

**Returning to training after a period of absence.
Supported Return to Training (SuppoRTT)**

Guys and St. Thomas' NHS Foundation Trust (GSTT)

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Introduction:

Doctors may require a prolonged period of absence from their clinical work and duties for many reasons. A prolonged period of absence from work is usually defined as at least 3 months off and may extend to several years. The reasons for their period of absence are many and typically include: parental leave, sick leave, time off as a carer, burn out or mental health issues, time out for conduct or capability issues, need for a career break and commonly an out of programme period of research or dedicated training and experience.

Out of Programme for Research is also called (OOPR), Out of Programme for Experience is called (OOPE) and Out of Programme for a career break is called (OOPC)

Guidance by the Academy of Royal Medical Colleges has suggested that a period of absence of more than 3 months may significantly affect clinical knowledge and skills¹. Skill fade is a described phenomenon² and is dependent on length of time away from clinical practice and age. The rate at which the trainee returns to their previous level of competence, confidence and knowledge is also dependent on the amount of time in training and the level of experience gained prior to their career break.

Whatever, these reasons are for their period of absence, Health Education England (HEE) and the Department of Health (DoH) have now recognised that this time out away from clinical duties and responsibilities can significantly impact on a trainee's confidence, in respect to their competence in clinical skills and techniques. This has implications for both patient safety, the trainee's confidence and the rate of return to the level of previous competence.

It is with this in mind that the HEE have committed to support these trainees returning to work as much as possible and have encouraged all trusts to implement a Supported Return to Training (SuppoRTT) policy. The scheme gives trainees and trainers a structured process which can be followed, resources to support both the period of absence and return to training and the potential for an individualised programme to meet the individual needs of each trainee.

SuppoRTT document:

<https://www.hee.nhs.uk/our-work/supporting-doctors-returning-training-after-time-out>

Recently London and South East HEE have released guidelines on supported return to training for all trainees across all specialties. This HEE website includes

documentation and forms to be completed by the trainee together with their Educational Supervisor (ES) or Training Programme Director (TPD) prior to their planned leave of absence and on their return along with a documented supervised phased return to work. It also includes access to funding to support trainees, up to a maximum of £3000 per trainee to be used to help them keep in touch and up to date in their speciality whilst away from work.

This document is designed to help support all these trainees who are returning to work at GSTT. It will help guide these trainees themselves but also advice their Educational Supervisor (ES) and their Training Programme Director (TPD) as to how best to guide and support their planned return to work.

Details of the trainees plans for absence, plans for return to work and the final sign off during their supervised phased return to work should all be documented on the forms which are supplied in this HEE document:

<https://london.hee.nhs.uk/professional-development/supported-return-training>

These forms should then be sent as a copy to the SuppoRTT Trust champions here at GSTT.

1. Planning for a Period of Absence

Ideally an absence planning meeting should be arranged between the trainee and their Educational Supervisor or their Training Programme Director at least 3 months before their plan to leave. If relevant, such as due to health reasons, they should also contact the Occupational Health Department.

This should also apply to all trainees even if they are planning to return to a new trust after their period of leave.

There are several points that should be discussed and documented during this meeting.

- Current speciality and stage of training
- Anticipated date of leave and total period of leave
- Anticipated date of return to work if known
- Reasons for period of leave
- Any outstanding areas of training or skills that they will need on return to work
- Any current appraisal requirements
- Any other outstanding issues requiring attention prior to their absence from training

This meeting will also be a useful forum to inform the trainee of ways of helping keep the trainee up to date during their period of leave which can greatly improve confidence on returning. These would include things such as:

- Keeping in Touch Days (“KIT” days) or “SPLIT” days (Shared Parental leave in Touch Days)
- Regional training days in their speciality and Speciality specific courses
- Seminars or Workshops on “Returning to Work”
- Simulation days for help with clinical or technical skills
- Access to local return to Clinical Practice Days

In order to stay up to date with training whilst away from clinical practice, trainees are encouraged to continue accessing any other educational initiatives that they may find beneficial in addition to the above.

Trainees who are planning to return to work on a Less Than Full Time (LTFT) basis will also need to apply to the Deanery for approval, usually at least 3-4 months before their return to work date. They should also review the Trust Guidelines on “Less Than Full Time work” and the Champion or Lead in LTFT training can also be contacted. anna.goodman@gstt.nhs.uk

Also see full Guidelines and Policy on LTFT training at GSTT and from the GMC.

<https://www.gmc-uk.org/education/standards-guidance-and-curricula/position-statements/less-than-full-time-training>

This meeting may also be the time to address current work and on-call commitments in particular in circumstances such as pregnancy and these trainees may need their current work commitments reduced or adapted prior to their period of leave.

At this meeting **Form 1 “SuppoRTT Pre-Absence Form”** should be filled in and uploaded to the trainee’s portfolio.

This form can be found on the link:

<https://london.hee.nhs.uk/professional-development/supported-return-training>

Direct contact with the SuppoRTT Team at HEE can be made at:

srtt.lase@hee.nhs.uk

2. Planning for the Return to work

A meeting between the trainee and their Educational Supervisor or training Programme Director at the trust at which they are returning to, should be arranged ideally at least 2-3 months prior to the planned date of returning to work.

This meeting is an ideal time to discuss and document the following areas:

- Planned date of return to work
- Their next training placement and level of training
- Any KIT days that they have done or are planning to do
- Any particular areas of concern at this stage
- Any need to contact Occupational health
- Plans to devise a supervised phased return to training.
- Named supervisor or mentor to be given (either Consultant or Senior Trainee)
- Dates for Trust and Departmental Induction can be arranged
- Meetings with Occupational health or Human Resources (HR) can be arranged to discuss days worked, rotas etc.
- Offer to the trainee to start early in a supernumerary capacity in order to familiarise themselves with their workplace
- Trainees can be offered a period of enhanced shadowing for up to 3 weeks prior to their return date
- Encourage use of on-line e-learning resources whilst on leave
- If the trainee wishes to return LTFT, the TPD and LTFT Deanery advisor must be involved

Keeping in Touch (KIT) Days can be used in a number of ways. They can be used to perform supervised clinical work, such as sitting in on clinics or attending ward rounds with a supervising consultant or senior trainee. They can attend meetings such as Departmental Teaching or Educational meetings, attend National courses or conferences or Regional training days and also to attend Trust induction days.

These can all be taken as half or full time days. A maximum of 10 x KIT days can be taken for each trainee and usually can begin after 2 weeks after they start their period of leave. However, the number of days taken and any pay awarded will have to be mutually agreed between the trainee and the trust and must be prospectively approved. Formal application for funding from the HEE must be done via their web-site and email address.

Planning their Supervised Phased Return to work:

It is anticipated that all trainees returning to work will need a period of additional supervision and support in the first 4 weeks of returning to work. The level of support

will depend on the individual trainee's prior level of experience and stage of training as well as their time away from training.

As a guide therefore we recommend that **all trainees should be supervised** during their first 4 weeks in any:

- Clinics
- Surgical / theatre lists
- Procedures requiring experienced skills such as endoscopy, bronchoscopy or catheterizations
- It is also recommended that **all trainees should be exempt from any on-call commitments unless they are supervised and covered by a senior clinician** such as night-time ward cover, theatre on call or endoscopy on call for the first 4 weeks on return to work
- Before the trainee is to start any on- call commitments, it is recommended that provision should be made for that trainee to attend an on-call shift in a supernumerary capacity prior to this.

For more complex interventions, local discussion and agreement is recommended, dependent on the trainee's experience and competency.

It is anticipated that some trainees may require a longer period than 4 weeks of supervised phased return and this should be offered as required after discussion at the end of the 4 weeks with their Educational Supervisor or Training Programme Director. Any concerns about competency, clinical skills or confidence can also be addressed at this meeting.

At this meeting **Form 2 "SuppoRTT Pre-Return/Follow up Review Form"** should be filled in and uploaded to the trainee's portfolio. The Form 2 is provided at the HEE website and again a copy of this should be sent to the GSTT SuppoRTT Trust Champions.

3. Following a Return to Training:

All trainees should have a Mandatory Trust and Departmental Induction.

It is advised that the trainee contact the ES or TPD at approximately 1 week after their return to work to ensure that there are no initial concerns or problems such as: lack of supervision, being asked to do on-call commitments or a full time timetable for those doing an LTFT work schedule.

If the ES or TPD cannot be contacted or is not available to discuss these concerns then the 2 x Champions or Leads for SuppoRTT should be contacted via email:

michele.mccarthy@gstt.nhs.uk

rachel.byng-maddick@gstt.nhs.uk

Subsequently a final face to face meeting should be arranged between the trainee and ES or TPD after their completion of the 4 weeks of supervised phased return to work, to sign this off as completed.

It may be useful here to use Work Based Assessments (WBAs) or Clinical based Discussions (CBDs) as well as a Log book for any procedures performed to help assess their level of competence and independence during this period.

Any outstanding Occupational health concerns can also be addressed at this meeting.

If for any reason, it is felt that the trainee should have an extended period of supervised and phased return to work, then this can be organised by the ES or TPD. If this is going to be significantly prolonged then the Deanery and the Royal College in that speciality should be contacted in the event that this may result in a delay to the trainee's CCT date.

At this meeting **Form 3 "SuppoRTT Post-Return Follow up Review Form"** should be filled in and uploaded to the trainee's portfolio.

Please can the EDs and TPDs then send a copy of this Form 3 to the Trust Champions and Leads in SuppoRTT so that the number and details of trainees returning to GSTT can be carefully monitored and audited.

4. Other Support from Health Education England and Locally at GSTT:

HEE has also supplied a number of other useful learning tools for trainees returning to work with the aims of both giving confidence to the trainee as well as helping to provide updates on clinical skills.

A number of videos are available to download:

1. How to apply for SuppoRTT Video: <https://youtube/nHuad4omqXE>
2. Return to Clinical Practice Video 3: <https://londonpaediatrics.co.uk/current-trainees/returning-to-clinical-practice/pracp-videos/>

Other Online Resources for Clinical Updates and e-learning:

Learning material:

RCP e-Learning: <https://learning.rcpe.ac.uk/>

RCEM Learning: <https://www.rcemlearning.co.uk/>

e-LfH Tutorials: <https://www.e-lfh.org.uk/programmes/>

RCPSG e-learning: <https://rcpsg.ac.uk/elearning#physicians>

Faculty of Intensive Care Medicine Learning: <https://ficmlearning.org/>

Resuscitation Council-guidelines and algorithms:
<https://www.resus.org.uk/resuscitation-guidelines/>

RCEM Clinical Updates: <https://www.rcem.ac.uk/RCEM/QualityPolicy/ClinicalStandardsGuidance/>

Critical Care Education Updates: <https://www.rcoa.ac.uk/events-professional-development/education-professional-development/rcoa-videos/critical-care>

V-Space: Virtual Support Sessions for returning Trainees

<https://www.lpmde.ac.uk/professional-development/inductreturnretain/rtp/v-space-virtual-support-sessions-for-returning-trainees>

Within our own trust at GSTT, we have a well-staffed and structured **SIMULATION TEAM** run through the SaiL centre at GSTT.

This team can provide some in house training sessions and seminars throughout the year that trainees will find very useful. We currently have arrange of seminars and workshops which include: venesection skills, cannulation courses, advanced life-saving skills (ALS) and team working skills workshops.

We have in the past been able to offer a formal “Return to Training Workshop” which was a 4 day course. Unfortunately due to recent lack of funding we have not been able to offer this in the last 2 years but it is hoped that we can apply for future funding to get this course put on again at our trust to be run 3 times a year for 2 days. The course will give the learners the opportunity to practice clinical skills as well as the values associated with practice. There will be a forum for the trainees to discuss their concerns common to all who are returning to training after being away for an extended period of time.

The Simulation team can be contacted via: simulation@gstt.nhs.uk and also via www.guysandstthomaseducation.com/return-to-training/

Her at GSTT both the Trust Champions give an induction talk at the Postgraduate induction lecture days held several times throughout the year so that returning trainees can touch base with us and will know how to contact us if required.

Similarly we are also planning to participate in the yearly Mandatory Consultant Training Days so that all consultants but especially Educational Supervisors and Training Programmed Directors will also know about our policy and know how to contact us and more importantly how to direct their trainees to us via email.

References:

1. Return to Practice Guidance 2017 revision. Academy of Medical Royal Colleges 2017
<http://www.aomrc.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2017/06/Returntopracticeguidance2017revision0617-2.pdf>
2. GMC skill fade literature review: Skills fade: a review of the evidence that clinical and professional skills fade during time out of practice, and how skills fade may be measured or remediated. December 2014
<https://www.gmc-uk.org/Skillsfadeliteraturereviewfinalreport.pdf60956354.pdf>
3. SuppoRTT website:
<https://www.hee.nhs.uk/our-work/supporting-doctors-returning-training-after-time-out>
4. srtt.lase@hee.nhs.uk
5. <https://london.hee.nhs.uk/professional-development/supported-return-training>
6. <https://london.hee.nhs.uk/professional-development/professional-support-unit>
7. <https://london.hee.nhs.uk/covid-19-wellbeing-hub>
8. These links are to all the specialty schools and Royal College web-site links:
<https://www.lpmde.ac.uk/training-programme/specialty-schools>
<https://www.lpmde.ac.uk/laserecruitemt/medical-specialty>

