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# The Educational Supervisor and Careers Advice

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## The Educational Supervisor and Careers Advice

One of your responsibilities as an educational supervisor is to provide trainees with careers support. To a large extent the provision of effective careers support rests on generic supervision skills such as active listening, posing insightful questions, and giving clear and constructive feedback. But in addition to these generic supervision skills effective careers support also involves knowing about what other sources of information and support are available for trainees, as well as understanding a simple framework for careers planning.

This guide contains brief coverage of such issues in order to provide clear practical advice on how best to fulfil your careers support responsibilities. It doesn't replace other forms of training that London Deanery provides (such as workshops, or e-learning modules). But it is recognised that in the short term not all educational supervisors will have completed additional training on how best to provide careers support, so they may find the guidance contained in this booklet useful.



## The structure of careers support in London Deanery

London Deanery is implementing a tiered structure of careers support.



Figure 1

All trainees have been issued with a booklet ('Planning Your Medical Career: A Guide to Careers Support') that outlines this pyramid structure. In addition, all trusts have been sent a poster of the careers support pyramid which should be displayed in a prominent place in the Education Centre.

Although the pyramid was devised in the context of careers support for foundation trainees, it is actually equally relevant to supporting trainees at later stages of their careers.

The bottom tier of the pyramid is self-help. In an early discussion with your trainee it can be helpful if you ascertain whether they are aware of the different careers support resources that are available. These resources are documented at the back of the 'Planning Your Medical Career' booklet, and also at the back of this guide. It is important that you encourage your trainee to become actively involved in career planning, so that they don't leave all career-related tasks to the last minute.

The second tier in the pyramid is support provided by the educational supervisor. This is an essential component of foundation and specialty training programmes and every trainee should be given an opportunity to discuss their career plans with their educational supervisor. For the majority of trainees, the careers support provided by educational supervisors (in conjunction with careers-planning workshops offered as part of the foundation or specialty training programme) will be enough for them to make appropriate career plans. But some trainees may need to be referred to Tier 3 (other Postgraduate Education faculty) or Tier 4 (Deanery Careers Resources).

Reasons why a trainee may need these additional sources of career support are described below.

## How best to help your trainee – the importance of a shared framework

In a large-scale research study of work-based careers discussions, *Hirsh et al (2001)* found that if the providers and recipients of careers support shared a common framework, the recipients found the discussions were more useful. The implication of this for the role of educational supervisor is that trainees are more likely to find the careers support you provide helpful if you are working from a shared understanding of what is entailed in the task of career planning.



## Introducing the four-stage framework

When providing careers support in a higher education/professional development context, careers practitioners frequently use a four-stage framework (see Fig. 2).

<p><b>Stage 1: Self Assessment</b> Becoming Clearer about your values, skills, interests and personal stressors</p>
<p><b>Stage 2: Career Exploration</b> How to carry out a systematic thorough investigation of different options</p>
<p><b>Stage 3: Decision Making</b> Weighing up the pros and cons of different options in order to identify a first choice (and a back-up) option to pursue post-foundation</p>
<p><b>Stage 4: Plan Implementation</b> How to write first-class CVs/Application Forms. Preparing for interviews/selection centres in order to maximise the chances of being successful.</p>

Figure 2. Four-stage careers support framework

Sharing a framework certainly helps you approach the task of providing careers support to your trainee in a more systematic way. So, for example, if a trainee comes to you asking for help with their CV (a Stage 4 task), you need to establish whether they have completed Stages 1–3 in sufficient depth. Without doing this, it is very difficult to know if their career decision making is robust. In addition, on their application form, or at interview, they will have to describe key skills and interests (Stage 1) and link these to the particular demands of the specialty they are applying for (Stage 2). What this means in practice is that even if a trainee comes to you saying that they have made their mind up, and all they need is help with Stage 4, it is still necessary to review the earlier career-planning stages with them, in order to maximise the chances that they will successfully implement their career plan.

## How to help your trainee with each of these four stages

All foundation trainees have been provided with a copy of a book called *The ROADS to Success*, which is a practical careers support guide for foundation trainees and their educational supervisors. This book is based on the four-stage approach and contains a series of self-help exercises that the trainee can carry out in order to help them with each of the four stages. It is not recommended that the trainees complete these exercises in their educational supervision sessions. Instead, they can complete them in their own time, or in the careers-planning workshops offered as part of the foundation programme. They can then bring the completed exercises to their educational supervision session, in order to discuss them in further depth.

*ROADS* also contains a chapter that has been written for you – the educational supervisor. This chapter explains how you can best help your trainees with each of the four stages. Although *ROADS* is targeted at foundation trainees, the exercises (with obvious minor adaptations) also apply to post-foundation trainees. In addition, the chapter written for educational supervisors is also relevant to the task of providing careers support to post-foundation trainees.\*

The title of the book is based on the *ROADS* acronym. You can use the acronym to structure a discussion about the robustness of a trainee's career decision. Specifically, you can ask your trainee the following questions:

- Realistic:** Are you being realistic about yourself and about the demands of the job?
- Opportunities:** Have you given serious consideration to all the opportunities available?
- Anchors:** Have you built in the things that provide support in your life?
- Development:** Do your choices fully develop your potential?
- Stress:** Have you considered those aspects of work that create particular stresses for you?

\*Post-foundation trainees will not necessarily receive their own copy of the book, but additional copies are also available in Education Centre Libraries.

## HELPING YOUR TRAINEE WITH STAGE 1 – SELF-ASSESSMENT

### a. Using the portfolio to help with self-assessment

As a matter of good practice, you should always ask your trainees to bring their portfolios with them to each educational supervision session. The foundation portfolio has a section on career management (Section 1.3) which contains both generic and specific information for the trainee to complete to inform the basis of the career discussion that they have with you. At each session you should refer to the portfolio and discuss how the trainee has been progressing with their career decision making.

Postfoundation trainees also have a portfolio, and again it can be useful if they bring it to the supervision session.

### b. Using the national NHS Medical Careers website to help with self-assessment

NHS Medical Careers is soon to launch a comprehensive national website which has been specifically designed to help trainees with their careers planning. The website is also based on the four-stage framework, but it offers a more comprehensive set of self-assessment exercises than is contained in *ROADS*. As an educational supervisor you should be aware of the website and encourage your trainees to use it.

Pages 89–90 of *ROADS* outline the role of the educational supervisor in facilitating the trainee's self-assessment. This section of *ROADS* also gives examples of the sorts of questions you can discuss with trainees, in order to help them with the self-assessment process.



## HELPING YOUR TRAINEE WITH STAGE 2 – CAREER EXPLORATION

### a. Using the national NHS Medical Careers website to help with career exploration

The new national Medical Careers website will contain detailed information about each medical and surgical specialty and sub-specialty. This website will be updated regularly and should prove to be an invaluable resource for foundation and post-foundation trainees.

### b. BMJ Careers Fairs

Some trusts organise their own careers fairs, but this does not happen in every trust within the London Deanery area. But London trainees have the advantage of being able to access the BMJ Careers Fairs that are organised in Central London. Encourage your trainees to attend these events, as they can help them with the task of career exploration, i.e. Stage 2. (Of course, the BMJ Careers Fair also provides useful help with Stage 4 – CVs/Application Form/Interview Practice.)

### c. Where to get information about the competitiveness of different specialties/contacts in different specialties

In 2008 the MMC website published details of the Competition Ratios (i.e. number of applicants per vacancy) for each specialty in each deanery.

It is certainly important that trainees look at these figures, and discuss them with you. But is also useful to suggest that they complement the picture provided by the Competition Ratios with a more qualitative 'bird's-eye view' provided by senior figures in the specialties to which they intend to apply. They should ask these consultants about whether in general their specialty tends to be highly oversubscribed or somewhat oversubscribed – or even whether it is ever a shortage specialty.

### d. Medical and general careers guides

Each Education Centre has been given resources to equip the library with both general and medicine-specific careers guides. It can therefore be helpful to suggest to a trainee that they look in the Education Centre library to see what careers resources it contains.

### e. Tasters

It can happen that your trainee wants to apply post-foundation to a specialty that they haven't yet worked in. (This can arise if they are applying for a specialty that doesn't offer foundation placements or because they didn't succeed in getting a foundation placement in that specialty.) In this situation it can be helpful to suggest that your trainee try to organise a taster in that specialty.

If all else fails and it is not possible to organise a taster, as a bare minimum your trainee could consider arranging a few days of work shadowing, attending a national conference in their

specialty of interest, as well as reading recent issues of the major journals in that specialty. All these are ways in which they can find out more about working in that specialty (and are also ways in which they can demonstrate a commitment to the specialty in an application form or at an interview).

When your trainee returns from their taster, it can be helpful if you arrange to see them for a 'debriefing'. The sorts of questions you could discuss are included in Fig. 3.

- What were your expectations about this specialty?
- Prior to the taster, in what specific ways did you think you might be suited to the specialty?
- Prior to the taster, did you have any specific concerns about ways in which you might not be suited to the specialty?
- What did you find out about the specialty – and about yourself?
- To what extent do you think that you were able to get a representative picture of clinical practice in this particular specialty during the taster?
- Do you have any remaining questions about the specialty that you were not able to answer on the taster? If so, how could you have these questions answered?
- What are the next steps that you are going to take, on the basis of having completed the taster? (For example, have remaining questions answered; talk to more people in the specialty; find out how to apply for posts in that specialty; research other specialties.)

Figure 3: PostTaster questions to discuss with your trainee

Pages 91–2 of *ROADS* outline the role of the educational supervisor in facilitating the trainee's exploration of different career options. This section of *ROADS* also gives examples of the sorts of questions you can discuss with trainees, in order to help them with the career exploration process.

## HELPING YOUR TRAINEE WITH STAGE 3 – DECISION MAKING

### a. Using *ROADS*

The *ROADS* acronym can be used to have an in-depth discussion with your trainee about the robustness of their career decision making. Specifically, you should pose the following questions to your trainee:

- Realistic:** Are you being realistic about yourself and about the demands of the job?
- Opportunities:** Have you given serious consideration to all the opportunities available?
- Anchors:** Have you built in the things that provide support in your life?
- Development:** Do your choices fully develop your potential?
- Stress:** Have you considered those aspects of work that create particular stresses for you?

When discussing the *ROADS* criteria with your trainee it is helpful if you draw on all the Stage 1 and Stage 2 activities that they have carried out. So this might involve discussing exercises that they have completed in *ROADS* or any of the exercises that they have done from the national website as well as reviewing their learning portfolio.

### b. A plan and a back-up

When students apply for university through UCAS they accept a first-choice offer and a back-up offer, with the latter having lower grades. In a similar way it can be helpful to encourage your trainees (particularly if they are applying for a highly competitive specialty) to identify a second option that they would be happy to pursue if they are not successful in their first-choice option.

Some trainees are reluctant to consider having a back-up, and obviously in the end the decision rests with each individual trainee. But you might want to point out that the psychological literature suggests that it is a myth that each trainee is only suited to one specialty. (For a more detailed coverage of this issue see *ROADS*, pp. 23–4, or the e-learning Careers Support module on offer from London Deanery's Faculty Development Programme.)

Pages 92–3 of *ROADS* outline the role of the educational supervisor in facilitating the trainee's career decision making. This section of *ROADS* also gives examples of the sorts of questions you can discuss with trainees, in order to help them with this stage.

## HELPING YOUR TRAINEE WITH STAGE 4 – PLAN IMPLEMENTATION

### a. Being clear how much help you can give

Whether or not you are involved in short-listing or interviewing, it is certainly permissible for you to help your trainee plan Stage 4 appropriately. The sorts of issues that you might want to discuss with your trainee include the following:

- The practicalities of the application process.
- Helping the trainee to consider whether their answers adequately answer the question that has been posed.
- Warning them against plagiarism as the trainee has to sign a declaration that the content is their own work.

Beyond this, you can make general comments such as 'I don't think you have adequately answered the second part of the question. Perhaps you could give more detail on your audit project.'

But you should avoid suggesting specific wording for an application form or CV.



### b. Using the portfolio when writing applications/preparing for interviews

Each Education Centre Library has been sent 5 copies of a recent DVD produced by Peninsula Deanery in conjunction with AGCAS (The Association of Graduate Careers Advisory Services). The DVD is entitled ' Selection Centres for Specialty Training' and it provides a clear summary of how best to prepare for specialty interviews.

In some trusts your trainee will have been shown the DVD as part of a career planning workshop. If that has not happened then you might want to watch it with your trainee, or alternatively encourage them to watch it, and then discuss any queries with you.

### c. Using DVDs for interview preparation

Each Education Centre library has been sent five copies of a recent DVD produced by Peninsula Deanery in conjunction with AGCAS (The Association of Graduate Careers Advisory Services). The DVD is entitled *Selection Centres for Specialty Training* and provides a clear summary of how best to prepare for specialty interviews.

In some trusts your trainee will have been shown the DVD as part of a careers-planning workshop. If that has not happened then you might want to watch it with your trainee, or alternatively encourage them to watch it, and then discuss any queries with you.

### d. BMJ Careers Fairs

The BMJ Careers Fair provides opportunities for the trainees to learn more about CVs, application forms and interview preparation. You can therefore suggest that, if at all possible, your trainee should attend this event.

### e. Trainees with particular difficulties

If your trainee experiences particular difficulties with application forms/CVs or with interviews, in the first instance you might want to discuss this with the senior member of the educational faculty who has responsibility for careers support in your trust. Sometimes this person might be able to provide additional support with these tasks. But if this is not possible then the central deanery careers team may be able to offer 1:1 coaching or a small group workshop.

Pages 94–5 of *ROADS* outline the role of the educational supervisor in helping the trainee with preparing to write good application forms and preparing for interview. This section of *ROADS* also gives examples of the sorts of issues you can discuss with trainees about CVs, application forms and interviews.

## Additional sources of careers support for trainees

Looking back at the careers support pyramid (Fig. 1), you can see that some trainees will need more support than you can offer, and may need to receive additional support from other educational faculty at your trust (Tier 3) or from members of the deanery careers team (Tier 4).

Typical reasons for suggesting that the trainee receive help from other educational faculty at your trust might include the following:

- Despite spending time discussing career issues in each educational supervision session using the approach outlined below, the trainee is struggling to decide what options to apply for next.
- The trainee has decided which options they wish to apply for, but you are concerned that their career plans are hopelessly unrealistic.
- The trainee is wondering whether they want to continue in medicine.
- The trainee has identified a careers plan which you feel on the basis of their performance to date is realistic – but they have requested extra support with CVs/application forms/interviews.

Although it is possible for an educational supervisor to refer a trainee to the Deanery Careers Unit (i.e. to Tier 4), it is often advisable for the trainee to discuss their career plans with trust-based education faculty (Tier 3) first. Suitable people to consult at local level include the Foundation Programme Training Director, Director of Medical Education or the Faculty Careers Lead. Exactly who to consult will vary from trust to trust, but increasingly there is a pool of people who have received additional training in careers support, and who can provide more specialist careers guidance at trust level.

The Deanery Careers Unit (Tier 4) is also able to provide 1:1 careers support to individual trainees. However, initial referral to this service should be via the educational supervisor, or by other educational faculty at trust level, rather than by self-referral.

## Other sources of support for trainees

### Mednet

Mednet is a confidential counselling service for doctors working in areas covered by London Deanery. It is run by doctors and funded by London Deanery. It offers practical advice about emotional and career issues, and may also provide access to brief or longer-term psychotherapy:

<http://www.londondeanery.ac.uk/var/career-personal-development/MedNet>

### Mentoring

London Deanery also provides a confidential mentoring service which puts doctors interested in receiving mentoring in touch with skilled and trained mentors who are quality-assured and supported in their roles:

<http://www.mentoring.londondeanery.ac.uk/>



## What other resources are there for enhancing the quality of careers support that educational supervisors provide to trainees?

### a. e-learning

There is an e-learning careers support module as part of the faculty development programme. The e-learning module provides more in-depth coverage of the issues contained in this booklet. See [www.faculty.londondeanery.ac.uk/e-learning](http://www.faculty.londondeanery.ac.uk/e-learning)

### b. London Deanery workshops

Careers Support Training workshops for educational supervisors are currently being offered centrally through the Deanery Careers Unit. In addition, there are plans to offer these at trust level in the future. These workshops provide participants with an opportunity to explore the four-stage approach in more depth. The workshops also provide participants with an opportunity to discuss (anonymous) examples of trainees they have supported who have had more-complex career difficulties.

If you are interested in finding out more about the workshops then contact the Deanery Careers Unit.

### c. Support from the Deanery Careers Unit

It is always possible to contact the careers unit by telephone or by email if you have queries regarding a particular trainee. Contact details for the unit are given at the end of this guide.

### d. Postgraduate Certificate in Managing Medical Careers

This is a part-time course validated by the Institute of Postgraduate Medicine at Brighton and Sussex Medical School. Teaching takes place at the Kent, Surrey and Sussex Deanery (near London Bridge). The course is organised by faculty from KSS Deanery, although London Deanery faculty also teach on the course. Further details are available from KSS Deanery or from London Deanery's careers unit.

## Final checklist!

It is difficult to condense all the relevant points about providing effective careers support into one short list. But the checklist below attempts to summarise key issues that you need to keep in mind when providing careers support to your trainee.

- 1 In order to ensure that you and your trainee are both working from a shared framework, in your first supervision session check their understanding of the four-stage approach: Self-Assessment; Career Exploration; Decision Making; Plan Implementation.
- 2 Ask your trainee to bring their learning portfolios (and, if relevant, completed self-assessment exercises, drafts of application forms, interview preparation, etc.) to every supervision session.
- 3 Spend time discussing your trainee's career plans at each supervision meeting and if necessary arrange an extra meeting in which you will focus on careers support. In this way you will help your trainee not to leave career planning to the last minute.
- 4 Encourage your trainee to use the learning portfolio (and any other relevant data) to enhance their understanding of how they have been progressing and what the possible career implications of this might be.



- 5 Listening is key. See what happens if you listen more, and talk less, during each supervision session.
- 6 Help your trainee to lay the groundwork for good career decision making by spending sufficient time on Stage 1 (Self-Assessment) and Stage 2 (Career Exploration).
- 7 Ensure you provide your trainee with clear, constructive feedback on their performance to date. Without this it might be difficult for them to make appropriate career decisions.
- 8 When your trainee has made a decision about what they are intending to apply for next, use the *ROADS* acronym to check the robustness of the decision. Specifically, you should pose the following questions to your trainee:
  - Realistic:** Are you being realistic about yourself and about the demands of the job?
  - Opportunities:** Have you given serious consideration to all the opportunities available?
  - Anchors:** Have you built in the things that provide support in your life?
  - Development:** Do your choices fully develop your potential?
  - Stress:** Have you considered those aspects of work that create particular stresses for you?
- 9 At the end of each meeting ask your trainee to specify which particular career-planning tasks they will carry out, and within what specified time-scale.
- 10 If you are concerned that your trainee is being unrealistic, focus on posing challenging questions rather than giving direct advice. And if necessary suggest that they talk through their career plans with a colleague or with a member of the deanery careers team. Before this meeting provide your colleague or member of the deanery careers team with a brief report that outlines your concerns.

## Contact the Careers Unit

Telephone: 0207 866 3230

Email: [careersunit@londondeanery.ac.uk](mailto:careersunit@londondeanery.ac.uk)