

Planning to work in the UK

Start with the route, the evidence and the likely cost before booking examinations or making a move.

- ✓ 16 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

Do not treat registration, immigration and employment as one process. They are separate decisions made by different organisations. Map all three before spending money or leaving a current post.

Three next actions

- Use the GMC application finder and confirm that your primary medical qualification is acceptable.
- Identify the evidence of English, knowledge and skills that fits your circumstances.
- Build a realistic budget and timeline that includes registration, travel, visa, accommodation and time before the first salary.

Learning objectives

- Separate professional registration, immigration permission and employment into three coordinated workstreams.
- Compare the principal routes into UK medical practice without assuming that PLAB is the only route.
- Build a realistic evidence, cost and timing plan before making irreversible commitments.

Three gateways that must all open

Working as a doctor in the UK depends on three separate decisions. The GMC decides whether you may hold the appropriate registration and licence. An employer decides whether your evidence fits a specific job and whether you can undertake its duties safely. UK Visas and Immigration decides whether you may enter or remain in the country for that work. Success in one process does not compel either of the others to accept you.

Treat the three decisions as connected workstreams. A doctor can hold GMC registration but have no suitable job; have a job offer whose sponsorship or start date is uncertain; or hold immigration permission while still awaiting employer checks. Write down the owner, evidence, deadline and dependency for every step. This prevents a single delayed document from quietly undermining the whole plan.

- Professional gateway: correct GMC application route, acceptable qualification, knowledge and skills evidence, English evidence, identity and good standing.
- Employment gateway: suitable vacancy, person specification, references, employment checks, agreed scope, induction and supervision.
- Immigration gateway: eligible role, approved sponsor, certificate of sponsorship, application, dependants and continuing status.
- Personal gateway: money, housing, family, health and an exit plan if the timetable changes.

Choose the registration route before booking a timetable

PLAB is a common route for international medical graduates, but it is not a universal starting point. Depending on current GMC rules and an applicant's circumstances, another route may be available through an acceptable postgraduate qualification, an approved sponsorship scheme or an application for specialist or GP registration. These routes have different purposes and evidence standards. A postgraduate qualification that is respected in one country is not automatically on the GMC's current acceptable list.

Use the GMC registration application finder and read the guide generated for your circumstances. Do not build a plan from screenshots, social-media posts or another doctor's historic experience. Check whether your primary medical qualification is acceptable, whether primary-source verification is required, what internship evidence is needed and how recent English or good-standing evidence must be when submitted.

- Record the exact route name and save the live GMC link.
- List every required document and who must issue or verify it.
- Mark documents that expire or take months to obtain.
- Do not resign, travel or pay for a course merely because another applicant used it.

Test the employment reality

Registration is not a promise of employment. The number and type of vacancies vary by specialty, geography and time of year. Local titles such as clinical fellow or trust doctor can describe very different levels of responsibility. Before committing money, examine live adverts and person specifications for several weeks. Note the experience requested, rota level, locations, sponsorship statement and whether the post offers structured induction and supervision.

Be realistic about the first safe NHS role. Starting below a previous overseas title can provide time to learn local systems, but a post should not be so junior that it wastes established capability or leaves progression undefined. The safer question is not simply 'What title can I obtain?' but 'What scope can I perform safely

on day one, and what support will allow that scope to grow?'

- Compare at least five current adverts rather than relying on one attractive vacancy.
- Save the job description and person specification because web listings disappear.
- Look for named supervision, development time, appraisal and a clear rota tier.
- Check whether sponsorship is explicit and whether the proposed salary and occupation meet current rules.

Build a costed timeline with decision points

Separate professional entry costs from immigration, travel, arrival and continuing household costs. Include examinations, verification, registration, certificates, travel to test centres, visa applications, temporary accommodation, deposits, transport and the period before the first reliable salary. Costs and processing times change, so the workbook asks you to insert current figures from the official source and the date checked rather than publishing a figure that may quickly become false.

Add decision points instead of assuming the most optimistic sequence. Decide what you will do if an examination is delayed, a document is rejected, a job start moves or a dependant cannot travel at the same time. A reserve and a reversible plan reduce pressure to accept an unsuitable post simply because substantial money has already been spent.

- Best-case, expected and delayed dates for every critical step.
- Refundability and expiry date of each payment or document.
- Minimum household reserve before travel.
- A clear point at which you will pause, re-check the route or seek individual advice.

Create one controlled evidence record

Applications often fail through inconsistency rather than lack of experience. Names, dates, employer titles and periods of activity must agree across passports, qualifications, certificates, GMC forms, CVs and visa applications. Create a master chronology covering education, employment, unemployment, leave and other activity. Explain genuine gaps accurately; never invent activity to make a timeline appear continuous.

Store clear scans and the original files securely. Use descriptive filenames, note who issued each document and keep certified translations where needed. Avoid sending passports, certificates or patient information through informal groups. If a regulator or employer asks for information directly from an institution, follow that route rather than uploading a personal copy as a substitute.

- Master identity and activity chronology.
- Document inventory with issue, expiry and verification dates.
- Contact log for universities, regulators and employers.
- Secure backup that can be accessed during travel.

Common mistake

Avoid this

Passing an examination or receiving registration does not guarantee an NHS job. Plan for the registration-to-employment gap rather than treating it as a surprise.

Pause and reflect

Which single dependency could delay your whole plan, and what evidence or alternative route can you prepare now?

Takeaways

- Registration, employment and immigration are separate decisions that must be coordinated.
- Choose your route from current official guidance, not another applicant's history.
- A costed, reversible plan protects both professional judgement and household stability.

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. You have passed PLAB 2. What can you safely conclude?

- A. An NHS job is guaranteed.
- B. You have completed one important part of a possible GMC registration route, but registration, employment and immigration remain separate.
- C. You may work at any seniority.
- D. Your visa will be approved.

2. What is the best first step when deciding between PLAB and another route?

- A. Assume a postgraduate qualification is accepted.
- B. Book both routes.
- C. Ask a social-media group which is fastest.
- D. Use the GMC application finder and read the route-specific evidence guide.

3. Which job-market check is most informative before spending heavily?

- A. A recruiter saying jobs are plentiful.
- B. One vacancy shared by a friend.
- C. A sample of current adverts and person specifications in your specialty and likely grade.
- D. The number of hospitals in the UK.

4. Why should your plan include delayed scenarios?

- A. Because delays may affect money, document validity, family arrangements and job choice.
- B. To make the plan pessimistic.
- C. To avoid applying.
- D. Because official times are always wrong.

5. Two documents show different employment dates. What should you do?

- A. Check the source, correct any error and provide an accurate explanation where needed.
- B. Leave the difference unexplained.
- C. Create a third date between them.
- D. Use whichever date helps the application.

6. Which statement best describes a safe first NHS role?

- A. It should be the first offer received.
- B. It should have duties you can perform safely, with support and a credible route to development.
- C. It must match your previous title exactly.
- D. It should avoid all out-of-hours work.

Answers and explanations

1. B — You have completed one important part of a possible GMC registration route, but registration, employment and immigration remain separate.

Passing PLAB 2 does not itself grant registration, employment or immigration permission and does not define a safe job scope.

Revisit the three gateways and write a separate checklist for each.

2. D — Use the GMC application finder and read the route-specific evidence guide.

The GMC's current route finder is designed to direct applicants according to their individual qualification and circumstances.

Use the live GMC finder and record the exact application route it identifies.

3. C — A sample of current adverts and person specifications in your specialty and likely grade.

A current sample reveals actual requirements, titles, locations, sponsorship statements and support arrangements.

Review several live adverts and build a comparison table.

4. A — Because delays may affect money, document validity, family arrangements and job choice.

Contingency planning protects decision quality when one dependent step moves.

Add expected and delayed dates plus a response for each critical dependency.

5. A — Check the source, correct any error and provide an accurate explanation where needed.

Consistency must come from accurate source checking, not cosmetic alignment.

Reconcile every period against primary records and keep a master chronology.

6. B — It should have duties you can perform safely, with support and a credible route to development.

Scope, support and development matter more than title alone.

Define your safe starting scope and the support required to expand it.

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: [before you apply](#)

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

GMC: [PLAB overview](#)

UK / nation-specific · <https://www.gmc-uk.org/registration-and-licensing/join-our-registers/plab>

GMC: [application guide finder](#)

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

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