A Guide to the Formative CSA for ST3 Trainees

# About the formative CSA

The fCSA is designed to give you an introduction to the CSA, a flavour of what’s it’s like to do a GP consultation under exam conditions and some feedback from local GP trainers on your current progress. It is not an exam so you cannot pass or fail it - we aim to give you formative feedback that you can use in your clinical development and preparation for the CSA itself.

We are aware that everyone will be at different stages of preparation for the exam so will ask you to indicate when you are planning to sit the exam in order to make your feedback more specific to you.

# Preparation

No specific preparation is required for the fCSA. The best way to practice for the CSA itself is to consult in practice and analyse your performance with peers and GPs – you will be doing this already.

If you are not already aware, it may be helpful to look at the CSA pages on the RCGP website, especially the section on how cases are marked. The overview can be found here: <http://www.rcgp.org.uk/training-exams/mrcgp-exams-overview/mrcgp-clinical-skills-assessment-csa.aspx>

# How the sessions work – practicalities

The morning or afternoon sessions are split in two: a 4-case fCSA and an education session.

## 4-case fCSA

This part of the session takes about an hour and twenty minutes. 20 minutes has been allocated to each of the 4 cases and these will run as below. Please note that, unlike the real CSA *you* move rooms and are not required to take any equipment with you. You will be briefed by the fCSA co-ordinator and the beginning and end of the session and will have time to ask questions.

**Bell 1 (0 minutes):** Enter the room. Introduce yourself to the examiner and read the case.

**Bell 2 (2 minutes):** The actor will enter the room – start your consultation.

**Bell 3 (14 minutes):** Stop your case. You will get verbal feedback from the examiner with input from the actor playing the case.

**Bell 4 (19 minutes):** Finish feedback. Leave this room.

There will then be one minute for you to move out of that room and stand outside your next room read to start the cycle again. Please do not enter the next room before the bell goes – the assessor might be finishing up feedback from the last person.

If you are doing the exam before Christmas, you may decide that you would rather practise a 10-minute consultation (as in the exam). You will have the opportunity to indicate this to the assessors and they will stop you at 10 minutes. There will be no bell for this.

The first case if often the worse, as you are settling in – even if this goes badly, try to put it behind you and start the next case fresh: this is good practice for the real exam.

## Education session

This session is designed to help your preparation for the fCSA. The Education Fellows have designed a teaching session which complements your preparation. They will also coordinate a discussion where you share tips suggestion for CSA skills and preparation – we will summarise this into a document which will be sent to you all on completion of the fCSA days.

# Using your feedback

You will get written copies of your feedback from all 4 cases. This will be emailed to you and your trainees in the weeks after the fCSA. We ask assessors to try to provide balanced feedback but finding time to write everything down can be really challenging. They will therefore focus on recording what they feel that you can improve on as this is most helpful for your CSA preparation. If, therefore, you receive a form that has only a couple of positives and lots of things to improve on this doesn’t mean that you didn’t do anything well, just that there wasn’t time to record all of the positive things as well as give constructive comments.

Please take some time in tutorial with your trainer to go through the comments in details. It will be most helpful if comments match up with areas that they have already notes require improvement as these are foci for future learning. If there are mismatches between feedback and your work in practice, this may highlight some areas of exam technique that require focus or may have just been a momentary lapse in the stress of the exam conditions.

# What happens if we speak to your trainer?

For some trainees, in addition to forwarding the feedback forms to your trainer, we will speak to them on the phone. We will let you know that we are doing this and will also copy you in to any emails. This is not punitive and it certainly doesn’t mean that you have been highlighted as going to fail the CSA. It may mean that we have noted consistent problems across the cases and want to highlight this specifically to you and your trainer as an area for improvement, especially if you have indicated that you plan to sit the exam in the following few months.