

Understanding NHS employment

Read contracts, rotas, pay, job plans and appraisal as connected parts of working life.

- ✓ 21 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

The title on an email is not your employment framework. Keep the contract, job description, rota and actual work aligned, and ask when they do not match.

Three next actions

- Read the contract and compare it with the advert, job description and rota.
- Check the first payslip, tax code, pension position and recognised previous experience.
- Confirm your designated body, appraisal date, development time and study-leave process.

Learning objectives

- Distinguish the advert, offer, contract, job description, rota, work schedule and job plan.
- Audit the first payslip, pension, leave, working-time and additional-hours arrangements.
- Connect appraisal, designated body, revalidation, development time and evidence systems.

Understand what each employment document does

The advert attracts applicants; the person specification sets selection criteria; the job description describes duties; the offer records the proposed appointment and conditions; and the contract contains binding terms. The rota allocates working times. Resident-doctor-style posts may use a work schedule, while SAS and consultant posts use job planning structures. One document should not quietly contradict another on grade, hours, sites or duties.

Read documents together before accepting. Highlight ambiguous phrases, additional sites, flexibility clauses, on-call commitments and references to policies. Ask for written clarification of material points. A verbal statement at interview may help understanding but should not be treated as a substitute for the formal terms.

- Employer and employing entity.
- Grade, title and contract type.
- Start, end and notice provisions.
- Hours, sessions or programmed activities.
- Sites, on-call and additional duties.
- Pay, leave, pension and development arrangements.

Check working time, rotas and additional work

A rota must be understood as a repeating pattern, not a single week. Examine average hours, nights, weekends, on-call arrangements, rest, travel between sites and expectations after a shift. Contractual protections differ by grade and nation. Locally employed contracts may mirror national terms without being identical, so check the actual wording.

Keep records of work that materially differs from the agreed arrangement. Use the applicable exception-reporting, monitoring, job-planning or local review mechanism. An occasional emergency is different from a permanent hidden workload. Repeated unpaid or unrecognised work can affect fatigue, pay, training and patient safety.

- Average hours and intensity.
- Rest before and after nights or on-call.
- Cross-site travel and handover.
- How additional hours are authorised and paid.
- Process for reporting persistent variance.

Audit pay, tax and pension from the first month

Check basic salary against the grade and pay point in the written offer. Then identify enhancements, additional hours, on-call availability, weekend or night arrangements, arrears and deductions. Pay systems differ between contracts and nations; do not assume that the same rota produces the same enhancement under another contract.

A tax code determines how payroll collects income tax but is not a final assessment of all tax owed. Pension contributions and pensionable pay also need checking, particularly with multiple employments or

changes in hours. Use official HMRC and NHS pension sources or regulated advice for individual decisions. Keep payslips, P60s, contracts and correspondence.

- Identity, employee number and employing organisation.
- Grade, pay point, hours or sessions.
- Enhancements and authorised extra work.
- Tax code, National Insurance and pension.
- Year-to-date values and arrears.

Treat leave and development time as planned contractual resources

Annual, study, professional, parental and sickness provisions depend on contract and local policy. Learn the notice and approval process before booking. A service may legitimately manage timing, but leave should not become inaccessible because staffing is chronically inadequate. Keep requests and outcomes where a repeated pattern develops.

For SAS doctors, supporting professional activities or equivalent sessions support appraisal, CPD and wider professional work. For LEDs, development time may be locally agreed or arise from a national framework that the contract mirrors. Ask what time is protected, what it may be used for and how it appears in the schedule. Unrecorded promises are vulnerable when service pressure increases.

- Entitlement and carry-over rules.
- Notice and approval route.
- Study budget and eligible costs.
- Protected development activity.
- Record of repeated refusal and reasons.

Connect appraisal, designated body and revalidation

Appraisal is a structured annual professional discussion supported by evidence. Revalidation is the GMC process, usually informed by a responsible officer's recommendation. Your designated body is generally linked to employment circumstances, not chosen informally. Confirm the connection after starting and when employment changes.

Build evidence throughout the year: scope of work, CPD, quality improvement, significant events, feedback, complaints and compliments, teaching, leadership, health and probity declarations. For LEDs whose enhanced appraisal is linked to competency and pay progression under current England arrangements, understand the additional evidence and local process rather than assuming a standard appraisal will automatically produce progression.

- Correct designated body and responsible officer.
 - Appraisal date, appraiser and portfolio system.
 - Complete scope-of-work declaration.
 - Evidence and reflection across professional domains.
 - Separate contractual progression requirements where applicable.
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Resolve disagreement before it becomes normal practice

If the rota, payslip or daily duties do not match the agreed documents, start with a factual comparison. State the document, the observed arrangement, the practical consequence and the clarification or correction requested. Keep tone neutral and preserve copies. Many errors are administrative and can be corrected quickly when described precisely.

Where the issue persists or affects significant pay, fatigue, safety or contractual rights, seek advice from medical staffing, payroll, a manager, trade union or professional adviser as appropriate. Do not sign a retrospective document you do not understand. Formal grievance or legal routes may exist, but they are not the first step for every error and individual advice may be necessary.

- Identify the authoritative document.
- Describe the exact variance.
- Quantify dates, hours or money where possible.
- Request a specific correction and timescale.
- Escalate proportionately if unresolved.

Common mistake

Avoid this

Do not wait for the next contract renewal or revalidation date before resolving missing appraisal connection, unclear scope or persistent rota problems.

Pause and reflect

Could you explain today which document governs your duties, working time, pay and development—and where the documents disagree?

Takeaways

- Read the employment documents as one system and reconcile contradictions.
- Check pay, pension and working pattern from the first month.
- Appraisal, revalidation and development need planned evidence and named organisational ownership.

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. Which document is mainly used to select candidates?

- A. The pension statement.
- B. The person specification.
- C. The appraisal summary.
- D. The payslip.

2. Your rota repeatedly exceeds the agreed pattern. What is best?

- A. Accept it indefinitely.
- B. Alter the rota yourself.
- C. Stop attending shifts without notice.
- D. Keep accurate records and use the applicable review or reporting process.

3. What should be checked beyond net pay?

- A. Nothing.
- B. Only pension.
- C. Grade, hours, enhancements, tax, pension, deductions, arrears and year-to-date values.
- D. Only tax.

4. A manager verbally promises weekly development time. What strengthens the arrangement?

- A. A colleague remembering it.
- B. Using annual leave instead.
- C. Written inclusion in the work schedule, job plan or agreed local arrangement.
- D. No further action.

5. Who usually makes a revalidation recommendation?

- A. The interview panel.
- B. Payroll.
- C. The responsible officer, informed by appraisal and governance information.
- D. Any colleague.

6. A payslip error appears. What is the strongest first communication?

- A. A general complaint.
- B. Immediate resignation.
- C. A factual comparison identifying the error, dates, amount and requested correction.
- D. A public post.

Answers and explanations

1. B — The person specification.

The person specification provides the principal criteria for shortlisting and appointment.

Map the purpose of every employment document.

2. D — Keep accurate records and use the applicable review or reporting process.

Evidence and the correct mechanism distinguish a persistent variance from anecdote.

Record dates, hours, rest and service consequence.

3. C — Grade, hours, enhancements, tax, pension, deductions, arrears and year-to-date values.

Net pay alone cannot show whether each component is correct.

Complete the first-payslip audit.

4. C — Written inclusion in the work schedule, job plan or agreed local arrangement.

Protected time should be visible in the relevant formal arrangement.

Ask where the time is recorded and how it is reviewed.

5. C — The responsible officer, informed by appraisal and governance information.

Revalidation operates through the designated-body and responsible-officer system.

Confirm your designated body and responsible officer.

6. C — A factual comparison identifying the error, dates, amount and requested correction.

Specific evidence supports prompt correction and proportionate escalation.

Create a concise discrepancy record with attachments.

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.

NHS Employers: SAS resources

UK / nation-specific · <https://www.nhsemployers.org/sas>

GMC: revalidation

UK / nation-specific · <https://www.gmc-uk.org/registration-and-licensing/managing-your-registration/revalidation>

GOV.UK: understand your tax code

UK / nation-specific · <https://www.gov.uk/tax-codes>

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