

Structured Learning Placements (SLPs)

Frequently Asked Questions and Myth Busting

Clinical Time and Patient Contact

I'm worried about the loss of clinical time - will I get enough patient contact? SLPs do involve more educational time compared to traditional placements. However, registrars report that the structured learning helps them make better use of their clinical time, with one registrar noting: "Rather than just seeing patients and trying to wobble through your personal experience, the balancing of the learning and applying the knowledge in real time has improved my ability to engage patients properly." You should still have regular patient contact, and the learning is designed to complement and enhance your clinical practice.

Important: SLPs include flexible independent learning time that can be used to meet your individual learning needs, including arranging additional clinical sessions if you feel you need more patient contact.

Will I be ready for independent practice after an SLP? SLPs are designed to supplement, not replace, your clinical training. They're used alongside a minimum of 18 months of whole-time-equivalent training in a General Practice. The structured learning helps you develop the knowledge base and critical thinking skills that support confident clinical practice. Many registrars report feeling more prepared and confident after completing an SLP.

How do I complete clinical tasks and assessments with reduced clinical time? You'll work with your supervisor to plan clinical and educational activities that align with your SLP modules. The interleaved learning approach means you're constantly applying what you learn to your clinical practice. You should ask your supervisor to help you identify appropriate patients and learning opportunities during your clinical sessions.

Learning Format and Structure

Will I just be stuck in front of a computer the whole time? No! SLPs use principles of blended learning, including:

- Weekly face-to-face or online facilitated sessions with peers (often rated as a highlight)
- Interactive online modules with virtual reality, podcasts, and simulations
- Group work and presentations
- Clinical practice time
- Humanities-based learning activities
- Tutorial time with your supervisor

What will my typical week look like? For a full time GP Registrar, a typical week might include:

- Two days clinical practice in GP
- Two days structured educational time (mix of self-directed and facilitated learning)
- Half-day release/VTs plus flexible learning time
- Weekly in-contact session with your SLP cohort
- Regular supervision time

How much time will I spend on self-directed learning? As part of your paid work, you'll have allocated self-determined learning time for the placement. This isn't personal time; it's protected learning time to work through educational content. Additionally, you'll have flexible independent learning time that can be used to meet your individual learning needs, including arranging additional clinical sessions if you want more patient contact. Many registrars appreciate the flexibility to learn at their own pace while having regular face-to-face sessions for accountability and peer support.

How do I choose which personalised modules to take? You'll have an educational conversation with your supervisor to explore your learning goals and interests and your GP Educators are also available for support. You can select modules that align with your career interests, address learning gaps, or support your exam preparation.

Are the modules just online learning, reading and videos? No - modules use diverse learning approaches including:

- Interactive exercises and simulations
- Card games, podcasts, and virtual reality
- Exercises using the humanities and creative arts
- Reflection tasks and creative writing
- Group discussions and presentations
- Practical activities linking to your clinical work

Exam Preparation

Will an SLP help me pass my exams? Many registrars report that SLPs help with exam preparation. The structured approach to learning, "How to Learn" module, and flexibility to focus on exam-relevant content can be beneficial. One registrar noted: "The flexibility of the blended structure allowed me to adapt my timetable and focus on the AKT specific modules. I passed the AKT first time."

Is there specific AKT preparation? Yes, there's a dedicated "Preparing for the AKT" module, and the broad curriculum coverage helps build the knowledge base needed for the AKT. The interleaved learning approach supports long-term retention of information.

How does an SLP prepare me for the SCA? The face-to-face sessions develop communication skills, group work builds collaborative abilities, and the clinical reasoning modules enhance your consultation skills. Regular presentations help build confidence in explaining your thinking.

Team Integration and Peer Support

Will I feel isolated from my practice team? While you'll spend less time in the practice than in a full-time GP placement, you'll still be part of the team during your clinical sessions. Many trainees report that the structured learning helps them contribute more meaningfully to the team. Your supervisor should help integrate you into practice activities.

How will I connect with other registrars? SLPs provide enhanced peer support through:

- A community of practice and learning
- Weekly face-to-face or online facilitated sessions
- Group work and collaborative learning
- Shared online learning platforms
- Regular cohort meetings. Many registrars report stronger peer connections than in traditional placements

What if I'm new to the NHS or an IMG? SLPs can be particularly beneficial for those new to the NHS, providing structured learning about systems, professionalism, and UK healthcare approaches. The peer support and facilitated sessions help with networking and informal learning about how the NHS works.

Portfolio and Assessment

How will I complete my portfolio with less clinical time? The SLP modules provide rich material for portfolio reflections, and you'll have regular opportunities to reflect on your learning. The diverse learning experiences actually provide more varied content for your portfolio entries. Time should be allocated in your job plan for independent learning and the completion of assessments.

Will my supervisor be able to sign me off? Your supervisor maintains oversight of your learning through regular tutorials, portfolio reviews, and the placement review process. They'll have insight into your SLP learning through the structured feedback systems, which include an end-of-placement review form.

How does an SLP count towards my training requirements? SLPs count as general practice time and are recognised by the RCGP as part of your training programme. They supplement (not replace) your minimum 18 months of whole-time equivalent training in a GP practice.

Flexibility and Personalisation

Can I work Less Than Full Time (LTFT) on an SLP? Yes, SLPs have been designed to accommodate LTFT registrars at various percentages (50%, 60%, 70%, 80%). The flexible structure can be particularly helpful for those with caring responsibilities or health conditions. Your regions have been provided with suggested example rotas at various percentages.

What if I have specific learning needs? SLPs can be adapted for various learning needs:

- Different learning formats suit different learning styles
- Flexible timing accommodates various circumstances
- Modules can be chosen to address specific learning gaps
- Reasonable adjustments can be made as needed

Can I do additional clinical time if I want? Yes, some registrars have volunteered for additional clinical time, and you can discuss this with your supervisor. The flexible independent learning time can be used to arrange additional clinical sessions if you feel you need more patient contact. This flexibility is built into SLPs specifically to address individual learning needs.

Comparison with Other Placements

How does an SLP compare to a hospital placement? SLPs focus specifically on GP-relevant learning rather than hospital-based skills. They cover areas that may not be well-covered in hospital rotations, such as leadership, health inequalities, and systems working—all crucial for modern GP practice. They may give you experience in hospital specialities not part of your rotation, for example paediatrics and mental health.

What will I gain if my rotations include an SLP? SLPs offer:

- More structured, consistent learning across curriculum areas
- Enhanced peer support and networking
- Flexibility to focus on your specific learning needs
- Coverage of emerging topics like planetary health and digital health
- Better work-life balance for some registrars

Practical Concerns

What equipment do I need? You'll need access to:

- Computer/laptop/mobile device with a good internet connection
- Webcam for online sessions
- Space for learning (can be provided by practice if needed)
- Your training programme or employer may be able to support you if you have difficulties with equipment or finding a space to learn

Where will I do my self-directed learning? You can learn wherever suits you best - home, library, education centres, or your practice. The key is having a quiet space with good internet access.

How long are SLPs? SLPs typically last 4-6 months, though some regions offer longer placements. The length is designed to align with your local training programme structure.

What happens if I fall behind with the modules? You'll have regular check-ins with your SLP facilitator and supervisor. The in-contact sessions provide accountability, and support is available if you're struggling with the workload.

Career Development

Will an SLP help with my career development? Many registrars report that SLPs help with:

- Leadership skills development
- Presentation and teaching abilities

- Research and quality improvement skills
- Professional networking
- Finding career interests (like medical education)

Will an SLP disadvantage me compared to other registrars? No - SLPs are designed to provide enhanced training through a different approach. Many registrars report feeling more prepared and confident after completing an SLP, and the skills developed (presentation, leadership, systems thinking) are valuable for GP practice. The majority of registrars feel a SLP makes them more likely to get a job.

Getting the Most from Your SLP

How can I maximise my SLP experience?

- Actively engage with the face-to-face sessions
- Complete self-directed work to prepare for group sessions
- Reflect on how learning applies to your clinical practice
- Use the peer support opportunities
- Choose personalised modules that align with your interests
- Discuss your learning regularly with your supervisor

What if I'm not sure an SLP is right for me? Discuss your concerns with your supervisor or training programme director. Consider your learning style, career goals, and personal circumstances. Remember that SLPs are designed to complement, not replace, traditional clinical learning.

What if I have caring responsibilities - will an SLP work for me? SLPs can be particularly helpful for those with caring responsibilities due to the flexibility of self-directed learning time. You can complete asynchronous activities when it suits your schedule, while still benefiting from regular peer support and facilitated sessions.

Will I be able to complete workplace-based assessments (WPBAs)? Yes, you'll still complete WPBAs during your clinical time. Your supervisor will work with you to ensure you have appropriate opportunities, and the structured learning often provides good contexts for

assessments.

How will I know if I'm keeping up with the learning? You'll have regular check-ins through face-to-face sessions, supervisor meetings, and module assessments. The weekly facilitated sessions provide accountability - as one trainer noted: "When they haven't done the work, it's very evident they haven't done the reading."

What if I don't like online learning? SLPs aren't just online learning - they combine multiple approaches including face-to-face sessions, group work, practical activities, and clinical application. The variety of learning methods means you're likely to find approaches that work for you.

Can I change my personalised modules once I've started? Speak to your SLP facilitator about module choices. While there may be some flexibility, it's best to choose carefully at the start with your supervisor's guidance.

Will my CV look different with an SLP? Your CV will show a structured educational placement, which demonstrates engagement with innovative training approaches and commitment to comprehensive professional development - qualities valued by employers. The modules covered demonstrate additional expertise in areas employers may find valuable, including leadership and system working.

What if I struggle with self-directed learning? SLPs include a "How to Learn" module that develops study skills, and you'll have regular support from facilitators and peers. The face-to-face sessions provide accountability and motivation.

How is an SLP different from just doing extra studying? SLPs are structured educational programmes with defined learning outcomes, peer support, facilitation, and integration with clinical practice. They're not additional studying - they're a different approach to delivering your required training.

Will I have time for quality improvement projects? Yes, many SLP modules encourage quality improvement work that can be linked to your clinical placement. This can provide excellent portfolio material and practical experience.

What if I need to take leave during my SLP? As with any placement, you'll need to discuss leave with your supervisor and SLP facilitator. The flexible structure can make it easier to catch up on missed learning. It's important for our wellbeing that we take regular leave.

How does an SLP prepare me for the realities of GP practice? SLPs cover practical topics - like systems working, leadership, and health inequalities and population health - that are crucial for modern GP practice. The combination of structured learning and clinical application helps prepare you for the complexity of real-world practice. The NHS' 10-year plan highlights the need for innovation and reform of the NHS. Embracing innovative training prepares you for this future.

Myths About Structured Educational Placements

MYTH	REALITY
SLPs are just online learning because there aren't enough placements	SLPs are evidence-based educational programmes designed to provide more consistent, comprehensive training. They address gaps in traditional training and cover emerging topics that are crucial for modern GP practice.
I'll be isolated and miss out on team working	SLPs actually enhance peer support through weekly in-contact sessions with your cohort. Many registrars find this new community the most positive part of these placements. You'll still be part of your practice team during your clinical sessions, and many registrars report stronger peer connections than in traditional placements.
Online learning is just reading documents and watching videos	SLPs use interactive learning including virtual reality, simulations, podcasts, games, memory cards, group work, collaborative work, presentations, and humanities-based activities. The learning is designed to be engaging and varied.
Less clinical time means I won't be ready for independent practice	SLPs complement your clinical training with structured learning that helps you make better use of your clinical time. The total clinical exposure across your training programme remains substantial, including at least 18 months whole-time-equivalent training in a GP practice, and the educational content directly supports your clinical practice.
SLPs are just about exam preparation	While SLPs can help with exam preparation, they're comprehensive educational programmes covering leadership, systems working, health inequalities, and other areas essential for modern GP practice that go far beyond exam requirements.
All the learning happens at home in my own time	SLP learning time is protected, paid educational time. You'll have regular face-to-face sessions, group work, and dedicated learning time as part of your working week.
SLPs produce lower quality GPs	SLPs are designed to enhance GP training quality by providing consistent, comprehensive education across all curriculum areas. Many registrars report feeling more confident and better prepared after completing an SLP.

I won't get proper supervision	You'll have regular supervision with your clinical supervisor, plus additional support from SLP facilitators. The supervision is structured to integrate your SLP learning with your clinical practice.
SLPs are just a cost-cutting measure	SLPs represent investment in enhanced educational infrastructure, additional TPD sessions, and comprehensive curriculum development. They're expensive, and designed to improve training quality, not reduce costs.
I'll miss out on specialty experience	SLPs can be combined with specialty placements, and the modules cover areas that might not be well-covered in traditional hospital rotations. You'll still complete the same overall training requirements.