Guide to Academic Foundation Programme application

Part 1: The written application
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 interview 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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Application form sections: Educational Achievements

This is a section applicable to both the standard foundation programme and the academic foundation programme. The section allows you to input your intercalated degree and other educational achievements (publications, presentations and educational prizes) for extra points. Please note that this section counts for points on both programmes.

Tips:

# Put your best/ ‘most solid’ publication/presentation in this section. That way, if you do not succeed in gaining an academic foundation programme, you can be rest assured that you have achieved the maximum points available for the standard foundation programme.

# You get a maximum of 2 points for this section. Put a maximum of 2 entries in this section and save the rest for the ‘additional achievements’ section of the academic application.

# Where possible, avoid putting two of the same type of achievement in this section. E.g. Put a presentation and a prize, rather than two prizes or two publications.

# If you have presented a piece of research at a conference and had the abstract published in a journal as well, you can use this to gain more than 1 point. Enter it as a presentation and/or as a publication in this or the additional achievement section of the academic application.

# Most research papers will have their own unique PUBMED ID. However, abstracts usually do not. If your abstract is a small part of a journal paper (or the supplementary pages), use the PUBMED ID for the whole journal edition, then attach a scanned copy of both the cover page of the journal and the page containing your abstract.
Academic selection sections: Additional Achievements

This is a section which is unique to the academic foundation application. The section allows you to input any further educational achievements (publications, presentations and educational prizes) which you have not already added to the standard form. This section will count for extra points only on the academic programme and it is your opportunity to dump your CV on the form. This section will be visible to both Units of Application and there are no limits to the number of entries you can make.

**Tips:**

# Free for all! Some achievements which would not normally qualify for points on the standard application can now be entered here. For example, medical school prizes so not score points on the standard foundation application. However, they are worth points on the academic application for the London deanery.

# No negative marking! If you are unsure whether an achievement will count for points, include it anyway as you stand to lose nothing! (there are clear cut exceptions in the guidelines). Research funding, scholarships, summer schools etc may score points in some deaneries such as London.

# It may be difficult to track down all the required information for your entry. Use the details section to explain your achievement and sell it to the reviewers.

# If you entered a piece of research as an abstract publication in the educational achievement section, you can use it as a presentation in this section (and vice versa).
Academic selection sections: Academic items

This is a section which is unique to individual Units of Applications. It consists of specific questions that the deanery wants answered and they tend to be structured in the style of ‘white box questions’. This section will be marked and added to your overall written application marks. Treat this as an interview with more preparation time. Many of the questions are similar to those you will get at your interview. The questions tend to cover your educational/non-academic achievements, knowledge of academic careers, decision making, ethical knowledge and conscientiousness.

Please note that the emphasis of these questions are not on the impressiveness of your example or the uniqueness of your experience. The marks are based on your ability to reflect on the experience, what you have gained form it and most importantly, how you have interpreted your experience to answer the questions and demonstrate your abilities.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Give example of... Questions</th>
<th>Dilemma questions – what would you do if...?</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>EXAMPLE/TASK &amp; ACTION:</td>
<td>THINK SPIES:</td>
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<tr>
<td>Explain the situation and</td>
<td>Seek further information about the</td>
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<td>what you did very briefly</td>
<td>incident- what else do you want to know?</td>
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<td>(3-4 sentences max-no marks</td>
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<td>for this)</td>
<td>Patient Safety is always paramount –</td>
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<tr>
<td>REFLECT: Use your reflection</td>
<td>say it!</td>
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<tr>
<td>to answer each question</td>
<td>Initiate action – take initiative and say</td>
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<td>asked - explain your</td>
<td>what you think is right ( base on guidelines,</td>
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<td>motivations, lessons,</td>
<td>GMC, morals etc</td>
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<tr>
<td>shortcomings and skills</td>
<td>Escalate to seniors – mostly educational</td>
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<td>gained.</td>
<td>and clinical supervisors.</td>
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<tr>
<td>RESULT: Highlight your</td>
<td>Support- go to seniors, BMA, GMC, MDU,</td>
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<td>overall achievement and</td>
<td>Hospital Trust etc</td>
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<tr>
<td>relate it to your</td>
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<td>suitability for an academic</td>
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<td>job.</td>
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Tips:

# Most importantly, answer ALL questions in the most succinct way possible.

# Use this opportunity to sell yourself further! Consider sneaking achievements into your answers.

# The most prolific sources of examples and experiences to draw on are your electives, 4th year in specialties and your intercalation year/summer research for research-based questions. There are no better opportunities for you to have experienced teamwork, multidisciplinary team working, etc.

# Inspirations strike in odd places and random times! Do not sit at your desk and immediately try to answer these questions—there is no faster way to get writers block! Print them off, take them around with you, go for a walk, discuss them aloud and gradually process them. Make notes regularly. You can then compose your answers using the approach above.

# Give it to people to read! (previous successful applicants or trusted friends are ideal candidates—obviously not your fellow competitors). It can be embarrassing to share your answers and reflections. However, this is the best way to get feedback and make sure that you have answered the questions and your answers make sense.

# For ethical or professionalism questions, patient safety is always paramount. The right answer is always the one that ensures patient safety despite the consequences.

# Tackle each question/sub-question in individual paragraphs to make it clear that you have answered them.
Academic selection sections: Academic Programmes

This is the most painstaking part of the application. Here is where you rank the jobs according to your preferences. It is advisable that you print this section on the academic unit of application’s website first and make your decisions initially on paper. Input your final decisions online in one undistracted session to avoid errors.

You do not have to rank all the jobs.

**Tips:**

# Always rank your ideal job highest irrespective of your ranking or perceived ability! Don’t try to game the system by ranking seemingly unpopular jobs first. Not everyone wants the same job as you and the higher ranking candidate may be gunning for that surgical or public health job you wouldn’t touch with a bargepole!

# Some say you should rank the jobs with their academic component as the first F2 jobs higher so you have your publications ready for core training applications, others say the jobs with the academic bit sandwiched between clinical jobs are better for skills maintenance. There is no ideal answer, rank based on your preferences!

# Never rank a job that you are not prepared to do. Sod’s law dictates that this is the one you will get!

# The aUoA’s website usually has more information on the jobs than the FPAS website. Check this.

# Be careful of hinging your whole decision on one specific placement. Your jobs are subject to change even up to the point of signing the contract.
Please patiently await the second part of this publication which will cover interview preparation, formats, questions and tips.

Goodluck with stage one of your applications!

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.