Flexible Careers Scheme for NHS Hospital Doctors

The Flexible Careers Scheme is a response to the Improving Working Lives Initiative, which aims to make the National Health Service a better place to work. The IWL standard sets out the expectations placed on NHS employers to support staff and promote their welfare and development, in order to create a healthy and productive balance between work and outside life.

The Flexible Careers Scheme has been developed to give hospital doctors more opportunities to work flexibly in their careers, and so enable doctors, who would otherwise leave the service or have already left, to use their skills and experience gained in the NHS to benefit the NHS. This is a clear benefit both to doctors and the NHS where staffing and retention of staff is one of the key issues.

The Scheme is available for all hospital doctors, who have settled status or indefinite leave to remain in the UK/EEA and have appropriate GMC registration, regardless of gender, ethnicity, and level of training or grade. The Scheme is designed to enable doctors to fulfil the revalidation requirements of their speciality, keep up their practise, receive advice and have access to appraisal.

The flexible working element of the Scheme provides support for doctors to work up to half time. It can be used to facilitate job shares and allow Trusts to increase Consultant numbers as well as providing opportunities for irregular working patterns by annualising working hours.

Who is the Flexible Careers Scheme for?

Doctors in training grades

- Doctors who wish to take a managed break from training in the NHS, working 19 hours a week or less but still maintaining their clinical skills.
- Career grade doctors
- Career grade doctors with personal circumstances which mean they need to work flexibly
- Doctors who are semi-retired or approaching retirement who wish to continue making a service contribution to the NHS with reduced hours
- Doctors recently awarded their Certificate of Completion of Training (CCT) who wish to work flexibly as a consultant.
- Doctors working outside the NHS who wish to work flexibly within it, including doctors currently working as locums who are unable to work full-time and doctors who wish to come out of retirement to work flexibly for a period

‘Returners’ who need a supervised, funded period of practice before returning to regular employment in the NHS

- See detailed criteria
Specific Criteria for Doctors Returning to the NHS

The purpose of the Scheme is to support the return to clinical practice of medically qualified individuals who fulfil the criteria indicated below.

The Postgraduate Dean (or nominated Associate Dean) or Director of Postgraduate General Practice approves applications from doctors who have been assessed as suitable to join the Flexible Careers Returner Scheme and recommends them for entry to the Scheme. The following criteria should be used to assess whether an applicant is suitable for the Scheme.

- The Postgraduate Dean needs to be satisfied that a 6 month placement (or equivalent part-time) is sufficient for the applicant to reach a standard where they can compete in open competition for a NHS post
- It must be at least two years since the applicant last worked in a substantive NHS post
- The applicant must have at least 12 months whole time equivalent previous work in a substantive NHS post (can include pre-registration posts)
- The applicant will be required to supply satisfactory references from their last period of employment in the NHS
- The applicant must have been out of clinical practice for no more than five years. If the applicant has been out of clinical practice for more than five years, then he/she must first undertake a clinical attachment prior to being considered for the Scheme
- The applicant must have full registration with the General Medical Council and be in good standing with the GMC. The applicant must be able to demonstrate full compliance with Occupational Health and Criminal Records Bureau clearance requirements
- The applicant must have settled status in the UK/EEA or indefinite leave to remain

Structure and Funding

The structure of posts and the funding for Flexible Careers posts depend on whether doctors are Training Grades, Career Grades or Returners

Training Grade Equivalents

- Doctors can work a maximum of 19 hours per week, which can be annualised
- Employment costs will be funded 100% for up to 2 years
- Doctors will be required to have a plan for their re-entry into training
- Posts of less than half time cannot be considered as training posts and therefore do not qualify for banding payments

Career Grades

- Doctors will be funded for a maximum of 5 Programmed Activities, which can be annualised
- Doctors who have recently acquired CCT and are applying for their first Consultant post may be eligible for up to 6 Programmed Activities
- Any additional sessions must be fully funded by the Trust.
- Funding will be for 3 years on the basis of 50% in the first year, 25% in the second, 10% in the third
- Career Grade appointments under the scheme have tenure after NHSP funding ceases
- Career Grade doctors looking for Flexible Careers posts in Trusts they are not currently employed by must be interviewed and the posts advertised as appropriate for the grade.
includes doctors who have recently got their CCT and are applying for their first consultant post.

- The scheme does not fund Merit/Distinction Awards but will honour previously awarded discretionary points

Returners

- Can work up to six months full-time or the equivalent part-time on the scheme
- Employment costs will be funded 100%
- Doctors will be required to plan their re-entry into Training or Career posts and should receive help and advice with this

How the Flexible Careers Scheme/Returner Scheme works

Applicants for Returner posts should be aware of the following:

- The placements in the Scheme are not formally recognised training
- Acceptance onto the scheme does not guarantee a clinical placement or subsequent employment
- No Trust or consultant is under any obligation to accept a returner
- If having accepted a returner, a Trust or consultant deems that the supervisory arrangements are compromising patient care, the arrangements may be terminated
- Deaneries cannot accept responsibility for Trusts or consultants refusing to accept or to continue to supervise a returner
- No extensions will be approved beyond a six month full time placement (or equivalent part-time)
- A doctor who has had the benefit of a returner placement will be disqualified from further applications for a period of two years from their last day on the scheme

Appraisal, Revalidation and Educational content

- Posts will provide sufficient medical/clinical practice for revalidation purposes
- Each doctor will meet regularly with a clinical and educational supervisor who will also be the identified appraiser provided by the Trust
- Each post will have an educational CPD element
- All posts are subject to annual review

Hours of work and locum working

- Doctors hours can be annualised i.e. averaged out over the year so doctors can work more or less at different times as suits their personal circumstances
- Doctors will not be required to work out of hours, although they can do if this suits their circumstances (within the total hours limits). Working part-time on the scheme will not attract banding payments
- Any additional locum work undertaken by the doctor should either be done through direct employment by their Trust or through NHS Professionals

Rights and Benefits

- Doctors on the scheme will be entitled to access the same range of employment benefits as other NHS employees, e.g. sickness benefit, annual leave maternity rights
- Access to the NHS pension Scheme will be available, please refer to the final section of these guidelines
- Doctors on the scheme will be entitled to study leave on a pro-rata basis as applicable to their
Doctors will receive a fixed annual amount of £700 to cover professional expenses (pro-rata for those in post less than a year)

Specialist Registrars with a National Training Number may be able to retain this while on the scheme but will need to seek the permission of their Postgraduate Dean.

What to do next

Training Grade doctors

- Complete and return application form with a covering letter outlining why you need the Flexible Careers Scheme.
- You will then be invited to approach your local Postgraduate Dean or Associate Dean, to discuss and agree a job plan and plan your return to training.

Returners

- Complete and return the application form and a covering letter outlining why you need the Flexible Careers Scheme
- You will then be asked to contact the local Postgraduate Dean or Associate Dean to discuss your needs and a suitable placement and job plan

Career Grades

If you want to work in a new Trust:

- Complete and return the application form with a covering letter outlining why you need the Scheme
- We can make the initial approach to the Trust but making personal enquiries with the Department you are interested in can also benefit your application

If you want to work in your present trust:

- Discuss with your Clinical or Medical Supervisor
- Complete and return the application form with a covering letter outlining why you need the Scheme.

NHS Pension Scheme

If you have any concerns regarding the effect the Flexible Career Scheme will have on your pension, you should discuss this with your employer and ask them to request, on your behalf, current and future pension estimates (full time and potential reduction).

If, on receiving these estimates, you decide that reducing your commitment is still appropriate, then your employer should write to the appropriate Client Centre Manager (see list below) stating the following ‘ in order to retain key skills within the NHS the trust has given consent to ......................... to move to flexible working under the Flexible Careers Scheme and the pension benefits will need protecting from (date)
NB Benefits for periods of part time employment are calculated on the whole time equivalent salary.

If you have already drawn your retirement benefits, in most cases, you cannot rejoin the scheme, but you may need to check that your pension payments are not affected if you are under 60. This can be checked via your employer with the Client Centre Manager (see list below).

NHS Pensions Agency - Pension Centre Managers

<table>
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<th>Region</th>
<th>Pension Manager</th>
<th>Telephone</th>
<th>E-mail</th>
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<tr>
<td>North</td>
<td>Irene Tonge</td>
<td>01253 774620</td>
<td><a href="mailto:IATonge@nhspa.gov.uk">IATonge@nhspa.gov.uk</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Midland</td>
<td>Liz Skyrme</td>
<td>01253 774621</td>
<td><a href="mailto:EMSkyrme@nhspa.gov.uk">EMSkyrme@nhspa.gov.uk</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>London &amp; Wales</td>
<td>Tracy McMurtrie</td>
<td>01253 774621</td>
<td><a href="mailto:TLMcMurt@nhspa.gov.uk">TLMcMurt@nhspa.gov.uk</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South</td>
<td>Debbie Walker</td>
<td>01253 774502</td>
<td><a href="mailto:DLWalker@nhspa.gov.uk">DLWalker@nhspa.gov.uk</a></td>
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