



SPECIALISED FOUNDATION PROGRAMME • 2027 ENTRY

The SFP in 2027: which route are you actually on?

A free guide from Step2Med. Dates checked against the UKFPO on 8 September 2026.

Most of the advice online describes a process that no longer exists

The Specialised Foundation Programme changed fundamentally in 2025. If you have read about deciles, the Situational Judgement Test, applying to two Specialised Units of Application, or a national round of SFP interviews — that was the old system.

This guide tells you what the process is now, which route applies to you, and what to do about it.

In England there are now two completely different routes into an SFP, and they demand completely different preparation.

One rewards a strong academic record and a well-prepared application. The other is a lottery. Knowing which one you are on determines whether preparation is worth your time at all.

England: the two pathways

Pathway 1 — selection by your medical school

One third of England's SFP posts are filled this way.

- Only current students at **English** medical schools can use this route, and you must have been nominated by your medical school.
- Your **own medical school** runs the selection. It sets its own criteria, its own format and its own timeline.
- You can only be selected for an SFP in the foundation school **local to your medical school**. There is no choosing a region.
- Every medical school's process must conclude in **November**.
- If you are selected and accept, you are taken out of the main Foundation Programme allocation entirely and matched straight to your SFP post.
- If you are not selected, nothing is lost — you go back into the main allocation and can still be matched through pathway 2.
- Appeals are handled by your medical school, not nationally.

This is the route where preparation matters. Some schools score academic achievement, some interview, some do both, and they differ enormously.

Pathway 2 — allocation via PIA

The remaining two thirds are filled through the ordinary Foundation Programme allocation.

- You apply to the main Foundation Programme on Oriel as normal.

- You are allocated to a foundation school, then you preference groups within it. One of those groups is the SFP group.
- Matching uses **Preference Informed Allocation** — a computer-generated rank that is not informed by your performance at medical school.
- If you get into the SFP group, you then preference individual SFP programmes, again matched by PIA.

There is no application to write and no interview. Your publications, prizes and presentations count for nothing here. Preferencing the SFP group as your first choice is the only lever you have.

The other three nations

- **Scotland** — local selection run by the Scotland Foundation School, after you have been allocated to a foundation school.
- **Northern Ireland** — the same structure: local selection by the NI foundation school after allocation.
- **Wales** — SFPs sit inside the main Foundation Programme vacancy and are allocated by PIA. There is no separate selection.

In all four nations you must still complete the main Foundation Programme application on Oriel by the national deadline. This is not optional, whatever route you are pursuing.

What has gone

If your revision notes mention any of these, they are out of date.

GONE	WHAT REPLACED IT
Educational Performance Measure and academic decile	Computer-generated rank (PIA)
The Situational Judgement Test	Nothing — it is no longer part of two-year FP or SFP recruitment
Applying to two SUoAs on Oriel	Pathway 1 is your own medical school only
Nationally agreed white space questions	Whatever your medical school asks for, if anything
A national SFP interview round	Medical-school-run processes in England; local processes in Scotland and NI

One further change worth knowing: the Medical Training (Prioritisation) Act 2026 introduced priority and non-priority applicant groups for foundation training, with UK medical school graduates prioritised. It does not change SFP selection, but it does affect the main allocation you are sitting inside.

Key dates for 2027 entry

WHEN	WHAT
15 September 2026, 09:00 BST	Nomination emails sent to nominated applicants by UK medical schools

**23 September – 7 October 2026, 12:00
midday BST**

Foundation Programme application window on Oriel. Everyone, regardless of route. Late applications are not accepted

Autumn 2026

Medical school pathway 1 processes run. Timelines are set individually

November 2026

All pathway 1 selection complete

Your medical school's pathway 1 deadline may be considerably earlier than you expect, and it is the one date nobody will chase you about.

What to do this week

1. Find out what your medical school is doing

This is the whole game and it takes one email. Ask your medical school's SFP or clinical academic training lead three questions.

- What is the deadline for pathway 1 applications?
- What does the selection consist of — application form, scored portfolio, interview, or a combination?
- How many pathway 1 places does the school have?

If you are at a Scottish or Northern Irish medical school, ask your foundation school the equivalent questions about their local process instead.

2. Then decide honestly whether pathway 1 is realistic for you

If your school scores heavily on publications and you have none, pathway 2 and a well-placed group preference may be the better use of your autumn. That is not defeatism — it is how the system is now built.

3. If pathway 1 is realistic, prepare the things that do not change

Whatever format your school uses, the same underlying skills come up: structuring an answer around a real example, appraising a paper, managing an acutely unwell patient, and talking sensibly about research ethics. None of that is deanery-specific and all of it takes weeks, not days.

About Step2Med

We have supported SFP and academic applications since 2019, taught by NHS doctors who came through the programme themselves.

We are building a medical-school-by-medical-school breakdown of pathway 1 processes. If you would like it when it is ready — along with the timeline for your stage and our free guidance — sign up at tinyurl.com/step2med

For details of our SFP course, email hello@step2med.co.uk

Always check the current guidance on the UKFPO website and with your own medical school. Processes change, sometimes at short notice.

Sources: UK Foundation Programme Office (foundationprogramme.nhs.uk) and NHS England Specialised Foundation Programme recruitment and allocation guidance.

Step2Med is not affiliated with or endorsed by the UK Foundation Programme Office or NHS England.

© 2026 Step2Med · hello@step2med.co.uk · tinyurl.com/step2med