

INTERNATIONAL MEDICAL GRADUATES (IMG)

A BEGINNER'S GUIDE TO WORKING, TRAINING & LIVING IN THE UK



INTRODUCTION

Congratulations on being selected to work and train in the Southwest of UK.

International Medical Graduates (IMG) are doctors that have completed their primary medical qualification outside the U.K. or do not have relevant European qualifications.

Moving to a new country is exciting and life-changing but can be challenging. This booklet is meant to help support you with navigating some of the key issues you may face on arrival. It is not an exhaustive document but will give you an idea of the medical workforce in the NHS, working/training in the U.K. and a general idea of what you can do outside work.

The information can change rapidly so please keep yourself updated. Please do not hesitate to contact the local IMG Support Network if you have any questions ([1](#), [2](#)).

Great Britain consists of England, Scotland and Wales. The United Kingdom is made up of Great Britain and Northern Ireland ([3](#)). The South West of U.K. is mainly a rural region made up of Devon, Cornwall (including the Isles of Scilly), Channel islands, Dorset, Gloucestershire, Wiltshire and Somerset ([4](#)).

Peninsula Postgraduate Medical Education School covers Cornwall, Devon and Plymouth ([5](#)). Severn Postgraduate Medical Education School covers Gloucester, Wiltshire, Bristol, Somerset and part of Wessex deanery area which includes Dorset healthcare and Channel Islands.

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1. DOCTORS IN THE UK

The primary employer of doctors in the U.K. is National Health Service (NHS). There are private systems of healthcare, which are beyond the scope of this document.

Doctors in the NHS can be divided into three groups:

1. **Consultants** – These doctors have completed their training or have equivalent competencies. They practice independently and are autonomous.
2. **Trainees** – These are doctors in training schemes who are either Core Trainee (in initial 3 years) or Specialist Registrar (SpR) in higher subspecialty training (in next 3-5 years). Part-time (or Less than Full Time (LTFT)) trainees require longer time to complete the training.
3. **Non-consultant non-training posts** – This grade includes “associate specialists”, ‘clinical fellows’ “staff grades” “SASG”, “specialty doctors” and “trust grade”. These doctors are neither in training nor working as consultants. This can be for various reasons – family, personal commitments or difficulties with exams or finding their feet in the NHS. It is a matter of personal choice and what works best for the individual.

All roles require regular supervision for personal, professional and educational development.

2. WORKING IN THE U.K

Registration with the General Medical Council (GMC), U.K. GMC is the regulatory body that maintains the official register of medical practitioners in the U.K. GMC sets the professional and ethical standards for doctors in the U.K.. Doctors cannot legally practise medicine without GMC registration and license to practice. There are different routes to obtain registration with the GMC depending on which country you gained your primary medical qualification ([6](#)).

Licence to practice is an indicator that the doctor continues to meet the professional standards set by the GMC and the specialist standards set by the Medical Royal Colleges and Faculties. ([6](#), [7](#))

Revalidation is an evaluation of a doctor’s fitness to practice. It is the process by which the GMC confirms the continuation of a doctor’s licence to practice in the U.K. The process happens every five years.

You are legally required to revalidate every five years by having a regular appraisal based on GMC’s Good medical practice ([6](#), [7](#)).

Appraisal is a formal process in which doctors have the opportunity to reflect on their work and achievements including review of personal development plan and set objectives and learning needs for the coming year. Appraisal requires evidence to be gathered for all the domains of GMC’s Good Medical Practice.

On successful revalidation, you continue holding the licence to practise.

Designated body is usually the employing organisation for non-trainee doctors, which appoints the *Responsible Officer*. Upon successful completion of appraisals for 5 years, the Responsible Officer makes a revalidation recommendation to the GMC. The GMC then decides whether the doctor can retain the license to practice. ([7](#), [8](#))

Doctors in training meet the revalidation requirement through engaging with their training programme and completing their Annual Review of Competence Progression (ARCP) ([9](#)). Their designated body is the deanery and the Responsible Officer is the Post Graduate Dean.

Continuing Professional Development (CPD) is a learning process, outside of undergraduate and postgraduate learning, that helps maintain and develop skills to improve the care provided. This is a mandatory process for psychiatrists in non-training grades ([10](#)). CPD points are accumulated through learning. Each hour of learning corresponds to one point. These can be gained through e-learning, self-learning, conferences, educational programmes, Masters programmes. The list is not exhaustive and must be tailored to an individual doctor's learning and educational need. Please discuss with your colleagues about how to access CPD learning.

Certificate of Good Standing is a certificate issued by the Royal College of Psychiatrists when the minimum standards of CPD have been met. This is a requirement for the appraisal ([10](#)).

Peer Groups consist of colleagues of similar grade within the speciality. The group meets regularly, where complex cases are discussed and advice sought. The purpose of a peer group is to be reflective and educational in a supportive environment. The peer group approves the CPD hours needed for the appraisal ([10](#)).

Working in the U.K. workshop and seminar:

A very useful starting point is a free half day workshop run by the GMC called “**Welcome to U.K. Practice**” ([11](#)). It is highly recommended, and you are strongly advised to attend. In this session you are provided with practical advice and will explore different ethical scenarios that you may encounter in your practice. You will learn more about the GMC's key standards and guidance.

Another useful source of information is “*Setting up in the U.K.*” by the British Medical Association (BMA). This webpage provides useful practical information ([12](#)).

The NHS has an induction programme for international medical graduates, which is recommended ([13](#))

Key issues to keep in mind when working in the U.K.:

Language – even if one is proficient in English, the use of English has regional variations. These can be with accents, dialects and how different words/phrases are used.

Self-directed learning – can be very different from your country of origin. Please ask colleagues for advice on how to get started. This can be in the form of continuing

professional development (CPD), online learning, courses and conferences. You may wish to undertake a higher degree to further your career.

Asking for advice – Autonomy in practice AND approaching seniors when there is something you are not sure is always encouraged. Please do not hesitate to seek advice if you are unsure.

Mentor – Mentor is usually a peer or a senior colleague who offers guidance and support outside the usual management structure for personal and professional growth. A mentor is neither your supervisor nor your line manager. Mentors are supportive and the meetings are informal and less structured than formal supervision. It is an opportunity to discuss difficulties and career goals. There may be local mentorship schemes within the Trust or deanery.

Line manager – Line manager is the immediate senior colleague who directly manages your work and development.

Observership/Clinical attachment – Clinical attachment is a time-limited observation of a consultant in a relevant specialty. It helps with preparation to work in the NHS, gain an overview of medical processes and systems in the NHS. This has no bearing on GMC registration but may open doors for employment in the NHS. These can be accessed by contacting consultants or medical staffing. There may be a charge involved.

Shadowing – Shadowing experience is highly recommended for day time and on calls especially when starting a new role. It is a valuable opportunity for observing peers to develop an understanding of day to day working and learn the intricacies of a new system. Most Trusts provide a few days of shadowing at the start of the post.

On calls – This is work within and out of hours similar to duty work in other countries. It is on a rotational basis and has a bearing on the pay. There is always a back-up of a senior colleague. Please do not hesitate to contact them for guidance. On calls are an important part of learning and experience for future practice.

Addressing seniors/colleagues – Best is to ask your colleagues how they would like to be addressed. Most prefer first names. If addressing by titles, use title and surname e.g. John Smith as either “John” or “Dr Smith” or “Mr Smith”.

Expenses – Expenses is the process of claiming travel expenditure for work purposes or study budget as per the local Trust policy. This is part of the contractual rights ([14](#)) and maybe a new concept to a lot of IMGs. It can come to a significant amount and there is a time limit for claiming.

Quality improvement projects (QIP) – QIPs are processes that monitor, assess and improve quality of healthcare. Trainees must take part in regular and systematic clinical audit and/or quality improvement.

Good Medical Practice (GMP) – These are guidelines issued by the General Medical Council (GMC). You need to know these for practice in the U.K. There may be serious consequences if any of these are breached ([15](#)). It is also important to use good practice tools such as NICE, BNF to justify practice ([16](#), [17](#)).

Certificate of Eligibility for Specialist Registration (CESR) - It is a process for doctors who have not completed an approved training programme in the UK to prove equivalent experience and training to enter Specialist Register. Doctors must be on the Specialist Register to apply for a permanent consultant post. It can be a lengthy process, which involves submitting substantial evidence to the GMC ([18](#), [19](#)). CESR may not be acceptable in some countries for certain roles and responsibilities. It becomes relevant if you want to move out of the U.K. in the future ([19](#)).

Confidentiality and Information Sharing – The importance of confidentiality in medical practice cannot be overemphasised. Patient information is held under legal and ethical obligations of confidentiality with some important caveats. Information provided in confidence should not be used or disclosed in a form that might identify a patient without the patient's consent. There are a few important exceptions to this rule. Please consult seniors if you think you need to break confidentiality and BEFORE you break confidentiality ([20](#)). When communicating patient information by e mail or texts, you need to be sure that it can be confidentially delivered to the intended recipient.

Confidentiality breaches include accessing information about yourself, colleagues, friends and family for eg: blood results, scans or medical notes. Accessing this information can trigger a disciplinary investigation.

Self-prescribing - The GMC guidance warns against prescribing for self, friends or family. The doctors who breach the guidelines risk being referred to GMC's fitness to practice. ([21](#), [22](#))

Trade Union – There are trade unions for doctors in the U.K. – British Medical Association (BMA) and Hospital Consultants and Specialist Association (HCSA) – You are strongly encouraged to join either one of these. They can be approached for contractual difficulties. There is a subscription fee ([23](#), [24](#)).

Defence Union – Although NHS Trusts provide indemnity, the GMC's good medical practice states that all doctors MUST have personal indemnity ([15](#), [25](#), [26](#)). There is a subscription fee.

Medical defence organisations provide medical indemnity/insurance and defend doctors in the unfortunate event of disciplinary investigation by the GMC or in case of clinical negligence claims. NHS Trust will provide cover through Clinical Negligence Scheme for employees but this may not cover the entire scope of practice.

GMC can remove a doctor's licence to practice if there is no indemnity. A claim can be brought any time of your career, even after you retire. It's really important you have arrangements to cover if such situations were to arise. It is the doctor's responsibility to have adequate cover, which may not necessarily be with the company providing the lowest quote. Please read the terms and conditions carefully before deciding

Disciplinary investigation is done by the GMC when concerns have been raised about a doctor and/or doctor's fitness to practice. Majority of the complaints raised are closed without being investigated. These are not covered by the employing trust but are covered by the defence unions.

Occupational health – You need tests/health checks including vaccination before starting work. The occupational health department or the medical staffing will be able to guide you. In addition to the pre-employment checks, you can also approach the occupational health department for advice and support related to physical and mental well being.

Equality and diversity – The workforce and population of the U.K is very diverse. The diversity ranges from ethnicity to sexuality. It is very important to respect an individual's identity and culture as it can be a very sensitive issue.

Respect & dignity – It is expected that everyone will be treated with respect, dignity and courtesy. A warm smile and politeness can open many doors and ease your way.

3. TRAINING IN THE U.K

Entry into training schemes is through a national recruitment programme. There are two opportunities every year to apply for core psychiatry training. Core training lasts three years. By the end of core training, you need to have completed your MRCPsych examinations in order to apply for the next stage of training i.e, Higher Specialist Training. Application for both core and speciality training is available via the North West Deanery ([27](#)), who manage the recruitment process.

Once you have been accepted, Health Education England (HEE) provides a Restricted Certificate of Sponsorship and this enables you to apply for a tier 2 visa ([28](#)). Please read the guidance and eligibility criteria carefully before applying.

A small number of International Medical Psychiatry Graduates can enter the U.K. for experience in a training scheme via the Royal College of Psychiatrists (RCPsych) Medical Training Initiative (MTI) scheme ([29](#)). This route does not count towards permanent residency in the U.K, and you will need to return to your country at the end of this scheme.

Differential attainment is the difference in exam pass rates between IMGs and local graduates especially Clinical Assessment of Skills and Competencies (CASC). The reasons are multifactorial. It is important that you discuss this with your supervisor/mentor from the beginning. It can be an uncomfortable topic to bring up, but it is better to address this from the beginning rather than just before the exams ([30](#), [31](#)).

Certificate of Completion of Training (CCT) is awarded after successful completion of core and higher training, You can then apply to be included on the GMC Specialist Register and become eligible to apply for permanent consultant jobs ([32](#)).

Health Education England (HEE):

HEE is a national organisation responsible for education, training and workforce development in the health sector. HEE includes post graduate medical and dental education (PGMDE) or Health Care Education Teams (HET).

Peninsula deanery provides post graduate education and training to the doctors in the Southwest (33).

Support for trainees:

Peninsula Deanery Professional Support and Wellbeing is available to all trainee doctors who wish to optimise their personal and professional development e.g, through support in postgraduate examination, progress towards required standard for their level of training, career guidance or health issues. This resource can be accessed through self-referral, referral through the deanery or by trainers/ supervisors (34).

Peninsula School of Psychiatry has board members whose details can be found on the deanery website (35).

Peninsula deanery encourages trainees to have mentors to support personal and professional development. There is a buddy scheme, the concept of the scheme is to match a core trainee up with a "Buddy" higher trainee who can help with advice about any training matters (36). Mentors are usually consultants or other senior doctors (37).

Support for non-trainees:

These can be accessed through local networks, occupational health and local mentorship schemes.

4. LIVING IN THE UK

We hope that you settle and find working in the Southwest enjoyable and rewarding.

Useful Information:

1. **Postcode** – Every house and business in the U.K. has a postal address and postcode. A postcode is similar to PIN Code or ZIP Code and looks something like PL6 8BY (Post code of Peninsula Deanery). This is useful in finding directions as it can take you to a specific street in the U.K.. You can use postcodes to search for amenities around where you live e.g. for taxis, supermarkets, GP surgeries, government offices, restaurants etc.
2. **National Insurance Number (NINo)** – Your National Insurance number is unique to you and is for life. It ensures that the tax, National Insurance, and pension contributions that you pay are properly recorded against your name (38). It will be in your BRP
3. **Income Tax/ HMRC** - Income tax is usually deducted from your pay and reflected in your payslip. It is called Pay As You Earn (PAYE) (39).
4. **Pensions** – In addition to the state pensions, there is NHS pension scheme, please check with your employer (40).
5. **Denomination of currency** - U.K. coins are in the following denominations: £2, £1, £0.50p, £0.20p, £0.10p, £0.05p, £0.02p and £0.01p. The U.K. currency notes are in denominations of £50.00, £20.00, £10.00 and £5.00 (41).
6. **Bank account** – You will need proof of identity (e.g. passport) and residence (e.g. tenancy agreement or a letter from medical staffing) to open a bank

account. You can then use the bank statement as proof of residence. (REMEMBER: Bank statement, credit card statement or household bills can be used as residence proof. However mobile phone statements even if pay monthly, do not count as residence proof). Opening a bank account is essential especially to get paid on time, payment of utilities and other essentials. Individual banks have their own requirements for opening accounts. There are online banks, which can have different requirements. Please contact the banks directly.

7. **Landline** – There are many schemes/contracts and it is best to search on the internet for a deal that suits your needs.
8. **TV connection** – A TV licence is needed to watch TV or access any live programmes on any of your electronic devices. “Freeview” offers basic channels. If you want more channels, you can get a contract for TV from different companies. These can be bundled up with landline connection and broadband for a better deal. It is worth searching on the internet and asking people around as you can get good deals to suit your requirements.
9. **Internet** – There are different companies that provide an internet service either through landline, cable or mobile phone. If living in doctors’ accommodation, clarify with medical staffing or your estate agent/landlord for privately rented accommodation as internet can sometimes be a part of the rental agreement.
10. **Price comparison websites** - These are websites where you can compare deals and look for the best one. These websites are available for internet, phone, TV, home insurance, car insurance, mortgage etc.
11. **Mobile phone** – Mobile phones have become a necessity and it is recommended that you buy a mobile connection as soon as practicable. There are many tariffs to choose from provided by different phone companies. You might require an ID (e.g. passport) and residence proof (e.g. letter from medical staffing or your tenancy agreement). You will need to figure out whether you prefer a SIM only deal or sign up for a pay monthly contract.
 - a. *Pay as you go/sim only*: A handset is needed for pay as you go. You top up your sim with the required amount. It is worth thinking about getting a deal with data. Sometimes this is the only mobile connection you can get before you build up a credit score.
 - b. *Pay monthly*: This is a contract for a fixed amount of money every month. The contract can last for 12, 18 or 24 months. You can get excellent mobile handsets which come with free minutes for calls, data and texts to U.K. mobiles and landlines with a few exceptions. You may have to pay a certain amount for the handset. However, it will be yours at the end of the contract to do as you please after unlocking. A credit score may be needed. Disadvantage of pay monthly contract – You are obliged to pay the phone company for the duration of the contract and heavy fines if you want to end the contract early.
 - c. You can also purchase “add on” e.g. international call minutes and cellular data etc. or phone cards for international calls.
12. **Credit Score** - A credit score will be needed if you apply for things such as a mortgage, pay monthly phone etc. A credit score is a statistical number that the lenders use to evaluate the probability that a person will repay their debts.
13. **General Practitioners (GP)** - GPs are the family doctors in the U.K. Anyone in the U.K. can register with the GP surgery. Registration with a GP is free. You

do not need proof of address or immigration status, ID, or NHS number. GPs treat common medical conditions and refer patients to hospitals and other medical services for urgent and specialist treatment (42).

14. **Driving** - You can use an international driving licence for 12 months from when you become a resident. After this you will need to apply for a provisional licence. You must then pass a theory test and a practical driving test to drive in the U.K. Please check if your overseas licence can be converted to a U.K. licence (43).
15. **Car Insurance** – Car insurance, vehicle tax and Ministry of Transport Test (MOT) are legal requirements to drive in the U.K. (44). Driving without insurance can potentially lead to a referral to the GMC. Your insurance premium is likely to be higher with an international driving licence or provisional U.K. licence than with a full U.K. licence. You need to drive in accordance with the type of driving licence that you have at the time.
16. **Car purchase** – Access to a car can be an essential criteria for some jobs in rural areas. You can buy cars from local garages, personal sellers or reputable online websites. It is best to ask your colleagues or friends for advice especially if you are new to the U.K.
17. **Bank holidays/Christmas/New Year** – These are public holidays in the U.K. (45). If you work on any of these days, you get a day off in lieu. Many shops and supermarkets are open for a limited time on Sundays and Bank Holidays. Almost all shops are closed on Christmas Day and New Year's Day.
18. **Religion and Beliefs** – Some of the Councils have information about religion and beliefs. Please check with colleagues for your nearest place of worship.

General points about living in the U.K.:

1. **Immigration** – It is best to keep yourself up to date with changes to immigration e.g. through the GOV.U.K. website (46). The link to health and social care visas (47) and health surcharge is included in the references (48).
2. **Biometric residence permits (BRPs)**- This is a very important card that can be used as an identity proof, right to work and access any appropriate public service (49).
3. **Renting** – Doctors accommodation is usually a good starting place if available – please contact medical staffing for further information. Alternatively, you can contact local estate agents or look up reputable online websites.
4. **Buying a property** - This will depend on your individual financial and employment circumstances. Information about mortgage can be accessed through bank, mortgage advisors and comparison websites.
5. **Council Tax** – Most dwellings in the U.K. have to pay council tax (50). This is in addition to rent and bills (electricity, water, gas etc). The amount depends on the type and location of your property. The council tax is set by the local authority in order to meet budget requirements and cover services provided by the local council. Please ask your estate agent/landlord about the council tax you will have to pay and whether this is included in your rental agreement. Single occupancy of a property (NOT in a shared accommodation) can get a 25% discount on council tax. Hospital accommodation usually includes bills/council tax in the rental agreement.

6. **Waste and recycling collection** – Every council is responsible for collecting household rubbish and recycling. The details can be found for bin collection and recycling on the local council website.
7. **Travel** - Public transport outside larger cities can be limited. You can get more information about public transport on the Council public transport website ([51-59](#))
8. **Taxis** – It is useful to have at least a few numbers of taxi companies on your mobile. There are many companies, so it is best to do an online search.
9. **Supermarkets** – Supermarkets have most of the essentials you need such as groceries, clothes, linens, utensils, pharmacies etc. You can use your postcode in the “store locator” or “store finder” section or similar links on the supermarkets’ website. Most of the supermarkets also provide online shopping service and will deliver to your home.
10. **Pharmacies/ Chemists**- There are different pharmacy companies which have branches in villages, towns and cities. Prescription is required for most medicines. Please bring sufficient amount of medication to last as there may be a little delay in registering with a local GP and receiving prescription. There are only a few medicines, which can be purchased over the counter.
11. **Takeaways** – For lazy days when you don’t want to cook. It is best to ask people who live locally – they can provide a lot of information and suggestions on where to get takeaways. There are websites where you can order online and have it delivered to your doorstep.
12. **Information regarding schools** – All children in England between the ages of 5 and 16 are provided free education at state schools. Admission to state schools is based on the area of residence. There is information available on schools on the Council websites ([60-69](#)). Private or independent schools are an option but can be expensive. Schools are primary (upto 11/12 years of age) and secondary (upto 16/17 years of age). Grammar schools are state secondary schools. The selection process involves an entrance exam known as 11 plus.
13. **Nursery and childcare** – Childcare is available in the form of pre-school nurseries, creches, child-minders or live-in au pairs. There can be some difficulty in finding a place in a nursery for children. There will be payment involved. Children between the ages of 3-4 years can be eligible for free 15 hour/week childcare funding. Please check with your hospital if there are any childcare facilities or funding provided locally. Child-minders or au pairs can be accessed through agencies.
14. **Vaccination for children** – Please bring vaccination card of your children to continue receiving vaccines in the U.K.
15. **Hobbies** – Hobbies are essential for maintaining a good work-life balance and to unwind after a busy day. There are ample opportunities to develop your interests. Hobbies can include exploring beaches, woodlands, moors, walking, trekking, swimming, book clubs, golf, cycling, camping and watersports. There are gyms and leisure centres, which require membership to access the facilities.

5. USEFUL LINKS:

NHS Induction Programme for International Medical Graduates

<https://www.e-lfh.org.uk/programmes/nhs-induction-programme-for-international-medical-graduates/>

GMC guide on IMGs:

www.gmc-U.K..org/doctors/before_you_apply/imgs.asp

Free half day “Welcome to the U.K. workshop”:

www.gmc-U.K..org/doctors/WelcomeU.K..asp

Free “New to U.K. Practice Seminar”:

<https://www.bma.org.U.K./events/listing?tag=international+medical+graduates>

Working as a doctor in the U.K.:

<https://www.gmc-uk.org/registration-and-licensing/join-the-register/before-you-apply/working-as-a-doctor-in-the-uk>

A guide for international medical and dental graduates thinking about training or working in the U.K.

https://www.nhsemployers.org/sites/default/files/media/Working-and-training-in-NHS-2021_0.pdf

Working and training in the NHS: A guide for international medical graduates:

<https://www.nhsemployers.org/publications/working-and-training-nhs>

Please look at the GMC website for more detail on training in the U.K.

<http://www.gmc-U.K..org/education/27007.asp>.

Information for IMGs on Health Education England website:

<https://www.healthcareers.nhs.U.K./i-am/outside-U.K./information-overseas-doctors>

Information for IMGs on RCPsych:

www.rcpsych.ac.U.K./traininpsychiatry/trainees/internationalmedicalgraduate.aspx

Road to the U.K.:

<https://roadtoU.K..com/>

6. **GLOSSARY**

CPD – Continuing professional development. CPD is a range of learning activities, which ensure your professional skills and knowledge are up-to-date ([70](#)).

General Medical Council (GMC) – The GMC is a public body that maintains the official register of doctors in the U.K.. It is the regulator and can suspend or remove members when necessary. It sets the standards for medical training in the U.K..

NHS Trust – NHS trusts are organisations that provide healthcare, which include hospital services, community services and other aspects of patient care such as patient transport facilities.

Medical staffing – Medical staffing are human resources team who are primarily involved with the organisational and administrative details for all medical staff working in a trust.

Royal Colleges – Royal colleges are professional bodies responsible for education, training and raising standards in their specialty.

Supervision – This is protected time with your consultant to discuss issues relating to care of patients (clinical supervision) and your career development (educational supervision).

Disclaimer: The information provided in this booklet is intended for information purposes only. It is advisory and you are strongly advised to check the information from up to date sources for accuracy.

7. REFERENCES

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9. Council GM. Annual Review of Competency Progression [Available from: <https://www.gmc-uk.org/education/reports-and-reviews/progression-reports/annual-review-of-competency-progression>].
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