

The GP Retainer Scheme in Scotland



What is it?

The retainer Scheme is a time limited scheme to allow qualified GPs on the Performer's list who have caring responsibilities (usually for young children) which prevents them from committing to a more substantive post in GP. The scheme permits for up to 14 hours per week in a GP practice (with the option of undertaking up to 2 outside sessions per week in posts which are relevant for enhancing a retainer's GP skills) with the additional educational support of a mentor. The post is time limited to a maximum of 5 years.

Who can apply?

Principal carers who cannot commit to a salaried assistantship, locums or partnership. There must be an intention to return to a GP post at the end of the scheme – it is NOT suitable for those wishing to change careers to another specialty. The scheme is not confined to female GPs.

The educational component of the scheme is to enable on going career development while working a limited number of hours.

You need to be on the local Performer's list to be eligible. Those looking to return to General Practice who have not worked for 2 years or more should consider the GP Returner scheme instead. The scheme is also not suitable for those with long term health problems if there is not a possibility of returning to more substantive GP work after 5 years.

What is the educational support?

Only suitably approved practices and mentors are permitted to have retainer GPs. Protected monthly mentoring is provided, along with regular reviews of educational needs, to ensure that the retainer is maintaining his/her clinical knowledge and skills. The retainer is expected to inform the Retainer Adviser of their PDP priorities each year and to provide confirmation that 50 hours of educational activities are undertaken each year.

Educational events are provided for retainers by NES and a subsidised fee is also available for CPD Connect events.

What is the working week?

Most retainers work the maximum of 4 x 3.5 hour sessions per week. The minimum permitted is 2 sessions per week. A session usually consists of surgeries/ prescriptions/ telephone calls and house calls. There may be a requirement to undertake an on call session.

Retainers should be encouraged to attend practice meetings to get some experience of the business aspects of GP.

How do I apply?

There are 4 Regional Advisers for the scheme. Details about the scheme can be found on the NES website under Medicine/GP/retainer scheme as can contact details for the Advisers.

Your Regional Adviser will send you some pre interview paperwork to complete and arrange a meeting with you. This is to verify your understanding of the scheme and to ensure you meet the entry criteria. You will be given a list of suitable practices to approach and once you have found one that meets your needs your new mentor will complete the application form which you return to NES.

The adviser needs to confirm Health Board sessional reimbursement to the practice before the post can be confirmed.



Employment as a retainer

You are employed by the practice. Your Regional Adviser ensures the educational components of the scheme are observed.

You should have a contract of employment with the practice. If you are a member of the BMA you can ask them to check the contract for you.

You are paid by the practice. Your salary should be based on the Salaried Doctors pay scale which has several pay increments, depending on experience and workload. This pay scale is based on a 40-hour week so you need to extrapolate the salary bands down to 14/40ths.

You cannot undertake GP locum work while on the scheme until the last 6 months, when you can undertake locums in a different practice as your additional sessions.

You are entitled to 6 weeks holiday + public holidays pro rata. Maternity and sick leave entitlement is in line with all other employees.

Benefits of the scheme

The scheme allows those with (mainly) child care commitments to work in a limited, protected educational environment until such time as they are able to apply for more substantive posts. Feedback has shown that over 90% of retainers find either a part time partnership or salaried post when they leave the scheme. Many have in turn become retainer mentors or GP trainers.

The Retainer Scheme in Scotland provides a safe, protected environment in which to maintain your GP skills which then allows you to return to more substantive General Practice in the future.