

## Guidance on Approving Aspirational Leave and Budget Increases

HEE Study leave supports all junior doctors ('trainees') on approved secondary care sector training programmes to achieve their curriculum outcomes, with the same principles applying to trainees in primary care placements.

From HEE's document, [Enhancing Junior Doctors' Working Lives](#), there is a commitment from HEE to ensure that every trainee has the opportunity to gain all competences relevant to their level of training as defined in each curriculum. This means that activities that directly support acquisition of curriculum competences will be fully funded by HEE and should be available on Leave Manager as a Standard activity, requiring no additional approval. These activities are listed by specialty on the approved courses list.

We also appreciate that some trainees may progress through their curricula at a faster rate. Therefore, discretionary or career enhancing activities which add value to the individual and support the wider NHS system can also be considered. These are 'recommended' and 'aspirational' activities.

Therefore, HEE will support these activities in principle; however, this also means that Recommended and Additional activities (ie, activities that support a trainee's overall career development or special interests) will need careful consideration as to whether they are appropriate to fund (either fully or partially). **There is no hard cap on any individual trainee's budget**; however, we need to ensure that the overall budget is spent appropriately and fairly across Programmes and Schools.

Each eligible trainee therefore has an initial annual 'budget' of £1000 allocated to them to be used at their discretion on mandatory activities that they have agreed with their Educational Supervisor and have included in their personal development plan; and for Recommended/Aspirational activities, where the Training Programme Director (TPD) or Head of School (HoS) also agrees to support this.

Additional funding can be achieved by requesting a budget increase from the HoS via the [online form](#).

Budget increases that would take the trainee's actual/planned spend over £3000 need to be additionally approved by the Associate Postgraduate Dean for study leave in the East Midlands, currently Dr Ed Briggs. All requests for study leave and budget increases should be prospective. However, in special circumstances the HoS can grant approve retrospective requests.

The Leave Manager system offers applicants two options for submitting leave requests; Standard applications (for activities on their School's Programmes list of curriculum required events), and Exception requests.

Approval of these discretionary activities is through the exception approver – the TPD or HOS for the programme.

## What is an Exception approver?

Exception approvers are a senior member of the School's faculty, usually the TPD or Head of School, whose responsibility is to ensure that the activity being applied for is appropriate for the trainee's specialty, grade, career trajectory and curriculum competences.

This guidance is designed to provide some initial support regarding the kinds of things to consider when reviewing an Exception application. If you're still unsure, or if you have any other queries, please contact the East Midlands study leave team at [CSL.EM@hee.nhs.uk](mailto:CSL.EM@hee.nhs.uk), and we'll be happy to help.

## Recommended and Aspirational activities

Although HEE has committed to supporting trainees achieving their curriculum competences by providing additional financial support through the study leave budget, we are aware that there are additional educational or professional development opportunities that enhance the knowledge, skills and attitudes of the doctor in training, or enhance any aspect of patient care, but are not mapped to any direct curriculum requirements. These are referred to as Recommended and Aspirational activities.

Recommended activities are those that support the acquisition of curriculum competences, but the activities are not themselves required by the curriculum, ie, those curriculum-required competences could be attained in other ways. Aspirational activities can support the overall progression of the trainee towards their career goals and should benefit training and/or the wider NHS. Trainees apply for both types of activities are applied for using the "My event does not appear in the list above" toggle and the **Aspirational event name** free-text box on Accent:

The screenshot shows a form titled "Event details". It contains three main elements: a dropdown menu for "Event", a toggle switch for "My event does not appear in the list above" which is currently turned "Yes", and a text input field for "Aspirational event name". Two red arrows are overlaid on the image, one pointing to the "Yes" toggle and the other pointing to the "Aspirational event name" text box.

Such activities should be discussed between the trainee and their Educational Supervisor and included in the trainee's PDP for the year. If this has been done, the activity is appropriate for the trainee's stage of training/progression, and the costs/period of leave are appropriate, you can generally approve the request.

We would generally expect that additional activities would not be supported if the trainee is not progressing satisfactorily, as their focus should be on attaining curriculum competences. When trainees exceed £3000 per annum the APD may contact the TPD/HoS for clarification of the benefit.

## Additional guidance for Exception Approvers

Study leave funding is public money that is available to support the training and development of the future NHS workforce. There is therefore a requirement to obtain good value for money.

### In general, all leave must fulfil the following

- The activity should meet the educational needs of the individual.
- It should be clear how educational activity will support the trainee to achieve their curriculum outcomes and how the activity will help the trainee to improve the care they are able to provide to patients. This may require a statement from the educational supervisor.
- The support required by each individual trainee to achieve their curriculum outcomes should be discussed and agreed by the trainee and their Educational Supervisor.
- The activity should be of a high quality and locally delivered where possible.

### For Aspirational Leave, consideration should be given to the following:

- Trainee must be achieving curriculum competences at/above the expected rate in their programme. This only applies where the activity is genuinely aspirational (rather than helping to achieve curriculum competences)
- The activity is truly in line with their career trajectory and not a repeat of a similar activity (different learning objectives).
- Trainee's previous aspirational applications have been considered to promote fair use of study leave monies. **NOTE:** Attending exam preparation courses does not preclude aspirational activities but attainment of the exam should be the priority.
- The activity provides a skill/competence that is in demand at service level across the NHS or in the trainees intended place of work, eg, point of care assessment.
- The trainee is on a standard outcome from their last ARCP, unless part of remedial action, or the issues have been resolved and attendance at the activity will not detract from essential curricula requirements.
- The approver must make an assessment of the educational benefit and value for money of the course. This requires a consideration about the relative cost in comparison to other activities and the perceived benefit to the future NHS.
- The approver must be assured that the activity constitutes value for money and that regional or more cost-effective alternatives have been explored.
- The approver should only permit the minimum standard to achieve a capability and signpost trainees to appropriate activities.
- Preference should be given to activities within the Midlands region and trainees should be signposted by the educators to such providers.
- Popular aspirational activities should be managed through school budgets and considered for inclusion in the mandatory requirements.

## Exam Courses

Exam preparation courses are often funded as a historically supported activity that provide clear benefits to trainees. Preparatory courses may provide better value than training extensions and therefore should continue to be supported and should not preclude access to other curriculum required courses or personal development opportunities.

Exam courses are relatively expensive and there is great variability in the cost across programmes. Generally, one course per exam set (ie, MRCP part 1 etc) would seem prudent, depending on circumstances.

Trainees are advised to source local courses first and external ones only when not available, disclaimer is required on application. Consideration should be given to part funding of more expensive courses.

## What not to approve

Under the new arrangements, most activities that trainees request will be on the approved list or will require a straightforward review of whether the activity is appropriate for their programme, grade and career trajectory. However, there are a few activities that should not be approved for either leave or financing. These are included in the policy so trainees should be aware, but they are summarised below.

### **Mandatory training for potential future training programmes**

As a rule, mandatory training (ALS, ATLS, NLS etc.) that is not required for a trainee's current training programme, but is required for a potential future training programme, should not be supported from the study leave budget. Exceptional cases may be considered, but please discuss these with the HEE team first ([CSL.EM@hee.nhs.uk](mailto:CSL.EM@hee.nhs.uk)).

### **Academic research**

If the trainee is on an academic programme, academic research that is additional to the acquisition of the relevant GMC approved clinical curriculum competencies should not be funded by the Study Leave budget, but through the funding source for the junior doctor's academic research; for example, via the University or NIHR.

### **Higher degrees**

The study leave entitlement is not an appropriate source of time or funding for higher degrees (including Masters and PhDs), unless the degree is a specific and mandatory requirement for CCT. In these rare instances, please discuss with the study leave team ([CSL.EM@hee.nhs.uk](mailto:CSL.EM@hee.nhs.uk)).

### **Observerships/Clinical attachment**

Study leave days/budgets may not be used towards observerships or clinical attachments.

## Professional activities

Leave for Mandatory Teaching expected of the trainee's employer such as ALS (where it is not also a curriculum requirement), Annual Leave, Interview Leave and Employer Related leave do not come under study leave and this leave should not be booked on Leave Manager.

Similarly, attendance at GP Selection Centre, Specialty Training or Consultant interviews is not Study Leave and this should not be applied for on Leave Manager. Trainees should seek advice from their Trust about applying for Professional Leave in these situations (local arrangements may apply).

## Courses where an equivalent course is run and funded by HEE

Where a course is offered by HEE/a HEE East Midlands school (eg, Leadership & Management), funding will not generally be approved for the same/similar course delivered by an external provider. If the trainee is unable to attend the East Midlands course and needs to have completed the course before the next East Midlands date, the trainee is expected to contact us regarding this.

Meetings at which Junior Doctors Present Papers

Junior doctors should be encouraged to present papers at academic and clinical meetings. The decision as to whether associated costs would be considered will depend on whether the meeting concerned is judged by the TPD or Head of School (the exception approver) as relevant to the curriculum and/or an aspirational activity that is beneficial to the junior doctor's development.

## International leave

International courses/conferences will not be included on the list of pre-approved courses unless attendance is a curriculum requirement. International study leave should occur when the learning outcomes from the event are not available in the UK. As part of the approvals process, requests to attend overseas study events will only be considered in very exceptional circumstances.

The event must provide a clearly stated curriculum outcome. Such circumstances include where the training course is not available in the UK, where the course or activity is part of the college curriculum or guidelines on required training, for the presentation of significant research findings from within an NIHR recognised academic clinical fellowship or clinical lectureship or where the course is set out as a mandatory requirement of college training to reach the required qualification to practice.

A full programme should be provided with the application on Leave Manager. A report recovering the entirety of the leave may be requested from the doctor in training after attendance. Any contribution to funding of such leave will need the prior written approval of the HEE local Postgraduate Dean and should be requested through the [online form](#). If further periods of international study leave are required this will be considered on a case-by-case basis by the Postgraduate dean, and budget allowing.

Given that best practice in many specialties is now shared at European and global meetings, the lack of ability to attend international events may hamper advancing of medical knowledge and service development. This may also have the unintended consequence of preventing quality improvement within the NHS.

One international event, providing all other curriculum requirements are met will be supported for each doctor in training for any one programme, which can be defined as Foundation, Core, Higher or run through.

For such activities, part-funding may be considered – reflecting both HEE and the trainee's commitment to their enrichment. If an external body such as a Medical Royal College suggests a doctor in training attends an international conference. In such circumstances, HEE expects that body to contribute at least 50% of the costs.

We hope that this helps; this document is not intended to be exhaustive, but simply to provide some additional support and guidance regarding Exception applications. We will regularly update this guidance, but if you have any applications that you're unsure of, or if you need any other support relating to trainee study leave applications, please contact us at [CSL.EM@hee.nhs.uk](mailto:CSL.EM@hee.nhs.uk).