

GMC registration, PLAB and English tests

Understand what PLAB proves, which alternatives may apply and what the licence does not prove.

- ✓ 18 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

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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

PLAB has two parts and is designed to test knowledge and skills for UK practice. A doctor may instead qualify through another GMC route, but every applicant must use the route and evidence that apply to their own circumstances.

Three next actions

- Read the GMC's current English evidence guide before booking IELTS or OET.
- Check the relevant full-registration route, including internship and primary-source verification requirements.
- Keep every name, date and period of activity consistent across your documents and applications.

Learning objectives

- Understand how English evidence, PLAB or an alternative route fits within the wider registration decision.
- Prepare identity, qualification, internship, activity and good-standing evidence consistently.
- Distinguish registration, a licence to practise and entry on the Specialist Register.

Registration, licence and specialist status are different

The medical register records who is registered with the GMC. A licence to practise is normally required for NHS clinical work and brings continuing duties such as appraisal, revalidation and compliance with professional standards. Entry on the Specialist Register is a separate status relevant to substantive consultant appointments in most circumstances. Full registration with a licence does not automatically place a doctor on the Specialist Register.

Read the exact outcome for which you are applying. Doctors sometimes describe themselves as 'GMC registered' when an application is incomplete, a licence has been relinquished or registration does not include specialist status. Employers will verify the live register and any conditions. Use precise language in applications and professional profiles.

- Provisional registration has a limited purpose, principally linked to approved Foundation Year 1 training.
- Full registration and a licence allow medical practice subject to scope, competence and employment arrangements.
- Specialist or GP registration requires a separate route and evidence.
- A licence does not certify competence for every procedure, rota tier or specialty role.

English evidence: meet the current test, not an assumed one

The GMC accepts defined forms of evidence that a doctor can communicate safely in English. IELTS and the medicine version of OET are common routes, but the required scores, test-combination rules and validity periods must be checked on the current GMC page. In limited circumstances, recent medical education or employer evidence may be considered. The fact that English was used at work or university does not automatically satisfy every evidential requirement.

Visa English requirements and GMC English requirements are separate. Evidence accepted by one decision-maker may not be accepted by the other. Plan the dates carefully: a test can be valid when booked but outside the permitted period when a later application is submitted. Keep the full result and candidate details, not only a cropped screenshot.

- Use the correct test type and verify scores directly against current GMC rules.
- Record the test date, validity deadline and intended application date.
- Practise clinical communication as well as examination technique.
- Never alter, combine or selectively present results outside the permitted rules.

PLAB tests a defined threshold; registration needs more

PLAB 1 tests applied knowledge and PLAB 2 assesses clinical and professional skills through practical stations. Passing both parts is significant, but the GMC still considers the complete application, including qualification, internship, identity, English, good standing, activity and declarations. Booking rules, attempt limits, sequence and validity can change, so use the live PLAB pages for operational detail.

Prepare for UK practice rather than memorising isolated answers. Ethical reasoning, communication, consent, safeguarding, prescribing and escalation are as important as reaching a diagnosis. Commercial courses are not regulators. Check claims carefully, protect personal data and do not confuse a course certificate with evidence accepted by the GMC.

- Understand the current PLAB blueprint and booking rules.
- Use authoritative clinical and professional sources.
- Practise explaining risk, uncertainty and safety-netting aloud.
- Plan travel and visa arrangements without assuming a first-attempt pass.

Build the application evidence before pressing submit

Primary medical qualification and internship evidence must meet the route's current requirements. Primary-source verification may be required through the designated service. Certificates of good standing may need to come from every regulator with which you have been registered during the relevant period. These documents are time-sensitive and may depend on institutions that respond slowly.

Create a complete recent activity history and be ready to explain gaps. Declare fitness-to-practise, health or conduct matters honestly in response to the actual questions. A declaration does not automatically mean refusal; concealment or an inaccurate answer can create a more serious problem. If a question is unclear or the issue is significant, obtain appropriate individual advice before submission.

- Identity documents and consistent name evidence.
- Primary qualification and acceptable internship evidence.
- Verification and translations where required.
- Good-standing certificates and complete registration history.
- Accurate activity chronology and supporting employer evidence.
- Truthful declarations supported by relevant documents.

After submission: respond accurately and preserve the record

The GMC may request further documents, clarification or an identity check. Read each request literally, note the deadline and provide the specified evidence. If an institution must send evidence directly, follow that instruction. Avoid sending large quantities of unrelated material because it can obscure the point being assessed.

Keep the submitted form, uploads, correspondence and decision. Once licensed, connect to the correct designated body or suitable person through employment arrangements, participate in appraisal and keep professional details current. Registration is not a one-time administrative event; maintaining the licence depends on continuing professional practice and honest engagement with regulatory systems.

- Save a PDF or copy of the submitted application.
- Keep a dated correspondence log.
- Check the live register after the decision.
- Confirm designated-body and appraisal arrangements with the employer.

Common mistake

Avoid this

Do not describe PLAB as proof that every doctor is ready for any job at a particular grade. It is a regulatory gateway, not a job-specific appointment decision.

Pause and reflect

If the GMC asked you today to prove every period of recent activity and registration, which item would be hardest to obtain?

Takeaways

- Use the route-specific GMC guide and current evidence rules.
- Passing PLAB is part of a registration route, not proof of readiness for every NHS job.
- Precise, consistent and honest evidence is more valuable than a large disorganised upload.

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. Full registration with a licence means you are automatically on the Specialist Register. Is this correct?

- A. No, but only outside England.
- B. No. Specialist registration is a separate status and application route.
- C. Yes, for all experienced doctors.
- D. Yes, after five years' work.

2. Your English test met visa requirements. What should you assume about GMC acceptance?

- A. Nothing; check the GMC's separate current evidence rules.
- B. It is accepted if the employer agrees.
- C. It must be accepted.
- D. It remains valid indefinitely.

3. What does passing both PLAB parts prove by itself?

- A. That specialist registration follows.
- B. That every registration requirement is met.
- C. That you have met the PLAB knowledge-and-skills component, subject to the rest of the application.
- D. That you can work unsupervised in any post.

4. A declaration question may apply to an old matter. What is the safest approach?

- A. Ask a friend what they declared.
- B. Omit it because it is old.
- C. Answer the exact question honestly and obtain advice if significance is uncertain.
- D. Submit first and explain only if asked.

5. The GMC asks for a document sent directly by your university. What should you upload?

- A. A personal scan instead.
- B. Nothing until the deadline passes.
- C. An unrelated certificate.
- D. Follow the direct-source instruction and track the university's response.

6. Which action best supports licence maintenance after employment starts?

- A. Wait for the GMC to request CPD.
- B. Confirm designated-body, appraisal and revalidation arrangements and keep evidence current.
- C. Use only examination certificates.
- D. Rely on the licence being permanent.

Answers and explanations

1. B — No. Specialist registration is a separate status and application route.

Full registration, a licence and specialist registration are distinct.

Review the three statuses and check how each appears on the medical register.

2. A — Nothing; check the GMC's separate current evidence rules.

Different decision-makers apply different criteria and validity rules.

Compare the live GMC and visa requirements and record both.

3. C — That you have met the PLAB knowledge-and-skills component, subject to the rest of the application.

The complete registration decision considers additional identity, qualification, experience and conduct evidence.

List every non-PLAB part of your intended application route.

4. C — Answer the exact question honestly and obtain advice if significance is uncertain.

Accurate disclosure against the actual wording protects regulatory integrity.

Re-read the declaration guidance and gather the relevant records before submitting.

5. D — Follow the direct-source instruction and track the university's response.

Source requirements are part of evidential assurance and cannot necessarily be replaced by a personal copy.

Create a contact and deadline log for third-party evidence.

6. B — Confirm designated-body, appraisal and revalidation arrangements and keep evidence current.

A licence carries continuing professional and revalidation responsibilities.

Ask the employer to confirm your responsible officer and appraisal system.

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.

GMC: full registration for international graduates

UK / nation-specific · <https://www.gmc-uk.org/registration-and-licensing/join-our-registers/registration-applications/application-guides/full-registration-for-international-medical-graduates>

GMC: evidence of English

UK / nation-specific · <https://www.gmc-uk.org/registration-and-licensing/join-our-registers/before-you-apply-guide-for-doctors/evidence-of-your-knowledge-of-english>

GMC: acceptable postgraduate qualifications

UK / nation-specific · <https://www.gmc-uk.org/registration-and-licensing/join-our-registers/before-you-apply-guide-for-doctors/acceptable-postgraduate-qualifications>

GMC: registration with sponsorship

UK / nation-specific · <https://www.gmc-uk.org/registration-and-licensing/join-our-registers/registration-applications/application-guides/full-registration-for-doctors-with-sponsorship>

GMC: primary-source verification

UK / nation-specific · <https://www.gmc-uk.org/registration-and-licensing/join-our-registers/before-you-apply-guide-for-doctors/primary-source-verification-for-international-medical-graduates>

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