
Information about our requirements for
professionals returning to practice

Returning to practice

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Section 1 – Introduction

About this document

This guidance provides information about the process you need to complete if you are returning to practice after a break of more than two years.

Throughout this document, ‘we’ refers to the Health and Care Professions Council and ‘you’ refers to a professional who is considering returning to practice or, in Section 6, a supervisor or counter signatory. ‘Returner’ refers to someone who is returning to practice.

Who is this document for?

Most of the information is for professionals who are not currently registered and who need to apply for readmission to the Register, or who are registered but have been out of practice for more than two years. However, you may also find this guidance helpful if you are considering a break in your practice and thinking about what this might mean in the future, or if you are considering supervising or employing a returner.

Although the guidance is called ‘returning’ to practice, it is also relevant if you hold an approved qualification which was awarded more than five years ago and only now want to start practising your profession.

Returning to practice

During the course of your career, you may not practise your profession for a period of time. This may be for many reasons, which could include parental leave, extended travel, caring responsibilities or illness.

We know that you may want to come back to your profession and resume practising, which is why we have set up this process.

Our return to practice requirements are flexible, minimum requirements. They aim to protect the public by making sure you have up-to-date knowledge and skills. Returning to practice is a self-directed process. It is your responsibility to make sure that you meet the appropriate requirements and can practise

safely and effectively within your scope of practice, in line with our standards.

The amount of updating (the number of activities you carry out to update your practice) that we need is a minimum requirement. This means that you can carry out more updating if you need to, so that you are confident you can meet our standards.

More information

You can find details about how to contact us at the back of this document. If you are a member of a professional body, they may be able to give you more information or advice about how to update, how to structure your period of updating, or how to arrange your supervised practice.

About us

We are the Health and Care Professions Council.

We are a regulator and we were set up to protect the public. To do this, we keep a Register of professionals who meet our standards for their professional skills, knowledge and behaviour. Individuals on our Register are called ‘registrants’.

We currently regulate 15 professions.

- Arts therapists
- Biomedical scientists
- Chiropodists / podiatrists
- Clinical scientists
- Dietitians
- Hearing aid dispensers
- Occupational therapists
- Operating department practitioners
- Orthoptists
- Paramedics

- Physiotherapists
- Practitioner psychologists
- Prosthetists / orthotists
- Radiographers
- Speech and language therapists

Each of the professions we regulate has one or more 'designated titles' which are protected by law. These include titles like 'physiotherapist' and 'dietitian'. Anyone who uses one of these titles must be on our Register. A person who is not registered and who misuses a designated title is breaking the law and may be prosecuted.

Section 2 – Do the return to practice requirements apply to me?

The following is a summary of what the return to practice requirements mean for you. These are presented in the form of a flow chart on the next page. We explain more about our requirements for updating your knowledge and skills later in this document.

I have practised in the past two years and am still registered.

- You may continue to practise and do not need to meet our return to practice requirements.

I have been out of practice for more than two years, but am still registered.

You must either:

- come off the Register, then re-register in the future if you need to return to practice; or
- renew your registration, declaring that you have not practised your profession, and complete either 30 or 60 days of updating (depending on how long you have been out of practice) within six months of renewal.

I have been out of practice for more than two years and am no longer registered, but would like to re-register.

- If you have not practised for two years or more, you must complete either 30 or 60 days of updating (depending on how long you have been out of practice) within the twelve months before you apply for readmission to the Register.

I gained an approved qualification less than five years ago and have never been registered.

- You are eligible to apply for registration with us and do not need to meet our return to practice requirements.

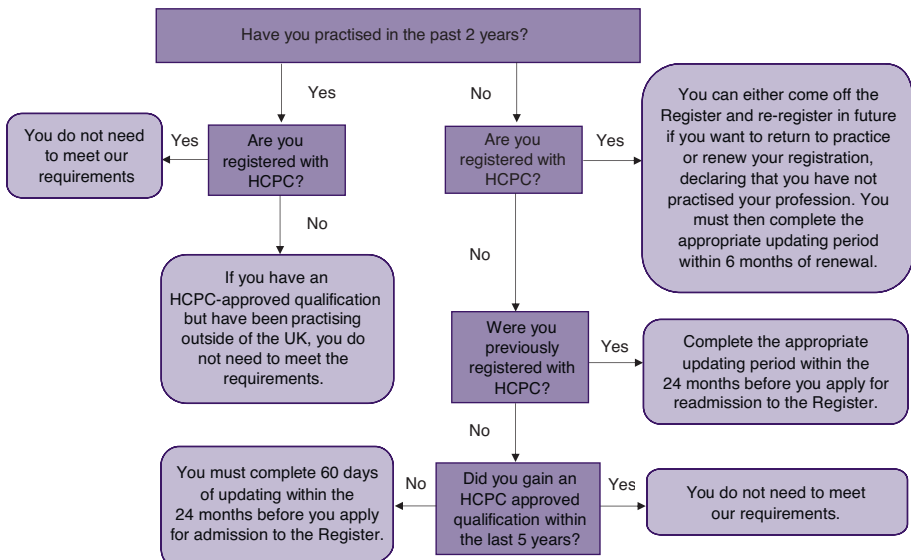
I gained an approved qualification more than five years ago and have never been registered.

- If you have never practised, you must meet our return to practice requirements by completing a 60-day period of updating before you can register with us.

- If you have practised outside of the UK in the five years since your qualification, please see below.

I have an approved qualification but did not register after I qualified. Instead, I have been practising outside the UK.

- You do not need to meet the return to practice requirements if you have not had a gap in practice of more than two years.
- When you apply for registration, please give us information about your work outside of the UK so that we can consider whether you need to meet our return to practice requirements.



Section 3 – Our requirements if you are returning to practice

If you are returning to practice, we need you to update your knowledge and skills as follows.

- 0 to 2 years out of practice – no requirements
- 2 to 5 years out of practice – 30 days of updating
- 5 or more years out of practice – 60 days of updating

In the ‘days’ requirements above, we consider one day to be equivalent to seven hours.

What we mean by ‘practising your profession’

We have defined ‘practising your profession’ as drawing on your professional skills and knowledge in the course of your work. This does not have to be in clinical or ‘frontline’ practice and can include roles in education, management and research, or other areas.

For most registrants, the question of whether they are practising, and therefore need to renew their registration, is a straightforward one. They will be practising using a designated title for their profession or, if they are employed, their employer will require them to be registered with us (or both).

For other registrants it may be less clear whether their work qualifies as ‘practising their profession’. This may include:

- people who work on a voluntary basis;
- people who do occasional work, or
- those who have moved into a role that is related to their profession, but not directly part of it.

This is not a full list. We do not want to exclude people from the Register who are using their professional skills in some capacity and who want to be registered. We believe that in many cases you will be the person best placed to decide whether you are practising your profession. In cases where it is less clear, you may need to make a judgement about this. You can contact us for advice if you are not sure.

If you have never been registered with us before

If you have never been registered with us but you have an approved UK qualification that you gained less than five years ago, we do not need you to carry out an updating period before we can register you. However, you should still make sure that you have taken steps to update your knowledge and skills so that you can practise safely and effectively.

If you qualified more than five years ago, you only need to update if you have been out of practice. If you qualified in the UK, then moved overseas and have been practising there, you can give us information about your overseas practice. Depending on satisfactory verification checks that we will carry out, you will not need to complete an updating period.

However, if you qualified in the UK more than five years ago, or practised overseas but have been out of practice for more than two years, then our return to practice requirements also apply to you.

If you are out of practice, but still registered with us

This information is for professionals who are still registered with us, but who have not practised their profession for more than two years.

To renew your registration with us every two years, you need to sign to confirm that you have practised your profession at some point during the past two years (the registration cycle which is about to end).

If you have not practised your profession during this period, you cannot make that declaration. You should either:

- come off the Register, and then potentially re-register at some point in the future if you need to return to practice; or
- renew your registration using the paper renewal form, declaring that you have not practised your profession. You will then need to complete a period of updating within six months of renewal.

You should provide a covering letter with your renewal form telling us how long you have been out of practice so that we can correctly advise you on the length of updating you need to carry out.

The only exception to this is if you have come onto the Register part of the way through a two-year registration period. This is because you will have either completed an approved course or had your application assessed, or you will have already met our return to practice requirements. As a result, we do not need you to complete a period of updating.

If you have been out of practice, but you expect to return to practice soon, we recommend that you complete your period of updating and renew your registration so that you stay on the Register.

If you have not practised for more than two years, and do not expect to return to practice soon, you should come off the Register. You should not be registered if you are not practising.

If you are out of practice and would like to re-register with us

If you have stopped practising and come off the Register but want to re-register with us, you can apply for readmission. At this point, the return to practice requirements may apply to you, depending on how long you have been out of practice. You need to complete your period of updating within the 12* months before applying for readmission. (*We are temporarily extending this period to 24 months due to COVID-19.)

You should also be aware that when you apply for readmission you will need to give us other information, including certified documents to confirm your identity and address. More information about applying for readmission is on our website.

Practising outside the UK

Our return to practice requirements are for people who have not been practising their profession. If you have been practising outside the UK and have not had a break of more than two years, our requirements will not apply to you. We will ask you to give us information about where you have practised and (if it applies) your registration with another regulator while you were outside the UK.

Section 4 – Updating your knowledge and skills

Your period of updating knowledge and skills can be made up of any combination of:

- supervised practice;
- formal study; or
- private study.

You do not need to carry out updating of all three types. Our only requirement is that private study must not make up any more than half the period.

For example, if you needed to do 30 days of updating, you could do this by completing:

- 30 days of supervised practice;
- ten days of supervised practice, ten days of private study, and ten days of formal study; or
- 15 days of private study, and 15 days of formal study.

This is not a full list of possible combinations. The above are just examples to show how our requirements are flexible enough to meet your requirements.

Supervised practice

‘Supervised practice’ means practising under the supervision of a registered professional.

To complete a period of supervised practice, you will need to identify a supervisor. Your supervisor must:

- have been on the relevant part of the HCPC Register for at least the previous three years; and
- not be subject to any fitness to practise proceedings or sanctions (such as a caution or conditions of practice).

We do not set detailed requirements for the level of supervision needed, or the tasks that you need to carry out. We believe that this is best decided between you and your supervisor, based on your learning needs.

Your supervisor should only supervise activities which are within their own scope of practice. This is so they can provide relevant input and guidance, and also to make sure that both you and they are practising safely and effectively. This means that your period of supervised practice could be carried out, for example, in teaching, management or research, or wherever your supervisor practises their profession.

Unfortunately, we cannot help with arranging placements or finding opportunities for supervised practice.

Formal study

‘Formal study’ is a period of structured study which is provided by a person or organisation. This can include distance learning or e-learning, or any other type of course or programme that is relevant to your practice.

Types of formal study that you might choose to take could include:

- ‘return to practice’ programmes run by educational institutions or other bodies;
- relevant continuing professional development (CPD) courses;
- relevant modules or elements currently included in programmes run by educational institutions; or
- programmes offered by professional bodies.

We do not approve return to practice courses, because their availability will vary among professions and we believe that you are best placed to decide which courses are most appropriate, and which types of formal study will best update your skills and knowledge so that you can re-enter practice safely.

Private study

‘Private study’ is a period of study which you structure yourself. If you choose to use private study as part of your updating, you could use resources such as:

- websites;

- library books; and
- journals.

You may want to spend time observing or shadowing another professional. We treat this as private study rather than supervised practice if there is no formal arrangement for supervision in place.

The aim of private study may be to refresh your skills and knowledge, or to bring you up to date with current developments in health or social care which are relevant to your profession. Time spent reflecting on and recording your learning can count towards your private study.

You may find private study a particularly useful option if you plan to return to a field which is extremely specialised, where there may be limited opportunities for formal study or supervised practice. It may also prove useful if you live in an area where it is difficult to gain a period of supervised practice, or if you need to fit your updating period around other demands on your time, such as another job, or caring responsibilities. However, you should be aware that private study can only make up no more than half of the total period (ie, 15 of your 30 days of updating, or 30 of your 60 days of updating).

Structuring your period of updating

We know that the updating you need to complete will be individual to you. The activities you carry out to update your knowledge and skills will depend on:

- the area in which you plan to work when you begin practising again;
- your prior experience;
- any relevant skills you gained whilst out of practice; and
- any relevant developments in your profession during the time when you were out of practice.

You may find it useful to use the standards of proficiency for your profession as a basis for thinking about which areas you should

concentrate on. If you are entitled to an ‘annotation’ on the Register because you have completed an additional qualification (for example, in prescribing, you should consider whether it is necessary for you to complete updating activities relevant to this area of practice.

By asking you to carry out a certain number of ‘updating days’, we are providing an outline which allows you to structure your period of updating in the way which best reflects your needs. You do not have to do your period of updating full-time, you can complete it part-time if you want. For the purposes of completing your forms, we treat one day as being equivalent to seven hours.

You also do not have to complete your entire period of updating at once. You can carry out part of your period of updating, have a break, and then come back and complete the rest.

Our only requirement for the timescale is that all of your updating needs to be completed, from start to finish, within the 12* months before you apply for registration or readmission (or within six months from when you renew your registration). We believe that this strikes a balance between operating a flexible system, which recognises that you may have family and caring commitments, and that if updating is carried out over a very long period, the opportunities for development are limited. If you think you may not be able to meet this timescale, please contact us to discuss your circumstances. (*We are temporarily extending this period to 24 months due to COVID-19.)

Your responsibility

As a returner to practice, you are responsible for your own period of updating and for making sure that you meet our standards before you return to practice.

We will ask you for information so that we can check that your updating period took place, but you are responsible for the learning that you carry out and for making a professional decision as to whether this updating is enough to allow you to practise safely and effectively.

All professionals, once registered with us, have to make sure that they meet our standards. This includes meeting our standards of conduct, performance and ethics, which mean that you practise within your scope of practice. We believe that most professionals will take this responsibility seriously, and will carry out their updating in good faith. However, if after you have re-registered with us, we find that you are not practising in a way that meets our standards, we could take action against you using our fitness to practise process. Similarly, if we find that the information you have supplied is not accurate, we could take action which may include removing you from the Register.

The role of the employer

Our requirements do not replace the responsibilities of an employer in appointing, inducting, and supporting members of staff.

Any employer who wants to employ you will need to set their own requirements in terms of knowledge, skills, qualifications and experience for any particular post, and will assess you for a post to make sure they make a suitable appointment.

We expect that an induction process would follow and the employer would want to put in place a process of support for you while you become familiar with practice again. This could include mentoring or using review and other support mechanisms. Equally, an employer may have a specific requirement for a certain profession, or for your role, that you should update in a certain area, in a certain way, or to do with a certain issue, before you can work for them.

However, we realise that not all registrants have employers, and some are self-employed. This is why we set our own requirements, rather than rely entirely on local induction or support methods.

You might identify a potential employer, and carry out your updating period as part of your induction with them. Equally, you might complete your updating period, then become registered,

then begin to look for a job. Our requirements mean that you can choose to update and look for work in whatever order is most convenient for you, most acceptable to your employer, or usual for your profession.

Section 5 – Processing your information

Forms

We provide forms for you to give us information about your period of updating, such as which activities you have carried out and for how long. These forms are available on our website or from the Registration Department. The contact details are at the end of this document. You may find it helpful to go online and download these forms and the guidance notes before you begin your period of updating.

Your counter-signatory

When you have completed your period of updating, you need to ask someone on your part of the Register to countersign your form, to confirm that you have carried out the period. Your counter-signatory does not need to supervise your updating activities and they do not need to confirm that you are fit to practise. They just need to take reasonable steps to be sure that you have carried out the number of days required. For example, they might ask to see a certificate from any formal study, or they might ask to see any notes from your private study.

If you carry out supervised practice as part of your updating, you can ask your supervisor to be your counter-signatory too. However, these are two separate roles.

Supervised practice

If you have carried out supervised practice as part of your updating activity, you will need to fill in a supervised practice form. This needs to be signed by your supervisor, who must confirm that you have completed that period of supervision. Your supervisor does not need to confirm that you are fit to practise.

Checking the information you provide

We will check the information you send us to see that you have completed the required number of days. We may contact you or the organisations or individuals that you work for to get more information, or to check the information that you have provided. For example, if you carried out supervised practice, we will look

at our Register to check that your supervisor is registered with us and does not have any fitness to practise action against them. We may also contact the organisation that provided your formal study, to check that they have a record of your attendance and that you have completed the course.

Section 6 - Information for supervisors and counter-signatories

The role of the supervisor

We do not set detailed guidance for supervisors because we believe that the level of supervision needed and the tasks carried out will depend on the returner's specific learning needs. Supervisors will often help returners to identify the skills and knowledge they need to update to practise safely and effectively within the scope of practice for the role they plan to return to.

As listed in Section 4, we do set requirements about who can be a return to practice supervisor. You should also only supervise activities which are within your scope of practice.

If you have supervised a return to practice placement, you will have to confirm that the person has completed the period of supervised practice that they have declared in their supervised-practice form. Your signature does not express that the returner is fit to practise.

The role of the counter-signatory

We apply the same requirements about who can be a counter-signatory as we do about who can be a supervisor. A counter-signatory must:

- have been on the relevant part of the HCPC Register for at least the previous three years; and
- not be subject to any fitness to practise proceedings or sanctions.

You will need to take reasonable steps to make sure that the returner has carried out the updating days and activities that they have declared in their return to practice form. Your signature does not confirm that the returner is fit to practise. If you have supervised a period of updating, you are also able to act as a counter-signatory for that individual, but there is no obligation that you do so.

What to do if you have concerns about a returner's fitness to practise

If you have serious concerns about a returner's fitness to practise when unsupervised after they have completed a period of updating under your supervision, or which you have been asked to counter-sign, there are two options available to you.

- Explain your concerns about signing the form to the person to help them in planning additional updating activities.
- Sign the form, and then raise a fitness to practise concern with us.

Section 7 – More information

If you have any questions about this document, please contact us or check the information on our website. However, we cannot provide individual advice on how you should update your knowledge and skills, as this will need to be decided on an individual basis.

You can contact our Registration Department using the details below.

Registration Department
The Health and Care Professions Council
Park House
184 Kennington Park Road
London
SE11 4BU

Phone: +44 (0)300 500 4472
(Monday to Friday, 9am to 5pm)

Email: registration@hcpc-uk.org

If you are a member of a professional body, they may be able to provide further information or advice about how to update, how you could structure your period of updating, or how to arrange your supervised practice.

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