



The Royal College of Pathologists

Pathology: the science behind the cure

RCPATH member survey: you spoke, we listened

June 2020

When we last asked you, in our 2018 member survey, 70% of you felt proud to be a member of the College. While much of your feedback was positive, it also indicated that there were several areas in which we can improve – in terms of what we offer our members and fellows, as well as where we focus our work and influence.

You told us we should focus on:

- continuing professional development (CPD) – specifically training and courses
- professional matters – including guidance, datasets and status
- the value of membership – costs, the support we provide, our conferences
- our service to you – our responsiveness, the information we offer and our regional work.

We take your feedback seriously. We have looked carefully at where we can do more and have made concerted efforts to improve the work we do for you. This document outlines how your feedback has shaped our activities over the last 18 months.

The five areas that are most important to you, and where satisfaction was under 70%

Maintaining the standard of training (strategic objective 1)

What we're doing to support it

The College is committed to ensuring the production of high-quality curricula, assessments and examinations for pathology trainees. For postgraduate medical training, we are regulated by the General Medical Council (GMC) and over the last two years we have been working towards ensuring our curricula and programmes of assessment meet the revised GMC standards 'Excellence by Design'. We work in close partnership with the Joint Royal Colleges of Physicians Training Board (JRCPTB), the Institute of Biomedical Science (IBMS) and the National School for Healthcare Science (NSHCS) in order to ensure a consistency of approach and standard for the shared medical pathology specialties, clinical scientists and biomedical scientists.

What we have already done:

- delivered high quality examinations for growing numbers of applicants. The College is the London examination centre where possible and there are 11 overseas Part 1 centres and three Part 2 centres (histopathology only), including the Republic of Ireland. There are robust procedures in place for applicants to apply and pay for their examination online, offering consideration of reasonable adjustments. Examiners are recruited, trained and supported to produce examination papers, set standards and mark papers. An examinations e-management system has been established and is being developed further. Examination performance reports are published on the College website after each session and each panel has a nominated Quality Assurance Lead who keeps their examination under review
- registered pathology Specialty Registrars and provided individual support and guidance to them during their specialist training, including recommending them for the award of the Certificate of Completion of Training (CCT)
- processed an increasing number of Certificate of Eligibility for Specialist Registration (CESR) applications, providing free advice to applicants and supporting an event for CESR applicants at the Princess Alexandra Hospital in Harlow in 2018
- carried out a satisfaction survey into our Learning Environment for Pathology Trainees (LEPT) system with trainees in April and May 2018, and published the results in the *Bulletin* and on the website. The LEPT system has subsequently been made available to doctors wishing to make a CESR application in order to support them in the collection of their evidence
- outlined position statements for each of the pathology specialties for which we produce curricula (Chemical Pathology, Histopathology, Diagnostic Neuropathology, Paediatric and Perinatal Pathology, Forensic Histopathology, Medical Microbiology and Medical Virology) and worked towards developing curricula for approval against the new GMC standards. All of the position statements have been approved and the curriculum development process includes as standard the opportunity for College members and trainees to provide feedback on the new curricula, syllabuses and workplace-based assessments

- published information on the College website about the new GMC standards and the new College curricula
- held an educational update meeting in November 2019, including a meeting with the heads of pathology schools
- held a new trainee welcome day in September 2019 for new pathology Specialty Registrars. providing them with information about their curriculum, assessments, examinations and ePortfolio. They have the opportunity to meet senior College officers, including the President, the clinical directors and College Specialty Training Committee (CSTC) and Examination Panel Chairs as well as Trainee Advisory Committee representatives.
- responded to the need for clarification about changes to the cytology service and its impact on training by producing guidance for Stage A and B histopathology trainees to ensure that they continue to meet curriculum requirements. We have also provided additional guidance for diagnostic neuropathology trainees to support their training.
- working with the Institute of Biomedical Science (IBMS), we provided Stage A and Stage C examinations for biomedical scientists undertaking the Advanced Specialist Diplomas in histopathology dissection and reporting. Recognising the impact of this College initiative, Health Education England has now announced it will support the training costs for two individuals per NHS Improvement-recognised network to undertake one of the histopathology training programmes offered by the College and IBMS.

Inspiring the next generation (strategic objective 3.2)

What we're doing to support it

The College recognises the importance of fostering opportunities for undergraduate and foundation trainees to be able to learn more about pathology. We then support them to develop their interest so that they might be successfully appointed to a pathology training programme.

What we have already done:

- revised and published the second edition of the pathology undergraduate curriculum
- run the pathology summer school
- run the undergraduate essay prize
- provided e-learning for undergraduates
- introduced an affiliate undergraduate student society scheme
- held the first foundation taster day for foundation trainees interested in a career in pathology
- launched the foundation essay prize and made the first award
- extended the undergraduate membership of the College to include foundation trainees
- run and developed Discover Pathology events/conferences within and outside London, delivering an interactive and engaging programme of careers talks and activities

- attended careers events to promote pathology as a career
- enhanced and re-launched 80+ pages of pathology careers materials on the RCPATH website and in print for secondary school students and undergraduates
- engaged and inspired secondary school and undergraduate students by producing interviews with pathologists on our YouTube channel
- encouraged and supported our members to give careers talks and similar activities in schools, supplying resources such as video guides on giving pathology careers talks in schools and downloadable quizzes
- offered activities relating to different pathology specialties by member groups and their lab teams at the Science Museum's 'Late' event, 'Medicine'. This event typically attracts thousands of people, including many medical and biomedical undergraduates, and offers an excellent opportunity to inspire the next generation.

Provision of opportunities for Continuing Professional Development (strategic objective 2.1)

What we're doing to support it

We aim to offer a broad range of educational opportunities across the breadth of pathology and provide guidance on all aspects of the CPD portfolio. The scheme provides access to an easy-to-use system for storing and cataloguing all the activities pathologists undertake to improve and enhance their practice.

What we have already done:

- held 14 meetings in 2018 and 23 in 2019, including the pathology summer school
- delivered a comprehensive new programme of medical examiner and medical examiner officer training, increasing RCPATH membership
- provided free-of-charge events to members, including the medical examiner information sharing sessions, and discounted rates for the medical examiner face-to-face training sessions, the education update and haematology updates
- invested in 6 Alie Street to enable larger conferences and events to run in-house, including the provision of state-of-the-art audio visual facilities
- developed the conference plan in collaboration with members, including your representatives on the Specialty Advisory Committees.

Influencing government policy (strategic objective 3.3)

What we're doing to support it

As a College we aim to ensure that policy makers and parliamentarians are made aware of the vital contribution our members make to patient diagnosis, treatment and care, as well as research and innovation in healthcare. At the same time, we also have to ensure that they are alerted to the challenges that face the profession. We maintain a programme of contact with governments, politicians and stakeholders including the Health and Social Care Secretary, Chair of NHS Improvement and the Chief Executive of NHS England. We also work alongside a range of charities, such as Blood Cancer UK (formerly Bloodwise), Cancer Research UK and Bowel Cancer UK to highlight the role of pathologists in the diagnosis and management of disease.

What we have already done:

- successfully advocated for the introduction of medical examiners in England and Wales, as announced in April 2019
- hosted a working conference to feed into the review of breast, bowel and cervical screening programmes led by Prof Sir Mike Richards. The interim review recognised College concerns
- raised concerns about workforce shortages, using data from the first of the workforce surveys that focused on histopathology. A pay premium has been introduced for histopathology trainees in England and we are lobbying for an uplift in Wales; there was full recruitment to histopathology trainee places in the first round of recruitment in 2019; and the Migration Advisory Committee's recommendation placing medical practitioners, biological scientists and biochemists onto the shortage occupation list was agreed by government
- campaigned for IT projects that support pathologists in their work. The government has invested in NHS diagnostic centres to support the work of centres of excellence in digital pathology. A further £40 million investment to reduce NHS staff login times was announced in January 2020
- responded to consultations to ensure that RCPATH members' views contribute to the development of policy. For example, we have made submissions to the Northern Ireland Affairs Committee: Funding priorities in the 2018-19 Budget; NHS England's consultation document Facing the Facts, Shaping the Future: A draft health and care workforce strategy for England to 2027; their call for evidence on cancer screening; and a UK government consultation on coronial investigations of stillbirths.

Involvement in scientific developments and research (strategic objective 1.5)

What we're doing to support it

We work to foster an interest in research and provide opportunities for both experienced researchers and trainees to build an online community where ideas can circulate quickly and be developed with other pathologists, for example, through our F1000 research gateway.

The College, through the College Research Committee, works to facilitate greater support for academic pathology and to seek funding to support these activities in training and beyond.

What we have already done:

- refreshed the College Research Strategy with a stronger focus on existing partnerships and support for both the quantity and quality of pathology research
- included basic research and the use of evidence in the RCPATH undergraduate curriculum to encourage learning and future uptake of research in pathology
- introduced the F1000 research gateway platform so members have the opportunity to rapidly publish original research, case reports and validation studies
- offered bursaries to medical and scientific trainees publishing on the F1000 research gateway
- successfully bid for funding for the Digital Now project
- nominated members to the Research Excellence Framework 2021 panels
- approved applications for fellowship by published works
- run the 'Disruptive technologies: where next for pathology?' symposium with the Association of Clinical Pathologists
- awarded annual medals for outstanding research work undertaken by pathologists or scientists in training
- introduced trainee poster presentations to the International Pathology Day conference
- developed 'Creating a poster for a conference: top tips' to help medical students and trainees to get experience presenting posters
- hosted the Cancer Research UK/Science and Technology Funding Council Sandpit Innovation Workshop: Applying artificial intelligence techniques to digital pathology images for early detection of cancer. Teams who successfully pitched proposals at the workshop received seed funding for one year to cover the costs of pilot/feasibility studies.

What is important to you and how we're improving our services

The following are some of the issues you rated as important to you. This section provides an update on the actions we've taken to improve our service to you.

Email and other communications with you

Over half of you said that you like to hear about College news and events by email, and 30% through the website, with communication tailored by specialty, career stage and location, in that order of preference. 85% said that the frequency of communications was about right.

We have:

- updated members via the monthly President's e-newsletter
- ensured email communications are in line with General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) requirements so that members are able to manage the emails they receive from the College
- produced the RCPATH *Bulletin*, introducing new sections to ensure we cover all specialties comprehensively
- published the Annual Report, with member case studies reflecting the variety of pathology specialties
- introduced a highly popular blog series on professional development
- launched a 'Service Spotlight' series to highlight services that have made impressive changes in their practice to improve quality and/or patient safety.

Access to member-only documents

We have:

- published Trustee Board and Council minutes on the member-only area of the website to provide transparency in the way the College is run
- maintained the member-only areas of the website to ensure up-to-date documents and information are published.

Use of post-nominals

We have:

- reintroduced DipRCPATH for people who have successfully passed the part 1 FRCPATH examination
- introduced RCPATHME and RCPATHMEO for Medical Examiners and Medical Examiner Officers, thereby increasing College membership
- trademarked all College post-nominals to ensure professional use only.

Opportunities to network with other members

We have:

- enhanced opportunities for member networking, for example at regional symposia, College conferences, new member ceremonies
- enabled quiet working at the College with a larger, dedicated members and trainees' area at 6 Alie Street offering free tea and coffee.

Events and conferences

We have:

- expanded the RCPATH conference programme (see p.4, Provision of opportunities for Continuing Professional Development)
- received feedback from delegates at the College's conferences that they consistently give these over a > 90% satisfaction rate
- co-badged events with sister societies, including the Association of Clinical Biochemistry and Laboratory Medicine, Cancer Research UK and London Air Ambulance
- run regional symposia in Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland
- provided the first of a free annual Educational Update for 80 members, focusing on developments in postgraduate medical training
- Organised an International Pathology Day event at the College, most recently in 2019, which addressed 'Advances in Rapid and Point-of-care Diagnostic Testing' and included speakers from across eastern and southern Africa. Representatives from 47 countries were able to join remotely to listen in on the roundtable discussion entitled 'A Question of Quality'.

Regional/local events and representation

We have:

- supported the regional councils for England, Scotland, Northern Ireland and Wales to meet regularly to discuss local issues
- ensured regional representation on Trustee Board, Council and committees
- ensured College Specialty Training Committees have complete regional and local representation
- surveyed and fed back to NHS Improvement members' concerns and comments on the formation of pathology networks in England
- added a map of UK College activities to the website, so that it's easy to see where RCPATH officers have been for visits, conferences and seminars, and to show when and where our regional council meetings will be held.

Overseas volunteering and opportunities to participate in international activities

With approximately one quarter of the College's membership from outside of the UK, the College recognises the importance and contribution of its overseas membership to pathology and the value of international exchanges of knowledge and skills. We have:

- updated the College's international strategy 'Pathology is Global' in association with the RCPATH International Committee, Diaspora Forum and Trustee Board
- delivered the FRCPath Part 2 examination in histopathology outside of the UK and ensured the continuation of established examiner exchange programmes with countries including Pakistan and Iraq
- partnered other charities and healthcare organisations in the EU ARISE project (African Research and Innovative Initiative for Sickle Cell Education: Improving Research Capacity for Service Improvement), establishing an inter-agency and multidisciplinary staff exchange programme to foster sharing of best practice in new-born screening, diagnosis and treatment of sickle cell disease
- provided opportunities for international medical graduates (IMG) to obtain GMC registration and training placements in the UK, including via the Medical Training Initiative (MTI). The College has also established an International Trainee Support Scheme (ITSS) in histopathology and medical microbiology, which provides support and mentoring to IMGs wishing to attempt the College exams
- developed a pilot Recognition Framework which sets out a structured way in which to evaluate training programmes outside of the UK and provide guidance about the suitability of pathology training in preparation for the FRCPath exams
- signed a range of Memoranda of Understanding (MoUs), most recently with the Ukraine; these are often developed in collaboration with the relevant UK diaspora groups.

Opportunities to hold a volunteer role

We have:

- publicised RCPATH volunteer opportunities widely. About 2,000 members volunteer for the College at any one time, including running our specialty advisory committees, overseeing our exam processes or being a College assessor for medical appointment committees
- revamped the RCPATH volunteer opportunity pages, based on member feedback, so they are searchable by membership type, specialty or location.

Public engagement activities

We have:

- kept a strong focus on inspiring the next generation through careers activities and resources (see p.3 Inspiring the next generation)
- worked closely with members to develop new activities and resources to explain why pathology matters and to showcase the work of pathologists. For example, 'What does your poo say about you?' included an activity on the FIT test, and 'Give it a shot!' helped to counter some widespread misinformation about vaccines
- produced a new 'What is pathology?' pamphlet with members to show the importance of pathology in healthcare to a wide audience
- developed more 'off the shelf' activities and resources to support public engagement activities undertaken independently by the many public engagement volunteers
- widened the types of creative activities that can be run, for example the 'Incredible You' colouring in resource or our 'Disease Detectives' pack of pathology-themed ideas, giving more choice and flexibility to volunteers
- produced a range of 'how to' video guides to make it clearer and easier for RCPATH member volunteers to run activities, and made these guides more readily available
- run public engagement training for volunteers to help them develop ideas and gain skills.

What you like most about the College

The following are the four areas in which you rated the College most highly. This section provides an update on our efforts in these areas and what else we are doing for members.

CPD portfolio

The scheme is running well, with about 5,000 members participating and using the online portfolio.

We are taking steps to better publicise the activities that qualify for CPD credits.

Datasets

We continue to be a participant in the International Collaboration on Cancer Reporting (ICCR) to contribute to the production of *internationally validated and evidence-based pathology datasets for cancer reporting for use throughout the world*.

We continue to add to our dataset and tissue pathways programme. We are developing the first RCPATH Medical Microbiology clinical guideline on '*Diagnosis and management of Entamoeba histolytic infection*'. We are also surveying members to assess how (and how much) our clinical guidelines are being used by our members and to identify areas for improvement.

In collaboration with members, we have developed a 'documents in development' tool for members to use when producing guidelines and best practice recommendations. This has significantly increased levels of engagement with the process.

Professional status

The FRCPath is internationally acknowledged as a high-quality qualification. The College has been recognised by the General Medical Council as having no differential attainment with regard to Black, Asian and minority ethnic candidates for the last two years.

We have recently introduced the Medical Examiner qualification to recognise training and expertise in this new group of College members.

We have overhauled the range of our best practice guidelines to ensure they are up to date and reviewed regularly.

Guidance documents: in addition to our datasets and best practice recommendations, we have produced a series of Patient Safety Bulletins. During CQI Awareness Month, we prepared and promoted materials to support pathologists to get involved in quality improvement activities.

Training

We have maintained the standard of training (see 1) and supported the provision of CPD activities.

What you like least about the College and what we're doing to improve

Cost/fees

We are one of the few medical royal colleges that openly publish information on the cost of training.

To help keep costs as low as possible, we lobbied successfully to obtain clearance for tax relief on examination fees for medical and Higher Specialist Science trainees (HSST) from Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs (HMRC).

We have recently introduced a reduced subscription for access to the Indexa app, which provides digital access to the British National Formulary, Oxford Handbooks including those covering clinical haematology, infectious diseases and microbiology, and NICE guidelines.

To keep membership fees as low as possible, we have increased income from new external sources including conference centre hire, rental of space and our corporate membership scheme. The Events@No6 venue at the College's new premises has already proven to be a valuable and innovative new space for bespoke events and large-scale conferences, attracting professional clients and adding new income that supports the College's work. Our consulting services (RCPATH Consulting) continues to generate income by providing independent, authoritative and specialist advice for high-quality pathology services from the NHS and other providers.

London-centric focus

The new RCPATH headquarters at 6 Alie Street is in London. However, our honorary officers, trustees and council members are based throughout the UK and one-fifth of RCPATH members are based outside the UK.

Many RCPATH and co-badged meetings are held outside of London, and we have invested in new audio visual equipment to allow members to participate in meetings and conferences remotely.

The regional councils in Northern Ireland, Wales and Scotland are supported by the College. All are active in their regions, influencing politicians and policy makers on behalf of members.

The President carries out a programme of laboratory tours across the UK, organised by the College and enabling members who are not able to travel to London to meet and interact with the most senior honorary officer. This programme of presidential laboratory tours across the UK allows her to hear directly from members about their concerns.

We have expanded our seminars in Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales to improve members' access to events across the UK.

Concerns about costs

It is important to note that the College does not make a profit on examination fees. The fact that RCPATH is a College with 17 different specialties with different requirements makes our examinations much more complex and expensive to run than some larger Colleges which run 'one size fits all' examinations.

We are conscious of concerns about costs among members. Our educational update meeting and new trainees welcome day are free to members/trainees. Trainee rates for attending other symposia are significantly discounted. Membership subscriptions are available to pay by instalment so as to spread the cost and deferments are available to those members experiencing hardship.

Lack of responsiveness

The College's values and behaviours have been revised and agreed by the Trustee Board, with standards introduced for staff responses to member/trainee enquiries. We have organised staff training sessions on customer care and simplified and automated our most frequently used processes for members. These include exam applications, trainee registration and electronic expenses management for members who are volunteering on behalf of the College.

To improve the College response to any allegations of bullying and harassment, and to enhance understanding of the issues involved, the College Council has received training on issues raised by members. A workshop on bullying and harassment has been attended by College staff.