



Chartered Society  
of Physiotherapy

# International Recruitment

**A getting started guide for  
Physiotherapy managers**



# Contents

<b>A getting started guide for Physiotherapy managers .....</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>International Recruitment – Getting Started .....</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Background Understanding.....</b>	<b>3</b>
HCPC Process .....	3
Visa Requirements.....	4
Ethical Recruitment Practices .....	5
National Schemes.....	5
<b>Service Considerations .....</b>	<b>6</b>
Application and Shortlisting Process .....	6
Interviews .....	8
Expectations of Knowledge, Skills and Competence.....	8
Driving .....	10
<b>Useful Links and Docs.....</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>Check List.....</b>	<b>11</b>



# International Recruitment – Getting Started

In recent years we have seen a significant increase in the number of internationally trained physiotherapists coming to work in the UK. Last year alone saw an additional 5000 added to the HCPC register. While many areas of the UK are struggling to recruit, and vacancies go unfilled, for the physiotherapy profession, international recruitment has never been more necessary.

International recruitment does however bring with it many challenges. Often physiotherapists from overseas have little knowledge or experience of working within the UK health system. They may not qualify with the same knowledge and skills as UK graduates and are said to be 'comparable' rather than equivalent to UK trained graduates. They must learn to adapt and integrate into a new culture and the support and finance to achieve this varies considerably across the country.

As the professional body for all physiotherapists in the UK it is imperative we fully understand the pertinent issues facing services, international recruits (IR) and existing staff aiming to support. In doing so we will then be able to address the issues and ensure that our workforce and profession thrive.

**This guide has been created to support physiotherapy managers involved in the recruitment process. It sets out background information and service considerations to be made before vacancies are advertised to ensure you are prepared for applications from internationally educated physiotherapists (IEP). In this guide we use the term IR as the guide is about recruitment.**

## Background Understanding

### ▶ HCPC Process

The HCPC assess international applications in terms of 'comparability' of an applicant's qualifications, knowledge, skills and experience. They must meet the HCPC standards of proficiency and other requirements to join the register.

Each application is considered on an individual basis. Applications are assigned to two assessors who evaluate and decide whether to admit to the register based on the evidence submitted.

HCPC assessors evaluate the physiotherapy course completed, ensuring it meets the standards set for physiotherapy in the UK. This involves assessing the level, content, and duration of the program. Assessors also use a combination of evidence provided by the applicant, such as certificates, work experience documentation, and any other



relevant information, to determine if the applicant meets the standards required for registration in the UK.

Applicant must also demonstrate their ability to communicate effectively in English language. HCPC set the requirements for Physiotherapists at International English Language Testing System (IELTS) level 7.0.

Following the assessment of the application, the applicant will be either allowed to join the register, asked for further information, invited to take a test of competence, or refused admission. A test of competence may be offered where some standards of proficiency are outstanding. The test is normally carried out virtually and results in a pass or fail.

If you want to explore international registration in more detail, please visit the [HCPC webpages](#).

## ▶ **Visa Requirements**

Anyone who is not a British citizen will need a visa from the [UK Visas and Immigration Department \(UKVI\)](#) before they can work in the UK. There are a number of different visas a Physiotherapist may be eligible for. A Health and Social Care worker visa is the most common visa for a Physiotherapist coming to work in the NHS or for an NHS provider.

When recruiting internationally, you must adhere to UK immigration rules and as an employer obtain the necessary sponsorship licence from the UKVI to sponsor visas and comply with sponsorship eligibility criteria and requirements.

For the latest guidance on the UK's immigration rules, check the [Visas and Immigration page](#) of the UK Government website.

Having a blanket policy which excludes individuals who require sponsorship will disadvantage non-UK candidates on the grounds of their nationality or citizenship, which could also amount to direct race discrimination. At the time of writing this guide in 2024, in the UK NHS there is no specific requirement to employ a UK citizen before employing an international candidate who directly applies for the vacancy. NHS employers must comply with UK employment law, including non-discrimination legislation, when recruiting staff. It is important you understand your responsibilities as an employer and avoid discrimination. NHS Employers [provides guidance for employers](#).



## ► Ethical Recruitment Practices

In some cases, NHS trusts/health board may have specific workforce planning needs that require them to actively recruit internationally to fill certain roles, particularly in areas facing workforce shortages. There are examples of this in physiotherapy where UK advertising has not been successful. Active recruitment involves advertising UK employment opportunities in a targeted country, often through an agency. Any organisation actively recruiting internationally must follow their government's 'code of practice for international recruitment'.

England and Wales: [Code of practice for international recruitment of health and social care personnel in England](#).

### [Ethical and Sustainable recruitment of International AHPs](#)

Scotland: [International recruitment of health and social care personnel: code of practice](#)

Northern Ireland: [Northern Ireland Code of Practice for the International Recruitment of Health and Social Care Personnel](#)

Best practice benchmarks for international recruitment includes:

- The UK government [red list](#), where active recruitment from countries rated red is not permitted.
- That international recruitment services should not charge recruits gaining employment in the UK.
- That all IR will have an appropriate level of English required by their regulator ([HCPC English language requirements](#)).
- That applicants will have proper pre-employment checks, including convictions or cautions in line with UK law.
- That applicants will have a valid visa before entering the UK.
- That all IR have access to appropriate support and induction.

## ► National Schemes

There are various government support schemes available in the UK aimed to facilitate international recruitment of health professionals. The schemes offer funding to support international recruitment and the costs associated for health boards/trusts and individuals. What is funded differs between schemes, and, in some instances these schemes target specific professions. Some are only applicable to active recruitment,



whilst others can be applied to direct applicants who are relocating from overseas to work in the UK. Access to schemes differs across the UK and within each country, so you will need to explore what is available for physiotherapists in your workplace.

Our insights work with physiotherapy managers indicated support schemes for international recruitment were available in around half health boards/ trusts, but not of all of these were open to physiotherapists. Support schemes that were accessed by physiotherapy services all included pastoral support and initial accommodation funding, with the majority also including visa application support and funding, flights and other relocation funding.

A minority provided funding for English language tests, HCPC registration fees, and a period of supernumerary employment. In some cases, the financial resource came from within physiotherapy budgets. We acknowledge that navigating what support scheme you can access to support IRs is challenging; some workplaces do have recruitment leads and some even international recruitment leads so it is worth exploring.

**// We have supported 6 IEPs through normal recruitment efforts and have applied the relocation funding policy to them enabling a substantial amount of their costs to be reimbursed for travel, accommodation and HCPC costs."**

**"Very difficult to navigate the policy with mixed support from HR. We had to do a lot of research to understand what we could and couldn't offer – it was a bit of a minefield."**

## Service Considerations

### ▶ Application and Shortlisting Process

Physiotherapy managers have reported feeling overwhelmed by the sheer number of applications received from internationally trained applicants. A common criticism is that the statements are long, generic and not tailored to the post being applied for. Others suggest that AI or recruitment agency templates are being used which further complicates the short-listing process. Almost all managers reported that they struggled to effectively shortlist and in some instances the information provided was so scattergun that applicants were difficult not to short list.



Such issues can be addressed by ensuring that service specifications clearly articulate what the role requires and that this is reflected in the essential criteria. If these are written in a detailed and specific way, they will aid shortlisting and ensure applicants tailor their application to your specific vacancy. Do really consider what is essential for each individual role. For example, is NHS experience essential, or would experience of working in another health system be appropriate. The answer may be different for different posts, and may be desirable but not essential, after all NHS systems and processes can be learnt. It is important you are clear on the requirements.

Similarly, you should tailor your advert and questions to reflect exactly what you are looking for. A lengthy statement in support may not be the most appropriate way to gather information; shorter more targeted questions will ensure that the question is better understood and that applications cannot simply be copied and pasted from templates or other applications.

Some services have added screening questions as an additional step for international applicants ensuring that visa eligibility, HCPC registration, specific skills and competence required, and some other essential criteria must be confirmed to proceed with an application submission. In this way inappropriate applications can be reduced, and time spent shortlisting on only suitable candidates.

It is important to ensure the process you follow does not directly or indirectly discriminate. You can find helpful guidance from [NHS Employers](#) to follow when shortlisting.



**...lots of info but nothing targeted at the job being applied for – because so much is written and so many areas mentioned, you feel you have to shortlist."**

**"It takes a lot of time to shortlist overseas applications due to the vast amount of information that is not relevant to the post"**

**"May meet essential criteria but not tailored for specific aspects of the role; not mentioning the locality of the area of the work. "**



## ► Interviews

Managers must consider the best way to interview candidates to ensure they select an individual who possesses the right knowledge and skills for the post. Many commented in the survey that while paper applications were often strong, applicants may overstate knowledge and skills and often do not fully understand the role. This is why the planning of your interview is so important.

You must consider the best way to establish competency and not simply ask textbook questions which can be pre learned. This can be challenging on Teams / VC but it is imperative to get this right. Consider what knowledge, skills, behaviours, and values are needed and find ways to assess each.

Do be mindful that some language we use in healthcare in the UK is not universal and so may not be understood by applicants from other countries (e.g. MDT or clinical governance). Do consider the language you use in your interview questions to ensure they are clear for all applicants.

In person can be easier to enact role play and clinical scenarios.

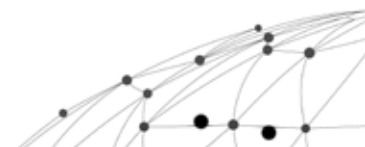
## ► Expectations of Knowledge, Skills and Competence

As stated above the HCPC registration process for IR is a paper-based process and reliant on the applicant's evidence and outline of the physiotherapy qualification curriculum. What is clear, is that HCPC are not trying to claim the training, knowledge, skills and competence to practice physiotherapy are equivalent to those of UK graduates, but comparable.

Prior to employing an IR, services must be clear that additional support will be required and often for a prolonged period of time. Knowledge and skills can be assessed to identify the additional support and training that will be needed. Managers must make service considerations and make the necessary preparations to adequately support IRs for the process to be successful. This includes ensuring existing staff aware and prepared for the role that will be expected of them.

Professional autonomy and direct access to physiotherapy services vary widely across the world. Some IR's may not have had to assess, diagnose and treat using their clinical reasoning skills. In some countries it is a doctor who sets the physiotherapy treatment plan for the physiotherapist to carry out. The focus may be more 'hands-on' therapy and electrotherapy rather than exercise and self-management.

Further, many internationally trained physiotherapists are not trained in the anatomy, physiology, pathology or treatment of respiratory conditions. This can be learned, but





managers must consider the impact this may have on service delivery in acute hospital rotational posts or where there is an on-call service.

In addition to the clinical difference, IR coming to the UK face considerable challenges relocating and require considerable personal as well as professional support and guidance. Best practice would be to help them find accommodation, set up bank accounts, integrating into a different culture, register with a GP and supporting them to better understand how health services are delivered in the UK system. All of this takes time and must be planned well in advance.

Despite this, our recent survey showed that services weren't ready and prepared with bespoke induction packages.

- Around 50% relied on their standard induction package.
- Just over 30% had an induction package specific to international recruits.
- Less than 30% offered cultural support.
- Less than 10% offered preceptorship.

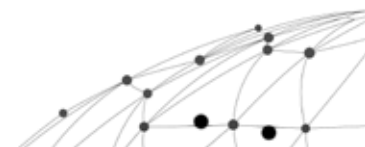
Some services were able to support IR being supernumerary for 3 months (<10%) while (<5%) for up to 9 months.

Additional support needs did vary with over 25% of respondents suggesting the additional support was needed for over a year and in some cases for 2 years. Obviously, this will vary considerably between IRs, but prior to recruiting services must ensure they have adequate staff time and resource to properly support IR.

**// Everyone across the team gave additional supervised time, supported time, time for learning competencies. We saw the time as a long term investment."**

**"3 months in and have required at least 5 additional sessions per week to support upskilling."**

**"6-12 hours of 1:1 support a month needed to ensure safe and effective care. This has been ongoing for 9 months."**



## ► Driving

Many jobs in the UK require applicants to hold a driving licence. While an individual may hold a driving license from their home country, they may not have driven in the UK. Although they are legally allowed to drive in the UK for up to a year with their existing license, our survey suggested there were challenges:

- In the UK we are in a minority of countries who drive on the left.
- The UK is one of the few countries who continue to favour manual cars.

This should not be a barrier to employment but should be considered and planned for. An IR coming to the UK may need time to complete their UK driving test and so a community rotation or post may not be appropriate.

If expected to access fleet vehicles be aware that these are commonly manual cars and will require a UK licence for insurance purposes.

## Useful Links and Docs

There are many resources from NHS England to support services prepare for international recruitment. At the time of writing this we are not aware of similar resources from the other countries and would suggest the content is largely applicable across the UK.

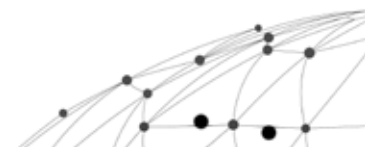
### [International recruitment toolkit](#)

This toolkit is for managers involved in leading and delivering international recruitment in the NHS. It aims to encourage and enable good practices and processes for the recruitment of international staff.

### [International Retention Toolkit](#)

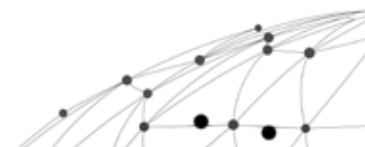
This resources is valuable to evaluate, plan and prepare your service to effectively support IRs from when you make a job offer.

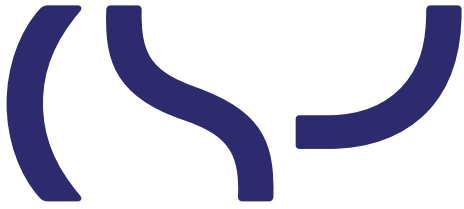
Based on a framework of four pillars, this toolkit brings information, best practice examples and resources together in one place and focuses on what organisations, systems and regions are already doing to create the conditions for all international staff to thrive in the NHS. The end of each section provides an opportunity to reflect on what you have read and consider how you or your team will play your part.



# Check List

<b>Consideration</b>	<b>Red</b>	<b>Amber</b>	<b>Green</b>
Have you read, considered and understood visa requirements?			
Have you considered the national and local support schemes available for IR and how they may apply in your service?			
Have you reviewed your service specification and job description to ensure real clarity in what is required for the role?			
Have you considered a pre-application screening tool to ensure only applicants with the required prerequisites need fill in the whole application form?			
Have you considered how you will interview to ensure your preferred candidate has the required knowledge and skills?			
Have you fully considered what additional support needs an IR may have and planned in adequate induction, support and supervision?			
Are your existing staff aware of their role in the support process and have you managed their expectations?			
Have you considered how your service will accommodate an IR into rotations and/or on-call?			
Are your service and staff ready to welcome and support an international recruit?			





Chartered Society  
of Physiotherapy

3rd Floor South  
Chancery Exchange  
10 Furnival Street  
London EC4A 1AB

**[www.csp.org.uk](http://www.csp.org.uk)**

**Tel: +44 (0) 20 7306 6666**

**THE CHARTERED SOCIETY OF PHYSIOTHERAPY**

is the professional, educational and trade union body for the United Kingdom's  
65,000 chartered physiotherapists, physiotherapy students and support workers.

