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 NCCRCD 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 specialty 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 specialty 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 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,

Dr Mary Armitage
Co-Chair
MMC England Programme Board

Professor David Haslam
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On behalf of the MMC England Programme Board.