Don’t panic!

LEADERS
Leeds Academic Development Education and Research Society

Guide to Academic Foundation Programme application

Part 2: The interview
The aim of this guide is to provide an informal source of information about the academic foundation programme to medical students who are preparing to take on the challenge. I vividly remember being in final year, trying to complete my placement case reports, preparing for finals and going to placements while also applying for academic jobs (with its additional requirements). I had many questions at this stage. However, since the application process had just been changed that year, there were a lot of uncertainties about the new application process and whether advice from previous years would be applicable. Luckily, the application process has remained tamper-free this year and many of the experiences of the last year are very much applicable to the current year.

The information for this guide are based on my experience of the application process in the last year, and those of colleagues who I have interviewed. They are in no way meant to be regarded as ‘gospel’. However, I do hope you find them useful and applicable to your application process. This guide will not help you make your decisions about whether to apply for academic programme, neither will it help you choose your ideal academic programme. It's sole objective is to help you navigate the sometimes confusing steps and sections involved in the academic programme application.

For information about the academic foundation programme and the application process, please consult the ‘Rough Guide to the Academic Foundation Programme (March 2013 edition)’. For formal advise about application procedural issues, timelines and requirements, please read the ‘FP/AFP 2014 Applicant’s Handbook (June 2013 version)’. Both of these documents are invaluable to the application process and can be found on the foundation programme website (http://www.foundationprogramme.nhs.uk/pages/home/how-to-apply).

I have tried to make this guide both brief and comprehensive. The guide is divided into two versions with one tackling the paper application while the other covers the academic foundation programme and common questions. Feel free to distribute as you see fit, provided this is not for commercial purposes and the guide remains available for no charge. I will appreciate some feedback about the document so that it can be continually improved for future applicants. Please forward questions or feedbacks to dareoladokun@doctors.org.uk and/or leadersleeds@gmail.com.

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The AFP interview is the most nerve-wracking aspect of application process mainly because of ‘fear of the unknown’ but also because of the potential to mess it up in the heat of the moment. However, the AFP interview is the perfect opportunity for you to separate yourself from the pack. It allows you to expand on the contents of your paper application and it gives you an opportunity to personally convince the interviewers that you are the person for the job despite a lack of prizes and publications!

The good news:

# In most deaneries, the competition has usually narrowed down significantly by the interview stage. This is particularly true in London where the competition ratio goes down to 2:1! - so your chances are much higher.

# The interview is not actually that bad. You will be surprised by how friendly the interviewers turn out to be.

# The questions are a mixture of technical and personal. From most experiences last year, the questions were more about your academic interests than about medical statistics!

**Typical interview format**

# Most AFP interviews run over 20 to 50 minutes.
# There are generally 1-3 stations max.
# Each station lasts 10-20 minutes.
# Typical themes are clinical, academic and presentation stations
AFP interview: 
the clinical scenario

The clinical station usually involves one or two clinical scenarios and you are expected to talk through your management of these scenarios. There is usually an ethical or professionalism question as well. Some deaneries will give you the clinical scenario a few minutes before the station while others present the scenario within the station. Some stations also incorporate data interpretation, actors and other clinical staff into their station (most don’t). What they are looking for is a thorough, safe and systematic approach to the scenario.

**Tips – clinical scenarios:**

# As in your finals OSCE, be logical - use an ABCDE approach!

# Read the emergency pages of the OHCM – most scenarios will be emergencies! - It is also worth going over less common emergencies such as spinal cord compression and head injury. These have come up in the past.

# Everyone has read the OHCM – rather than spilling out algorithms, present the answers in practical ways to show that you have been on the wards.

# Don’t forget non-technical skills in your answer- e.g. I will delegate, update family, involve other teams, situation awareness etc.

# Be safe: Ask for help early – but say meanwhile, I will do ...

# Avoid tunnel vision, give differentials even when the diagnosis is barndoor obvious!

# Classify your answers and say the most common things first- also good practice for finals!
Dilemma questions – what would you do if...?

THINK SPIES!

Seek further information about the incident- what else do you want to know? Ideally, you should speak to the person concerned first!

Patient Safety is always paramount – say it!

Initiate action - take initiative and say what you think is right (base on guidelines, GMC, morals etc)

Escalate to seniors – mostly educational and clinical supervisors.

Support- go to seniors, BMA, GMC, MDU, Hospital Trust etc

# Consider reading SJT books (especially the first few pages of ISCMedical 250 SJTs) as they succinctly summarise current GMC and BMA guidelines for many ethical scenarios.
The academic station actually sounds scarier than it is. It conjures up images of being quizzed about complicated medical statistics and research methodologies. However, this station tends to focus more on your knowledge/expectations of the academic process and career (in most deaneries). The typical format for this station varies significantly between aUOAs. In most cases, you will get a paper or abstract to read for a few minutes. Then you answer questions about the paper in the station. You may also be quizzed on your interest in research, research experience, your knowledge of the academic career pathway, etc. Portfolio review takes time, you can take it but you do not need it for most deaneries.

**Tips:**

# This is the main opportunity to sell yourself – link your responses to your research experiences and achievements.

# Learn how to critically appraise a paper and practice doing this quickly.

# When discussing a paper, demonstrate the skills mentioned in the person specification. Don’t just focus on the academic elements, mention ethics and clinical significance.

# Learn about the integrated academic career pathway (Walport’s scheme) and what an academic career actually involves. You should know what an academic does and why you feel you want such a career.

# Have a vague idea of where you see your academic career going in the next 5-10 years but be pluripotent! Demonstrate your interest in an area of research without limiting yourself.

# Brush up on your old research projects (particularly anything you mentioned in your paper application) and be ready to discuss them further.
**Academic interview: the situation questions**

**Situation questions – Tell me a time when you...?**

**THINK STAR!**

**SITUATION and TASK:** Explain the situation briefly (3-4 sentences max- if possible, something impressive from your CV).

**ACTION:** explain your personal role and responsibility

**RESULT:** Highlight your overall achievement and relate it to the question and your suitability for an academic job.

# Go in armed with 2-3 generic examples that you can adapt to demonstrate any skills e.g. Intercalated BSc, SSM, summer research, conference visit etc.

# It is less about the example and more about the way you use it to sell yourself.
Academic interview: the presentation station

The presentation station is not very common. However, it is synonymous with the academic recruitment process in Yorkshire. There is absolutely no excuse for messing up this station as you get a lot of time to prepare it. Also, the questions are designed to give you multiple opportunities to sell yourself. You will most likely make a presentation, on a pre-issued topic, to a panel of two interviewers for approximately 10mins with 5mins for question.

Tips:

# The obvious: answer the question! –in the most ‘self selling’ way possible

# Sneak in your achievements and research experience at every chance.

# Keep it succinct and straight to the point- Aim for no more than1 slide per min.

# be ready to answer questions on any part of your presentation.

# End on your trump slide- finish on a slide you will like to imprint on their memory forever and leave it on while answering questions!

# Sounds obvious but practice, practice, practice! (in front of peers and supervisors).

#And finally, do not run over time!
Academic interview: common questions

Here are a few question styles you should familiarise yourself with before your interview:

# What does an academic clinician do in a typical day?
# Talk me through a research project you have been involved in. What did you enjoy/hate?
# Where do you see your academic career going in the next 5-10 years?
# Tell me about a teaching session you have delivered, what did you learn from it?
# Why academic foundation/academic career?
# How would you design a study/trial to investigate...?
# What are the strengths and weaknesses of this paper?
# How would you deal with conflict between two colleagues?
# Your fellow F1 missed work because she was hungover, what will you do?
# What area of research are you interested in and why?
# Tell me about the academic career pathway.
# What does this graph show?
# What kind of study is this?—what are the strength and weaknesses?
# How is research funded?
# Why this deanery?
# Your colleague is always off-sick at work, how will you deal with this?
# What makes a good researcher?
# What are you interested in?
# Tell me about any challenges you have faced in research. What did you learn from the experience?
# You have 2 patients presenting with ..., who will you see first? Why? How will you manage..., who can you call for help?
# Tell me about a paper you have read recently.
Academic interview: Stating the obvious!

**Generic interview advice:**

- Prepare & Practice!, Prepare & Practice!, Prepare & Practice!

- Consider visiting the lab/ university hospital you’ve applied to if you are not already familiar with the place. This will give you something to talk about at the interview.

- Speak clearly and confidently

- Dress in a way that makes you feel like you’ve already got the job!

- Print and reread your paper application before going to the interview.

- Update yourself on your previous audits and research papers.

- Prepare a question to ask them in case you get the chance.

- Be aware of your body language and nervous ticks

- Be honest! Sell yourself but don’t make things up or overdo it.

- There are many arrogant people at AFP interviews, don’t be one of them!

- The interview is an even keel, enthusiasm and common decency count for more than prizes and publications.

- Most importantly, remember to smile!
The advice I would give is not to worry about them too much. Mersey seemed very laid back and friendly. They didn't seem to be looking for you to have vast amounts of knowledge of random and specific things - rather they wanted to know that you would be a safe doctor with the knowledge expected of everyone and that you had some vague idea of research methods and statistics.

— Dr Jonathan Squibbs (Mersey)

All 3 sets of interviewers (effectively 2 panels in Southampton) were really nice and there weren't any unexpected questions, or as one guy put it in Bristol "the questions were relatively benign!! My main advice would be, know the academic career path, learn the common emergency conditions and be yourself as the questions are so generic you as a person has to come through :)

— Dr Pip Thomas (Southampton)
Academic interview: reports from veterans!

NW Thames wanted to hear you talk out loud and be safe. Know clinical conditions as if you were walking into finals... practice timed-conditions critical appraisal—Dr AG (NW)

Sell yourself at every station, every opportunity and in every response. Work your achievements into your answer—Dr OO (South Thames)

Prepare for the obvious questions about your interests and past research experience. Revise an approach to critical appraisal and practice reading/critiquing articles within a tight time limit. Revise the main clinical emergencies to the depth given in the Oxford Handbook of Clinical Medicine. Finally, practice, practice, practice...and be yourself!

—Dr NCB (Bristol)
I hope you find this guide useful and I wish you goodluck with your interviews! Consider reading part 1 of the guide as well for some more potentially pertinent information (on Leader website).

I am keen to include an FAQ section in future versions of this booklet. Please forward your questions to dareoladokun@doctors.org.uk and I will endeavour to respond promptly.

In order to improve this guide for future applicants, please email your feedback and advise/information about your interview experiences to the email above, and/or leadersleeds@gmail.com.