



Policy on Managing Absences from Training

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1.0 Purpose

This policy sets out the conditions under which GP trainees need to make up time away from training and/or develop a return to training plan.

GP Trainees taking extraordinary statutory leave or exceptional leave pose a variety of complex challenges, including:

- **Coordination Challenges:** Managing the schedules, paperwork, and reintegration of trainees taking time out requires significant administrative effort. This can divert resources from other critical administrative tasks.
- **Regulatory Compliance:** Ensuring compliance with medical training regulations and standards during periods of absence can add to the complexity of administrative tasks.
- **Loss of Continuity:** Time out can disrupt the sequential learning process and accumulation of practical experience essential for GP training. This interruption can lead to gaps in knowledge and skills.
- **Skill Degradation:** Extended periods away from training may result in a loss of clinical skills and knowledge, making it challenging for trainees to catch up upon their return.
- **Reintegration Challenges:** Re-entering training after a break may require additional support and adjustment periods, potentially delaying educational milestones and assessments.
- **Mentorship Disruption:** The continuity of mentorship relationships may be affected, which can impact the trainee's guidance and support structure critical for professional development.

2.0 Scope

In accordance with the Trainee Leave Policy, this policy covers the conditions under which a GP trainee may return to their training programme.

Responsibility for ensuring that a workable programme for return to training is in place and applied rests with the relevant Scheme Director. In addition, the trainee has the equal responsibility of working positively and reasonably with the Scheme Director through the process.

A return to the training programme will not be initiated unless an adequate plan is in place and the trainee explicitly agreed to participate in the process.

This policy does not cover flexible training arrangements or applications to return to training following a deferral, suspension, or withdrawal. Refer to the relevant policies listed in Section 6 for details.

Trainees should contact the Irish Medical Council (IMC) for information on how their time away from training impacts their ability to meet the legal minimum professional competence requirements.

3.0 Policy

3.1 Policy principles

Safety and Continuity of Care

Approved leaves and return to training arrangements will put the patient's safety and continuity of care first.

Responsiveness

The College is committed to supporting trainees who wish to take time away from their training programme and will endeavour to assist them.

Transparency

Any approved leave will be in writing and recorded on the trainee's educational portfolio. Return to training plans will be agreed to in writing between the Scheme Director and trainee. Return to training programme arrangements will be made with the knowledge and support of the employer.

Natural justice

Underpinning this policy is the three-way relationship between the trainee, the employer and the College. Variations to the approved training seek to take into consideration:

- The trainee's personal circumstances and professional objectives
- The College's requirements for training, assessment and maintenance of competence, and expectation of timely progression through training, and
- The employer's staffing requirements, service provision and continuity of care

Impact of time out of programme on evidencing competency

Absences from training for extended periods of time may affect a trainee's ability to demonstrate competency and progression through the curriculum. This policy standardises the management of trainee leave and out of programme events to:

- Consistently assess knowledge and clinical skills gaps,
- Develop and implement plans to remediate time away and
- Assist Scheme Directing Teams (SDTs), trainers and trainees in demonstrating due diligence with respect to performance.

3.2 General Policy

In accordance with the Trainee Leave Policy, Trainees who take more than 10 training days cumulatively of leave (except for ordinary statutory leave) in a training year are required to remediate that time away, subject to a permitted grace period at the discretion of the SDT. Trainees who are away from training more than 10 training days consecutively (extended leave) are not permitted a grace period.

The trainer and SDT will review a trainee's educational portfolio and absence to determine whether they need:

- Targeted training to make up time away (make up time plan),
- A return to training plan,
- To have their training programme end date extended, or
- Re-take the training phase.

The Scheme Director may refer a case to the GP Training Directorate.

Relevant factors in making an informed decision include:

- Timing of the absence
 - is it early in training or in the final months of the programme,
 - is it immediately after a period of annual leave
- History of absence
 - has the trainee had repeated periods of absence
- Nature of the absence
- Nature of the training that has been missed
- Performance and competency and progression assessments

If the trainee is away from their training programme for a period of longer than a year, on return to the programme they may be required to transfer to new programme rules or to undertake an alternate programme in discussion with the SDT. This may include resuming training from the beginning.

Leave from training without prior notification and, where required, approval from the College may be grounds for disciplinary action.

Trainees cannot complete their written and clinical assessments before having successfully completed their return to training plan and/or made up their time away from training.

The maximum time for completion for a training programme is six (6 years), excluding time out of programme due to a College-approved exceptional leave or statutory leave as described in the "Trainee Leave" Policy.

4.0 Remediation of Time Away

Trainees who take more than 10 training days cumulatively (except for ordinary statutory leave) in a training year are required to remediate their time away from training at a ratio of one make up day for every training day missed.

In addition to making up time away from training, Trainees who take more than 10 training days cumulatively of leave in a training year (except for ordinary statutory leave as defined in the Trainee Leave Policy) may be required to develop and implement a return to training plan in collaboration with their SDT.

Note that training programme assessments cannot be completed until all required training days missed are remediated and the trainer has reported back to the SDT that all performance requirements have been satisfactorily met.

Sample scenarios are provided in Section 6. For procedures and template on setting up a plan to make up time away, see the Remediate Time Away Procedure.

5.0 Extended Leave

A Trainee who is absent from training more than 10 training days consecutively due to an extraordinary statutory leave or exceptional leave as per the Trainee Leave Policy will be deemed on extended leave.

5.1 While on Leave

While on extended leave, the trainee's educational portfolio will continue to be reviewed by the scheme's Competency and Progression Committee at regular intervals for any new or salient information (e.g. a new leave application or change to start date or proposed return to training plans). This will also ensure that the Scheme Director can include the trainee in planning and scheduling future training phases.

5.2 Return to Training after an Extended Leave

For leaves greater than 12 calendar weeks, the trainee should contact their SDT at least 30 working days before their scheduled return to the programme to make any necessary arrangements.

For leaves less than 12 calendar weeks, the trainee should contact their SDT at least 15 working days before their scheduled return to the programme to make any necessary arrangements.

Consideration should be given to a trainee's skills and knowledge fading following an extended leave for a thoughtful assessment of their competency and Trainees returning from an extended leave should complete a return to training plan. However, the SDT may at their discretion waive a Trainee's need for a return to training plan and require the trainee only to make up time away from training.



The College cannot guarantee the date or the location of the trainee's return placement. It is therefore important that both the SDT and employer be advised well in advance of a trainee's wish to return to training. The SDT will attempt to identify a placement as soon as possible but trainees should indicate their intention and preferred time of return as soon as they are able to do so.

The SDT and trainer will review the clinical placement the trainee left immediately prior to taking the extended leave. This is to establish that the type of placement the trainee will be returning to meets the training programme's clinical experience requirements.

Although the returning trainee will be accommodated in the next available suitable vacancy, there is no guarantee of a return date, and it may take time for a suitable vacancy to arise.

Employing organisations need to be party to any decisions by trainees to relinquish their contract so that they can manage their service needs, and so that the process is timely and fair.

When returning to training after an extended period of leave, it is the trainee's responsibility to ensure that they meet the IMC's requirements of good standing and are recorded on the appropriate IMC register.

5.3 Timing

First six (6) months of training

If the trainee begins their extended leave within the first six (6) months of their training programme, and the trainee does not meet programme requirements, then the SDT, in consultation with the GP Training Directorate when appropriate, may recommend that the trainee re-enter the programme with the following year's intake.

After six (6) months of training

If the trainee begins their extended leave more than six (6) months after beginning their training programme, the trainer and trainee will work together on a return to training plan.

At their discretion, the SDT may waive the need for a return to training plan.

5.4 Return to Training Plan

The purpose of the return to training plan is to identify and remediate any knowledge and clinical skills gaps incurred due to the time away from training and to demonstrate competency.

The return to training plan must take into consideration necessary arrangements for a smooth transition to work (coordinated by the trainee with his employer) and any remedial training required. An effective plan should include specific learning goals and regular review of performance against these goals.



Example scenarios where a training plan may be required are provided in Section 6. For information on how to develop and implement a return to training plan and monitor progress to demonstrate competency, refer to the Return to Training Procedure.

5.5 Exceptional Circumstances

Trainees whose circumstances are not covered by the above arrangements will be managed on a case-by-case basis.

6.0 Examples

Keep in mind that the following examples are for illustrative purposes to bring clarity to more common scenarios. Each case should be reviewed based on its own merit.

6.1 Extended leave requiring a return to training plan

Marie has been on maternity leave for 20 weeks and is planning a return to training after 26 weeks absence from training. Before commencing her leave, she was in Year 2 of the training programme and was satisfactorily meeting all academic and clinical requirements of her programme and progressing as expected. Marie recorded her planned leave on ePortfolio and reported it to the training scheme following approval from her employer.

To return to training, Marie needs to:

- Contact her SDT no later than 30 days before her leave ends to inform them of her continued intention to return to training.
- Assess her readiness to training by completing a Knowledge and Clinical Skills Self-Assessment.
- Discuss her self-assessment results with her SDT and together, identify learning needs.
- Formulate a training plan using the Return Training Plan Template and submit to the SDT for review.
- Contact her employer to ensure any required onboarding is scheduled for her return date.

Why did the SDT not waive the return to training plan?

In coming to a decision, the SDT considered the following information:

- Time away from programme and potential for knowledge or skills degradation
- Trainee and patient safety
- Possible requirement for training or workplace adjustments
- Knowledge and Skills Self-assessment by the trainee

6.2 Extended leave where the SDT waived the need for a return to training plan

Jimmy fell off his mountain bike and broke his leg, requiring surgery. There were complications and he was unable to work or attend to his training duties for three weeks (15 training days). Jimmy recorded his unplanned leave in his ePortfolio when he returned home and was able to log in. Jimmy understands that in accordance with the Trainee Leave Policy and Time Out of Program Policy, he was on extended leave. However, at his last CPC review, he was deemed to be progressing faster than expected and the SDT agrees that he is fit to return to training and make up the time away without requiring a return to training plan. He is in Year 3 of his programme.

To return to training, Jimmy needs to:

- Document his ability to return to training discussion by completing the Knowledge and Clinical Skills Self-Assessment.
- Discuss the elements of training missed with his trainer and draft a Remediation Plan. He is required to make up 15 training days.
- Submit his completed self-assessment and proposed Remediation Plan to the SDT and request a waiver for a return to training plan.
- After the SDT agrees that a return to training plan is not necessary, finalise his Remediation Plan with this trainer to include comments received by the SDT.

Why did the SDT decide to waive the return to training plan?

In coming to a decision, the SDT considered the following information:

- Jimmy is in Year 3 of his programme and has been progressing faster than expected.
- This is Jimmy's first time away from the programme other than ordinary statutory leave and 4 days of personal time in the previous year.
- He recently completed a positive performance review with his clinical supervisor.
- The results of Knowledge and Skills Self-Assessment indicate that any knowledge or clinical skills lost or faded can be quickly addressed through the Remediation Plan.

6.3 Exceptional leave for clinical experience

Margaret was accepted by a global health programme to practice in Tanzania for two months (45 training days). She applied to the College for an exceptional leave under the Trainee Leave Policy and was approved. Before commencing her placement, she was in Year 2 of the training programme and was satisfactorily meeting all academic and clinical requirements and progressing as expected. Margaret reported her planned leave on ePortfolio. She believes her experience in Tanzania negates the need for a return to training plan because she improved her clinical skills.

To return to training as planned, Margaret needs to:

- Contact her SDT no later than 15 days before her leave ends to inform them of her continued intention to return to training.
- Assess her readiness for training by completing a Knowledge and Clinical Skills Self-Assessment.
- Discuss her self-assessment results with her Scheme Director and together, identify learning needs.
- Submit her completed self-assessment with a request for waiver for a return to training plan.

Why the Scheme Director decide not to waive the return to training plan?

The Scheme Director did not waive the need for a training plan because:

- The length of time away: Margaret missed 45 training days.
- The self-assessment highlighted knowledge gaps that were covered in the curriculum while she was absent.
- There is no recent performance review in her educational portfolio.
- The work and clinical experience gained while on the Global Health Programme was not directly related to the training programme.

6.4 Combination of leaves culminating in 11 days in a training year

Philip is in Year 1 of the training programme. During the year, Philip took 5 days off to care for his sick children, then was sick himself and had a medical certificate for 2 days of sick leave. In March, his father passed away and he took 4 days of compassionate leave to make the journey to attend the wake and funeral. Philip is also a volunteer crew for his neighbouring RNLi Lifeboat Station and was required to complete 4 days of training exercises (2 days in January and 2 days in June) which he took as annual leave. Philip reported his unplanned leave as soon as he returned to training and his planned RNLi volunteer crew training duties in advance on ePortfolio. He has been keeping track of the amount of leave he has taken to date.

According to the Trainee Leave Policy, Philip needs to make up time away from training. He needs to:

- Notify his SDT that he has taken time away from training (except for ordinary statutory leave) for more than 10 training days cumulatively during the training year: 11 training days in total;
- Complete the Knowledge and Clinical Skills Self-Assessment;
- Discuss the elements of training missed with his SDT;
- Agree with the SDT the knowledge and clinical gaps that need to be made up: Phil is permitted a grace period of 10 training days and is required to make up 1 day (the volunteer activity does not need to be remediated because it was taken as annual leave);
- Submit a proposal to the SDT on how to make up the 1 day away using the Remediation Plan Template.
- Upon approval from the SDT, implement the plan and report back to the SDT once complete, along with the feedback and signature of the trainer.

Why did the SDT not recommend a return to training plan and permit the grace period?

- There is no evidence of knowledge or clinical skills fading.
- Feedback and performance reviews from the trainer and clinical supervisor were positive.
- Phil's leave, though extensive, was not consecutive and spread through the year, and was not likely to result in knowledge or skills degradation as above.

7.0 Roles and responsibilities

GP Training Directorate	Act as an escalation point for the Scheme Director, where appropriate, on matters related to managing a trainee's out of programme events.
Scheme Directing Team (SDT)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review and approve/deny proposed return to training arrangements (either Remediation Plan or Return to Training Plan) • Submit a trainee's proposal for a return to training arrangement to the GP Training Directorate, as appropriate, for recommendations and/or decisions. • Recommend changes to proposed return to training arrangements. • Agree to close a return to training arrangement or recommend further training. • Where appropriate, may delegate some of their responsibilities.
Trainee	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Complete a Knowledge and Clinical Skills Self-Assessment. • Collaborate with the trainer and Scheme Director on developing and implementing an adequate return to training arrangement.
Trainer	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Collaborate with the trainee and SDT on developing and implementing an adequate return to training arrangement. • Provide written feedback and performance review on the trainee's progress through the return to training arrangement. • Include the return to training arrangement into the trainee's educational portfolio. • Upon request, make recommendations to the SDT on the appropriate return to training arrangement.

8.0 Definitions

Return to training arrangement	A Remediation Plan or Return to Training Plan.
Extended leave	An absence from a GP Training Programme greater than 14 days consecutive in a training year that is not an ordinary leave.
Ordinary statutory leave	Statutory leave to which all trainees are entitled and which all trainees take as a matter of course. This includes: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Annual leave • Study leave and • Bank holidays
Training days	Training days equal working days as defined in the NCHD contract or the full-time equivalent. The calculation of the grace period and extended leave is based on the number of training days missed. The remedial path will depend on whether the missed days are cumulative or consecutive.
Grace period	Number of training days away from the GP Training Programme that a trainee may not be required to remediate. Under Trainee Leave Policy, the grace period is the full-time equivalent of 10 training days.

9.0 Related and supporting documentation

- Trainee Leave Policy
- Trainee Statutory Leave Notification Form
- Trainee Exceptional Leave Application Form
- Return to Training Procedure
- Remediation of Time Away Procedure
- Knowledge and Clinical Skills Self-Assessment

10.0 Contact

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