

POSTGRADUATE INSTITUTE FOR MEDICINE AND DENTISTRY

STUDY LEAVE: Guidance for Clinical Tutors, Programme Directors, Educational Supervisors and Trainees

Background

1. Colleagues will be aware that the Deanery has to find £2.8 million pounds of savings recurrently from its budget. The Deanery has agreed a plan for the current financial year with its three Strategic Health Authorities.
2. An early proposal was to cut funding for study leave for the remainder of the financial year. Existing agreements would have been honoured and a review carried out before any decision was made for the financial year beginning 1 April 2005. **We have since amended this proposal and the study leave budget for the remainder of the financial year will remain as it was to allow trainees to obtain funding to attend mandatory courses.**

Mandatory courses are "courses that are deemed necessary for the trainee to undergo in order to complete their training and are, therefore, provided under the auspices of the STC".

What this means

The principle remains that study leave for trainees is not an entitlement but is a discretionary allowance of time and funding to enable trainees to access experiences which cannot be gained in planned clinical attachments. The study leave funding which exists for trainees, which is calculated as a notional amount of £950 per SpR and £650 per SHO, is to act as a guide only to aid trainees in their planning. It is more important that trainees carefully consider and make a case as to how the proposed educational experience meets their learning needs.

3. Trainees will apply for study leave on the existing form, following the requirements that are already in place. Their educational needs and objectives should be explicitly stated on the form, and their application should be supported by their educational supervisor. Any application should be submitted within the required time frame.
4. Clinical Tutors, as now, will remain responsible for making decisions on whether or not to approve applications for study leave. They will take into account whether or not the course applied for is mandatorily required for training i.e. is essential. They will also consider the educational objectives as defined by the trainee, in relation to their training programme (consulting with the relevant Programme Director or educational supervisor where necessary). Clinical Tutors will also take

into account study leave and funding already previously provided or agreed for the trainee. Clinical Tutors are requested to explain their study leave decisions to trainees and particularly if they have made a decision which is outwith the Deanery's Study Leave Policy.

5. Clinical Tutors remain accountable for their share of the study leave budget that is devolved to them for managing. No funding is retained by the Postgraduate Institute. Given the imperative for savings, it is essential that these local budgets are not exceeded. Trainees refused approval for study leave may appeal to the Postgraduate Institute.

What this does not mean

6. Trainees will not automatically get any study leave they apply for. The budget remains capped at the level agreed at the beginning of the financial year ie it has not changed. This means that if an excessive number of trainees apply for study leave during the remainder of the year some will be disappointed.

Issues for the future

7. Whilst the original proposal created a strong reaction, there was also considerable support for looking critically at the issue of study leave. There are questions about whether or not courses described as mandatory really are absolutely necessary for successful completion of a programme of training. The assumption that all examinations require attendance at a course of preparation has been challenged. Too many courses are believed to be chosen almost at random. There is very little quality control, assessment or feedback involved. There is little perceived benefit beyond a pleasant experience in some cases. Many courses are a source of income generation for a range of organisations, with an alternative view that such funds should only benefit the learner (beyond meeting necessary costs).
8. Many programmes provide an important and significant amount of study and learning as an integral part: this element is not always funded by the study leave budget directly or indirectly. In addition a range of learning opportunities are often provided by trusts and other organisations, also without recourse to study leave funds.
9. These and other issues underpin an agreement that the Deanery should work with colleagues, including those in trusts, over coming months, in order to agree how we can deploy the whole study leave resource more efficiently and effectively, both financially and educationally, in the year 2005/6 and beyond.

Contributions to a review

10. As we are considering further the issue of study leave, learning and its funding, you are welcome to contribute any ideas or thoughts you may have.
11. In addition, on behalf of the UK Conference of Postgraduate Medical Deans (COPMeD), I am reviewing study leave nationally, including the extent to which earlier guidance, issued in 1998, was implemented (this guidance can be found on the COPMeD website at www.copmed.org.uk).

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