

We asked ten practitioners to share their career experience so far.

What happened after you graduated?

After I graduated I stayed in the profession, moving from Cardiff to Oxford when I was offered the band 5 post in clinical photography.

Rebecca Gardiner

I graduated from the PG Diploma course in Cardiff whilst working as a trainee (2 year course then) and then took one year out to travel, working in NZ en route.

Once I returned to the UK I applied for several clinical photography jobs across the UK and ended up at Addenbrookes in Cambridge and gained lots of experience in a large department.

I then moved to Scotland to the Highlands to take up another clinical photography job (female only post - that was allowed back then!) to work in a smaller department but within a beautiful part of the UK.

Lucy Griffin

I studied photography in college, to advanced diploma level.

In 1998 I started full time work at The Royal Hospital for Sick Children, Glasgow. After being in post for a year or so they put me forward for the distance learning BSC in Medical Illustration, at Glasgow Caledonian University.

Laura Johnston

I graduated in July 2018. As my job at the time was a temporary trainee post I started to look for permanent positions around the UK, but generally centered around certain cities that would work for my family. This included Liverpool and Norwich. I was working in Birmingham and doing a 100 mile round trip each day to get to work. I ended up getting an interview at Alder Hey in Liverpool for a post I narrowly missed out on.

Birmingham also created a new post for me (I was unaware that they planned to do this for me) and I also managed to get an interview at my local trust, Nottingham.

I ended up taking the job in Nottingham. Before I left Birmingham I had been awarded the Peter Kilshaw award by IMI for some work I had done in Birmingham, I collected the award at the next IMI conference.

Paul Larkins

After graduating, I was able to stay in the profession after getting a permanent post as a clinical photographer. As I'm from South Wales, I was looking to stay local to where I had trained.

Jessica Leonard

I stayed in the profession. I was hired as a Band 4 trainee which included taking on the course as I worked full time. I worked for NHS Lanarkshire as a Band 4 then as a Band 5 before moving over Greater Glasgow and Clyde when a position became available.

Lisa Miller

Towards the end of my BSC in Clinical Photography at the University of Westminster, I began searching for jobs. I was lucky enough to be interviewed, and then hired, at Addenbrooke's Hospital, Cambridge, on a maternity post.

After the one year contracted had ended, there was a part time permanent position available in the same team, which I was re-hired for. Because this was part-time, I sought more work in the field. Another part-time position came up at the Royal Free London which I was hired for on a one year fixed contract.

Vanessa Shepherd

After graduating from Staffordshire University I continued my employment with Bradford Teaching Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust (BTHFT) as a clinical photographer, and became accredited with the Academy for Healthcare Science (AHCS). My job responsibilities during studying were primarily covering the photography studio and perfecting controlled lighting and standardised techniques, in addition to finding suitable patients and surgeries to use in my assignments.

Graduating from the course gave me the opportunity to begin learning specialist diagnostic ophthalmic imaging, including but not limited to Slit Lamp photography and OCTA.

Additionally there was an increase in the amount of non-clinical work undertaken, allowing me to work closely with the Graphic Design team here at BTHFT to produce excellent images for use in Trust publications and patient information.

Nicola Moorhouse

I moved to Broomfield, Essex to work at Mid Essex Hospital Trust from Wakefield, West Yorkshire in order to enrol on the Staffs Post-Grad Clinical Photography course. Once finished I was offered a band 5 post with Leeds Teaching Hospitals Trust which enabled me to move back up north after I had graduated.

Caitlin O'Connell

I did a medical art internship for three months in the UK, where I studied, right after I graduated. Then I went back to my home country to become a freelancer, but it was very unstable and I had to get a job teaching illustration to support myself while freelancing on the side.

After a year I found a medical illustration job abroad and moved again for that position.

Cristina Sala Ripoll

How did you feel during this time?

I was excited to finish the course/training and looking forward to the next challenge. I was a little nervous at the prospect of jobs not being advertised in places I would want to live/work, but I had spoken to colleagues in different regions who informed me of possible upcoming job opportunities so I was prepared to wait for the right jobs to apply for.

Rebecca Gardiner

I was a bit anxious after graduating but I decided to take a 1 year break as my 2 year trainee post & course finished and I knew once I took up a more permanent role it would be harder to travel.

Lucy Griffin

I was working full time and managing to also keep on top of all my degree work, I was very proud when I got my degree.

Laura Johnston

Changing places of work was difficult for me. Whilst the travelling was challenging, I loved the work I did and I felt valued and I was developed by my employer. Ultimately though I had to consider my family and work/life balance in moving to my local trust.

Paul Larkins

I felt a sense of uncertainty towards the end of my training, due to my job being a fixed term post. However, I was excited to graduate knowing that I had done something that I was truly interested in and had the prospect of being able to become a qualified clinical photographer upon completion of the course.

Jessica Leonard

As I was already employed I was excited to start my role properly as a fully-fledged medical photographer without supervision.

Lisa Miller

I felt a mixture of emotions when graduating from the course ranging between excitement, anxiety and relief. It was a great feeling to have attained a high result after a year of hard work and I felt a sense of relief that I could once again enjoy having some spare time not only in my work life but in my personal life too.

The extra time I gained enabled me to start attending ophthalmic clinics shadowing a senior member of the team, beginning with the basics such as OCT and Optomap before eventually building up to more complex procedures such as FFA and ICG. I felt anxious about moving forward at first as there is so much to learn within ophthalmology and it did feel a little overwhelming.

However it was important for me to realise I was not going to learn everything in a week and it takes perseverance and the ability to learn from any mistakes in a positive manner.

Nicola Moorhouse

I was excited about finishing the course and my time as a trainee, but I was anxious about what would happen next as my contract with Mid Essex Hospital Trust would be coming to an end not long after I finished the course.

Thankfully they offered me a full time, permanent position as a band 5, which I accepted. Not long after however I managed to accept an offer from Leeds Teaching Hospitals, where I started last July, 2019.

Caitlin O'Connell

I was excited to be completing the BSC, but anxious of how much debt I was in with university costs and whether I would be able to find a job in this niche field. I was so thrilled to be taken on for the maternity position. If I had waited till after graduating I would have missed this great job opportunity.

Vanessa Shepherd

I felt a lot more confident about my skills after I graduated, and the internship taught me a lot more; it allowed me to experience what it would be like to work as a medical illustrator.

Once the internship was over I felt very anxious about my unstable income and scarcity of jobs in the area where I wanted to live. I'm sure it would have been easier if I had been okay with relocating anywhere.

Cristina Sala Ripoll

What are you up to now?

I am now based at Oxford Medical Illustration working as a band 5 clinical photographer. The role incorporates some general and public relations photography alongside the clinical.

Rebecca Gardiner

I am still based in the Highlands, I have been here for 20 years this year and was promoted to senior photographer and then head of department in 2010.

I love my work life balance, with the outdoors on my doorstep for adventure; remember life is not just about work!

Lucy Griffin

I am currently a Senior Photographer at Queen Elizabeth University Hospital, The Royal hospital for Children is also on the same campus. Everything has changed since I graduated.

I studied film processing and printing and nothing was digital. We processed slides and edited VHS video tapes; these are all skills I no longer use. The nature of this job means you are continually learning new skills.

Laura Johnston

I have been working Nottingham for 17 months and I consider myself integral to my team. The department is extremely busy but I hope that things will become somewhat less stressful in the future.

Paul Larkins

I'm based at the University Hospital of Wales, working in both clinical and ophthalmic photography.

Jessica Leonard

I am now based at NHS GGC full time and I am also in charge for VTC for IMI.

Lisa Miller

Currently I am working at Bradford Teaching Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust within the Medical Illustration department, and I have recently been successfully appointed as a Senior Clinical Photographer taking on a broad range of responsibilities within my role.

In 2019 I was honoured to receive the Trust's first 'Brilliant Bradford' trainee of the month award and at the end of the year I went on to be presented with the Trainee of the Year award. I am very proud of this achievement and it's a great feeling to be recognised by my peers as being a skilled and valued photographer.

Since graduation I have driven forward the development of the Trust's staff portrait photography process, ensuring the department has a standardised and refined procedure. I thoroughly enjoy taking on new challenges and seeing a project through to completion.

In the future I hope to begin a new project concentrating on PR photography on wards and in theatres for use in the Annual Report and patient information. As a Senior Clinical Photographer I will begin to receive training and insight into the internationally renowned ophthalmic research work that is carried out at Bradford.

Nicola Moorhouse

Do you have a quick tip for students applying for full time roles?

Give yourself plenty of time to put together a comprehensive and keen portfolio, and do your research on the department and Trust. Value Based Interviews require you to know the Trust values and behaviours so prepare examples that demonstrate those behaviours.

Also be prepared to bump into your colleagues/fellow students at the interview.

Rebecca Gardiner

Make sure your portfolio reflects a broad range of skills, don't just include medical content.

Be prepared for interview, you will be asked about your own skills & merits, how you work under pressure with examples as well why you want to work where the post is based.

Remember your employer is investing in you so wants to see some commitment to the place you are applying to work. If you are prepared to move away from where you are from / based now, you will gain greater life skills and have more choice of posts.

Lucy Griffin

Ask to visit some Medical Illustration departments to get an idea of how things run. For me a good portfolio would be one which shows attention to detail, good grasp of the technical aspects of lighting and focus etc.

I think a caring nature is very important, we deal with very ill, upset patients and families sometimes and although we are photographers (or videographers) we are healthcare professionals and need to remember we are dealing with patients.

Laura Johnston

Do you research but the department you will be applying to work in. Find out what work they do, how many patients they see, challenges they face. Visit the department, even if it is very far away. This shows you are serious about getting the post.

Consider what interview questions you will be asked and prepare for them. You will always be asked why you want the job so know what you answer is and relate it to what you found out about the department. Do you research on how to write applications for NHS roles as it is a completely different way of doing an application to any other private sector role. Tailor your portfolio to the type of work that the department do. If they see lots of dermatology then make sure this in your portfolio. Be prepared to make sacrifices to get a role you want as well. If I had not been prepared to drive 100 miles a day to complete my training I would never have made it as a medical photographer.

Paul Larkins

I always found it helpful to visit the department before the interview to have a look at the facilities and meet the team. And even if you don't get the job the first time round, don't be afraid to apply to the same department again.

Jessica Leonard

Have a portfolio that includes every discipline possible. From medical photography and video, PR to Ophthalmology (OCT, FFA) this shows a wide array of skills which will help in applying to roles.

Lisa Miller

Interview preparation is so important; ensure you have done as much research into the department as you possibly can! Most of this information can be found on the hospital website, or have a look on Twitter, which is quickly becoming popular and can be a good way of seeing what a department has been achieving recently. Think about what you could bring to the team, never sell yourself short, and finally always be yourself!

Nicola Moorhouse

I had both an electronic and printed portfolio for my last interview, which the panel responded well to as everyone has a preference when viewing images and this allowed my images to be viewed simultaneously by multiple people. I would suggest any students applying for roles are as optimistic and enthusiastic about themselves when talking to potential employers and be confident in your knowledge and experiences. Especially when preparing for interviews. And good luck for the future.

Caitlin O'Connell

Have an online portfolio (a website or something similar) and keep it updated, it makes a huge difference in selection processes. Even if you don't have a lot of work to post yet, I recommend that you showcase your best pieces only. If you need more content, create a personal project that you love. Reach out.

Sometimes businesses don't know that you can help them. Some don't know what a medical illustrator is. Don't be afraid to contact them, even if they have no job postings at the moment. They might be interested, or keep you in mind for the future. Create a visual CV. If you're an illustrator or designer, you're surely good at making things beautiful and eye-catching. You can do this with your CV too! It will stand out among the rest and it's yet another opportunity to show off your skills.

Cristina Sala Ripoll

Try to show a range of skills in portfolio. In my photography interviews I tried to show clinical and creative images. Advice I have been given for interview was.

Vanessa Shepherd

Thanks to those who responded.