

RCEM Guidance on Taking Time Out of Programme (OOP)

There are a number of reasons why a trainee may wish to spend some time out of the training programme to which they have been appointed; to gain training or clinical experience, to undertake research or to take a career break. Time out of programme (OOP) will not normally be agreed until a trainee has completed at least one year of specialty training. Occasions where OOP is granted to core trainees are likely to be exceptional given the length and nature of their training.

All time out of programme must be prospectively approved by the Postgraduate Dean and, in some cases, by the Royal College of Emergency Medicine (RCEM) and the GMC. Therefore, trainees are advised to discuss their proposals with their Training Programme Director (TPD) and Educational Supervisor (ES) as early as possible (please refer to local guidance for regional timescales and application processes).

Time out of programme is divided into five categories:

- **Training (OOPT)**

An OOPT allows a trainee to undertake clinical training that is not part of their training programme, either within the UK or overseas. GMC prospective approval is required for an OOPT if it is to be counted towards a CCT and is not already part of a GMC-approved programme in the same specialty. OOPTs will normally be for a period of up to one year and trainees will retain their NTN during this time. Trainees who undertake an OOPT must continue to participate in the ARCP process of their home locality.

All OOPTs require prospective approval from the College for all, or some, of the time to be recognised towards training. This includes OOPTs in locations which are GMC-approved for training. To request prospective approval, the trainee must submit:

- a completed **RCEM OOPT/R approval form** signed by both the Educational Supervisor and Training Programme Director. This should indicate the part of the training programme to be covered, e.g. ST4, and the percentage of the post to be recognised towards training;
- a full job description (JD) which confirms details of the duties of the post, shift pattern, supervision arrangements, and the percentage of the post to be recognised towards training. If the JD does not include rota and supervision arrangements, the College will require written confirmation from the trainee's supervisor during the OOPT that the trainee will receive appropriate educational supervision and will be working a representative split of shifts across the full shift pattern of a standard middle grade/HST rota;
- a confirmation email from the Head of School of the OOPT location confirming their endorsement of the OOPT (*required only if the OOPT is outside the trainee's training region*).

Please note that an OOPT post must be for a minimum duration of six months (WTE) and not less than 50% clinical EM for the OOPT to be recognised towards training.

The College recommends that all documentation is submitted at least three months before the post is due to commence to allow for the necessary deanery, College and GMC approval processes to be completed in time.

If the application for recognition towards training is approved, the College will provide the trainee and deanery with a 'letter of endorsement' confirming the maximum amount of time that may be counted towards training, along with the predicted date of completion of training. The CCT date will be confirmed once a successful ARCP outcome has been awarded (coverage of the appropriate % WPBAs for the % clinical time during the OOPT must be reviewed for CCT recognition). If the OOPT is in a non-GMC approved

location, the deanery will apply to the GMC for prospective approval, confirming that the training location offers sufficient opportunities to meet curriculum and assessment requirements and that appropriate supervision for trainees is in place.

If an OOPT is to be extended beyond the original duration approved by the College, the trainee must submit a further [RCEM OOPT/R approval form](#) for the additional time to be recognised towards training.

Overseas OOPTs

For overseas OOPTs, the approval process is the same as for UK-based OOPTs. Please note that the College is only able to approve recognition of 50% of overseas OOPTs towards training.

Chief Registrar and Clinical Fellow posts

The RCP Chief Registrar Programme can be undertaken either 'in programme' or as an OOPT, whilst Clinical Fellow posts must be taken out of programme.

The College is keen to ensure the integrity of higher specialty training and considers 36 months of HST essential; therefore, the CCT date will need to be extended as appropriate for both Chief Registrar and Clinical Fellow posts. Both posts will require prospective approval from the College following the same process as above.

The RCEM Training Standards Committee has published a [position statement](#) on Chief Registrar and Clinical Fellow posts.

Sub-Specialty Training in Paediatric or Pre-Hospital Emergency Medicine

Sub-specialty training does not require College approval. However, trainees who have been selected for a sub-specialty training post in PEM or PHEM will need to inform the College Training Team so that their expected completion of training date may be adjusted as appropriate.

Acting up as a Consultant (AUC)

Trainees who are within one year of their anticipated completion of training date are eligible to 'act up' as a consultant for a period of up to three months (WTE). Acting up posts allow trainees to navigate the transition from junior doctor to consultant, whilst maintaining the supervision associated with being a trainee. AUC posts will count towards a CCT and do not require GMC approval *providing* the management part of the curriculum will be covered.

Trainees undertaking an AUC post must notify the College Training Team, and the Educational Supervisor must submit a short report to the College at the conclusion of the period of acting up before a recommendation for the award of the CCT may be submitted to the GMC.

Please refer to the College [guidance](#) on AUC for further information.

- **Research (OOPR)**

Trainees may wish to undertake a period of research, normally for a higher degree, e.g. PHD, MD or Master's degree. An OOPR will not normally exceed three years (although the Postgraduate Dean has discretion to extend the OOPR in exceptional circumstances), and the clinical element may be recognised towards the award of a

CCT. RCEM Training Standards Committee recommendations for counting clinical time for EM trainees on OOPR (including higher degree/research fellows) can be found [here](#).

Prospective College approval is required for OOPRs where the trainee is requesting clinical time to be counted towards training. Trainees must submit the [RCEM OOPT/R approval form](#) to the College, signed by both their TPD and Educational Supervisor, allowing sufficient time for the approval process to be completed. The College recommends that the approval request and supporting documentation is submitted at least three months before the post is due to commence.

If an OOPR is to be extended beyond the original duration approved by the College, the trainee must submit a further [RCEM OOPT/R approval form](#) for the additional time to be recognised towards training.

Trainees who **do not** wish the clinical time to be recognised towards CCT must still provide the College Training Team with details of the OOPR, such as a copy of their deanery approval, so that their expected completion of training date may be adjusted as appropriate.

- **Pause (OOPP) pilot - England only**

Out of Programme Pause (OOPP) is a new initiative that allows trainees to step out of formal training for up to 12 months to undertake a non-training NHS or other UK based patient-facing post. This includes clinical roles which may also include non-clinical activities such as leadership, management and informatics which are within the training curriculum. OOPP has been subject to a limited pilot and, following the Covid pandemic, this pilot has been extended as part of a series of measures to address trainee wellbeing.

OOPPs also give trainees the opportunity to have any capabilities gained whilst out of training assessed upon their return to the training programme, and these may contribute to the CCT. A gap analysis will identify the specific curriculum outcomes that may have been achieved during the OOPP and the ARCP panel and faculty will make a formal assessment as to whether these capabilities have been demonstrated and the CCT date can be adjusted.

A one-year application window opened in August 2020 and trainees interested in taking an OOPP should first discuss this option with their ES and TPD.

OOPPs do not require College approval; however, trainees must provide the College Training Team with details of the OOPP, such as a copy of their deanery approval. The completion of training date will be adjusted, if appropriate, following the ARCP.

Further guidance on OOPPs can be found on the [NHS Health Education England](#) website.

- **Experience (OOPE)**

Trainees may wish to undertake time out of programme to gain clinical experience which is not approved by the GMC. This could be to:

- experience different working practices or gain experience in another area of practice;
- experience and support overseas work and training, particularly in developing countries;
- gain professional skills that would enhance future practice, such as medical leadership, academia, medical education or patient safety.

An OOPE will normally be for up to one year and will not count towards a CCT.

OOPes do not require College approval; however, trainees must still provide the College Training Team with details of the OOPe, such as a copy of their deanery approval, so that their expected completion of training date may be adjusted as appropriate.

- **Career break (OOPC)**

OOPCs allow a trainee to step out of a training programme for a designated and agreed period of time for personal reasons, such as ill health or caring responsibilities; or to pursue other interests, such as working in industry, developing talents in other areas, or entrepreneurship.

Periods of ill health should in the first instance be managed under the guidance of the employer's occupational health services, as for other staff. However, an OOPC may be an appropriate way of managing health issues.

An OOPC will usually be for up to 12 months, with a second year at the discretion of the Postgraduate Dean. Trainees wishing to take an OOPC for longer than two years will normally need to relinquish their NTN/training contract and reapply in open competition for re-entry to the training programme. Trainees should also be aware of the GMC's expectations around the [currency of examinations](#) when relinquishing their NTN, and will need to consider how a career break might affect their licence to practise with the GMC.

An OOPC will not count towards a CCT and does not require College approval; however, trainees must still provide the College Training Team with details of the OOPC, such as a copy of their deanery approval, so that their expected completion of training date may be adjusted.

Regional information and guidance

For local policies and procedures on taking time out of programme, please contact the relevant deanery:

England

- [East of England](#)
- [East Midlands](#)
- [London and Kent, Surrey and Sussex](#)
- [North East](#)
- [North West](#)
- [South West \(Peninsula\)](#)
- [South West \(Severn\)](#)
- [Thames Valley](#)
- [Wessex](#)
- [West Midlands](#)
- [Yorkshire and the Humber](#)

Scotland

- [Scotland](#)

Wales

- [Wales](#)

Northern Ireland

- [Northern Ireland](#)

For general information and guidance on taking time out of programme, please refer to:

- [GMC guidance on taking time out of an approved training programme](#)
- [COPMeD Gold Guide \(8th edition\)](#)

For further advice on the College OOPT and OOPR prospective approval process, or to notify the College that you will be taking time out of training as an OOPE, OOPC or OOPP, please contact RCEM Training training@rcem.ac.uk.