in other specialties from applying for these posts.

2. Post advertising and acceptance

The MMC Programme Board has agreed that the **minimum** period for the advertisement of specialty training posts will be 72 hours, excluding Saturdays, Sundays and public holidays. This will mean that applicants should keep a careful eye on Deanery websites for advertisements throughout the application timetable.

On the period of time that applicants will have to accept or reject the offer of a post, trainees' representatives on the Programme Board strongly urged that the minimum period should also be 72 hours. However, after recruitment for most ST1 and ST2 level posts ends on 16th May for the August start date, NHS Trusts also need to carry out normal pre-employment checks on their new appointments for patient safety reasons, which places a restriction on the timetable. For this reason, and to maximise

the number of offers that can be made to junior doctors before 16th May, the Programme Board has agreed that applicants will have a **minimum** of 48 hours (excepting weekends and public holidays) to accept or decline the offer of a post.

3. The number of available places

In our 7th December letter to you, we set out indicative figures for the number of posts ST1, 2, and 3 equivalent levels.

Below are the latest forecast numbers of training places which will be available for specialty training in 2008. We must stress that these numbers will change as Deaneries agree changes in training posts. It is crucial that potential applicants keep looking at individual Deanery websites for the latest information.

When considering which posts and specialties to apply for, we urge all applicants to consider carefully the likely levels of competition involved. For example, at the end of Round One recruitment in 2007, there were over 15 applicants for every general surgical ST2 post in Mersey Deanery, but just over 3 applicants for every ST2 oral and maxillofacial surgery post in the same deanery. Considering a different location to train also makes a difference to competition ratios. At the end of Round One recruitment in 2007, for example, there was just one applicant per training post for ST2 oral and maxillofacial surgery in Northern Deanery.

You can access the most recent available competition ratios via the MMC website: <http://www.mmc.nhs.uk/pages/cr>.

The latest forecast of the total number of available posts in 2008 will be in the range of 8,900 to 9,100. This has increased from the indicative 8,400 to 8,700 range originally reported to the MMC Programme Board four weeks ago.

ST1 level

Table 1 shows the latest forecast number of ST1 equivalent level posts. The total number of available posts has increased from an indicative 5,800 to the latest forecast of 6,100.

Table 1	ST1/CT1 Posts	FTSTA 1 posts	Total Indicative
General Practice	2,200	-	2,200
Specialty posts	3,500	400	3,900
Total ST1 level posts	5,700	400	6,100

ST2 level

Table 2 shows the latest forecast posts planned at ST2 level. The number of posts has risen from an indicative 2,000 to the latest forecast of 2,070.

Table 2	ST2 posts (ST3 for Psych & Paeds)	CT2/FTSTA2 Posts (CT3/FTSTA3 for Psych and Paeds)	Total
General Practice	30	-	30
Specialty posts	40	2,000	2,040
Total ST2 level posts	70	2,000	2,070

ST3 level range

The indicative figures included in our letter last week indicated a range of 600 to 900 available ST3 posts over the course of 2008.

The latest forecast is that over 380 ST3 posts will be advertised in early January, with a further 165 towards the end of January. Therefore the total number of ST3 posts likely to be advertised in the January to May recruitment period is likely to be about 550.

There will be two further recruitment exercises in June and September. The Department of Health forecasts that between 200 and 400 ST3 posts may be advertised in these two later recruitment exercises in 2008, depending on the rate at which current holders of NTN obtain their CCTs and then consultant posts, so releasing their NTN.

Therefore the latest forecast of the total number of ST3 posts likely to be advertised during the whole of the year 2008 is between 750 and 950.

The Department of Health is about to publish the MMC 2008 Applicant Guide, as well as a new national website for the 2008 process (www.mmc.nhs.uk). Once the switch has been made from the 2007 website to the 2008 website, there may be a delay of up to 24 hours whilst your particular server adjusts to the new technical location (www.mmc.nhs.uk will remain the URL address). If you receive an error message, please be patient for a few hours or try again the next day.

These will be able to provide greater detail on the numbers of available posts by specialty and deanery, as well as detailed competition ratios on the 2008 website. We would urge you to study them carefully.

Thank you.

Yours faithfully,

Dr Mary Armitage
Co-Chair
MMC England Programme Board

Professor David Haslam
Co-Chair
MMC England Programme Board

On behalf of the MMC England Programme Board.



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7th December 2007

Dear Doctor,

Specialty Training Recruitment in 2008

We are writing to you to set out how the 2008 specialty recruitment process will work in England, as well as to give you early indications of the Department of Health's initial modelling of the likely numbers of posts and competition ratios involved. We will be writing to you again shortly with the final figures. A new national MMC 2008 website which will contain more detailed official guidance will be opening in mid-December.

The Department has set up an MMC Programme Board, working with the BMA, the Academy of Medical Royal Colleges, deaneries and employers to advise ministers on the many complex decisions needed to help the process run smoothly for 2008.

An outline of the 2008 process

1. Recruitment to most specialty training posts will be led by Deaneries at local level. There will not be a national IT application system. There will be no limit to the number of applications any individual can make.

2. However, some specialties will undertake nationally-coordinated recruitment processes for specialty recruitment. Academic posts – Academic Clinical Fellows and Clinical Lecturers - are being recruited through a separate process as in 2006. The first round of recruitment for Academic Clinical Fellows is currently underway. Detailed information on this process can be found on the NCCRC website: www.nccrcd.nhs.uk. Making an application for an Academic Clinical Fellowship does not preclude an application for non-academic specialty training.

Other specialties have elected to use nationally co-ordinated processes either because they are relatively small, or because they have effective nationally-standardised systems.

These include:

- Cardiothoracic Surgery (ST3)
- Neurosurgery (ST3)
- Plastic Surgery (ST3)
- Public Health (all levels)
- Histopathology (all levels)
- Paediatrics and Child Health (all levels)
- Obstetrics and Gynaecology (all levels)
- General Practice (all levels)

3. There will be a mixture of run-through training and 'uncoupling' in 2008, with some specialties offering run-through training and other specialties uncoupling by offering specialty training entrants two or three years of specialty core training followed by open competition for higher speciality training at ST3 / ST4. Further details will be available on the new MMC website shortly.

4. Deaneries and specialties will be able to hold up to three recruitment exercises or phases during the year. The first exercise, while locally-led, will be carried out with a national start date (5th January) and a national closing date (16th May).

Most of the posts at ST1 and ST2 levels will be advertised in this first recruitment exercise for entry in August 2008, because Foundation Programme doctors leave the Programme in the summer. However, recruitment to ST3 posts will be spread across the three recruitment exercises because ST3 posts become available throughout the year, as and when trainees complete their training and release their National Training Number (NTN).

Competition levels in 2008

Run-through trainees who were successful in the 2007 process will proceed to the next level of training, providing they pass the appropriate assessments. The process for allocating run-through trainees currently at ST2 level to their ST3 posts will be set out on the new MMC website shortly.

Many posts which were available at ST2 and ST3 in 2007, will be filled in 2008 by run-through trainees who were successful in the 2007 process. In addition, a recent Court of Appeal ruling means that the Department of Health cannot give priority to applications from UK medical graduates.

The Department of Health predicts that as a result, competition in 2008 will be more severe than in 2007, with an average 3:1 ratio. This will vary by speciality and location, with some being much more competitive.

It is anticipated that there will be around 5,800 ST1-level posts available in 2008. Around 5,000 Foundation Programme doctors will be competing with more experienced doctors wishing to change specialty. Doctors at this level will stand a very good chance of securing a post.

There will be around 2,000 ST2-level posts available, of which a high proportion will be one-year posts, as opposed to around 1,200 doctors completing their FTSTA1 posts. There will be also be some competition from applicants currently in NHS service posts and from outside the NHS. However, FTSTA1 doctors will stand a good chance of finding at least a one-year post in 2008.

There will be between 600 and 900 ST3 training places available, compared to around 2,000 doctors currently in FTSTA2 posts. These doctors will be competing with many applicants currently in NHS service posts and from outside the NHS. This will result in a high level of competition at this point, and an even higher rate for over-subscribed specialties such as surgery.

Doctors who are unsuccessful in securing a training post will have many opportunities to move into a service post. The NHS will need more, not fewer doctors in 2008.

Please note that these are indicative numbers and that we will be writing to you again shortly to provide the final figures.

What should I do as a junior doctor wishing to apply for a specialist training post in 2008?

This intense level of competition for training places will mean that applicants will need to think very carefully about the specialties and locations to which they apply. Some specialties are very much more competitive than others.

As there could be up to three distinct exercises for recruitment in different specialties, there will be a broader 'spread' of training posts, particularly at ST3 level, advertised over the course of the year. Applicants will have a 'free hand' to apply for as many posts as they like.

The new national MMC website will continue to provide details of the 2007 competition ratios in different specialties and locations so applicants can see their chances of success clearly. The site will also contain figures for how many different posts each deanery will be advertising.

The fact that recruitment will be Deanery-led means that applicants will need to keep a careful eye on Deanery websites for advertisements and vacancies. Many, but not all Deaneries will also be using NHS Jobs (www.jobs.nhs.uk) to advertise their vacancies.

There is an important point to note for those considering applying for FTSTA1 posts in those specialties which are retaining run-through training. If you are successful in obtaining an FTSTA1 in those specialties, your chances of obtaining a run-through post at ST2 in 2009 will be relatively low, as there will be very few available.

What are the implications for me as an NHS doctor involved in interviewing and advising applicants?

Many consultants involved in the 2007 process expressed their concern about the national application form and national shortlisting scoring system. For 2008, in most specialties forms will be determined locally, but will need to be structured and CV-based. In addition, shortlisting scoring systems will be determined locally.

There have been recent concerns that random-selection processes could be used during shortlisting. The Department of Health will issue guidance to Deaneries shortly to forbid this. This guidance will also require advertisements for specialty training posts to be open for a minimum of 72 hours.

Many doctors, especially potential applicants, will of course be seeking further clarification on the process outlined above. We will be writing to you again shortly to provide these, as well as opening a new MMC 2008 website within the next two weeks.

Yours faithfully,

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