

# Organising Your Elective

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The elective was introduced to the Scientist Training Programme (STP) scheme in 2011, as part of the changes that occurred due to the Modernising Scientific Careers initiative. The aim of this four to six week rotation is to encourage learning and development in an area outside of the trainee's normal environment and to gain a valuable insight into how different services function. It is a compulsory piece of work that all trainees carry out as part of their work-based training and evidence for this is uploaded to the trainees online portfolio, OLAT.

It can be difficult to know where to begin when organising an elective and available information and guidance for trainees can be scarce. In this article, I will address some of the common questions regarding organising and funding using information gathered from trainees in my year and in the years above who have completed, or are currently carrying out, their electives.

## Choosing an elective

It is intended that the idea for an elective originates from the trainee. However, in some instances the trainee's supervisor will already have an elective in mind or they may suggest several possible options. The final decision on the topic of the elective should be made by the trainee but it is essential that this is discussed with the host institution or department first. Of the trainees who provided information about their electives, 66% came up with their own elective idea. However, in the vast majority of cases it was the trainee's supervisor who made initial contact with the department or organisation in order to organise the elective, particularly when this was based outside of the host institution. Eighty three percent of trainees carried out their elective at another healthcare institution in the UK, with the remainder of trainees carrying out an elective abroad or at their host institution.

For examples of electives that have been carried out by trainees, please visit [http://www.acb.org.uk/whatwedo/trainees\\_home/electives-page](http://www.acb.org.uk/whatwedo/trainees_home/electives-page) on the ACB website.

## Timing

The National School of Healthcare Science advise that an elective can be arranged for any time during specialist training (i.e. second or third year) and that this can be a single period of four to six weeks, or a series of shorter periods. It can be difficult to find a suitable time due to other training commitments such as research projects, time spent at University, exams, completing rotations and specialist training etc. However, the majority of trainees aim to complete their elective towards the end of their second or beginning of their third year. It is important to start exploring options as early as possible in your training as this will give you plenty of time to discuss an

appropriate time that will suit you and the people you hope to work with, as well as finding funding if needed.

### Funding

Expenses incurred during an elective can be due to accommodation, travel and university fees. Very few trainees who provided information about their electives received any funding. This is likely to be the main reason why more and more trainees are carrying out electives at their host institution, or at healthcare institutions based nearby in the UK. For the few trainees who did receive funding, this came from their training budgets and in some cases, money was provided from the host department's own budget. However, the majority of trainees who have carried out their electives abroad self-funded their accommodation and travel expenses. It is sometimes possible to arrange student accommodation near the hospital or institution, and this can cut down on costs. Unfortunately, the ACB cannot provide funding for electives as it is a core part of the STP training. However, the CP Steward memorial fund ([http://www.acb.org.uk/whatwedo/grants/cp\\_stewart\\_fund.aspx](http://www.acb.org.uk/whatwedo/grants/cp_stewart_fund.aspx)) is available to those trainees carrying out an elective abroad. In addition, if a trainee is planning on combining their elective with a research project, they are eligible to apply for an ACB Scientific Scholarship ([http://www.acb.org.uk/whatwedo/science/scientific\\_scholarships.aspx](http://www.acb.org.uk/whatwedo/science/scientific_scholarships.aspx)). There will be only 5 grants awarded per year but these can be quite substantial. There may be other professional organisations you are a member of that offer travel bursaries or scholarship awards and so it is worth researching into what is available. The majority of funding bodies will want detailed reasoning for you undertaking an elective abroad. They will also want to know how the work you'll be doing will support them as an institution and what you think your contribution will entail.

### Other factors to consider

If you decide you want to carry out your elective abroad, you may need to consider factors other than how you will fund it. For instance, depending on where you plan to carry out your elective, you may be required to organise vaccinations, travel and health insurance and a work visa. Trainees should consider what safeguards are in place in terms of their own health, as well as what would happen if they make a mistake which has a clinical consequence. If there is no existing link with the department then it is important that the trainee has some understanding of the laboratories track record and accreditation, and that this has been discussed in detail with their supervisor.

Although sometimes difficult to organise around an already busy training programme, the elective can be an extremely interesting and rewarding experience. Therefore, it is worth investing time and effort into planning an elective you will enjoy and find beneficial for your future career.