



College Strategy 2021-24

In Conversation with Daniel Waeland, Director of Education & Training and Dr Jonathan Darling, Vice President for Education and Professional Development

The changing landscape of a career in paediatrics

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Daniel Waeland

Welcome to the RCPCH podcast, where we examine the issues that matter to paediatricians and the communities they serve. My name is Daniel Waeland, and I'm Director for Education and Training at the College. I lead the teams that support all aspects of education, exams, careers and training for our members.

We started a new series of podcasts where we sit down with college senior leaders and fellow members to bring you four episodes that take a deep dive into our college strategy running from 2021 to 24. In this episode, we are talking with Dr Jonathan Darling, Vice President for Education and Professional Development. Dr Darling is also Clinical Associate Professor in Paediatrics and Child Health and Medical Education at the University of Leeds, he is also Honorary Consultant General Paediatrician at the Leeds Children's Hospital at Leeds General Infirmary.

Welcome, Jonathan.

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Jonathan Darling

Hi, good to be with you.

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Daniel Waeland

So first I thought we'd ask a question to get those listening in to better understand yourself and your drivers and aspirations. So why is being Vice President of Education and Professional Development important to you?

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Jonathan Darling

Well, paediatric education and training has always been really important and interesting to me throughout my career, as has the work of the College. So, this role is a great opportunity for me to bring those two things together. And I think that good education and professional development are vital to excellence in paediatric care. And they're also part of what brings fulfilment and satisfaction to our work. And I'd go so far as to say that it is the lifeblood of our speciality.

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Daniel Waeland

I couldn't agree more with you there. And so you've been in role now for just over one year. What do you hope to achieve during your full tenure?

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Jonathan Darling

Part of my role is to chair the annual conference committee and I'm very keen that we have great conferences that are genuinely useful, inclusive, inspiring and enjoyable.

And regarding why the education and professional development, I'm really excited that we've established a new education and Learning Board, which is led by Dr Chakrapani Vasudevan. We've established over the past year, but we hope that that will bring a more strategic approach to the education agenda, giving us the ability to prioritize, innovate and again, to make sure we're really meeting the needs of members.

My role also covers careers recruitment and workforce, which is a massively important area and rightly it is a priority for the college. I'm not expecting that we can solve everything. But I do believe we can gain a deep understanding of the lay of a land. What's in our power to change and so we can do that and make things better. And to bring influence to decision makers that are outside the college. So that as far as we can we make paediatrics a really rewarding career where every person thrives from the first time they begin their careers through to when they retire and beyond.

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Daniel Waeland

Thank you very much for that summary, Jonathan. That's really helpful I think will help our members understand and we'll delve into those as we start looking into the strategy.

So, turning to the strategy now, there are three threads that run through our college strategy that cover areas across education, careers and training. We won't be covering those specifically around curricula, although we will touch on

Progress+, or around exams during this podcast. But those areas are being covered extensively in other comms channels just due to the amount of changes that those worlds are both experiencing.

This strategy covers two other important areas, and that's lifelong learning and lifelong careers. Lifelong learning covers equipping members with skills and knowledge that they need. So, can you tell us about how the college is supporting members with lifelong learning?

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Jonathan Darling

Well, I've mentioned the conference, and although I do think that our conference in June in Liverpool was an amazing gathering. It was just so great to be part of it. It was record attendance and I felt we really did deliver on the theme which was celebrate paediatrics and child health together. And of course we were coming back after COVID. So it was the first big gathering like that for paediatrics in the UK. And there was this sense of celebration. I want the conference in 2023 to be even better. That's happening in Glasgow. So I just encourage anyone who's not been to a conference to consider joining in because it's going to be a great event.

RCPCH Learning is our new digital platform. It's a more intuitive way to find and work through learning resources that are right for you. And that's replacing the old Compass site. It looks great. It's really easy to use and so I encourage people to look at that, it's something we're going to keep on working on and developing. And you can easily access it from the quick links section of the website.

And as part of the courses, generally we need to make sure that we're delivering a set of courses that are right for members and delivered in the most successful way and sustainable for the future. And I think we're really lucky to have so many amazing people who deliver great courses in the College and we're keen to see new faculty come on board to join them. So that the courses are sustainable for the long term.

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Daniel Waeland

And so it's looking into the future. Where do you think we need to have more emphasis going forward?

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Jonathan Darling

Well before I came into this role, and I have to confess I wasn't aware of the extent of the College education offering. It really is quite extensive and high quality, well very extensive and high quality, and I suspect I wasn't the only one. And so I think one of our priorities is our communications, making sure those are right and the publicity is right, that members have that awareness and can find what they

need. And so one simple way for people to keep up to date is to sign up for the regular email bulletins, which you can easily do in the Contact section, Your account section of our website and those allow you to kind of see what courses are coming up easily and see which ones would be suitable for you and sign up easily.

And I think we have to grow our online offering, which we'll do via RCPCH Learning. But there will always be a place for face-to-face courses and we're in the process of working out the right balance of face-to-face and online and all the other channels we can use such as podcast like this one.

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Daniel Waeland

And that's a really key point. So as someone who joined the College during the pandemic myself, I know it's been a huge learning opportunity for the College as it's changed, as it's learned how to bring things online. And indeed, it was great being there in June in Liverpool to actually experience my first in person conference and I'm sure, I saw so many members really happy to be back together. So it's that wonderful hybrid, isn't it, Between the online and the real? And I'm sure we're learning.

So turning out a slight curve here to another part of our CPD arena. So the Academy of Medical Royal Colleges, which for members who may not be aware all the medical royal colleges meet up together as part of this Academy, and we do some issues together, some issues at sound boarding and helping each other out. But they do produce some centralised documents. And this includes a recent appraisal toolkit. So can you tell us about what we're doing in the space of CPD and revalidation?

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Jonathan Darling

Yeah. So there has been this project across the medical royal colleges to update appraisal and there's a new toolkit published, and the overall aim is to make appraisal a bit more light touch in terms of documentation and more focused on reflection, and making that appraisal discussion of really high value. And so that's one key thing.

RCPCH did move away from mandatory CPD points a few years ago with more emphasis on reflection again and the quality of CPD that supports our practice. And other colleges are reviewing their own position on that. And I think there's a general idea to do the same across the colleges. I'd like to put in a plug for Kaizen as well, which is our ePortfolio for members to record their CPD. And it's not just for trainees. And in my experience, quite a few people aren't aware that it is quite easy to use the home page, in effect, as an app for your phone. So then you can

add your CPD on the go and if you search the College website for CPD Diary and there's instructions on how to do that, and that works really well.

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Daniel Waeland

Thank you for making that important plug. I think it's important for members to be aware of that. And great that you make the point about moving away from mandatory CPD points, which I think is one of many examples where the RCPCH has led the way in royal college land.

So CPD nicely coming out of education leading to revalidation and it helps to have a nice narrative bridge towards lifelong careers. As revalidation is always a part of that.

So we have strategic aim four within our strategy, which I'll read out: to develop our communities, supporting members throughout their careers and attracting new recruits. And it covers again another broad range of activities across ChoosePaediatrics, across our lifelong careers framework and of course, recruitment.

So I'll concentrate first on lifelong careers. In late 2020, we appointed the College's first ever Officer for Lifelong careers, and that's Dr DI Hothi. Why do you think that was a milestone for the College?

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Jonathan Darling

Well, I think this new development is really important and it's a sign of our increasing recognition that is not enough just to recruit people into paediatrics. Although of course that is important, but it's equally vital to attend to all phases of paediatric careers with that goal that everyone thrives throughout the career. And I think the College can make a big difference here, and Dal's role is going to be really key in that. So it's exciting that she's been appointed.

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Daniel Waeland

Completely agree. I think Dal is exactly the personality that you want in that role at this time, exciting herself in terms of ideas and innovations. So on the back of Dal and indeed the College team's work, we've successfully made a bid for funding from the Dinwoodie Foundation, which is going to help us take forward two work streams, two explorative work streams, I suppose would be the best way of describing them, in the area of supporting lifelong careers. Can you tell our audience a little bit about them, please?

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Jonathan Darling

Yes, it is great we've obtained this funding for these two streams of work. So the first is about best practice guidance and we're developing a series of statements about what good looks like in our paediatric workplaces. And the idea is that those can be used then to bring change, to share good ideas and to improve how it actually feels to be in the workplace.

Now, obviously workplaces are outside the realm of where the College can directly change things for many of these issues, but I think we can have a significant influence. And so that's the first stream of work about changing the workplace for paediatrics.

The second one is about our wellbeing and innovation networks, called WIN for short. And the idea there is to have effective regional communities that become hubs of professional support and guidance and innovation tailored to local requirements.

Beginning of that will be sort of piloting different ways of doing that and having local champions that can bring some leadership this area and then part of it is working out what works well and sharing that in other places. So I think those are both exciting streams of work that are really good to see beginning.

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Daniel Waeland

I completely agree. It's interesting to see how they are part of both the relationships between the college and its members. We can help define what best practice looks like. So as a lead body, but it is also key on members being empowered themselves to be able to make those changes happen. I really look forward to seeing that work develop.

And one of the others I thought I was going to touch on a bit here was around Choose Paediatrics, which predates both yourself and I, Jonathan, but is an important part of attracting people to our specialty. Now we changed over the last year how we've done that. Well I thought I'd just describe a little bit here so that people understood it.

We originally did essentially at one point in the year a big video campaign around Choose Paediatrics, and we thought that we were potentially missing a couple of opportunities in that space. The first is that people don't make a decision to have a career at one point in the year, it's a constant, ongoing, fluid discussion and debate that happens. But also one of the many benefits of being in paediatrics is that there is such a range to what you can do. It's not as absolutely specific and hyper specialized as some specialties are. So you can make decisions all along

your career in one of 18 different specialties to remain as a generalist, academia to mention just a few.

And so the idea of moving to something which was a year-long process where we had little peaks of activity, bits where we had paid social media, so we got up on, you know, the Twitter rankings and so forth. And we're able to use lots of different little products in terms of you know, Twitter code cards and videos and blogs to really talk about the full range of what we can do and get those messages out to medical students, to foundation and potentially in the future before or even they make a decision to go to medical school. I mean that's the idea that it's one of the first decisions and first things that people hear.

So I mean that's Choose Paediatrics program as it runs and we are learning as we go with up-to-date information from our web and from our social media. But there are of course lots of other things that we're doing in that promoting space. So could you give us an idea in terms of that promoting, improving paediatrics as a career in some of the work streams that are coming out of that?

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Jonathan Darling

Yeah. Well, I really like Choose Paediatrics and what's been happening in that area. And then there's quite a few other good things going on. So there's the review of the undergraduate curriculum document which we started a few years ago with an interested group and this will align it with the new medical licensing assessment and so that's good to be happening. And the College works with the UK Aspiring Paediatricians Society, otherwise known as UKAPS, and that brings together all the different paediatric undergraduate societies across medical schools in the UK and with the idea of supporting in the work they do and enthusing people about their career in paediatrics.

And so the other area, Soft Landings. That's a really exciting initiative that the College has been supporting to help international medical graduates as they arrive in the UK to start well and to get really well established as they work in the UK system.

And finally, we've already talked a bit about the work on lifelong careers with that focus on thriving at every stage. And I think that's really key because if that's happening, then people who are looking at a Paediatrics career will see what a great opportunity it is and be encouraged to join us.

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Daniel Waeland

Thank you for that. That's one of the other areas that will touch upon careers is of course Progress +. We've covered in lots of other channels from the college like Principle of the Month about some of the actual changes that are technically

happening to the curriculum. But of course, one of the drivers for it has been its impact on long term training careers. So, could you tell us a little bit more about that please?

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Jonathan Darling

Well, Progress + is in effect a maturing of our specialty training system. And overall it's about better preparation for future working and there is somewhat shortened training. So the indicative period of training is seven years instead of eight. And it'll be a clearer, simpler training framework. So, we're going to have two levels instead of three. And there's a general move away from the kind of granular tick box approach to a clear vision of capabilities at each level. And that will mean we're aligned with the General Medical Council (GMC's) Shape of training document.

And it brings a new level of flexibility and so within Progress+ we want to prioritize flexibility, individuality and personalised training. And I think that will work better for everyone who's going through the training system.

And we do feel that with careful planning of the training system and empathetic listening to training needs and aspirations, and a can-do approach to it, we can deliver high quality NHS services and a training environment in which each trainee thrives.

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Daniel Waeland

And of course, all coming in August 2023. So we are one year away from it would be an interesting 12 months for us. We've seen recruitment rates, or recruitment fill rates rather, improve in the last three years. What would you say to one of our new doctors starting their training program about what a career in paediatrics may hold for them?

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Jonathan Darling

Well, I think paediatrics and child health is an amazing specialty. It's got a huge breadth of career options. As long as you enjoy working with children, young people, then there's bound to be an area of paediatrics that suits you.

And it's one of the few aspects where you can still be a true generalist. And the difference you can make patients is often very obvious and it really can last a lifetime.

I think with the College's emphasis on lifelong careers, lifelong learning that we've been discussing today, that's part of the reason that we can be confident that paediatricians of the future will continue to thrive and why it's a great career choice.

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Daniel Waeland

That is a wonderful sign off, I think, to a conversation about both education and careers. So thank you, Jonathan. I think the key thing, I suppose, from everything you've said and, everything we've covered here is a lot of this is about the College facilitating members helping members and indeed, members helping themselves.

So, I would strongly encourage members to keep a clear eye out for any volunteer opportunities that are coming up in all the space of education and lifelong careers as we'd love to have people on board and love to have people contributing.

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Jonathan Darling

Clearly. Thank you.

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Daniel Waeland

So I've just a final thank you again to Jonathan Darling, who is our Vice President for Education and Professional Development. Thank you so much for talking us through those important areas of the strategy.

And I've been Daniel Waeland. I'm the Director of Education and Training. And thank you so much for joining us at this RCPCH podcast.