

Sessional GP: A vision for the future.



Sessional GPs are invaluable to the NHS and are essential for the delivery of safe, effective and efficient patient care.

A career as a Sessional GP can and should be a positive and rewarding choice for any current or aspiring GP. As expert post-CCT generalist doctors they should be respected, valued and remunerated as such, in accordance with their experience, skill and responsibilities. Sessional GPs should be encouraged and supported to pursue their areas of interest and career aspirations to ensure a personalised, fulfilling and rewarding working life of continuous learning and growth.

However, the Sessional GP Committee is gravely concerned about the underemployment crisis our members face and for our future career prospects.

NHS healthcare providers across the UK are struggling with more than a decade of underinvestment from governments. As a result of inadequate funding and real terms cuts sessional GP work is increasingly difficult to find, while those in work are being stretched thinner with unsustainable workloads. Their pay has been rapidly eroded by 25% since 2008/09. These are our goals and aspirations for sessional GPs. This is a vision of what could be achieved if governments genuinely invested in the profession and truly valued the work of sessional general practitioners.



Safety

The current conditions in general practice for sessional GPs are not sustainable. Those who are able to find work may be subject to unsafe workloads and expected to work well beyond the time they are actually paid and contracted for. On average GPs across the UK are working 25% above their contracted hours per week. The next generation of GPs are justifiably anxious about their future career prospects in the NHS. In a [recent survey](#) of GP Registrars 73% reported burnout and stress, with less than 20% stating they felt confident about their future as a GP. These are alarming statistics and paint a bleak future for the profession. Our vision for the future is one where we hope GP registrars could once again feel excited and hopeful for their careers.

Over the past few years sessional GPs have seen a dramatic increase in responsibility and bearing the personal liability for supervising an increasing number of allied health professionals including Medical Associate Professions who are increasingly being used as substitutes for GPs.

Where GPs are working outside of practice settings, they are being offered wholly inadequate and derisory terms and conditions which fall far short of what is outlined in the salaried GP model contract.

All of this leads to unsafe working conditions for salaried and locum GPs, which in turn compromises patient safety.

We need to see the following changes:

- Safe workload limits enshrined into all GP contracts, including the model contract, ensuring a minimum of 15 minutes per consultation and a maximum of 25 consultations per day (guidance differs in Wales).
- A mechanism that ensures all employed GPs, regardless of setting, employer or salary, receive the employment benefits outlined in the model contract as an absolute minimum.
- A mechanism that ensures practices are fully funded for annual DDRB uplifts to salaried GP pay and that it is passed on in full to salaried GPs.



- Safe job plans that can be reasonably achieved within their contracted working hours.
- Agreed overtime worked by a GP is paid in full and in line with the minimum pro-rata rates outlined in the salaried GP rate card.
- A reversal of the pay erosion suffered by salaried GPs since 2008/9 over 3 years.
- An agreed target for patient/FTE GP ratios within practices and nationally.

These changes would see a brighter future for sessional GPs, ensuring sustainable, safe, and fair working conditions. Implementing safe workload limits and the model contract will ensure there is equity and consistency across the profession and go some way to address the GP retention crisis.

Autonomy

The autonomy to define how you work is a core aspect of being a sessional GP, offering the flexibility to tailor professional commitments to personal needs and career aspirations. This not only enhances job satisfaction and work-life balance but also allows GPs to pursue continuous learning and the development of specialist interests.

However, the current lack of opportunities for salaried and locum GPs is leading to increased pressure on existing staff, and ultimately a compromised quality of patient care.

We are asking governments to significantly invest in the sessional GP workforce, including:

- reallocation of ringed-fenced Additional Roles Reimbursement Scheme funding into core general practice contracts and ensure the flexibility to use this funding to employ/engage more sessional GPs (only applicable in England).
- Increased investment into core general practice contracts to at least 15% of the total NHS budget.

Our aspirations for this vision are centred around creating more opportunities for salaried and locum GPs to work in a way that best suits them. This will in turn ensure that patients receive the safe and quality care they expect and deserve.

Opportunities

Sessional GPs need to be afforded the time, opportunity and resource to develop their skills and interests to build a fulfilling and bespoke career.

Opportunities to upskill and further education are being reduced, with essential funding for retention and fellowship schemes being withdrawn.

Despite the value they bring to the NHS, what we are seeing for sessional GPs is a woeful lack of employment opportunities and the unconscionable situation where fully qualified GPs are struggling to find work in the NHS, despite the incontrovertible need for more GPs.

Every GP brings with them their own diverse experience. It is this experience that we bring from working in different settings which fosters the dissemination of best practice and innovation within the NHS, and ultimately contributes to improved patient outcomes and system-wide knowledge sharing.

Having a range of roles positively impacts job satisfaction among sessional GPs in the UK. A study by [BMJ Open](#) highlighted that nearly two-thirds of GPs who had additional roles outside their NHS clinical responsibilities reported greater job satisfaction. These additional roles can include teaching, research, and management to name a few, all of which help to diversify professional experiences and reduce burnout.

International Medical Graduates (IMGs) form a large and vital proportion of the current and future sessional GP workforce. Those needing a visa to continue to work in the UK on completion of training need to have their visa sponsored by an employer. To ensure their retention within the NHS GP workforce it is essential governments relax visa requirements for such sessional GPs who are struggling to find work and ensure that the opportunities for employment are available to them.



In addition, we are calling for:

- Reinstatement of funding for the New to Practice Fellowship Scheme and Retention schemes
- IMGs qualifying as GPs to be granted indefinite leave to remain on completion of training.
- The introduction of personal development budgets for GPs to enable them to access training and education to develop their personal interests.
- The costs incurred by GPs for them to be able to work and develop as GPs are fully reimbursed to them directly, including indemnity, appraisal and GMC fees.

Parity

The sector faces a significant unjust gender pay gap, with female sessional GPs often earning less than their male counterparts, despite the same expertise, for undertaking the same work. In 2023, the overall gender pay gap for all employees in the UK was 14.3%, with a larger gap observed in specific professional sectors, including healthcare. The gender pay gap is far more pronounced amongst sessional GPs. Tackling the gender pay gap is crucial not only for fairness and equality but also for the retention and motivation of our highly skilled profession.

The flexibility of being a sessional GP allows for those with children to take necessary parental leave and retain a balance between work and care responsibilities. Having access to maternity leave and other family-friendly policies can reduce stress and improve job satisfaction by allowing them to balance their professional and personal lives more effectively.

We are asking for:

- A commitment from governments and the NHS to reassess the gender pay gap amongst sessional GPs and agree to implement the measures in the [***Mend the Gap: The Independent Review into Gender Pay Gaps in Medicine in England***](#)
- Maternity leave entitlements outlined in the model contract to be brought in line with other employed NHS doctors.

By making these changes, we will foster a more supportive and equitable landscape for all Sessional GPs, ensuring the sustainable delivery of safe, holistic and timely GP care our patients want and need.

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