

C Anatomical examination

Guide for the general public to Code of Practice C



A guide for the public to Code of Practice C: Anatomical examination

This guide is intended to be read alongside [Code of Practice C: Anatomical examination](#).

This guide is written to 'you' as someone considering body donation.

We regulate the storage and use of human bodies and material for anatomical examination in England, Wales and Northern Ireland. Our powers to license and inspect these organisations come from [the Human Tissue Act 2004](#) (the Act). There are different, though similar, provisions in Scotland.

Anatomical examination refers to the teaching of students or healthcare professionals about the structure and function of the human body.

Anatomical examination does not include making or displaying images of human bodies or body parts. We do not regulate anyone creating or displaying photographs, films or electronic images. However, we have produced [guidelines](#) for journalists and programme-makers who might be filming or taking photographs of activities that we regulate, or that take place on HTA-licensed premises.

Commonly used terms

Tissue and organs

Organs

Where we use the term organ, or organs, in this guidance, it refers specifically to a whole solid organ, or organs, including:

- Kidney
- Liver
- Heart
- Brain
- Eyes

The general definition of what constitutes an organ in this context is a body part which has a specific vital purpose.

Tissue

Where we use the term tissue, this refers to all other various human materials that are not whole solid organs.

Tissue and Organs

When we refer to "tissue and organs", this is to make it clear there is a combination of both.

Licensing

Any establishment where human bodies or body parts are used to teach students and train surgeons and other healthcare professionals requires a licence, by law.

Each licence has a named 'Designated Individual' (DI), who is responsible for ensuring compliance with the Act and the conditions of the licence we provide.

Bodies or body parts stored or used for anatomical examination must be kept on licensed premises. However, the DI can give written permission to move bodies or body parts to unlicensed premises. This can only be done where:

- the bodies or body parts are being used for the purpose that consent was given for; and
- the DI has identified a suitable person to take responsibility for the bodies or body parts.

Consent

If you wish to donate your body for anatomical examination after death, this can only happen with your consent. Consent cannot be given by someone else on a person's behalf. This means that your next of kin cannot donate your body after your death.

Valid consent

For your consent to be valid, it must be:

- given by you;
- in writing; and
- signed by you, in the presence of at least one witness.

If you wish to give consent but are unable to write, you may be able to direct someone to sign on your behalf. For more information, please refer to the [Code of Practice](#).

Information you will receive before donation

Before you give consent to donate, you should receive the following information:

- who will have access to your body or the material you have donated; and
- for which types of courses your body or material may be used.

You should also be told of any reasons why your body donation may not be accepted for anatomical research. Organisations may also provide human tissue and other resources to other teachers, researchers or organisations. Where they do this, they can charge to recover their costs. For example, they may charge to cover the costs of transporting and embalming bodies, or preparing tissue samples for use. You should receive clear information about:

- who they may supply your body or tissue to, including whether they supply to commercial organisations;
- the range of activities and researchers they supply; and

- how and why they charge.

How to donate

To offer to donate your body, you should contact your nearest medical school. For more information on how to donate, please refer to our [body, brain and tissue donation pack](#).

You must give consent in writing, which can be via:

- **Medical School consent forms**

The medical school will have a consent form that they will send to you to sign. Once you have signed and returned the form, they will keep it as part of their donation records.

- **Your Will**

You can also give consent to donate your body in your Will. We recommend that you also complete a medical school consent form and insert a copy in your Will.

We recommend you use the same wording in your Will as in your consent form. This will help avoid any confusion about what you have consented to. Medical schools need to be certain what you have consented to before they can accept your body. If your intentions are not clear, they may not accept your body.

It is important that you tell your next of kin about your decision to donate your body. This will help to ensure the medical school is contacted as soon as possible after your death.

It is also important to understand that there may be reasons why a medical school is unable to accept your donation. For example, if you have certain medical conditions. This can occur even if you have given consent to donate your body after death. This should be explained to you during the discussions you have with the medical school.

Import and Export

It is lawful to import and export human bodies or body parts for anatomical examination. Imported or exported material should only be used, handled, stored, transported and disposed of in line with the consent given.

Organisations importing or exporting bodies or body parts are responsible for making sure the donor has given consent. Organisations exporting bodies or body parts are responsible for ensuring they will be:

- treated with dignity and respect; and
- used only for purposes for which the donor has given valid consent.

Disposal

As part of the consent process, you should be given information about how your body and any tissue will be disposed of after use. There is not one set method of disposal that all organisations must use. HTA-licensed establishments can make decisions about the most suitable method of disposal in each case. You should be told about the options available.