



The hidden financial hurdles of commitment to Ophthalmology in the current UK training system

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To the Editor:

Ophthalmology speciality training in the UK is highly desirable, yet competitive (2018 ratio 4:1) [1]. Approximately 400 candidates engage in a yearly national recruitment process, presenting a portfolio of achievement based on the advice from the Severn Deanery website. The real-world cost of this portfolio is unknown. We are aware of some Scottish

Deaneries that have no allocated study leave budget for Foundation Years (outside of resuscitation and medical simulation courses). As the BMA estimates an average UK medical student debt at graduation is £70,000 [2], we wished to quantify the potential costs of producing a competitive application. We also wished to highlight hidden OST costs.

We estimated costs from 2018/19 candidate information on the national recruitment website, and mandatory training

Table 1 Table detailing likely events to produce a competitive ophthalmology portfolio, the published registration costs and the hidden additional costs of travel (approximately £100) and subsistence and accommodation (approximately £150 per day)

Example of potential achievements detailed on Severn Deanery website for the ophthalmology application portfolio	Expected event cost	Additional hidden costs
Part 1 FRCOphth (written exam; various national centres, 1 day event)	£555	£250 (1 return travel, 1 night B&B)
Refraction certificate (practical exam; held in Birmingham or London, 1 day event)	£660	£250 (1 return travel, 1 night B&B)
Microsurgical skills course 2018 (held at RCOphth London, 3 days event)	£685	£700 (1 return travel, 4 nights B&B)
Ophthalmology undergraduate elective arrangement costs (as charged by University of Glasgow in 2018; 4–6 weeks duration)	£150	–
Regional conference ± presentation in 2018 eg., Scottish Ophthalmological Club (rotating Scottish centres, 1 day)	£130	£50 (1 return regional travel)
National meeting attendance ± presentation in 2018 eg., RCOphth Annual Congress (rotating UK Centres, 4 days)	£173	£700 (1 return travel, 4 nights B&B)
International meeting attendance ± presentation in 2018 eg., European Society of Cataract & Refractive Surgeons annual meeting (rotating EU centres, 4 days)	£50	£700 (1 return travel, 4 nights B&B)
Professional printing of portfolio	£25	–
Potential subtotal costs	£2428	£2650
Total costs	£5078	

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Table 2 Table detailing mandatory events to achieve Ophthalmology training as documented by the Academy of Medical Royal Colleges 2017 report (AoMRC), the published registration costs, and the hidden additional costs of travel (approx. £100) and subsistence and accommodation (approx. £150 per day), accounting for a 42% underestimation of real-world costs

AoMRC mandatory ophthalmology training events	Expected cost as per AoMRC report	Additional hidden costs
Part 1 FRCOphth—(written exam: various national centres, 1 day)	£555	£100 (1 return travel)
Refraction certificate—(Birmingham or London, 1 day)	£660	£250 (1 return travel, 1 night B&B accommodation)
Microsurgical skills course (London, 3 days)	£685	£700 (1 return travel, 4 nights B&B accommodation)
Part 2 FRCOphth written—(national centres, 1 day)	£405	£250 (1 return travel, 1 night B&B accommodation)
Part 2 FRCOphth (Oral exam, Cardiff, Wolverhampton or Singapore 1 day)	£635	£250 (1 return travel, 1 night B&B accommodation)
Royal College of Ophthalmology annual membership fees ST1–ST7	£2148	–
Subtotal costs	£5088	£2150
Likely total costs	£7238	

costs from RCOphth curriculum [3] (see Supplementary Figure).

Table 1 calculates the various expenses associated with suggested portfolio achievements, approximately £2428. Table 2 shows breakdown of mandatory OST training costs (£5088). Neither of these figures include real-world costs of travel (approximately £100), accommodation and subsistence (estimated £150 per night), which could double estimated figures.

Significant financial hurdles already exist in a climate of growing graduate debt, particularly affecting students from lower socio-economic backgrounds, and those with dependants [2]. Additional ‘hidden costs’ of training were highlighted as causing low morale by the recent ‘Enhancing junior doctor’s working lives’ Report and this was the inspiration for this study [4]. We raise concerns that the AoMRC report has underestimated financial costs of OST by at least 40%, and does not include Part 1 and 2 revision courses (like Oculus). Such inaccurate calculations undervaluing the true costs of training jeopardises realistic planning of local study budgets by regional deaneries, placing financial pressure on individuals and potentially limiting access to educational opportunities. These costs are further influenced by geographical location (travel/accommodation), which may ultimately lead to inequality of opportunities. Recent surgical publications suggest trainees achieve their educational requirements at substantial personal expenditure [5].

We wish to encourage a realistic approach to study budget levels, hoping that the publication of our estimates

will start dialogue regarding training requirements and appropriate funding for junior doctors.

Compliance with ethical standards

Conflict of interest The authors declare that they have no conflict of interest.

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