



Training Handbook:

Higher Specialist Training, Institute of Medicine

2026/2027



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Foreword

This document has been prepared by the Royal College of Physicians of Ireland (RCPI) and provides important information in relation to the Institute of Medicine (IOM) Training Programmes. The purpose of the document is to also outline the Rules and Regulations pertaining to specialist training for the following programmes:

Training Programme
Cardiology & General Internal Medicine
Clinical Genetics
Clinical Neurophysiology
Clinical Pharmacology & General Internal Medicine
Dermatology
Endocrinology & Diabetes Mellitus & General Internal Medicine
Gastroenterology & General Internal Medicine
Genito-Urinary Medicine
Geriatric Medicine & General Internal Medicine
Infectious Diseases & General Internal Medicine
Medical Oncology
Nephrology & General Internal Medicine
Neurology
Palliative Medicine
Pharmaceutical Medicine
Rehabilitation Medicine
Respiratory Medicine & General Internal Medicine
Rheumatology & General Internal Medicine

This document replaces previously published documents and reflects the continuously evolving nature of training in the above specialties. The document also refers to the published RCPI policies which should be read in conjunction with the Training Handbook.

Important

Information in this document is accurate at the date of publication. However, regulations are continually evolving, and up-to-date information should be obtained from RCPI if in doubt. The most up-to-date version on this document will always be available on [The RCPI Website](#).

While other institutions are referenced (e.g. Medical Council, Health Service Executive, National Doctors Training Planning) we have given our interpretation of their regulations but the institutes themselves should be contacted for definitive information.

There is inevitably some repetition in this document as it is intended to be used as a reference. If regulations are unclear or seem contradictory, RCPI or the Specialty Training Body will determine the correct interpretation

Governance of the RCPI Training Programmes

Governance Structure

There are six accredited postgraduate training bodies under the umbrella of the Royal College of Physicians of Ireland:

- Faculty of Occupational Medicine
- Faculty of Pathology
- Faculty of Paediatrics
- Faculty of Public Health Medicine
- Institute of Obstetricians & Gynaecologists
- Institute of Medicine

The accredited Training Body oversees the development and delivery of the postgraduate training programmes.

In Medicine the Institute of Medicine oversees the Higher Specialty Training Programmes in the medical specialties. Higher Specialist Training (HST) is four–six years in duration (specialty dependent).

The Director of Training and Education for the IOM oversees the delivery and development of the IOM HST training programmes. Supporting the Director of Training are the National Specialty Directors for HST.

At Higher Specialist Training each specialty training programme has an appointed National Specialty Director(s) (NSDs). The NSD(s) chair the Specialty Training Committee (STC) for their HST specialty training programme. A key responsibility of the National Specialty Director(s) is to provide advice, career guidance and support to trainees on issues relating to training, examination and general queries relating to the specialty. The NSD reports to the IOM and the STC should meet, at a minimum, quarterly.

The function of the STC is to actively participate in the development and delivery of postgraduate specialist training in the defined specialty, under the governance of the Training Body. The STC Forum is responsible for delivery of the training programme in the defined specialty in accordance with decisions made by the Training Body. All decisions and proposals for changes relating to development and delivery of the training programme in the defined specialty must be approved by the Training Body prior to implementation by the STC Forum.

Dual Training

Some specialties have developed Dual Training (additional training in general internal medicine), whereby you receive a Certificate of Satisfactory Completion of Specialist Training (CSCST) in both your main specialty and in general internal medicine. The following specialties offer Dual Training:

- Cardiology
- Clinical Pharmacology and Therapeutics
- Endocrinology & Diabetes Mellitus
- Gastroenterology
- Geriatric Medicine
- Infectious Diseases
- Nephrology
- Respiratory Medicine
- Rheumatology

RCPI Trainers

Trainers play a crucial role in the delivery of our Higher Specialist Training programmes. They guide Trainees along the path to becoming a specialist and help the next generation of medical leaders reach their full potential.

RCPI recognises that the quality of training depends largely on Trainers' clinical experience and expertise, along with competence, aptitude, attitudes and abilities as good role models. The aim of the College is to continue to strive for education and training excellence for all our trainees, at all levels and in all locations across Ireland.

The primary focus of the RCPI Trainer is to oversee RCPI trainees' development and education at all training levels, through their involvement in teaching, training, evaluation and supervision. At HST level no Trainer can have more than one HST Clinical Trainee. This rule can be reviewed by the IOM under exceptional circumstances.

The core responsibilities of the Trainer are

- Meet the Trainee and understand requirements of training
- Meet with the Trainee in their first week in a post and agree the Trainee's Personal Goal Plan
- Facilitate attendance at educational activities

- Act as a supervisor to the trainee
- Provide feedback and motivation to Trainee
- Attend Trainee annual evaluations
- Monitor progress and performance
- Completing the End of Post assessment and signing relevant activities in ePortfolio.
- Appraising the Trainee's progress at regular intervals during the post

One clinical year maximum can be spent with the same Trainer.

The following criteria are required to be a registered Trainer

- Registered on the relevant Specialist Division of the Medical Council Register
- Registered on a Professional Competence Scheme
- Practising at consultant level in Ireland
- Fellow of the relevant training body (RCPI or one of our Faculties/Institutes) - this is desirable but not mandatory

Training Site Environment

All training posts and the training environment are monitored by RCPI through the Training Site Quality Improvement (QI) model. This model evaluates the Trainee, Trainer and site environmental factors that influence training outcomes. Further information is available on the [Quality Enhancement Office Website](#)

Facilities

Your training location/hospital must provide an appropriate training environment and facilities that will allow you to develop the knowledge, skills and clinical judgement essential for your specialty. Physical facilities should include enough space for research and study. You should also have access to professional literature and information technology.

We regularly inspect all training locations approved for training to ensure that they meet these requirements.

Trainees' Committee

The RCPI Trainees' Committee is the 'voice' of Trainees in RCPI. They represent Trainees on College Council, the Advisory Committee, the Institute of Medicine, each STC and the Examinations Committee.

The RCPI Trainees' Committee has always had an active interest in postgraduate specialist training and acts as an important interface between Trainees and RCPI. The goal of the Committee is to represent Trainees' interests and work towards improving training.

They are also responsible for the organisation of several Trainee Awards including:

- The Corrigan Medal
- The David Mitchell Award
- The William Stokes Award
- The Kate McGarry Prize
- The Dorothy Stopford Price Award
- The Arthur Eakins Award

Trainees are encouraged to get involved with the Trainees' Committee. For information on the Trainee Committee please email trainees@rcpi.ie. For a list of current Trainee Committee members and details on the role please see the [Trainees' Committee Webpage](#)

Training Post Evaluation

Each year you will be asked to complete a short online Training Post Evaluation (TPE). In it, you are asked to evaluate the training post that you just completed. This includes the working conditions and the training-related supports available to you in that post.

The evaluation is completely anonymous. You are not asked for any identifying information such as your name, date of birth or RCPI ID number. Your honest feedback is enormously important to us, as it helps RCPI identify any issues affecting the quality of training in specific posts or sites so that we can act and continue to drive improvements in training.

Regulations Relating to Higher Specialty Training (HST)

Point of Entry (Recognition of Prior Training)

Entry to the HST Programme is once a year, in July. Trainees, in most circumstances enter year one of the programme.

Recognition of prior training, in most cases, is not possible. Trainees must complete all years and requirements of each programme to be awarded a Certificate of Successful Completion of Specialist Training (CSCST). Retrospective recognition may be considered, in some programmes, if the previous experience formed part of a recognised, structured training programme, successfully completed within the previous five years. Trainees will be expected to submit a full application with relevant supporting documentation including, logbooks, evaluations, curricula documents and appraisals.

Such requests will be dealt with on a case-by-case basis. This is applied for in advance of the first year Annual Evaluation through the Recognition of Prior Training Policy and any credit is subject to approval by the Evaluation Panel.

Training Post

The first two years of HST must be spent in a clinical training post in Ireland.

When you are accepted into HST within RCPI, you are generally required to take up a full-time SpR post in the July of your first year. You are required to spend at least two years in an approved HST training post in Ireland before undertaking research or out-of-clinical-programme experience. You cannot defer your first year of HST or start HST in a research year.

During the annual allocation of training posts, we will endeavour to be as flexible as possible, within the confines of your training programme requirements, to allow you to develop a subspecialty interest. A full list of RCPI approved training sites can be found on the [RCPI Website](#).

If exposure to an essential specialty requirement is missing from your programme, we will make appropriate arrangements, for example day release or secondment.

Annual allocation of Training Posts

After your first two years on the programme, in September you will be asked to submit a Training Intentions Form, on which you state your intentions for the following year of training. Your National Specialty Director (NSD) uses these forms to allocate posts for the following year and calculate how many places are available for new Trainees.

As you have already been placed in an approved training post for at the first two years of HST, you will not be asked to complete a Training Intentions Form until you are in the second year of your programme.

If you intend entering a full-time clinical SpR post in your third and subsequent years, you can also indicate your preferred site on the Training Intentions Form. We cannot guarantee you will be placed in your preferred post, and change to posts may occur at short notice.

It is important to return your Training Intentions Form even if you plan to undertake out of clinical programme experience (OCPE). If you have applied for OCPE or a flexible training post but don't have confirmation at the time of submission, you still need to let your NSD and HST coordinator know so that they can keep this in mind when preparing for recruitment and allocation.

Remember, you cannot undertake research or out-of-clinical-programme experience in your first two years of HST.

If you don't submit your Training Intentions Form you risk not having a clinical SpR post for the following year. NSDs, along with the STC of the respective training programme assign posts to trainees based on set criteria. Trainees are informed of their allocation a minimum of 12 weeks prior to taking up the post.

The allocation general principles are as follows:

- 1. *Training Needs*** - When completing the allocations, the NSD will take into consideration the experience already gained by the Trainee and the future experience needed to meet the training programme requirements as outlined in the curriculum. Allocations will be made on that basis. Recommendations made by the annual evaluation panel and the requirement that Trainees should have experience in a range of services and demographic settings will also be taken into consideration
- 2. *Trainee Preferences*** - Trainees will be asked in September, prior to allocation, to indicate what their preferred post is.

3. *Seniority (or ranking at interview in case of candidates who interview for entry into the programme)* - Trainees are assigned available posts according to their seniority i.e. available posts are assigned to Trainees entering year 5 according to their expressed preferences and training needs before they are assigned to Trainees entering year 4. This cohort are, in turn, assigned posts before Trainees entering year 3.
For candidates applying to the training programme, posts are assigned according to how the candidate ranked at interview, i.e. the candidate who ranked highest is assigned available posts according to their expressed preferences first
4. *Post availability/geographic distribution* - The availability of the post. The number of Trainees expressing a preference for a post may exceed the number of those posts available in that site. While service requirements do not take priority over training needs, a situation may arise where a Trainee needs to be allocated to a hospital to fulfil geographic distribution. Where none of the above considerations allow for a decision between two Trainees who wish for the same placement the National Specialty Director may refer to interview ranking scores at entry to the Scheme

When trainees are advised of their post they are encouraged to engage with their site as early as possible in relation to onboarding paperwork. Trainees are encouraged to keep their information up to date via their National Employment Record ([NER app](#))

Note the above are general principles and the training body reserves the right to change allocation depending on circumstances and can occur at short notice

Notes

- For operational reasons, the NSDs may make changes to placements at short notice
- Trainees are assigned posts for a minimum of their first two years of training; however, flexibility will be provided if there is a change to the Trainee's training needs or to the availability of training posts (e.g. new post approved or a post withdrawn). Trainees must formally apply for a change in post through the RCPI post reassignment process
- Training sites are informed of their allocations on an annual basis after posts have been assigned
- If, following the issuing of allocations, a previously allocated post becomes available due to the withdrawal of a Trainee, the NSD may consider allocating that placement to a Trainee

who was not allocated to his/her preferred placement

- Final allocations are reviewed and agreed by the relevant STC

Generally, posts are of a duration of six months or twelve months, depending on the training programme, and Trainees are allocated to preapproved defined rotations.

The following rules apply for the allocation of training posts over the duration of the programme:

- One clinical year of the training programme must be completed in a training site outside of the Dublin area
- Two clinical years, maximum, can be spent in the same training site
- One clinical year, maximum, can be spent with the same Trainer

There are exceptions to some of the above training requirements for smaller IOM specialties due to the small number of training sites e.g. Genito-Urinary Medicine, Clinical Pharmacology & Therapeutics and others. There are some instances where it may be acceptable for there to be more than one Trainee per Trainer. Typically, this occurs where there is limited access for the Trainees in a specialty to acquire some specific experience.

Where an essential element of the curriculum is missing from a programme, access to it should be arranged, by day release for example, or if necessary, by secondment.

The number of clinical posts in a specialty must remain constant. If an individual moves out of a programme he/she does so knowing that there is no established date to allow him/her to return into the programme at any particular time, but only when a slot in the training programme again becomes available. Trainees in out of programme experience will be considered for re-entry to posts before the appointment of new Trainees to the programme

One clinical year maximum can be spent with the same Trainer.

Post swaps between trainees may, on occasion, be approved by the National Specialty Director(s) subject to the following parameters: Both parties involved must mutually agree to the change. No pressure or coercion should be involved, and full consent must be given by both trainees. All post swaps must be independently validated and approved by the Royal College of Physicians. This ensures that the swap complies with the programme and curricula requirements and does not negatively impact the training objectives of either trainee.

It is of the utmost importance to always review your [Specialty Curriculum](#) to ensure you are meeting the specific requirements of your programme.

Trainees are expected to complete their Higher Specialist Training programme within a

maximum of seven years, inclusive of any Out of Programme (OCPE) experience.

Flexible/ Less Than Full Time Training

It is the policy of the RCPI training bodies to advocate for flexible training. Whilst the training programme is full-time, it is recognised that some Trainees may have individual circumstances that mean that training on a full-time, continuous basis would not be practical for them.

Trainees can apply for flexible training through two routes:

- HSE Job Sharing
- HSE Supernumerary Flexible Training Scheme

HSE National Flexible Training Scheme

The HSE National Doctors Training and Planning (NDTP) operates a National Flexible Training Scheme, which allows a small number of Trainees to train part-time for a set period of time at 50% WTE.

This scheme is not recommended for final year Trainees. You must have a well-founded reason to apply, e.g. responsibility for young children or elderly relatives, or personal family circumstances. You cannot apply for flexible training in order to pursue other paid work or research.

Participation on the flexible training scheme will be restricted to a maximum of two years and will only be extended by NDTP in exceptional circumstances. This is to provide as many Trainees as possible with the option to train flexibly.

Applications generally open in September each year and RCPI will share the details with trainees on behalf of NDTP.

Job Sharing

Postgraduate Trainees on the HST Programmes can avail of job-sharing opportunities for a set period of time.

These posts involve matching two trainees in a site to share a 0.5 WTE post.

A training post can be shared by two Trainees who:

- Are training in the same specialty *and*
- Are within two adjacent years of each other on the training programme

Applications may be made up to 12 months in advance of the proposed date of commencement of the job share post and received no later than the month of October of the previous year of commencement.

Please refer to the [Job Share](#) policy document for more information on how to apply and further information on the regulations of job sharing.

Reasonable Adjustments

In some instances, it may be necessary for Trainees to apply to have a reasonable adjustment to their training programme in line with the RCPI Reasonable Adjustment Policy. This policy applies to all areas of disability including physical and psychological such as learning disability or a mental health condition. If a Trainee wishes to inform the RCPI of a disability requiring reasonable adjustment, they are required to submit all relevant and recent supporting documentation written by the appropriate health professional (e.g., treating physician, Occupational Medicine physician, psychiatrist, education psychologist). The supporting documentation should include the nature of the adjustment requested and must be submitted to the RCPI via email to wellbeing@rcpi.ie

Leave of Absence

Leave of absence may be taken in special circumstances only e.g. maternity leave or sick leave. This leave must be applied for prospectively to the Specialty Coordinator using the [Leave of Absence Application Form](#) and approved by the National Specialty Director(s). CSCST dates will be amended, if necessary, at this time, as trainees are expected to make up the shortfall in training. Completion of the Taught Programme may be completed during time of absence if desired, but if not will be required to be completed upon return to the programme.

Any changes to the approved leave of absence, must be brought to the attention of the HST Coordinator and further approval from the NSD(s) should be sought.

In the absence of special circumstances (e.g. maternity leave or sick leave), Trainees must complete the rotation they are allocated to for the duration of the post. If a Trainee is mid-post and wishes to

take a leave of absence under circumstances that are not considered special, they are obliged to complete the post to fulfil the employment commitment to the clinical site.

Extended sick leave and its impact on the date of CSCST will be dealt with on a case-by-case basis.

Trainees returning from a leave of absence must notify their RCPI HST Coordinator in writing with as much advance notice as possible. Trainees are not guaranteed a post immediately but will be given the first available post.

Trainees may take up to three consecutive months leave of absence from training within the duration of their programme with no impact on the CSCST date, at the discretion of the National Specialty Director(s). After three months, credit will no longer be accumulated and the CSCST date will be extended accordingly. This three month's credit will not be awarded for any leave of absence undertaken during the High-Intensity GIM year for dual specialties.

Maternity, Paternity and related Leave

Maternity, paternity and related leave should be discussed and applied for directly with your employer. You must also seek approval from RCPI through the leave of absence process as outlined above. Please refer to the [HSE website](#) for more details.

Parental Leave

If a Trainee takes parental leave, they will have to make up this time on the programme and the date of CSCST will be extended accordingly. This includes parental leave taken in blocks or as part of a shortened week. You must also seek approval from RCPI through the leave of absence process as outlined above.

Out of Clinical Programme Experience (OCPE)

OCPE cannot be taken until year three or four of the programme, depending on the specialty. Please refer to your specialty curriculum for further information. For those on dual specialty programmes, two specialty clinical years and the high-intensity GIM year must be completed before undertaking an OCPE year.

For Pharmaceutical Medicine, due to the nature of the specialty, there is no period of research or out of programme experience that will count towards the completion of the training programme.

A maximum of one-year credit for OCPE may be sought to pursue the following:

- A specialist training opportunity (for example a clinical fellowship) in Ireland or abroad approved by the training body OR
- Dedicated research post approved by the training body OR
- A suitable academic post approved by the training body

If more than 12 months is spent in these posts, Trainees will only receive 12 months credit towards their training programme. If a Trainee does 12 months in a clinical fellowship and 12 months research, only 12 months will be recognised towards completion of training. Some Trainees may wish to spend two or three years in research leading to an MSc, MD, or PhD, by stepping aside from the programme for a time. During this period the Trainee will not accrue training credit if 12 months OPCE credit was awarded previously.

Trainees must complete the [OCPE Form](#) before taking up an OCPE research, clinical or lecturer post. All applications must be made prospectively. Sufficient time must be allowed for enquiries to be made about a proposed OCPE post if credit is to be awarded towards completion of Higher Specialist Training (HST). This form must be submitted to the Training Coordinator. Completed applications must be received at least six months before the proposed OCPE start date.

OCPE is not guaranteed, the decision to allow a Trainee to go on OCPE is based on several things, including but not exclusive to, relevance of clinical experience, relevance of research, training rotation numbers, service requirements etc.

Trainees must continue to log activities in their ePortfolio while undertaking OCPE if expecting to receive credit for the year (clinics, CBDs, attendance at conferences/meetings, delivery of teaching etc). Trainees are also expected to complete quarterly assessment and end of year evaluation forms with their OCPE supervisor on ePortfolio as normal.

HST Taught Programme

The HST Taught Programme is an essential element of the HST curriculum. It consists of a series of modular elements spread across the years of HST covering essential training components such as communication, ethics, etc. The programme is delivered via a combination of self-paced online learning material, live virtual tutorials, and in-person workshops. Trainees will be assigned self-paced

online content per quarter. This self-paced online content will be delivered via RCPI's virtual learning environment, Brightspace. Trainees will also attend two scheduled 2-hour virtual tutorials each training year. Allocated tutorial dates will be provided before the start of the training year. Trainees must plan the time to complete requirements per quarter and to attend the virtual tutorials and specialty-specific workshops. For more information on the Taught Programme, please visit the [HST Taught Programme FAQ](#)

In relation to attendance at study days, courses, exams, and conferences, including study leave, entitlement is as per the NCHD Contract for educational leave as per the HSE contract.

Audit

Trainees must take part in audit activities during HST and provide evidence of having completed the process. Audit activities must relate directly to a Trainee's practice. The Minimum Requirements for Training section of the specialty curriculum outlines the requirements. Quality Improvement projects can be counted towards this requirement.

Teaching

Trainees are required to participate in teaching during HST. The knowledge and skills you are expected to acquire include:

- Bed-side undergraduate and postgraduate teaching
- Developing and delivering lectures
- Principles of adult learning, teaching and learning methods available and strategies
- Educational principles directing assessment methods including, formative vs. summative methods
- The value of regular appraisal and assessment in informing the training process
- How to set effective educational objectives and map benefits to learners
- Design and delivery of an effective teaching event, both small and large groups
- Use of appropriate technology and teaching materials

Acting up as a consultant

It is possible to act up as a consultant in your final year on the programme, for a **maximum of three months**. To be eligible the following criteria apply:

- Trainee must be in their Final Year on a HST Programme
- They must be working in the relevant specialty with support from other departmental Consultants in the same specialty
- Substantive Consultant post must be available within the same training site
- The trainee must be required to cover periods of leave for a consultant in a substantive post – not to cover a long-term locum or to start a substantive post earlier than training is complete
- Trainees must have no significant outstanding training issues at their Penultimate Annual Evaluation that will have an impact on their ability to carry out the acting position
- In line with HSE regulations for the appointment of locum / temporary consultant posts, no higher specialist trainee –including flexible trainees – is permitted to “act up” during their flexible training post
- Application form to be completed by Trainee including work plan for the post and both agreed and signed off by the NSD and supervising Consultant
- An application form which is available from your HST Coordinator, must be completed in typed format and submitted back to the coordinator. If you are unaware of your coordinator you can submit to training@rcpi.ie
- You must also receive written approval from the Hospital Manager/CEO and the Clinical Director and submit a copy of this to the HST Department in RCPI
- Once the application form is submitted and verified you will be notified of approval
- If any of the application details change you must contact the HST Department with an update.

Annual Evaluations

The Annual Evaluation of Progress (AEP) is the formal method by which a Trainee’s progression through their training programme is monitored and recorded each year. The evidence to be reviewed by the panel is recorded by the Trainee and Trainer in the Trainee’s e-Portfolio.

Trainees are required to undergo an annual evaluation process. This evaluation will take place within the RCPI administration offices in Dublin or can be virtual. Trainees must attend the evaluation, including those on OCPE.

At the Evaluation, recommendations will be highlighted and approved by the Evaluation Panel. These recommendations will be shared with the Trainee’s next assigned Trainer and will be recorded and

saved in the Trainee ePortfolio.

Evaluations take place between April and June each year. The evaluation panel includes the National Specialty Directors for the specialty and RCPI administrative support.

During the evaluation, the panel will review the ePortfolio and an evaluation pack. For those attending PYAs, there will be an extern present. A PYA should occur when the trainee has one clinical year left to complete on their training programme, to ensure recommendations on completion of the curriculum can be fulfilled within the final clinical year. The extern will have access to the trainees' ePortfolio prior to the evaluation. At the evaluation the extern will provide specific recommendations for the trainee. At the end of your evaluation, the panel will agree on a list of recommendations for the following year which will be recorded on the End of Year Evaluation form.

Further information on the Annual Evaluation process can be found in the [HST Progression Through Training HST policy](#).

Duration of Training Programme

Generally no more than two years, maximum, can be added to the duration of the training programme e.g. Oncology HST is four years in duration plus two years, a total of six years to complete CSCST. This includes Trainees who participate in flexible training. The revised training requirements and CSCST date for Trainees on extended leave of absence who return to the programme will be assessed on an individual basis. Requests to extend beyond two years will be considered on a case-by-case basis by the IOM.

Withdrawal from Training Programme

If a Trainee wishes to withdraw from a Training Programme before their expected CSCST date, they must first notify their Specialty Training Coordinator and Trainer of their wish to withdraw from the Training Programme. The trainee should give at least four weeks written notice of their wish to leave their current training post. The Specialty Training Coordinator will organise an exit interview with the trainee and the National Specialty Director(s), which the trainee is expected to attend. The trainee can complete a [Pre-exit interview Questionnaire](#) ahead of this to ensure all details are captured in relation to exit. Leaving the programme without giving reasonable notice or explanation to the NSD(s) is not acceptable behaviour.

Please note it is a requirement of the college to notify Medical Manpower on your site of your intention to leave the programme once we are notified. If you have not been in contact with the college in 12 months, or have failed to respond to communication, you are de-facto removed from the training scheme.

HST Completion Criteria – Certificate of Satisfactory Completion of Specialist Training (CSCST)

For a Trainee to be awarded a Certificate of Satisfactory Completion of Specialist Training (CSCST)

Trainees are required to:

- Complete the full duration of the programme in HST posts as allocated by the Training Body that are approved for HST and have been awarded training credit through the annual evaluation process
- Achieve all outcomes as set out in the [specialty curriculum](#)
- Attend relevant study days
- Attend the Taught Programme and/or mandatory courses listed in the specialty curriculum
- Maintain an up-to-date and correctly completed ePortfolio as evidence of satisfactory completion of training
- Attend and satisfactorily pass annual evaluations

Failure to complete any of the above may result in a Trainee having their training time extended.

CSCST Ceremony

Once a Trainee has successfully completed all the requirements of the specialty programme they will be awarded a CSCST. This allows Trainees to apply for specialist registration with the Irish Medical Council. Trainees will be invited to a conferring ceremony with their relevant training body where they will be awarded a CSCST.

ePortfolio

ePortfolio is an electronic logbook for recording essential information about training, educational and evaluation activities. Trainees are required to maintain an up-to-date ePortfolio throughout HST, as it is an official record of satisfactory completion of training. There are useful ePortfolio supports available both in the [ePortfolio knowledge base](#) and on the [Learning Support](#) section of Brightspace.

Trainees must complete an ePortfolio during their training programme. All Trainees will be given access to the RCPI ePortfolio which is set up depending on the specialty of the Trainee. Trainees must complete the minimum requirements for their specialty (in line with minimum requirements or OBE curricula as relevant). Details on this can be found in each specialty curricula. The ePortfolio is also used to conduct Trainee Evaluations and end of post feedback.

The ePortfolio is the Trainee's record of their training and the information in the ePortfolio is owned by the Trainee. The Trainee is expected to keep their ePortfolio up to date and log activity each week. RCPI provide the ePortfolio system for the Trainees to record their training programme requirements. This is the Trainees record and RCPI has no authority to share with third parties unless authorised to do so.

Following completion of the training programme a Trainee will have access to the ePortfolio for three years, at which point Trainees can download all their records. Access to ePortfolio after three years will not be possible.

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As you rotate through posts, your Trainers are required to verify recorded information and sign off on assessments. To do this, they will need to log into their own ePortfolio account.

Trainees must update their ePortfolio at key points, listed below.

At the start of the year

- Check that personal details are correct
- Check that the details of post, site and Trainer are correct
- Review the training curriculum and requirements for the specialty. The curriculum and specialty requirements are reviewed every year, so Trainees need to be aware of any changes

At the start of each post

- Trainees must meet with their Trainer within the first two weeks to agree on the personal goals plan. The personal goals plan must be recorded on ePortfolio and the Trainer must sign it off

During each post

- Trainees must enter training and educational activities on ePortfolio

- Complete workplace-based assessments as they happen

At the end of each quarter and at the end of the post

- Trainees must ensure ePortfolio is up to date and signed off by the Trainer
- Meet the Trainer to complete the End of Post Form

At the end of each training year

- Trainees must make sure that the ePortfolio is up to date and signed off by the Trainer in preparation for the End of Year Evaluation
- Complete the annual evaluation form with the Trainer in advance of the Evaluation

At the end of your training programme

- Make sure that the ePortfolio is up to date and signed off by the Trainer in preparation for the Final Year Evaluation with the NSD(s)

RCPI Benefits

We are pleased to offer you a range of benefits to support all trainees on our training programme:

- Free attendance at Masterclasses, St Luke's Symposium as well as events and webinars organised by our Faculties and Institutes.
- Free four-month subscription to a BMJ OnExamination Package – request an access code by emailing Training@rcpi.ie. To redeem your voucher and activate your four-month subscription, You can log into [BMJOnExamination](#)

RCPI Trainee Representative

RCPI Trainee Representatives have been appointed to training sites across Ireland.

The Trainee Rep is there to help Trainees stay connected to RCPI while in training. They act as a conduit between Trainees on site and RCPI, sharing important information about training and giving feedback to RCPI (and vice versa).

Trainee Representatives are an important point of contact for Trainees seeking clarification or direction relating to training and education matters and are expected to encourage and support

improvements to educational facilities that will improve training delivery, for example MRCPI tutorials, journal access, journal clubs, internet access and Trainer engagement.

They are also expected to encourage open and honest feedback from Trainees on their training experiences. Trainee Reps are appointed each year for a period of one year, with applications for new appointments normally opening in June. It's an ideal opportunity to take up a formal role in RCPI and put your management skills into action.

Trainees can apply to become a Trainee Rep for their hospital if they meet the following criteria:

- A SpR in a full-time clinical post in Higher Specialist Training or in the second or later year of Basic Specialist Training
- Clear assessment/training record of at least 12 months prior to your application
- Interest in education and training

Trainees are encouraged to get apply to be a Trainee Representative. For information on the Trainee Committee please email Trainees@rcpi.ie

HSE Financial Support Schemes

Please note up to date information on Financial supports can always be found on the [Medical Careers Ireland Website](#)

Clinical Course & Examination Refund Scheme for NCHDs

This HSE scheme is open to all NCHDs. The HSE Clinical Course and Examination Refund Scheme covers the cost of examination fees and clinical courses such as Advanced Cardiac Life Support.

There is an approved list of mandatory clinical courses and examinations qualifying for this refund scheme contained in the [HSE Clinical Course & Examination Refund Scheme Document](#). The full cost of an approved examination/course taken on after this date is eligible to be refunded for the **first sitting of the exam**. Applicants must hold HSE NCHD contract 2010. Subsequent sittings of the same exam are ineligible for any payment under this scheme. However subsequent sittings may be claimed from the HSE Training Support Scheme (TSS).

Specialist Training Fund for Higher Specialist Trainees

The Specialist Training Fund was introduced by the HSE to support Trainees in HST participation in education and training activities in addition to the mandatory elements of HST provided by their training body.

This scheme is open to higher specialist Trainees (SpRs) registered on the Higher Specialist Training Programme. The funding available to each HST Trainee is €500 per year of training and the fund rolls over if not claimed in a particular year. Trainees can claim for participation in relevant non-mandatory educational activities (such as attendance at conferences) from the Specialist Training Fund is for Higher Specialist Trainees.

The [Specialist Training Fund for Higher Specialist Trainees HSE Document](#) contains a detailed explanation of the Scheme. Trainees who are eligible to avail of this fund must submit the signed reimbursement form and return it with original receipts and a certificate of attendance (if applicable) to Training@rcpi.ie to claim your refund. All applications must be signed and approved by the current Trainer or training director as set out by the Training Body.

Training Support Scheme (TSS)

This scheme is in addition to existing financial supports such as the Clinical Course and Exam Refund Scheme and the Higher Specialist Training Fund. Funding is allocated based on Grade. Funding is available pro-rata for doctors employed on shorter contract durations.

More guidance on this can be found on the [TSS Policy Document](#)

Health and Wellbeing

The health and wellbeing office provides professional services to Trainees who require additional support during their training programme. This can include any of the following areas:

- Mental/physical health issues which impact on training progression
- Interpersonal conflict or difficulties
- Professionalism competencies development, such as communication, assertiveness and building relationships
- Complaints made by Trainees or about Trainees
- Difficult working environments/conditions including bullying which was not resolved locally
- Burnout
- Career guidance
- Mentoring
- Advice and referral to other services such as Occupation Medicine, Health Committee,

psychology and psychiatry

- Advice and referral to additional resources such as courses, books, online resources and mentors

The health and wellbeing service is available to RCPI Trainees only and forms part of their training programme where required. As such, it is not a confidential service. Trainees are referred by their Trainers, NSDs or they may self-refer into the service. All supports can be reviewed via the [Health and Wellbeing Website](#)

Trainee Awards

Further information on all awards can be found on the [RCPI Trainee Awards Website](#)

David Mitchell Award for Audit

The David Mitchell Award is awarded by the Trainees' Committee in RCPI. It recognises audits that improve patient care and/or specialist education and training. The winning Trainee or team of Trainees receives an educational grant worth €1,000 for a single

Trainee or €1,500 for a team of Trainees.

William Stokes Award for Research

The William Stokes Award is awarded by the Trainees' Committee in RCPI. It recognises research of the highest standards carried out by Trainees in Higher Specialist Training. The winning Trainee receives the William Stokes Award and an educational grant worth €4,000. The award is open to all Trainees currently undertaking Higher Specialist Training with RCPI.

Dorothy Stopford Price Medal

The Dorothy Stopford Price Medal recognises excellence in research or audit on vaccination, immunisation or control of infectious diseases and its potential impact on public health. The medal is awarded by the Faculty of Public Health Medicine to honour this pioneer in infectious disease control in Ireland. This competition is open to all Trainees.

Arthur Eakins Award

The Arthur Eakins Award was introduced in 2024 by the Health and Wellbeing sub-committee of the RCPI Training Committee, in conjunction with the Faculty of Occupational Medicine. It aims to recognise the importance of Trainee health and wellbeing and encourage Trainees to actively get involved in improving and promoting health and wellbeing. It is awarded to a Trainee for a research project or quality improvement initiative which improves and promotes Trainee Health and

Wellbeing. The medal and education grant worth €1,000 is funded by the Faculty of Occupational Medicine

Fellowships/Scholarships

A number of Fellowships/Scholarships are available for Trainees to apply each year. This list below is not exhaustive, and Trainees are encouraged to discuss potential opportunities with their Training Director.

HSE Dr Richard Steeven's Scholarship

The scholarship was established by the Health Service Executive (HSE) in 2007, arising from a recommendation of the Report of the Postgraduate Medical Education and Training Group. This important initiative provides a valuable opportunity for specialist medical trainees to spend time training in centres of excellence abroad and to bring the skills gained back to the Irish health service. The programme is aimed at supporting clinical training as distinct from research, particularly targeted at Specialist Registrars /Senior Registrars, who are in the latter stages of their Higher Specialist Training (HST) programme, in order to maximise the benefit of specialised training abroad. Applications for this generally open in August/September each year and the training body will issue an announcement related to same.

Post CSCST Fellowships

RCPI in association with the HSE has established a register of approved Post-Certificate of Satisfactory Completion of Specialist Training (CSCST) Fellowship posts in the Irish health service.

These Fellowships allow Trainees to gain training or experience which is not currently available on the RCPI Higher Specialist Training programmes, or which a Trainee may need for a particular consultant post with a special interest. These Fellowships offer training opportunities for doctors who are within two years of obtaining a CSCST.

The additional training is designed to expose Trainees to subspecialties and advanced clinical skills.

The posts will offer:

- A structured educational experience designed to deliver the requirements of a particular subspecialty which are not readily available within HST
- A supervisor with authority and accountability for the fellowship post
- Opportunities for audit and research
- An enhanced salary

Where appropriate, the post will fulfil training body requirements and HSE employment requirements for consultant posts. All posts are evaluated and approved by the appropriate training body. To be eligible for these posts Trainees must have successfully completed a RCPI Higher Specialist Training programme within the last two years.

HSE Aspire Fellowships

[The NDTP Aspire \(Post CSCST\) Fellowship](#) awards have resulted from the collaborative efforts of HSE's Acute Hospitals' Division, Mental Health Division, National Doctors Training and Planning (NDTP) and the Post-Graduate Medical Training Bodies in Ireland. The NDTP Aspire Post CSCST Fellowships are Fellowships funded by NDTP and recognised through the training body.

Successful Aspire Fellows receive:

- SpR salary and headcount for the duration of the fellowship
- Eligibility to access the Higher Specialist Training Fund during the fellowship
- Formal recognition of achievement following completion of the fellowship from the relevant Irish Post Graduate Medical Education Body/Bodies
- A high-quality fellowship experience in Ireland that will improve competitiveness for positions within Ireland
- A logbook provision for logging all activities during the fellowship
- A formal evaluation process during the fellowship

Irish Clinical Academic Training (ICAT)

The Irish Clinical Academic Training ([ICAT Programme](#)) is a unique all Ireland cross-institutional, comprehensive national programme for Clinician Scientists based at six major Irish universities and their affiliated hospital groups. The partner universities include Trinity College Dublin, University College Dublin, National University of Ireland, Galway, Queen's University

Belfast, Royal College of Surgeons in Ireland and University College Cork. At its core is an integrated programme spanning 6-7 years of seamless, supported and mentored academic and clinical training targeting future academic leaders.

ICAT's mentorship scheme spans the entire duration of specialist medical and postgraduate academic training. At the time of completion, ICAT fellows will have graduated with a PhD at their chosen university/ institution and achieved CSCST (RoI) / CCT (NI) in their chosen specialty. The ICAT Programme adopts a dynamic training focus whereby the emphasis shifts and leads the ICAT Fellow from (i) learning how to start a research career as a PhD candidate, (ii) to successful completion of a PhD, (iii) to establishing independence through novel thought and independent research funding.

Irish Clinician Educator Training Programme (ICET)

The Irish Clinician Educator Training programme is an innovative, advanced educational pathway in the field of Postgraduate Clinical Education. It is a two year programme and is open to SpRs as an Out of Clinical Programme Experience (OCPE). The aim of the programme is to support the training and professional development of future leaders in Postgraduate Clinical Education in Ireland.

ICET Trainees are involved in supervised teaching at postgraduate and undergraduate levels and are expected to conduct research to a level of Medical Doctorate. Selected candidates avail of funding over the course of the two years on the ICET programme. ICET applications open for trainees in November and again this should be discussed with the NSDs and OCPE Form submitted well in advance should the trainee be interested in applying. Interviews take place in January with outcomes communicated to all applicants in February. More information on ICET can be found on the [ICET Programme Information Document](#)

Policies and Procedures

There are a number of other [HST Policies and Procedures](#) that Trainees may refer to throughout the duration of their training programmes. Below is a summary of these policies and procedures.

RCPI Policies

- Roles and Responsibility of a Trainer
- Post Reassignment Policy
- Job Sharing Policy
- Progression through Training: Higher Specialist Training
- Anti-Bullying Policy
- Appeals Policy: Postgraduate Training
- Disciplinary Process for Postgraduate Specialist Training

- Equal Opportunities Policy
- Grievance Policy: Postgraduate Training
- HST Allocation Policy

Other Relevant HSE Policies

- Specialist Training Fund Policy
- Clinical Course and Exam Refund Scheme
- Training Support Scheme

This Handbook shall be subject to review every year from the date of approval of this document by the Institute of Medicine.

Review	
Review by Institute of Medicine	July 2026