

# Microsurgical Skills Course: a review

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**Andrew shares his experience at the Royal College of Ophthalmologist's Microsurgical Skills Course.**

## Introduction

The Microsurgical Skills (MSS) course is a highly popular 3 day course run by the Royal College of Ophthalmologists aimed at introducing and teaching basic microsurgical skills to junior trainees.

## Who is it for?

Completion of this course is a fundamental requirement for all new ophthalmic specialist trainees in order to start participating in surgery. However it is also open to both foundation year 1 and 2 trainees. On the October 2012 course the vast majority of participants were current FY2s.

## When did you do it?

I took part on the 3 day course in October 2012.

## Why did you do it?

I did the course for 2 main reasons. Firstly, like the majority of potential ophthalmology applicants, I had very little experience or exposure to the microsurgery involved in ophthalmic surgery. I therefore wanted to get a taste of what microsurgery involves at a basic level and see whether I enjoyed it. Secondly, the application form for ST training rewards attendance at ophthalmology courses and, although no-one likes box ticking, unfortunately a certain amount of it has to be done to get invited for an interview.

## What did it involve?

The course is very structured and involves a combination of didactic lectures and practical sessions. Based on feedback from previous courses the current course is structured with the aim of maximising the amount of time actually practising on eyes and eyelids. This means the time for lunch and coffee breaks has been reduced (but are still sufficient) and the length and number of lectures have also been reduced.

On day 1 the focus of the day is to learn about the key surgical instruments, how to use them and how to suture at a microscopic level. Over 5 hours are spent suturing pigs eyes and repairing eyelids. At the end of the first day I felt I had progressed massively from no previous

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None

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## REVIEW

**When:** Every Month, see website for specific dates

**Where:** Royal College of Ophthalmologists, London

**Costs:** £625

**Recommended:** ★★★★★

**Info:** [www.rcophth.ac.uk](http://www.rcophth.ac.uk)

microsurgical experience to producing sutures on pig eyes and eyelids under microscope with respectable results.

On day 2 the focus was on continued suturing practice with more difficult traumatic cases. There were also lectures on astigmatism and how to properly place a surgical drape. This skill is not to be underestimated as many consultant ophthalmologists feel it is one of the most important skills that can be learnt.

Day 3 is phaco day. After a few morning lectures on the how the phacoemulsification machine works and the principles of phaco, practice begins on fake eyes in the skills lab. These are apparently pretty realistic and I found this part of the course particularly enjoyable. From making the initial limbal incisions and capsulorhexis to actually performing the phacoemulsification, you get to practice it all.

Throughout the whole course, everyone gets to use the simulator to practice different aspects of phaco surgery. At the end of the third day the course ends with feedback and presentation of certificates.

### How much did it cost?

From January 2013 the course is priced at £625. This includes lunch on all 3 days (hot buffet which is actually very tasty and halal!) and an evening meal on the first night. This price also included access to the ophthalmology E-learning modules and a book on fundamentals of phacoemulsification worth £22.50.

### Was it worth it?

The course was well worth it! The course size is limited to 18 places and you get very close supervision and guidance from the consultant ophthalmologists. I personally felt a significant improvement in my own skills and felt I got a real taste of what microsurgery is like and the skills involved.

### Top Tips?

Ensure that the e-learning modules are completed before attending the course. This will not only help you understand the principles behind the practical sessions but it is also mandatory that all modules are completed in order to receive the course certificate. Apply early as the course is very competitive and places fill up months in advance. ■