



Returning to Training After a Long Absence Policy

September 2024

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1.0 Policy Overview

1.1 Introduction

This policy is to be used where a Trainee on any of the RCPI registered training programmes is returning to training after a significant period of absence from clinical duties of 12 months or more.

There is substantial evidence that time out of practice has an impact on skills retention. Skills have been shown to decline over periods ranging from six to 18 months, according to a curve, with a steeper decline at the outset and a more gradual decline as time passes. The amount of time between learning and losing a skill varies between skills and between individuals, with many mitigating factors.

As there is little concrete evidence to suggest the maximum length of time away from clinical practice before skills fade is observed, the 12 months duration was selected as a reference point as this is the average amount of time taken off. The 12 months absence period will be regularly reviewed and is subject to change, particularly if rigorous evidence on impact of length of time out on skills emerge. The reasons for the absence could include any of the following such as:

- Maternity leave
- Sick leave
- Personal leave
- Professional leave (such as a year out for research)

Each Trainee's needs upon returning to training will be different and any plan to facilitate the safe return to training will reflect those needs. In other words, some Trainees will return to training with no special accommodation needs whilst others will need some adjustment to make their return to clinical work safe for their own safety, that of their patients and their respective teams.

1.2 Aim

Research on physician re-entry into clinical practice is scarce and no one really knows when time away begins to affect a doctor's clinical skills and what might best remediate any deficiencies. However, it is important to reassure patients and team members that the Trainee they are working with knows what he or she is doing and is competent in all areas relevant to his/her level of training.

This policy is for Trainees who take a period of absence from clinical practice during training for several different reasons and varying durations. This can include maternity leave, shared parental leave, carers leave and sickness. It may also include a formal Out of Programme periods such as Experience, Research, Training, and a Career Break. In some cases, upon their return to work and train, Trainees who have had a prolonged period of absence have been expected to immediately assume full duties, including independent call without any re-introduction period, which potentially has negative implications for the Trainee and patient safety.

The purpose of this policy is to ensure that the experience of Trainees returning to clinical practice is as safe and as smooth as possible. It outlines a process which enables Trainees to regain their confidence and previously required skills quickly and safely, while significantly benefiting patient safety and quality of care.

The support outlined in this policy has been designed to be flexible, considering the differing nature and length of absence, as well as the speciality and experience of the Trainee, to ensure that the individual can safely and confidently return and practice within their training programme. The key principles incorporate the following stages of absence; pre absence, during absence, prior to return and the review of the return.

1.3 Scope

This policy applies to all RCPI's registered Trainees enrolled in approved RCPI training programme at any year or specialty within the Republic of Ireland.

This policy is designed to provide guidance and information for those who are involved in supporting Trainees at various levels, including:

- Trainees
- All recognised Trainers
- NSDs
- Programme Directors
- Deans and Chair of all six Training Bodies
- Directors of Training
- RCPI Staff

Regardless of the reason or duration of absence, if Occupational Health involvement is required, they may stipulate that the Trainee requires a phased return which could include amendments to their working pattern. Therefore, any phased return / training plans devised by Occupational Health or HR should take precedence. However, this policy document can still be used in parallel with the Trainee's phased return plan to help outline the Trainee's training needs during their return period.

The rotation/post in which the Trainee will return to will be determined by the established process in their training programme. The placement of the Trainee will be dependent on their stage of programme and the availability of posts.

1.4 Long Absence Under 12 Months

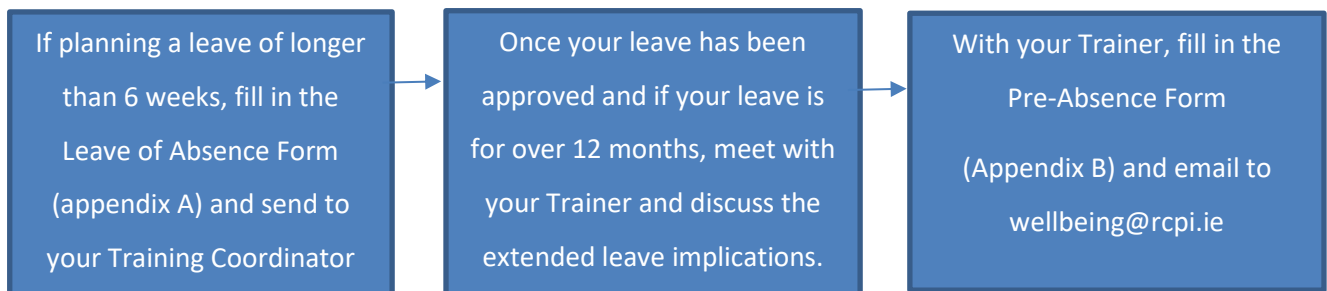
If a Trainee is absent for a significant period of less than 12 months, this absence won't trigger the return to training process. However, the Trainee may still follow the processes outlined within this policy. In such case, Trainees are encouraged to contact the Health and Wellbeing office directly (wellbeing@rcpi.ie) and discuss their concerns with the health and wellbeing representative. It is advised that the Trainee will need to discuss their needs with their assigned Trainer prior to their return to training to determine what support they will need during their period of re-introduction.

2.0 Process

2.1 In Brief

Prior to Absence

- It is recommended that a meeting between the Trainee and the Trainer would take place three months prior to the start of the Trainee's period of planned absence, where possible.
- If the absence is unplanned, this meeting can take place later.

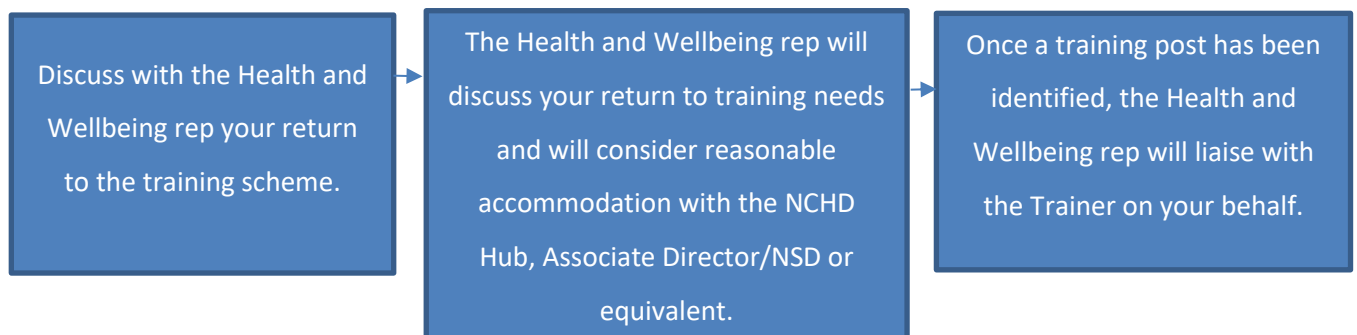


Keep in regular contact with the RCPI Health and Wellbeing rep or RCPI specialty coordinator.

- Continue to attend any study days, mandatory courses, conferences etc if possible.
- Keep abreast of any relevant research and audit.
- 8-12 weeks prior to your planned return, contact RCPI Health and Wellbeing representative and the Training team in RCPI.

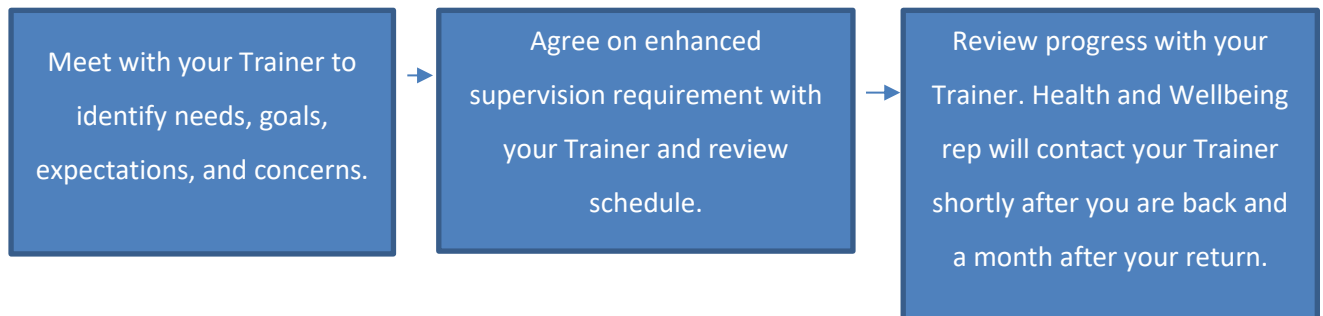
Prior to Return

Once a timeframe for return is known, the Trainee will be required to discuss their return with Health and Wellbeing. It is advised that this takes place 8-12 weeks prior to the estimated date of return, allowing enough time for the return to training to be organised e.g., rota coordination.



Upon return to training

In some cases where recommended, Trainees may return to training on a phased-return basis, flexible training, supernumerary post. In most cases Trainees will return fully having established a plan to return that works for both the clinical site and the Trainee. It is strongly recommended that trainees do not do on-call for a period of one month depending on the circumstances following a return to training. Regardless, Trainees should inform the Training Team in RCPI and meet with their Trainers to discuss the fact that they have been out of clinical practice for a significant period and explore how to best support a safe return to practice. Enhanced supervision and regular reviews are in place to provide a supportive structure and to ensure that the return to training is safe, smooth and responsible.



2.3 During Absence

During the period of absence Trainees are strongly encouraged to keep clinically up to date by continuing to read relevant articles and research papers and to attend study days, courses or team meetings where possible. It is also advisable to keep in touch with the RCPI Health and Wellbeing representative and the Training team to check-in, find out information and discuss any emerging concerns.

2.2 Pre-Absence

Planned absence:

Prior to a planned extended absence, Trainees **must** inform their RCPI training co-ordinator in writing, using the Leave of Absence Form (appendix 4.1) of their intention to take a leave of six weeks or longer. Where possible the Trainee should meet their assigned Trainer for a Pre-Absence meeting before their period of absence commences to discuss:

- how the Trainee may wish to keep up to date (if appropriate for their circumstances).
- any concerns they may have about returning to work/train.
- both Trainer and Trainee should consider the questions outlined in appendix 4.4.
- it is recommended that this meeting should take place at least 10-12 weeks prior to the start of the Trainee's period of planned absence.
- upon approval of extended leave of 12 months or over, the Trainee and Trainer will complete the Pre-Absence Form (appendix 4.4) detailing the discussion and then send a copy of this to wellbeing@rcpi.ie.
- this form will be added to the Trainee's personal file with the Health and Wellbeing Office as per Confidentiality Policy.
- the Trainee must also upload a copy in their ePortfolio.
- if the reason for the extended leave is health-related, it is recommended that the Trainee meets with the RCPI Health and Wellbeing rep, however at this stage this meeting is not mandatory.

Unplanned absence:

If the absence is unplanned (e.g., sickness, bereavement, carers leave), meetings with the Trainer and the RCPI Health and Wellbeing rep can be held later and does not need to be face-to-face (dependent on the Trainee's circumstances).

2.4 Prior to Returning to Training

Once a timeframe for return is known then the Trainee will be required to inform the Training Team so that an Initial Return Meeting with the Health and Wellbeing representative could be arranged. Depending on the reason for absence, this meeting may or may not be a face-to-face meeting. This meeting should NOT delay the Trainee's return date or affect any other aspects of the return process as detailed above. However, the sooner this meeting can take place the more likely it is for additional suitable supports to be arranged.

The aim of the Initial Return Meeting is to create an individualised plan of return which will consist of identifying and discussing:

- Specific concerns.
- Learning and training needs (including possible assessments or courses that the Trainee should attend).
- The need for a supernumerary and/or supervised period.
- Trainees are encouraged to use the 'return to practice' questions (appendix 4.4) and actions to help facilitate the discussion.
- The details of the meeting (educational needs, concerns, required adjustments to the Trainee's working pattern) must be noted in detail on the Initial Return Meeting Form (appendix 4.5).
- The Health and Wellbeing rep will then share the detailed Initial Return Meeting Form with the prospective Trainer and discuss any reasonable accommodation concerns that the Trainer might have. The Health and Wellbeing rep will liaise with the Trainer, local HR and Occupational Medicine where necessary.

The assigned Trainer should also:

- Signpost to the Trainee as to where they can access additional support and arrange an informal 'catch up meeting' within the first week of the Trainee's return.
- Ensure trainees are not on the on-call rota for a period of at least one month following return.
- It is advised that this meeting takes place 8-12 weeks prior to the estimated date of return, allowing enough time for the return to training to be organised e.g., rota coordination.
- Under exceptional circumstances it may not be possible for a Trainee to adhere to the 8-12-week timeframe.
- It is essential that any plans for a Trainee to return over a shorter period are communicated immediately to the Health and Wellbeing rep so that they can endeavour to make the necessary arrangements within a suitable timeframe.
- All documents to be shared with the relevant Trainers/NSD as per Confidentiality Policy.

2.5 Enhanced Supervision Period

An enhanced supervision period is typically described as a short, intensive period of enhanced supervised practice, focused learning activities and direct observation of clinical activities with the aim of enabling Trainees to return to normal duties safely and confidently.

Depending on the individual and the circumstances, it is expected that during this time the Trainee may not be required to undertake any clinical work where enhanced supervision isn't available. The length of the enhanced supervised period, level of supervision required and activities within it will be bespoke to the Trainee dependent on their needs.

For a period of absence that is longer than 12 months it is recommended that upon their return to training, Trainees should undertake a period of enhanced supervision. The need for an enhanced supervised period and length should be discussed at the Initial Return Meeting approximately 8-12 weeks prior to their return.

The Trainee and Trainer should discuss the length of enhanced supervision period required, recommended training needs and their expected roles and responsibilities during this time. All decisions must be detailed within the Initial Return Meeting Form. All forms and corresponding emails will be dealt with upmost sensitivity and will follow the Confidentiality Policy.

Near to the end of the Trainee's enhanced supervision period the Trainee and Trainer will meet at a Return Review Meeting to discuss the Trainee's progress, review the assessments, address any concerns, arrange any further targeted training and if necessary, extend the enhanced supervision period. Once the Trainee and Trainer are both satisfied with the Trainee's progress then the Trainee can be signed off to return to normal duties.

In circumstances where Trainee under enhanced supervision cannot meet their curricular requirements, they will not be able to accrue training credits against that period of time.

2.6 Return to Training Review

Towards the end of the enhanced supervision period, the Trainee and Trainer will meet and discuss the Trainee's progress, review assessments, address any concerns and arrange any further targeted training. If the Trainee and Trainer are both satisfied with the progress, then the Trainee can be signed off and return to normal duties. If the Trainee requires an extended return to training period, the Trainee and Trainer will need to arrange a further Return Review Meeting until the Trainee and the Trainer agree that the trainee is ready to be signed off and can return to their normal duties.

3.0 Review

This Policy shall be subject to review every three years from the date of approval of this document by the Training Committee

Approved By:	Date
Training Committee	September 2024
Review	
Review by Training Committee	September 2027

RCPI is GDPR compliant should you have any queries on GDPR please contact dataprotectionofficer@rcpi.ie.

4.0 Appendices

4.1 Leave of Absence Form

This form can be downloaded from the RCPI website:

<https://www.rcpi.ie/Learn-and-Develop/Training-Programmes/Higher-Specialist-Training/HST-Policies-Procedures-and-Important-Documents#hst-policies-and-procedures>

4.2 Out of Clinical Programme Experience (OCPE) Application Form

This form can be downloaded from the RCPI website:

<https://www.rcpi.ie/Learn-and-Develop/Training-Programmes/Higher-Specialist-Training/HST-Policies-Procedures-and-Important-Documents#hst-policies-and-procedures>

4.3 Pre-Absence Form

Pre-Absence Form		
Date of meeting		
Trainee Surname	Trainee Forename	RCPI ID
Training Level <input type="checkbox"/> BST <input type="checkbox"/> HST <input type="checkbox"/> International	Year of Training	Training Site Training Post
Trainer's Name	Date of Absence to commence:	Anticipated Date of Return:
Trainer's email address		
Reasons for Absence:		
Are you happy to be contacted by the RCPI Health and Wellbeing rep whilst on leave? <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No	Preferred email address	Phone number
Please provide a detailed summary of the discussion between Trainer and Trainee. Discussion should include but is not limited to the following: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ongoing CPD while on leave • Any work that may be done during absence • Sign posting to return to work activities. • Any concerns over time away and returning. • Learning and training needs including possible training opportunities whilst on leave • Any support required while on leave 		
Trainee's signature		
Trainer's signature		

4.4 Return to Practice Questions

The questions below are to be used as a guide only. These are questions to be considered by both the Trainee and the Trainer. These questions can help facilitate a discussion around the safe return to work and train.

1. How long is the Trainee expected to be absent? (Is there any likelihood of an extension to this?)
2. Are there any training programmes (including mandatory training) or installation of new equipment due to take place in the Trainee's workplace in the period of absence? If so, how should the Trainee become familiar with this on return?
3. How long has the Trainee been in their current role? Is this relevant in determining their needs?
4. Will the Trainee be able to participate in CPD or e-learning to keep up to date?
5. Will the Trainee be able to participate in any keep-in-touch days or other means of keeping in touch with the workplace? If so, how will this be organised?
6. Does the Trainee have any additional educational goals, during their absence?
7. What sort of CPD, training or support will be needed on the Trainee's return to practice?
8. Are there any funding issues related to question 6 which need to be considered?
9. Are there any issues relating to the Trainee's next assessment which need to be considered? If so, the Medical Training may need to be informed.
10. How do they plan to return to work/train?
11. What will be the Trainee's full scope of practice on their return?
12. If the Trainee will be returning to a new role, what support relating to this will be needed, and how can they prepare?

4.5 Initial Return Meeting Form

Initial Return Meeting Form		
Date of meeting		
Trainee Surname	Trainee Forename	RCPI ID
Training Level <input type="checkbox"/> BST <input type="checkbox"/> HST <input type="checkbox"/> International	Year of Training prior to absence:	Training Post Prior to Absence:
Date of Absence commenced:	Anticipated Date of Return:	
Reasons for Absence:		
Intention of work capacity upon returning (full-time, less than full time):		
During your period of absence, did you engage in any form of CPD/clinical activities? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Locum work • CPD • Any other work, research, or audit • Learning and training completed whilst on leave. • What supports did you have access to 		
Prior to returning, can you please elaborate on the following: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Your level of clinical (knowledge and skills) confidence • Re-integrating to a new or existing clinical team. • Your general confidence prior to returning to a work and training environment. • Any adjustment required after returning. • Any requirements prior to returning. • Any concerns • What are your learning and training needs? • First day/week/month arrangements 		
Is supernumerary period required upon return?	Is enhanced supervision required upon returning?	Is a period of "shadowing" required?
Hours of work	Call issues	Other flexible arrangements required?

Next post/rotation:		
Assigned Trainer:		
Date discussion with Trainer and H&WB		
Date for Trainee/Trainer meeting		
Date of review with H&WB		