Ireland (NI) have a well-established peer-mentoring programme which continues to provide valuable support to trainees. Feedback from medical students in NI suggested that those keen to pursue a career in Paediatrics would benefit from a trainee mentoring programme. As #choosepaediatrics is a significant RCPCH strategic priority to encourage recruitment to our specialty we set out to provide medical students with the opportunity to be ‘mentored’ by a trainee paediatrician. It was our hope that the mentoring programme would help give medical students an idea of our specialty, how to apply, opportunities available and an overview of what life is like as a paediatrician.

**Methods** The NI Paediatric Mentoring programme collaborated with the Child Health Society from Queen’s University Belfast. This society, run by enthusiastic medical students keen to pursue a career in paediatrics, was pivotal in the recruitment of medical students. Following an initial scoping exercise with medical students, a pilot mentoring programme was founded with paediatric trainees from all levels of training and final year medical students. The programme was advertised via email and social media. Mentees had the opportunity to review an anonymous profile of each mentor and rank their preferred mentor. The profile detailed special interests, work patterns, location and a brief summary paragraph about the mentor. Following the matching process contact details were provided and the mentee was encouraged to initiate the mentoring journey.

**Results** This small, pilot student mentoring programme had five successful mentoring pairings. It was found to be hugely beneficial for both the mentee and their mentor. All student mentees rated the programme as ‘quite’ or ‘very’ beneficial with 80% of mentees suggesting that they would ‘recommend to a friend.’ Common topics of conversation included careers advice, exams, the application process, life as a foundation year doctor and work life balance. Students commented that it was ‘extremely useful to hear what paediatric training is like in terms of work life balance.’

**Conclusion** Paediatrics is in the midst of a recruitment and retention crisis. We need to engage with medical students to help promote our specialty otherwise (as noted by the RCPCH) these issues will threaten the safety of children’s health. This was a small project which has been very well received by all participants. Following this feedback, the programme is to be expanded and offered to all medical students within their clinical years. We have formally partnered with our training deanery to utilise the online ‘Mentornet’ software platform and to facilitate mentoring training for all interested paediatric trainees in Northern Ireland. We hope this will mutually benefit our trainees whilst encouraging the future paediatricians of Northern Ireland.

### Abstract 556

**Figure 1** Flow chart depicting the three phases of data collection allowing for iterative constant comparison.

**Figure 2** Conceptional model of the effect of experience on perceptions.

The progression from uncertainty to a position of confidence and enjoyment is dependent on positive exposures, which can correct any misconceptions and reinforce accurate experience of hospital wards or teaching sessions. Without a deeper understanding of the processes leading to medical students choosing paediatrics as a career, recruitment drives will miss key opportunities to influence medical students. Therefore, the aim of this study was to explore how medical students’ perceptions and experiences of paediatrics influence their decision to pursue or avoid a career in the specialty.

**Methods** This qualitative grounded theory study sampled sixteen University of Exeter medical students, who have completed a paediatric clinical placement. Students were recruited via paediatric societies and then snowballing was used to create heterogeneity. Between March and June 2021, interviews and focus groups were conducted via Zoom in three phases, as shown in figure 1, facilitating iterative analysis. The data was coded andanalysed using Strauss and Corbin’s constructivist interpretation of grounded theory with NVIVO software.

**Results** The study identifies the sources which contribute to students’ perceptions, many of which are informal and opinion based. The preconceptions lead students to start their placement with a degree of uncertainty. There are perceived barriers that are unique to paediatrics: children as patients, parental interactions and safeguarding children. The students doubt their ability to face these barriers in real life, which causes them to have reservations about choosing a career in paediatrics.

The students are exposed to a brief snapshot of paediatrics for their placement and their perspective is coloured by a lack of insight into medical careers and knowledge required to interpret some experiences correctly.

### Abstract 556

**BEING FRIENDLY IS NOT ENOUGH TO INSPIRE THE NEXT GENERATION OF PAEDIATRICIANS**

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**Aims** Paediatrics faces a workforce crisis and specialty training is undersubscribed.1,2,3 When choosing a career, medical students match their list of career needs with their perception of the specialty. Crucially, this is often based on personal

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10.1136/archdischild-2022-rcpch.620

Arch Dis Child 2022;107(Suppl 2):A1–A537
information. Given the right conditions, seemingly challenging exposures can become positive learning experiences.

Conversely, there are negative, damaging exposures that need to be managed appropriately. If these negative exposures are not identified or remedied by the supervising clinicians, a cycle of uncertainty can develop. This complex process is summarised in the conceptual model, attached as figure 2.

**Conclusion**
To combat the workforce crisis facing paediatrics and to inspire the next generation of paediatricians, strategies are needed to change the perceptions that create the barrier of uncertainty and, simultaneously, clinical placements must focus on providing experiences that enable students to move from a place of uncertainty to one of confidence.

**REFERENCES**

A UNIQUE MULTI-DEANERY COLLABORATION BETWEEN SENIOR PAEDIATRIC TRAINEES IN THE UK FOR REMOTE ‘START’ PREPARATIONS DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC—SURVEY FEEDBACK

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Aims
START (Specialty Trainee Assessment of Readiness of Tenure as a consultant) is an assessment tool used to highlight areas requiring further development in the final stages of specialist training in Paediatrics. During the COVID-19 pandemic, traditional study groups were not feasible due to lockdown measures. A group of Paediatric and Sub-speciality trainees in Paediatrics who had their START assessment in July 2020, took the initiative in forming a group together on ‘Whatsapp’ for revision purposes.

Methods
The author conducted an online survey via Survey Monkey. 13 ST7 and ST8 trainees were part of the group, 10 responded to the survey. Trainee characteristics are charted in figure 1.

Results
Group discussion, revision and role play took place for approximately 2 hours both Saturday and Sunday mornings every week, mostly on ‘Zoom’. There were 5-6 trainees during each revision session, coordinated by the authors. 31% had their START assessment within 4-6 months, 54% within 2-3 months, 7% within four weeks and 7% within 2 weeks.

After July 2020, some trainees continued to run the group for October 2020 diet. The group expanded rapidly between trainees nationally. During this period of preparation, trainees developed a unique bonding. Trainees felt the best part of this group was the variation in subspecialty interests; they could draw expertise from each other that were relevant to different scenarios. During and after the meeting, the trainees freely shared constructive feedback using the ‘Assessor Feedback Form’ on the RCPCH website, learning points, and background knowledge with each other.

Following the completion of START assessment in October 2020, trainees stayed in the group and continued to support each other with consultant applications and interviews. The Whatsapp group name changed from ‘July 2020 START’ group to ‘October 2020 START’ group to ‘Consultant interview preparation’ group. CCT dates ranged from February 2021 to June 2022.

All trainees reported the group to be useful, relevant, valuable, good length, and quality: ‘improved my knowledge level irrespective of the START outcome’.

All trainees found the group as being friendly, responsive, professional, exceeded expectations: ‘improved my confidence level’, ‘helpful even after assessment’.

**Abstract 582 Figure 1**

Abstract 582 Figure 2 illustrates the percentage of START outcome success trainees attributed to their work place and to revision group.