

Guidance for Clinical Observerships (previously known as Clinical Attachments)

1. Introduction

Clinical Observerships are primarily designed for international medical graduates who have been practising abroad and who wish to gain experience and an appreciation of the nature of clinical practice in the NHS in the UK and to observe the role of doctors and other professionals within the healthcare system.

In addition a doctor who is suspended or who has undertakings or conditions on their registration may participate in a Clinical Observership to help maintain their skills and knowledge whilst they are suspended from the register or as part of a return to work plan.

It must be noted that doctors undertaking Clinical Observerships are unpaid and carry no responsibility or authority for making decisions or providing advice in relation to patients' treatment. **Clinical Observers should not be regarded as locums for absent doctors and they must not be used to provide service to any patient. Guidance is clear on the role of the Clinical Observer; see point 3.**

2. Scope of the Guidance

This guidance provides information for those responsible for the administration, approval and supervision of the Clinical Observer and for the following groups of doctors who may make an application for a position:

- i. the medical graduates who have been practicing abroad and who wish to practice in the UK for the first time
- ii. doctors who are suspended or who have undertakings or conditions on their GMC registration and wish to maintain their skills and knowledge whilst suspended from the register, or as part of a return to work plan.

This guidance does not apply to:

- i. overseas medical students seeking electives - these should refer to the medical elective process
- ii. non-clinical observers - these should contact the Human Resources Department.

3. The Role of the Clinical Observer

A Clinical Observer position allows an international medical graduate to gain an overview of medical processes and systems in the UK, specifically in the NHS, by observing a consultant in a relevant speciality at work. During the attachment, the doctor is not given any responsibility and is not able to make clinical decisions or give clinical advice.

There are clear limitations on the duties and opportunities for Observers; the Supervising Consultant may use their discretion to allow the following interaction with patients:

- attendance at ward rounds
- observation of consultations in clinics
- participation in patient administration (clerking) under direct clinical supervision
- undertaking of patient histories under direct clinical supervision
- undertaking routine physical examinations with the patients' consent under direct clinical supervision
- directly observing surgery (i.e. not assisting in surgery)

Under no circumstances may a Clinical Observer perform invasive procedures, advise on patient treatment or initiate, alter or stop the treatment of a patient. Additionally the Clinical Observer should never be regarded as a locum for absent doctors.

In addition the Observer must:

- not take part in any procedure involving patients, including ordering tests, taking specimens, obtaining or witnessing signatures for consent
- not advise colleagues or patients on the treatment of patients, teach clinical procedures, carry out research or assist with laboratory work
- not be permitted to visit other departments except for appropriate attachments where agreed in advance with the supervising consultant and other consultant staff (in the department to be visited).

Any Clinical Observer found in breach of this guidance will have their application or position ceased immediately and no refund of placement fee will be given.

The benefits to the Trust include an additional team member who may carry out a limited number of tasks to support colleagues for a limited time period; an investment in the future medical workforce in particular 'hard-to-fill' specialities and the opportunity to learn good practice from other organisations and healthcare providers overseas.

4. Cases involving Fitness to Practise or Additional Time Required

Fitness to Practise Panels have in the past used clinical attachments/observerships as a means of re-introducing a sick, or poorly performing doctor to the full range of clinical duties. They have also sometimes been used for doctors suspended following a finding of misconduct at the end of the suspension period. In these cases, the conditions of the placement would be in line with guidance received by the GMC in relation to the specific individual.

All cases involving Fitness to Practice or Additional Time Required will only be approved following communication with the GMC or relevant office of Health Education England and with full approval of the Trust's Medical Director.

5. The Role of the Supervising Consultant

The Supervising Consultant should ensure the Clinical Observer is aware of the skills essential for effective patient care within the NHS. In addition to allowing the opportunity to attend clinics and ward rounds the areas of focus should include:

- An introduction to the NHS healthcare environment and to a clinical discipline
- The opportunity to safely shadow clinical colleagues in their clinical duties
- An overview of clinical audit, clinical governance, and legal aspects of health care
- Advice on the role of teams, management, and leadership within the healthcare setting
- Advice on writing effective CVs and cover letters for job applications
- Coaching on preparing for and attending interviews for posts.

Once a Consultant has agreed to supervise a Clinical Observer they should contact the Medical Education Department to confirm the name of the doctor, proposed dates of the position and the type of Clinical Observer required (see point 2 above).

Objectives will be set in discussion with the Clinical Observer, an educational contract signed and a review of the objectives undertaken towards the end of the placement.

6. Eligibility

To be eligible to apply applicants must meet the following minimum criteria:

1. Must be a qualified doctor
2. Must have passed PLAB Part 1
3. Must be preparing for/have passed PLAB Part 2
4. Must be competent in English (IELTS score of 7.5 or above)

Additionally the Director of Medical Education will consider the application and advise if the position is suitable for Clinical Observerships.

7. Length of Placement

A Clinical Observer position can be agreed for a period of one to eight weeks depending on the objectives and the visa status of the applicant (see section 8.3.4. for Visas). There is no scope to extend the length of a placement.

Positions may be taken in any available speciality providing there is a Consultant within the speciality who has agreed to supervise and there are no other Clinical Observers in a position in the same speciality at the proposed time. Applicants should be aware that Consultants are not obliged to agree to an Observer and do so out of goodwill; additionally a Consultant may only facilitate one Observer at a time.

A placement may take place across two specialities consecutively provided that there is a Consultant within each speciality who has agreed to supervise, the Occupational Health clearance for the speciality is in place and the total length of time does not exceed eight weeks.

8. Application Process

Those wishing to undertake a Clinical Observership are required to follow the two stage application process below. Once the Medical Education Department is satisfied that all approvals and paperwork are in place a confirmatory email will be sent to the applicant. The placement cannot commence until this email has been received.

It is important for applicants to appreciate the timeline listed in stages to ensure the placement can commence on the desired date.

8.1. Communication

The Medical Education Department will communicate exclusively via email to those applying for Clinical Observership positions on MedicalEducationDartford@dvh.nhs.uk. Applicants must not contact the department by telephone or visit in person without prior agreement of the officer managing the application. Should this instruction not be adhered to the application will not be processed and any given approval to commence in the position will be withdrawn.

8.2. Stage One: Identifying an opportunity

Those wishing to complete a Clinical Observership should refer to the Darent Valley Hospital website at www.dvh.nhs.uk to identify the consultant they wish to supervise their placement. The candidate should contact the consultant directly to request a placement and include the following in the discussion:

- the reason for the request i.e. to gain UK experience / Fitness to Practice / Additional Time Required
- the desired objectives of the placement
- an agreement on the proposed dates of the placement (six to eight weeks maximum depending on visa status).

Once the provisional placement has been agreed with the supervising consultant the applicant may continue to Stage Two of the application process.

8.3. Stage Two: Pre-Placement Administration

The initial placement request is subject to approval by the Director of Medical Education or Medical Director to ensure the post is educationally sound. Once the DME has reviewed and authorised the request the process can be progressed.

Clinical Observerships are subject to pre-placement checks and permission to commence will not be granted until all full approvals are in place. It should be noted this pre-placement administration can take up to three months to complete.

8.3.1. Application Form

Once the Supervising Consultant has agreed to the placement and dates have been discussed the applicant should fully complete and submit an application form to the Medical Education Department at least twelve weeks prior to the proposed date of the placement. A non-refundable payment of £200.00 is required for the application to be processed.

An email confirming receipt of the application will be sent to the applicant within five working days. Incomplete application forms will not be considered and will be returned to the applicant for review.

8.3.2. Occupational Health

Those commencing a placement are required to have full health clearance in accordance with the requirements outlined in Appendix A. The Medical Education Department will email an electronic Occupational Health form to the applicant for completion; this should be returned directly to the Occupational Health Department on dvh.occhealth@nhs.net at least eight weeks prior to the proposed date of the placement.

8.3.3. Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS)

The DBS search an applicant's criminal record history and replaces the Criminal Record Bureau (CRB) checks. The applicant should complete the on-line application form so that confirmation of a clear history is received prior to the date of commencement. In order for the DBS check to progress three different original identification documents must be submitted to the Medical Education Department as listed in the 'NHS Employment Check Standards' document. Photocopies of documents will not be accepted and it should be noted that a UK address is required for DBS checks to be processed. No exceptions to this rule can be given.

The Medical Education Department will communicate with the Medical Staffing Department on behalf of the applicant regarding the progression and completion of the DBS check.

8.3.4. Visa

Applicants from outside of the European Economic Area (EEA) and Switzerland are required to hold a Business Visa through the UK Border agency to take up a Clinical Observer placement. There is a specific category in the immigration rules for these positions and a restriction has been introduced on the amount of leave that can be granted specifically to undertake Clinical Observerships to 6 weeks at a time (or 6 months in total) as they are designed to be filled for short periods only. This is in line with the purpose of these positions, for overseas doctors to familiarise themselves with UK working practices.

For more information see:

- www.gov.uk/business-visitor-visa/overview
- www.nhscareers.nhs.uk (search FAQs for overseas doctors)

8.3.5. Language Test

The International English Language Testing System or IELTS is an international standardised test of English Language proficiency for non-native English language speakers. The GMC has produced a list of countries where the first and native language is English. Those holding a passport from these countries are not required to complete the English Language test. Those who do not hold passports from one of these countries will need to submit evidence of an IELTS score of 7.5 or above.

For more information see:

- www.ielts.org
- www.gmc-uk.org/doctors/registration_applications/english_first_language.asp

8.3.6. Identification

A photocopy of the passport and a passport size photograph must be submitted to the Medical Education Department at least 8 weeks prior to the proposed date of the placement.

8.4. Stage Three: Contract and Placement Fees

8.4.1 Contract

Once the pre-placement administration is considered satisfactory the applicant will be emailed a contract for the position. The document should be signed and returned to the Medical Education Department prior to the date of commencement. Scanned documents will be accepted; electronic signatures will be rejected.

The Medical Education Department will then arrange for a copy of the contract to be signed by the Supervising Consultant to ensure an agreement of the conditions of the appointment are in place.

8.4.2. Fee

A fee is required for the Clinical Observer placement which includes the non-returnable payment at Stage One. Payment must be received prior to the commencement of the position.

The breakdown is as follows:

- £100.00 Stage One fee required with application form
- £100.00 Processing of Pre-Placement paperwork including DBS check
- £100.00 Four week Clinical Observership position
- £25.00 Per additional week up to a total of eight weeks

Please note that fees for health related clearance will be notified separately where they apply.

8.4.3. Confirmation of Placement

On receipt of the signed contract by the applicant and the Supervising Consultant and agreement that all pre-placement administration is complete, the Medical Education Department will email the applicant with the agreement that the placement may commence.

9. During the Position

9.1. Objectives

The objectives of the placement are listed on the application form and agreed as part of the contract. Additional objectives may be set following the initial meeting with the Supervising Consultant. It is an expectation that the Clinical Observer will take responsibility for their learning whilst on site, with the support of the Supervising Consultant, however the rules included in section 3 must be adhered to at all times.

The Supervising Consultant is required to agree objectives prior to the placement commencing. The details of these objectives will be included in the learning agreement which should be monitored periodically throughout the placement and reviewed during the last week. The Medical Education Department will facilitate these discussions.

9.2. Identification

An identity badge (with end date) will be supplied by the Medical Education Department. This must be worn at all times when on site.

9.3. Accommodation

Please note that the Medical Education Department is not able to assist with accommodation. For help in finding suitable accommodation, please contact the accommodation office directly on 01322 428100 extension 8103.

9.4. Meetings and Teaching

Clinical Observers will generally be welcome to attend academic and postgraduate meetings but should not be directed to attend any protected teaching sessions for Postgraduate Doctors in Training or undergraduate teaching (lectures or ward based) without the specific approval of the teachers. All requests should be made via the Supervising Consultant to the relevant College Tutor.

10. Completion of Clinical Observership

10.1 Letter Confirming Clinical Observership

Those completing Clinical Observerships may request a letter confirming the Clinical Observership from the Medical Education Department. The Supervising Consultant must confirm the successful completion of the position prior to a letter being issued.

10.2. Return of Identification Badge

On completion of the position the Clinical Observer must return the Identification Badge to the Medical Education Department.

Occupational Health Guidance for Clinical Observerships

Whilst this role is essentially non-clinical the Trust is required by Health and Safety legislation to apply appropriate measures to ensure health, safety and welfare is in place within the Trust. The role of Clinical Observer has therefore been categorised as either EPP (*See Note 1*) or Non-EPP.

Clearance for Clinical Observerships will be offered subject to an individual meeting the health criteria detailed below. Clearance will only be given once all the relevant criteria has been met in full.

All applicants will be required to complete a health declaration form. This will identifies which category the Clinical Observership falls into.

The completed form must be returned (via email) to our occupational health department at:

dvh.occhealth@nhs.net

The form should be accompanied by copies of any documentation as proof of immunisation status including copies of any relevant laboratory blood reports (*See Note 2*).

Any samples for EPP Observers must be Identity Validated Samples (*See Note 3*).

Immunisation details required to be provided are:

Non EPP Observers	EPP Observers
Observers – located in any and all clinical areas where patients are treated.	EPP Observers - who will potentially have some patient contact in any surgical setting e.g. General Surgery, Orthopaedics, Obstetrics & Gynaecology etc
Information relating to their immunity to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Tuberculosis · MMR (Measles, Mumps and Rubella) · Chickenpox · Hepatitis B · Copies of any blood tests related to any of the above. 	Information relating to their immunity to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Tuberculosis · MMR (Measles, Mumps and Rubella) · Chickenpox · Hepatitis B · Copies of any blood tests related to any of the above.
	Information relating to their infectious status against: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Hepatitis B (Hep B surface antigen &/or core antibody) · Hepatitis C antibody · HIV antibody
Please be advised that, where you are unable to comply with these requirements, we are able to offer the appropriate screening in house. A charge will be made for this service. Prices on application.	

Please note:

1. Exposure Prone Procedures are those invasive procedures where there is a risk that injury to the worker may result in the exposure of the patient’s open tissue to the blood of the worker – as a result there would be a risk to the patient if the worker was infected with Hepatitis B, Hepatitis C or HIV.

2. Laboratory Reports must be in English, from a UK Accredited Laboratory, be legible and, as a minimum, state clearly your full name, date of birth, test performed and sample result.

3. Identity Validated Samples are samples taken by an Occupational Health Service who have confirmed the identity of the person being sampled by checking photographic ID. Acceptable forms of photographic ID will include a passport, photographic driving licence or other photographic ID card. Confirmation that the samples are identity validated must be recorded on the sample reports.