

Monitoring the Clinician Scientist Scheme

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Abstract – The National Clinician Scientist Scheme was devised to enable future leaders of academic medicine to continue post-doctoral research and at the same time complete their specialist registrar training. The awards are generously funded by the major grant-giving bodies and are held in a variety of specialties in academic departments across the UK. Award winners are given the suffix A to add to their existing national training number (NTN) achieved in open competition in the relevant specialty. The deanery whence they came is permitted an additional NTN to be awarded to the clinician scientist's successor in the deanery specialty training programme. The clinician scientist's further clinical training is arranged on an individual basis to dovetail with their ongoing research.

KEY WORDS: clinician scientist, deanery, monitoring committee, NTN(A), specialist registrar

The National Clinician Scientist Scheme was established following reports from the Royal College of Physicians¹ and the Academy of Medical Sciences² in 2000. Clinician Scientist Fellowships are awarded in open competition to doctors and dentists who show outstanding promise in research, have already completed a basic research fellowship and a higher research degree (PhD or MD), and are usually undergoing but have not completed specialist regis-

trar training (see Box 1). Funding for the scheme comes from a variety of sources including the Department of Health, the Higher Education Funding Council, the Research Councils and medical charities. A national Clinician Scientist Monitoring Committee was set up to quality assure the programmes, monitor the selection of candidates, the progress of those selected and the scheme itself.

Tables 1a–c show the distribution by deanery, specialty and grant-giving body of the first 54 clinician scientists in fellowships recognised by the Monitoring Committee since the scheme started. These show a reasonable spread across the UK (Table 1a). It is notable that most of the specialties are in the medical disciplines but include dentistry, pathology, paediatrics and surgery (Table 1b). The distribution of grant-giving bodies (Table 1c) shows widespread support from the Department of Health, the Research Councils and the Association of Medical Research Charities. The cost of each Clinician Scientist Fellowship is considerable, given that each one is usually held for up to five years and includes not only the salary of the holder but also the cost of technical support and contributions to laboratory costs. The total cost of one fellowship over five years is estimated at over half a million pounds.

A feature of the Clinician Scientist Scheme is that it combines further research with clinical training on an *ad personam* basis so that holders can complete their specialist training in their chosen field. All but one or two of the first 54 Clinician Scientist Fellows already held a national training number (NTN), achieved in open competition in their chosen specialty. Most already had two or three years clinical training at registrar level before gaining their Clinician Scientist Award. Once the Monitoring

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The Lead Dean for the Clinician Scientist Scheme is
now Dr Bill Burr, Postgraduate Dean in the Yorkshire
Deanery

Box 1. Clinician scientist award criteria.

- Accepted on a clinician scientist training scheme recognised by the National Clinician Scientist Monitoring Committee.
- Undergoing specialist registrar training with a minimum of one year of SpR training remaining.
- Has proof of submission of a thesis for a PhD, MD or MS to the appropriate university.
- Has an existing NTN gained in open competition or is eligible to apply for one.

*On behalf of the Conference of Postgraduate Medical Deans of the United Kingdom (COPMED).

Table 1a. Number of clinician scientists by deanery.

Eastern	7
Edinburgh (SE Scotland)	3
KSS (Thames South)	2
Leicester	2
London (Thames North)	17
Mersey	2
North West	1
Northern	3
Oxford	6
South Western	1
Wessex	3
West Midlands	2
Yorkshire	5
Total	54

Table 1b. Number of clinician scientists by specialty.

Chemical pathology	1
Clinical genetics	2
Clinical immunology and allergy	1
Diabetes and endocrinology	1
Dental specialties	1
G(U)M	1
Gastroenterology	7
General (internal) medicine	2
General psychiatry	1
Haematology	3
Infectious diseases	1
Medical oncology	5
Neurology	7
Neurological surgery	2
Paediatrics	4
Paediatric oncology	1
Paediatric surgery	1
Renal medicine	7
Respiratory medicine	3
Restorative dentistry	1
Rheumatology	2
Total	54

Table 1c. Number of clinician scientists by grant-giving body.

Academy of Medical Sciences/PPP Foundation	1
Arthritis Research Council	1
Cancer Research Campaign	1
Department of Health	15
GlaxoSmithKline	1
Imperial Cancer Research Fund	3
Institute of Child Health	1
Kennedy Institute of Rheumatology	1
Leukaemia Research Fund	3
Medical Research Council	17
National Kidney Research Fund	1
The Wellcome Trust	9
Total	54

Tables 1a–c: Summary December 2001 to May 2003. Clinician scientists holding NTN identified by suffix A. One clinician scientist not yet holding an NTN is not included in the tables.

Committee had endorsed the validity of the grant-giving award as meeting the requirements of the scheme and checked the successful candidate's credentials, the Lead Dean for the Clinician Scientist Scheme was able to issue the suffix A to the clinician scientist's existing NTN and informed the relevant deanery accordingly. This enabled the deanery whence they came to replace the clinician scientist in the deanery training programme with another registrar in the same specialty (regardless of any other national or local restrictions of training numbers in the specialty at the time), by the usual competition for which an additional NTN was made available. The rare clinician scientist who has been selected before getting into the registrar grade has to get an NTN in open competition, to which the suffix A will then be added. The deanery concerned will then also be able to select another candidate to fill the gap in the standard clinical programme, so there is no disincentive to selection of a clinician scientist who fulfils the appropriate criteria for entry into the grade in the specialty concerned. The one or two clinician scientists initially appointed without an NTN were able to get their NTN subsequently in open competition and the suffix A was then added. Once clinician scientists have obtained their Certificate of Completion of Specialty Training (CCST) their NTN(A) is deleted. Since they have already been replaced by a new NTN holder in the specialty and relevant deanery, there is no fixed quota.

The clinician scientists with the NTN(A) keep their original number with the suffix A added if they continue the fellowship in the same deanery. If their research is to be conducted in another deanery, they may need to be given a new number. Apart from the added prestige, the addition of the suffix A signifies to the deanery, the trainee and trainers alike that the trainee has to have an *ad personam* programme tailored to meet the trainee's needs in order to complete clinical training. The Deanery Training Committee in the specialty concerned needs to agree with the clinician scientist on how their required clinical training can be dovetailed with their research programme. This is relatively straightforward to arrange if they need only one or two years' whole-time training spread over the five years of a Clinician Scientist Fellowship. It is more difficult if the clinician scientist needs to complete virtually all of a four- or five-year clinical programme as well as the research programme in the five years of the fellowship. Flexible arrangements with periods in a full-time clinical post, while supervising research at a distance in a well organised department, are feasible. This needs understanding and support, not only from the deanery but also from the academic department and clinical colleagues, and the cooperation of the trainee too. Most clinician scientists achieve their CCST before their fellowship ends so that they are in a position to compete for higher academic appointments carrying consultant status because they will be on the specialist register. Some may indeed be awarded honorary consultant status once they have achieved their CCST, which naturally adds to the cost of the fellowships.

The scheme has started well although there were inevitable teething troubles, usually related to poor understanding of the criteria for selection, recognition of the seniority of the research

Box 2. Process for the allocation of NTN(A)s.

- The award holders from schemes compliant with the national standard should contact the National Co-ordinating Centre for Research Capacity Development (NCCRCDC).
- Forms are returned to NCCRCDC and reviewed for completeness. Awardees who do not hold an NTN or have PhD/MD are requested to provide a CV.
- Completed monitoring forms are then forwarded to the lead dean to judge their eligibility for the addition of the suffix A to their NTN.
- The lead dean notifies the deanery and awardee of the process by which they may add the suffix A to the NTN for eligible candidates.

award (ie intermediate, not an initial research fellowship), the addition of the suffix A to an NTN awarded in open competition for a specialist registrar position in the specialty concerned, and arranging programmes to meet individual requirements. Many of these difficulties are avoidable if the grant-giving body and the successful candidate inform the National Monitoring Committee of the award and supply the necessary personal details (see Box 2). The Lead Dean for the scheme is responsible for issuing the suffix A and notifying the relevant deanery but does not issue a new NTN. The deanery concerned will help to plan the clinical scientist's further clinical training in collaboration with the award holder and their academic colleagues. The deanery will also issue an additional NTN to the next specialist registrar (SpR) appointed to replace the Clinician Scientist Fellow.

References

- 1 Royal College of Physicians. *Training in academic medicine*. London: RCP, 2000.
- 2 Academy of Medical Sciences. *The tenure-track clinician scientist*. London: Academy of Medical Sciences, 2000.