

Building the best portfolio for career progression

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Abstract

This article outlines the author's recommendations on accomplishing the best surgical portfolio to support successful career progression. The key areas covered are research, education, quality improvement, management skills, leadership development, clinical/operative experience and external interests. The article is intended to guide trainees towards a more balanced portfolio and offers hints and tips on how to enhance the key areas of the portfolio that often go undervalued.

Keywords ARCP; ISCP; Management and leadership; Quality improvement; Research

Introduction

The portfolio has become the modern equivalent of a curriculum vitae for a doctor in training. The portfolio is used to collect appropriate evidence to demonstrate progress, competence and reflective practice. Surgeons led the way with the development of the Intercollegiate Surgical Curriculum Programme (ISCP) to provide an online tool to store appropriate evidence in readiness for the Annual Review of Competence Progression (ARCP).¹ However, maintaining a high-quality portfolio is much more than a tool to progress through training. It is key to being shortlisted for higher training numbers or other senior positions. Maintaining it is crucial to success. Here are our tips to having a Portfolio which will impress. We have broken it down into six areas (Figure 1) and will deal with each in turn.

Research

A major area of surgical practice in which can distinguish yourself from the crowd is the research section of your portfolio. All surgeons in training are required to have some participation in research, but the level at which you have participated can be the difference between getting shortlisted for a job or not. Case reports or retrospective case series presented at local meetings certainly have their place. However, publication of those results will earn additional points for your efforts and should therefore be the aim of any small project. Try to think of areas where publication is likely before you start the hard work of data collection and analysis. Aim for national presentation or publication from the outset to maximize your reward for the effort you will need to apply. It is also important to follow through with

projects and not let them fade into the background when other activities come along. There are, for instance, open access journals which look for interesting cases or small cases series (i.e. *Foundation Years Journal*, 123Doc) and Royal Colleges will consider case series publications.

Undertaking a period of formal research, often in pursuit of a higher degree, is a great way to enhance your portfolio. This can be done as out of programme experience (i.e. undertaking a Medical Doctorate during Higher Surgical Training) or by applying for dedicated research training (i.e. Academic Clinical Fellow or Academic Clinical Lecturer post). Additional time and resources mean that research is generally of a better quality and more likely to lead to (often multiple) publications and national/international presentation. These all help bolster your portfolio, but don't underestimate the value of being in control of your own time and the management skills this can teach you. These should be highlighted and evidenced in the portfolio too. Any grants, awards or prizes you earn along the way need to be highlighted. Make sure they are understandable to doctors or surgeons outside your direct interest, e.g. 'Patey Prize Winner' in itself doesn't put across that this is a national prize awarded by the Society of Academic and Research Surgery at its annual meeting. Just being shortlisted for these types of prizes is a distinction in itself and should also be included.

Writing review articles for publication is another good way of adding to your academic portfolio. The Cochrane Collaboration produce structured reviews on defined topics and are a great way to start off. They offer courses for beginners and support with things such as literature searches and statistics along the way. Often there are titles registered and not completed, so editors are keen to find enthusiastic new authors to take on these dormant projects. Otherwise, identifying an area of particular interest and checking the title isn't already registered is a great start. A word of caution though; for your first Cochrane review, it is probably best to avoid a title which has a huge evidence base with hundreds of randomized controlled trials to go through. Choose a more modest project for your first with perhaps a dozen or so trials to include. Once you are a seasoned reviewer, then take on those bigger articles!

We would advise exploring some of the collaborative groups both in your region and around the country. There are now such groups in existence for all of the major surgical specialties and these are excellent ways of ticking the 'national audit' box on your CV. The concept of these collaborates is that the trainee network is used to collect data from multiple centres, improving the recruitment to trials and ensuring their generalizability. The national appendectomy audit, which involved 95 centres, is a recent example.² A list of trainee research collaboratives is available from the Ideal Collaboration website.³ Trainee research networks will also participate in collaborative audits. Some provide limited funding and support to help get research ideas off the ground, such as 'Dragon's den' style funding rounds at national meetings.

It is important to understand the UK regulatory framework for research. Good Clinical Practice (GCP) is the international ethical, scientific and practical standard to which all clinical research is conducted. Compliance with GCP provides public assurance that the rights, safety and wellbeing of research participants are protected, and that research data are reliable. If you

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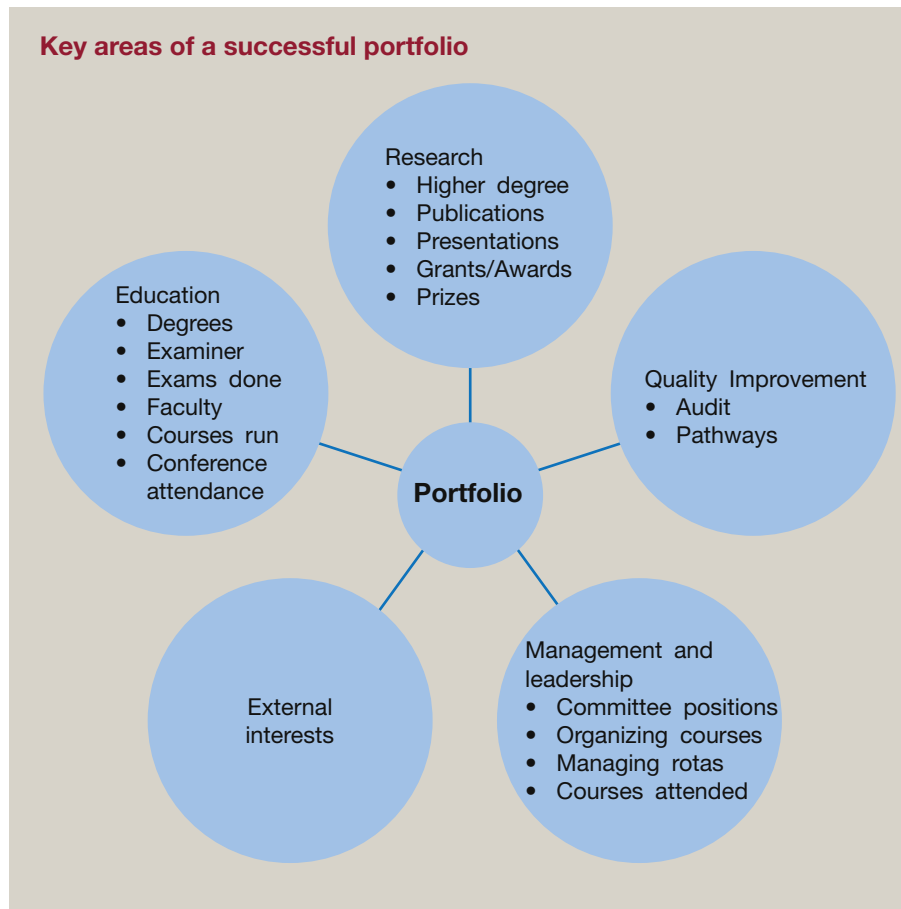


Figure 1

wish to be active in research, you should complete this training (NIHR CRN GCP courses are available free of charge to the NHS). Compliance with GCP training is mandated for trial Principle Investigators (PIs).⁴

Management and leadership

Leadership and management form an integral component of the ISCP Professional Behaviours and Leadership qualities of a surgeon. As you progress towards your certificate of completion of training (CCT) the emphasis on this element of your portfolio becomes even more pertinent so it is good to make a start early. At the most basic level link relevant Workplace Based Assessments (WBA) to demonstrate your ability to: lead safe and effective handover, maintain and update safe patient lists, and your ability to deal with conflict resolution.

Look to take on a role of responsibility, such as 'rota co-ordinator, explore your chosen specialties trainee societies locally and nationally. If your feeling more ambitious some of the national surgical training groups such as The Association of Surgeons in Training (www.asit.org) and even the Royal Colleges offer committee positions, but some will require a full-time commitment. Speciality societies may have a trainee group (i.e. Rouleaux club in vascular surgery, Duke's club in colorectal surgery) and these societies may have representation on their speciality society's council.

Before you rotate to your next placement, contact the head of the department, express a keen interest to enhance your management and leadership skills. There are many roles and positions for trainees that rarely require an onerous commitment. Offer to co-ordinate the trainee's rota or organize and present at their multidisciplinary (MDT) or mortality and morbidity (M&M) meetings, which will likely already be established.

If you have the opportunity, try to attend a root cause analysis (RCA) relating to an unexpected elective death, never event or another serious clinical incident. Many NHS organizations run RCA training. Complete a critical incident form, write feedback to a trainee or member of staff that has demonstrated exceptional practice or behaviour and as ever always reflect upon all of these activities in your portfolio.

Being a good manager includes understanding the structure of the NHS. There are several courses around the country specifically designed for this purpose. Although some are expensive, look carefully as some are still running gratis! Another cheap and innovative way to enhance this element of your portfolio would be to spend time shadowing managers to gain a broader insight into their roles; from the bed manager to the theatre matron, this experience will enhance your appreciation of the various managers and their roles in the NHS and may also help you identify meaningful ways of improving service. The NHS annual report provides an overview of current NHS performance and future strategy.

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