

FAQs Round 1 NIHR ACF – Applicants

2020 ACF Round 1 Timetable			
Application Window	07/10/2019	to	04/11/2019
Interview Window	06/11/2019	to	20/12/2019
Initial Offers Issued	06/01/2020		
Hold Deadline	13/01/2020		
Return recruitment status updates to NIHR Academy	17/01/2019		
No upgrades			
2020 ACF Re-advert Timetable			
Application window	20/01/2020	to	31/03/2021*
Return recruitment status updates to NIHR Academy on the 1st of the month until all posts are unconditionally filled			
Optional – 2020 ACF Re-advert timetable allowing clinical benchmarking			
Application Window	20/01/2020	to	06/03/2020
Interview Window	09/03/2020	to	06/04/2020

**Successful 2020 NIHR ACF applicants must be in post by 31/03/2021*

The following guidance is for NIHR ACF recruitment into all General Medical Council (GMC) specialties.

1) I wish to apply for an NIHR ACF post to commence in 2020. What is the process?

The ACF recruitment process is summarised in [Figure 1](#).

NIHR ACF posts are allocated annually to Integrated Academic Training (IAT) partnerships comprising an HEE local office, Higher Education Institute (HEI) and NHS organisation.

The recruitment process is managed by the relevant HEE local office in the IAT partnerships, and advertisements will appear on their websites and Oriel from October 2019. You will need to apply for NIHR ACF posts using the Oriel online application system (<https://www.oriel.nhs.uk/Web/>).

The 2020 NIHR ACF recruitment window runs from October 2019 to 31 March 2021, this is divided into round 1 (October 2019 – December 2019) and re-adverts (January 2020 – 31 March 2021).

ACF Application Form

Applicants will need to complete the ACF application form for the ACF posts advertised in the relevant specialties and levels through Oriel.

Specialty Training Application Form

When the national application window opens, ACF applicants successful at interview who require **clinical benchmarking** (defined in FAQ2) will need to complete the relevant **specialty training application form** (options are defined in FAQ3).

Following assessment of the ACF application forms, shortlisted applicants will be invited for interviews (November - December 2019). The interviews are organised by the HEE local office hosting the ACF post.

The ACF interview has several components assessing the clinical–academic potential of the applicant. Appointable applicants at the ACF interviews will be ranked, with the top ranked applicant being offered the ACF post. A **conditional offer** is given if the applicant requires clinical benchmarking when the offers window opens on 6 January 2020.

A **conditional offer** will be given to successful applicants at the ACF interviews that do not already hold a National Training Number (NTN) or Deanery Reference Number (DRN) in the GMC specialty and level to which they are applying. These applicants require clinical benchmarking (defined in FAQ2) before they can accept the ACF offer.

Applicants with appropriate NTN/DRNs for the advertised ACF receive an **unconditional offer**. If the top ranked applicant at the ACF interviews requires clinical benchmarking then ACF applicants that were deemed appointable at the ACF interviews will also be invited for clinical benchmarking, if required.

An unconditional offer to the reserve applicants, who pass clinical benchmarking, is dependent on the applicants ranked higher at the ACF interviews withdrawing or failing clinical benchmarking.

2) What is clinical benchmarking?

Clinical benchmarking relates to reaching the “*threshold of appointability*” at the national standard, clinical interviews/assessments for the GMC specialty and level of ACF post for which you are applying. Only applicants successful at the ACF interviews that do not hold an NTN/DRN at the appropriate level in the GMC specialty and level to which they are applying need to be clinically benchmarked. For example:

- Applicants who hold a DRN in a core specialty, who are applying for an ACF at ST3/4 will be required to attend clinical benchmarking at the higher level. The clinical interview that resulted in the award of the DRN will not be acceptable for clinical benchmarking.

- Applicants who hold an NTN at ST3 in Cardiology, who are applying for an ST3 cardiology post do not need to attend clinical benchmarking as they would have already passed the clinical benchmarking for this post.

Applicants who fail to reach the “*threshold of appointability*” at clinical benchmarking, will be ineligible for appointment to the ACF post in that recruitment round. Under these circumstances the conditional ACF offer will be withdrawn. If applicants require clinical benchmarking at national clinical assessment/interviews then the HEE local office hosting the ACF post will arrange this.

Withdrawal of a conditional ACF offer does not prevent the affected applicants from reapplying in future recruitment rounds.

3) Do I need to submit a separate application for standard clinical training in that specialty in order to be able to attend an interview for clinical benchmarking?

If you require clinical benchmarking then you **must** also complete a separate standard clinical application form. You will be asked on your standard clinical application form whether you wish to be considered for academic recruitment only (i.e. clinical benchmarking only) or whether you wish your standard clinical application to be considered for both academic and clinical appointments. The two options are described below, once you have made your selection and submitted the standard clinical application form you will not be able to change this decision.

Standard clinical application form options:

Academic Recruitment Only

This option informs the national recruitment office that you wish your standard clinical application form to **only** be used for clinical benchmarking for the ACF post you have applied for. You will only be invited to standard clinical interviews if you were appointable at the ACF interviews, and thus invited for clinical benchmarking. This selection informs the national recruitment office that they should remove you from the offers process for the standard clinical training posts. Your score will only be used to assess whether you reached the level of appointability, you should be informed of the outcome as soon as possible.

Academic Recruitment and Specialty Training

This option advises the national recruitment office that in addition to using the standard clinical application for clinical benchmarking as part of the ACF recruitment process (Option 1), you would also like to be considered for a standard clinical training post in the related specialty. Your score will be used to assess whether you reached the level of appointability for the ACF post offer, and you should be informed of the outcome as soon as possible. If your score is also high enough to be appointed to a standard clinical training post then you will receive this offer when the national standard, clinical training offers window opens. Guidance on accepting ACF posts is detailed below.

4) I currently hold a clinical NTN at the appropriate level in the GMC specialty associated with the ACF I am applying for; do I need to be clinically benchmarked?

No. You will have already passed the assessment at the national clinical interview for this GMC specialty and therefore will not have to do so again.

5) I currently hold a Deanery Reference Number (DRN) having previously successfully applied for core level training. Will I still need to be clinically benchmarked?

It depends on the level of training of the ACF that is being applied for.

If you hold a DRN whilst applying for a post linked to a GMC specialty that has relevant core level training (e.g. core trainee in Anaesthetics, Core Medical Training for medical specialties and Core Surgical Training for surgery), then you will have already passed the assessment at the clinical interview previously and therefore will not have to do so again.

However, if you hold a DRN for core training but are applying to academic training at a higher training level (i.e. ST3/4) you will need to attend a national clinical assessment/interview at the appropriate level.

If the core level training you are undertaking is not relevant to the GMC specialty you will be applying for in the NIHR ACF round, then you will need to undergo clinical benchmarking.

6) I hold a National Training Number but not in the same GMC specialty that I am applying for academic training. Will I still need to be clinically benchmarked?

Yes. Although you have met the required standard in a national clinical interview before, it was not in the same GMC specialty. Therefore, to ensure a consistency of approach with all applicants, you will need to undergo clinical benchmarking for this GMC specialty.

7) When will ACF offers be released?

Academic Round 1 offers will be released in January 2020. If you already hold an NTN in the relevant GMC specialty and are the preferred applicant following the ACF interview, then you can be offered the post. If you require clinical benchmarking, then the offer will be conditional upon meeting the required standard in the clinical assessment/interview.

8) What is the process of accepting an ACF post after clinical benchmarking?

If, after confirmation of clinical benchmarking, you choose to accept your ACF post, you must ensure that you withdraw from all other applications that you have submitted. It is your responsibility to contact the appropriate lead recruiter(s) and inform them that you would like to withdraw your application. This should be done within 5 working days of confirmation of clinical benchmarking. Withdrawal from other applications will not automatically occur through Oriel.

9) What happens if I do not reach the required standard at clinical benchmarking?

Your NIHR ACF offer will be withdrawn by the relevant HEE local office.

10) Would I receive a rank at clinical interviews when being clinically benchmarked?

It depends on the option selected in the standard clinical application form. ACF applicants who select:

- **Academic recruitment only** will not receive a rank at the standard clinical assessments/interviews.
- **Academic recruitment and specialty training** will receive a rank at the standard clinical assessments/interviews.

11) What will be the likely delay between my round 1 ACF interview and clinical benchmarking?

It depends on the level of the NIHR ACF post that you are applying for. Round 1 NIHR ACF interviews will take place in November/December 2019.

Standard clinical assessments/interviews for ST1 specialties will take place between January and March 2020.

ST3/4 standard clinical assessment/interviews take place between March and April 2020.

12) I am undertaking higher specialty training but the ACF is advertised at a lower ST entry level; will I have to repeat my clinical training when I start the ACF?

Yes. Applicants at e.g. ST5 are eligible to apply for an ACF advertised at ST3 entry; however, if such applicants were to accept the ST3 ACF post, they are required to repeat their ST3 clinical training.

FAQs NIHR ACF Re-advertisements

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1) What is the process for re-advertising and recruiting to unfilled NIHR ACF posts from academic round 1?

In order to re-advertise NIHR ACF posts, NIHR needs to be made aware of recruitment outcomes in round 1. For example: Accepted unconditional offer, conditional offer or unfilled posts. The 2020 NIHR ACF recruitment window runs from October 2019 to 31 March 2021, this is divided into round 1 (October 2019 – December 2019) and re-adverts (January 2020 – March 2021).

Recruitment outcomes, specialty change requests and general queries should be sent to IAT.Management@nihrtcc.org.uk. This will allow accurate re-advertised posts to be shown on the NIHR website and provide information regarding the current recruitment status of posts. An update on recruitment status should be provided to NIHR Academy on the 1st of the month, or until all posts are unconditionally filled.

Re-advertising of unfilled posts should commence as soon possible after the posts have been confirmed as unfilled and NIHR has been notified. NIHR need to be made aware of unfilled NIHR ACF posts as soon as possible. The deadline for successful applicants to be in post for 2020 allocated NIHR ACFs is 31 March 2021. Where possible, recruitment to unfilled posts should continue until the post is filled. If the post is unfilled

on 31 March 2021 then the NIHR ACF post will be withdrawn from the IAT partnership's allocation.

2) How can applicants for re-advertised ACF posts attend clinical benchmarking?

To facilitate successful ACF applicants attending clinical benchmarking, where possible, re-advertised ACF posts should follow the following optional timetable:

ACF Timetable Re-adverts

Application window	20 January 2020 - 06 March 2020
Interview window	09 March 2020 - 06 April 2020

Following the above timetable is advised to maximise the availability of clinical benchmarking interviews. However, it is not mandatory and recruitment to unfilled posts should continue until the post is filled (up to 31 March 2021), assuming the applicants have already been or scheduled to be clinically benchmarked in the current round or already hold an appropriate NTN/DRN.

Successful applicants at the ACF interview should be notified of their offers as soon as possible. If the successful applicants at the ACF interviews require clinical benchmarking then this should be coordinated through Health Education England (HEE) local offices and the lead recruiter for the related specialty as soon as possible to ensure placement at the national clinical training interviews, as per round 1.

3) What is the process if the ACF applicant has not applied for standard clinical training in addition to the ACF?

Where national clinical recruitment at the appropriate level and specialty as the re-advertised ACF post is available in the 2020 NIHR recruitment window, applicants **must** also complete the clinical application form. If the clinical application is not completed, then the ACF application may be withdrawn by the lead recruiters.

4) If an applicant applied for an ACF in round 1 and failed clinical benchmarking can they apply to re-advertised ACFs and another attempt at clinical benchmarking?

Yes, applicants can apply for re-advertised ACF posts and if available clinical benchmarking, but they are only permitted 1 attempt at clinical benchmarking per ACF.

5) What happens if national clinical training interviews are unavailable for clinical benchmarking?

Where standard clinical training interviews are unavailable then only the following applicants will be eligible for re-advertised ACF posts:

- applicants that are scheduled to be clinically benchmarked in the current round

- applicants who have been successfully clinically benchmarked in the current round
- applicants who hold an appropriate NTN/DRN are eligible for the post.

6) When are the national clinical training interview windows for clinical benchmarking?

National clinical interview windows for specialty training and clinical benchmarking:

Round 1 - CT1/ST1 and Run-Through	02 January 2020 - 06 March 2020
Round 1 - CT1/ST1 Re-adverts	06 April 2020 - 24 April 2020
Round 2 - ST3/ST4+ Recruitment	02 March 2020 - 22 April 2020
Round 2 - ST3/ST4+ Re-adverts	25 August 2020 - 02 October 2020

7) What if the ACF post is unfilled following the optional re-advertisement timetable?

Re-advertising unfilled NIHR ACF posts should continue beyond the optional re-advert timetable, where necessary to ensure the posts are filled by 31 March 2020. However, the NIHR ACF adverts should state that applicants must meet the following eligibility criteria:

- They are scheduled to be clinically benchmarked in the 2020 NIHR ACF recruitment window,
- have been successfully clinically benchmarked in the 2020 NIHR ACF recruitment window; or
- hold an appropriate NTN/DRN for the post.

8) Do successful ACF applicants, for re-advertised posts, who have passed clinical benchmarking in academic round 1 have to be clinically benchmarked again?

If the ACF applicant has been clinically benchmarked, in the same GMC specialty and level, as their NIHR ACF application (since 2020 ACF recruitment opened) then the applicant will not require further clinical benchmarking. However, HEE local office recruitment teams will need evidence to confirm clinical benchmarking from the relevant national recruiter.

When applicants are invited to the ACF interview, the HEE local offices will be responsible for ascertaining if they require clinical benchmarking for that specialty. If the applicant has previously been deemed appointable and may even have been offered a post, they must inform the HEE local offices and provide evidence. They will not be required to undertake further clinical benchmarking.