

RCSLT Student to NQP Learning Day 2024 - FAQ

- 1. If you're wanting to start a job as an NQP in August 2025. When is the most appropriate time to send an application for the post?**
 - a. Timing varies by organisation: Many organisations may start looking after Christmas. However, be mindful that if a post starts in summer, it might be too early for some employers to make decisions.
 - b. Make contact first: It's worth calling the organisation before applying to confirm whether it's too early for the specific post.
 - c. Post-specific considerations: Jobs that are more challenging to fill might accept applications early, while time-sensitive posts may require a closer start date. It doesn't hurt to check with the employer.

- 2. If you start out in one clinical area, for example, paediatrics. How easy is it to transfer to a different specialism for example, adults post-stroke?**
 - a. Transferable skills: Demonstrate how your skills are applicable across specialisms.
 - b. Highlight relevant experiences: Even if most placements were in one area, focus on how the assessments and therapies you've practiced are transferable.
 - c. Flexibility and roles: Some practitioners move from paediatrics to adults (or vice versa) but may need to accept a lower grade initially. Band 5/6 transition roles may provide opportunities for skill development in a new area.
 - d. Networking: Communicate your interest to local organisations and inquire about pathways to transition into a different specialism.

- 3. How independently are you expected to practice in your first few weeks on the job? Do you have any tips on transitioning from a student on placement to an NQP?**
 - a. Initial support: You're not expected to work independently from the start, many new practitioners start by doubling up with team members during joint assessments etc and learning from them.
 - b. Gradual independence: Advocate for yourself when ready to take on tasks independently. Supervisors may wait for you to let them know when you're ready rather than pushing too soon. Plan your transition with your supervisor. For example, suggest shadowing for a set number of weeks and then gradually move to independent work with support as needed.
 - c. Comfort zone: Push yourself slightly out of your comfort zone to grow. For example, start independently with simpler tasks or familiar client groups before tackling more complex work.
 - d. Practical tips: Engage in peer supervision and share tips with colleagues to gain insights from their experiences. Regularly check expectations with your

supervisor to ensure you're on track and comfortable with the pace of your development.

4. I'm worried I'm not at university and not on placements in the area I want to work. Any advice on networking with services in the area I want to work in?

- a. Join Clinical Excellence Networks (CENs): These networks are a valuable way to connect with professionals in your area of interest and give you the opportunity to familiarise yourself with names and services. You can find out more about CENs and how to join here: [CENs \(Clinical Excellence Networks\) | RCSLT](#)
- b. Using LinkedIn: Reach out to professionals and organisations via LinkedIn. Introduce yourself and ask about opportunities to observe or volunteer. Don't hesitate to ask about spending time with their team or organisation, this is a great way to make yourself known and visible.

5. How long should you wait until applying for a band 6 role?

- a. Placement experience: Extensive placement experience in a specific area can fast-track your readiness for Band 6 roles.
- b. Timing and opportunity: Career progression can depend on vacancies and team changes.
- c. Take a chance: Applying early can be a learning opportunity. Even if you're unsure about your readiness, the interview process will make that apparent.

6. What sort of questions would be appropriate to ask in a pre-interview phone call?

- a. Introduce yourself: Express your interest in the role and why you applied.
- b. Service details: Ask about the client group, caseload, and the services provided. Learn about the daily responsibilities and settings to better prepare you for the role.
- c. Team structure: Inquire about team size, supervision arrangements, and development opportunities.

7. Will most jobs wait for you i.e. if you want to take a month off after graduating for a holiday or a break?

- a. Negotiable start dates: Recruitment policies often allow for flexibility, for example, a planned 3–4 week holiday is unlikely to cause issues. However, requesting a start delay of six months may not be feasible due to clinical or logistical needs.
- b. Be transparent: Clearly communicate your plans during the application or interview process. Employers often appreciate honesty and are willing to accommodate reasonable requests if they believe you are the best candidate.

8. What's a mistake you perhaps made which would have been useful to know about beforehand?

- a. Administrative errors: Sending referrals to the wrong teams or areas can happen especially in regions with complicated processes. For example, understanding which postcodes are covered by which teams are critical to avoid delays.
- b. Clinical judgment challenges: Dysphagia assessments, for instance, are subjective and can lead to errors. Mistakes in bedside assessments are common learning moments.
- c. Reflection and accountability: Mistakes are a natural part of learning. Always inform your manager immediately, reflect on what happened, and identify changes to avoid similar errors in the future. Supervisors value your ability to recognise and learn from mistakes and use them as a learning opportunity.

9. How soon can you specialise in something?

- a. Pathway positions: The NHS offers certain pathway positions which you can apply to. If unsuccessful, similar roles in related fields may provide relevant experience.
- b. Conversations with managers: Discuss your interests with your manager. They may help you find opportunities or develop a pathway to build experience in your chosen area.
- c. Timeframe: It's recommended to gain broad and general experience before specialising too quickly, as this helps you become a more well-rounded therapist. For example, in the adult field, working in both acute and community settings is beneficial. Experience in acute care enhances your skills in community practice, and vice versa, because understanding the whole pathway significantly informs and improves your practice.

10. Is it easy as an NQP band 5 to request part-time positions?

- a. NHS: Flexible working policies in the NHS have improved significantly, with many trusts open to accommodating part-time schedules if it aligns with service needs.
- b. Service considerations: If a job is advertised as full-time, there's no harm in asking if they'd consider a part-time arrangement. Employers will also need to take into consideration that they would need two part-time therapists to cover one full-time role, which could create logistical challenges.
- c. Progression: If requesting a part-time role, take into account that working fewer clinical hours may affect how quickly you progress with your competencies and ability to work independently.

11. What are the biggest pros and cons of working in a rotational post as an NQP?

- a. Pros: Rotational posts provide experience in lots of different areas which helps you develop a well-rounded skill set. Band 5 rotations often include peer support, which can help ease transitions.

- b. Cons: The first rotation can feel overwhelming, but sharing experiences with peers in similar roles helps. Frequent transitions can feel like starting a new job repeatedly and shorter placements may not allow you to fully immerse yourself in one area before moving on.

12. When at university we have to do extensive planning for sessions. How do you plan when you have a job and you're qualified? Is it similar or do you simplify it?

- a. Fast paced: Unlike university, where planning is detailed and not time critical, planning as an NQP is more fast paced and streamlined. While daunting at first, the thought processes for planning become easier and faster with practice.
- b. Preparation: Ahead of seeing a patient it's good to take approximately 30 minutes to review referrals, advice sheets, resources and decide on assessments or questions to ask. Workplace planning will often require adaptability. For example, if a session involves a child who is non-speaking and autistic, assessments may shift from formal to observational methods instead of pre-planned tools.

13. Is it appropriate to ask in an interview if there will be one or more NQPs working alongside you in the role that you're applying for?

- a. Yes: Ask about the support system, including other NQPs, as peer support is invaluable for brainstorming and shared learning. Even if the service is small, inquire about NQPs in related roles (e.g OT or physio), there may not always be another SLT but there are other healthcare professionals or education professionals you can link with.