



Routes back into the NHS: Information for speech and language therapists

Updated 14 April 2020

Executive summary

- The Coronavirus Act includes provisions for recently retired speech and language therapists and speech and language therapy students nearing the end of their studies to work in the NHS.
- The relevant provisions of the Act include:
 - **Emergency registration:** enables regulators to emergency register suitable people as regulated healthcare professionals, such as nurses, midwives or paramedics. This might include (but will not be limited to) recently retired professionals and students who are near the end of their training. Registered staff can then be used appropriately, with decisions made on a local basis, to increase the available health and social care workforce and enable essential health and care services to function during the height of the epidemic.
 - **Emergency Volunteer Leave:** enables employees and workers to take Emergency Volunteer Leave in blocks of 2, 3 or 4 weeks' statutory unpaid leave and establish a UK-wide compensation fund to compensate for loss of earnings and expenses incurred at a flat rate for those who volunteer through an appropriate authority.
 - **Indemnity:** provides indemnity for clinical negligence liabilities arising from NHS activities carried out for the purposes of dealing with, or because of, the coronavirus outbreak, where there is no existing indemnity arrangement in place. This will ensure that those providing healthcare service activity across the UK are legally protected for the work they are required to undertake as part of the COVID-19 response. This is in line with and will complement existing arrangements.
 - **Pensions:** suspends the rule that currently prevents some NHS staff who return to work after retirement from working more than 16 hours per week, along with rules on abatements and drawn-down of NHS pensions that apply to certain retirees who return to work. This will allow skilled and experienced staff who have recently retired from the NHS to return to work, and also allow retired staff who have already returned to work to increase their commitments if required, without having their pension benefits suspended.
- While the RCSLT encourages those former speech and language therapists and our final year students to take up this opportunity, if you wish to, we recognise that you may need help and guidance on this, including around receiving the appropriate level of training, supervision and access to relevant health and safety equipment. We are working with members on producing resources, guidance and Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) on these issues. See our dedicated Coronavirus webpage here: <https://www.rcslt.org/learning/covid-19> Please let us know if there are other issues

you are finding on the ground or think it would be good for us to support you with.

- As you know, events are moving very quickly. This note sets out the position on 6 April 2020. Further updates will be issued when Governments across the UK issue further guidance.

A. The routes to returning or joining the NHS across the UK

This note covers the situation as we understand it across the UK. The Health and Care Professions Council (HCPC) is currently working on creating the emergency register, which will be in two parts:

- a temporary COVID-19 register of all former registrants who have de-registered in the past three years.
- A temporary COVID-19 register for final year students on UK approved programmes, who have completed all their clinical practice placements.

No fees will be charged in relation to the COVID-19 temporary registers. You will not need to apply to be added to the registers, it will be populated by HCPC in conjunction with other bodies, such as universities, as required. Creation of the register is taking place in three phases. The re-registration of qualified SLTs is taking place in phase 2 and that of final year students in phase 3. HCPC will write to registrants when they have been placed on a temporary register.

HCPC has advice for current registrants, former registrants, education providers, and students about temporary registration <https://www.hcpc-uk.org/covid-19/advice/>.

Recently retired SLTs and those in independent practice

If you are able to offer to re-join the NHS and help on a more regular basis please follow the steps at this link here and also see the FAQs available

<https://www.england.nhs.uk/coronavirus/returning-clinicians/faqs-ahps/>

If you are able to help on an ad hoc basis only then the advice is to register with local bank providers or register with NHS Professionals

<https://www.nhsprofessionals.nhs.uk/en/Joining-NHSP/Our-NHS-our-Bank/Allied-Health-Professionals>

Northern Ireland nation specific Information

The Department of Health NI has produced guidelines for Allied Health Professionals returning to work and final year students in Northern Ireland here: <https://www.health-ni.gov.uk/Covid-19-returning-professionals>

Plans are also being prepared for 2nd year nursing, midwifery and AHP students in Northern Ireland to play their part in this emergency situation. The latest information will be made available here: <https://www.health-ni.gov.uk/coronavirus>

B. FAQs: supporting your journey into the NHS: RCSLT guidance for returning speech and language therapists

Will I be doing speech and language therapy?

It is important to discuss with your employer the work that you will be expected to undertake before you begin work with them. You may or may not be expected to undertake speech and language therapy. Due to current prioritisation, unless you are dysphagia trained and competent it is unlikely that you will be working within Speech and Language Therapy. There may be some high priority communication roles with client groups such as those with Motor Neurone Disease, but otherwise work is likely to be mainly dysphagia based. It is more likely you will be in clerical roles, support assistant roles and other roles across services. However, work should still be within an individual's grade and professional scope of practice, and/or competencies. In whatever role you undertake it is essential that you receive adequate training on the use of equipment and supervision appropriate to the role being undertaken.

What if what I am asked to do is beyond my scope of practice?

If you are asked to undertake a role beyond your scope of practice then you will need to ask your employer for additional training, support or supervision. If you have any concerns about what you are being asked to do, then you must raise these with your employer immediately. There is guidance from the HCPC on this here: <https://www.hcpc-uk.org/covid-19/advice/advice-for-temporary-registrants/>

I have a paid role in an HEI or research, how can I be released to undertake clinical duties?

You may wish to talk to your academic employers about the possibility of being released from this role in order to focus on your clinical work. It is important to get the balance right between your clinical and non-clinical work. There is guidance from the NHS on this here: <https://www.england.nhs.uk/coronavirus/returning-clinicians/faqs-ahps/#i-work-in-a-part-time-clinical-role-with-a-second-non-clinical-role-what-are-the-next-steps-for-me>

Discuss with your line manager the options for your contract; either a temporary change to allow paid NHS/Bank work or continue on your current salary but accept a change in role to allow you to do clinical work.

Do I have to go back to practise?

You do not have to return to practise if you do not want to.

There is further guidance from HCPC about this here: <https://www.hcpc-uk.org/covid-19/advice/advice-for-temporary-registrants/>

What guidance is there for independent practitioners about seeing clients and maintaining my income?

RCSLT and ASLTIP have developed joint guidance for independent practitioners. It is available here: <https://www.rcslt.org/learning/covid-19/rcslt-guidance>

What if I think something I am being asked to do is unsafe for me personally?

You should raise any safety concerns that you have with your employer in the first instance. If they are not able to resolve these issues then you can contact the HCPC for advice. There is guidance from HCPC on this here: <https://www.hcpc-uk.org/covid-19/advice/advice-for-temporary-registrants/>

Am I classed as a key worker?

Please refer to your nation for the answer to this question.

England

Yes. In the government document about school closures, health and social care staff are identified as key workers: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-maintaining-educational-provision/guidance-for-schools-colleges-and-local-authorities-on-maintaining-educational-provision>

Scotland

Yes. In the government document about school closures, NHS and social care staff are identified as key workers. It is possible that SLTs could be in category 1 or 2, depending on their role. Local authorities are taking their own decisions about how to provide childcare and in what categories:

<https://www.gov.scot/publications/coronavirus---school-and-elc-closures-guidance-on-critical-childcare-provision-for-key-workers/>

Wales

Yes. In the government document about school closures, health and social care staff are identified as key workers: <https://gov.wales/written-statement-eligibility-ongoing-provision-children-who-are-vulnerable-or-whose-parents-are>

Northern Ireland

Yes. In the government document about school closures, health and social care staff are identified as key workers:

<https://www.education-ni.gov.uk/general-guidance-covid-19-schools>

If I temporarily return to the NHS from another setting, will the terms and conditions at my existing employer be protected?

You will need to ask your current employer if they will protect your existing terms and conditions.

Will I be insured if I return to the NHS?

Employers (including the NHS) should provide the relevant insurance. There is advice on professional indemnity insurance from the HCPC here:

<https://www.hcpc-uk.org/covid-19/advice/advice-for-temporary-registrants/>

There is advice from the NHS on this here:

<https://www.england.nhs.uk/coronavirus/returning-clinicians/fags-ahps/#will-i-have-insurance-and-indemnity-cover>

RCSLT's insurer has confirmed that SLTs joining the temporary HCPC register will be covered by RCSLT's medical malpractice and public liability insurance policy. You need to apply to RCSLT to be a temporary member in order for this insurance to be activated. Please complete the form here to apply <https://www.surveymonkey.co.uk/r/BZ82DZD> .

As a Newly Qualified Practitioner, how will my competencies be signed off?

You should discuss this with your current employer. If you continue in your current role then it should be possible to continue to have competencies signed off. If you are deployed elsewhere in your service it will depend on what your new role is and the arrangements in place to sign off any competencies that are relevant to that role.

If you have not yet had dysphagia training you should not be required to do anything dysphagia related without training and close supervision being in place from an appropriately qualified SLT.

What should academics do who need to continue teaching both students now and the new intake in September?

HCPC have provided comprehensive guidance for education providers here:

<https://www.hcpc-uk.org/covid-19/advice/advice-for-education-providers/>