**NOTCH: the National Oncology Trainees**

**Collaborative for Healthcare Research**

**General Terms of Reference**

**Overview**

The UK National Oncology Trainees Collaborative for Healthcare Research (NOTCH) is a trainee-led research initiative in non-surgical oncology that in its first incarnation existed as The Northern Oncology Trainees Collaborative for Healthcare Research. NOTCH expanded nationally in 2019.

**Purpose**

NOTCH is a trainee-led collaborative that exists to provide both medical and clinical oncology trainees within the UK with an opportunity to lead, manage, shape*,* undertake and present the results of collaborative research which is both relevant and of potential impact to the care of patients. Prior to the NOTCH collaborative, there were no trainee-led collaborative endeavours in non-surgical oncology. Outside of formal academic training programmes, most trainees gain academic experience by undertaking single-centre retrospective analyses and audit or quality improvement projects. A key aim for NOTCH is to provide these trainees with an opportunity to invest the time previously spent on these smaller projects in to larger, collaborative projects. Further, NOTCH *additionally* provides an opportunity for those trainees with a more significant academic interest to gain leadership and a raft of other key academic skills through leading, shaping and directing research.

**Membership & Structure**

NOTCH is a trainee-led collaborative that now extends across the UK and incorporates both medical and clinical oncology trainees. The collaborative is led by a Chair, supported by a Vice Chair, and they together lead a Trainee Board. This Trainee Board in turn reports to an Advisory Group comprising of senior academics and clinicians from key stakeholder organisations and **cover** the geographical regions from which NOTCH members derive. The Advisory Group Lead is the most recent outgoing NOTCH Chair NOTCH Chair, titled the Advisory Group Lead. Each centre involved in contributing to NOTCH projects is led by two medical and two clinical oncology trainees, one of whom is the nominated liaison for that centre. This person reports to the relevant representative for their region on the NOTCH committee. Project-specific teams will form as required and will report within their centres and to the lead for that project on the Trainee Board.



*Figure 1: Overview of the interplay between the various divisions of the NOTCH collaborative.*

**Accountability**

The Trainee Board is accountable to the Advisory Group. Centres are individually accountable via their nominated liaison to their geographical representative, who sits on the Trainee Board.

**Partnership**

NOTCH endeavours to work closely with the Royal College of Radiologists, which oversees the training of clinical oncology trainees and to which NOTCH is affiliated, and the Association of Cancer Physicians, which oversees the training of medical oncology trainees and which has formally endorsed NOTCH’s approach. NOTCH will additionally endeavour to work alongside and support National Cancer Research Institute Clinical Studies Groups in coordinating site-specific trainee-led projects, provided that they meet the collaborative’s core values and purpose. NOTCH welcomes opportunities to work with collaboratives outside of the field of non-surgical oncology.

**Funding**

NOTCH welcome funding both for the collaborative as a whole and for specific projects. Funding is welcome from the charity sector, government bodies and as part of project-specific funding calls. Any offer of funding will require review from the Trainee Board prior to acceptance. Unless in exceptional circumstances and agreed by both the Trainee Board and Advisory Group, NOTCH will not accept industry or pharmaceutical-funding in order to ensure both perceived and actual independence from industry.

**Meetings**

An Annual General Meeting will be held once yearly to coincide with the UK Oncology Forum meeting. A second meeting will be held in January or February of each year. Additional meetings will be held on an as-required basis.

**Sharing of information**

Members of the Advisory Group, Trainee Board and Centres will correspond with one-another via teleconference and email. Resources will be shared via email and stored in a central DropBox repository. Specific project-related information will be shared in accordance with the project protocol, which will contain strict criteria for the transfer of patient-related data.

**Review**

The group will review the relevance of its work on an annual basis at its Annual General Meeting. Following the Annual General Meeting, the Trainee Board Chair will provide the Advisory Group Lead with a summary of the year’s activities and plans for the forthcoming year, including information relating to succession planning.

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**NOTCH Trainee Board - Terms of Reference**

**Overview**

The Trainee Board organises and oversees the activities of the UK National Oncology Trainee Collaborative for Healthcare Research (NOTCH). It is the executive arm of NOTCH and, as with the collaborative as a whole, comprises both medical and clinical oncology trainees. The activities of the Trainee Board are overseen by the Chair and Vice Chair. The Trainee Board is accountable to the Advisory Group.

**Purpose**

The Trainee Board provides leadership for NOTCH. As the executive arm of the collaborative it is responsible for overseeing research projects undertaken by the collaborative and for supporting both medical and clinical oncology trainees who wish to undertake research and gain academic skills through the collaborative. In order to achieve this aim, the Trainee Board will work closely with both the Royal College of Radiologists and the Association of Cancer Physicians, to whom NOTCH is respectively affiliated and endorsed by, and will seek to position NOTCH as a key vehicle for the delivery of academic skills training and experience for non-surgical oncology trainees within the United Kingdom. Project proposals will be sought and reviewed by the Trainee Board through a transparent and fair process, which will itself be reviewed periodically by the Trainee Board. The Trainee Board is also responsible for seeking funding and additional support for the collaborative, to ensurethat any funding received meets the criteria outlined in *Funding* within the *General Terms of Reference*, and to ensuring that the activities of the collaborative are accurately reported and advertised. Finally, the Trainee Board will actively recruit centres from across the United Kingdom to join the collaborative and will provide support for their contribution to the collaborative.

**Membership & Structure**

The Trainee Board comprises eleven fixed posts and a variable number of project lead posts, in the following roles:

* Chair\*
* Vice-Chair\* (& Vice-Chair elect for a short period of each year)
* Secretary\*
* Communications lead\*
* Treasurer\*
* Education and Events\*
* Representative for Scotland\*
* Representative for the North of England\*
* Representative for the Midlands & East of England\*
* Representative for London\*
* Representative for South West & Central\*
* Representative for Northern Ireland\*
* Representative for Wales\*
* Project leads (variable number)

Fixed posts are denoted by a star. Members from any part of the United Kingdom may take on posts as Chair, Vice-Chair, Secretary, Communications lead or Treasurer. Regional roles must be held by a trainee from that specific region. With the Chair’s agreement, it is possible for Trainee Board roles to be performed as a ‘job-share’, which is largely a vehicle for facilitating inclusion of trainees in less than full time roles. Post-holders will rotate on an annual basis, usually in the summer of each year. Any member of any NOTCH-involved centre may apply to take on a fixed role. In the event that two or more persons apply for a role, a vote will be held by the outgoing Trainee Board on which to elect. Fixed posts may be held by both medical and clinical oncology trainees. However, the Chair and Vice Chair roles must rotate though clinical and medical oncology, so that at any one time the Chair and Vice-Chair represent both of the two specialties, and so that there will not be two successive medical or clinical oncology Chairs or Vice-Chairs. Project leads will be co-opted on to the Trainee Board based on the projects undertaken by the collaborative in that specific year. Trainees will be expected to hold each role for a maximum of one year, and it is expected that trainees will hold only one of the roles at any one time. There is no limit on the number of roles that trainees can hold successively, so that it is possible to move from one role to another within the Trainee Board. Roles will ordinarily be rotated at the NOTCH Annual General Meeting in the summer of each year.

The Chair is responsible for coordinating the activities of the Trainee Board and will be supported by the Vice Chair. A new Vice Chair-elect will be selected in the summer of each year and will shadow the current Vice Chair until their succession to Chair in December of each year. All remaining roles will rotate in the summer of each year.

The Secretary will be responsible for the group’s administration, including organising and documenting the agenda for and outcomes from meetings, and supporting the organisation of the summer and winter meetings for the collaborative.

The Communications Lead will be responsible for ensuring the collaborative’s activities are widely and accurately reported, including through ensuring a web-presence and by curating a social media account (@onctrainees). The communications lead will also be responsible for monitoring the NOTCH email account.

The Treasurer will be responsible for supporting each project in terms of securing and handling any project-specific funds, and will be responsible for seeking and handling funds allocated to the collaborative as a whole.

Regional representatives will be responsible for coordinating the activities of centres within their region and will liaise with Centre Representatives from each participating centre on a three-monthly basis.

A board representative can petition the board for early termination of their role and assuming there is a majority vote for acceptance of the board member’s resignation from the board they will be granted permission to step down. In addition, the board can in exceptional circumstances vote by majority to terminate a trainee’s membership of the board should there be significant concern about their ability or willingness to fulfil the agreed terms of their role. It is expected that this will only be required in exceptional circumstances.

**Record of Membership**

A comprehensive record of all members of NOTCH and their assigned role will be kept on the shared Google Drive and maintained by the secretary.

**Accountability**

The Trainee Board is accountable to the Advisory Group, and will additionally seek support for activities from the Royal College of Radiologists and the Association of Cancer Physicians. The Chair will be responsible for the activities of the Trainee Board, and the Trainee Board for the activities of each of the NOTCH centres and each of the NOTCH projects.

**Meetings**

The Trainee Board will meet by teleconference once monthly and will meet in person at each of the summer and winter meetings. Additional meetings may be held as required.

**Sharing of information**

Members of the Advisory Group will correspond with one-another via teleconference and email. Resources will be shared via email and stored in a central password-protected DropBox repository. Specific project-related information will be shared in accordance with the project protocol, which will contain strict criteria for the transfer of patient-related data. Regional representatives will liaise with centre representatives via email, teleconference or both, depending on their joint preference.

**Review**

The group will review the relevance of its work on an annual basis at its Annual General Meeting. The membership of the Trainee Board will be reviewed at this point.

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**Centres - Terms of Reference**

**Overview**

The NOTCH Centres directly organise and oversee the activities of trainees involved in NOTCH research and education projects. Centres may comprise any number of trainees but will be led by two medical and two clinical oncology trainees. One trainee will act as the liaison for each centre and will liaise with the relevant Regional Representative of the Trainee Board.

**Purpose**

NOTCH Centres are the engine of the NOTCH collaborative and directly coordinate the activities of their own trainees. Centres may be a specific cancer centre or a collection of cancer centres within close geographical proximity, or who are tied by the rotation of trainees. Their purpose is to recruit trainees to the collaborative, to explain its mission and values, to propose and undertake research projects, and to ensure that the good governance practices of each research project are met.

**Membership & Structure**

There is no limit to the number of trainees who may form part of each centre. Membership may additionally extend to trainees not in oncology-specific training programmes, as well as medical students. However, each centre will be led by two medical and two clinical oncology trainees; preferably one more junior and one more senior from each of the two disciplines. One of these trainees will act as the liaison for the centre. This trainee will be selected by the centre and can rotate as per the centre’s wishes.

**Accountability**

NOTCH Centres are accountable to their specific Regional Representative and the Trainee Board.

**Meetings**

NOTCH Centres may meet as frequently or as infrequently as they require in order to meet their purpose.

**Sharing of information**

Members of NOTCH Centres will correspond with one-another via media agreed at the centre level. Communication with the Advisory Board will occur via email, teleconference and in person.

**Review**

The activities of each centre will be reviewed annually at the NOTCH Annual General Meeting.

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**Advisory Group - Terms of Reference**

**Overview**

The NOTCH Advisory Group supports the collaborative and comprises of senior clinicians and academics from across the United Kingdom. It is led by the immediate past Chair of the Trainee Board.

**Purpose**

The NOTCH Advisory Group provides a source of support for the NOTCH Advisory Group and senior oversight of the collaborative’s activities.

**Membership & Structure**

The Advisory Group comprises consultant medical and clinical oncologists from across the United Kingdom. Members are selected by the NOTCH Chair in consultation with the Trainee Board. The immediate past Chair of the NOTCH Trainee Board leads the Advisory Group. Members of the Advisory Group are selected to represent each of the involved regions with a range of expertise that links with organisations relevant to oncology research and training, including CTRad, the Royal College of Radiologists (RCR), the Association of Cancer Physicians (ACP) and Joint Royal Colleges Postgraduate Training Board Speciality Advisory Committee (JRCPTB SAC).

Regional Representatives

* Representative for Scotland\*
* Representative for the North of England\*
* Representative for the Midlands & East of England\*
* Representative for London\*
* Representative for South West & Central England\*
* Representative for Northern Ireland\*
* Representative for Wales\*

**Accountability**

The NOTCH Advisory Group provides oversight of NOTCH activities and reports to the immediate past Chair of the Trainee Board. The past Chair will then feedback to the main NOTCH Trainee Board.

**Meetings**

The NOTCH Advisory Group meets via teleconference twice yearly.

**Sharing of information**

Information is provided to and from the NOTCH Advisory Board via email and via teleconference.

**Roles and Responsibilities**

* Review project proposals following NOTCH Board shortlisting and feedback to the Board
* Once developed review the project protocol and data collection tools and provide suggestions for improvement if felt to be needed
* Meet twice a year (via TC) to discuss the development and progress of NOTCH
* Provide networking support for NOTCH where appropriate and necessary

**Review**

The NOTCH Advisory Board will review its Terms of Reference annually, with support from the immediate past NOTCH Chair (the ‘Advisory Group Lead’).