

Workforce and Education Reform Programme



Return to Practice
Return to NHS

For further information:

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Title of Project:	Return to Practice; Return to NHS
Report Date:	31/03/2023
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<p>Executive Summary</p> <p>In response to growing demands on podiatry services, all efforts to increase the foot health workforce are in effect. Health Education England (HEE) funded the Allied Health Professional (AHP) bodies with a WFER programme, to ensure each profession and its workforce are prepared, and in alignment, with recent publications that plot healthcare trajectory and demand. One way to increase the workforce, is to encourage a national <i>Return to Practice</i> (RtP) movement. The greatest need for the workforce is in the NHS service provision, and thus, the sub-project 5a, focuses on <i>Return to the NHS</i> (RtNHS) from those working in the private sector, by driving the NHS Portfolio Careers campaign.</p>	

Introduction

AHPs may be away from their normal working environment for a multitude of reasons, such as illness, maternity/paternity leave, carers leave, and much more – resulting in extended periods of clinical inactivity¹. Supporting return to practice involves balancing safety and quality care delivery, alongside reducing barriers to return¹. The Next Steps for the Five Year Forward View³ highlights ‘a greater return to practice after a time out of the workforce’ will be needed to support future service delivery. Table 1 shows 12% of podiatrists left the profession in the last five years, with the total average percentage leaving rate across the AHPs to be 11%².

Number of chiropodists/podiatrists registered with HCPC (June 2018)	Numbers leaving the register in the last 5 years (2018-2022)	Percentage leaving
13,115	1,512	12%

Table 1: Chiropodists/Podiatrists leaving the HCPC register²

Both Return to Practice and Return to NHS, aim to contribute to national priorities of supporting promotion of RtP and RtNHS to optimise this supply route by encouraging experienced podiatrists back into the profession and NHS to support service delivery, especially during times of shortfalls in staffing.

Throughout these projects, the Royal College of Podiatry (RCPod) aim to support a change in attitude to returning staff, promote part-time and flexible working, as well as facilitating access to support worker roles pending registration. Furthermore, the college aimed to leader a RtNHS movement by highlighting NHS Portfolio Careers.

Activities undertaken:

1. Review of current resources and guidance available to RCPod's membership, and non-members
2. Scoping guidance and resources available – including HEE, Health and Care Professions Council (HCPC), other AHP body's webpages
3. Scoping current RtP and RtNHS factors, including risks, incentives, barriers – through literature, stakeholder consultations
4. Creation of a new, user-friendly RtP webpage; built for both returnees, and those supporting returnee's journey in RtP – including updated resources, guidance, and signposting for further support
5. Development of a RtP handbook for both returnees and those supporting returnees
6. Capturing case studies of RtP and RtNHS, alongside NHS Portfolio Careers
7. Boost the awareness and use of the RCPod mentorship platform so that returnees and those supporting RtP can connect with greater ease.

Discussion

As the project evolved, 'Return to Practice' was rephrased as 'Returning to the Profession' to be inclusive of the diverse range of sectors available to work in as a podiatrist. For example, clinical, academia, research, industry etc. As well as incorporating the option to return as a member of the **foot health support workforce**.

This inclusive movement has been enhanced by highlighting NHS Portfolio Careers – an interest expressed positively through stakeholder engagement, where the incentives were highlighted as 'flexibility, combined with holiday pay', 'work/life balance and good variation in working week' as contributing factors when considering to RtNHS. To support this, case studies have been captured of hybrid working to show the benefits of returning to the profession and NHS. These case studies, will sit on an updated Return to the Profession webpage on the RCPod website within the NHS Portfolio Career section, providing linkage to further resources, such as **applying to NHS** as a Bank worker to

maximise call to action. Furthermore, a **presentation** to encourage returning to the profession, NHS, and leadership of NHS Portfolio Careers will also sit on this webpage. This will be aimed at those returning to the profession to highlight the support available during their RtP journey, as well as employers to demonstrate the benefits of employing a returnee in their service, and finally to those supporting the RtP journey, such as supervisors, to signpost resources which will aid and enhance their role.

Through stakeholder engagements, it was clear the RCPod membership were looking for a 'simplistic guide of the process accessible on the website', which is now in development. This guidance booklet will sit on the RCPod Returning to the Profession webpage. The main purpose of this booklet is to be a 'one stop shop' for all things that people should know about returning to the profession. However, the sustainability of this manual will be tested if amendments to factors influencing return to practice change, for example, HCPC requirements, HEE funding eligibility criteria etc.

From stakeholder engagement, barriers to effective return to practice included:

- Misconceptions regarding what a returnee to podiatry can do, in comparison to a returnee to the support workforce
- Confusion around using support workforce employment hours as a contributor to the Return to Podiatry hours required by HCPC
- Lack of simplistic guides to support RtP.

RtP to regain registration Vs RtP as a support worker

Misconceptions regarding the route back into the profession can act as a barrier in facilitating a supportive RtP journey. Vacancies that support RtP (Appendix 1) report, "As part of your role within the team, the hours you work can be used to regain your registration with the HCPC via developing clinical and professional competence to meet the standards of proficiency for readmission or renewal to the HCPC register." Although this is statement is true, HCPC report: "as a returner to practice, you are responsible for your own period of updating and for making sure that you meet our standards before you return to practice.

This includes meeting our standards of conduct, performance and ethics, which mean that you practise within your scope of practice.” Table 2 highlights the differences between the two approaches.

	RtP to regain podiatry registration	Returning to the profession as a support worker
HCPC Requirements	If you have been practising in the last two years, you'll need to complete a readmission form ; whereas, if you have not practised for more than two years, you'll need to complete a RtP form .	No contact to HCPC required.
RCPod Requirements	If practised within <2 years, filled out the readmission form, and regained registration - you can apply for ' UK Practising Member ' status. However, if practised outside >2 years, you'll sign up as a ' Mentored Member ', which will involve pairing you with a podiatry supervisor to support your RtP application.	You'll be eligible to apply for ' Associate Member ' at RCPod, once you have completed the relevant support worker module to support your transition into this new role.
Insurance Cover and Scope of Practise	This will provide insurance cover for the returnee to practise to their full previous scope of practice (whether this be Band 5, 6 etc.) Please note, this will not affect the supervisors' insurance with RCPod.	RCPod do not provide insurance to support workforce, as they are covered by the supervising podiatrists' insurance.

Table 2: RtP to regain podiatry registration versus returning to the profession as a support worker.

The difference between these two approaches is determined by the returnee's initial considerations whether to RtP to regain their podiatry registration through HCPC application, or whether the individual would prefer to return to the profession as a support worker.

Returning to the profession as a support worker

As a foot health support worker, the roles applicable for this job description are titled as, 'Podiatry Assistant'. These are not developmental roles, such as the RtP job applications.

If you then decide to RtP to regain podiatry registration at a later stage after working as a support worker, you can contact RCPod, and follow the 'RtP to regain podiatry registration' to begin this journey.

Returning to regain podiatry registration

Tailoring job opportunities to support AHP RtP are becoming more frequent – an example of which can be seen in Appendix 1. Although these are unpaid placement roles, they enable development under supervision, alongside providing a mentor to support developing clinical competence, leadership, and reflective practice skills in the workplace. Upon completion of these programmes when HCPC registration is regained, if the Trusts have a podiatry vacancy available, transition into this role is honoured, which is used as an incentive to attract recruits.

Whilst working towards regaining HCPC registration, you can apply for 'Return to Practice - Allied Health Professional' roles and use these skills to contribute towards your clinical hours. After speaking with Oxford Health about their contracts, they report their contracts can be tailored to individual needs, including, how frequent the placements are held, the content of upskilling needed, alongside fitting these to compliment additional RtP activities, such as formal study (see below).

Finally, Trusts report that if Assistant Practitioner roles are available upon enquiry for their RtP scheme, they may offer this individual part-time paid Band 3 work, alongside this support. However, it is important to note, whilst working within the **scope of a Band 3 practitioner**, these hours should not be considered, or should be used with caution, as part of clinical hours needed to support an application to RtP, as these skills do not fulfil a scope of practice of a Band 5 or higher podiatrist.

In April 2022, HEE commissioned two providers, **Coventry University** and **Birmingham City University**, to provide a RtP course. 'The programme provides the opportunity for AHPs, whose HCPC registration has lapsed after a break in practice of two years or more, to return to practice in England with proficiency and confidence'⁴.

Coventry University course details:

- 100% online (utilising virtual simulations) – starting at any time, and completing the programme at your own pace
- A skills scan recognises the wealth of life and professional experience returnees bring, allowing for the course to be tailored to individual needs
- Consists of two Level 6 non-credit bearing modules equating to 210 hours per module, which meet HCPC RtP guidance; module one (Readiness to practice for registration) for 30 days learning; module two (Embedding lifelong learning for registration) for 60 days learning
- Incorporates Four Pillars of Practice mapped against HCPC Standards of Proficiency
- Additional benefits: the course matches students with a mentor of the same profession to support finding your clinical voice again through coaching; no assessments or submissions are required through the programme; access to the university's journals, eBooks, health and wellbeing hub, financial, study, and employability support, as well as a life coach
- Funding: HEE will fund 100% of course fees for those planning to live and work in England once returned onto the register, with £800 available for personal use to support your studies.

Birmingham City University provide a very similar outline; however, the differences are outlined below:

- The course's two modules provide 40 credits in further learning; Module 1: Knowledge Focused Learning for AHP Returners, and Module 2: Practice Focused Learning for AHP Returners
- Specifies a start date, alongside scheduled practice-based learning weeks

	Birmingham City University	Coventry University
Number of Podiatrists on Course	3	0
Attrition Rate of Podiatrists on Course	3 podiatrists are still on programme to date	N/A
Barriers around RtP	Health Family commitments Finances Accessing supervised practice (not part of course)	N/A

Table 3: Data on returnees in podiatry accessing formal study opportunities.

Although neither course provide support to access in-person, supervised placements, which was highlighted as a barrier in RtP, an opportunity for professional bodies to signpost returners to these placements would overcome this, highlighted by both the universities and literature². Organised placements, or work-shadowing, can greatly support a podiatrist's return to practice, through enabling networking, strengthening CVs and personal statements, and increasing confidence for interviews. Returnees should seek these placements through opportunities such as an NHS RtP contract programme, or by contacting potential employer, or previous connections and colleagues⁵.

In addition, returners can undertake self-directed study as part of their re-registration. This includes a wide range of self-directed online study, reading professional journals or volunteering².

HEE Funding

The financial costs of RtP can be significant for some returnees, and may include childcare, travel, course materials and HCPC feeds. HEE provide £500 funding to support returnees through their journey, developed to support previously HCPC registered individuals back onto the register. Additional funding support is available for organisations. This can be accessed through their **employer toolkit and resources for individuals section** on the webpage. There are separate processes for paying NHS organisations and non-NHS organisations. There is also a separate process

for returnees who wish to claim for expenses incurred as part of their RtP journey. The funding guide sets out the process for each claimer, step by step, as well as going through eligibility criteria.

Benefits of working in the NHS

Aside from usual employee benefits including annual leave, pension, and being on PAYE, working within the NHS has a multitude of benefits worth considering. However, these benefits can differ from Trust to Trust, and therefore it is important to check with your local Trusts on their staff incentives. These can include, but are not limited to:

- Lease car schemes
- Keyworker living and housing options
- Flexible working
- Staff lottery
- Cycle to work schemes
- NHS discounts at a wide range of shops, retailers and restaurants.

Preceptorships

Although preceptorships have a historical notion towards supporting newly qualified practitioners, the programmes can be tailored to support any transition circumstance, such as RtP. The **RCPod Preceptorship guidance** booklet can be used to develop a preceptorship programme within your organisation.

Organisations or employers offering a preceptorship programme to support RtP should be considerate of conditions enabling a successful transition back into practice. A primary study⁶ conducted in New Zealand highlighted contributing factors to a successful return to practice for occupational therapists included a strong sense of professional connectedness, professional identity, accessibility to resources, and flexible employment options. Demonstrating value and investment to a returnee can enable them to feel comfortable and confident with compromises they may have needed to consider in deciding to RtP⁷.

A supporting learning environment is important to enhance a returnee's experience. Their journey can be supported by a mentor. Mentoring in this circumstance can be described as a relationship between mentor and mentee which facilitates podiatrists' return to practice via sharing experiences and reflection⁵.

Month 2021-2023	Mentored Members on RCPod Membership
October 2021	10
December 2021	10
March 2022	15
June 2022	11
August 2022	10
December 2022	8
March 2023	12

Table 4: Number of Mentored Members on RCPod Membership during 2021-2023.

Currently, when an individual decided to RtP and contacts RCPod for support, and to be considered for Mentored Membership, the returnee is paired with a mentor and supervisor to support them through this process. However, the current total of mentors available does not meet the capacity for those wishing to return. It is because of this, a push for use of the RCPod mentorship platform is needed. The platform allows for RCPod members to offer mentorship for a variety of purposes, such as upskilling in a specialism, support with private practice, and return to practice. Mentors who have capacity to offer supervised placements need to be highlighted to reduce the barrier of lack of supervised placements available. To learn more about mentoring, and how to get involved, [click here](#).

Recommendations

- The RCPod should consider the creation of a data base to document information, including number of podiatrists un/successfully returning to practice, length and reason for absence, alongside access/numbers to training, supervision, or mentoring – to inform future areas of development
- The RCPod should publish clear guidance on what is within a returnee’s scope of practice, in comparison to a support worker, working with the NHS Trusts and private sector to develop a set standard to reduce variability
- The RCPod should develop a form of promotion (e.g., section on RtP webpage) where NHS trusts or non-public organisations can offer in-person supervision; alongside boosting RCPod mentorship platform for RtP mentors
- The RCPod should consider collaboration with **NHS Professionals** to demonstrate support to increase bank workers enhancing RtNHS from private sector. This will demonstrate RCPod’s commitment to promoting flexible and sustainable career opportunities, whilst simultaneously promoting RCPod’s support for NHS service needs
- The RCPod should collaborate with HEE RtP programme to further support their identified goals as opposed to replicating these
- Further exploration into HEE’s funding availability to access RtP support and resources should be undertaken and simplified – especially regarding its applicability to the private sector
- The RCPod should consider a dedicated internal or external RtP Ambassador to monitor changes to RtP guidance to keep documents created within the project up to date, alongside providing support and advice to returnees, who is visible and well networked amongst podiatrists.²



Contributors

Birmingham City University

Coventry University

Health Education England

NHS Managers

Oxford Health Trust

Royal College of Podiatry

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Appendix

Job advert - See page 16.

Clear job role title attracting a returnee

Return to Practice - Allied Health Professional

Main area
Return to Practice - Allied Health Professional

Contract
Honorary

Hours

- Full time
- Part time
- Flexible working
- Compressed hours
- Other

37.5 hours per week (honorary)

Job ref
267-OCAHP1234-J

Site
Various sites across Oxfordshire

Town
Oxfordshire

Salary
Honorary, unpaid placement hours

Closing
01/04/2023 23:59

Oxford Health NHS Foundation Trust has been rated as Good by the Care Quality Commission (CQC).

We are a responsive and innovative Foundation Trust that places our values of Caring, Safe and Excellent at the heart of everything we do. We take great pride in our staff and believe that investing in you is key to us achieving our vision of outstanding care delivered by outstanding people.

We work with a wide range of partner organisations to deliver care and support to people in their own homes and from a number of hospitals and community bases. We focus on delivering care as close to home as possible.

Introduction to Trust, alongside outlining their value in their staff, who are worthy of investment

Job overview

Are you looking to return to practice? We would love to support you to return to your AHP profession!

We currently provide the following 'Return to practice' placements within the Trust, for HCPC regulated professions:

- Occupational Therapists
- Physiotherapists
- Speech and Language Therapists
- Dietitians
- Podiatrists

Offering support with placement opportunities

Main duties of the job

Working within our clinical teams, shadowing and completing clinical work as appropriate, with flexibility around hours, times and frequency that suit you. **This will be completed via an honorary contract and will be unpaid.**

Once you regain your registration, you will be supported to apply for any AHP vacancies within our Trust.

Working for our organisation

At Oxford Health we provide physical, mental health and social care for people of all ages across Oxfordshire, Buckinghamshire, Swindon, Wiltshire, Bath and North East Somerset.

Our services are delivered at community bases, hospitals, clinics and in people's homes. We focus on delivering care as close to home as possible.

In everything we do, we strive to be caring, safe and excellent. When you need us, we're here for you.

Opportunities for employment and support to gain employment upon registration

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Our services are delivered at community bases, hospitals, clinics and in people's homes. We focus on delivering care as close to home as possible.

In everything we do, we strive to be caring, safe and excellent. When you need us, we're here for you.

Detailed job description and main responsibilities

For further information and a chance to talk through the necessary steps required for returning to your AHP career, please contact careers@oxfordhealth.nhs.uk.

We look forward to hearing from you and supporting you further towards your journey in practicing as a HCPC registered Allied Health Professional.

Person specification

Knowledge

Essential criteria

- Ability to communicate with a wide range of people verbally and in writing

Desirable criteria

- Previous experience of managing the care of patients with minimal supervision

Qualifications

Essential criteria

- Previously registered as an AHP

Desirable criteria

- Willingness to complete Return to Practice Programme

Experience

Essential criteria

- Evidence of lone working and good time management
- Able to prioritise work
- Good written and verbal communication skills

Desirable criteria

- Experience of interdisciplinary working

Benefits of working for Oxford Health NHS Foundation Trust include:

- Excellent opportunities for career progression
- 27 days annual leave, plus bank holidays, with an increase to 33 days with continuous service
- NHS Discount across a wide range of shops, restaurants and retailers
- Staff accommodation
- Competitive pension scheme
- Lease car scheme
- Cycle to work scheme

Focus on the benefits of working within this team as incentive against competitors

Further information:

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