

Finding and choosing an NHS job

Search official portals, read beneath the title and check whether the post is safe and developmental.

- ✓ 17 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

Search on official NHS recruitment portals, but judge the work rather than the title alone. The job description, person specification, rota, supervision and contract tell you what the post really is.

Three next actions

- Create accounts on NHS Jobs and Trac, then save searches using several likely job titles.
- Download the job description and person specification for every serious application.
- Ask about rota level, senior cover, induction, supervision, development time, appraisal and visa sponsorship before accepting.

Learning objectives

- Search across the official four-nation recruitment routes and use several accurate job titles.
- Decode an advert by examining duties, rota, supervision, employment terms and sponsorship.
- Compare offers using safety, development and household feasibility rather than title alone.

Search the official market systematically

NHS Jobs and Trac carry many vacancies in England and Wales, while Scotland and Northern Ireland use their own official recruitment services. Not every organisation uses the same platform and local titles vary. Build several saved searches using specialty, location and titles such as clinical fellow, trust doctor, locally employed doctor, specialty doctor and specialist where these match your experience.

Treat agency or social-media messages as leads, not verified offers. Confirm the employing organisation, vacancy reference and application route on an official site. Fraudulent recruitment can involve requests for money, identity documents or unofficial visa payments. An NHS employer should be identifiable and the formal offer should follow its recruitment checks.

- Use a dedicated professional email address with secure recovery details.
- Save searches at more than one plausible title or grade.
- Download serious adverts before their closing date.
- Record reference number, contact, closing date and application status.

Decode the work beneath the title

A job title is not a national guarantee of seniority. 'Clinical fellow' may describe a supported first NHS post, a service job at resident-doctor level or an advanced specialist fellowship. 'Senior clinical fellow' may still be locally defined. Read the duties, person specification, reporting arrangements, patient group, procedures, sites, rota tier and decision-making expectations.

Compare what the employer expects with evidence from your recent practice. Clarify ambiguous phrases such as 'appropriate supervision', 'cross-cover as required' or 'participation in the middle-grade rota'. Ask who is physically available out of hours, which specialties are covered and how capability is assessed before independent duties begin.

- Clinical scope and procedures.
- Rota tier, nights, weekends and cross-cover.
- On-site and remote senior support.
- Induction, supervisor, appraisal and development time.
- Contract length, notice, salary basis and relocation between sites.

Use the person specification as the assessment map

Shortlisting normally assesses evidence against essential and desirable criteria. Separate eligibility requirements from qualities that can be developed after appointment. If an essential licence, qualification or experience is absent by the required date, persuasive prose will not replace it. If terminology differs from your overseas system, explain the equivalent function and evidence rather than merely copying the criterion.

Contact the named person when a material point is unclear. Ask a focused question after reading the documents, not one answered in the advert. A brief pre-application conversation can clarify whether your experience fits, but it is not an informal promise of shortlisting or appointment.

- Mark each criterion: met, partly met, not met or unclear.
- Attach one or two verifiable examples to each criterion.
- Identify missing evidence before spending time on the full form.

- Do not claim an equivalence that only a regulator or formal process can determine.

Assess whether the post is safe and developmental

A vacancy can be attractive yet unsafe for a doctor new to the NHS if the rota assumes local system knowledge, senior cover is unclear or induction is only corporate. Look for a planned departmental induction, initial scope review, named clinical and educational support, access to systems before clinical work and a process for reviewing progress. Service pressure is not a reason to omit these safeguards.

Development should be specific. 'Excellent training opportunities' is weaker than a named clinic, protected session, study leave process, supervisor and review timetable. For fixed-term posts, ask what evidence doctors usually gain and what happens near the end. Avoid assuming that good performance will automatically convert a local contract or secure a training number.

- Who decides readiness for the rota and how is it documented?
- What does the first two weeks look like?
- How much time is protected for development, appraisal or portfolio work?
- What happens if the doctor needs more support?
- What evidence can be obtained by the end of the post?

Compare offers before accepting

Do not compare only basic salary. Examine additional-hours arrangements, nights and weekends, pension status, leave, study support, travel between sites, contract duration, visa sponsorship and probable household costs. A higher headline salary can be offset by unsafe frequency, expensive travel or loss of developmental opportunity.

Request the written conditional offer and proposed contract, then identify conditions that remain outstanding. Keep material assurances in writing. If you need immigration sponsorship, check the certificate process and timing before resigning or travelling. Declining an unsuitable role can be difficult after months of applications, but sunk cost does not make a poor post safer.

- Scope and support.
- Total working pattern and remuneration.
- Professional development and appraisal.
- Location and household feasibility.
- Contract and immigration security.
- Exit options and notice requirements.

Common mistake

Avoid this

Do not rely on a verbal promise of supervision, protected development or future progression. Ask for material terms and arrangements in writing.

Pause and reflect

Which fact about your next post would most affect patient safety if it remained unclear until your first shift?

Takeaways

- Search using several legitimate titles across the correct national portals.
- Judge duties, rota and support rather than trusting a local title.
- A written comparison protects you from accepting an unsuitable post under time pressure.

Knowledge check

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

1. A recruiter sends a vacancy and requests an upfront processing fee. What should you do first?

- A. Verify the employer and vacancy through official channels and do not send money or identity documents informally.
- B. Ask other applicants to share the fee.
- C. Send a passport copy only.
- D. Pay quickly to reserve it.

2. What does 'senior clinical fellow' reliably tell you?

- A. It is always a training post.
- B. Very little without the duties, person specification, rota and contract.
- C. It is nationally equivalent to Specialist grade.
- D. It guarantees consultant-level autonomy.

3. You partly meet an essential criterion. What is the best response?

- A. State the relevant evidence accurately and clarify whether the remaining element must be present by appointment.
- B. Ignore it.
- C. Claim that you fully meet it.
- D. Replace it with an unrelated achievement.

4. Which promise is strongest evidence of development?

- A. Support as required.
- B. A named supervisor, protected clinic, study process and scheduled review.
- C. Excellent opportunities.
- D. A friendly department.

5. Which comparison is most complete?

- A. Length of advert.
- B. Job title and city.
- C. Basic salary only.
- D. Scope, rota, support, total remuneration, contract, sponsorship, development and household feasibility.

6. A verbal assurance materially affects whether you accept. What should you do?

- A. Assume it forms part of the contract.
- B. Ask for the arrangement to be confirmed in writing before relying on it.
- C. Wait until the first appraisal.
- D. Record the conversation secretly.

Answers and explanations

1. A — Verify the employer and vacancy through official channels and do not send money or identity documents informally.

Verification protects against recruitment fraud and inappropriate data handling.

Use the official portal and employer contact details to verify the vacancy.

2. B — Very little without the duties, person specification, rota and contract.

Local titles are not consistent national grades.

Practise decoding one advert by function rather than title.

3. A — State the relevant evidence accurately and clarify whether the remaining element must be present by appointment.

Honesty plus targeted clarification is stronger than overclaiming.

Mark every criterion met, partial, absent or unclear before applying.

4. B — A named supervisor, protected clinic, study process and scheduled review.

Specific structures are more reliable than promotional language.

Ask the employer to describe the actual development timetable.

5. D — Scope, rota, support, total remuneration, contract, sponsorship, development and household feasibility.

Employment and safety depend on the whole offer.

Use the job-offer comparison in the workbook.

6. B — Ask for the arrangement to be confirmed in writing before relying on it.

Written clarification reduces misunderstanding and supports an informed decision.

List every material assurance and request written confirmation.

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 Jobs

UK / nation-specific · <https://www.jobs.nhs.uk/candidate/search>

Create an NHS Jobs account

UK / nation-specific · <https://www.jobs.nhs.uk/candidate/auth/register/>

Trac jobs

UK / nation-specific · <https://apps.trac.jobs/>

NHS Scotland recruitment

UK / nation-specific · <https://apply.jobs.scot.nhs.uk/Home/Index>

HSC Northern Ireland medical jobs

UK / nation-specific · <https://jobs.hscni.net/Search?SearchBandID=0&SearchCatID=63&SearchOrgID=0>

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