

Name of Document	Professional Support and Wellbeing Service for Trainees
Category	Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) This SOP is applicable for all doctors and dentists in training within England.
Purpose	This document is one of a suite of Standard Operating Procedures to support the management of trainees across England. This SOP is aligned to the principles of 'A Reference Guide for Postgraduate Foundation and Specialty Training in the UK' (The Gold Guide) and 'A Reference Guide for Postgraduate Dental Foundation, Core and Specialty Training' (The Dental Gold Guide). Please refer to the most recent versions. Since 2020, Foundation Training is embedded within the Gold Guide. Therefore, the NHS England suite of SOPs applies to all doctors in training, including Foundation, unless specified otherwise. Within the SOP, whenever reference is made to the Postgraduate Dean, it refers to the Postgraduate Dean or their nominated representative who will be responsible for managing the process on their behalf. Throughout the document, unless otherwise stated, the term 'trainee' refers to postgraduate doctors in training and also applies to postgraduate dentists in training and public health trainees with a medical or non-medical qualification. Within this SOP whenever reference is made to ARCP, in relation to dentistry this also refers to Review of Competency Progression (RCP). This SOP is intended to be a guide to encourage consistency of practice across England. Due to the complex nature of training, there will be occasions where Postgraduate Deans will apply their discretion in enacting this SOP to take account of individual circumstances and varying local structures (e.g. Lead Employer). Local offices should ensure they review the associated Process Alignment Group (PAG) document with regards to Trainee Information System (TIS) implications. English Deans are committed to equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI), with a duty to eliminate discrimination, promote equality and ensure inclusive opportunities are available to all with regards to age, disability, gender, ethnicity, sexual orientation, religion or belief in the design and delivery of all our services. English Deans aim to meet and exceed their statutory obligations under the Equality Act 2010 by adopting a continuous improvement approach.

This suite of SOPs will be routinely screened against relevant Equality and Diversity documentation.			
Authorised by		English Deans	
Date Authorised		27/06/2017	
Implementation Date (current version)		01/10/2025	
Next Review Date		SOP to be reviewed in line with any future Gold Guide revisions, or every 12 months, whichever comes first	
Document Author		English Deans and Senior Managers Group	
Version	Date	Author	Notes Reason for Change, what has changed, etc
1	27/06/2017	HEED	Document signed off at HEED
2	22/06/2018	HEED	Document signed off at HEED
3	17/09/2019	HEED	Document signed off at HEED
4	28/04/2021	HEED	Document signed off at HEED
5	11/10/2022	HEED	Document signed off at HEED
6	19/07/2023	HEED	Document signed off at PGMDE Operational Oversight Group
7	17/10/2024	English Deans	Document signed off at PGMDE Operational Oversight Group
	23/09/2025	English Deans	Document signed off at PGMDE Operational Oversight Group

Related Documents

- *Gold Guide 10th Edition: A Reference Guide for Postgraduate Foundation and Specialty Training in the UK:*
<https://www.copmed.org.uk/publications/gold-guide>

- *A Reference Guide for Postgraduate Dental Foundation, Core and Specialty Training in the UK:*
<https://copdend.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/09/DGG5-2025-v5.pdf>
- *Promoting Excellence:*
<https://www.gmc-uk.org/education/standards-guidance-and-curricula/standards-and-outcomes/promoting-excellence>
- *Former HEE/ BMA Joint Whistleblowing Guidance:*
<https://www.hee.nhs.uk/news-blogs-events/news/joint-whistleblowing-guidance>
- *Former HEE ARCP Review:*
<https://www.hee.nhs.uk/our-work/annual-review-competency-progression>
- Standard Operating Procedures: Withdrawal of an NTN:
- *Supported Return to Training:*
<https://www.hee.nhs.uk/our-work/supporting-doctors-returning-training-after-time-out>

1. Background

Professional support for trainees comes in many forms, including support from faculty, employers and services. Professional Support can be considered to both enhance positively a trainee's career, as well as provide additional support where needed. Professional support may be delivered locally, regionally or nationally.

2. How does NHS England provide professional support?

NHS England is obliged to offer trainees professional support:

1. As Responsible Officers for trainees
2. As Postgraduate Deans with oversight for the delivery of programmes leading to full registration and CCT as defined by the requirements of the regulator.

These GMC requirements are as listed in 'Promoting Excellence' but the principles are also relevant to dentists in training.

R1.4 - Organisations must demonstrate a learning environment and culture that supports learners to be open and honest with patients when things go wrong – known as their professional duty of candour and help them to develop the skills to communicate with tact, sensitivity and empathy.

R2.16 - Organisations must have systems and processes to identify, support and manage learners when there are concerns about a learner's professionalism, progress, performance, health or conduct that may affect a learner's wellbeing or patient safety.

R3.1 - Learners must be supported to meet professional standards, as set out in Good Medical Practice and other standards and guidance that uphold the medical profession. Learners must have a clear way to raise ethical concerns.

R3.2 - Learners must have access to resources to support their health and wellbeing, and to educational and pastoral support, including:

- a. confidential counselling services
- b. careers advice and support
- c. occupational health services.

Learners must be encouraged to take responsibility for looking after their own health and wellbeing.

R3.5 - Learners must receive information and support to help them move between different stages of education and training. The needs of disabled learners must be considered, especially when they are moving from medical school to postgraduate training, and on clinical placements.

R3.10 - Doctors in training must have access to systems and information to support less than full-time training.

R3.11- Doctors in training must have appropriate support on returning to a programme following a career break.

R5.12 - Organisations must make reasonable adjustments to help disabled learners meet the standards of competence in line with the Equality Act 2010, although the standards of competence themselves cannot be changed. Reasonable adjustments may be made to the way that the standards are assessed or performed (except where the method of performance is part of the competence to be attained), and to how curricula and clinical placements are delivered.

3. NHS England's approach to Professional Support in the context of GMC standards

NHS England is required by regulation to deliver the requirements above. These can be broadly defined as:

- Professional/generic skills
- Careers Advice
- Confidential Support

The purpose of the support is either to enable training to continue or remediate as required. Professional support **must** be offered, sign-posted or provided by the Postgraduate Dean to trainees:-

- To facilitate links with employers to access Occupational Health services, Access to Work, etc;
- To offer pastoral support and/or coaching and/or mentoring;
- To provide guidance and support for those considering less than full time working patterns;
- To provide career guidance;
- To support professional development;
- To ensure support for both personal and educational issues.
- To provide exam support

A professional judgement is made to identify how best to support trainees who are facing challenges. In some cases, more than one intervention may be appropriate. Coaching and guidance could be used as tools to support trainees as needed.

4. Accessing Support

Trainees experiencing issues should normally seek guidance from their local Educational Supervisor or Training Programme Director in the first instance and may additionally seek support from their employer directly (via the Human Resources department, Director of Medical Education or other local contacts within the local education provider dependent upon the nature of the support required). Trade unions are an additional, helpful source of support.

Trainees are encouraged to discuss any concerns with faculty at an early stage to ensure any issues are addressed in a timely manner.

Trainees who have been out of work/training should also make use of the 'SuppoRTT' (Supported Return to Training) package provided within every office of NHS England.

5. Identifying Trainees Requiring Professional Support

The Postgraduate Dean has a range of mechanisms to identify and monitor trainees who are facing challenges and may require professional support. These mechanisms are in place with the intention of ensuring that trainees who are facing challenges receive the support and care that they need.

5.1 Professional support required available to individual trainees:

Methods of identifying individual trainees that require professional support may include:

- 5.1.1 Information from an ARCP panel
- 5.1.2 Information arising from complaints and SUIs
- 5.1.3 Fitness to Practice concerns
- 5.1.4 Trainee self-referral
- 5.1.5 Information from Occupational Health reports
- 5.1.6 Information from the regulator (where applicable)
- 5.1.7 Referral by an educator

It is the Postgraduate Dean's responsibility to have oversight of all these sources of information whilst overseeing a programme of education for an individual for which they are the Responsible Officer. Therefore, any operating model within NHS England must allow for this governance and oversight.

Reasons for establishing appropriate educational/professional support may prevent premature termination of the educational contract, withdrawal of the NTN (see SOP) and so termination of employment. Mechanisms for professional support being correctly and appropriately provided therefore prevent legal risk to NHS England from employment tribunals.

5.2 Professional support for specific groups of trainees

It is established that all trainees may require professional support. There are key stages where specific support should be supplied.

5.2.1. Transition from medical school to the Foundation Programme

5.2.2 Provision of careers advice for Foundation doctors (ref. Foundation review recommendation 6)

The following Careers advice should be available for all Foundation doctors:

- Career sessions for FY1s either as part of 'core teaching sessions' at each LEP or delivered at foundation school level
- Career sessions for FY2s either as part of 'core teaching sessions' at each LEP or delivered at foundation school level
- 1:1 sessions with a careers specialist for the small numbers of trainees who are particularly struggling with career choices or have differing needs
- 1:1 sessions with a careers specialist for the small numbers of foundation trainees who receive an ARCP outcome 4

5.2.3 Those returning to work after an absence (see SuppoRTT guidance in the NHS England local offices)

5.2.4 Less than full time trainees

5.2.5 International Medical Graduate Trainees

6. Professional Support in the context of Whistleblowing

NHS England has extended whistleblowing protection for trainees, providing a new legal route directly against ourselves, if required, for trainees who raise concerns and believe that we have caused detriment to them as a consequence. NHS England has now placed into our contracts with local employers a provision that protects trainees making patient safety disclosures.