

South West Supported Return to Training (SuppoRTT) Guidance Document



Introduction

Trainees take time out of clinical practice for a number of reasons and at varying stages of their clinical training. Reasons include maternity/shared parental leave, research, career breaks, ill health and suspension. Health Education England estimates that approximately 5000 doctors return to work each year¹. In the past, junior doctors have been expected to return from prolonged periods of absence and resume clinical and out of hours duties immediately, without any additional support or supervision.

The purpose of the Supported Return to Training (SuppoRTT) within the South West, and nationally, is to enhance the experience of doctors returning to clinical practice, enabling them to regain their confidence and clinical skills more quickly and safely. We hope that this will improve the experience of returning trainees but also have significant benefits to the safety of patients.

We appreciate that the needs of returning trainees can vary greatly, due to multiple factors, but we hope that this SuppoRTT guidance provides a framework around which a more bespoke and tailor-made plan can be developed for individual trainees.

Overview

The Academy of Medical Royal Colleges (AoMRC) suggests that a period of absence of 3 months or more is likely to have a significant impact on a doctor's clinical skills and knowledge and an absence of 2 years or more is likely to require some formal retraining upon re-entry². Within the South West, we ask that the guidance and frameworks outlined within this document are followed for any trainee who has a break from clinical practice of 3 months or longer.

The responsibility of engaging with the SuppoRTT programme lies with the trainee. However, it is also the responsibility of the Educational Supervisor (ES), Training Programme Director (TPD) and SuppoRTT Champion to facilitate a bespoke return to training package. A thorough understanding of the guidance, process and available resources is essential.

Please note if you are a trainee in primary care your first contact should be with your Educational Supervisor or Training Programme Director when arranging a meeting.

Pre-absence planning

Following on from the AoMRC recommendations, planning for a trainee's return to clinical practice should begin even before the absence. Where possible, i.e. planned absences, the trainee should arrange a meeting with their current ES to conduct a pre-absence planning meeting at least 4 weeks prior to the period of absence. At the time of this meeting, a Pre-Absence Planning form should be completed through this Online Surveys link.

[Online Surveys: Pre-absence planning form](#)

The purpose of this meeting is to consider areas that might be challenging for the trainee when they return. It should cover the reason for absence and the expected duration. The trainee and ES should consider how the trainee may stay up-to-date with clinical developments and what (if any) work related activities may take place during their absence. It may also be an appropriate time to consider if a trainee wants to return to Less Than Fulltime Training (LTFT) as an application must be submitted well in advance.

Once the form is submitted, a PDF version can be generated by click 'My Responses'. This PDF should be downloaded and saved to the trainee's e-portfolio.

The information captured from this online form will then be uploaded to the SuppoRTT SW spreadsheet by the HEE SW SuppoRTT hub. All new data will be stored centrally for subsequent database manipulation and reporting. The HEE SW hub will then disseminate filtered information via a separate reporting tool to each SuppoRTT Champion/administrator. This will only include the information relevant to the trainees within their trust or GP School.

Trainees must give their permission (GDPR regulation), by selecting the appropriate box within the form, for Health Education England (HEE) and other administrative teams within their Trust/General Practice (Local Education Providers or LEPs) to have access to the information provided within the online forms. Trainees should be aware that some personal and confidential information may be included. For example, trainees requiring counselling from the Professional Support Unit (PSU) as part of their supported return to training package. This sensitive personal information will be stored on a password protected database. It will only be accessible to those individuals directly linked with SuppoRTT, and limited to following:

- Associate Deans for Professional Support Units in Severn and Peninsula
- Key named administrators within HEE and employing trusts/GP Schools
- SuppoRTT Champions related to their absence and return

Any data provided by a trainee will not be visible to other trainees, consultants or employees within Health Education England unless the trainee gives permission for the data to be shared with named individuals.

Once the trainee has submitted the online pre-absence planning form, they will receive an email from their SuppoRTT Champion (Appendix 1). This email will outline the role of the SuppoRTT Champion and make some initial recommendations, which a trainee should be aware of when planning their return, including the application process for Less Than Fulltime Training (LTFT).

Unplanned Absences

In cases of unplanned absences (e.g. sickness or bereavement) we ask that the ES or SuppoRTT Champion completes an unplanned absence form via Online Surveys on behalf of the trainee, if the period of absence is anticipated to extend beyond 3 months.

[Online Surveys: Unplanned Absence form](#)

The purpose of this is to allow the absence to be logged contemporaneously within the SuppoRTT hub and to ensure that the trainee is offered the appropriate support upon their return.

During the period of absence

Three months prior to the expected return to training date, an email from HEE SW should be sent to the trainee (Appendix 2). The email should draw trainee's attention to the regional SuppoRTT webpages where information is available about upcoming return to training events/conferences/study days as well as Keeping in Touch (KIT) and Shared Parental Leave in Touch (SPLIT) days, mentorship and application for Less Than Fulltime Training (LTFT).

Three months prior to the expected date of return, the Training Programme Director/Specialty Manager needs to notify HEE SuppoRTT hub of which trust/general practice (or LEP) the trainee will return to. Where possible, we strongly recommend that trainees return to the trust/general practice from which they left, taking into consideration a trainee's personal preference, as it can support a smoother transition back to clinical work.

The SuppoRTT hub at HEE will contact the SuppoRTT Champion/administrator at the returning LEP notifying them of the trainee's expected return to work date, along with the reason for and duration of absence. Those trainees who have required a period of absence due to more complex reasons, e.g. sickness or bereavement, will be highlighted. It is the responsibility of the SuppoRTT Champion to ensure an appropriate ES is allocated promptly and this will be communicated to the trainee by either the SuppoRTT Champion or a member of the Postgraduate Training Team.

Pre-Return Planning

The trainee will have been notified of their ES at the returning trust/general practice two to three months before their return to work. It is the responsibility of the trainee to arrange a pre-return planning meeting with their ES, a minimum of 6 weeks before their return. A minority of trainees who have had periods of absence for more complex reasons (e.g. sickness/stress, bereavement, other personal reasons) should also be offered an additional meeting with the SupportTT Champion. The SupportTT Champion/administrator will make email and/or telephone contact with those individuals to arrange a face-to-face meeting to discuss the trainee's plans for returning to work.

The aim of the pre-return meeting is to identify any areas of concern which the trainee may have regarding returning to work and to create a bespoke action plan to facilitate the trainee's return to clinical practice. The ES should signpost the trainee to any relevant resources which may be useful e.g. the SupportTT mentoring scheme, KIT days etc.. If a trainee would like to be assigned a SupportTT mentor, an email should be sent to the trust SupportTT Champion who can look to allocate a mentor from the same trust. The pre-return planning form should be completed at this time through Online Surveys.

[Online Surveys: Pre-return planning form](#)

Once submitted, it will generate a PDF version which must be saved and uploaded to the trainee's ePortfolio. The PDF will only be available to download for 15 minutes after submission of the form and so it must be downloaded and saved immediately. Please be aware that it is not possible to generate this PDF again at a later date.

The information captured from this form will then be uploaded to the SupportTT SW spreadsheet. As with the Pre-absence form, this will likewise be generated by the HEE SW hub for inclusion in the SupportTT database and reporting to the relevant trust or GP School.

Enhanced Supervision

It is strongly advised that **all** returning trainees benefit from a period of enhanced supervision where the period of absence has extended beyond 3 months. During this time, an action plan should be agreed between trainee and ES about what level of supervision is required and an appropriate support package created, reflecting the duration and reason for absence. It may include amendments to the type of clinical activities undertaken. For example, trainees who undertake clinics may require a reduced number of patients with a named consultant available to provide help and advice when needed. Trainees in craft specialties will require directly supervised lists.

It is also expected that during the period of enhanced supervision, trainees do not undertake out of hours (OOH) commitments unless it is in a shadowing capacity.

During the period of enhanced supervision, the default is for trainees to work their normal daytime rostered hours for the week. If they choose to work an evening, night or weekend shift during their period of enhanced supervision, that is their prerogative. However, their hours should not exceed their standard working hours and they should be working in a shadowing capacity only. The details should be discussed and agreed with their Educational Supervisor and rota co-ordinator prior to their return to work.

We recommend the duration of enhanced supervision equivalent to a minimum of **10 working days** (this applies irrespective of whether a trainee returns full time (2 weeks) or less than full time (e.g. 3 weeks + 1 day for 0.6 LTFT) to ensure access to enhanced supervision is equitable for all returning trainees) but this can be tailored to suit the requirements of individual trainees where necessary. In some cases, for example where trainees have undertaken clinical work during their period of absence (eg OOPR/OOPE) a period of enhanced supervision may not be required. If both the trainee and ES agree it is not required, this must be documented within the pre-return planning form, with explicit reference as to how the trainee has maintained clinical competence during their period of absence. We also recognise that for some returning trainees a more prolonged period of enhanced supervision will be required.

In cases where there is any deviation from the recommended 10 working day period of enhanced supervision, this must be exception reported using the SW Reporting Variation to the Enhanced Supervision form:

[Online Surveys: Reporting Variation to the Enhanced Supervision Period](#)

This online form should be downloaded and a copy emailed to the SupportTT Champion, Training Programme Director and Educational Supervisor (if known).

Approval must be granted by the SupportTT Champion before it can proceed. Once approved, trainees not requiring enhanced supervision can immediately return to all usual clinical duties, including out of hours commitments, upon return.

Once the pre-return form has been submitted, the SupportTT Champion/administrator should then send out a “Return to Training” email to the trainee (Appendix 3).

If any specific problems or concerns are identified at this meeting, either by the trainee or ES, the trainee should be discussed with the SupportTT Champion with the consideration of a face-to-face meeting between the Champion and trainee. The ES should contact the SupportTT Champion via email, and the SupportTT Champion then make arrangements to meet the trainee to discuss concerns in further detail, if required.

SuppoRTT Champions should have a detailed knowledge of the local and regional resources available for return to training e.g. the SuppoRTT mentoring scheme and return to training events such as one-day conferences and study days. They should also be able to refer directly to their trust Occupational Health department and to the Professional Support Units at HEE SW. For trainees who require a phased return to work, the SuppoRTT Champion should liaise with the trust Occupational Health department to facilitate this. If it is felt a trainee requires longer term supernumerary status upon their return, the SuppoRTT Champion should liaise with the Training Programme Director/Head of School to arrange this and signpost to the Professional Support Unit if necessary.

The SuppoRTT Champion/administrator is responsible for liaising with the unit/department, particularly the Clinical Lead, College or Specialty Tutor and the ES prior to the return date to highlight that the trainee is returning from a period of absence and additional support and enhanced supervision of the trainee is required during the return period.

Rota planning

It is the responsibility of the ES to communicate with the rota co-ordinator about a returners period of enhanced supervision so the necessary rota amendments can be made **before** the trainee returns to work. It **must not** be the responsibility of the returning trainee to swap out of any on call commitments during their period of enhanced supervision.

Any trainee who encounters difficulties surrounding their rota/clinical commitments during their period of enhanced supervision should contact their SuppoRTT Champion, who has the authority to enforce these recommendations.

Post-Return Review

Once the period of enhanced supervision is complete, the trainee should arrange a review meeting with their ES. The aim of this meeting is to review the trainee's progress since returning (including completion of any work-based assessments agreed at the pre-return planning meeting) and to address any concerns or difficulties the trainee may be experiencing. If necessary, the period of enhanced supervision can be extended. If this is required, the SuppoRTT Champion, the HEE SW SuppoRTT hub (SuppoRTT.SW@hee.nhs.uk) and Training Programme Director (TPD)/Head of School should be notified.

Once the trainee and ES are satisfied with progress, the trainee can be signed off to resume usual clinical duties and out of hours commitments. A post-return review form should be submitted.

[Online Surveys: Post-return review form](#)

Once submitted, it will generate a PDF version which can be uploaded to the trainee's ePortfolio. The information captured from this form will be uploaded to the SupportTT SW spreadsheet. As with the Pre-absence form and pre-return form, this will likewise be generated by the HEE SW hub for inclusion in the SupportTT database and reporting to the relevant trust or GP School.

The SupportTT Champion/administrator should then send the trainee a link to the online SupportTT evaluation form for completion.

In situations where an extended period of enhanced supervision is required, it is the responsibility of the ARCP panel/TPD/Head of School to determine if this time can count toward CCT.

SupportTT Champion: Responsibilities

Whilst the role of the SupportTT Champion is largely focused on leadership and training, it is essential that all educational supervisors (ES) are aware of the SupportTT programme, its aims and how it should be delivered. It is the ES who will be the initial point of contact for returning trainees, and only a minority of trainees with complex requirements or particular difficulties will be referred onto the SupportTT Champion for a more individualised package of support.

Every SupportTT Champion should oversee a programme to educate and up-skill all ES within their trust/GP school on the SupportTT programme. It should focus on the reason supported return to training is required, the aims and objectives of the programme and what specialised support and resources are available for returning trainees. Educational Supervisors should have a clear understanding of their role and when to refer trainees to the SupportTT Champion for further assistance.

HEE SW has developed a slide pack for SupportTT Champions, which can be used as a resource to assist with this training. This is available through the SupportTT SW Sharepoint site which all SupportTT Champions will have access to.

SupportTT Champions/administrators should collate the feedback received from returning trainees who complete the online evaluation questionnaire. This should be used to create an annual report for SupportTT within each trust/GP school, which can then be presented at the annual HEE SW SupportTT Champion Network event.

SupportTT Peer Mentoring

The SupportTT Champions are asked to facilitate with the SupportTT Mentoring Scheme. SupportTT Champions will co-ordinate local mentoring within their organisation by matching local SupportTT peer mentors with prospective mentees. However, the training and network supervision will be provided for those trainees volunteering as mentors by the SupportTT hub at HEE.

Certification will be available for SuppoRTT mentors and is explained in more detail in a separate document “SuppoRTT mentor programme”. However, in summary, SuppoRTT mentors will be expected to have at least two mentees and meeting on two occasions (a minimum of 4 hours contact time). Mentors will record their reflections of mentoring and receive an evaluation from their mentee for each contact. They will then be asked to write a short reflective piece about their experience, before receiving their certification. The SuppoRTT Champions should be available as a point of contact for mentors within their trust/GP school, who encounter difficulties relating to the mentoring programme or who are struggling to adequately support a mentee. It is anticipated that the SuppoRTT Champions will support appraisal and feedback for SuppoRTT mentors providing they have received training

Links

For ease of use, the links to each online form are listed again:

[Online Surveys: Pre-absence planning form](#)

[Online Surveys: Unplanned Absence form](#)

[Online Surveys: Pre-return planning form](#)

[Online Surveys: Post-return review form](#)

[Online Surveys: Reporting Variation to the Enhanced Supervision Period](#)

References

1. Full HEE Supported Return to Training guidance document available at:
<https://www.hee.nhs.uk/our-work/doctors-training/supported-return-training>
2. The Academy of Medical Royal Colleges, Return to Practice Guidance 2017
Revision: https://www.aomrc.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2017/06/Return_to_Practice_guidance_2017_Revision_0617-2.pdf

Appendix 1**Pre-absence email from departing trust SuppoRTT Champion**

Dear Trainee,

I am the SuppoRTT (Supported Return to Training) Champion for {insert trust/GP school}, your current employer.

I understand that you are planning to have a period of absence. As part of the process to support your return to training in the future, please submit the [Pre-Absence Planning Form](#). Many thanks if you have already done so; this will enable us to support you when you are ready to return to training.

If you are planning maternity leave, leave due to ill health or shielding according to government guidance, a risk assessment may be required. You should contact your line manager or trust Occupational Health department to arrange this. If relevant, guidance of medical risk assessment related to COVID-19 can be found here: <https://alama.org.uk/covid-19-medical-risk-assessment/>

Even if you are shielding from the pandemic, and you are willing, there may still be opportunities to undertake curriculum based non-patient facing training & education activities, please discuss with your education supervisor. The following weblink provides guidance for this purpose:

<https://peninsuladeanery.nhs.uk/about-us/supportt-2/show/shielding-trainees>

My role as SuppoRTT Champion is to support trainees returning to clinical practice after a period of absence, for any reason. We are aware that returning to clinical work after time away can be a daunting and stressful time. My role is to help to make this transition as smooth as possible for you.

Early planning of your return to work is vital in order to make your transition back into clinical practice as straightforward as possible. It is important for you, but it is also important for the safety of your patients. Approximately 6-8 weeks before your planned return to work date, you should have another meeting with your educational supervisor. If you are returning to a different trust to the one you have left, this meeting should take place with your new educational supervisor. You will be notified of your new trust and educational supervisor in plenty of time for this meeting to be arranged. It is your responsibility to arrange your pre-return review meeting. The point of this meeting is to finalise the plans for your return including the use of any Keeping in Touch (KIT) days and the attendance at any specialist return to training study days that may be suitable. A list of local and regional courses is available on the SuppoRTT page of the deanery website:

<https://peninsuladeanery.nhs.uk/about-us/supportt-2/show/local-and-national-courses-2>

The meeting is also where the plans for your period of enhanced supervision will be made. Please see the SuppoRTT webpages on the deanery website (HEE) for further information: <https://peninsuladeanery.nhs.uk/about-us/supportt-2/>

This meeting also provides an opportunity to discuss any particular areas of concern that you may have and enables you to develop a strategy about how best to regain your clinical confidence and competence upon your return. All trusts and GP schools within our region have an appointed SuppoRTT Champion, such as myself. I should be your next point of contact, after your Educational Supervisor, if you are experiencing any difficulty surrounding returning to training. If you return to a different trust, the email address of the SuppoRTT Champion at your new trust is available on the deanery website: <https://peninsuladeanery.nhs.uk/about-us/supportt-2/show/support-champions>

Please be aware that if you are planning to return to training Less Than Full Time, your application needs to be submitted as early as possible (a minimum of 16 weeks' notice is required) Please refer to the Severn and Peninsula HEE websites for further information relating to this:

Severn: [Less Than Full Time Training \(Severn\)](#)

Peninsula: [Less Than Full Time Training \(Peninsular\)](#)

I hope the SuppoRTT programme will enable your smooth transition back to clinical practice.

Good luck!

Kind regards,

Trust SuppoRTT Champion.

Appendix 2

Pre-return email from returning trust SuppoRTT Champion

Dear Trainee,

I am the SuppoRTT (supported return to training) Champion for {insert trust/GP school}, which you are due to return to after your period of absence. My role as SuppoRTT Champion, is to support trainees returning to clinical practice after a period of absence for any reason.

As part of the process to support your return please submit the [Pre-Return Planning form](#) so support can be facilitated with your education supervisor. Thankyou if you have already done so.

We are aware that coming back into clinical work after time away can be a daunting and stressful time. My role is to help to make this transition as smooth as possible. Early planning of your return to work is vital, in order to make your transition back into clinical practice as straightforward as possible. It is important for you, but it is also important for the safety of your patients. Now that you have had your pre-return planning meeting, you should have a better idea of how to embark onto your return to clinical practice. Whilst the first few weeks back are challenging for most people, you should regain your confidence quickly. If you are having difficulty, there is additional support available. The deanery website has a list of the local and regional courses that are available to help support trainees returning to practice. There is also a specialist Return to Training mentoring scheme available for trainees in the South West. Further details can be found on the deanery website: <https://peninsuladeanery.nhs.uk/about-us/supportt-2/show/mentoring-39>

I am your next point of contact, after your Educational Supervisor, if you are having problems. Please notify me by email if you are encountering difficulties; for example, with arranging KIT days, your rota or plans for your induction that your Educational Supervisor has not been able to address. It is inappropriate for trainees to return straight to unsupervised on call duties after a period of absence, unless this has been specifically agreed in advance. Your educational supervisor should communicate with your rota coordinator to make the necessary rota amendments to facilitate your period of enhanced supervision. However, if you are experiencing problems with this, please let me know.

If a more detailed discussion surrounding your return to work is required, please email me and we can arrange a face-to-face meeting to help plan your return in more detail.

Kind regards,

Trust SuppoRTT Champion