

Guidance for the support of study leave requests

This guidance is provided to assist Training Programme Directors in the consideration of study leave applications from Resident Doctors in Training (RDiT).

RDiTs are adult postgraduate learners who should be expected to be able to set up their own goals for development and identify their own learning needs in collaboration with trainers. Where possible these needs and goals should be supported such that RDiTs are not financially disadvantaged by seeking to develop in their careers.

The purpose of study leave for Resident Doctors is to meet curriculum requirements and professional development goals to progress in training and in clinical practice. It should be an adjunct to excellent in-programme and local opportunities for training and development.

Most applications for study leave will be supportable by TPDs (as long as there is money and/or time remaining in the budget) and should be approved, but in rare situations it will be necessary to reject an application or ask for it to be clarified.

The guidance aims to ensure that all applicants have equity and applications are treated consistently, there is transparency in the factors which will be considered when assessing an application, and there is best value for the individual, training programme and use of public funds.

At the time of writing, each RDiT has a notional allocation of £600 per annum (pro rata if working less than full time) however this is not an absolute cap.

Training Programme Directors manage their overall programme budget and can exercise discretion over how funding is used, so long as this is done fairly, equitably and transparently. In all cases NES is supportive of fully utilising available funds to offer the maximum support and educational opportunities to Resident Doctors in Training. NES supports Training Programme Directors to exercise flexibility where there is funding available this could include accepting applications for study leave from resident doctors with provisional approval that funding may be appropriate and systematically re-assessing these applications at the end of the funding year with the remaining budget even if the RDiTs notional individual amount has been reached.

Specialty Training Boards (STBs) will create and maintain information about core (essential for curriculum progression) study leave activities required for each programme in their remit and developmental activities that would be considered desirable for progression in training and be of a standard considered appropriate by the STB. This information is designed to support consistency, transparency and timely decision making. The list of developmental activities is not exhaustive, and activities not noted must still be considered for support (it may be helpful to utilise the principles in this guidance document).

Activities noted as core or developmental by the STB will be regularly reviewed and can be amended as required. Programme Directors can make recommendations to the STB for additions to the lists of activities or for removal of activities. The core and developmental lists will be overseen by the Medical Directorate Study Leave Governance Group.

Principles

The following principles may be helpful when assessing an application for study leave (time only or time & funding), though they are non-exhaustive:

- The activity is a core requirement for progression in training

If it is then it should be listed on the STB core activities and supported. If for any reason the activity is not listed, please inform the chair of the STB and this will be added to the core activity list.

This principle is not a suggestion that only activities which are essential for progression should be supported but is designed to aid quick decision making where something is included in the STB lists.
- There is an opportunity to attend the event remotely/virtually

The Programme Director and Resident Doctor may wish to consider the most appropriate mode of attendance.

Consideration should be given to the specific benefit which the resident doctor and/or their supervisor wish to gain from the activity. If networking, practical skill acquisition or collaboration are an intended focus then virtual attendance is unlikely to be suitable. Balancing these goals with the benefits of remote attendance (less time utilised, lower costs etc.) is a key question for trainees and their supervisors/trainers. There should not be a presumption of virtual-only attendance but a recognition that savings from virtual attendance may enable RDITs to spread their study leave budget to more activities.

Consider whether funding equivalent to the cost of virtual attendance could be authorised to part-fund the resident doctor attending the activity in person if a full application is not felt to be supportable.
- The applicant is presenting at the event or participating in some other way

This principle could be useful if there are multiple applications from RDITs in the programme to attend the event and not all can be supported. In such circumstances presenting or participating in the event may be considered higher priority than just attending. It is recognised that not all events will offer such opportunities to present e.g. teaching or exam preparation events
- The participant has attracted funding to support their attendance from another recognised body

Funding from another body could suggest an additional level of endorsement of the value of the event. Funding from another body does not mean that study leave funding cannot also be sought. If costs exceed the funding from another body study leave funding can be applied for.

- The event is being held overseas- there may be a UK equivalent course

Ideally necessary training and development activities should be available to trainees in the UK allowing them to access the event without incurring the cost (money or time) of travel.

Nonetheless, sometimes international training and development activities will be easier to access or more economical than UK courses (but of equivalent standard) or will present a unique opportunity. This should be supported where possible.

- The applicant has prevailed in a competitive process in order to undertake this activity

Where a RDIT has competitively applied for an event or activity and been successful this should be specifically factored into decision-making around study leave.