

Specialty Tasters in the Foundation Programme: Guidance for Foundation Schools

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Definition of a Taster

A taster is a period of time, usually two to five days, spent in a specialty in which the Foundation trainee has not previously worked. Its purpose is to enable the development of insight into the work of the specialty and promote careers reflection.

The promotion of tasters at both F1 and F2 level was one of the key recommendations of the recent Collins Evaluation of Foundation training. It said *“Deaneries/Foundation Schools should make a greater effort to meet one of the important purposes of the Programme – to ensure that trainees experience many different specialties – by maximising and simplifying access to tasters.”*

Aims of this guidance

This aims to support the development of high-quality tasters in each locality of every foundation school; and to facilitate the development of a local register of pre-arranged tasters which is accessible to all Foundation trainees within the local programme. It is recognised that there are already many examples of good practice in this area and this document aims to support all Foundation Programmes in developing career exploration for their trainees.

Background

One of the original aims of the Foundation Programme was to ensure that trainees have access to a wider range of specialties in a variety of care settings prior to selecting a career path. Currently, most Foundation trainees are exposed to a maximum of six specialties before they enter for specialty training, but only 4 by the time they apply for specialty training. Because of this, there is a demand from some trainees for short “tasters” in other specialties.

By definition, a taster experience offers time-limited exposure to the work and lifestyle of those involved in a specialty. These experiences may have a positive effect on the Foundation trainee and confirm that a particular choice is appropriate for the individual. Conversely, a trainee may learn through this experience that the specialty is not what s/he had expected and may be excluded as a future career choice – again an experience which aids career decision making.

There is evidence that any experience in a specialty, however brief, can be influential in a career choice. There are currently 60 medical specialties and 32 sub-specialties in the UK. Medical undergraduates are unlikely to have the opportunity during their training to experience all specialties.

Foundation trainees have reported that the initiation and organisation of tasters is frequently left to them. This effort may repeat that of a previous trainee to arrange the same taster. They have also questioned that there is little guidance for the trainee or the trainer on content or outcome and the results are not always a high quality experience. There is little data on how many trainees currently undertake tasters or how many would wish to do so if the processes were simplified.

Developing High Quality Tasters

The purpose of a taster experience is to:

- Enable the doctor to gain a small amount of clinical experience in a specialty in which they have not worked whilst a medical student or foundation trainee;
- enable the doctor to explore in closer detail what a career in a specialty might entail – skills, attitudes, behaviours, essential aptitudes;
- compare the taster specialty with others already experienced;
- meet clinicians and explore career pathways in “unusual” specialties; and
- explore opportunities available in small specialties and those specialties which have traditionally been undersubscribed.

The essential components of a taster experience include:

- Opportunity to find out what is needed to succeed, progress or enjoy this specialty in terms of skills, attributes and behaviour.
- Time with senior clinician(s) in the specialty, observing work, discussing careers pathways, future opportunities and work life balance issues. This should include some time for 1:1 discussions
- Time with current trainees (of various grades) in the specialty, observing work, discussing what life is like as a trainee in the specialty, work life balance, how their careers choices were made, current and future shift patterns, exams, curricula and entry to specialty. This should include some time for 1:1 discussions.
- Time with key workers who support the specialty such as Nurse practitioners, professions allied to medicine, community specialists, operating department practitioners and laboratory staff.
- Opportunity to participate in hands on activities under direct supervision
- Opportunity to attend specialty education / training events e.g. multidisciplinary team meeting, trainee tutorial, skills lab or an audit meeting

Seven steps to developing local taster opportunities:

1. Identify a lead contact in a specialty for foundation tasters (this would usually be a consultant or GP trainer).
2. Determine the number of taster weeks which might be accommodated / supported in the specialty.
3. Develop a programme which lasts for 2-5 days. This programme should explicitly state where to go for each half day, the start and finish times and who trainee should contact. (See Appendix 1 for sample timetables)
4. Develop a short summary of what the Foundation taster will deliver in each component.
5. Outline the objectives of the taster experience.
 - a. Include 1:1 time with a senior clinician (clinic, theatre, laboratory, GP surgery); time with the whole team (outpatients, ward round, team meetings) and time with trainees in the specialty. This should include some evening work which can demonstrate the out of hours experience
 - b. Include educational events
6. Develop an evaluation form which allows ongoing development of all components of programme
7. Ensure Foundation Training Programme Director (FTPD) locally has full details of all taster opportunities (and any changes which are made following evaluation) and all local Foundation trainees have access to this register of tasters e.g. by promotion of taster experience at induction.

Tips for a specialty: ensuring the best taster experience for the Foundation trainee:

- Discuss each individual placement in advance to give the Foundation doctor the opportunity to identify what they wish to achieve/see/do during the placement
- Ensure the doctor is welcomed at start of Day One by the person who will be their main contact. They will explain the programme again, introduce to the department, explain who to contact in an emergency, explain trainee is expected to undertake all the agreed activities and encourage reflective notes in Foundation Portfolio.
- Explore why the individual is undertaking this taster – expectations v reality
- Meet with Foundation doctor regularly during the week to ensure satisfaction with experience so far, anything else they would like to do?
- At end of week, meet to review the week, review reflective notes in Foundation portfolio, and ensure evaluation form is completed.

Developing a Register of Tasters

A locally-held register of tasters has been requested by Foundation doctors. i.e. a list of tasters already in place and which may be accessed using locally agreed processes. This local register should contain the outline programme and the short summary of the objectives of each taster and should be easily available on each foundation school's website.

There are a number of steps which Foundation School Directors and their local Foundation Training Programme Directors can take to encourage tasters in their foundation schools

Foundation School Directors (FSDs)

- Ensure tasters are promoted to trainees at their induction and throughout their Foundation training.
- Promote the development of registers of tasters within the programme/school.
- Work with the deanery career leads and Heads of Specialty Training Schools to identify specialties/locations which might be encouraged to promote and develop tasters. These might include those specialties with recruitment difficulties, those where career enquiries have regularly been made, etc)
- Discuss and develop local arrangements within your deanery to facilitate “borrowing” of up to five days study leave from the F2 year for F1 doctors.

Foundation Training Programme Director (FTPDs)

- Maintain an up-to-date local register of tasters.
- Ensure all taster experiences have an agreed timetable and clearly defined objectives.
- Discuss tasters with Foundation doctors early in their F1 year and encourage them to plan them in to their timetable / rota.
- Review all post-taster evaluations to ensure they are meeting the needs of trainees.
- Link with other taster providers to identify good practice and any barriers to successful experience.
- Feed back to FSDs on tasters delivered and outcomes.
- In exceptional circumstances, liaise with other local FTPDs to arrange access to tasters by Foundation trainees from nearby hospitals i.e. if trainee has interest in speciality not available in their location

Foundation Schools are encouraged to include information about availability of local tasters on their web pages.

Tasters in F1

Tasters in F1 as well as F2 are already well established in many foundation schools. To assist their further development at F1 level, consideration could be given to borrowing some study leave entitlement from the trainee's F2 year. This opportunity is best met by development of local arrangements to enable more tasters to be undertaken before specialty applications are made.

*Melanie Jones
Special Advisor – Careers
UK Foundation Programme Office*

APPENDIX 1 – EXAMPLE TASTER PROGRAMME TIMETABLE 1

Taster in Anaesthetics

	AM (8.00-12.30)	PM (13.30 – 17.30)	Notes
Monday	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Meet Dr A – @ 9.30. discuss work of speciality • Plan for week • Introduction to department • Tour of theatres / ITU • Meet trainees and consultants 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Theatre with Dr B • Inpatient list • Ward visit for pre-assessment • Preparing the theatre with ODP • Communication skills 	
Tuesday	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Day surgery theatre with Dr C • Suitability for day surgery 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Chronic pain clinic with Dr D 	
Wednesday	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Acute pain ward round with Dr E • Prescribing for acute pain 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Intensive Care Unit with Dr F • Out reach programmes • Care of the acutely ill patient 	Department teaching for trainees at lunchtime
Thursday	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Obstetric theatre with Dr A • Explore future developments in specialty 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • On call with Dr F until 21.00 • Emergency theatre 	Long day shift – end at 21.00 after handover to night shift
Friday	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Theatre with Dr C • Airway management • Visit recovery room 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Attend simulator session with trainees. • Review meeting with Dr A • Discuss the week and career planning for anaesthesia and critical care 	Complete evaluation and hand in Reflective entry in Portfolio.

APPENDIX 1 – EXAMPLE TASTER PROGRAMME TIMETABLE 2

Taster in Cardiology

	AM (8.00-12.30)	PM (13.30 – 17.30)	Notes
Monday	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Meet Dr A – @ 9.30. discuss work of speciality • Plan for week • Introduction to department • Tour of ward / catheter lab • Meet trainees and consultants 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Catheter Lab with Dr B • Ward visit for pre-assessment • Preparing the environment • Practical skills • Communication skills 	
Tuesday	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Outpatients Dr C • Long term follow up • Links with general practice 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cardiac rehab clinic with Nurse consultant 	
Wednesday	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ward round with Dr C • Prescribing for cardiology patients • Management of admissions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Coronary Care Unit with Dr A • Care of the acutely ill patient 	Department teaching for trainees at lunchtime
Thursday	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Outpatients Clinic with Dr A 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • On call with Dr F until 21.00 • Emergency admissions 	Long day shift – end at 21.00 after handover to night shift
Friday	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Research with Dr B • Role of academic medicine • Explore future developments in specialty 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Attend simulator session with trainees. • Review meeting with Dr A • Discuss the week and career planning for cardiology 	Complete evaluation and hand in Reflective entry in Portfolio.

APPENDIX 1 – EXAMPLE TASTER PROGRAMME TIMETABLE 3

Taster in General Practice

	AM (8.00-12.30)	PM (13.30 – 18.30)	Notes
Monday	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Meet Dr A – @ 9.30. discuss work of speciality • Plan for week • Introduction to practice and locality • Tour of surgery • Meet trainees, partners and practice staff 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Afternoon visits and surgery with Dr B • Practical skills • Communication skills 	
Tuesday	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Surgery Dr C • Long term follow up • Links with hospitals 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Diabetes clinic with Practice Nurse 	Attend practice meeting at lunchtime
Wednesday	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Minor ops session with Dr C • Developing a special interest 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Afternoon visits and surgery with Dr B • Management of admissions 	Practice teaching for trainees at lunchtime
Thursday	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Surgery with Dr A • Explore GP contract 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Attend half day release for GP STR 	Evening shift with out of hours service – finish at 21.00
Friday	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Morning with Practice manager 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review meeting with Dr A • Discuss the week and career planning for general practice 	<p>Complete evaluation and hand in</p> <p>Reflective entry in Portfolio.</p>