



# A Guide to Working as a Locum Doctor



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Working as a locum doctor provides you with an alternative to occupying a permanent position at a hospital or general practice. You may also choose to take on part-time locum shifts to supplement your existing income.

Locums fulfil a vital role in health services – from covering last-minute rostering gaps to supporting departments during times of increased demand, including more long-term opportunities such as maternity leave cover.

Although the day-to-day work within each hospital or practice placement is broadly the same as that of a permanently-employed member of staff, there are a number of key differences.

With the ability to carefully choose the positions you take and more flexibility over your working hours and salary, locum employment offers many attractive benefits. This routine is not for every doctor. Choosing locum work is an important decision and whatever your motivations to seek locum shifts, whether on a full-time or part-time basis, it is essential that the nature of locuming will fit your lifestyle and career aspirations.

This guide explores some of the differences between traditional doctor employment and locum work, detailing what you can expect whilst working in a locum role, as well as the benefits and challenges of these opportunities.

# How Does a Locum Role Differ from a Permanent Position?

Locum employment can offer more flexibility than a permanent position in a general practice or hospital. Locuming lets you choose a working pattern to suit your lifestyle rather than having to fit your life around work.

There is a vast variety of locum roles available nationwide, giving you the chance to find the ideal position for you. Locum positions vary in timescales, allowing you to choose between short-term placements (as short as a single additional shift) to more long-term positions (including maternity leave cover).

## What to Expect

If you choose to become a locum doctor, you will have wider flexibility over your working hours, the medical services you choose to practise in and the locations you choose to work from, as well as the chance to negotiate your salary.

As you will be changing roles regularly, staying organised and on top of your locuming schedule and incoming finances is essential. Locum recruitment agencies and locum chambers can assist you in the process of moving from one role to the next, but you will be required to efficiently adapt to each individual environment and the team members.

Often, locum doctors will oversee a large number of patient cases, but with less continuity of permanent staff, and are less likely to see the same patients repeatedly. This diversity for hospital locums and GPs is what usually makes locum work so exciting, but it can also be challenging as you may have little time to familiarise yourself with individual patient cases and a practice or hospital before you move on again.

Life as a locum doctor has plenty of advantages but also a few disadvantages, so it's important to understand what to expect before taking a role.

## The Advantages

Locum work provides you with excellent opportunities to develop the perfect work-life balance and experience a range of working environments. As such, there are many benefits, including:

- More independence to choose your own work schedule and routine
- The chance to work across the country, combining work with travel
- The opportunity to explore your career options before settling
- Diversity when it comes to the work environment and individual hospital or practice ethic
- The ability to switch between various sectors and/or roles in the medical services (depending on your training and experience)
- The opportunity to build experience and further grow your CV and credentials
- The potential to earn a higher salary than you would in a permanent position
- Free practical and online training through our agency
- Able to fast-track your career (locuming counts towards Specialist Registration)

## The Disadvantages

Becoming a locum doctor requires self-discipline and dedication to the role. If you plan to be a full-time locum, it is essential that you properly manage your time in order to keep a regular working schedule and income. Due to this, there can be a couple of disadvantages:

- It is unlikely that you will receive sick-pay or be entered into a pension scheme, and conditions like maternity/paternity rights may differ; however, after 12 weeks AWR Rights (Agency Worker Regulations) entitle locums to a host of benefits that a permanent worker would receive.
- You will be completely in charge of managing your own finances or will need to hire an external accountant to advise you on your finances and taxes.
- Establishing good working relationships with permanent staff at hospitals and practices can be difficult, but it is also a valuable opportunity to network with other locums and substantive staff.

## Does a Career as a Locum Doctor Suit You?

You can seek locum roles at any point in your career: whether you are an established doctor or still relatively new in your medical field and looking for a change in routine, or you are a doctor hoping to supplement your current (permanent) medical role with locum shifts. Depending on your current situation, there may be various stages in your medical career where you feel that working as a locum is a convenient or suitable option.

## Experience Different Medical Disciplines & Environments

One of the primary reasons for doctors to seek locum work is for the opportunity to experience different medical disciplines. This is especially common if you are a junior doctor and are not yet sure which area of medicine you want to specialise in. Locum work would allow you to experience a variety of roles and work environments – for example, working in a local general practice, in the military sector, or within the emergency departments.

In the same way, if you are an experienced doctor, you might consider locum work in order to explore alternative avenues within the medical sector. Many established doctors switch to locum work as a way of changing career path, particularly if they have been in the same role or at the same practice for many years.



## Temporary Alternative Between Jobs

Although there are some long-term locum positions available, the majority of locum work is on a short-term basis, which is especially useful if you find yourself out of work. If you want to specialise in a certain branch of medicine or a specific work environment (i.e. military, naval, NHS or Private Practice) and are having difficulty finding a position, you can seek locum work as an alternative, in the meantime, to ensure financial stability and the chance to continue contributing to the healthcare sector.

These temporary positions will still provide you with medical experience and, often, locum work can count towards your medical credentials when it comes to applying for future positions. You don't have to give up your career ambitions and settle for a permanent role that is not what you're looking for. Locuming while you wait for the ideal job to be advertised can be an excellent employment solution.

## **Enjoy the Benefits of Flexible Working**

You may find that the long and changeable working hours which are common in doctor positions do not fit around your lifestyle or general routine. Working as a locum doctor may provide you with more flexibility to accommodate your personal responsibilities, especially if you have children or a family to care for, or you often travel from one place to another.

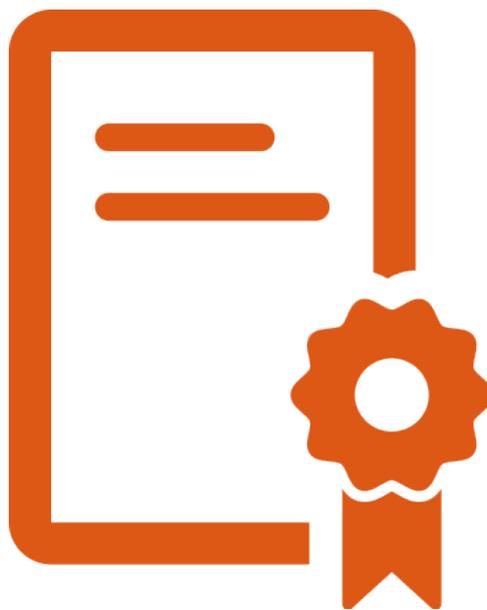
Crucially, the flexibility of locuming allows you to better balance your work and home lives, manage your own workflow, and take control of your career opportunities. Locuming also gives you extra time to study (whether you are a junior doctor or seeking additional qualifications), as well as allowing you to enjoy certain leisure activities or hobbies, such as keeping up a regular gym routine or attending social events.



# What Are the Requirements of Being a Locum Doctor?

As a locum doctor, you will still need to be fully qualified as a doctor, have full registration with the GMC (General Medical Council), and be registered as a GP or practitioner – just like you would in a permanent, full-time position. Depending on the hospital or practice and their reasons for hiring locum doctors, having plenty of credentials and experience can work considerably in your favour.

There are multiple requirements that will help make your search for locum roles – and your time as a locum doctor – run more smoothly.



## Have Copies of Your Credentials

Regardless of whether you are operating via a chambers (for GPs only) or agency, it is a good habit to have copies of all of your credentials ready when you interview with and visit practices. This can help to speed up the process of securing your next locum position, simplifying the necessary paperwork procedure of each individual practice.

The following is a checklist of everything a practice will need before they consider employing you:

- A copy of your medical degree and completion of training as proof of your qualifications
- A copy of your medical indemnity certificate
- Your GMC registration number and certification details
- Proof of identity (this needs to be a photographic document, e.g. your driving licence or passport) and your NHS Smartcard if applicable
- Your full employment history in the form of a medical CV (and written explanations if there are any gaps in employment of one month or more)
- At least one recent (within the last year) reference, as evidence of your previous employment and conduct
- For GPs, a copy of your certificate verifying your position on the Performers List (this confirms your qualifications as a GP and is proof of a valid DBS check)
- A DBS check certificate and any other role-specific certifications or health documents

Overseas doctors seeking roles in the UK will need at least six months' NHS experience.

## Register with the Correct Health Boards

Before you can take any role as a GP (locum or otherwise), you need to be enrolled on the GP Performers List. This is a database documenting all GP doctors nationwide who are qualified to practise in the UK. From 2013, this became a single national list in England, Wales and Northern Ireland, so if you are seeking employment in Scotland you will be required to apply to each individual Health Board you want to work in.

The application process for the Performers List can be lengthy (up to 6 months), so you should complete it well in advance of your job search. You can find the 27-page document on the official NHS Performers website. Part of the application process requires proof of a completed DBS check, as well as occupational health checks by an accredited provider.

## Attain Annual Professional Reviews

As a locum doctor – GP or hospital-based – you will not be exempt from revalidation. The revalidation process regulates and assesses your performance and your medical knowledge as a doctor, in order to ensure that you are continuing to carry out the necessary medical procedures correctly and to the best standard.

If you are locuming alongside a permanent medical role, your annual appraisal of competence will cover you with regards to revalidation. However, if you are exclusively working as a locum doctor you will need to arrange an appraisal. Unless you have an NHS contract that will supercede this requirement, it is essential that you organise this. You can arrange your appraisal through the agency you most regularly locum with, or during a more long-term locum placement. A trained officer must be there to oversee this revalidation process, and you should retain records of this.

## Bring Your Own Equipment

When you enter a practice in a permanent position, you are usually provided with all of the necessary equipment you'll need for the role. As a locum, this is not the case, so it is vital that you have your own medical bag every time you take a new position. This will depend largely on the role you are entering into, whether working as a GP or a specialist doctor.

Locum GPs should always carry, among other things, their own stethoscope, thermometer, a roll of micropore, and an adult pulse oximeter. If you are working in a hospital, you should be able to acquire hospital scrubs from the necessary hospital trusts prior to your locum appointment.

## How Do You Find and Secure Locum Employment?

If you are ready to take an alternate route in your career and seek locum work (part-time or full-time), there are several ways to find suitable roles. First, it is important to realise that the locum jobseeking process varies from that of looking for permanent doctor roles.

The most important factor in being successful in your locum search is the ability to sell your skills as a doctor. Many hospitals and practices seek locum doctors due to shortages of staff or during particularly busy periods, so you will need to present yourself confidently and showcase your skillset, as this will assure a practice or hospital that you are capable of adapting to the working environment.

There are two main ways to find locum employment: through recruitment agencies and by joining a locum chambers. Both options offer different benefits.

## Finding Work Through Recruitment Agencies

Sourcing a locum appointment through a recruitment agency that specialises in locum positions is often the easiest and most common route. Agencies will take out of a lot of the legwork from your career search, overseeing the full process of finding and securing positions on your behalf.

Certain agencies will also provide training while you are in a position, and (where necessary) some will even assist in sourcing accommodation and arranging travel. Also, many locum agencies are willing to support your PDP (Personal Development Planning), carefully overseeing the roles you choose in order for you to gain as much experience as you can during each position and your career as a whole. If you return to an agency again and again, you are likely to build a strong rapport that can work in your favour.



There are some distinct overall incentives for choosing locum shifts that are advertised by agencies – namely regarding flexibility, availability and hourly rates.

### Flexibility

Agencies generally offer wider flexibility when it comes to the working hours of locum positions, advertising a varied selection of roles with different schedules, alongside both short-term and long-term positions. This gives you a greater choice to find the right role: one that fits your personal commitments. Locum agencies also recruit for positions nationwide, so you should have no difficulty being matched with a role close to your desired location.

## Availability

If you need to find a position on a tight timescale, operating through an agency can help to greatly speed up your search. Agencies have access to the latest roles as they become available, and will be able to suggest the most suitable positions from a wide range of different roles. Hospitals and practices often require locums to start immediately due to unforeseen staff shortages, which can make the transition between roles much easier for you, and without a gap of unemployment.

## Salary

Many doctors who have switched to locuming have cited that the salary rates vary considerably to permanent positions, with locum work often offering much higher figures. Due to the potential irregularity of locum work, a higher salary can be especially attractive. It is possible to earn more as a locum due to the higher hourly rate, and the flexibility of negotiating your hours and pay-rates.

Agencies tend to advertise roles that are higher-paid than the roles offered by locum chambers, especially for positions that are more medically demanding or need to be filled urgently. You are also more likely to receive your salary on time when operating through an agency, as they will ensure that payments are met – often on a weekly basis – which is especially convenient to quell any financial worries.

## Finding Work Through Locum GP Chambers

Depending on where you are located, there may be a local locum chambers that you can sign up to as a GP doctor. They will be able to offer professional advice regarding locum work, and can help you to source your next role. The chambers provides an invaluable support mechanism, bringing together different locum doctors under one body.

The group acts as a sharing base, notifying locum doctors of new positions and sending their details to local practices in the area. It is also an opportunity to share your experience as a locum doctor with others, to ensure role satisfaction, and to work together discussing best practice.

If you are part of a locum chambers you will usually have to pay a small percentage of your income to the chambers. However, this percentage is countered by the training and supporting you receive from the chambers and the other locum GPs within it. The chambers can book all of your work on your behalf, taking the pressure off of you when it comes to finding roles, which can be especially useful if you are unable to actively seek new roles outside of your working hours.



## Seeking Positions as a Freelance

A less popular third course of finding locum positions is to work for yourself and source roles without the aid of a locum agency or chambers. This is usually a risky approach unless you are an established doctor with many years' experience and a vast contact database.

Medical networking events can be pivotal if you want the freedom to secure your own positions. When it comes to locuming in general, it's often a combination of who you know and the strength of your reputation that will help you to successfully fill a role.

Be knowledgeable about local practices, and personally visit them to discuss your experience and credentials. Introducing yourself in real life can be an especially beneficial and admirable approach.

## Advice for Securing Your Next Role

Whichever avenue you choose to go down in order to seek locum positions, there are a few key things to keep in mind to make your search more successful. Whether you are seeking locum work on a regular basis, to supplement a permanent position, or just during the interim before you take on or return to a permanent position, it is crucial that you build upon your reputation and medical experience as a doctor, and remain flexible to job opportunities.

### Healthcare Provider Preference

Becoming well-known and highly regarded by local practices, a locum agency, and/or a locum chambers can significantly help you. Often, healthcare providers will have a preference over who they consider for a role, so you are more likely to be selected for positions if you have a strong track record. Keep a log of all the roles you have filled to demonstrate your abilities and growing level(s) of experience.

### Retain Contacts and References

Building relationships with other doctors and practices is an integral part of locum work. Retaining a strong contact base can speed up the recruitment process. Having a number of different references who are willing to be called upon by practices, in order to verify your professional conduct and medical experience, can increase your chances of filling a position. Before you provide the details of someone as a reference, ensure that they are willing to speak on your behalf. As you are likely to take on many different roles in a short space of time, some of your references may feel uncomfortable being contacted frequently.

## Be Flexible and Responsive

Sometimes the basis for selection boils down to who is available and who responds to the opening most quickly. If you want to make locuming work for you on a regular basis, it is important to be proactive in your search and also be willing to respond promptly to opportunities. However, this doesn't mean taking every role available – it is worth being selective, taking positions that are best suited and right for you, but ultimately you should be quick to respond to those that are relevant.

## Conclusion

Whatever your reason for seeking locum employment, there are many things that you will need to be mindful of, both during your job search and when you enrol in a position. Although you will still be providing the same imperative medical care as a permanent doctor, there are many differences.

Ultimately, it is the flexibility of locuming that is especially rewarding and attractive, giving you the opportunity to fit your work around your personal life. While income may vary and you may have periods of irregularity in your working schedule, choosing to take locum roles offers a challenge and an alternative working routine.



One of the key traits of locum doctors is having strong organisational skills – it is essential that you are able to quickly adapt to new routines and working environments, manage your own finances, and oversee your schedule of appointments from one locum position to another.

Every locum position is different, as every hospital or practice will have its own working routine and demands, but finding positions that are suited to you can be really beneficial to your continuing career.

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