

THE LONELY PLANET GUIDE TO LESS THAN FULL TIME TRAINING - IS IT FOR YOU?

Yorkshire and the Humber Deanery

Introduction

If you are thinking of applying for Less than Full time Training (LTFT) there is plenty of information available to you. The [Yorkshire and Humber Deanery website](#) explains how the process works and how to apply; your TPD and ES can give you advice and most importantly you can talk to other doctors or dentists who are following this route or have done in the past.

The purpose of this short document is to provide you with some basic information on LTFT so you can decide if it's for you.

What are the Pros & Cons?

Training LTFT allows you to gain the same training over a longer period because you work and train fewer hours a week. This means your training takes longer and your salary will be reduced. You will generally progress from year to year when you have completed the equivalent period required, rather than on an annual basis.

Placements may be extended, or you may rotate with everyone else but need to return to repeat some of that placement later.

Unless dictated by your circumstances you should follow a similar shift or work schedule pattern to those training full time. This may not always be the same, as rotas must be covered, but you should get exposure to the same out of hours work over the length of your career. You should also get the same training opportunities but over the extended time. This will mean that you do not progress at the same rate as full time colleagues but at the end of your training when you reach CCT you should be trained to an equivalent standard.

Being LTFT can make it much harder to gain exposure to all the skills and competencies you need for your portfolio – if you only work certain days of the week for instance you may miss out on some clinics or theatre opportunities. The teaching days you need to attend may also fall on days when you are not rostered to be at work and short courses such as ATLS may fall on days when you would expect to be free. While some flexibility can usually be organised by the rota team, it's not always possible especially at short notice and many PGDiTs training LTFT will say they do far more extra work in their own time than their full-time colleagues need to.

Your personal study time in the week will be proportionally reduced so at times in your training, i.e. preparing for exams or finalising portfolios before an ARCP, it may seem that you are doing much more in your own time. Fixing up meetings with supervisors and trainers can be more difficult as their timetable may not be able to accommodate you on the days you are at work. You will still have a yearly ARCP though your progression will be judged on how long you have worked taking into consideration your reduced hours.

Some residents worry that being LTFT may give an impression they are not fully committed to training and that may impact on how they are perceived by colleagues or even on job applications down the line. It's important to say that this is really not the case any longer – most realise that as a resident training LTFT they often have to work harder to fill their portfolio and sometimes longer placements in a department can lead to better relationships with staff who they might want to return to work alongside one day.

The comment I hear most often from LTFT doctors is that you need to be so much more organised – but that can be a useful habit to acquire during your training as whatever your senior post is you will find good organisational skills are a necessity as you juggle a work plan.

Let's look at some of the reasons you might think about moving to LTFT training.

Health

Historically this was one of the main reasons doctors applied to work LTFT.

Over the years it has enabled many people to complete their training who might not have otherwise done so. The secret to success is to balance your health needs, either acute or chronic, alongside your training. Shorter working weeks with rest days can really help this. As can having more time to pursue things that support your health such as exercise or physiotherapy. Health issues inevitably come with worry and often a loss of self-confidence so sometimes just having time to reflect about work you have just done, or plan for the shift ahead are helpful.

What most people say is the benefit of being able to feel you are looking after yourself, but managing to continue your chosen career, is the huge plus of training LTFT.

Carers responsibilities

This has always made up the largest group of LTFT doctors and dentists, and the chances are if you speak to more senior colleagues this will have been the reason they chose to train LTFT.

The benefits do not really need explaining. and over the years I have been glad to hear so many stories of the satisfaction in being able to look after someone properly whilst not losing sight of one's career.

What it does require though is excellent organisation and the ability to juggle many tasks often at once. When you are at work you must be completely there - in mind and body - which means having robust arrangements in place at home, being able to accommodate the occasional early start or late finish request for a shift change from a colleague or help cover sickness.

If you are a carer for children, school holidays and bank holidays can create their own set of problems, and everyone is expected to (and wants to do) their share, so it can take some planning ahead. If you are the carer for someone who is unwell, their health may be unpredictable, or you may need to juggle work commitments alongside hospital visits or treatment.

A lot of people will tell you that training alongside being a carer is incredibly challenging and requires much more organization than being in full time training – but they will inevitably say it was worth it.

Lifestyle Choices

Before the changes to LTFT, applications to train less than full time as a lifestyle choice were not an option – in short you had to have a reason not to be able to train full time.

A pilot run in Emergency Medicine some years ago demonstrated there was a real keenness for doctors to opt to work fewer hours in the week to give them more time to do other things. Consequently, when the national changes to LTFT were introduced several years ago the need to be in a “category” was removed. This has resulted in many doctors choosing to move to reduced training hours, often 80%, to

help realign their work-life balance. There is no doubt that for many this can be a positive move and can often result in more energy and enthusiasm for work.

However, it is important to think carefully about what the extra free hours will bring to your life as well as the reduced hours in training, plus the resultant impact on exposure to skills and the need to train for longer. If, for instance, you feel that you are not enjoying training, or if you are experiencing problems with your portfolio, changing to LTFT may not provide the answers and may in some cases make things worse.

It's a good plan to talk to your supervisor about your situation, or if you want to speak with someone outside of your work then contact [Professional Support at the Deanery](#) and we can find someone for you to chat with confidentially.

Increasing your Training Percentage/ Returning to Full-Time

There are many reasons you may decide at some stage in your training that you would like to increase your percentage of training or even return to full time. The advantages are clear:

- You will speed up your remaining training time and your CCT will move closer. This may be helpful for many reasons such as a job opportunity approaching.
- The "juggling of experiences" needed when you are LTFT to ensure you get exposed to all training opportunities may lessen.
- Your pay will likely increase.
- You may find it easier to rotate in synchrony with full time colleagues.
- You may find it facilitates taking on some different roles. This is especially true toward the end of your training as you will have more work time.

The mechanism is straightforward. Speak first with your Educational Supervisor to discuss how this will impact on your training and on you personally. This is especially important if you have been training LTFT for health reasons. If they are supportive then seek the agreement of your TPD who must agree all percentage changes. You should then complete the LTFT application form stating your intention to increase your percentage. This should be done at least 16 weeks before your anticipated change date. This allows plans to be made with rostering, pay roll etc.

If for some reason you need increase your training percentage outside of the 16-week window, we will do our best to help accommodate. If your HR department are able to adjust rosters it may well be possible within a shorter time frame. The caveat may be if you are in a slot share. It may be then that the rota cannot accommodate a

doctor at a greater percentage within the shortened time frame as all the rota lines may be full.

As a final but important point. Moves to a higher percentage of working hours should be considered a long-term plan - staffing levels and rota planning need consistency. Understandably events may intervene and a hoped-for sustained increase in hours may not work for an individual, but this should be the exception. Planning is key and ensuring that this is the right thing to do at this point in your training.

Previously, doctors with health issues needed the agreement and support of Occupational Health to increase their working time. However, this is no longer required. We would however strongly urge you to discuss your plans and the impact of working longer hours on your health with your GP or whoever is looking after you, as well as with family and friends. If there is to be a significant change to your rota style - for instance returning to a significant OOH workload such as night shifts, we would suggest a discussion with OH might be helpful in making the transition successful.

Making your application

After reading the information on LTFT training and talking things through with friends, family, and colleagues, you may still have some aspects you want to discuss – if so please contact us through [Professional Support at the Deanery](#) and we will put you in touch with someone who can help.

If you have decided LTFT is for you, just a few points to highlight as you make your application.

- You must be in a training post to apply for LTFT training.
- You must discuss your application with your TPD and submit evidence of their agreement. This agreement relates to LTFT being appropriate and suitable to your training needs. It does NOT guarantee that you will have a placement on a given date as that is the decision of the Employer you will be working for. Your TPD may say they have a placement lined up for you and they are hopeful you can commence LTFT but that will have to be agreed with the employer.
- Your application form (the links to which can be found on the [Yorkshire and Humber Deanery website](#)) must reach the LTFT team 16 weeks before your placement start date, along with the relevant TPD agreement.
- If you are a new starter and have not received a job offer 16 weeks before you would wish to start LTFT, please make your application as soon as you receive your offer. Ticking the box for LTFT training on your application form

does not register you for LTFT, it merely informs the application system how many doctors may wish to be LTFT. To apply for LTFT you must fill in the application form.

- Once your application has been agreed at Deanery level, the employer will be informed, and they will continue to progress your application. The teams in HR and deployment are busy and often understaffed. They will be doing their best to confirm your placement and rota as soon as they can, but they may be waiting on other factors beyond their control.
- The ultimate approval for you to train LTFT in a specific placement sits with the employer – they will try to confirm this as soon as they can as they know everyone needs to make plans but please understand the pressure they are under. Be as patient as possible and respond to any queries they send you as quickly as you can.

Making the most of your time in LTFT

Once you have commenced in LTFT training we very much hope you will enjoy it, and it will benefit your training and help you achieve your goals as a doctor or dentist.

I have already emphasised the need to be organised but there are a few other tips that people have provided over the years.

- Be as flexible with your colleagues as you can be; if you are in a position at a certain time to help out or stay over then consider that. People will regard you as a good member of the team and when you might need a favour back – maybe if you have a caring responsibility or need to be somewhere for your own health - they will repay your favour and kindness. Often helping is even more appreciated as your colleagues may know you are LTFT because of certain commitments.
- Keep up regular contact with your supervisors and TPDs and see them in the same time frame as full timers do rather than adjusting meeting intervals because you are LTFT.
- Get ahead of the portfolio game. At ARCP if you have more in your portfolio than would be expected then people will respect that and give you credit. If you have less than you should have, they may be concerned that LTFT is limiting your progression.
- Take every opportunity that presents itself to you to acquire skills or competencies, even if that means staying a bit longer than you had planned. If someone offers you a chance to do something you know will be valuable and you are able to say yes, then do so as it may not come round again when you are in the same situation.

- Finally, plan ahead. It may be that moving back to full time training suits you and your training at some stage. The more notice you can give the better that can be arranged.

Useful Contacts

You can find support from your peers on LTFT below:

- **Facebook:** A group of volunteer admins, who are also LTFT Resident Doctors in Training, run a Facebook group for all LTFT doctors. This is a public forum intended to offer peer support, respond to common LTFT queries and signpost for further advice. This group is searchable on Facebook as 'LTFT Trainees Forum', and there are a series of joining questions.
WhatsApp: There are two WhatsApp groups for Yorkshire and the Humber LTFT trainees: one for doctors training LTFT and another for dentists training flexibly, which includes LTFT dentists as well as those out of programme. Both groups are intended to enable peer support, find a response to common queries, and signpost for further advice within the region. Details are on the [website](#).
- [Flexible Working Champions](#)
- The Deanery [Professional Support team](#) are available if you would like to discuss your application in further detail.
- You can also access an up-to-date list of [Training Programme Directors](#) and their contact details.

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