

ALIGNING AMBITION: INSIGHTS FROM MY STEWARDING EXPERIENCE AT THE BRITISH ORTHODONTIC CONFERENCE



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The British Orthodontic Conference (BOC) is the annual event held by the British Orthodontic Society (BOS) that takes place in the autumn of each year. This year the conference took place from 16 to 19 October, 2024 and was held at the International Conference Centre in Birmingham marking the 30th anniversary of the event.

The conference brings together professionals from across the United Kingdom and beyond to share knowledge, research, and developments in the field of orthodontics. The conference features a range of educational sessions, including lectures, studio sessions, and a trade theatre. It also provides a platform for networking, professional development, and the discussion of issues pertinent to orthodontic practice and patient care. Attendees typically include orthodontists, orthodontic therapists, practice managers, dental nurses, trainees and students, all looking to enhance their skills and stay updated on industry trends or gain a better insight into the specialty they so desire to join.

As a dental core trainee with aspirations of becoming a specialist orthodontist, I decided to volunteer as a steward at this year's conference. This role was more than just a volunteer opportunity; it was a stepping stone in my professional journey. This three-day event marked my first experience as a steward, where I, alongside thirty-two others, helped facilitate the smooth operation of the conference.

Stewarding at a conference offered unique opportunities. While my primary role involved assisting attendees, I also had the unexpected opportunity to co-chair a meeting which enabled me to build on my CV by demonstrating adaptability and leadership

skills. However, I was not tethered to such responsibilities throughout the event. When not scheduled for stewarding duties, I was free to immerse myself in the networking and learning opportunities the conference presented. One of the highlights was the popular poster display that provided an opportunity for everyone from students to experienced clinicians to showcase case reports, research and clinical effectiveness projects - a great motivation to submit a poster next year. The main scientific programme saw leaders from across the globe showcase the most recent developments in orthodontics. Common themes included complex treatment and workflows involving clear aligners and guest speakers included the Major Incident Planner and medical doctor, Professor Kevin Fong.

A personal highlight of the event was the early career meeting titled '*So You Want to Know About Orthodontics?*' All stewards who were attending the conference as aspiring orthodontists were scheduled to attend this busy session. As someone on the cusp of applying to orthodontic training programmes, this session was invaluable. It was designed not only to inform but also to inspire and connect individuals like myself with professionals and peers who share similar career aspirations. The interactive nature of this meeting allowed me to engage directly with registrars and consultants, gaining insights not only into the application process but the nuances of a career in orthodontics. Current specialty registrars provided sessions on what to expect during the training programme. It was interesting to learn how training posts vary depending on location, but usually comprise of teaching, treatment and research sessions. Consultants and those

involved in the application process provided sessions that focused on how to maximise the self-assessment component of the application and a closing session provided advice on how to perform well in high pressured interviews.

Networking interactions were not confined to formal sessions but extended into lunches, the trade stalls and social events which provided a more relaxed setting to converse with delegates.

Reflecting on these experiences, I recognise the value in volunteering as a steward. Yes, stewards were obliged to be in attendance for the three-day programme but the benefits far outweighed the slightly longer days than other delegates experienced. This experience not only enabled me to contribute to the success of the conference but also allowed me to explore the field of orthodontics from a vantage point of learning and engagement. Each conversation with an experienced professional, each session attended, and every interaction with fellow aspiring orthodontists brought clarity and direction to my own career path. Furthermore, conferences can often be expensive to attend, but by volunteering as a steward, I was entitled to a discounted fee – a fantastic way for young professionals to affordably experience a conference and fully engage with the community. I would highly recommend this to those thinking of a career in orthodontics.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank the BOS for this experience. It has enhanced my motivation to pursue specialisation in orthodontics and I am ready to tackle the challenges of the application process and beyond.