CONTRACTS, JOB PLANNING, PAY & PENSIONS | MODULE 10

NHS Pension Scheme: sections, contributions and record control

Understand the broad scheme architecture, distinguish pensionable pay from total pay and keep records accurate across career changes.

✓ 18 min reading

✓ Full teaching, practical next steps and reflection

✓ Six practice questions with answers and explanations

✓ Complete source list and jurisdiction notes

Prepared for SAS, locally employed and other UK doctors

Author: Dr N Aziz

Using this module

Independent education

This is general professional information, not individual clinical, legal, employment, immigration, regulatory, tax or pensions advice. Current official instructions and the circumstances of the individual case remain controlling. Practice scores do not establish professional competence or accreditation.

The short answer

An NHS pension is deferred pay governed by scheme regulations, not an ordinary savings account. England and Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland have separate administrations. Many members now build future benefits in a 2015 career-average scheme while retaining earlier-section benefits. Your first task is to identify scheme membership and verify service, pay and contact records.

Three next actions

- Register for the official online pension service for your nation and download the latest benefit or reward statement.
- Check employer history, membership dates, whole-time equivalent or pensionable pay and personal details.
- Ask the employer and scheme administrator to correct gaps well before retirement or a tax deadline.

Learning objectives

- Explain the broad difference between legacy and 2015 benefits.
- Identify pensionable pay and contribution issues.
- Audit a personal pension record.

The scheme map

NHS pension arrangements are statutory occupational schemes. England and Wales are administered by NHSBSA, Scotland by SPPA and Northern Ireland by HSC Pension Service. Similar names do not mean every regulation, portal or form is shared.

Legacy 1995 and 2008 sections generally use final-salary structures; the 2015 Scheme uses career-average revalued earnings. Since April 2022, active accrual for affected members is generally in the 2015 arrangement while earlier benefits remain. Individual protections and remedy position require the official record.

- Use the administrator for the nation of employment.
- Keep legacy and current benefits distinct.
- Do not infer section from age alone.

Pensionable versus taxable pay

Pensionable pay is defined by scheme regulations and employment arrangement. Basic contracted NHS pay is commonly pensionable; some allowances, overtime, locum or additional work may not be, or may be treated differently. Taxable pay and total gross pay are separate concepts.

Ask payroll which elements were reported as pensionable and compare with the scheme statement. A high gross month does not necessarily produce equivalent pension growth.

- Check each recurring pay element.
- Reconcile payroll and scheme data.
- Do not use taxable pay as a substitute.

Member contributions

Member contribution rates are based on pensionable earnings and current scheme rules; thresholds can change. Employer contributions are separate and are not a personal pot. Use the current official contribution table rather than an old percentage.

Backdated pay, WTE change or unpaid leave can alter deductions. If a contribution appears wrong, ask payroll for the pensionable-pay figure and rate band, then verify the official rule.

- Use current thresholds.
- Check back pay and leave effects.
- Separate member and employer contributions.

Part-time work and additional hours

Pension treatment of additional hours has changed in some schemes. For England and Wales, regulations were amended from 1 April 2025 so qualifying additional hours for part-time 2015 Scheme members up to whole-time equivalent are automatically pensionable, subject to the official rules and retrospective correction process.

Do not assume the same treatment for work above whole-time, bank work or a second employer. Check contracts and administrator guidance, especially where employers were required to revisit historic records.

- Check the 1 April 2025 England/Wales change if relevant.

- Distinguish additional hours from separate locum employment.
- Verify corrections on later statements.

Audit the record

Check name, date of birth, address, nominations, employment dates, scheme section, pensionable pay, breaks, transferred service and annual benefit figures. Keep P60s, payslips, contracts and statements. Earlier errors are easier to correct while employer payroll records remain accessible.

Online estimates are planning tools, not guarantees. Request a formal estimate where required and allow time. Update nominations and contact details after major life events.

- Review annually.
- Retain evidence across employer changes.
- Update personal details and nominations.

Leaving, breaks and transfers

Leaving NHS employment, opting out, taking unpaid leave or moving nation can affect accrual, death benefits, ill-health protection and administrative records. Transferring another pension into the scheme may have a strict time limit and requires individual comparison.

Do not opt out or transfer solely to reduce a current deduction without understanding lost benefits and tax consequences. Use official information and, for a consequential decision, regulated financial advice.

- Check protection lost during breaks or opt-out.
- Act early on transfer deadlines.
- Use regulated advice for irreversible choices.

Common mistake

Avoid this	Thinking the pension contribution buys a personal investment pot equal to the amount deducted. NHS benefits arise under scheme formulas and regulations.

Pause and reflect

Does your latest official statement show every employer, period of service and material pay change you expect?

Takeaways

- Use the correct national pension administrator.
- Pensionable pay differs from total or taxable pay.
- Annual record checking prevents late-career surprises.

Knowledge check

Choose one best answer. These practice questions support reflection; they do not assess a real case or confer accreditation. Answer positions match the browser edition.

1. A doctor moves from Wales to Scotland. Which record should they verify?

A. Only HMRC

B. Both NHSBSA and SPPA records and any transfer/linkage implications

C. Only the current payslip

D. The GMC register

2. Why can total gross pay exceed pensionable pay?

A. The payslip is optional

B. The taxable-pay figure alone identifies which components are pensionable

C. Every taxable allowance is pensionable on the same basis as basic salary

D. Some payments may not meet the scheme definition of pensionable earnings

3. A backdated award increases one month’s pension deduction. What should be checked?

A. GMC fees

B. The annual leave balance

C. Pensionable arrears, applicable contribution rules and scheme reporting

D. Only net pay

4. A part-time England/Wales member worked extra hours in 2025/26. What is safest?

A. Use the Scottish form

B. Assume none is pensionable

C. Check whether the regulation change required those hours to be pensionable and whether records were corrected

D. Assume all extra income is pensionable

5. When should a doctor first review retirement records?

A. Only after leaving the NHS

B. Only if payroll contacts them

C. Wait for the final retirement quotation before reconciling earlier service records

D. Throughout the career and after changes, not only months before retirement

6. A new NHS doctor has an overseas pension. What should they do?

A. Choose a transfer based only on consolidating administration without comparing benefits and restrictions

B. Send original certificates to a colleague

C. Check scheme transfer eligibility and deadline, then obtain suitable advice

D. Defer checking transfer eligibility and time limits until retirement planning

Answers and explanations

1. B — Both NHSBSA and SPPA records and any transfer/linkage implications

Both NHSBSA and SPPA records and any transfer/linkage implications This applies the principle in “The scheme map”.

Re-read “The scheme map”, then identify the controlling document and the fact you would verify before acting.

2. D — Some payments may not meet the scheme definition of pensionable earnings

Some payments may not meet the scheme definition of pensionable earnings This applies the principle in “Pensionable versus taxable pay”.

Re-read “Pensionable versus taxable pay”, then identify the controlling document and the fact you would verify before acting.

3. C — Pensionable arrears, applicable contribution rules and scheme reporting

Pensionable arrears, applicable contribution rules and scheme reporting This applies the principle in “Member contributions”.

Re-read “Member contributions”, then identify the controlling document and the fact you would verify before acting.

4. C — Check whether the regulation change required those hours to be pensionable and whether records were corrected

Check whether the regulation change required those hours to be pensionable and whether records were corrected This applies the principle in “Part-time work and additional hours”.

Re-read “Part-time work and additional hours”, then identify the controlling document and the fact you would verify before acting.

5. D — Throughout the career and after changes, not only months before retirement

Throughout the career and after changes, not only months before retirement This applies the principle in “Audit the record”.

Re-read “Audit the record”, then identify the controlling document and the fact you would verify before acting.

6. C — Check scheme transfer eligibility and deadline, then obtain suitable advice

Check scheme transfer eligibility and deadline, then obtain suitable advice This applies the principle in “Leaving, breaks and transfers”.

Re-read “Leaving, breaks and transfers”, then identify the controlling document and the fact you would verify before acting.

Official and professional sources

Confirm the current source version and applicable nation, contract, scheme or specialty. A source list is not a statement that every rule applies to every reader.

NHSBSA: NHS Pension Scheme member hub
England and Wales · https://www.nhsbsa.nhs.uk/member-hub

NHSBSA: understanding benefits in the 2015 Scheme
England and Wales · https://www.nhsbsa.nhs.uk/member-hub/understanding-your-benefits-2015-scheme

NHSBSA: pension regulation change for part-time additional hours
England and Wales · https://www.nhsbsa.nhs.uk/nhs-pension-scheme-regulations-changing-part-time-nhs-staff-1

Scottish Public Pensions Agency: NHS members
Scotland · https://pensions.gov.scot/nhs

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