

A Guide to Your Structured Learning Placement

"This training model doesn't just work on paper, it's reshaped how I learn, work and think as a future GP." — GP Registrar, East of England

Introduction

This guidance is designed to help you understand your Structured Learning Placement (SLP). SLPs, previously known as Blended Learning Placements, are best understood as educational integrated training posts and are used to supplement a minimum of 18 months of full-time training in GP (whole time equivalent).

You will spend part of your week working through a programme of structured education, aligned with the GP curriculum, and undertake self-directed and facilitated activities, as well as continuing to engage in educational activities such as 'half day release' and tutorials in practice. In addition to any clinical time, SLPs increase the proportion of your week spent in structured education, with more sessions allocated to focus on learning, as well as personal and professional development.

Placement lengths vary and some of you will undertake your SLP during normal training time, with others doing so during additional training time to support your exam preparation.

You should also attend your local half-day release ('VTS') and practice-based education sessions, and you have sufficient self-determined time to engage in project and ePortfolio work, ensuring a balanced learning experience. Many of the modules encourage quality improvement and leadership project work, which can be linked to your clinical placement.

As part of your SLP, you should have additional flexible independent learning time that can be used to meet your learning needs, including arranging additional clinical sessions.

"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, so I could have spent the same time with the patient and not be aware whether I'm doing something that is right or not."

— GP Registrar, West Midlands

Programme construction and modules

Your SLP educational time is structured, which means you will undertake a series of programmed activities overseen by educators and designed to meet your learning needs. For many of you, this will mean completing several nationally designed learning modules, but your region may decide that a different programme better meets your needs. This might include exam preparation modules or courses to support neurodivergent learners.

Module content is divided into *self-directed* and *in-contact* activities. Although you are allocated paid self-determined learning time, self-directed activities can be completed at a time of your choosing. In-contact activities are facilitated and completed alongside your peers, either face-to-face or online.

Self-Directed Activities (asynchronous)

- Complete these at your own pace, when and where it suits you
- Include reading, videos, interactive exercises, and individual reflection tasks
- Designed to prepare you for collaborative work during your facilitated sessions
- Allow you to process information thoroughly before group discussions

In-Contact Activities (synchronous sessions)

- May be delivered face-to-face or online, depending on your region
- Include facilitated and self-facilitated group discussions and presentations
- Feature collaborative problem-solving and case work
- Provide opportunities for peer learning and knowledge sharing
- Build on the foundation you've created through your individual study

"When they haven't done the work when they come to a session with us, it's very evident that they haven't done the reading and they don't know what the discussions about."

— Training Programme Director, West Midlands

Some modules are core – most of you will do these – but you can often personalise your learning by choosing from a list of optional modules.

Core modules

- Cancer diagnosis
- Clinical supervision
- Equality, diversity and inclusion
- How to learn (skills for effective learning)
- Leadership
- Mental health
- Paediatrics
- Planetary Health
- Population health and health inequalities
- Professionalism
- Safeguarding children

Personalised options

- Adverse childhood experience and trauma-informed care
- Chronic pain
- Clinical reasoning
- Dermatology
- Developing skills in education
- Difficult conversations
- Digital health
- Enhanced care in care homes
- ENT
- Genomics
- Learning disability and autism
- Medical emergencies in GP
- Menopause
- Men's health
- Musculoskeletal
- Ophthalmology
- Palliative care
- Personal wellbeing
- Preparing for the AKT
- Research and scholarship
- System working
- The on-call day

“The most important aspect...is that it has given me the time and space to learn, interact with peers and study topics I might not have done so otherwise. All of this has brought back some of

the joys of being a doctor."

Doctor in training, GP Blended Learning Pilot

Blended Learning

SLPs utilise the principles of blended learning, which combine the best of both digital and face-to-face education. Rather than simply moving content online, it integrates self-directed digital activities with collaborative in-person sessions to create a more effective learning experience than either approach alone.

During your SLP, you'll balance clinical practice with focused educational time that combines individual study with rich collaborative learning during your structured facilitated sessions. This approach mirrors the reality of medical practice, where you must balance independent research and reflection with peer discussions and collaborative decision-making.

Why Blended Learning Works for GP Training

- **Enhanced Knowledge Retention:** Self-directed study allows you to process information at your own pace, while group sessions help consolidate and apply that knowledge through discussion and practice.
- **Flexible Learning:** Asynchronous activities fit around your other commitments, while structured, facilitated sessions provide dedicated time for collaborative learning and peer support.
- **Deeper Understanding:** Individual preparation enables more meaningful participation in group discussions, resulting in richer learning experiences for everyone.
- **Real-World Application:** The combination of independent study and collaborative work reflects how you'll continue learning throughout your medical career.
- **Improved Critical Thinking:** Moving beyond passive consumption of information to active engagement, discussion, and application of knowledge.

"I think it's given me some motivation back. It's allowed me to enjoy learning again. And I think all those things will help me towards completing."

— GP Registrar

Understanding Interleaved Learning

Your learning experience uses an innovative approach called interleaving. Instead of studying one topic intensively and then moving on, you'll work on multiple modules simultaneously throughout your placement. This means weaving different subjects through your learning schedule rather than tackling them in isolation.

"I think the interleaving methodology and pedagogy is working really well and actually instead of doing a full day just on one topic, I think weaving it through the weeks has been really useful..."

the discussions have been deeper by the end of the weeks where they've done those additional tasks as well."

— Training Programme Director, North West

Benefits of Interleaved Learning:

- **Reduced boredom:** Variety in your weekly learning keeps engagement high
- **Better knowledge retention:** Spaced practice across multiple topics strengthens long-term memory
- **Deeper understanding:** Returning to topics over time allows concepts to develop and mature
- **Enhanced connections:** You'll start to see links between different areas of general practice

Many GP registrars find this approach more sustainable and engaging than traditional block learning, though it may feel different at first if you're used to intensive single-topic study.

The Learning Framework Behind Your Activities

Your activities are based on Diana Laurillard's ABC framework, which recognises six distinct types of learning. Understanding these can help you recognise what each activity is designed to achieve:

1. **Acquisition:** Learning through reading, watching, and listening to expert knowledge
2. **Inquiry:** Exploring topics through investigation, experimentation, and research
3. **Discussion:** Engaging in meaningful conversations, debates, and idea-sharing with peers and facilitators
4. **Practice:** Applying knowledge through exercises, simulations, and skill rehearsal
5. **Collaboration:** Working together to build understanding and create shared knowledge
6. **Production:** Creating outputs that demonstrate and consolidate your learning

Humanities and Reflective Learning Activities

Most modules include humanities-based learning activities that enrich your educational experience beyond traditional medical learning. These creative and reflective exercises might include:

- **Creative writing tasks** that help you explore patient narratives and your own professional experiences
- **Art and literature analysis** that develops empathy and communication skills
- **Storytelling exercises** that enhance your ability to connect with patients

- **Reflective activities** that support professional identity development

These humanities activities complement your clinical learning by exploring affective domains of learning and developing the "human" side of medicine - crucial for building therapeutic relationships and understanding the patient experience.

Making the Most of Your Learning

Resources

Please ensure you have access to the following **free** resources for your learning modules:

- e-Learning for Health <https://portal.e-lfh.org.uk/>
- RCGP FourteenFish ePortfolio <https://www.fourteenfish.com/partners/rcgp>
- Zoom/ MS Teams
- RCGP LGBT learning hub <https://elearning.rcgp.org.uk/course/view.php?id=584>
- FairHealth E-learning <https://www.fairhealth.org.uk/home>
- Channel 4's online streaming service <https://www.channel4.com/>
- BBC Sounds <https://www.bbc.co.uk/sounds>

Before Your In-Contact Sessions

- **Complete self-directed activities:** These provide the foundation for meaningful group work
- **Reflect on your learning:** Consider how the content relates to your clinical experience
- **Prepare questions:** Note areas where you'd value peer or facilitator input
- **Review collaborative tasks:** Familiarise yourself with any group activities planned for the session

During Your In-Contact Sessions

- **Engage actively:** Your preparation allows you to contribute meaningfully to discussions
- **Share insights:** Your individual learning can enrich the whole group's understanding
- **Listen actively:** Learn from your peers' perspectives and experiences
- **Participate fully:** Group activities are designed to deepen understanding through collaboration

In-contact sessions are consistently rated as highlights by GP registrars, valued for deepening understanding through focused discussions and providing accountability for completing preparatory work.

After Your Sessions

- **Complete any follow-up activities:** These help consolidate collaborative learning

- **Reflect on new insights:** Consider how group discussions have shaped your understanding; consider making ePortfolio entries
- **Access additional resources:** Explore extended materials that interest you
- **Connect with peers:** Continue conversations through discussion forums
- **Discuss with your supervisor:** Let them know what you have learned and reflect together on how you link your learning to clinical practice

Connecting to Clinical Practice

- **Relate to patients:** Consider how each topic applies to your recent clinical experiences
- **Discuss with supervisors:** Share insights from your learning during supervision
- **Apply in practice:** Look for opportunities to practise new skills in your surgery
- **Reflect regularly:** Use your e-Portfolio to track development and insights

Building Professional Networks

- **Peer connections:** In-contact sessions are valuable for building relationships with fellow registrars
- **Facilitator expertise:** Make use of experienced GP educators during sessions
- **Specialty contacts:** Connect with specialists involved in topic-specific modules
- **Ongoing dialogue:** Maintain connections through discussion forums and peer support

Preparing for Assessment and Future Practice

- **Portfolio development:** Use reflections and learning outputs for your portfolio
- **Exam preparation:** Content aligns with MRCGP curriculum requirements
- **Continuing development:** Skills learned here support lifelong learning habits
- **Quality improvement:** Apply collaborative learning approaches in your future practice

Supporting Your MRCGP Success

This learning approach is specifically designed to enhance your performance in both components of the MRCGP examination:

Applied Knowledge Test (AKT) Preparation

- Structured individual study builds the broad knowledge base essential for AKT success
- Interactive activities and self-assessment tools help identify knowledge gaps
- Spaced learning through multiple modules supports long-term retention
- Topic coverage aligns with MRCGP curriculum requirements

"When I listened to the interviews of the previous participants, they sounded like it was something they really enjoyed, and one particular thing they said was that it really helps them with the exams you take in your second year." — **GP Registrar, West Midlands**

Structured Clinical Assessment (SCA) Preparation

- Collaborative facilitated sessions develop communication and consultation skills
- Peer learning and discussion enhance clinical reasoning abilities
- Practice activities build confidence in applying knowledge to patient scenarios
- Group work develops the collaborative skills essential for modern general practice

More Than Just Help with Exams

Your learning journey during this placement extends far beyond exam preparation. The range of modules you'll encounter are designed to:

- **Develop Clinical Confidence:** Through structured learning and peer support, you'll build confidence in managing a wide range of clinical presentations and patient interactions
- **Enhance Professional Competence:** The combination of evidence-based knowledge acquisition and collaborative skill development prepares you for the complexity of modern general practice
- **Foster Lifelong Learning Habits:** The self-directed learning skills you develop here will serve you throughout your career, supporting continuous professional development and adaptation to evolving healthcare needs
- **Strengthen Professional Identity:** Facilitated sessions provide opportunities to discuss challenges, share experiences, and develop your professional identity alongside your peers
- **Prepare for Independent Practice:** The balance of individual responsibility and collaborative learning mirrors the autonomy and teamwork required in GP practice

Accessibility and Flexibility

The learning approach has been specifically designed to accommodate diverse learning needs and circumstances:

- **For registrars with caring responsibilities:** Asynchronous learning can be completed around other commitments
- **For neurodivergent learners:** Multiple learning formats and self-paced study provide options to find approaches that work best for you
- **For those new to the NHS:** Additional time for processing information and cultural learning supports international medical graduates
- **For registrars with health conditions:** Flexible scheduling and varied delivery methods support those managing ongoing health needs

- **For different learning preferences:** A variety of learning materials and methods makes it more likely that you will find a way to learn about a topic that suits you