

# The Norwich Academic Specialist Foundation Programme

---

## Foreword

We are delighted that you are considering applying for the Norwich Academic Specialist Foundation Programme (Academic SFP). Our Academic SFP has been running since 2007 and for many of our previous trainees has been a springboard for future success in their clinical academic careers. The Norwich Academic SFP provides a range of exciting opportunities for early clinical academics with excellent links with researchers based across the Norwich Research Park (NRP).

An Academic SFP post is a prestigious role and is the first stage in the Integrated Academic Training (IAT) pathway. The Norwich Academic SFP will provide you with a valuable opportunity to gain hands-on research experience, develop research skills, collaborate and receive mentorship among a thriving community of researchers, as part of our mentorship programme. In addition to supporting your development as a clinical academic, we are very keen to see our Academic SFP trainees secure significant outputs leading from their research, including peer-reviewed publications, and presentations at a national or international level. We strongly encourage our Academic SFPs to make the very most of the two-year programme and consider how best to prepare for the next stage in their career, such as applications for Academic Clinical Fellowship (ACF) posts. We were both Academic SFP post-holders in Norwich over a decade ago and we look forward to helping you develop your clinical academic career and explore what we believe is a very rewarding career path.



Dr Max Yates  
Co-Director, Academic SFP Norwich  
Clinical Associate Professor  
Honorary Consultant Rheumatologist  
[M.Yates@uea.ac.uk](mailto:M.Yates@uea.ac.uk)



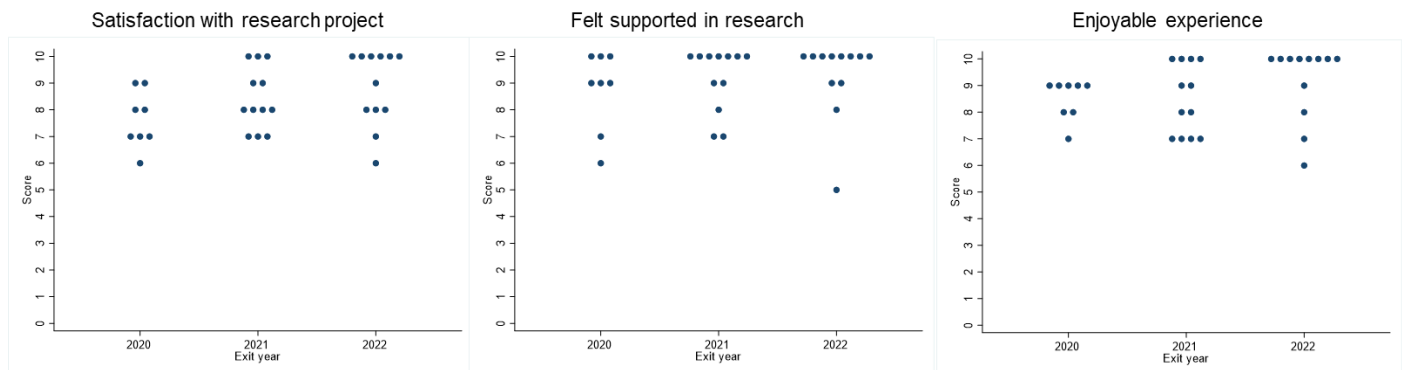
Dr Leo Alexandre  
Co-Director, Academic SFP Norwich  
Clinical Associate Professor  
Honorary Consultant Gastroenterologist  
[Leo.Alexandre@uea.ac.uk](mailto:Leo.Alexandre@uea.ac.uk)

# Why should you apply here!

The Norwich Academic Specialist Foundation Programme (Academic SFP) is part of Health Education East of England's East Anglian Foundation School. It is a well-established and successful programme which, has seen over a hundred and fifty doctors in training join the Programme. Please see website links for more information on the [East of England Foundation School](#), the [University of East Anglia](#) (UEA) and [Norfolk and Norwich University Hospital Foundation Trust](#) (NNUH). The Programme is well supported between the UEA and NNUH with Foundation Year 2 doctors based in either the Norwich Medical School or other schools across the UEA campus or the wider Norwich Research Park (NRP). This affords access to outstanding researchers and leading clinicians in their field. We encourage applicants to look our [Research Directory](#) to identify a potential supervisor and project / project theme in advance.



In the exit questionnaire from cohorts completing since 2019 have stated that they would recommend the Norwich programme to a colleague or friend. Feedback indicates that our trainees have been highly satisfied with their research projects, felt supported in their research and had an enjoyable experience. Five out of 12 trainees in 2021-2023 cohort have been appointed as academic clinical fellows.



The Norwich Research Park (NRP) provides an ideal location for the delivery of integrated academic training (IAT) given the extremely close links that exist between academic clinicians based at the Norfolk & Norwich University Hospital, and researchers based at Norwich Medical School and UEA more widely. Additional partners on the NRP comprise the Quadram Institute (QI), the John Innes Centre for plant research (JIC), the Earlham Institute (EI) and the Sainsbury Centre. The different institutions provide a unique opportunity for health related research. The NRP is one of the major areas of investment by the Biological and Basic Science Research Council and has in recent years received significant central government funding. This is best exemplified in the current creation of the Quadram Institute which has incorporated the previous Institute of Food Research together with the main NNUH endoscopy unit and the joint QI, NNUH and UEA Clinical Research Facility. BBSRC has invested more than £60m in this project which has a total value in excess of £85m and represents one of the biggest capital projects in British biomedical research of this decade.



Today we have over 200 postgraduate students registered across research degrees in health and some 140 competitively funded, live medical research projects providing a stimulating research environment that includes practitioners and academics right across health and biomedical professions; as a postgraduate, you will find that it's right at the forefront of biomedical and health research.



*The Quadram Institute*

A place on the Academic SFP offers the opportunity to spend protected time on academic research. At Norwich, this will be one four-month rotation during FY2. The remaining five rotations will be clinical attachments, during which clinical competencies must be met. Previous post holders have conducted basic research, epidemiological analysis, clinical trials, and systematic reviews across a number of disciplines.

During their academic block, Foundation Year doctors have no clinical commitments but will be required to keep up with their training portfolios. This may include attendance at a clinic or a documented case discussion and will be outlined by your Department when you join it. As a Foundation Doctor you are still required to complete SLEs, write reflective reports and complete narrative summaries.

There are 12 posts available to start in August. The following host specialities represent the core placements that support our programme: public health/ primary care, respiratory/ older people's medicine, endocrinology and gastroenterology. However, we are keen to offer academic training that is tailored to individual's career aspirations and are very happy to support other academic specialties outside those identified above. Academic rotations have previously been made available in cardiology, dermatology, rheumatology, haematology, ophthalmology, general surgery, obstetrics and gynaecology, orthopaedics and ENT in recent years. If you are keen to undertake a project in another speciality and have a supervisor in mind we would be delighted to help support and guide you with the aim of making this possible.

The Norwich Academic SFP offers dedicated research training sessions held on a monthly basis. Topics covered include basic statistical principles, study design, epidemiology, clinical trials, ethics, scientific writing, critical appraisal and peer review. The quality of these sessions has been commended by previous Academic SFP trainees. Each Academic SFP post holder will be offered a mentor at the Academic Clinical Fellow / PhD or Clinical Lecturer grade to help guide their future careers along the integrated academic training pathway. Our previous academic trainees have found this very helpful and rated their mentors very highly.

## Our programme aims are:

- Becoming well-versed in different research techniques, from basic science to epidemiology to clinical trials, means you will be a better doctor with a better grasp of how evidence for best practice is derived and how to interpret different types of evidence.
- The skills required in designing, developing and carrying out a research project are transferable to any field of medicine and will allow you to demonstrate effective organisational, leadership and team working abilities.
- Applying for ethical approval, presenting at conferences and publishing your research allows you to develop the confidence to critically analyse your work and defend it during peer review, which is central to modern science and is a crucial skill for any NHS consultant.



### Role of the Academic Supervisor

The academic supervisor is responsible for overseeing a specified foundation doctor's academic work and providing constructive feedback during an academic or related placement. You will agree the academic learning objectives and how they will be achieved at the beginning of the academic placement or programme, these being aligned to the Academic Compendium (available via the UK Foundation Programme webpages: <https://foundationprogramme.nhs.uk/programmes/2-year-foundation-programme/academic-training/>). The academic supervisor is responsible for the assessment of academic progress and confirming progress has been satisfactory and achievements identified within the academic component of the programme. There will be an Academic Report that we expect you to upload to your ePortfolio.

# The Norwich Academic Training Office

The Norwich Academic Training Office (NATO) provides support for academic training across the range of health professions.

The Office is located within the Research and Innovation Services support team of the Faculty of Medicine and Health Sciences. Contact can be made by emailing [Norwich.ato@uea.ac.uk](mailto:Norwich.ato@uea.ac.uk) The current director of NATO is Professor Vassilios Vassiliou, Clinical Professor of Cardiac Medicine.

The office facilitates the liaison between the NHS Trusts, Deanery, NIHR and UEA on the allocation and award of Academic Clinical Fellows and Clinical Lectureships.

The NATO Board meets 4 times a year to discuss ways to improve and expand the IAT programme delivered across the Norwich Research Park. Academic trainees are represented by a Trainees Representative on this board. This is currently Dr Pratyasha Saha, NIHR Academic Clinical Fellow in Rheumatology, who also Chairs the Norwich Clinical Academics in Training (NCAT) group.

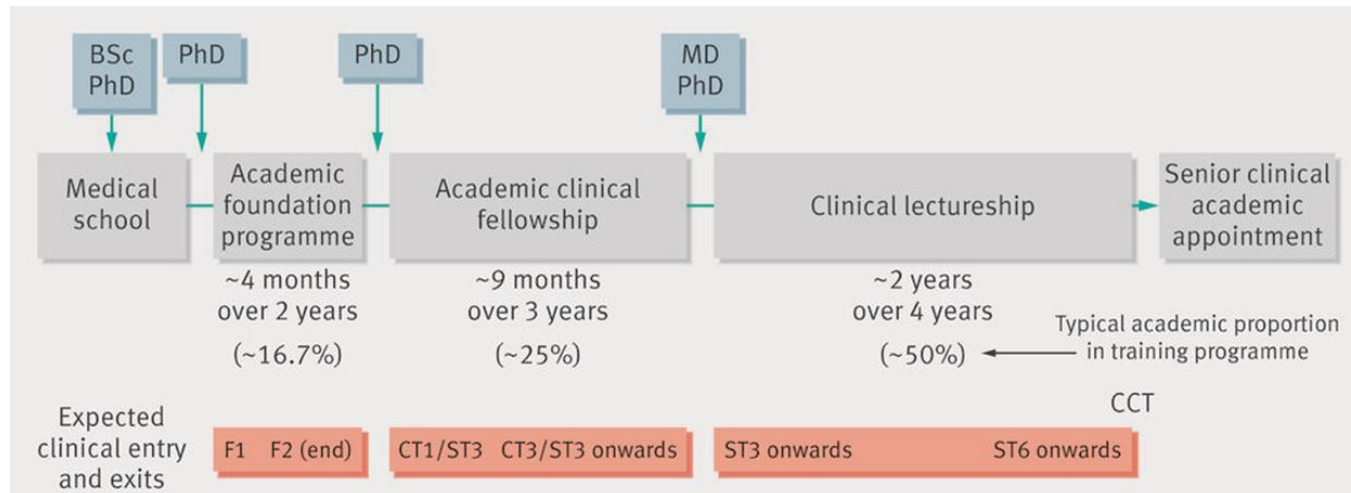
NATO web site can be found at <https://www.uea.ac.uk/medicine/academic-clinical-training>



FACULTIES AND SCHOOLS	FURTHER INFORMATION		
Medicine and Health Sciences	The principle of closely integrating academic training into existing clinical training pathways is at the heart of the various opportunities for academic training here in Norwich. Click on the menu to the left to find out more.		
Norwich Medical School			
Academic Clinical Training	<b>WHAT IS IAT?</b>	<b>WHAT IS NATO?</b>	<b>WHY DO IAT IN NORWICH?</b>
Integrated Academic Training (Research - F2, ACF, CL)			
What is IAT?			
What is the NIHR?			

# A Thriving Academic Community

The integrated academic training pathway is well established in Norwich, from Academic SFP positions, Academic Clinical Fellowships, Doctoral Fellowships through to Clinical Lectureships. We are very keen to see the community of IAT trainees grow, ensuring a pipeline of future clinical research leaders.



*The integrated academic training pathway. Source: BMJ 2015;350:h786*

It is important for our Academic SFPs to feel connected to their peers and our more senior IAT trainees. Some of the most fruitful collaborations for our Academic SFPs have arisen from these interactions. It is also an excellent opportunity for informal and formal mentorship. We feel it is important to support this sense of community and we highly recommend you get involved in the social activities organised by our NCAT chair, Dr Pratyasha Saha. We also strongly encourage you to get involved in journal club, which is held weekly, and involves colleagues (both trainees, academic clinicians and NHS consultants alike) from both NNUH and Norwich Medical School. It is an excellent opportunity to stay abreast of the latest high-impact clinical research, develop critical appraisal skills and meet peers across disciplines. NATO host an excellent annual research awards event to showcase the work of our doctors on IAT pathways.

# A Successful Academic SFP trainee

## Dheeraj Sethi (Academic Clinical Fellow)

### **Why did you want to do the Norwich academic programme in the first place?**

The Academic Specialist Foundation Program represents the first step of the Integrated Academic Training (IAT) pathway. Knowing I wanted to pursue a career in academic medicine, I felt starting off on this route would give me the best opportunity to be successful in a competitive field. The Academic SFP would equip me with the right skills and experiences necessary for the next step of the IAT pathway. The opportunity to have dedicated research time, during my FY2 year meant I could lay the groundwork for a successful research block, and hit the ground running. I felt the Norwich Academic SFP would be of particular value, as it allowed me to continue collaborating with colleagues based across the Norwich Research Park, in a supportive and well-established environment.

### **What experience did you gain during your academic programme?**

The Norwich Academic SFP offers a robust teaching curriculum that I was able to make the most of. The opportunity to have protected time to spend on a research project meant that I was able to focus on a lab-based project that would not have been feasible outside of the Academic SFP as a Foundation Trainee. I was also able to continue developing academic skills, such as writing research proposals, study protocols and gaining ethical approval. I was also able to continue work on a meta-analysis and another manuscript that had been in progress.

I received reliable support from approachable academic supervisors who were able to offer advice specific to my project and more generally, for ACF applications and career advice.

### **What academic achievements did you complete in your academic programme?**

During the Academic Block, I was able to apply for and receive ethical approval to start a study that is currently underway. Preliminary work on this project was completed during the 4-month rotation, and will form the basis of a subsequent MRes project over the next year.

I have submitted one paper to a peer-reviewed journal, where it is under review. Another body of work had been published over this rotation.

As the NNUH has been actively contributing to the Recovery Trial, there was an opportunity for me to gain further experience during this research block under the Associate-PI scheme.



**Would you recommend the academic programme to medical students considering a research career?**

I would strongly recommend the Academic SFP to anyone considering a career in academic medicine. It allows begin your career on the right path to pursue the IAT Pathway, and equips you for a subsequent Academic Clinical Fellowship application.

**What are your top tips for the Academic SFP?**

I would advise getting in touch with your supervisor early to design a project of mutual interest. If you lay the groundwork down early, you can use your limited time more effectively. Also, the Norwich Academic Training Office can help put you in touch with other researchers that are approachable and amenable to collaboration.

**What is your next job and has the Academic SFP helped you in your career progression?**

I will be continuing my academic and professional development as an Academic Clinical Fellow, in Respiratory Medicine at the Norfolk and Norwich University Hospital. I believe the Academic SFP played a crucial role in my successful application and am grateful for the experience and training received.