

## Immunology as a specialty

Immunology encompasses clinical and laboratory activity dealing with the study, diagnosis and management of patients with diseases resulting from disordered immunological mechanisms, and conditions in which immunological manipulations form an important part of therapy. In the UK Immunologists provide combined clinical and laboratory services for patients with immunodeficiency, autoimmune disease, systemic vasculitis and allergy.

The clinical work of Immunologists is largely out-patient based and involves primary immunodeficiency, allergy, autoimmune rheumatic disease and systemic vasculitis (jointly with Rheumatologists), joint paediatric clinics for children with immunodeficiency and allergy and immunoglobulin infusion clinics for patients with antibody deficiency. On the laboratory front, Immunologists are responsible for directing diagnostic immunology services and perform a wide range of duties including clinical liaison, interpretation and validation of results, quality assurance and assay development.

Immunologists encounter a variety of clinical problems and have the opportunity to solve difficult diagnostic problems in patients with undefined immunodeficiencies or complex multi-system disease and the specialty is closely linked to cutting edge science and new immunomodulatory therapies.

Entry into Immunology training is possible following successful completion of both a foundation programme and a core training programme. There are three core training programmes for Immunology training:

Core Medical Training (CMT)

Acute Care Common Stem - Acute Medicine (ACCS-AM)

Paediatric level 1

## The Immunology Curriculum

The curriculum for each specialty defines the process of training and the competencies needed for the award of a certificate of completion of training (CCT). The curriculum includes the assessment system for measuring trainees' progress comprising workplace based assessment and knowledge based assessment. Please refer to the Royal College of Pathologists' website for information about FRCPATH including guidance for candidates.

The full immunology curriculum can be viewed by visiting  
<http://www.jrcptb.org.uk/specialties/immunology>

The 2015 curriculum applies for all doctors starting in training from August 2015 and those transferring to the new curriculum. Please see the implementation of the new curriculum guidance on <http://www.jrcptb.org.uk/specialties/immunology> for further information.

NB: Information has been extracted from the Joint Royal College of Physicians Training Board. (JRCPTB) website.

Immunology as a medical specialty deals with the clinical and laboratory care of patients with diseases due to disordered immunity. Immune-mediated disease covers a wide spectrum of disorders, ranging from failure of the immune system (immunodeficiency) to disorders characterised by heightened immune reactivity (allergy and autoimmunity). In practice, clinical immunologists take a lead role in the investigation and management of patients with immunodeficiency and severe allergy whilst working collaboratively with relevant organ-based specialists to provide optimal care for patients with systemic autoimmune disease and vasculitis. Alongside the provision of a clinical service to the aforementioned group of patients, immunologists direct a comprehensive diagnostic laboratory service which underpins the diagnosis and monitoring of this broad range of immunological diseases.

The purpose of the immunology curriculum is to define the process of training and the competencies needed to produce a consultant immunologist capable of independent practice in the United Kingdom. The award of a certificate of completion of training in the specialty will denote that a trainee is equipped with the requisite specialised scientific knowledge, clinical and laboratory skills required to diagnose, treat and where relevant, prevent diseases characterised by immunodeficiency, autoimmunity and allergy coupled with the ability to direct a diagnostic immunology laboratory service. The UK clinical practice of immunology is fully consistent with the World Health Organisation's (WHO) definition of Immunology as a specialty, encompassing clinical and laboratory activity dealing with the study, diagnosis and management of patients with diseases resulting from disordered immunological mechanisms, and conditions in which immunological manipulations form an important part of therapy (Lambert PH et al. Clinical Immunology: -guidelines for its organisation, training and certification: relationships with allergology and other medical disciplines - a WHO/IUIS/IAACI report. Clin Exp Immunol 1993;93:484-91). In practice, this translates in to Immunologists providing combined clinical and laboratory services for patients with immunodeficiency, autoimmune disease, vasculitis and allergy.

The curriculum has been designed to build upon the knowledge and core competencies in general internal medicine that trainees will bring with them as they enter immunology training. Throughout specialty training, the curriculum provides a structured framework to enable incremental learning and reflection across the whole breadth of clinical and laboratory immunology.

### Training Pathway

Specialty training in Immunology consists of core and higher speciality training. Core training provides physicians with: the ability to investigate, treat and diagnose patients with acute and chronic medical symptoms; and with high quality review skills for managing inpatients and outpatients. Higher speciality training then builds on these core skills to develop the specific competencies required to practise independently as a consultant immunologist. Core training may be completed in Core Medical Training (CMT), Acute Care Common Stem Medicine – Acute Medicine (ACCS-AM) or Paediatric Level 1 training. Completion of core training will be evidenced by satisfactory:

Foundation competences

Completion of CMT or ACCS-AM (which may include Broad Based Training) or Paediatric level 1 training

**Immunology Trainee Dr Philip Bright says;**

What influenced you/made you decide to choose Immunology?

A wide spectrum of medicine in which to gain experience, and the chance to do HIV medicine without Genito-Urinary Medicine.

What was your first experience in your specialty like? (Did you hit it off immediately?)

Yes, I got to do an HIV clinic, a primary immunodeficiency clinic and covered the care of some complex immune deficient patients.

Did you always want to train in this specialty? When did you decide?

No, I wanted to do infectious diseases but realised the difficulty of doing this as a career. I decided halfway through my ST2 year, when it became clear that Infectious Diseases was not a viable career opportunity.

Do you work closely with other specialties?

Yes. For example I am currently doing some renal (having also sat in on clinics in Rheumatology / Paediatric Immunology / Tuberculosis / Bronchiectasis / Allergy). Immunology is partly a laboratory Speciality, meaning that I frequently am called upon to give advice on the interpretation of laboratory results to specialists.

In what ways is your job satisfying?

I am given the time and involvement to answer fairly complex questions that have direct patient impact. This may be a direct product of my own clinic (e.g. patient with granulomas as a consequence of immune deficiency – what do we do about this?), or a question from outside (e.g. joint pain, HIV positive with a positive test for lupus – what does the positive lupus test mean?). I like the chance to read the literature on a topic and then provide a reasoned answer in evidence free / or evidence poor areas of medicine. I like being knowledgeable about medicine and if I don't know something I am encouraged to look it up.

What are your typical working hours? Are they sociable/family-friendly hours?

Generally we do not do on calls. I work 9-5.

How much annual leave do you get?

32 days.

Are there opportunities for travel?

Yes. Attended/Attending conferences in Nottingham, Dublin and Florence this year.

Are there opportunities for research?

Yes. I did an MSc in Medical Immunology with a research project. PhD's are encouraged, but not necessary. There is a lot of minor research involved in the day-to-day job

The UK's national professional academic society which represents allergy & immunology professionals is called the British Society for Allergy and Clinical Immunology (BSACI)