



National Selection for Trainees

Steven Hunter
Cardiothoracic Dean

The attendance at the annual SCTS meeting has increased and the discussion at the trainees meeting was more open than in previous years. This has to be encouraged and I hope that next year at least every NTN will attend. There was still concern about career prospects but notably less than previous years. There was discussion about onerous rotas and their impact on training. The advice from the panel was to keep in touch with the SAC liaison for the training programme and if objective evidence of a reduction in training opportunities can be produced then the SAC can address this with the programme directors. Certainly the NTN trainees of the future should expect (demand) preferential access to training opportunities. Amazingly one view expressed by the floor was to support an onerous rota because it is more lucrative and "pays the mortgage"! While I would have sympathy if trainees were living in poverty I believe the primary goal of a trainee is to be trained and not to build a housing empire!

Late in November 2007 we had the approval to run national selection for trainees (entering in to ST3). Despite the tight deadlines enforced by MMC we managed to submit all the required information. Sion Barnard and I led the process. All the English programmes were invited by the SAC to bid for one of the 5 available posts. East Anglia and Oxford, South West, North West, Yorkshire and Northern were successful. The West Midlands Deanery had agreed to host the selection process. The advert for the post appeared at the end of January and short listing took place on 18th February 2008 with selection on the 17th and 18th March. Despite protestations from their Deaneries and Trainers the assemblies of Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland refused to be part of the national selection. Wales and Scotland decided to appoint a NTN to their programmes and fortunately the Northern Ireland assembly were persuaded not to appoint in 2008. Because we (the SAC) were convinced that the selection should be for the whole of the UK and this view was supported by the Training Programmes of Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland we invited the TPDs

of the, so called, Celtic fringe to participate in the selection of the 5 NTNs for the English programmes. The selection panel consisted of a representative from each of the UK training programmes, an academic cardiac surgeon, the Education Secretary of the SCTS, a representative from the Committee of Postgraduate Medical Education Deaneries and the panel was chaired by a lay person. Scoring templates were produced for all sections of the selection process including short listing.

The two day selection was held in Birmingham and consisted of a structured interview, a review of the trainee's portfolio, a presentation of a completed audit project and three objective structured assessments of technical skills (OSATS). The successful candidates were informed by telephone by either Mr Tim Graham or me. The successful candidates and their allocated programmes were (in alphabetical order) Miss Allanah Barker to East Anglia and Oxford, Mr James Barnard to North West, Mr Phil Botha to Northern, Mr Neil Cartwright to Yorkshire and Mr Chanaka Rajakaruna to South West.

A separate analysis of the OSATS was performed by a group from the Department of Surgery at Imperial College London. This was not used as part of the selection but will be analysed to validate the assessors (selectors) and we can use this information when organising the selection process for next year. A formal report of the whole process will be submitted to MMC and other interested parties before the end of July. My personal view, which is inevitably biased, is that this is the way forward for our specialty to select trainees. We may have to hold more than one selection next year as the early indication from the workforce review team suggests that we will be able to appoint over 10 trainees to ST3 in 2009. We sincerely hope that the assemblies of the Celtic fringe will agree to formally join the national selection process. We already have the agreement of Professors Dark and Angelini that their Walport ACFs (Academic Clinical Fellows) for 2009 and 2010 will be included in the



national selection process. This will obviously mean that the selection process for these will have to include a separate academic section and applicants will have to declare an interest in the ACF posts on their application form.

I hope that all involved in training are using the ISCP website and the assessment tools therein. I have been impressed by the short amount of time the completion of each of the assessments takes. I regularly use CPDs and mini-CEX assessments in the outpatient clinic and a PBA takes less than 10 minutes to complete.

There will be a new education committee for our specialty chaired by the SCTS Education Secretary, Professor Pepper. The remit of the committee will be to look at education for trainees and consultants, including revalidation and CPD. The committee will also have the responsibility for accrediting the many training/education courses that are available to cardiothoracic surgeons. Professor Pepper will be responsible for selecting the committee but I suspect at least the SAC Chair, Examination Board Chair and the SCTS Dean are likely to sit on this committee. This brings me to the future role of the SCTS Dean. I have yet to receive clarification of the future of the SCTS Dean as I approach the end of my 5 year term. I have written to the secretary of the SCTS to ask for this to be discussed at the next executive meeting so as you read this article you may have heard about the future of the role of SCTS Dean. This will not be my last article as Dean but I sincerely hope that I will not be the last Dean of the Society for Cardiothoracic Surgery of Great Britain and Ireland.

As always I can be contacted by email at Steve.Hunter@stees.nhs.uk