

AHCS Policy

Career Breaks and Return to Practise

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Introduction

The Academy for Healthcare Science (AHCS) aims to protect patients and the public by making sure a registrant can practise safely and effectively in line with its standards.

Registration with the AHCS is undertaken for a period of 12 calendar months. When a person's registration lapses or is not renewed, or they wish to take a break from their practise and registration, their online AHCS account is made inactive and their details are removed from the public register. However, in the interests of patient safety and the public, a registrant's data will be held for a period of seven years.

The policy is to be applied when a person has taken a break in their career as a Healthcare Science practitioner, returns to practise and wishes to be readmitted to the AHCS Accredited Register.

There may be many reasons a person takes a career break from their professional practise. This policy document specifies three scenarios and sets out the requirements for each before registration can be resumed.

The policy and its accompanying guidance are set in the context that registration with the AHCS is voluntary and not a statutory requirement. As such, these policy requirements are not intended to support professional revalidation; it is the individual's responsibility to ensure they are able to meet the relevant standards of proficiency specified by their employer or professional body.

This policy will only apply to individuals who have previously been registered with the AHCS.

A set of guidance notes is provided as an Appendix to complement and clarify the requirements.

Scenarios for Returning to Practise

1. Where a person returns to practise following a career break period of less than 12 months

The person may apply for readmittance to the register by requesting reactivation of their online account and completing a renewal application.

The applicant should ensure that:

- all registration account data fields are completed, including their current employer details;
- all required documents are current and uploaded, although the certified identity documents are not required as a previous registrant;
- the required Declarations are completed;
- the registration fee payment is made with the application submission.

2. Where a person returns to practise following a career break period of between one and five years

The person may apply for readmittance to the register by requesting reactivation of their online account and completing a renewal application, declaring that they have not practiced their profession and providing evidence that they have completed a minimum of 30 working days* updating within the six months before an application for readmission to the register.

The applicant should ensure that:

- all registration account data fields are completed, including their current employer details;
- all required documents are current and uploaded, although the certified identity documents are not required as a previous registrant;
- the required Declarations are completed;
- the registration fee payment is made with the application submission;
- the details of their role, responsibilities and a summary of the updating activities undertaken is provided, countersigned by their Head of Department/Manager, and their Supervisor as appropriate.

***One working day is equivalent to 7 or more hours.**

3. Where a person returns to practise following a career break period of more than five years

The person may apply for readmittance to the register by requesting reactivation of their online account and completing a renewal application, declaring that they have not practiced their profession and providing evidence that they have completed a minimum of 60 working days* updating within the twelve months before an application for readmission to the register.

The applicant should ensure that:

- all registration account data fields are completed, including their current employer details;
- all required documents are current and uploaded, although the certified identity documents are not required as a previous registrant;
- the required Declarations are completed;
- the registration fee payment is made with the application submission;
- the details of their role, responsibilities and a summary of the updating activities undertaken are is provided, countersigned by their Head of Department/Manager, and their Supervisor as appropriate.

***One working day is equivalent to 7 or more hours.**

APPENDIX: Guidance on the Requirements for Returning to Practise

What is meant by 'practising your profession'?

'Practising your profession' is defined as drawing on your professional skills and knowledge during your work.

For most registrants, the question of whether they are practising is straightforward. If they are employed, they will be practising and their employer may, increasingly, require them to be registered with the Academy for Healthcare Science.

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 and 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 the individual will be the person best placed to decide whether they are practising their profession.

Updating knowledge and skills

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

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

It is not necessary to carry out updating of all three types. The only requirement is that private study should not make up any more than half the period.

For example, 30 working days of updating could be undertaken by completing:

- 30 days of supervised practise;
- 10 days of supervised practise, 10 days of private study, and 10 days of formal study; or
- 15 days of private study, and 15 days of formal study.

where one working day is equivalent to 7 or more hours.

These are just examples to show how the requirements are flexible to meet individual needs.

Supervised practise

‘Supervised practise’ means practising under the supervision of a registered healthcare science professional who is included currently on either on a statutory (e.g. the HCPC register) or an accredited register (e.g. the AHCS register).

A supervisor must:

- have been registered continuously for at least the previous three years; and
- not be subject to any fitness to practise proceedings or sanctions (e.g. a caution or conditions of practise).

Detailed requirements are not set for the level of supervision needed, or the tasks that an individual needs to carry out. This is best decided with the supervisor, based on learning needs.

However, a supervisor should only supervise activities which are within their own scope of practise, so they can provide relevant input and guidance, and to make sure that both the individual and they are practising safely and effectively. A period of supervised practise could be carried out, for example, in education, management or research, or wherever the supervisor practices their profession.

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 relevant to practise.

Types of formal study that could be undertaken include:

- ‘return to practise’ 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.

The AHCS does not approve return to practise courses, because their availability will vary among professions and we believe that the individual is best placed to decide which courses are most appropriate, and which types of formal study will best update their skills and knowledge to re-enter practise safely.

Private study

'Private study' is a period of study which is self-structured. If private study is part of updating, useful resources include:

- websites;
- library books; and
- journals.

An individual may want to spend time observing or shadowing another professional. This should be treated as private study rather than supervised practise where no formal arrangement for supervision is in place.

The aim of private study may be to refresh skills and knowledge, or to raise awareness of current developments in health or social care relevant to the profession. Time spent reflecting on and recording learning can also count towards private study.

Private study is a particularly useful option if returning to a field which is extremely specialised, where there may be limited opportunities for formal study or supervised practise. It may also prove useful if living in an area where it is difficult to gain a period of supervised practise, or if the updating period needs to be fitted around other demands, such as another job, or caring responsibilities. However, private study should make up no more than half of the total period (i.e. 15 of 30 days of updating, or 30 of 60 days of updating).

Structuring your period of updating

The updating needed will be individual to you. The activities carried out to update knowledge and skills will depend on:

- the area to be worked in when practising again;
- prior experience;
- any relevant skills gained whilst out of practise; and
- any relevant developments in the profession during the time when out of practise.

The standards of proficiency for the profession should be used as a basis for the areas to concentrate on. Asking for a certain number of 'updating days' provides an outline which allows the period of updating to be structured in the way which best reflects the individual's needs, and the period of updating does not have to be completed in one go; a break could be undertaken before then coming back to complete the rest.

Your responsibility

A returner to practise is responsible for their own period of updating and for making sure they meet our standards before returning to practise.

When applying for re-registration the AHCS will ask for information so that we can check that an updating period took place. When applying for re-registration, the AHCS will ask for information so that we can confirm that monitored updating took place with oversight by an accountable registrant.

All professionals, once registered with the AHCS, must make sure that they meet and maintain our standards, including our standards of conduct, performance and ethics, and practising within the scope of practise. Most professionals will take this responsibility seriously and will carry out their updating in good faith. However, if after re- registration, it is found that an individual is not practising in a way that meets our standards, we will investigate using our fitness to practise process and rules. Similarly, if we find that the information supplied is not accurate, we will investigate which may result in removal from the register.

The role of the employer

AHCS requirements do not replace the responsibilities of an employer in appointing, inducting, and supporting members of staff. Any employer will need to set their own requirements in terms of knowledge, skills, qualifications and experience for any post, and will assess applicants 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 while an individual becomes familiar with practise 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 role, that an individual should update in a certain area, in a certain way, or to do with a certain issue, before working for them.

An updating period may be carried out as part of an induction with a potential employer. Equally, an updating period may be undertaken before re- registration and looking for a job. Our requirements mean that updating and looking for work can be chosen in whatever order is most convenient for the individual, most acceptable to an employer, or usual for the profession.

Processing your information

When returning to practise and applying for re- registration, we will ask for information about the period of updating, such as which activities you have carried out and for how long.

Your counter-signatory

When the period of updating is complete, this should be confirmed by the individual's Head of Department or Manager. The counter-signatory should take reasonable steps to be sure that the number of updating days required have been carried out together with evidence. For example, they might ask to see a certificate from any formal study, or they might ask to see any notes from private study.

If supervised practise is carried out as part of the updating, the supervisor can be a counter-signatory as well. However, these are two separate roles.

Your Supervisor

If supervised practise is carried out part of the updating activity, a supervisor must confirm that the period of supervision has been completed.

The AHCS may also contact the individual, or the organisations or persons worked with to obtain more information, or to confirm the information provided.

Information for supervisors and counter- signatories

The role of the counter-signatory

A counter-signatory should take reasonable steps to make sure that the returner to practise has carried out the updating days and activities they have declared. The signature confirms that a programme of monitored updating took place with oversight by an accountable registrant(s).

The role of the supervisor

The AHCS does 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 practise for the role they plan to return to.

However, we do set criteria for who can be a return to practise supervisor. A supervisor must:

- only supervise activities which are within their scope of practise;
- have been on a Statutory or Accredited 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 practise).

The supervisor of a return to practise placement will confirm that the individual has completed the period of supervised practise they have declared. Their signature confirms that a placement involving monitored updating took place with oversight by an accountable registrant.

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

If there are any serious concerns about a returner's fitness to practise when unsupervised, after they have completed a period of updating under supervision or which they have asked to be counter-signed, there are two actions available:

- Explain your concerns to the individual, to help them in planning additional updating activities;
- If concerns remain, raise a fitness to practise concern with the Academy for Healthcare Science.

More information

Any questions about this guidance should be emailed to the Academy of Healthcare Science Registration Team (registration@ahcs.ac.uk) or the information checked on our website.

The AHCS cannot provide individual advice on how an individual should update their knowledge and skills. A professional body is best placed to provide its members with further information or advice about how to update, how they could structure their period of updating, or how to arrange their supervised practise.