

**South-East**

# **Return to Practice Employers Guide**

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**A comprehensive guide for placement providers and employers to help support Nurses and Midwives returnees back into the NHS workforce**



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## About this Guide

The aim of this Guide is to generate awareness of the NHS England (NHSE) funding opportunities; to maximise Return to Practice (RtP) recruitment and to prevent underutilisation of funded places. The Guide is designed to enable organisations across the South East, to support Nursing & Midwifery Council (NMC) registrants to return to the permanent register.



To achieve this there is a need to focus on making RtP navigation easier for all former NMC registrants and for organisations to view returners as an essential part of their workforce. COVID-19 has meant a change in many of our practices and opportunities to have additional learners in teams, but there is still a need and plenty of opportunities to support RtP. As part of the NHS COVID-19 pandemic response, the *'Bring Back Staff'* campaign attracted high numbers of nurses and midwives whose registration had lapsed and are now signed up to the NMC temporary register, this enabled some to work in a clinical role throughout the crisis. Many of these temporary registrants may decide to return to the NMC permanent register via the RtP route and therefore will continue to work in the NHS longer term.

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## Background

NHSE supports the delivery of excellent healthcare and health improvement to the patients and public of England by ensuring that the workforce of today and tomorrow has the right numbers, skills, values and behaviours, at the right time and in the right place.



Nurses, midwives, and health visitors constitute the biggest workforce in the NHS and are a critical part of the multi-professional team required to deliver quality and safe 21<sup>st</sup> century care. However, the challenges that nursing shortages brings will require a multifaceted and carefully co-ordinated strategy to grow the nursing workforce.

NHSE has a role in contributing to the growth of the nursing workforce in meeting the government's pledge of 50,000 more nurses and recognises that supporting experienced nurses, midwives, and health visitors to return to practice is an effective route to strengthen the workforce and bring expertise back into practice.

NHSE has a history of successfully returning health care professionals back into practice. In 2014 a RtP campaign was launched; '*Come Back to Nursing*', to specifically support nurses with a lapsed registration to re-register with the NMC.

## Routes to NMC Re-Registration

RTP is a vital component of the nursing and midwifery workforce development and following a break in practice there are 3 options to re-registration with the NMC:

### University Return to Practice Programme

These courses are a combination of academic and placement-based learning in line with the NMC RtP Standards. More information on specific courses is available on the Health Careers website for [Nursing](#) and [Midwifery](#)

### NMC Test of Competence

The Test of Competence (ToC) was launched in January 2020 to offer more flexibility with regards to re-registration. The test is made up of two parts, a multiple-choice computer based theoretical test, known as the Computer Based Test (CBT) and a practical test known as the Objective Structured Clinical Examination (OSCE). You can find out more information about it on the NMC website, including test blueprints, as preparation is key for a successful pass on the first attempt.

The [ToC](#) can be undertaken at the following test centres:

- [Oxford Brookes University](#) (SWINDON)
- [University of Northampton](#)
- [Ulster University](#)
- [Northumbria University](#)
- [Leeds Teaching Hospitals NHS Trust](#)

## Readmission

Any hours practised on the temporary register will count, along with any other practising hours as a nurse or midwife while on the permanent register within the last three or five years:

- *registered practice hours of 450 over previous three years or 750 hours over previous five*
- *35 hours of continuing professional development (CPD) in the last three years*
- *to provide 3-character references*



### Applying for readmission within 6 months of a revalidation due date

For further information regarding the readmission requirements and process, including applying for readmission within 6 months of when a revalidation is due there is more information on the NMC website - [here](#)

## Return to Practice Models

- **HEI Led Model or Traditional Model:** returners contact their local university who work in partnership with employers to secure a suitable placement for the returner before enrolment. The returner is not employed by the organisation, where they undertake their placement, and there is no guarantee of employment on completion.
- **Employer Led Model:** employers identify gaps in their own workforce and recruit returners to earn, learn and work within their organisations. A returner is traditionally employed as a band 3 with a guarantee of a band 5 post, once they have successfully completed the course and re registered with the NMC.
- **Work and Return model:** some returners may currently be within employment (eg: working in retail) and wish to return to practice whilst maintaining this. It is possible for them to utilise annual leave, days off, or mutually agreed leave with their current employer to enable them to continue earning whilst completing their programme of study; this is known as the 'work and return' model. For this model to be successful we rely on clinical placements to be willing to flex their offered hours to suit the returner. Flexibility is key to support returners to return and essential to attract and retain returners. Some returners may also have caring responsibilities which may need to be supported and shifts provided around these.



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## NHSE Funding Model HEI-Led Route

There are three financial incentives to support returners undertaking the RTP programme route:

- 1. Course fees** – to the **education provider** for the cost of delivering the programme. The aim of the RtP programme is to support returners, with a lapsed registration to return to practice as a safe, competent, and confident practitioner, in order to provide a high standard of care. When programmes delivered are blended learning or online this suits the flexible needs of returners. Course fees are met by NHS England and provided directly to the education provider.
- 2. Clinical placement fees** – to the **placement provider** to contribute to the cost of providing placement support. The regional NHSE office where the returner is undertaking their placement will fund the returner. Placements are offered in a wide range of settings, but the placement area must be able to offer the returner a practice assessor/supervisor, as the returner has supernumerary status until re-registered with the NMC. The placement fees £586 are either paid directly from NHS England or the education provider will provide this via invoice to the placement provider – local process can be confirmed by RTP Lead NHSE.
- 3. Stipendiary** – to the returner a £1,175 **stipend** to contribute to travel, subsistence, childcare, course materials. The stipend is normally provided by the education provider directly to the returner, which is normally provided in two installments. **Please note - For returners undertaking the employer led model, no stipend is available to the returner, and this amount of funding is directed to the employing organisation as well as the placement fee. This is paid either by the education provider to the organisation or by the NHSE local office, so it is important for the employer to confirm with the education provider the model the returner is undertaking to return. It is good practice to ensure that if the organisation is planning to support the employer led model the returner has their contract in place at the start of the programme to ensure they are not financially disadvantaged.**



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## **Test of Competence (ToC) Funding Model: *Employer-Sponsored Route***

Key learning following recent engagement activities including a NHSE hosted ToC webinar, is that preparation is important for a successful pass. Therefore, NHSE is offering any employer supporting a nurse or midwifery returner to complete the ToC, a £2,000 support package (available for each returner), to cover an educational support programme and the costs of the computer-based test (CBT) and objective structured clinical examination (OSCE). This offer is open to all NHS employers and to those delivering NHS-commissioned services. Please note that to be eligible for the support package of £2,000 per returner payment will be made once the returner has successfully passed the test, re-registered and returned to the workforce as a registered nurse or midwife.

The amount is to cover both elements of the Test of Competence – the Computer Based Test and the Objective Structured Clinical Exam (OSCE) – and one OSCE resit if necessary. For information, the current ToC costs are:

- Computer Based Test = £83
- OSCE = £794
- OSCE resit = £397

## **Test of Competence Funding model: *Self-funding route***

NHSE local offices will refund self-funding ToC returners, once they have re-registered with the NMC and returned to the workforce as a registered nurse or midwife. For NHSE to provide reimbursement we would require the following information:

- Successful test of competence pass
- Reside in England
- Provide receipts from Pearson Vue/OSCE Test Centres for CBT and OSCE
- NMC re-registration details
- Provide a current DBS
- Evidence of a contract of employment (stating the contracted hours)

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## Employer Benefits

RtP is a relatively quick and cost-effective lever to increase supply: average cost per returner is £3,600 (NHSE funded) and returners can be re-registered and back in the registered workforce within 3-12 months (average is 6 months).

- RtP addresses workforce gaps, for example offering and supporting a band 3 position then transitioning into a band 5 registered nurse/midwife role upon obtaining NMC registration – *a grow your own approach*.
- Tap into a skilled workforce: these individuals not only have clinical experience, but extensive life experience, are generally motivated and live locally, increasing the chances of retention.
- RtP reduces recruitment and agency costs and increases bank capacity.
- There is evidence that if people are supported to return, they are highly likely to seek employment with that organisation.

## New Developments

There is a real need to consider new approaches to educating and training RTP nurses and midwives in relation to the impact of new and emerging technologies and the requirement for strong digital capabilities. There is also a need for a future workforce that is flexible, adaptable, has a growth mindset, that is innovative and enthusiastic about change. Therefore, NHSE is modernising our approach to routes to re-registration and developing alternative routes for the future.

- **ToC preparation programme** - Key learning following recent engagement activities is that preparation is key for a successful pass, therefore NHSE is Happy to support ToC returners and the opportunity to undertake a preparation programme via NHSP Academy
- **RtP Blended Learning Programme** -Potentially, creates a significantly different offer in RTP nursing and midwifery education that will support the growth of an expert and professional workforce suited to the demands of care and service now and in the future.
- **Back to the Floor Programme/Retire and Return Programme** - Whilst there is a recognised route for returners with a lapsed registration to return to practice, there is no formal route to support nurses and midwives who have an active registration but who are out of current clinical practice and wish to return to front line care with confidence and competence. The scope of the programme is to develop a resource to ensure that returners return to front line care with confidence and competence.

## Conclusion

The pandemic has meant rapid developments in the delivery of healthcare services and education, which means now is the time to think more broadly about how to develop and support returners to the workforce. This document aims to offer organisations different models and routes to support the expansion of return to practice opportunities in your service.

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## **Appendix A** FAQs - FOR THE RETURNER

### **1. I have been out of practice for over 10 years can I still return to practice?**

The RtP course and ToC route is open to all regardless of how long you have been out of practice.



### **2. I must have a degree to return to practice.**

You do not need a degree to return to practice. However, as nursing and midwifery is now only studied at degree level, the NMC require the Return to Practice Programmes to be undertaken at degree level. If you successfully pass the course, you will receive credits at degree level which can be used towards completion of a degree. You can sometimes study at level 7 instead and worth discussing with the university.

### **3. Can I work and return to nursing at the same time?**

Yes, you can. Many employers advertise for Return to Practice nurse posts. Where they will support you to return to the register and provide a salary too, normally at a band 3.

### **4. I am an enrolled nurse; can they Return to Practice?**

Yes, all nurses including second level nurses, midwives and nursing associates, who have been away from practice for a period of time and are unable to meet practice hours requirements and seeking to return to, or remain on, the NMC register can do so via an approved RtP programme or by passing the NMC test of competence.

### **5. Am I guaranteed a job after I have returned to the NMC Register?**

No, returning via the ToC route or a university RTP course enables you to re-register with the NMC. However, some Trusts may offer an 'employer led model' where they support you through return to practice with either a guaranteed job or support to find one upon completion. RtP posts are advertised on NHS jobs:

<https://www.jobs.nhs.uk>

### **6. Can health visitors undertake the NMC Test of Competence to re- register on the SCPHN part of the register?**

No. There is no test of competence for returners wishing to return to the Specialist Community Public Health Nurses (SCPHN) part of the register. Returners must undertake a return to practice course returning to their original field of registration. These courses are a combination of academic and placement-based learning and are flexible. More information on specific courses is available on the Health Careers website: <https://www.healthcareers.nhs.uk/explore-roles/nursing/returning-nursing/return-nursing-practice-programme>

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## Appendix A FAQs – FOR THE EMPLOYER

### 1. What does a returner bring to the workforce?

RtP is a relatively quick and cost-effective way to increase the skilled workforce. Returners not only have clinical experience but life experience, generally live locally, increasing chances of retention. RTP also addresses workforce gaps, for example offering and supporting a band 3 position then transitioning into a band 5 registered nurse or midwife role upon obtaining NMC registration – a grow your own approach.



### 2. What support offer is there to help me source and recruit a returner?

The cost per returner is £3,600 (NHSE funded) and returners can be re-registered and back in the registered workforce within 3-12 months. Alternatively, employers can support band 3 RtP positions then transition the returner into a band 5 registered post upon re-registration with the NMC. Opportunities can be advertised on NHS jobs and a selection of the current RtP vacancies are also advertised on the Health Careers RtP page: <https://www.healthcareers.nhs.uk/explore-roles/nursing/returning-nursing/return-nursing-practice-programme> Potential returners may find out about the programme and test of competence through several routes, including internal Trust communications, to support this NHSE has developed an online campaign toolkit to raise awareness and support recruitment: (<https://www.healthcareers.nhs.uk/returning-nursing-toolkit>).

### 3. What can returners do whilst on placement?

**Supernumerary status of returners, both unpaid and employer led route:** The NMC states: students in practice or workplace learning must be supported to learn without being counted as part of the staffing required for safe and effective care in that setting. For employer led return to practice, this includes practice placements within their place of employment; this does not apply when they are working in their substantive role. Placements should enable students to learn to provide safe and effective care, not merely to observe; students can and should add real value to care. The contribution students make will increase over time as they gain proficiency, and they will continue to benefit from ongoing guidance and feedback. Once a student has demonstrated that they are proficient, they should be able to fulfil tasks without direct oversight. The level of supervision a student needs is based on the professional judgement of their supervisors, taking into account any associated risks and the student's knowledge, proficiency and confidence" (REF: Standards for Return to Practice Programmes. Glossary page 12)

### 4. How long does it take a returner to return to the register?

To support returners to re-register with the NMC it can take between 3-12 months. Depending on how long the returner has been off the register.



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# Appendix B

## Regional RtP Lead

| Region     | RtP Regional Lead | Email and contacts                     |
|------------|-------------------|--|
| South East | Claire Wardle     | 01865 932097<br>claire.wardle3@nhs.net |

## Useful Contacts

| Organisation   | Email address  | Contact number                         |
|----------------|--|--|
| Health Careers | <a href="http://www.healthcareers.nhs.uk">www.healthcareers.nhs.uk</a>   | Enquiry number: 0345<br>60 60 655      |
| NMC            | <a href="http://www.nmc.org.uk/registration/returning-to-the-register">www.nmc.org.uk/registration/returning-to-the-register</a> | Enquiry contact number:<br>02076377181 |

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