

TIME OUT OF PROGRAMME (OOP) GUIDELINES

There are a number of circumstances when a trainee may seek to spend time out of their specialty training programme whilst retaining their NTN. Any application to do so requires formal approval from the Postgraduate Dean and will depend on two factors:

- Applications meeting the criteria set out in this document
- The ability of the programme to accommodate the absence and the remaining requirements of a trainee on return

Requests for OOP relate to obtaining clinical training (OOPT), clinical experience (OOPE), research in a different setting (OOPR) or taking a career break (OOPC).

OOPT allows the trainee to spend time in clinical training that has been *prospectively approved* by the GMC, which is not part of the trainee's specialty training programme.

OOPE allows the trainee to gain clinical experience, which is not a requirement of the specialty training programme curriculum, and does not require prospective approval.

OOPR allows the trainee to undertake research, normally for a higher registerable degree, e.g. PhD.

OOPC allows the trainee to take a planned career break, normally for personal reasons such as health problems, carer responsibilities or to pursue outside interests.

With the exception of ACF trainees, Core trainees will be granted out of programme time in exceptional circumstances only. Trainees undertaking fixed term specialty training appointments (FTSTA) or training locums (LAT) cannot request time out of training.

This policy does not include statutory leave such as maternity or paternity leave, which are dealt with through the Lead Employing Organisation.

1 GENERAL PRINCIPLES

- 1.1 Trainees wishing to take time out of programme must have the written agreement of the Postgraduate Dean. The Postgraduate Dean will consider requests that are submitted on the Deanery's OOP application form *only*, which has the support of the Training Programme Director and is

accompanied by the relevant supporting documentation.

- 1.2 Trainees must submit their application for time out of programme to the Deanery **at least** six months in advance of the proposed start date. The Deanery has two windows of approval for out of programme requests and applications *must* be received by the relevant deadline to be considered (see 4.5 below).
- 1.3 Time out of programme will not normally be agreed until a trainee has been in a training programme for a least one year, unless at the time of appointment a deferred start date was agreed for statutory reasons.
- 1.4 Time out of programme to undertake clinical experience (OOPE) or research (OOPR) will not be allowed in the final year of training. Trainees must comply with College regulations regarding time spent out of programme in clinical training (OOPT) in their final year of training.
- 1.5 Time out of programme may not be allowed if in doing so this impacts upon the ability of the specialty training programme to fill the resulting gap in the interests of patient care.
- 1.6 The start and finish dates of the out of programme period will normally be expected to coincide with post changeover dates within the particular specialty training programme.
- 1.7 Trainees must discuss their plans to take time out of programme at their annual review of competence progression or with their Training Programme Director/ Educational Supervisor and these plans must be included in their educational objectives.
- 1.8 A trainee whose annual review of competence progression is deemed unsatisfactory or with unmet objectives identified at their PYA will not normally be granted a period of OOP.
- 1.9 Trainees will retain their NTN during the period of OOP. Where a trainee's CCT date falls within a period of OOP, the trainee's contract will continue to run into the period of grace.
- 1.10 Before requesting out of programme training or research (OOPT/R), trainees must seek support for their application from the appropriate Royal College or Faculty. The College/Faculty should also indicate the length of time the OOPT/R should count towards CCT. If time can count towards the CCT date then the Postgraduate Dean will expect it to do so. Requests for OOPT/R that **do not** count towards CCT will not be considered for hospital specialty trainees*. The trainee's CCT date will be reassessed on return to the programme in the light of educational progress and the time left in

programme.

Following recommendation from the relevant Royal College/ Faculty, the General Medical Council (GMC) is the only body that can educationally approve OOPT/R to count towards the award of a CCT and the Deanery is responsible for submitting OOPT/R applications to the GMC for educational approval. The GMC will not accept applications from any other source, e.g. the trainee, College etc. Applications must be submitted to the GMC in advance of the OOPT/R as they **will not approve applications retrospectively**. The Deanery will submit to the GMC those applications for OOPT/R that it has approved following the approval window.

* General practice trainees cannot count OOPR towards CCT and applications will be considered as for OOPE.

- 1.11 Trainees wishing to curtail or extend approved OOP must make a formal application to do so and follow the normal application procedure.
- 1.12 Trainees taking time out of programme must give **at least** six months notice of their expected date of return. Although the returning trainee will be accommodated into the next available suitable vacancy in their programme, it may take time for a suitable placement to arise. There is no guarantee that the return date will be within six months of a trainee indicating their wish to return to training.
- 1.13 Trainees must ensure that the Deanery has an up-to-date contact address and e-mail address throughout the period of OOP and must submit an updated form annually.
- 1.14 Any trainee who begins a period out of programme without ensuring prior approval by the Postgraduate Dean will be considered absent without leave.

2 TYPES OF APPLICATION

- 2.1 **OOPT** – clinical training that will be used towards the award of a CCT. All OOPT must be prospectively approved by the GMC and will not normally exceed one year. Exceptional approval may be given up to a maximum of two years. OOPT will not normally result in a delay to the trainee's CCT date.

If a trainee wishes to 'act-up' as a consultant and count this period of training towards their CCT the normal application process must be followed. If the Royal College or Faculty agrees that this post is part of the relevant approved specialty training programme then GMC approval is not required. However, the trainee will be expected to show that the post has appropriate supervision and is relevant to gaining the competences, knowledge, skills and behaviour

required by the curriculum in their OOPT application.

NOTE: Any change in post for general practice trainees should be administered through a request to change posts. .

- 2.2 **OOPE** – clinical experience that will not be used towards the award of a CCT. OOPE will normally only be approved for one year in total.

NOTE: If trainees are undertaking clinically based placements they will be expected to apply for OOPT and not OOPE. If the application is for clinical experience a covering letter explaining why the out of programme does not count towards CCT *must* be submitted by the trainee; exceptional circumstances, e.g. work overseas in developing countries, will be considered.

Trainees in their final year of training will not be granted OOPE.

- 2.3 **OOPR** - research-based OOP. Time spent out of programme for research purposes can be recognised towards the award of CCT for higher specialty trainees when the relevant curriculum includes such research as an optional element. This will normally be for a registerable higher degree and should be explored with the relevant College or Faculty.

Applications for OOPR should not normally exceed three years (of which at least one year should count towards CCT). Extensions will be given at the discretion of the Postgraduate Dean who will take into account the impact of such an extension on the ability of the specialty training programme to fill the resulting gap in the interests of patient care and service provision

Trainees in their final year of training will not be granted OOPR.

NOTE: As OOPR does not count towards CCT for general practice trainees, the trainee will be required to submit clear reasons as to why the research requires time out of programme rather than being done once CCT is achieved.

- 2.4 **OOPC** – career break from training. Requests for a career break will be sympathetically considered however there may be limiting factors within the specialty which will not allow the application to be approved. e.g. the capacity of the programme to accommodate the trainee's return at the end of the planned break.

Applications will be considered on their individual merits and be prioritised on a needs basis. Career breaks will be limited to two years and trainees wishing to take longer will be expected to relinquish their NTN and reapply in open competition in order to return to the specialty.

Applications for OOPC will normally only be granted for one of the following reasons:

- Those with significant health issues
- Those who have caring responsibilities that cannot be accommodated through less than full time training
- Those who have childcare responsibilities that cannot be accommodated through less than full time training
- Those with a clearly identified life goal, which cannot be deferred until after CCT is achieved

3. ANNUAL REVIEW

3.1 All OOP will be subject to an annual review. Trainees will be required to return an annual out of programme report for consideration at a review panel and will be expected to attend an annual review if based in the UK. If the OOP is based overseas then the trainee will not be expected to return for an assessment however documents should still be submitted as stated below.

- Clinical-based OOP – normal assessment forms for their specialty to be completed and accompanied by a progress report from the clinical supervisor and an updated OOP form outlining intended date of return to programme and expected CCT date.

Where a trainee's CCT date falls within a period of OOP, trainees will be expected to submit full documentation to show that their time out of programme has met any remaining competences, knowledge, skills and behaviour required by the curriculum before leaving the programme. They will also be expected to demonstrate how they have maintained competencies previously attained.

- Research-based OOP – report on progress of research towards the stated objectives from the research supervisor and an updated OOP form outlining intended date of return to programme and expected CCT date.
- Career break OOP - updated OOP form outlining intended date of return to programme.

4 APPLICATION PROCESS

4.1 The OOP application form and supporting documentation can be obtained from the Deanery Website at <http://www.nwpgmd.nhs.uk/hospmed/oop/oop.htm>

4.2 Trainees must complete all sections of the application form and forward it together with the supporting documentation to the Training Programme Director with whom they should have already discussed the proposal. The Training Programme Director will be required to sign section E of the form.

NOTE: Trainees must ensure that they sign section D of the form to confirm their understanding of the NHS Pension Scheme regulations whilst out of programme (see 6.5 below).

4.3 After obtaining the approval of the Training Programme Director, trainees must forward the form to the Chief Executive of their Host Trust to obtain its agreement to meet the employers superannuation contributions for the first six months of their time out of programme. Chief Executives will be required to sign section E of the form (see 6.5 below).

4.4 Trainees must forward the completed forms and accompanying documentation to the OOP Administrator at the North Western Deanery.

NOTE: Incomplete applications, e.g. those with incomplete documentation or signatures will not be accepted and will be returned to the trainee for completion.

4.5 The Deanery will consider applications twice a year in March and October and will only consider those applications that give **at least** six months notice of time out of programme. The deadline for consideration of applications will be 28 February for the March window and 30 September for the October window.

4.6 Trainees will be notified in writing of the outcome of their application.

4.7 Where relevant, the Deanery will submit successful applications to the GMC for prospective approval following closure of the application window.

4.8 Trainees who wish to appeal the decision of the Postgraduate Dean should do so in writing within 10 days of receiving the notification and should include all reasons and evidence relating to the appeal. The Postgraduate Dean will convene an appeal panel and the result will be sent to the trainee within 2 weeks of the appeal.

5 CHANGES TO APPROVED APPLICATIONS

- 5.1 Trainees wishing to extend or curtail periods of OOP must have the approval of the Postgraduate Dean.
- 5.2 Trainees must make a formal application **at least** six months in advance of their currently approved end date.
- 5.3 The Postgraduate Dean can only consider requests submitted on the appropriate form and accompanied by a letter outlining the reason(s) for the extension/ curtailment, and which have the support of the Clinical/ Research Supervisor and Training Programme Director.
- 5.4 If the application is to extend OOPT or OOPR the trainee will be expected to explore with the appropriate College Advisor the extent to which the extended time out can count towards CCT.
- 5.5 If time can count towards CCT then the Postgraduate Dean will expect it to do so. Exceptions to this will be where:
 - The extension is for no more than one month
 - The extension is due to prolonged period of illness during OOP
 - The extension is due to maternity leave taken during OOP
 - Or where the full allocation for time counting has already been granted

6 FUNDING/CONTRACTUAL ISSUES

- 6.1 Trainees whose OOP applications are successful will be granted **unpaid** leave for the period of the OOP.
- 6.2 Trainees must ensure that the organisation/ authority offering the OOP post issues a statement of terms and conditions of service.
- 6.3 Trainees taking career breaks should get advice from the Lead Employing Organisation on their statutory rights in relation to career breaks.
- 6.4 Approved OOPT/**E/R** is unpaid leave and therefore does not constitute a break in service in respect of:
 - Continuous employment

- Incremental progression
 - Maternity leave (but see note below for how OOP affects entitlement to **paid** maternity leave)
- 6.5 Trainees undertaking a period of unpaid leave who wish to remain in the NHS Pension Scheme are required to maintain their pension contributions currently as detailed below:
- Months 1-6** - Trainees will be required to pay via standing order/ direct debit the amount that would have been deducted in respect of employees pension had they remained on the payroll. This payment must be made on the 1st of the following month. For the first six months, the employers contributions will be paid by the respective Trusts.
- Months 7-24** - Trainees wishing to stay in the NHS Pension Scheme are liable for both the employees and employers contributions and will be required to pay these as detailed above.
- Trainees employed by another NHS organisation whilst taking time out of programme can continue payments with the receiving organisation.
- NOTE: Trainees taking time out of programme for a period longer than 24 months will be required to take a break in service after the 24 month period is concluded.
- 6.6 Trainees on OOP are not eligible to apply for funded study leave from the specialty study leave budget. Any study leave taken during the period of OOP must be funded either by the trainee or the organisation/ authority hosting the research/ clinical experience post.
- 6.7 Trainees on OOP are not eligible to receive expenses from the Deanery budget. It is the responsibility of the host organisation/ authority offering the post to meet any expenses associated with it.

North Western Deanery
November 2010
 (Review Date: November 2011)