



RCS

ADVANCING SURGICAL STANDARDS

PROFESSIONAL AND CLINICAL STANDARDS DIVISION

INVITED REVIEWS

**SERVICES FOR HEALTHCARE ORGANISATIONS IN
RELATION TO FURTHER TRAINING AND RE-SKILLING**

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1. INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

This document provides information and guidance to healthcare organisations on the range of services offered by the College to support them in designing and implementing the clinical elements of further training and return to work programmes. This document primarily deals with those surgeons whose clinical capability has been called into question, and, following an appropriate investigation, a formal approach to further training has been recommended.

Further training for surgeons returning to work after an extended period of leave (e.g. sabbatical, maternity leave, ill health, exclusion etc) might not require such a formal approach. While not specifically addressed in this document some of the principles may apply. Ideally, such circumstances will be dealt at a local level and within the healthcare organisation employing the surgeon concerned. Where external clinical advice is required, an approach for advice can be made to the College.

Requests for further training are managed under the auspices of the RCS Invited Review service, which is overseen by a committee made up of representatives from the College and the ten surgical Specialty Associations.

2. ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

The development and delivery of an effective formal further training programme will require the involvement and collaboration of a number of external agencies. This may include the College, Specialty Association, and the National Clinical Assessment Service (NCAS). The College has no statutory obligation to assist in further training programmes but it is committed to working with employers and other key stakeholders to advise on the development of further training programmes and where possible facilitate surgeons' return to clinical practice safely and without unnecessary delay.

2.1. The employing healthcare organisation

Responsibility for any programme of further training, including the design, monitoring and assessment of the programme and the decision on whether the surgeon is competent to return to independent practice, lies with the healthcare organisation that employs the surgeon.

The College cannot 'sign off' a surgeon as being competent and cannot be involved in a decision on whether the surgeon should return to practice. These are contractual and governance issues and therefore matters for the surgeon's employer.

2.2. NCAS

Where NCAS has been asked to assist in the development of an action plan to support further training for a surgeon, NCAS may on some occasions approach the College to advise on a plan which is practicable, workable and realistic.

NCAS will also not “sign off” a practitioner as ‘competent’ at the end of a further training programme, nor will it become involved in management decisions about re-entry to clinical practice, as again these remain the responsibility of the surgeon’s employer.

There is a working protocol in place between the College and NCAS which provides guidance on how the two organisations work together and the mechanisms they will use to ensure effective communication and collaboration.

2.3. The College

If it becomes involved in a request for assistance in this area, the role of the College is to act in an advisory capacity only as an independent professional body.

At its discretion, and depending entirely on the circumstances of each individual case, the College may be in a position to provide the following services:

- A professional opinion on the feasibility and practicality of a proposed further training programme.
- Advice on the clinical content of further training programmes including duration, methods of assessment, key learning objectives etc.
- Assistance with the identification of further training placements.
- Provision of specialist advice to the employing organisation through participation in a panel organised to oversee the programme.
- A Confidential Support and Advice Service for the surgeon undergoing further training.

These services are described in more detail below.

3. CONDITIONS

3.1. Conditions

Where the College is able to become involved, the following conditions are attached to the College's involvement in any further training programme. Before any formal College involvement commences, the organisation employing the surgeon is asked to confirm in writing to the College that these are acceptable:

- Throughout the programme, all negotiation and liaison with the surgeon concerned (excluding educational advice and peer support) will be undertaken by their employing organisation.
- The surgeon must have undergone an appropriate diagnostic process to identify the further training requirements. Normally this will be via a formal review process e.g. College invited review or NCAS/GMC assessment.
- The surgeon concerned must agree to the involvement of the College and be fully informed of the College's role and remit.
- The employing organisation must disclose any relevant information pertaining to the case in order that the College can make informed decisions about the further training requirements. If for reasons of confidentiality or otherwise, the employer is not able to disclose to the College information which may be critical, it must inform the College of that fact and the reasons for withholding the information. The College must be given sufficient information to allow it to make an informed decision. The College recognises the importance of confidentiality and security of the information provided.
- Responsibility for the programme lies with the employer who remains responsible for any action taken as a result of the advice given by the College.

3.2. Indemnity

The employing organisation is required to indemnify the College and Association and any surgeon acting on its behalf by signing a deed of indemnity.

3.3. Charges and Fees

The College will levy a charge to the employing organisation. The fee level will be dependent on the level of College involvement in the programme. The College will inform the hospital of the fee once a formal request for involvement has been received.

In addition, the healthcare organisation is responsible for meeting any travel and subsistence expenses of the College/specialty representatives involved.

4. REQUESTING COLLEGE INVOLVEMENT

College involvement in further training programmes will be initiated when a formal request is made by the Chief Executive or Medical Director of the surgeon's employing hospital. To do so, a request must be made to the Chairman of the RCS Invited Review service with a covering letter. The covering letter must include the following details:

- The name, the specialty and the grade of the individual requiring further training
- Confirmation of acceptance of further training conditions [see above]
- Any relevant supporting information e.g. NCAS/GMC assessment reports

The College can only accept request for assistance from the Chief Executive or Medical Director acting on behalf of the hospital. A surgeon wishing to request College involvement can only do so by approaching their employer to request involvement on their behalf.

The College will not normally become involved in advising a healthcare organisation on further training unless the need has been identified by an appropriate diagnostic tool (i.e. A College invited review, NCAS or GMC assessment). Further information on RCS Invited Reviews can be obtained from the College.

The completed request and any supporting documentation provided will be considered by the Chair of the RCS Invited Review service and the relevant specialty member of the Joint Standing Committee who will be responsible for deciding whether the RCS is able to become involved. If it is decided that the College cannot be involved, an explanation as to the reasons why will be given and the College will try to provide advice on an alternative course of action.

Once the College has confirmed it is in a position to become involved, and the surgeon's employers have confirmed what service they would like the College's support in providing, an appropriate indemnity will be drawn up and agreed.

5. SERVICES OFFERED

The following are examples of services that may be offered by the College. They are not mutually exclusive or sequential. For instance, it may be necessary to identify a placement before the detail of a further training programme can be considered.

5.1. Programme development

In this example the College may work with a programme supervisor¹ and locally appointed clinical supervisor² to advise on the development of the clinical components of a proposed further training programme. This might include advice on the programme structure, content, duration, assessment tools and the training goals and objectives.

The programme should be documented in the form of a learning agreement or action plan agreed between the surgeon, employer and host organisation (if appropriate i.e. the placement does not occur at the employer's hospitals). It should document the overall objectives of the programme, the programme content, assessment methods and should be used to record discussions between the parties involved.

The development of this document will be the responsibility of the employing organisation. While the College may provide advice on the content of the document, it will not be a formal party to it.

It is the College's view that further training programmes should be competence based and the standards, competencies and learning objectives required for each stage of the programme should be drawn from the final stage of the surgical curriculum (www.iscp.ac.uk). In addition, there may be other additional competencies in relation to more specialised practice and specialty training courses that might be recommended.

¹ Programme supervisor refers to the person appointed by the employing organisation with overarching responsibility for drawing together and overseeing all aspects of the further training programme (including clinical and non-clinical elements if appropriate.)

² Clinical supervisor refers to the individual who will provide close supervision of the surgeon during the clinical placement. (The clinical and programme supervisor role may, on occasion, be undertaken by the same individual)

5.2. Identification of placements

In the event that a further training programme cannot be delivered within the surgeon's employing organisation, the College may in certain circumstances be able to assist in facilitating contact with potential host organisations.

If it is in a position to assist with such an exercise, the College may work with the relevant Specialty Association to devise a list of potential host organisations.

If a potential placement is identified, it will be the responsibility of the surgeon's employing organisation to make the necessary contractual, financial and indemnity arrangements with the placement provider to include all appropriate protection for patients and the supervising surgeon. If the surgeon is not willing to accept an offer of a placement it will be the responsibility of the employer to resolve the issue.

If having considered the circumstances presented, it seems unlikely that a placement will be identified the College's involvement may at the College's sole option cease.

5.3. Participation in an 'oversight panel'

The College and relevant Association may also, on request, nominate a surgeon of the appropriate specialty to participate in an 'oversight panel' established by the surgeon's employing organisation. The role of the panel will be to provide oversight of a further training programme which might for example include reviewing the reports from the local clinical supervisor to consider the surgeon's performance against the agreed objectives of the learning agreement. The frequency and method of meeting would be determined by the employing organisation but it is anticipated that the panel would meet at regular intervals to consider progress and that then a final meeting would be held to decide whether the programme had been completed.

The role of the person on this 'oversight panel' will be an advisory one. They will support the oversight panel by providing a specialist opinion as to whether the programme had been followed and whether the surgeon had achieved the objectives as set out in the learning agreement.

Any decision regarding the early termination of a programme due to unsatisfactory progress would be taken by the surgeon's employer.

The College would also ask to receive a copy of the panel's final report for its records.

5.4. Confidential advice and peer support for surgeons

While participating in a further training programme, the surgeon involved may choose to access existing College support services for example the College's Confidential Support and Advice Service.

This will facilitate contact with a surgeon in another region who will be able to provide peer support. This individual will not be part of the College's involvement in the further training activity and will not have details of the further training programme. Enquiries of this nature should be directed to the Medical Director of the employing organisation.

6. CONTACTING THE COLLEGE

All enquiries regarding further training should be directed to the Invited Review Coordinator in the Professional and Clinical Standards office at the College.

Invited Review Coordinator
Telephone: 020 7869 6222

7. FURTHER READING

Back on Track – Restoring doctors and dentists to safe professional practice - Framework Document (October 2006)

<http://www.ncas.nhs.uk/resources/good-practice-guides/back-on-track/>

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