

Planning a Career Taster

This is a practical guide to help you understand what a career taster is, how to go about organising them and how to get the most of the experience.

What is a Career Taster?

A Taster is an opportunity to:

- Undertake a shadowing or observation placement during Foundation Training, in a specialty of potential career interest
- Gain insight into a specialty that you may not have exposure to as part of your medical school or foundation training
- Use a structured opportunity to gain valuable evidence to enhance your future employability to a specialty training programme

There may be restrictions in some specialties as to the depth of practical experience you would be permitted to undertake, but even in an observational setting, you can still gain a good overview and develop helpful networks.

Career tasters are not compulsory, although are a helpful way of gaining portfolio evidence to meet the requirement of the Foundation Curriculum which suggest that you ***“maintain an e-portfolio record of activities demonstrating exploration of possible specialty career options e.g. completion of taster period and reflection on the experience”***.

How many Taster days am I entitled to?

As a foundation trainee you are entitled to use some of your study leave allocation to take career tasters at any point in the two-year training programme. You can take up to five career taster days in each year, from the study leave allocation for that year; note that study day allocation cannot be carried over from the first to your second year of foundation training.

How do I organise a Career Taster?

You can take your career tasters either in one block (5 days) or in several shorter periods over the course of the year, allowing you to explore more options. You are only permitted to take career tasters in the region you are working in (Wales) and should ideally arrange this within your employing Health Board. If you cannot find an opportunity within a specialty there, you can arrange this in another Health Board but you would only be able to do this on the basis of shadowing or observation.

Your local Foundation team may have a process for helping you to plan and record Tasters and to manage the study leave process, so find out what is required first, as local arrangements vary. To find a taster, you can:

- Approach a department direct; most are only too happy to have someone come and explore their specialty with a view to possibly choosing it as a career.

- Contact any clinical, academic or undergraduate centre staff you met during medical school (if in Wales) who could help you to find an opportunity
- Approach network contacts made at local careers fairs, conferences and meetings
- Find key contact information from the Health Education and Improvement Wales [specialty information pages](#) e.g. College tutors, Career leads; these are people who help to manage the training programme and will have an overview of locations suitable for learning opportunity.
- Your local Foundation team have some information about known Tasters within and in other Health Boards so do ask; this will not represent every possibility but can help to start the ball rolling.

How can I make the most of career taster experiences?

To get best value from a taster, aim to:

- Plan in advance and prepare questions to explore – this is a short period and you need to focus your information needs
- Do some basic research in advance so that you can be focussed about what you want to find out now
- Speak to as many people in the team as you can to help give a rounded view. What do consultants do? What do trainees do, enjoy, experience? What other specialties link with this one? Who is in the multidisciplinary team and what do they do?
- Develop network contacts who you can go back to for more information or with further questions

After a taster, record the experience as part of your learning. Career Tasters are to help you gain an idea or feel for a specialty and help you to decide on a particular specialty path following foundation, so it's important that you critically reflect on what you see and learn.

Your Foundation E-portfolio is a key resource to record and reflect your career experiences. It is also for some specialties, a tool for assessment in the national recruitment process for core and specialty training programmes. If you are considering applying in the future then showing how your career taster experience helped you to explore and consider the specialty will show genuine interest and potential commitment to assessment panels.

Some local Foundation teams require you to complete a review of your study leave/taster time. There are several tools to prompt reflection and you can use the reflective questions highlighted in this guidance to help you. It is sometimes not so much the opportunity itself but how you think about it afterwards which helps you to clarify career decisions for the future.

Career Taster Reflection

What was the specialty/subspecialty?

What was the focus of the opportunity? (e.g. types of patient and team worked with, setting, type of observation or direct involvement)

What elements did I enjoy most and least, and why?

Was there anything I couldn't find out and still need to explore?

How does this specialty seem to relate to my personality, values, interests, attitudes and skills? Is this a potential "match" for me or can I rule it out?

Who did I speak to and what did I learn about this area of work, from a careers perspective?

How has this experience affected my current thinking about my career options?

What do I need to do next to clarify my career intention?