

GP Return to Practice Programme (RtP) - Northern Ireland

Summary of application process and guidance notes

Revised November 2024

Overview

The Return to Practice (RtP) programme provides a safe, supported pathway for qualified GPs wishing to return to NHS General Practice after an absence.

The Return to Practice (RtP) programme is designed for General Practitioners (GPs) who have previously been on the General Medical Council (GMC) GP Register and a UK Primary Medical Performers List and would like to return to work in general practice after a break in their career.

All GPs are required to be on the General Medical Council (GMC) GP register with a License to Practise, and be on the Northern Ireland Primary Medical Performers List (NIPMPL) before they can practise.

Please refer to Annex 1 Pathway to GP Careers NI flowchart alongside these guidance notes.

Background

Northern Ireland Medical and Dental training Agency (NIMDTA) are responsible for the training and education of NHS staff.

The GP National Recruitment Office (NRO) was set up by the Committee of General Practice Education Directors (COGPED), and is the administrative body responsible for co-ordinating the nationally agreed and quality assured process for recruitment to general practice.

The Strategic Planning and Performance Group DoH NI (SPPG) is responsible for managing the performers list in line with the Health and Personal Social Services (Primary Medical Services Performers Lists) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2004 and 2008 Amendments.

The Strategic Planning and Performance Group DoH NI (SPPG) is required to assure itself that any doctor on the PMPL:

- has a working knowledge of the NHS;
- is both clinically safe and practices in accordance with the values of the NHS;
- is comfortable managing patients' expectations across the broad curriculum of general practice;
- and in addition, in the case of doctors where English is not their first language, to ensure they have a level of linguistic competency compatible with safe practice.

This duty is discharged through the Responsible Officer (RO) of the Strategic Planning and Performance Group DoH NI (SPPG).

Any doctor wishing to work as an independent and unsupervised GP in Northern Ireland is required to:

- be on the GMC's GP Register
- hold a GMC licence to practise
- be on the Northern Ireland Primary Medical Performers List (NIPMPL).

The SPPG RO will take the final decision to support any application for full inclusion on to the NIPMPL as an independent NHS general practitioner.

Step 1 GMC registration, inclusion in GP register and apply for licence to practise

All doctors will require GMC registration, inclusion in GP register and a licence to practise, see <https://www.gmc-uk.org/registration-and-licensing>

Step 2 Application to Northern Ireland performers list (NIPMPL)

To practice as a GP in N Ireland it is a requirement to be registered with the GMC and on the NIPMPL.

The application procedure and initial assessment procedure will be designed to:

- Assess if a doctor can be added directly to the PMPL without further assessment or induction.
- If an RtP programme is required, establish the length of time that the doctor is likely to require to be in the scheme.
- Identify any GP with re-training needs but who does not have the necessary level of knowledge and skill to practice safely in a clinical setting.
- Establish that the GP has not previously been part of a returner, induction or remedial training scheme. Where this is the case, the doctor will not be funded for inclusion in the Induction Scheme.

Application process

Application to the NIPMPL is by the application form available at <http://www.hscbusiness.hscni.net/services/1813.htm>

The form will require provision of full details of qualifications, employment history including the reason for leaving general practice previously, any conditions on practise, two references, evidence of

English language competency and any other circumstances which may impact on the ability to work as a GP in NI. Additional information may be requested following submission of this form.

Application to the NIPMPL is initially approved by a Medical Adviser at SPPG subject to completion of a RtP programme. The Medical Adviser may seek approval from the SPPG Performers List Committee if any issues are identified which require further discussion.

Step 3 Educational interview at NIMDTA

This may take place before Step 2 is completed in order to expedite the process.

An educational interview at NIMDTA with the Associate Director of GP Career Development will be arranged. At this structured interview further information will be sought regarding the applicant's educational needs, availability to complete the required number of sessions in practice placement and their career intentions on completion of the scheme. A placement in a recognised Training practice will be discussed and possible locations and timeframe considered pending confirmation of acceptance onto the Programme. An observational 'Taster session' in a training practice may be offered.

There will be discussion regarding educational resources including RCGP SelfTest and 1-year free RCGP membership. The workplace-based assessment (WPBA) portfolio requirements will also be outlined.

Following the Educational Interview, the applicant will be advised if they can proceed directly to practice placement or if they need to first complete a summative MCQ assessment through the NRO (National Recruitment Office). An appeals process is in place and information on this can be provided by NIMDTA.

Step 4 Acceptance onto Northern Ireland RtP programme

Following acceptance onto the RtP programme, the applicant will be required to submit written evidence in relation to the following;

- The applicant must be able to work at least half time during the period of training. Exceptions to this will be made rarely and at the discretion of the PMPL committee at the time of consideration of the initial application to the scheme.
 - If the applicant undertakes 8 sessions per week, 1 session will be non-patient facing for self-directed learning or CPD. If the applicant works fewer than 8 sessions per week then the non-patient facing sessions will be worked out on a pro-rata basis. The non-patient facing session will form part of the funded sessions.
- The applicant undertakes not to work as a locum in primary care or in out of hours provision during the period of training.
- The applicant should be prepared to have transport appropriate to the requirements of the practice placement and to commute to an identified practice. Since the number of practice placements available is limited, it is not guaranteed that a practice in the desired location will be available.

- The applicant is not required to be resident in NI at the time of application but should have a stated commitment to providing GMS in a substantive GP post in NI following completion of their training.

Step 5 Multiple Choice Examination (only if required following Educational Interview)

[MCQ assessment | Medical Hub](#)

The applicant will be invited to sit a validated multiple-choice question (MCQ) assessment which delivered through the NRO. It is designed to assess some of the essential competences outlined in the national person specification and based around clinical scenarios. Applicants will first be asked to complete a professional dilemmas (PD) paper, followed by a clinical problem solving (CPS) paper. There are eight sittings per year in agreed venues across the UK and in approved sites worldwide. Educational resources are provided to assist with preparation for this assessment.

A Pass in the PD assessment is required and a band 4 result or above in the CPS in order to progress to the placement in practice. Four attempts at the MCQ are permitted. If successful in one part, you only need to re-sit the part you did not achieve standard. NIMDTA provide educational resources to prepare for this assessment.

Costs of the MCQ will be borne by the applicant however subject to successful completion of the IIP scheme, the cost of one full attempt at the MCQ will be reimbursed.

Step 6 Placement in practice

Placements will be in a GMC approved training practice.

Practices will be paid an agreed (nationally determined FTE) fee for the supervision of doctors on the RtP scheme and this will include for the completion of required assessments or reports

Each placement will have a named GP Educational Supervisor (who will be a GP trainer) and will be for an agreed period.

The nature of RtP placements will vary based on the educational needs of each individual and the local availability of training places.

The placement will commence within 3 months of approval for inclusion onto the scheme; in exceptional circumstances only, approval may be granted for a longer period of time. The minimum placement length is 4 weeks (32 sessions). It is anticipated that the placement will last a maximum of 12 weeks FTE (96 sessions in GP practice); however, it can be extended to a maximum length of 26 weeks if necessary and progress is being made.

If the practice placement is not completed satisfactorily within 26 weeks the doctor will be released from the programme and the doctor's name will be removed from the performers list.

Step 7 Completion of placement and full inclusion in NIPMPL

Completion of placement requirements assessed by review of ePortfolio evidence and reports.

Full inclusion in the NIPMPL.

Funding Arrangements

Payments to Participating GP

Payments to the GP are made by NIMDTA. This payment is an educational bursary of £85 per session at the end of each calendar month in arrears. Funding will be provided for up to a maximum of 26 weeks for up to 8 sessions each week.

Payments to Participating Practice

A trainer grant, calculated pro rata in accordance with the Medical and Dental Staff Pay and Conditions Circular, will be payable by SPPG at the end of the placement duration.

Identity Checks

Formal Identify checks will be undertaken in person (using passports and original documentation) at the following stages:

- Registration with the GMC
- Application to the performers list. This will be face to face at the BSO offices in Belfast. This will be arranged by BSO after submission of the performers list application form.
- At Pearson VUE Computer Testing Centres when completing Multiple Choice Examination see [Global ID Policy 1](#)