



Non-GP Trainee Survey Report

Survey of the factors which influenced career choice in non-GP Specialty Trainees in Scotland (2017)

Background

In June 2016, the Information Services Division (ISD) of NHS Services Scotland published the results of the Primary Care Workforce Survey 2015¹. These official national statistics confirmed the evolving reduction in GP manpower. The increasing GP vacancy rates are published regularly and GMS practices are being handed over to Health Boards monthly in the face of long term and cumulative underfunding of general practice and insufficient numbers of general practitioners.

The National Clinical Strategy for Scotland (2016) proposes '*to change the main focus of the NHS from hospitals to primary/community care*', but the current trend of GP numbers will provide an inadequate future workforce to meet these strategic plans.

Meanwhile, there has been a continued increase in the vacancy rates within GP Specialty training programmes. We have witnessed a year on year reduction, between 2012 and 2016, in the number of doctors applying to GP training in Scotland, as the total percentage of doctors applying to any specialty training on completion of their Foundation training falls to almost 50%². The Scottish Government mandated NHS Education for Scotland to offer a further 100 GP Specialty training places per year, but although there has been a small increase in the total GP Recruitment numbers in 2017, failure to fill the additional places has resulted in an overall reduction in fill rate.

The proportion of medical students from Scottish medical schools entering general practice training has always been significantly less than the projected 50% required to meet future workforce planning needs. This proportion, which varies considerably between medical schools, had, however, remained remarkably static over many years but the reduction in doctors applying to all specialties, added to the increase in the number of training places available in many of the hospital specialties, has resulted in a reduction in the net pool available to apply to GP training.

It is clear if we are to achieve the necessary improvement in GP Recruitment and to be effective in promoting general practice as a career choice, we need to have as full an understanding as possible of what it is that attracts doctors to pursue a GP career and what is discouraging them. There is now growing evidence for what influences medical career choice^{3,4,5} and Professor Val Waas' Report, *By Choice not by Chance* offers a significant insight into the influences within medical schools in the UK and an international perspective on what deters medical students from considering General Practice as a career⁶. To date however, there has been little formal exploration into why doctors training in other medical specialties in Scotland did not choose general practice and whether there is anything to be learned from the factors which influenced non-GP Specialty trainees.

Method

A questionnaire was prepared by RCGP Scotland which established the specialty, medical school attended and basic demographics of the study group which included all Specialty trainees in core and specialty training to ST3 level in Scotland excluding general practice

trainees. The questionnaire was designed to explore which trainees had ever considered general practice as a career and those who had not and to investigate the influencing factors in each group. The questionnaire was shared with First Five GPs for sense checking and feedback prior to distribution. The questionnaire was conducted using survey monkey (Appendix 1) and with the support of NHS Education for Scotland was emailed to the study cohort.

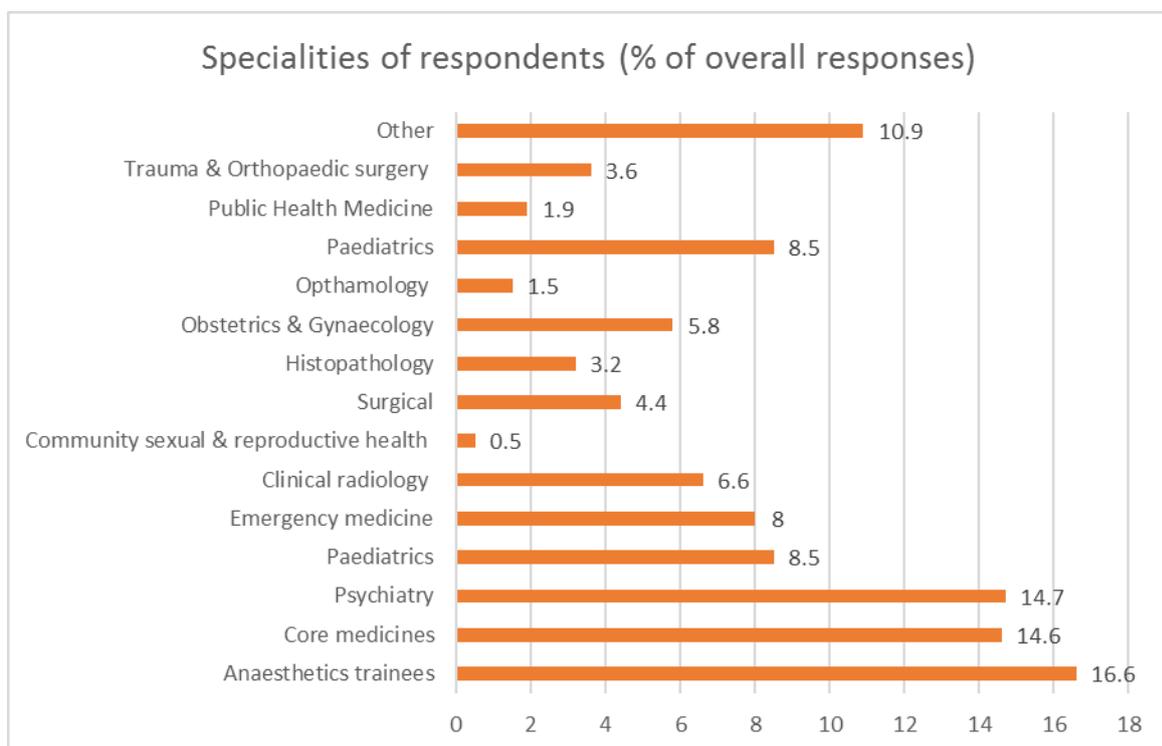
Results

Response rate and distribution

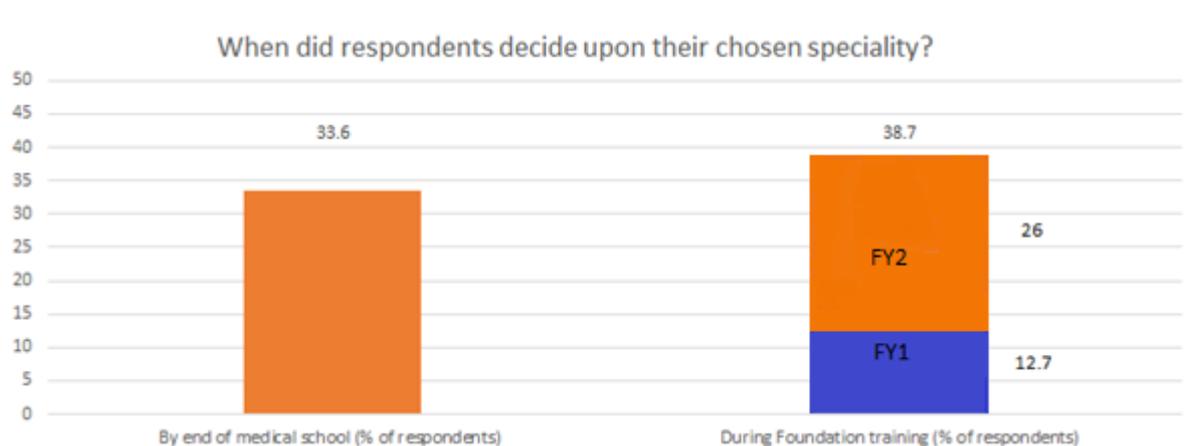
411 responses from 1273 questionnaires sent, giving **32.3%** response rate.

There was acceptable proportionate representation of responses across the four regions of the Scottish Deanery.

Responses were received from across the range of specialties with the highest number of responses from anaesthetic trainees, core medicine and psychiatry.



Timing of career decision:



Stated influence

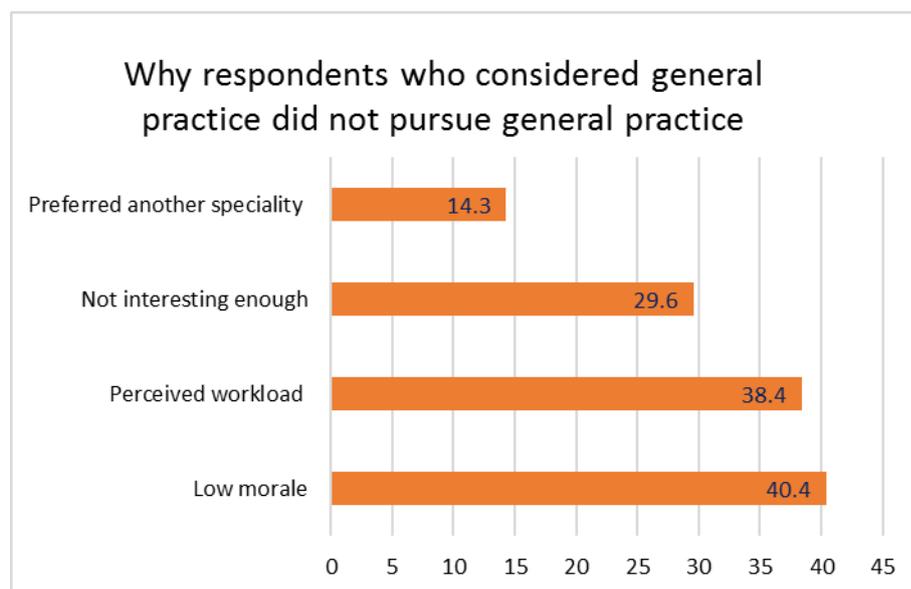
Ranking of factors about the speciality which impacted the decision on speciality choice:

Factor	Impact on decision
Appeal of job/ nature of speciality	1
Intellectual stimulation	2
Variety	3
Work environment	4
Career progression/opportunities	5
Work/life balance	6
Geography	7
Academic opportunities	8
Domestic circumstances	9
Prestige	10
Salary	11

Also, **65%** of all responders indicated that they had been influenced by staff they met in placements (in line with other evidence)

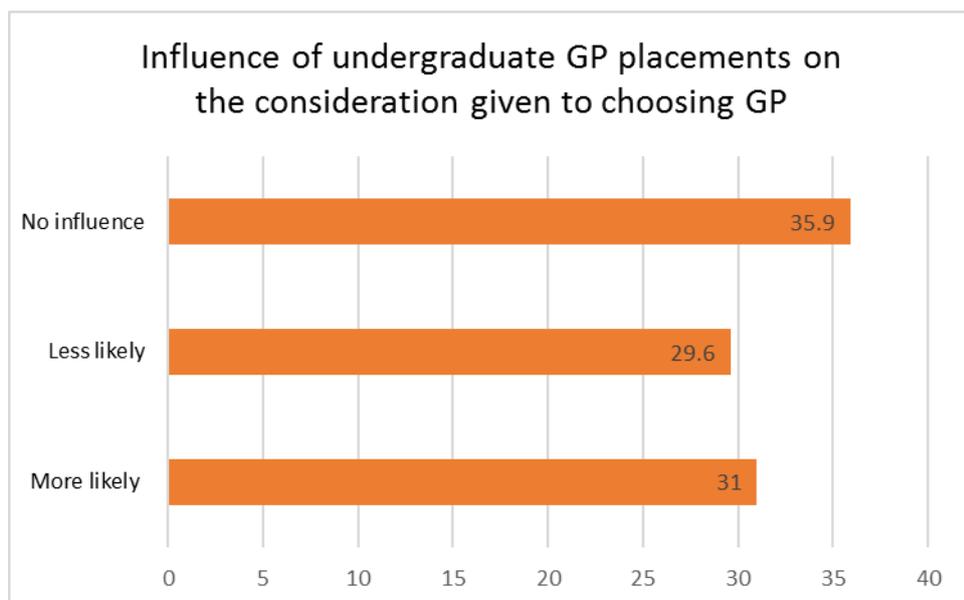
Consideration given to General Practice

Approximately a half of responders (**49.4%**) indicated that they had considered general practice as a career option (it is recognised that there may be an inherent bias in those who responded to this survey)



Words trainees associate with GP – busy, high workload (**30.8%**)

Influence of experiences



There was a broad range of reasons stated for why trainees might be more and less likely to choose general practice, with no one reason standing out as notably higher than the others in either group.

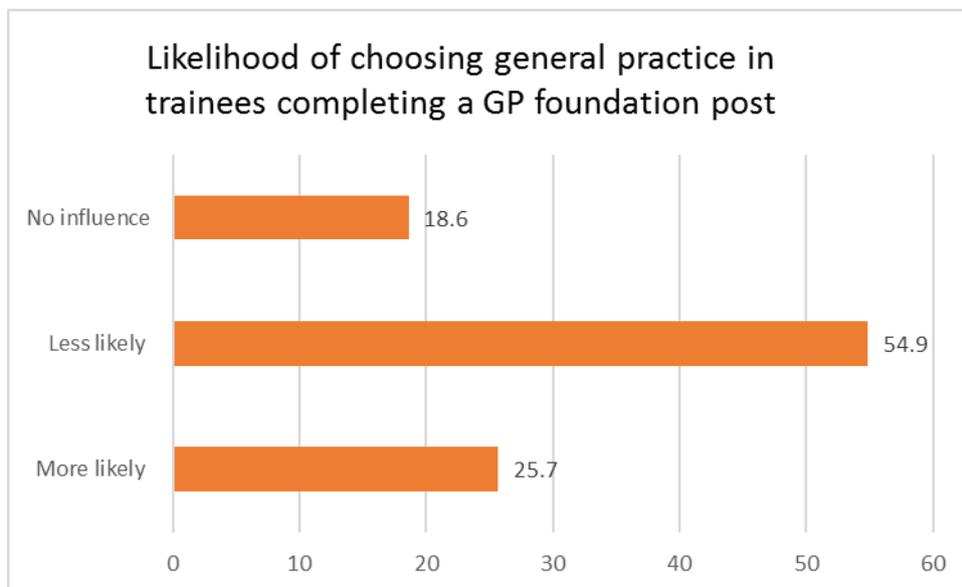
Of note, however, in the group who had considered general practice, 48.3% indicated that the undergraduate placement had made them more likely to choose general practice compared to only 13% in the group who had never considered general practice. This suggests the likely positive influence of undergraduate placement which concurs with other evidence even though this was not borne out in this study group by the time of applying to specialty training.

Referring to **postgraduate experience** in general practice in this survey:

27.5% in total had some experience ranging from a two week 'taster' to greater than six months in a General Practice placement.

23.6% of responders completing a 4 month Foundation post.

The % who had completed a Foundation post of 4 months was higher (33.5%) in the group who had considered GP which might suggest that these posts had some influence on the consideration of GP as a career option but it is also likely that earlier consideration of General Practice made it more likely to choose a Foundation rotation which included General Practice.



For those specialty trainees expressing that they were less likely to choose General Practice, this may simply reflect a reaffirmation of their decision to pursue their specialty of choice and cannot be interpreted as the experience actively discouraging them from choosing General Practice with a broad range of reasons given.

However, of those who had previously considered General Practice, 48% indicated that it made them less likely which is of more potential concern. An insufficient number of responders provided a reason for this to enable any firm conclusion to be drawn.

(Respondents did not answer all the questions. Freetext questions tended to have a lower response rate. For consistency, responses are presented as a % of the total number of respondents participating in the survey monkey)

Summary

In this cohort of trainees who have opted not to pursue GP, it is not surprising that the influence of undergraduate placement was relatively evenly spread across whether it made it more or less likely or had no influence on choosing a career in GP, but it is perhaps worth noting that as many as 31% of the total number actually indicated that it had had a positive influence reinforcing the previous evidence of the potential for undergraduate placements to positively influence choice towards general practice. Of those who had indicated that they had considered GP, almost a half said undergraduate placement had made them more likely to consider GP despite ultimately opting for another career choice. A key initiative supported by Scottish Government has of course been the development of the new Scottish graduate entry medical school (ScotGEM), which will deliver a community focused curriculum and which commences September 2018. It is anticipated that this will lead to the majority of the graduates entering general practice but will require comprehensive evaluation of its main objectives.

It can be reasonably concluded that most Doctors have made their choice of career based on sound and appropriate reasoning and therefore the impact of postgraduate training in general practice for a cohort who have actively chosen a different specialty must of course be interpreted with caution. It is worth noting that of those who had given some consideration to GP as a career (almost a half of the respondents in this survey) under one third chose an alternative career pathway because they considered GP wasn't interesting enough.

However, there is a very clear theme expressed in the responses in this survey on the perception of general practice of heavy workload and poor morale and it would not be unreasonable to consider in what ways the current workload in general practice and the resulting 'hidden curriculum' experienced during Foundation placements will undoubtedly be having on FY2 Doctors' decision not to choose general practice. We must therefore look to ways of addressing this potentially negative influence on career choice if we are to encourage rather than discourage recruitment to general practice specialty training during Foundation training placements in general practice.

It must be borne in mind in drawing any conclusions from the survey results that there may be an inherent bias in the responders to a survey conducted by RCGP which has skewed the proportion of those specialty trainees who considered general practice as a career resulting in a higher proportion than is actually the case. Also, there was an apparent anomaly in the % of non-UK graduates and the % who reported not experiencing an undergraduate GP placement which all UK graduates experience. This raises a question of possible misinterpretation by a few responders and the overall reliability of some responses. However even taking account of these potential weaknesses, the results can still be translated into important messages going forward.

References

1. Primary Care Workforce Survey Scotland 2015. A Survey of Scottish General Practices and General Practice Out of Hours Services. Publication Date – 14 June 2016. Information Services Division (ISD), NHS National Services Scotland.
2. The Foundation Programme. Career Destination Report 2016. The UK Foundation Programme Office.
3. Smith F, Lambert T, Goldacre M, (2015) Factors influencing junior doctors' choices of future specialty: trends over time and demographics based on results from UK national surveys. *J R Soc Med.* 10.8 (10), 396-405.
4. Sharon Wiener-Ogilvie, Drummond Begg & Guy Dixon (2015), Foundation doctors career choice and factors influencing career choice. *Education for Primary Care*, 26:6, 395-403, DOI: 10.1080/14739879.2015.1101869
5. BMA – Influences on choice of medical career.
<https://www.bma.org.uk/collective-voice/policy-and-research/education-training-and-workforce/influences-on-choice-of-medical-career>
6. By choice - not by chance. Supporting medical students towards a career in general practice. Health Education England and Medical Schools Council.
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(With special thanks to Drs David Cunningham and Drummond Begg of NHS Education for Scotland (NES) for their feedback and comments on the results)

APPENDIX 1 Specialty Training Survey



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Specialty Training Survey

We are seeking the views of medical trainees who are currently completing their Specialty Training in CT/ST 1-3 and are based in Scotland. We would appreciate you taking the time to respond to a short, 10 minute survey to inform our evidence base regarding specialty training decision making and general practice. All respondents will be entered into a prize draw to win a £100 Debenhams voucher which will be drawn once the survey closes on the 20th February 2017.



Specialty Training Survey

Your current specialty choice

1. Are you based in Scotland?

Yes

No

2. Are you currently undertaking specialty training?

Yes

No



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Specialty Training Survey

Your Current Specialty

3. Which NES region in Scotland are you mainly based?

- East
- South East
- North
- West

4. What specialty training programme are you currently undertaking?

- Core Medical Training
- Anaesthetics
- Emergency Medicine
- Clinical Radiology
- Community Sexual & Reproductive Health
- Core Psychiatry Training
- Core Surgical Training
- Histopathology
- Neurosurgery
- Obstetrics & Gynaecology
- Opthamology
- Oral and Maxilo-facial Surgery
- Paediatrics
- Public Health Medicine
- Trauma & Orthopaedic Surgery
- Other (please specify)

5. At what stage in your training did you finally decide on your specialty course?

- Before I started medical school
- Early in my medical school training
- Intercalated year at medical school
- Towards the end of my training
- During or immediately after an undergraduate placement in my chosen specialty
- FY1
- FY2
- During or after a placement in a specialty post
- After completion of my Foundation training
- Immediately before applying
- Other (please specify)

6. What was it in particular in regards to your chosen specialty that made you choose it?

7. What factors impacted on your decision to choose your current specialty training programme? Can you please indicate how important the following factors were in making your choice? 0 being not important at all. 5 being extremely important.

	0	1	2	3	4	5
Salary	<input type="radio"/>					
Work/Life balance	<input type="radio"/>					
Intellectual stimulation	<input type="radio"/>					
Appeal of job/nature of specialty	<input type="radio"/>					
Career progression/opportunities	<input type="radio"/>					
Geography	<input type="radio"/>					
Prestige	<input type="radio"/>					
Academic opportunities	<input type="radio"/>					
Variety	<input type="radio"/>					
Work environment	<input type="radio"/>					
Domestic circumstances	<input type="radio"/>					

Other (please specify)

8. Did anyone in particular influence your decision? Please tick all that apply.

- Friends at medical school
- Other friends/ University Staff or Lecturers
- Staff met during placements
- Family members
- Doctors I met outside of placements
- News or media
- No clear influences - it was my choice
- Other (please specify)



Specialty Training Survey

Questions on general practice

We would like to ask you a few questions relating to your views of general practice

9. Did you ever consider general practice as a specialty?

- Yes
- No

10. Why did you decide not to pursue a career in General Practice? Choose all that apply.

- No interest in General Practice
- Perceived workload
- Perceived low morale in General Practice
- Press Coverage of General Practice
- Effects it may have on your physical or mental health or stress
- I did not think it would be interesting enough
- Other (please specify)

11. Based on your experience which words or phrases do you associate with general practice, if any?



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Specialty Training Survey

GP placements at undergraduate level

12. Did you complete a GP practice placement as part of your undergraduate training?

Yes

No



Specialty Training Survey

General Practice placement at undergraduate level

13. How long was that undergraduate placement?

- One month
- 2 months
- 3 - 4 months
- Other (please specify)

14. Did this make any difference to you when making your specialty choice?

- More likely to consider General Practice
- Less likely to consider General Practice
- No influence on my Specialty Training choice
- Not applicable
- Other (please specify)

15. Was there anything in particular regarding this placement that made it more/less likely to encourage you to choose general practice?



Specialty Training Survey

Postgraduate GP placement

16. Did you do a GP post or 'GP Taster' placement during post graduate/Foundation training?

Yes

No



Specialty Training Survey

GP Placement at postgraduate level

17. How long was that postgraduate/foundation GP placement for?

- 1-2 weeks
- 3 months
- 4 months
- 6 months
- Greater than 6 months

18. Did this make any difference to you when making your specialty choice?

- More likely to consider General Practice
- Less likely to consider General Practice
- No influence on my Specialty Training choice
- Not applicable

19. Was there anything in particular regarding this placement that made it more/less likely to encourage you to choose general practice?



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Specialty Training Survey

What would make you consider a career in general practice?

20. Is there anything that would make you consider a career in general practice?



Specialty Training Survey

Your details

21. Which of the following describes how you view yourself?

- Male
- Female
- In another way
- Prefer not to say

22. What year of study are you in?

- ST/CT 1
- ST/CT 2
- ST/CT 3

23. Are you a graduate of a UK university?

- Yes
- No



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Specialty Training Survey

Prize Draw

Thank you for taking the time to respond to our survey. If you would like to be entered into the prize draw please provide your email address in the box below.

24. Email address:



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Specialty Training Survey

Thank you for taking the time to click on our survey. Unfortunately we are only seeking the views of CT/ST1-3 at this time.

Thanks

RCGP Scotland



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Specialty Training Survey

END OF SURVEY