Considerations before applying for OOPR

These will be personal and specific to each trainee, and there are no right answers. Factors to keep in mind are:

- **Total length of time out of training**: weigh up 2 years for an MD versus 3 years for a PhD. These numbers can suddenly rocket to 4 or 5 if you’re considering starting a family at this time.

- **MD or PhD?** My personal advice would be to prioritise the research that interests you. Any higher degree is easier and more enjoyable if you want to do it.

- **Mat leave**: Look into both NHS and University maternity leave policy. Straightforward maternity leave for rotating doctors is tricky. Throw in an OOP and it becomes a minefield, so be forewarned and forearmed. The bottom line is that you are entitled to maternity leave, irrespective of when you start an OOPR, as you will have done more than 12 months continuous service in the NHS. It will vary as to whether the Trust pays or the University. Make sure you have an honorary NHS contract even if you’re not doing any clinical work to keep your service continuous for both maternity leave and pension reasons.

Applying for OOPR

This needs to be started long in advance - at least 12-18 months before going out of programme. It is important to let your educational supervisor know that this is something you are considering. If there is an academic lead in the deanery, it is useful and good form to speak to them too. With more firm plans and a timeline, you should approach your TPD. Once you have the okay from the ES and TPD you can start the paperwork with the deanery which is lengthy but straightforward. There may be one last hurdle of speaking to the head of the surgical school too before sign-off. This will be to ensure that you understand what is expected of you while you are out of programme and should you wish to return earlier or later. Whilst on OOPR, you will be expected to complete the appropriate OOPR documentation (in the Gold Guide) each year at ARCP time. It is very unlikely that any period of OOPR would count towards training. If this is something you want to arrange, again leave plenty of time and be mindful that it needs to be approved prospectively.

Choosing a supervisor

This is arguably the most important decision. Especially for a PhD, your enjoyment and output is inextricably linked to the relationship you have with your supervisor. Therefore it is important to choose someone that you can see yourself interacting with easily on a daily

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basis. In my case, I met my supervisor, Prof Abigail Tucker, at a conference and immediately liked her scientific style and research. We exchanged emails and I spent a week of A/L at her lab where I was able to talk to other students and staff and get a feel for the lab before deciding to commit.

**Funding for PhDs**

Some projects (most MD projects) come with funding attached and will involve some clinical commitments. If you have a project and supervisor lined up but need to get your own funding, there are many options.

Most ideal are funding bodies which will pay your (un-banded) salary for the full three years. They also provide the most straightforward progression if you decide to continue your research interest post PhD and alongside / following your training.

**MRC Clinical Research Training Fellowships**: This is the best option if you have a specific project and supervisor in mind.

https://mrc.ukri.org/skills-careers/fellowships/clinical-fellowships/clinical-research-training-fellowship-crtf/

**Wellcome PhD Training Fellowships for Clinicians**: These are now devolved to individual programmes (i.e. you would apply directly to UCL etc rather than to the Wellcome Trust)

https://wellcome.ac.uk/funding/clinical-phd-programmes

There are centres such as the [Francis Crick Institute](https://www.frankiscrick.ac.uk/) in London which put out calls for clinicians funded by their own substantial funds. Always look these up online.

There are options for a single year's funding intended to ‘prime’ your application for one of the above fellowships. These are:

**RCS one-year research fellowship**: 

https://www.rcseng.ac.uk/standards-and-research/research/fellowships-awards-grants/fellowships/one-year-surgical-research-fellowship/

**BRC research fellowships for clinicians**: 

https://www.guysandstthomasbrc.nihr.ac.uk/education-training/fellowships/

It is entirely possible, if stressful to fund a PhD as you go along from multiple sources. In some cases (e.g. clinical trials are difficult to get fellowship funding for) this may be the only option. Sources to keep in mind and approach are charities such as:

**Rosetree trust**:

http://rosetreestrust.co.uk/research-fellowships/

**The Dunhill Medical Trust**

https://dunhillmedical.org.uk/

**Action on hearing loss**

https://www.actiononhearingloss.org.uk/