Guidance on Specialty Tasters for Foundation Trainees.

March 2021

Definition of a Taster

A taster is a period of time, usually two to five days, spent in a speciality 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 levels 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 guidance 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 four specialties before 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 speciality. 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 speciality is not what s/he had expected and may be excluded as a future career choice.

There is evidence that any experience in a speciality, however brief, can be influential in a career choice. There are currently 60 medical specialities and 32 sub-specialties in the UK. Medical undergraduates are unlikely to have the opportunity during their training to experience all specialities.
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 taster. They have also questioned that there is no 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 speciality 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 speciality might entail – skills, attitudes, behaviours, essential aptitudes
- compare the taster speciality with others already experienced
- meet clinicians and explore career pathways in “unusual” specialities
- explore opportunities available in small specialities and those specialities which have traditionally been undersubscribed

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

**Seven steps to developing local taster opportunities:**
1. Identify a lead contact in a speciality 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 speciality.
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 the 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 speciality. 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 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.

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 the 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, encourage reflective notes in Foundation Portfolio.
- Explore why the individual is undertaking taster – expectations vs. reality
- Meet with the Foundation doctor regularly during the week to ensure satisfaction with experience so far, anything else they would like to do?
- At the end of the 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 (FSD)
- 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 Speciality Training Schools to identify specialities / locations which might be encouraged to promote and develop tasters. These might include those specialties with recruitment difficulties or those where career enquiries have regularly been made
- Discuss and develop local arrangements within your Deanery to facilitate "borrowing" of up to 5 days study leave from the F2 year for F1 doctors.

Foundation Training Programme Director (FTPD)
- Maintains 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 into their timetable/rota
- Review all post-taster evaluations to ensure they are meeting the needs of trainee
• 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. The UKFPO offers to signpost these local tasters via their website at www.foundationprogramme.nhs.uk in the careers advice section.

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
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UK Foundation Programme Office
# APPENDIX 1 – EXAMPLE TASTER PROGRAMME TIMETABLE 1

## Taster in Anaesthetics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>AM (8.00-12.30)</th>
<th>PM (13.30 – 17.30)</th>
<th>Notes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| **Monday** | • Meet Dr A – @ 9.30. discuss work of speciality  
• Plan for week  
• Introduction to department  
• Tour of theatres / ITU  
• Meet trainees and consultants | • Theatre with Dr B  
• Inpatient list  
• Ward visit for pre-assessment  
• Preparing the theatre with ODP  
• Communication skills | | |
|        | **Tuesday** | • Day surgery theatre with Dr C  
• Suitability for day surgery | • Chronic pain clinic with Dr D | |
| **Wednesday** | • Acute pain ward round with Dr E  
• Prescribing for acute pain | • Intensive Care Unit with Dr F  
• Outreach programmes  
• Care of the acutely ill patient | Department teaching for trainees at lunchtime |
| **Thursday** | • Obstetric theatre with Dr A  
• Explore future developments in specialty | • On call with Dr F until 21.00  
• Emergency theatre | Long day shift – end at 21.00 after handover to night shift |
| **Friday** | • Theatre with Dr C  
• Airway management  
• Visit recovery room | • 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 2 – EXAMPLE TASTER PROGRAMME TIMETABLE 2

Taster in Cardiology

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>AM (8.00-12.30)</th>
<th>PM (13.30 – 17.30)</th>
<th>Notes</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Monday</strong></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>• Meet Dr A – @ 9.30. discuss work of speciality</td>
<td>• Catheter Lab with Dr B</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Plan for week</td>
<td>• Ward visit for pre-assessment</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>• Introduction to department</td>
<td>• Preparing the environment</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Tour of ward / catheter lab</td>
<td>• Practical skills</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Meet trainees and consultants</td>
<td>• Communication skills</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Tuesday</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>• Outpatients Dr C</td>
<td>• Cardiac rehab clinic with Nurse consultant</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Long term follow up</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>• Links with general practice</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Wednesday</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Ward round with Dr C</td>
<td>• Coronary Care Unit with Dr A</td>
<td>Department teaching for trainees at lunchtime</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Prescribing for cardiology patients</td>
<td>• Care of the acutely ill patient</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>• Management of admissions</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Thursday</strong></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Outpatients Clinic with Dr A</td>
<td>• On call with Dr F until 21.00</td>
<td>Long day shift – end at 21.00 after handover to night shift</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Emergency admissions</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Friday</strong></td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>• Research with Dr B</td>
<td>• Attend simulator session with trainees.</td>
<td>Complete evaluation and hand in</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Role of academic medicine</td>
<td>• Review meeting with Dr A</td>
<td>Reflective entry in Portfolio.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Explore future developments in specialty</td>
<td>• Discuss the week and career planning for cardiology</td>
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</table>
### APPENDIX 3 – EXAMPLE TASTER PROGRAMME TIMETABLE 3

#### Taster in General Practice

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Day</th>
<th>AM (8.00-12.30)</th>
<th>PM (13.30 – 18.30)</th>
<th>Notes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Monday</td>
<td>• Meet Dr A – @ 9.30. discuss work of speciality &lt;br&gt; • Plan for week &lt;br&gt; • Introduction to practice and locality &lt;br&gt; • Tour of surgery &lt;br&gt; • Meet trainees, partners and practice staff</td>
<td>• Afternoon visits and surgery with Dr B &lt;br&gt; • Practical skills &lt;br&gt; • Communication skills</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Tuesday</td>
<td>• Surgery Dr C &lt;br&gt; • Long term follow up &lt;br&gt; • Links with hospitals</td>
<td>• Diabetes clinic with Practice Nurse</td>
<td>Attend practice meeting at lunchtime</td>
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<tr>
<td>Wednesday</td>
<td>• Minor ops session with Dr C &lt;br&gt; • Developing a special interest</td>
<td>• Afternoon visits and surgery with Dr B &lt;br&gt; • Management of admissions</td>
<td>Practice teaching for trainees at lunchtime</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thursday</td>
<td>• Surgery with Dr A &lt;br&gt; • Explore GP contract</td>
<td>• Attend half day release for GP STR</td>
<td>Evening shift with out of hours service – finish at 21.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Friday</td>
<td>• Morning with Practice manager</td>
<td>• Review meeting with Dr A &lt;br&gt; • Discuss the week and career planning for general practice</td>
<td>Complete evaluation and hand in Reflective entry in Portfolio.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>