The Northern Ireland Academic Foundation Programme: Pathway to Academia

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Background:

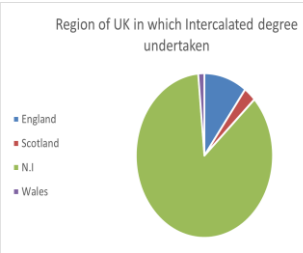
- The Academic Foundation Programme (AFP) provides foundation doctors with protected time for the development of the skills and aptitudes required in academic medicine.
- It is regarded as the first postgraduate step along the pathway to a career in academia.
- It is hoped undertaking the programme will encourage future engagement with academia and provide the opportunity to develop the necessary skills to do so.
- The Northern Ireland (NI) AFP programme was established in 2008 and is coordinated by Queens University Belfast (QUB) and the Northern Ireland Medical and Dental Training Agency (NIMDTA).
- There are 9 AFP posts each year which each include a four month academic placement – clinical, laboratory-based or educational research.
- To date there has been no analysis of this cohort.
- We sought to describe the academic and career outcomes of the Northern Ireland AFP cohort.

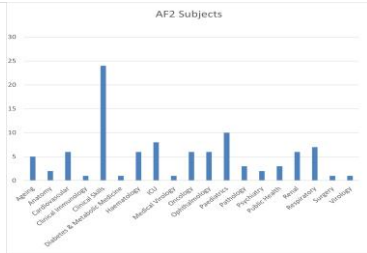
Methodology:

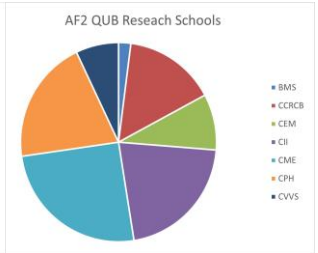
- Anonymised data on AFP trainees between 2008 and 2018 was obtained through QUB and NIMDTA.
- A structured questionnaire was designed by the project team and sent to the cohort. (n=99)

Results:

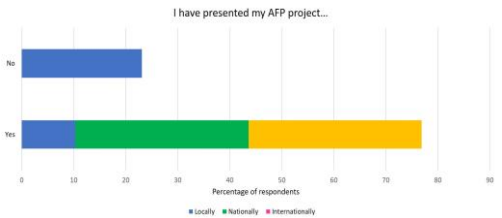
- 58 (58.6%) females and 41 (41.4%) males completed the NI AFP between 2008-2018.
- The majority of trainees (59.6%) were QUB graduates.
- 69 (69.7%) had completed an intercalated degree in the UK (figure 1).
- Subjects (figure 2) and QUB research schools (figure 3) in which AF2 projects were undertaken are displayed below (figure 2 and 3 respectively):

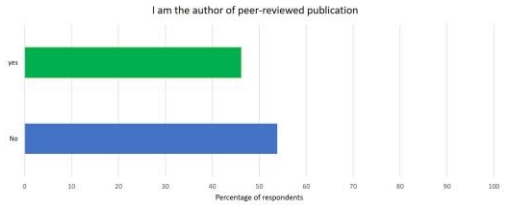


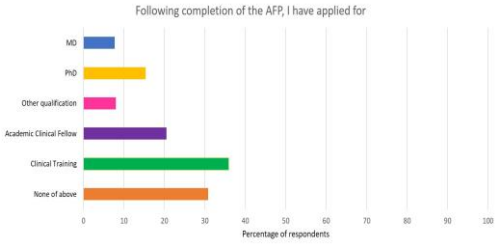


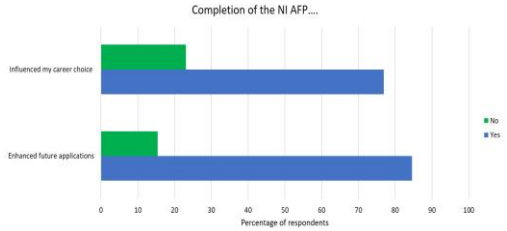


- The response rate to the survey was 44.8%









Discussion:

- The UK AFP was established in 2005 in response to the Walport (1) report which made recommendations to enhance training in academic medicine, including creating a structured career pathway.
- Since its introduction, there is little published data on the UK AFP, thus little to inform its progress to date.
- Our study represents the first analysis of the NI AFP cohort and has allowed a pragmatic approach to gaining insight into the experiences of NI AFP trainees.
- Interestingly, in our study, medical education comprised 24.2% of AFP projects – compared to 7% in a similar study analysing AFP trainees across the UK (2).
- We have shown the positive impact of the NI AFP - the opportunity it provides for trainees to present and publish work, the high number of trainees who apply for higher research qualifications and the influence that completion of the NI AFP has on career choices.
- Understanding the experiences and outcomes of this cohort is important in shaping the future of this programme and encouraging participation by future medical graduates.

References

(1) Walport M. Medically- and dentally-qualified academic staff: recommendations for training the researchers and educators of the future. Report of the Academic Careers Sub-committee of Modernising Medical Careers and the UK Clinical Research Collaboration. London; 2005. [cited 2020 Oct 16]. http://www.ukcrc.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/03/Medically_and_Dentally-qualified_Academic_Staff_Report.pdf.

(2) Ologunde R, Sismey G, Kelley T. The UK Academic Foundation Programmes: are the objectives being met? J R Coll Physicians Edinb [Internet]. 2018 Jan. [cited 2020 Oct 16]; 48(1):54-61. Available at: https://www.rcpe.ac.uk/college/journal/uk-academic-foundation-programmes-are-objectives-being-met