

EMPLOYMENT PROCESSES FOR INTERNATIONAL MEDICAL GRADUATES (IMGs)

RESPONSE FROM THE UK

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INTRODUCTION

The employment regulations governing both training and career grade posts in the UK vary greatly between EU (Britain is part of the EU) and non-EU countries.

DOCTORS AND DENTISTS FROM OTHER MEMBER STATES OF THE EUROPEAN ECONOMIC AREA

Doctors/dentists from the other Member States of the EEA benefit from freedom of movement and employment within the UK without any restrictions. Access to postgraduate medical or dental training is therefore available to such individuals on the same basis as UK graduates. European Directives 1993/16/EEC (doctors) and 1978 686/687/EEC (dentists) sets out the minimum training requirements for specialist training which are common to all Member States. Individual Member States may choose to have a higher standard for their own nationals but cannot require these higher standards of nationals of other Member States whose training meets the minimum standards set out in the Directives.

Registration

Doctors/dentists who are nationals of other Member States and who obtain their primary medical/dental qualifications from one of those countries are entitled to Full Registration with the General Medical/Dental Councils.

Language testing

Although the GMC cannot require EEA nationals with EEA qualifications to take a test of linguistic competence for the purposes of Registration, prospective employers may, as a condition of employment, require EEA doctors to provide evidence of a satisfactory standard of English. Some employers do this by requiring doctors to take the 'Use of English' component of the PLAB test or other approved English language proficiency test.

Basic Specialist Training

Appointment is through a competitive process. Doctors who benefit from freedom of movement will not have any limits placed on the amount of time they may spend in basic specialist training.

Higher specialist training

Doctors may choose to undertake part or all of their higher specialist training in the UK. Doctors who elect to undergo a full programme of higher specialist training will be required to compete for appointment. Doctors who are undertaking a programme of training in their own country leading to the nationally recognised qualification may choose to undertake part of this training in the UK. Doctors who do so will be eligible to apply for a Fixed Term Training Programme (also known as Type II training). Candidates must be nominated by the relevant authority or institution, in the country, where they are undertaking the majority of their training programme. Appointment to such programmes need not be through competitive procedures although a formal interview will be required. Further details may be found by viewing A Guide to Specialist Registrar Training on the Department of Health's web-site www.doh.gov.uk/medicaltrainingintheuk or by contacting the Specialist Training Authority or relevant medical Royal College for advice.

Training for General Practice

Doctors wishing to enter general practice training must have full registration with the General Medical Council. It is possible to undertake the hospital component of their training with limited registration, but it is not possible to undertake the GP component unless full registration has been achieved.

The minimum educational requirement for entry to GP vocational training is the potential to be trained to the standard required for independent general practice within the normal period provided for GP vocational training. This will be established by the interview and selection process carried out under the management of the Directors of Postgraduate GP Education. Doctors who have received specific training in general practice in another Member State or who are otherwise qualified to work as a General Practitioner under freedom of movement arrangements will be eligible to apply for further training in the UK.

Employment as a Consultant or General Practitioner

Doctors/dentists who have successfully completed their training in another Member State and have been awarded the qualification listed in 1993/16/EEC or 1978/686/687/EEC will be eligible to apply for appointment to career grade posts in medicine/dentistry and/or general practice. Doctors wishing to be appointed as Consultants in the NHS must have their name entered in the Specialist Register maintained by the GMC. Doctors are advised to check their position with the Specialist Training Authority.

Member States of the EEA include: Austria, Belgium, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Iceland, Ireland, Italy, Liechtenstein, Luxembourg, The Netherlands, Norway, Portugal, Spain, Sweden, and the UK

GENERAL IMMIGRATION REGULATIONS

Immigration Rules, registration requirements and recognition of qualifications

Doctors who do not have any rights to live and work in the UK must satisfy immigration requirements. Doctors wishing to do postgraduate training in UK hospitals or community health services must have 'permit free' status which means that they are allowed to work without a work permit. Doctors may have three years of permit free entitlement for their basic specialist training (with the possibility of a further one year extension with their postgraduate dean's support.) Permit free training periods are granted in blocks of up to three years for higher specialist training, with the possibility of extensions in blocks of up to three years as required, so long as the postgraduate dean is supportive

Overseas doctors who are graduates of UK medical schools must satisfy immigration requirements if they wish to continue training in the UK. They are allowed to complete their pre-registration year without reducing their entitlements to further training.

Immigration

There are specific rules governing postgraduate medical training in the NHS. Whereas individuals without indefinite rights of residence in the UK would, for most professions, require a work permit, medical and dental trainees are admitted under arrangements known as 'permit-free', which means no work permit is required.

A doctor's exact immigration status will be determined by the reason he/she is seeking to enter the UK.

Visitor Status

If he/she is seeking to come to the UK to seek employment in a training post, to attend an interview or to take an examination such as PLAB or a Royal College examination, or to take a clinical attachment, then it is likely that he/she would be admitted as a visitor. This will normally be for a maximum of 6 months and there may be restrictions on his/her ability to take any form of employment - paid or not. He/she should seek advice from the Immigration Authorities at an early stage to find out what would be required of them.

Permit-free status

If he/she has been appointed to a training post and is either seeking to enter the UK or to remain in the UK to take up this post then he/she should seek advice from the Immigration Authorities.

The amount of time he/she may be admitted to the UK to train in medicine is directly linked to the type of training he/she is following. Training falls into three basic types, pre-registration, basic, and higher specialist training. Each of these types of training is provided for in the Immigration Rules. Doctors undertaking Pre-Registration training will be admitted for a maximum of 12 months, doctors entering basic specialist training (in the SHO grade) will be admitted for a maximum of 4 years (granted in periods of from 6 months to 3 years) and doctors in higher specialist training (in the Specialist Registrar grade) will be admitted for an unspecified amount of time dependant on the length of their specialist training programme. Extensions of permission to remain in the UK within the above limits require the support of the Postgraduate Dean, who must be satisfied that he/she is making satisfactory progress in training.

If he/she is coming to the UK to take a training post, he/she should always have a copy of their letter of appointment with them, when he/she arrives. This, together with his/her visa if required, will provide the Immigration Officer with information on which to decide his/her right to enter the UK.

If a doctor is coming to the UK to take a non-training position, then he/she will require a work permit which the hospital or other person wishing to employ the doctor must apply for. This permit should be sent to the doctor and presented to the Immigration Officer on his/her arrival in the UK.

Changing his/her immigration status

Depending on the reason the doctor entered the UK, he/she may need to change their immigration status - this is sometimes referred to as 'switching'. For example, he/she may wish to take a postgraduate training post under permit-free arrangements after entering the UK as a visitor or student. Decisions relating to changes in status whilst remaining in the UK, will be made by the Immigration and Nationality Directorate

He/she is advised to resolve at an early stage issues relating to their ability to enter the UK, including seeking advice on whether or not he/she will require a visa to do so. Advice may be sought from the local British Embassy (or Consulate) or British Council offices.

Further information can be obtained by reading the document *A Guide to the Immigration and Employment of Overseas Medical and Dental Students, Doctors and Dentists in the UK* which can be viewed at the Department of Health's website www.doh.gov.uk/medicaltrainingintheuk

SKILLS/QUALIFICATIONS

SEEKING EMPLOYMENT IN A TRAINING GRADE POST IN THE UK

It is vital that anyone intending training in the UK has a clear idea of what they wish to achieve from that training. Unclear or poorly focussed training goals

can lead to a disappointing and frustrating training experience. Doctors intending training in the UK are advised to seek appropriate careers advice from senior colleagues. It may also be helpful, if possible, to discuss this with a doctor who has himself or herself spent a period in training in the UK.

He/she may also wish to consider seeking a clinical attachment. A clinical attachment will provide them with an insight into the workings of the NHS and can be a valuable contribution to preparation for the PLAB test. Clinical attachments are unpaid, and do not provide direct patient access, but can be undertaken without GMC registration and with visitor status from the Immigration Authorities. He/she should contact one of the postgraduate deans (see Section 8) for advice and information.

What should be done before leaving for the U K

Medical and Dental Registration

Medical Registration

All doctors wishing to work in any capacity in the NHS must be registered with the General Medical Council (GMC).

In medicine there are two, main types of registration - Limited (LR) and Full (FR). Most doctors who have obtained their Primary Medical Qualification (medical degree) from a country other than the UK or other Member State of the European Economic Area (EEA) will be eligible only for Limited registration. There are exceptions for doctors who qualify from certain Universities in Australia, New Zealand, Malaya, Singapore, Hong Kong, South Africa and the West Indies. These graduates will be eligible for Full Registration and advice should be sought from the GMC.

In order to be granted LR, doctors must demonstrate their linguistic and clinical abilities. This is done by taking two tests - a test of linguistic ability such as the International English Language Testing Service (IELTS) test, and a clinical test known as the Professional and Linguistic Assessment Board (PLAB) Test. Doctors with overseas qualifications recognised for Full Registration are required to take the IELTS or similar recognised test, but do not need to undertake the PLAB test.

IELTS

IELTS tests English language competence in listening, reading, writing and spelling. Each paper is scored on a nine band scale with one being the lowest score (non-user of English) and nine the highest (expert user in English). The band scores from each of the four papers are added together and averaged to give an overall score. Doctors must score an average of seven, which must include a minimum of seven in the speaking part, alongside a minimum of six in the other three. Even some native English speakers have to do it and have failed.

An IELTS pass is only valid for up to two years in order to sit the first part of the PLAB exam at which time if a candidate hasn't successfully passed Part I, he/she will have to re-sit the IELTS. The IELTS exam is frequently criticised. It is designed as a marker of English competence for professionals coming to the UK. It therefore doesn't test medical English and some feel that the standards expected are unnecessarily high and could be more appropriate and valid. Many overseas doctors, including refugee doctors repeatedly fail at this hurdle. Also EU doctors are not required to sit the IELTS exam, which is generally seen as unfair.

The PLAB test

The PLAB test exists to satisfy the GMC that an overseas qualified doctor has the knowledge of English and the professional knowledge and skills which are necessary for medical practice in the UK. In order to take the PLAB test overseas doctors need to have their primary qualifications accepted by the GMC and included on the World Health Organisation's world directory of medical schools.

The PLAB test consists of two parts. Part 1 is a single paper with extended matching questions. On successful completion of Part 1, the doctor can sit Part 2, an Objective Structured Clinical Examination (OSCE). The PLAB test places an emphasis on clinical management. The exams are designed to assess "core knowledge, skills and attitudes relating to conditions commonly seen by SHO's, to the generic management of life-threatening situations, and to rarer, but important, problems" (GMC).

Passing the PLAB test presumes competence at SHO level and will ensure limited registration once the doctor has secured a training post.

There are a number of routes to limited registration for overseas doctors without taking the PLAB test. These include:

- being selected for sponsorship
- appointment to a Type 1 specialist registrar (SpR) post
- providing evidence of completion of basic specialist training to the satisfaction of a UK Medical Royal College
- eligibility for inclusion in the specialist register

These groups of doctors are required to have obtained a score of at least seven in each section of the IELTS exam.

Some doctors may qualify for certain categories of exemption from the PLAB test and should make enquiries from the GMC.

Doctors who are nationals of other EEA Member States but whose medical qualification was obtained outside the EEA should seek advice from the GMC.

The IELTS test can be taken at any of the British Council's offices in many countries or in the UK, and doctors cannot take the PLAB test without first

passing the IELTS or a similar recognised test. Further information may be obtained from any British Council office, from the British Council's Advice Centre by telephone +44-161 957 7474 or by visiting their web-site at www.britishcouncil.org/health

Most doctors who are required to take the PLAB test will need to come to the UK to do so, although there are test centres in India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Egypt and Sri Lanka where the first part of the test is held. The doctor would be admitted to the UK as a visitor to do the PLAB, which means he/she would not be able to work.

Although the length of time it can take to meet all the requirements for medical registration varies between individuals, doctors from outside the EEA should allow 6-9 months. They should therefore make their plans accordingly and be aware that this process can be expensive, particularly if more than one attempt at the IELTS and PLAB is needed, and the doctor will need to ensure that he/she has sufficient money to keep themselves during this period.

Doctors should note that passing the PLAB test and gaining registration does not guarantee employment in a training grade post. It may be some months before he/she is able to obtain a suitable training grade appointment.

Dental Registration

In dentistry there are two forms of Registration, Temporary and Full.

Temporary Registration is granted in a similar way to Limited Registration in medicine and will be the form of Registration granted to most overseas-qualified dentists. This form of Registration will allow a dentist to practice in the UK for a limited period in specified posts without the need to take further examinations.

Restrictions on limited registration

Doctors with limited registration are unable to work as GPs, consultants or at staff grade level. After 18 months in training posts, a doctor is eligible to apply for *full* registration. However if a doctor gains entry to the specialist register, in practice, the GMC can change the doctor's status to *full* registration within a few hours if necessary.

Recent changes to funding regulations and immigration rules have greatly improved the position of overseas doctors who want to work in general practice. However an anomaly remains that these doctors are still required to sit the PLAB even if they have been given a certificate of equivalent experience.

Medical staffing departments frequently misunderstand the immigration and registration requirements for overseas doctors, which causes significant problems for both the trusts and the overseas doctors.

Applying for Medical or Dental Registration

Further details on how to apply for registration and the costs involved can be obtained from the General Medical Council by telephone +44-20 7915 3481 or by visiting their web-site at www.gmc-uk.org or from the General Dental Council by telephone +44-20 7887 3800) or by visiting their web-site at www.gdc-uk.org

Doctors are advised to resolve at an early stage any issues relating to Registration.

SEEKING EMPLOYMENT IN A CAREER (NON-TRAINING) GRADE POST IN THE UK

In addition to employment in the training grades as described above, doctors may wish to seek employment in a career grade. The three main grades of employment are Consultant, Associate Specialist and Staff Grade (the latter two also known as Non-Consultant Career Grades and more recently SAS {Staff and Associate Specialist Grade}), although there are other titles applied to doctors by the NHS Trust in which they are employed. Some examples of these are Trust Specialist, Trust Doctor, Trust Fellow, and collectively these are known as non-standard grades and doctors should be aware that such posts may bring no or little training benefit and, more importantly, may not be recognised for training.

Senior Doctor Route

Up until recently, doctors could come to the UK via the senior doctor route. The GMC would consider applications from doctors who had practised overseas for at least five years in one broad specialty and who had at least two years experience in posts providing postgraduate training in that specialty area. This route to limited registration was aimed at experienced doctors who want to come to the UK for enhanced training opportunities. One example might be a neurosurgeon living in a small country with a population insufficient to give the doctor the casemix needed.

The senior doctor route was recently abolished by the GMC without consultation. The GMC's Registration Committee has taken the view that seniority alone should no longer exempt a doctor from the requirement to take the PLAB. This is likely to disadvantage a certain group of doctors, for whom sitting PLAB is perhaps an unnecessary hurdle. Is it really necessary for an older refugee doctor who is an experienced ophthalmologist to prove a level of competence in obstetrics and gynaecology? The GMC's registration committee argues that the majority of doctors who come to the UK via the senior route, end up working as SHO's so the PLAB exam is appropriate. The committee also argues that there are other routes open for experienced doctors yet in reality very few overseas doctors manage to come to the UK via the sponsorship routes and overseas doctors' scheme. Those coming to the UK under the overseas doctors' training scheme must leave at the end of their

training, which in part may account for its low uptake. The abolition of the senior doctor route is only likely to affect a relatively small number of doctors.

EMPLOYMENT ARRANGEMENTS

OBTAINING EMPLOYMENT IN A TRAINING GRADE

Type I Specialist training

An overseas doctor with residency status can apply for Type 1 training and an NTN. Overseas doctors who do not have a right of indefinite residence have the immigration status of permit free training and can now apply for Type 1 training posts and are given a VTX

Type II Specialist Training

Overseas doctors can also work as Type II specialist registrars on fixed term training (FTT) appointments. Type II training programmes are specifically designed to meet the needs of the individual overseas doctor, but they do not lead to CCST. Doctors are able to transfer from a Type II to a Type I post if they are successful in open competition (where they will be awarded a visiting training number, VTN)

GP training

Currently overseas doctors need full registration to work as a GP or train in a general practice setting. An overseas doctor who wishes to enter a GP registrar post must obtain a training and work experience work permit (TWES). Holders of TWES permits are normally required to leave the UK at the end of the period for which the permit was granted. However the Home Office has agreed that those undertaking GP registrar training on TWES permits will not be subject to normal TWES restrictions.

An overseas doctors who has completed GP training can either apply for a salaried GP post, for which a work permit is required or apply to become a GP principal and apply to remain in the UK through the Highly Skilled Migrant Programme. Overseas doctors who are fully trained GPs in their home country can also apply to the HSMP . However doctors in this position would need to obtain a certificate of equivalent experience from the JCPTGP beforehand.

Doctors wishing to take up non-training posts in UK hospitals need work permits. Employers must apply for the permits. A requirement for a work permit to be granted, is that no suitably qualified EEA national is available to do the job. A work permit is specific to a particular post.

Registration requirements

Non-EEA graduates fall into three categories:

- sponsored by host or country of origin
- self-funding
- refugee.

The majority of non-EU doctors are self-funding and in order to get limited registration with the GMC are required (unless exempted) to pass IELTS and PLAB.

Application Procedures

Training in the Hospital and Community Health Services

Unless a doctor is coming to the UK under direct placement arrangements he/she should expect to need to attend an interview in the UK. Doctors/dentists should not apply for training posts until they have confirmed with the General Medical Council that their primary medical qualification has been accepted for the purposes of either Full or Limited Registration.

Most jobs are advertised in the Classified Advertisement Section of the British Medical Journal (BMJ) or in the Lancet. It is also well worth looking in specialist journals, depending on where his/her interests lie, and in national broadsheet newspapers, where research and academic posts may be advertised, as well as posts outside medicine but for which a medical background might be useful. All members of the British Medical Association (BMA) receive the BMJ as a benefit of membership. If a doctor joins while he/she is living abroad, however, the Classified Advertisement Section will not be sent to them, but he/she can arrange with BMJ staff to have details of certain posts sent to them. If the doctor has access to the Internet, he/she should also be able to find details on the BMJ website www.bmj.com

Advertisements for training posts should state whether the post has both educational approval and approval by the relevant postgraduate dean (this is known as dual approval). If it does not have dual approval, it cannot be designated a training placement and this will affect the immigration status of any successful applicants from outside the European Union. In the BMJ Classified Advertisement section, dual approval is indicated by the following statement in bold:

"The Postgraduate Dean confirms that this placement and/or programme has the required Educational and Dean's approval".

If the advertisement does not carry these words, doctors are advised to contact the employer to establish whether the post has dual approval.

Further information relating to recruitment procedures may be obtained by reading the document "The Recruitment of Doctors and Dentists in Training"

which can be viewed on the Department of Health's web-site at www.doh.gov.uk/medicaltrainingintheuk

Entry to General Practice Training

Directors of Postgraduate GP Education, based in the Deaneries, manage the advertising and recruitment system for GP training. Advertisements usually appear twice a year (once in Northern Ireland). Doctors may apply through this process for the full three-year vocational training scheme (including hospital and general practice training), or for the general practice element of training alone. There may be demand for places and early application is advisable. Deaneries will be able to advise doctors about the recruitment process in the local area.

Dental training in the UK

Arrangements for training in dentistry are broadly similar to those in place for medicine. The grades are similar (House Officer, Senior House Officer and Specialist Registrar) and the mechanisms for approving training posts are the same. The Postgraduate Dental Dean provides a similar service to that of Postgraduate Dean in medicine. Appointments are most likely to be advertised in The British Dental Journal, details can also be found on the Internet at www.bdj.co.uk

Induction training

Appropriate induction training is an important aspect of a new doctor's early experience of working in the National Health Service in the UK. All doctors from outside the UK who have been appointed to a post, must receive appropriate induction before commencing work.

Sponsorship and non-competitive entry to training

Although the normal route into training is through competition for advertised posts, arrangements do exist which allow doctors to be appointed directly to training without having to compete for individual posts. These arrangements are presently under review, and further information may be obtained from the Department of Health web-site or by contacting the relevant medical Royal College. In general however these arrangements are intended to support short periods of training in specific areas for doctors intending to return home. There is no provision to place a doctor through non-competitive entry to a programme leading directly to the certificate of specialist training in either hospital or general practice - i.e. the CCST for medicine or the Certificates of Prescribed or Equivalent Experience for General Practice.

OBTAINING EMPLOYMENT IN A CAREER GRADE POST

Requirements for employment as a consultant

The Specialist Register

In addition to the requirement to be registered with the General Medical Council (see Section 3) the doctor must also be on the Council's Specialist Register if he/she wishes to work as a consultant in the National Health Service (NHS). The General Medical Council cannot include a doctor in the Specialist Register until he/she has been accepted on the main Medical Register, but he/she can apply for both at the same time.

If the doctor is a national of a Member State of the EEA and holds a specialist qualification from another EEA country which is listed in the relevant European legislation (directive 93/16/EC), he/she can apply to the Specialist Training Authority, which will recommend to the General Medical Council (GMC) that the doctor concerned be included in the specialist register. This process should be straightforward.

EQUIVALENCE ASSESSMENT

If he/she is not a national of a Member State of the EEA and holds a specialist qualification from either inside or outside the EEA, he/she must apply directly to the Specialist Training Authority. It will consult the relevant Royal College to determine whether or not this qualification is equivalent to a UK Certificate of Completion of Specialist Training (CCST) in the specialty in question. All Medical Royal Colleges operate an equivalence assessment process and the basic determinants are whether the doctor concerned has obtained training and qualifications which are equivalent in quality and duration to those required in the UK. Experience is not normally considered in place of training, except under certain restricted EU regulations.

Doctors can also apply for entry to the Specialist Register if they have a specialist qualification awarded outside the UK or have knowledge of or experience in any medical specialty derived from academic or research work. The Specialist Training Authority must be satisfied that these give the individual a level of knowledge and skill consistent with practice as a consultant in that specialty in the NHS.

There is an appeals procedure for applicants whom the Specialist Training Authority refuses.

A doctor does not need to be included in the Specialist Register to be employed in a Non-Consultant Career Grade or non-standard grade, but must still have appropriate registration with the GMC.

Requirements for employment as a General Practitioner

Doctors wishing to work as a General Practitioner must possess a Certificate of Prescribed or Equivalent experience, or an equivalent EEA certificate. It is not possible to work in any capacity without this.

Most general practitioners are self-employed contractors (known as GP Principals) working either individually or as part of a group practice who provide services in return for payment, which is based on a system of fees and allowances. Doctors without rights of residence in the UK wishing to become GP Principals are therefore required to meet the requirements of the Immigration Rules for persons intending to establish themselves in business. Advice on these requirements should be obtained from the appropriate immigration authorities.

However, there are an increasing number of salaried general practitioner positions available for which a work-permit would be required.

Obtaining employment

The procedures involved in obtaining employment in a career grade position are broadly similar to those set out earlier for training posts.

Most jobs are advertised in the Classified Advertisement Section of the British Medical Journal (BMJ) or in the Lancet. It is also well worth looking in specialist Journals, depending on where a doctor's interests lie, and in certain national newspapers (e.g. The Times, Guardian, Independent, Telegraph in England, The Herald or The Scotsman in Scotland and, in Northern Ireland, The Belfast Telegraph), where research and academic posts may be advertised, as well as posts outside medicine but for which a medical background might be useful.

Immigration (see also earlier)

If a doctor is coming to the UK to take a non-training position and does not have indefinite rights of residence in the UK, then he/she will require a work permit which the hospital (or other person wishing to employ he/she) must apply for. This permit should be sent to the doctor and presented to the Immigration Officer on his/her arrival in the UK. In order to obtain a work permit for the doctor, the hospital (or other employer) will need to show that they could not have appointed a doctor from the resident labour force, which includes workers from the European Economic Area (EEA).

If the doctor is taking a career grade post after a period as a trainee or visitor then in addition to a work-permit he/she will need permission to alter their immigration status - also known as 'switching'.

The doctor is advised to resolve at an early stage issues relating to his/her ability to enter or remain in the UK, including seeking advice on whether or not he/she requires a visa to do so. Advice may be sought from the local British Embassy (or Consulate) or British Council offices or from the Immigration and Nationality Directorate.

Further information can be obtained by reading the document "A Guide to the Immigration and Employment of Overseas Medical and Dental Students,

Doctors and Dentists in the UK” which can be viewed at the Department of Health's website at www.doh.gov.uk/medicaltrainingintheuk