Introducing paediatrics - information for foundation doctors

Recruitment & Careers team

Paediatrics is an exciting and varied specialty, and every day is different. If you're in foundation training and considering a career in paediatrics, here is the advice to help you explore our specialty further and prepare for your application to paediatric specialty training.

Table of contents

- Paediatric experience in your foundation training
- What experience you'll need before apply to paediatrics
- How to get paediatric experience
Paediatric experience in your foundation training

In the UK, paediatrics will be one of the blocks of specific specialty training that will be on offer within the placement options for your foundation programme. These placements may take place in either your Foundation Year 1 (FY1) or FY2 rotation.

As part of the national application process, some foundation schools allocate successful applicants to two-year programmes where all placements are known at the beginning of foundation training. Other schools allocate successful applicants to the F1 year initially, with a separate process for allocation to the F2 rotation. Each foundation school must publish details about the process used to match to either one-or two-year rotations prior to the opening of the foundation programme national application process.

There is a limited number of paediatric placements, which means you will **not** necessarily be guaranteed a paediatric block, even if you have listed it in your placement choices. But there are plenty of other ways to gain the exposure to paediatrics that you are looking for, and this will not count against you in your application to paediatrics.

What experience you'll need before apply to paediatrics

First, you do not need extensive prior paediatric experience nor paediatric-specific knowledge to succeed during the recruitment process and join our training programme. No doubt it will be handy to have that experience to help demonstrate clinical competencies and an understanding of paediatrics and child health when you apply. But you will not be ruled out of selection if you haven’t been able to complete a full paediatric foundation placement.
Do you need a placement in foundation school then? The answer depends on what your career plans really are and can be confirmed on the basis of the following two questions:

1. Are you already certain that you wish to apply to paediatric specialty training?
2. Or, do you feel you need some more exposure to our specialty before making that choice?

If the answer to the first question is 'yes', you don't need to worry too much about getting a placement, though it can be helpful to gain some extra experience. Equally, it may be just as profitable to experience other areas of medicine which can only help to make you a more rounded doctor in the long run.

If the answer to the second question is 'yes' and you would like to find out more about working in paediatrics and the variety of roles available, it would definitely be recommended to gain a paediatric placement but if you do miss out, there are other ways to get the extra exposure you need to help you make an informed career decision.

**How to get paediatric experience**

There are many other ways to gain exposure and experience:

- **Use your experience working with children in other specialties**, such as general practice, emergency medicine and paediatric surgery. You'll learn valuable transferable skills.
- **Try to get on a taster week** in paediatrics through your foundation school. This is probably the best way of getting experience of the actual working day of a paediatrician, outside of a formal placement.
- **Volunteer with children and young people’s clubs**, such as those helping people with with disabilities or learning difficulties. You'll develop your communication skills and rapport with children.
- **Ask a paediatrician to be your mentor**. We find that paediatricians are friendly and approachable! They'll be happy to answer your questions about the specialty and you may be able to shadow them at work, or get involved in a project, such as a clinical audit or research. To find a mentor, speak with the College Tutor at your local hospital’s paediatric department or contact UKAPS, who have developed a mentorship scheme for aspiring
paediatricians.

- **Incorporate a paediatric aspect into one of your posts in another specialty.** For example, if you're working in emergency medicine, you could do an audit on children's care.

- **Join our very own own RCPCH Conference** - it's a great opportunity to immerse yourself in the world of paediatrics, with informative lectures from prestigious speakers, as well as opportunities to submit posters or apply for prizes.

- **Go along to a careers event** - there are still a range of events available at Foundation level, either run by your own school, local trusts or by the RCPCH and UKAPS (UK Aspiring Paediatricians Society). If you are signed up as a Medical Student or Foundation Doctor RCPCH member, our joint UKAPS and RCPCH eBulletins and UKAPS Facebook page are an excellent source of information.

- **Attend paediatric courses, such as in life support or safeguarding.** They're an insight into the specialty, great for skilling yourself up before specialty training and useful for your application. The RCPCH Learning platform gives you access to quality-assured courses to support your professional development and clinical practice. RCPCH members can sign in via their RCPCH online account; others may register for an account.

- **Access our educational webinar archive.** We run short, free and accessible educational updates for health professionals on topics ranging from clinical conditions to service design.

---

**When to apply to paediatric specialty training**

If you are looking to start specialty training at the end of FY2, then the usual application process involves submitting your application to national recruitment a couple of months into your F2 year, with a view to moving straight into your specialty of choice after you have completed your foundation.

It's increasingly popular for junior doctors to take a year out between completing a foundation programme and entering specialty training - such as to work internationally, further explore a particular specialty (either to broaden your knowledge/skills base or to cement the decision around the specialty to pursue as a career) or take a career break. This is often referred to by the unofficial term 'F3 year', and the experiences and skills from this time could prove to be helpful.
It's important to note taking an 'F3 year' won't negatively impact your application. You'll apply in the same way as anyone moving straight from foundation training, just a year later. You could use any paediatric experience gained between foundation and specialty training to help move through your early training years a little bit quicker.

**How to prepare your application**

The application window for entry level specialty recruitment (ST1 in paediatrics) is usually open November to December. Once an applicant is successfully longlisted, sections of the application form are then scored by assessors, followed by an interview. Applicants are assigned an overall score, that defines a national ranking, from which offers of specialty training jobs are made. These training posts will then commence from August or September the following year.

Our [guidance for applying to Level 1](#) paediatric specialty training gives a detailed overview of the application and interview process - do take time to read it carefully before applying.

Take particular note of the two parts of the interview that need to be prepared in advance. Firstly, your selected portfolio (maximum of 12 sides of A4 of your choice) that you'll be discussing to demonstrate career motivation. Secondly, the example you wish to use for the reflective practice question. You have a great opportunity to prepare both stations well, in advance, and use this to your advantage. Be creative and think carefully about the role of a paediatrician and the skills it takes to do the role well.

**Apply for one of our prizes**

We offer two annual prizes for foundation doctors. They each offer a fantastic opportunity to join our annual RCPCH Conference and exhibition to meet paediatricians and hear about the latest child health research.

- [Foundation Doctor Prize](#) - awarded to Foundation doctors in the UK and Republic of Ireland, as nominated by their school
- [Tony Jackson Memorial Prize](#) - awarded to a medical student or foundation doctor for outstanding personal reflections on paediatric experience
Become an RCPCH member (it's free!)

Finally - why not join the College? Foundation doctor membership is free of charge, and you'll enjoy access to a wide range of specialist information, UKAPS eBulletins and discounts such as our events and scientific journal.

We work closely with the United Kingdom Aspiring Paediatrician Society (UKAPS) which was set up in 2014 to help support and inspire all of you - the next generation of aspiring paediatricians! Together we have run many joint events such as the joint UKAPS and RCPCH session at the RCPCH Conference, working together for the annual Tony Jackson Memorial Prize and the #ChoosePaediatrics programme workshops on YouTube that we have run. UKAPS have foundation school reps in every region, so why not seek them out to see what other opportunities they can direct you towards or even apply for one of these positions yourself?

Next steps

You can start reading our guidance for applying to Level 1 paediatric specialty training. Also check out our introducing paediatric training page, first published in October 2021, to find out about the training pathway and the options. These can help you start thinking what you can bring to the application process, including the interview, that will demonstrate your interest and understand of paediatrics.

Contact us

For queries about anything else, or if you just want to discuss your career plans with someone, please contact the RCPCH Recruitment & Careers team at paediatric.jobs@rcpch.ac.uk