

# A Guide for Educational and Clinical Supervisors: Supervising Foundation Doctors Effectively

## Introduction

As an educational or clinical supervisor, your role is vital in ensuring that Foundation Doctors (FDs) develop the necessary skills, knowledge, and professional attributes to deliver high-quality patient care. This guide provides practical advice on how to supervise Foundation Doctors effectively, ensuring their success while maintaining the highest clinical standards.

## 1. Establish Clear Expectations

From the outset, it is crucial to establish clear expectations. Foundation Doctors must understand what is required of them in terms of clinical responsibilities, professional conduct, and educational objectives.

- **Initial Meeting:** During the first meeting, clarify roles, responsibilities, and learning objectives.
- **Learning Contracts:** Develop a learning contract outlining the doctor's strengths, areas for development, and specific goals for their rotation.
- **Regular Feedback:** Make feedback part of daily practice, so expectations are consistently reviewed and adapted as necessary.

## 2. Create a Supportive Learning Environment

Foundation Doctors are in a transitional phase between medical school and independent practice. Your role is to create a supportive environment where they can learn and develop.

- **Encouragement:** Encourage open communication and reassure FDs that it's acceptable to ask questions or admit uncertainties.
- **Psychological Safety:** Foster an environment where they feel safe to share their concerns, challenges, or errors without fear of punishment.
- **Access to Resources:** Ensure that Foundation Doctors have easy access to learning materials, clinical guidelines, and experienced colleagues for guidance.

## 3. Provide Structured Feedback and Assessment

Feedback is essential for a Foundation Doctor's growth and development. Effective supervision relies on structured and timely feedback.



- **Constructive Feedback:** Offer specific, actionable feedback regularly. Focus on both areas of strength and those needing improvement.
- **Use of Assessment Tools:** Utilize formal assessment tools, such as mini-CEX (Clinical Evaluation Exercise) and DOPS (Direct Observation of Procedural Skills), to monitor progress. Make these assessments opportunities for teaching, not just evaluation.
- **Reflective Practice:** Encourage reflective practice by asking FDs to review clinical cases, their actions, and learning points.

#### 4. Balance Supervision and Autonomy

One of the key challenges in supervising Foundation Doctors is striking the right balance between providing adequate supervision and allowing them to develop autonomy.

- **Gradual Responsibility:** As their competence increases, gradually increase the level of responsibility they hold.
- **Observation and Delegation:** Directly observe their work initially, then gradually delegate more complex tasks as confidence and skill improve.
- **Supportive Oversight:** While promoting independence, ensure a clear chain of supervision is in place so that they know when and how to escalate issues.

#### 5. Foster Professionalism and Reflection

Foundation Doctors must develop not only clinical skills but also professional behaviours and attitudes.

- **Role Modelling:** Demonstrate professionalism in your own actions. This includes demonstrating respect, maintaining patient confidentiality, and displaying a commitment to continual learning.
- **Ethical Dilemmas:** Discuss real-life ethical dilemmas and encourage them to reflect on their decisions and actions.
- **Reflective Practice:** Encourage FDs to use tools like reflective diaries or portfolios to think critically about their clinical experiences.

#### 6. Provide Career and Personal Development Support

As a supervisor, you play a crucial role in helping Foundation Doctors shape their careers and manage personal challenges.

- **Career Planning:** Discuss career aspirations early and help them explore different specialties, offering guidance on how to pursue their goals.
- **Personal Support:** Be mindful of their well-being and work-life balance. Encourage them to seek support for personal issues and ensure they are aware of available services (e.g., mentoring or counselling services).



## 7. Managing Underperformance

Occasionally, Foundation Doctors may struggle to meet expected standards. It is important to identify and manage underperformance early to provide appropriate support.

- **Early Identification:** Regular reviews will help identify underperformance early. Signs might include frequent errors, lack of confidence, or failing to complete tasks.
- **Supportive Interventions:** Work with the doctor to develop an action plan to address issues. This may include additional training, mentorship, or adjustments to workload.
- **Formal Processes:** If underperformance persists, follow local procedures for remediation and document all concerns and actions taken.

## 8. Ensure Regular Review Meetings

Regular review meetings between you and the Foundation Doctor are essential to track progress, address concerns, and update goals.

- **Set Review Dates Early:** Agree on a schedule for formal meetings at the beginning of each rotation, typically midway and at the end.
- **Personal Development Plans:** During these reviews, assess progress against their learning contract and adjust their personal development plan as needed.
- **Two-Way Feedback:** Allow Foundation Doctors the opportunity to provide feedback on their experience with supervision, the workplace, and their clinical development.

## Conclusion

Effective supervision of Foundation Doctors is critical for their development and patient safety. By establishing clear expectations, providing structured feedback, balancing autonomy with oversight, and fostering professionalism, you can ensure they become confident and competent doctors. Remember, your guidance today shapes the future of healthcare.



## Appendix: Useful Resources

- **Foundation Programme Curriculum:** [Curriculum - UK Foundation Programme](#) (section on UK FP curriculum)
- **Assessment Tools Guide:** [Curriculum - UK Foundation Programme](#) (Section on assessments)
- **Career Planning Resources: UKFPO website link** [Careers - UK Foundation Programme](#). Trainees can also discuss careers with a member of the Professional Support and Wellbeing team. They can do a self-referral to do so, please follow this link for the referral and they need to be specific in wishing to speak to someone regarding careers [PSW Referral Form \(Page 1 of 5\)](#)
- **Wellbeing Support Services:** [Wellbeing | PGME Plymouth](#) Our Wellbeing page has several wellbeing options and support all in one place to decide the best support networks for the trainee.

