



Head Medical



# **Doctors' Guide to Working and Living in the United Kingdom**



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## **Working in the UK**

- Healthcare System
- Registration
- Language Requirements



## **Living in the UK**

- Overview
- Cost of Living
- Salary
- Housing
- Education
- Moving Pets
- Useful Links





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# Working in the UK

## Healthcare System

The UK has a universal healthcare system called the National Health Service, which is funded in the most part (98.8%) through taxes and National Insurance contributions.

Healthcare in England is the responsibility of the central UK government, whereas in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland it is the responsibility of the respective devolved governments. Each country's NHS provides a comprehensive range of services, including prenatal care, emergency care, palliative care and general practice. The majority of these services are free at point of use for UK residents, and cover primary, secondary, and tertiary levels of care. The NHS is one of the UK's largest employers with over 1.6 million members of staff countrywide, and currently operates on an annual budget of just under £140 billion.

The latest report from the US-based Commonwealth Fund, after taking into account the views of patients, doctors, and the World Health Organisation, ranked the NHS as the best healthcare system in the world. According to the report, this ranking was based on the "effective, safe, coordinated, and patient-centered" healthcare available throughout the UK.

While the NHS dominates the provision of healthcare in the UK, there is also a considerable private healthcare sector, with approximately 12% of the population having some form of private medical insurance. Private insurance often offers faster access to care (particularly with regard to elective hospital procedures) but most policies exclude mental health, maternity services, emergency care, and general practice.





## Registration

All international medical graduates (IMGs) looking to work in the UK must be registered with a licence to practice. This licence is issued by the General Medical Council (GMC) and is required whether doctors are working in the NHS or the private sector, on either a permanent or locum basis. It applies to all levels of medical registration – provisional, full, and also the Specialist / GP Registers.

**The requirements and time taken for registration depends on several factors, including:**

- Your nationality
- The country in which you gained your primary medical qualification
- If you are a GP or Consultant
- Whether you have completed a period of post-graduate training

**To obtain registration with a licence to practise you will need to provide evidence of the following:**

- A primary medical qualification approved by the GMC
- IELTS certificate meeting minimum scores (see Language Requirements)
- Details of registration or licensing for the last 5 years
- Certificates of good standing for the last 5 years
- A pass in the PLAB test (see Language Requirements)
- Eligibility for entry onto the Specialist or GP Register
- Having the experience necessary to practise as a fully registered medical practitioner in the UK

For more information on the steps above, see the GMC's website for further details – **[www.gmc-uk.org](http://www.gmc-uk.org)**







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If you want to work as a GP in the UK, but have no prior UK-based work experience, you can undertake an Enhanced Induction Programme once you have completed your GMC registration. These programmes provide an opportunity for IMGs to become inducted into UK general practice in preparation for a career in the UK healthcare system.

This programme supports the transition of GPs who have qualified outside the UK and have no previous NHS experience. You will be allocated a practice-based supervisor who will provide feedback to assist your integration as an independent practitioner. During this period of training you will be paid a bursary by the NHS, and may also be eligible for one year's free membership of the Royal College of General Practitioners (RCGP).

It is possible to secure a permanent position before completing this training, which you can begin immediately once training is complete. The Enhanced Induction Programme is tailored specifically to the doctor following an individual learning needs assessment, and takes between 3–9 months to complete.

It is worth noting that eligibility for induction programmes does not guarantee acceptance onto them, which are dependent on government funding and availability of willing practices for placements.

To find out more about Enhanced Induction Programmes, visit the following NHS websites:

**[www.england.nhs.uk](http://www.england.nhs.uk)**

**[www.nes.scot.nhs.uk](http://www.nes.scot.nhs.uk)**



## Language Requirements

All IMGs wishing to practise medicine in the UK must be able to demonstrate the necessary level of English language ability required to effectively and safely communicate with patients and colleagues. The easiest way to do this is to take the academic version of the IELTS test:

### International English Language Testing System (IELTS)

The minimum IELTS scores the GMC accepts as evidence of knowledge of English for the purposes of registration are:

- A score of at least 7.0 in each of the four areas tested – Speaking, Listening, Reading, Writing
- An overall score of at least 7.5

### Professional and Linguistic Assessments Board (PLAB)

The PLAB test provides the main route for IMGs to show they have the necessary skills and knowledge to practise medicine in the UK. You will need to pass the PLAB test before you can apply for registration with the GMC if you meet either of the following criteria:

*You are a national of a country outside the UK, European Economic Area (EEA) or Switzerland who graduated from a medical school outside the UK*

**OR**

*You are a UK national who graduated from a medical school outside the UK, European Economic Area (EEA) or Switzerland*

From September 2017, candidates must pass both the written and practical parts of the test within a maximum of four attempts. Any application for registration and a licence to practise must be approved within two years of passing Part 2 of the test.





# Living in the UK

## Overview

The UK is a state made up of four separate countries: England, Wales, Scotland, and Northern Ireland, each having their own unique history and atmosphere (alongside significant areas of overlap). Steeped in history, the UK is known as the home of parliamentary democracy and the Industrial Revolution. The Queen is our head of state and the prime minister acts as the head of the UK government. More than 62 million people call the UK home.

The UK's landscape is stunningly diverse, ranging from the spectacular mountainscapes of northern Scotland to the lowland fens of southern England. In between there are rolling hills, moorland, farmland, rural villages, a lot of coast, and bustling cosmopolitan cities such as London, Edinburgh, Glasgow, Cardiff, and Belfast.

Historically, the UK's cultural contributions have been significant. We have a rich literary history, including Shakespeare, Wordsworth, Dickens, Tolkien, and Rowling. Musically we can boast the likes of the Rolling Stones, the Beatles, Oasis, and Radiohead. Artists as diverse as Turner, Hirst, Emin, and Banksy are admired around the world.

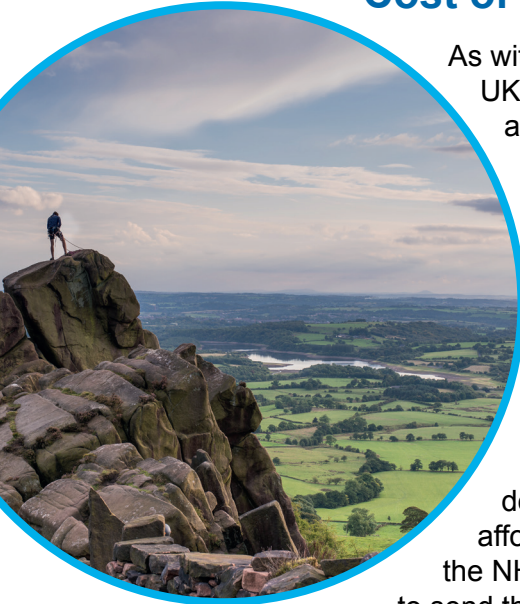
Contrary to popular opinion, it actually doesn't rain everyday! In general we have warm summers and cool winters. The official term for the UK's climate is 'temperate maritime' – meaning it is mild with temperatures falling not much lower than 0°C in winter and reaching around a 32°C high during summer. July and August are usually the warmest months, with average temperatures dropping the further north you travel.

The Head Medical office is based in Scotland, and we find that many doctors moving to the UK often decide to live here because it offers such incredible diversity in a relatively small area – everything from big cities, mountains, beaches and fantastic countryside are all quickly and easily accessible.





## Cost of Living



As with most locations, the cost of living in the UK depends both upon your lifestyle choices and where you are based. As can be expected, living in major cities like London or Edinburgh works out more expensive than living in the surrounding rural areas. With an excellent network of public transport available countrywide, commuting from rural to urban areas for work is a more than viable option, and may help reduce overall expenditure.

Quality of life in the UK is high, and doctors with temporary residency will be afforded access to free healthcare through the NHS, and those with children will be entitled to send them to state schools free of charge.

Things you will need to take into consideration when budgeting include accommodation and housing, transport, entertainment, and utilities.

Utilities will include gas, electricity, council tax, mobile phones, broadband internet, and any entertainment packages you may choose to buy. There is healthy competition between utility service providers in the UK, and it is worth shopping around in order to find the best value deals.

## Salaries

Payment systems in the UK are different for hospital doctors and GPs. While a hospital doctor working for the NHS will be paid along a 'payment scale', a GP's salary will be based on length of contract in addition to their previous experience.





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**Hospital Doctors** – The NHS payment structure is complex. It has payment scales that are based on the number of years experience a doctor has, and these determine basic salaries. If you are new to the UK, the lead consultant in your department will make the decision as to which scale you'll be on (it is worth noting that occasionally the department won't be able to take into account all of your overseas experience when determining an initial salary).

Hospitals work on a 17-week rota where each doctor will average 48 hours per week. This may mean, for example, that one week you work 54 hours, and the next week you work 42.

NHS hospitals will often have single accommodation available for doctors. This will be basic, but is ideal for when you first come to the UK as you do not need to pay a deposit on private accommodation straight away, or wait for a bank account or references to clear. Unfortunately, there is usually very little family accommodation available through the hospital. If you have travelled with your family, you would need to rent locally.

**General Practitioners** – Salaries for GPs vary according to the length of contract, previous experience and number of hours worked. For the majority of GPs salaries will start at around £70,000 and rise to £90,000+ over time.

Salaries are based on a working week of 40 hours, split into 10 sessions. Each session is 4 hours long, and usually involves 3 hours seeing patients at 10 minute intervals and 1 hour spent on administration.

Some GP job opportunities are more family-friendly, offering a greater scope of flexibility with regard to later starts, earlier finishes, and school holidays.





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## Other benefits

The NHS has an excellent pension scheme which is significantly more beneficial than any found in the private sector. The scheme works by you choosing to put part of your salary (currently 6%) into a pension scheme, and the NHS contributes a further amount (currently 14%). The amount paid is based on your basic salary, not the total salary package amount.

If you come to the UK from the EU with your family, you will most likely be eligible for child benefit. This is worth about £1,040 per year for the first child, and £680 for a second.

If you are EU nationals, you will automatically be entitled to NHS healthcare. You will need to register with a local GP and it is worth doing this as soon as possible after you arrive.

## Housing

The quality and cost of housing in the UK varies widely. Finding a place to rent is a fairly straightforward process, but you should be prepared to move quickly once you find accommodation to your liking, as the competition for good rental properties can be strong.



There are a number of options when it comes to finding somewhere to rent, including local newspaper listings, specialist property websites, and real estate agents. Lease agreements are generally signed on a six-month or one-year basis, with the option to renew should you desire. You may be required to provide up to six weeks' rent as a deposit, and letters of reference from a previous employer / landlords to secure a rental agreement. Tenants will usually be responsible for organising their own utility services.





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Those interested in buying property should engage the services of a licensed estate agent, who will help find suitable properties by providing free valuation and surveying services. Mortgages can be applied for through any bank or building society provided you are able to supply appropriate documentation, such as evidence of salary and reference letters.

## Education

The education system in the UK is divided into four sections: primary (ages 5-11), secondary (ages 11-16), further, and higher education. Primary and secondary education is legally required for children aged between 5 and 16 years of age. Parents can choose between public and private schooling, with each option having its own advantages and disadvantages.

The education system is split into 'key stages' as follows:

**Key Stage 1:** 5 to 7 years old

**Key Stage 2:** 7 to 11 years old

**Key Stage 3:** 11 to 14 years old

**Key Stage 4:** 14 to 16 years old

Students are required to take exams at the end of each stage. Following the completion of their GCSEs (General Certificate of Secondary Education) at the end of Key Stage 4, students have the choice of going onto further education (e.g. A-Levels, the International Baccalaureate, apprenticeships), higher education (university), or finishing school and seeking employment.

The Scottish education system differs slightly to the other countries in the UK, but timescales, learning expectations and examination schedules are similar.



## Moving Pets

You can travel to the UK with your pet cat or dog if it:

- has been microchipped
- has a pet passport or third-country official veterinary certificate
- has been vaccinated against rabies

It is usually necessary for dogs to have been treated for tapeworm.

Your pet may be refused entry or quarantined for up to 4 months if the criteria listed above are not met. You will be responsible for any fees or charges that arise from these measures being undertaken.

Before you travel, it is worth checking that the company you're travelling with will accept your pet (and how many they'll accept if you have more than one), and whether they need proof that your pet is fit and healthy to travel.

The rules are different if you're planning on bringing animals other than cats and dogs, so it is worth having a look at the UK Government website for more information – **[www.gov.uk](http://www.gov.uk)**

## Useful Links

### **UK Government**

[www.gov.uk](http://www.gov.uk)

### **General Medical Council**

[www.gmc-uk.org](http://www.gmc-uk.org)

### **International English Language Testing System (IELTS)**

[www.ielts.org](http://www.ielts.org)

### **Head Medical UK**

[www.headmedical.com/uk](http://www.headmedical.com/uk)

To find out more about Working and Living in the United Kingdom, contact our UK Team:

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We look forward to hearing from you!