

The Consultant Interview Runway

Building a consultant-shaped CV in the 18 months before you apply — what to do, what it costs, how long it takes, and where to sign up.



Every candidate at a consultant AAC is clinically competent — that is the entry ticket, not the differentiator. Panels appoint the colleague whose evidence answers "what will you do for this department?" Pick **two domains to go deep in**; tick the free baselines in the rest.

1 Research

OPPORTUNITY	COST	TIME & PAYOFF
NIHR Good Clinical Practice (GCP) — online via NIHR Learn; certificate lasts 2 years • nihr.ac.uk • GCP	Free	~Half a day. The baseline credential every research line on your CV assumes.
NIHR Associate PI Scheme — named role on a portfolio study; college-endorsed certificate • nihr.ac.uk • Associate PI	Free	6 months, ~2–3 hrs/wk alongside the day job. Formal "Associate PI" status — a genuine talking point at interview.
Your trainee research network — West Midlands: wmtrain.com • national umbrella: raftuk.org	Free	Join now; multi-centre projects and PubMed-citable collaborator authorship.

2 Quality Improvement

OPPORTUNITY	COST	TIME & PAYOFF
QSIR Fundamentals / Virtual / Practitioner — NHS England programme via trust faculties; RCP & RCN accredited • england.nhs.uk • QSIR	Free	1 day (Fundamentals), ~8 modules (Virtual) or 5 days (Practitioner). Ask your trust QI team for dates.
Raising the Standards: RCoA QI Compendium — the "recipe book" of ready-made anaesthetic audits & QI projects, aligned to GPAS and ACSA • rcoa.ac.uk • QI Compendium	Free	Download today; pick a recipe your department actually needs and own it to completion.
IHI Open School Basic Certificate — 13 online courses; internationally recognised • ihi.org • Open School	\$349/yr (often free via trust group licence — ask first)	~18 hrs of CE credit, self-paced.

3 Teaching & Training

OPPORTUNITY	COST	TIME & PAYOFF
RCoA Anaesthetists as Educators — An Introduction (1 day) + Teaching & Training in the Workplace (2 days) • rcoa.ac.uk • AaE	~£200–300/day (check current fee)	3 days total. Both courses + homework within 30 months → membership of the Academy of Medical Educators (post-nominals). Dates sell out — including Birmingham.
PGCert Medical Education — e.g. QMUL online £4,450; UK providers £2,500–£4,500 • qmul.ac.uk • Med Ed Online	£2.5–4.5k	6–12 months part-time. The "serious about education" signal — worth it if you want an educational consultant role.
e-LfH educator modules — free with your NHS email / OpenAthens • e-lfh.org.uk	Free	1–2 hrs each; quick CPD evidence while you decide how deep to go.

4 Leadership & Management

OPPORTUNITY	COST	TIME & PAYOFF
Edward Jenner programme — NHS Leadership Academy, fully online • leadershipacademy.nhs.uk • Jenner	Free	Launch ~5 hrs; Foundations ~35 hrs at your own pace → NHS Leadership Academy award in Leadership Foundations.
Mary Seacole programme — the step-up for first formal leadership roles; ~100 hrs online + workshops → Award in Healthcare Leadership • leadershipacademy.nhs.uk • Seacole	£995 (regional "Seacole Local" editions from ~£150)	6 months part-time; application windows apply.
FMLM trainee membership + regional leadership fellow posts • fmlm.ac.uk	Low	Networks, events and a recognised home for your leadership narrative.
National Medical Director's Clinical Fellow Scheme — 12 months out of programme in a national body; salaried • fmlm.ac.uk • Clinical Fellows	Salaried	Apps Dec–Jan for Sept start; must not hold CCT by 1 Sept — realistic for those 2+ years out, and transformative.

5 Digital & AI

OPPORTUNITY	COST	TIME & PAYOFF
e-LfH: Introduction to AI for healthcare professionals • e-lfh.org.uk • AI intro	Free	~1 hr. The fastest credible line in a near-empty CV domain.
AI for Healthcare — University of Manchester / NHS England • futurelearn.com • AI for Healthcare	Free to audit	~3–4 wks light study; built around the Topol Review agenda.
Stanford AI in Healthcare specialisation • coursera.org • AI in Healthcare	Audit free; ~£45–60/mo for certificate	1–2 months part-time; the strongest self-study credential of the three.
Topol Digital Fellowship • topol.digitalacademy.nhs.uk & NHS Fellowship in Clinical AI — Cohort 5 (Aug 2026–27) recruiting now • nhsfellowship.ai	Funded	Both 12 months alongside the day job (Topol: 0.2–0.4 WTE + £15k bursary to employer; Clinical AI: 2 days/wk, salary covered in funded posts).

6 The Human Side

OPPORTUNITY	COST	TIME & PAYOFF
Psychological First Aid — UKHSA · futurelearn.com · Psychological First Aid	Free (cert ~£32)	3 wks × 1 hr. Evidence for wellbeing, pastoral and supervision questions.
Mentoring & coaching skills days — run free by most trusts/deaneries; ask your education centre	Free	Usually 1–2 days. Pairs powerfully with an educational or wellbeing narrative.

The 18-Month Runway

18–12
months out

Build the evidence. Choose your two deep domains. Complete GCP and Edward Jenner. Join WMTRAIN. Start — and commit to finishing — one QI project you will own end to end. Book AaE dates before they sell out.

12–6
months out

Build the relationships. Identify target departments. Arrange informal visits; meet the clinical director and college tutor. Let people know you are looking — consultant posts are filled by known quantities far more often than by strangers. Availability, visibly signalled, is a strategy.

6–3
months out

Build the story. Restructure your CV and portfolio around the person specification, not chronology. Warm up referees. Draft structured answers to the banker questions and pressure-test them out loud, not in your head.

3–0
months out

Execute. Map the application form line-by-line to the person specification — shortlisting is a matching exercise, not a beauty contest. Do the pre-interview visit. Rehearse the full assessment set: presentation task, psychometric profiling, stakeholder panels, and the AAC itself, under realistic pressure.

Ten-second truths from the coaching room

- Panels don't appoint CVs. They appoint colleagues who will solve the problems keeping the clinical director awake.
- The interview begins the day you first telephone the department — every interaction before the panel is part of the assessment.
- Structured answers are not a formula for sounding robotic; structure is the thing nerves cannot take away from you.
- Shortlisting is won on the form. If your application doesn't mirror the person specification, the panel never meets you.
- "Any questions for us?" is still the interview. So is the coffee beforehand.

Ready to be the candidate they remember?

I'm Dr Nalin Wickramasuriya — retired NHS consultant paediatrician and one of the UK's most experienced interview coaches for doctors, with successful candidates appointed to consultant posts across anaesthesia, emergency medicine, ENT, obstetrics & gynaecology, paediatrics and beyond. Coaching slots are limited and typically book out weeks ahead.

Book individual coaching sessions → bit.ly/nalindiary

Course details, fees and application windows correct at time of writing (July 2026) and subject to change — always confirm with the provider before booking. This sheet is general careers information, not individual advice.