

Surgical Portfolio for Core Surgical Interview

Monday 27th July 2020

18:30

Q&A (questions have been anonymised)

1. Would a student organised conference count for a poster prize?

This is a 2-part answer. Firstly, it would unfortunately not count under the criteria stipulated by the CST recruitment office regarding poster presentation at a national or international conference. However, point number 2 would be that it is important to show your academic work anywhere you can. It builds CV fodder and helps your work become recognised by other like-minded people. So do not be discouraged by this and please do submit your abstract to student conferences. But just be mindful that it needs to be a official national/international conference hosted by a college or specialty society (e.g. Association of Surgeons in Training (ASiT) annual conference, or Vascular Society annual scientific meeting) to get the points in a CST portfolio.

2. Would an audit concerning a different specialty (e.g. radiology) count towards a surgical portfolio? Or does it have to be a surgery related audit?

This would absolutely count as an audit at CST interview stage. It is certainly ideal to have surgically related audits, but at CST stage it is important to be able to demonstrate you can design, lead and complete 2 cycles of an audit and present the re-audited findings at a national/international meeting. So, my tip would be to focus on high quality audits (i.e. Can they be re-audited? Will the findings be interesting enough for other people to read on a poster at a conference?), try and keep them as close as possible to an innate area of interest for you, and get them re-audited and presented!

3. I presented a poster at a Virtual International Medical Conference during COVID- I have a certificate to confirm. Would this count as an international medical meeting?

Yes, absolutely. However, there is one annoying caveat. Just for CST (as opposed to being across the board for all Core Training interviews), the recruitment office stipulate that an international conference is a conference which is held abroad in a different country. This was certainly the case for my interview and so I would carefully scrutinised the “terms and conditions” of each set of points in this section relating to what constitutes an international conference.

4. Would collaborative authorship count for anything?

Unfortunately, nothing much aside from commitment to specialty. So please do include it in your portfolio, I certainly did, and it won't detract from any points.

5. Do publications have to be related to medicine or can they be from previous science degrees?

As long as they have a PubMed ID, absolutely, yes.

6. Would be a university representative for a national society be classed as leadership experience?

Yes, it would indeed. It may not quite hit the jackpot of a full 8/8 marks on the leadership section if it's not a significant executive committee role such as chair/vice-chair etc. However, that's not to say that if you can demonstrate a positive impact from your role as a representative and have the evidence and stories to support this then you couldn't get high or full marks. One thing I would say is that I would refrain from over-scoring yourself on this section in the portfolio self-assessment part of the Oriel application, if this is the limit of your leadership experience – it's better to let them upscore you on the day. Otherwise I would advise work up to an executive committee role or build on the experience locally, e.g. organise a teaching course or make a society to get at least 6 points.

7. Which committee positions would count towards leadership? (ex social media manager, reps, treasurer etc)

As annoying and clichéd as it sounds, all positions count towards leadership if you can demonstrate leadership. For example, as a treasurer, you would have taken stock of all the accounts, ensured the society was solvent, and provided support to the chair as well as the rest of the committee members. This sounds stronger than simply stating you were treasurer for a society. It shows what you did with the responsibility from a leadership and management point of view. However, it is important to aim for higher roles in the society, such as chair, vice chair or an events/workshop/conference lead. These roles can give you more obvious leadership "stories" as they are higher yield leadership positions, i.e. they provide more opportunities to lead.

8. For eLogbook- 1. Was this something you started as a junior doctor or medical student? 2. Do you need a doctor/surgeon to sign off on each skill/operation you observe?

I created my logbook in pre-clinical years of medical school. However, the only time that is too late to start is when you don't start. So, create an eLogbook now and start filling it in with any theatre exposure you obtain, even if it's just observation of a surgery. And no, you do not need the consultant surgeon who performed the operation to sign your logbook. Ideally this should be the case, but it is very rarely done. You can instead obtain a signature from your foundation year 2 educational supervisor on the print out version of the logbook and show this at your interview in your portfolio.

9. What would be the minimum approximate total score you need to get in?

The answer to this is two-fold, in the sense that you first need to score well enough on the portfolio self-assessment section of the Oriel application to be accepted for interview and then score well enough in the interview as a whole to obtain a training number. There is no minimum score for the portfolio station or any other station as it overall depends of the calibre of interviewees on the day and how you rank relative to other interviewees. However, I imagine if you are primarily scoring 0-2 points per section of the portfolio self-assessment we went through during the lecture even before application, then your portfolio probably needs a bit more work prior to application.

10. For the leadership station, what was the 3-minute presentation on?

The recruitment office releases the title of the presentation once you gain an invitation to interview. But usually this is something along the lines of “describe your experience of leadership”. Mine was:

“Reflect on your experience of leadership when working as a team member and how this will be useful as a core trainee”.

11. How much time do you have to do surgical project/audit as a f1 or f2?

This entirely depends on how busy your rotation is. For example, during a GP rotation, usually in F2, you would have more time than a General Surgery rotation either in F1 or F2 where you'll be doing on-calls and nights as well as a very busy day job. There isn't any allocated time to undertake projects unless you are on an academic programme. So, you either make time yourself or apply for the Academic Foundation Programme (AFP) to obtain dedicated time to complete academic work. However, this entails a lot of work in itself and so I would only apply if you have the drive for academia (the interview process usually determines this for you by selecting only those who have a sound knowledge of and work ethic for academia).

12. Do postgrad degrees e.g MSc after medicine count towards the degree section?

Yes, they do, you achieve 2 points for this.

13. Does being part of surgical committee and being part of the organising committee count as 'attending the conference'?

I would say yes, absolutely. If you were there, you were there. If you weren't physically there but were involved in the organisation, see if one of your committee colleagues is kind enough to send you a certificate of attendance. However, the main thing here is that you helped organise the conference and this counts more than if you had simply attended said conference.

14. Do positions in junior doctor committees count towards leadership?

Yes of course. Again, if you can demonstrate a positive impact from those positions, it can count.

15. Is organising a teaching programme for sixth-formers count?

Unfortunately, it does not; it must be experience you have derived during your primary medical qualification. If it shows some commitment to surgery, then I would include it. Otherwise I would focus on obtaining the teaching experience at medical school.

16. Wasn't sure what I wanted to do when I was in med school. In FY1 now and keen on surgery, is it too late to start?

No, absolutely not. In all honesty, a lot of the portfolio work happens between invitation to interview and the interview itself! But nonetheless, there is a lot you can utilise from other non-surgical experience you may have gained, such as previous audits, teaching etc. The section you may need to acutely bulk up is commitment to surgery, but just look at the purple box to see which things you can tick off to rack up the most points.

17. Does an excellent award for a SSU count as a prize?

I think strictly speaking, if this is not an prize relating to your undergrad academic work, then unfortunately it would not count as a prize. I would include it as a merit to yourself in another section however, or even put it in the prizes section. There's always a chance it may get picked up and scored.

18. Are digitally signed letters acceptable or do signed letters/certificates need ink on paper?

Electronically signed is fine but this constitutes a signature pasted onto the document you need signing off. Naturally, a digital signature comprising a typed name is easy to falsify and so I would encourage you to seek authentic signatures as much as you can. Most people now have their signature saved as a JPEG or something and so can paste this onto a document.