Time out after F2

Taking some time out of training can provide an opportunity to explore specialty options and gain evidence to help a future application. However, trainees who have returned report that it needs forward planning and organisation. It will also reduce or cease access to educational support structures and career networks you have become used to, for a while.

What are the options?

Trainees typically use this time in a number of ways:
- **Working in a fixed term post in the NHS.** These are advertised on www.jobs.nhs.uk
- **Taking a further qualification** such as a Master’s degree
- **Undertaking work experience** which may be useful in a future specialty e.g.; anatomy demonstration, or which will boost their portfolio evidence e.g. medical education, research or quality improvement. Some NHS fixed term locum posts have time built into the work plan for these activities and they can be advertised under a number of headings at CT/ST1 level e.g. Fixed Term Appointment, LAS, Clinical Fellow, SHO, Trust Doctor
- **Working abroad:** this can include work in a mainstream healthcare system, voluntary or aid work or community development. Different places will have different risks and benefits in terms of cost, employment conditions, healthcare setting, health risks, personal safety etc.
- **Taking a Career break.** This may include mix of work and travel.

When is it possible to take time from training?

- **After F1:** Some Foundation Programmes (including Wales) allow doctors to take Time Out of Programme between F1 and F2. Contact your Foundation programme Director or Foundation Programme team for further information. In most cases, there will be a post to return to, but this can’t be guaranteed, so discuss this with your FPD before applying.
- **After F2:** You’ll be eligible to apply for Specialty Training, although after three years you may need to provide alternative evidence. Some specialty programmes e.g. GP will allow you to apply for a post during F2 and defer entry for a year, allowing you to secure a post to return to. Check the applicant guidelines for each specialty.
- **During Specialty Training:** There are opportunities for Time out of programme (TOOP) during Specialty Training, to undertake research, leadership, other or other career-related experience or even a career break. This allows you to return to resume your training programme after the period out. The procedures can be found here:
  - **Gold Guide (national)**
  - **TOOP Guidelines in Wales**
    - https://www.walesdeanery.org/specialty-training/out-programme

**Things to consider if going abroad**

Returning trainee tell us that it can take up to 2 years to plan for work overseas and needs thought well in advance to allow for contingencies:
- Visa application can be a lengthy process which can take up to 12 months
- Some locations are competitive (e.g. Australia) so you may need to be flexible.
• Your GMC licence to practice should ideally be if remaining in medical work and as a minimum, you'll need a “certificate of good standing” to show overseas employers. Bear in mind that any incident reported to a local regulator abroad will also be investigated by the GMC, which could make re-registration problematic on your return. GMC advise that you maintain full registration if working clinically.
• Prepare for the cost of flights, visa, injections, accommodation deposits etc.
• Plan for interviews: Many employers/agencies are used to people needing time to return for interviews and some build this into the contract/work-plan. Some specialties publish interview dates very early and some allow you to book your slot via Oriel. There is only one interview required for most specialties and some written assessments can be done online.
• Health and vaccination – make sure you know what you need
• Reflect on the transferable skills evidence you will build for applications and interviews e.g. planning, adaptability, awareness of other healthcare systems etc.
• If you're in a developing country, check IT systems so that you can make an online application or complete an SJT without problems
• Keep in touch with colleagues at home and find out what's happening or changing

Preparing for return to Specialty Training after time out

• Check for specialty recruitment rounds frequently. Some recruit twice a year for start dates in both August and February.
• Bookmark all sites relating to Specialty/GP Recruitment, especially http://specialtytraining.hee.nhs.uk/ and www.oriel.nhs.uk. Be on alert for recruitment process changes which can vary year on year in some specialties.
• Make use of all the resources and information on our Jobs and Applications pages, which are open access
• Keep collecting evidence for your Portfolio. You may need to take some or all of this to a specialty interview. Your Foundation portfolio will not be open to you so be sure to download as a PDF before you finish F2. think in advance how you will organise and gather current and new evidence
• Do seek advice from your Foundation programme Director, Foundation School or the GMC regarding what time out may mean for your revalidation arrangements.

Building Added Value from a Career Break

There are a number of ways you can use a break from training to demonstrate wider skills and attributes such as:

• Using the opportunity to switch off and returning recharged and with new focus
• Taking the time to reflect on things you need to clarify about your future career
• Wider experience/creating a better and more rounded person
• Appreciating the benefits of the NHS if working abroad. Not all health systems turn out to be as attractive as they look on paper or when presented by recruiting agencies and all have their challenges and pressures
• Learning independence, adaptability and ‘openness’ to new things
• Improving language, cultural awareness and being sensitive to difference
• Developing budgeting and project planning skills, demonstrating self-management
• Obtaining feedback from other jobs and experiences – collect testimonials

We know from data that most trainees make a smooth and successful return to specialty training within 1 - 2 years of taking time out. If you provide an email address to us at pgmedicalcareers@cardiff.ac.uk, we'll keep you posted with information about recruitment and developments in Wales.

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