

# Medical Training Initiative for UK hospitals and international medical graduates

Since its inception, the NHS has attracted international medical graduates. They come to advance their careers and receive education and training, and they have enriched the NHS with their skills and enthusiasm. They have become essential members of the medical workforce and many have established training links which give the UK additional influence in the field of global health (Gish, 1971).

However, the ethics of one-way medical migration from developing to developed countries has received much attention (World Health Organization, 2009; Voluntary Service Overseas, 2010). In the UK the negative aspects of uncontrolled medical migration came to a head in 2006 when the surge in the number of international medical graduates coming to the UK resulted in graduates spending 18 months or more unemployed (Trewby, 2008). Their skills were denied to the NHS, which had no vacant posts for them, and to the country that trained them. Recognizing this, and the destabilizing effect of this on UK graduate employment, the Department of Health changed the immigration rules for postgraduate doctors and dentists. From April 2006, all doctors from outside the EU/EEA wishing to work in the UK had to have a work permit.

Because international medical graduates could no longer apply on equal terms for UK training posts, there was a fear that the UK would be unable to maintain its international links, many of which had been built up since before the beginnings of the NHS. Pressure by the Royal College of Physicians of London and others led to the development of a new category for foreign-born medical graduates within the Managed Migration System, termed the Medical Training Initiative visa. This is now incorporated under Tier 5 of the Managed Migration System. The Medical Training Initiative scheme followed on from the Medical Training Initiative visa and was launched in February 2009 ([www.healthcareworkforce.nhs.uk/mti/](http://www.healthcareworkforce.nhs.uk/mti/)). This scheme allows doctors from outside the

EU/EEA to enter the UK to benefit from training in NHS posts for a maximum of 2 years before returning to their home country. This circular migration supports the UK's international development objectives and allows exchanges between the NHS and international partners to be fostered without danger of permanently depleting developing and developed countries of their brightest and best graduates.

## How does it work?

The Medical Training Initiative scheme is a collaboration between four principal parties: the medical Royal colleges, the Royal colleges' international partner institutions, NHS trusts and postgraduate deaneries.

For medical posts, the Royal College of Physicians receives submissions from trusts and deaneries detailing posts suitable for the scheme. The job description must detail the training component of the posts, but the posts need not be numbered deanery training posts – many are trust-grade posts or locum appointments for training posts. The training component of the post is paramount and must be on a par with UK training posts including opportunities for local training and study leave and must be signed off by the postgraduate dean and also approved by the head of school, regional specialty adviser or programme director depending on the level of post. The posts must be paid at standard UK rates.

Once posts have been approved, the College's overseas partners advertise for and identify medical graduates suitable for the posts. Graduates must fulfil certain criteria for College sponsorship through General Medical Council recognition; they must have been qualified for at least 3 years, have the International English Language Testing Scores English exam with a score of 7.0 or more across the board, and a postgraduate qualification (e.g. Membership of the Royal College of Physicians part 1, MD or board exams). A shortlist is drawn up by the overseas institutions in conjunction with the College and candidates are interviewed in their

home country by a panel of two UK consultants, a UK lay member and two or more consultants from the partner institution, many of whom have Fellowship of the Royal College of Physicians and experience of UK medicine. Candidates are interviewed in two stations: one station for clinical and ethical scenarios and the second assessing the graduate's CV and career intentions. Particular attention is paid to whether the applicant intends to return to his/her home country after the stay in the UK. The Medical Training Initiative is not a route to settlement in the UK, nor should it be used to provide an international medical graduate with skills that he/she will take elsewhere. The scheme is designed to help build upon the health systems of the candidate's home country.

International medical graduates approved at interview for the Medical Training Initiative scheme are then matched to NHS posts based on their specialty interests and skill levels. Trusts then undertake telephone interviews to establish contact and confirm the doctors are suitable for their post(s).

The interval between matching and starting work may be 1–3 months to allow the graduate to serve notice and time to process exit visas, UK Border Agency and General Medical Council formalities.

## How are the posts funded?

There is no difficulty in funding those recruited to existing unfilled specialist registrar, locum appointments for training or trust posts, but trusts should consider whether locum posts might be better replaced by Medical Training Initiative doctors, given the salaries and high recruitment costs of employing locum doctors.

A leap of faith is needed to move away from the unsatisfactory locum culture in the NHS. Locums are expensive, of indeterminate quality and in short supply, and there are always unfilled junior posts. The Medical Training Initiative scheme offers an alternative way of dealing with perennial vacancies and gives additional benefits

such as a degree of continuity not currently enjoyed by trusts as well as benefiting international graduates (Trewby, 2010).

## The Medical Training Initiative for the UK

The current restrictions on Tier 2 sponsorship makes the Medical Training Initiative scheme crucial in the stability of the NHS hospital workforce (NHS Employers, 2010). Until recently, trusts relied on Tier 2 visas to bring international medical graduates to fill junior doctor posts left unfilled by UK and EEA graduates.

The number of vacancies has increased recently, as a result of the European Working Time Directive, increasing numbers of doctors taking time out for family reasons and the increase in numbers of junior doctors taking one or more years away from UK medicine. The cap on Tier 2 visas will make recruitment very difficult for trusts. Now, more than ever, trusts need to turn to the Medical Training Initiative scheme for recruiting medical graduates from outside the EEA using the Tier 5 rather than the Tier 2 visa route.

## Developing health systems abroad

Migration of medical talent to wealthy nations is a growing concern for developing nations struggling to advance their own health systems. While the UK has stopped recruiting directly, the USA is recruiting and advertising openly.

The Medical Training Initiative is the UK government's way of addressing the brain drain to the UK. The scheme benefits international medical graduates by exposing them to new clinical practices and management and teaching skills that they might not enjoy in their home country. At the end of their UK training programme, when their Medical Training Initiative visa expires, graduates are encouraged to return to their home country to implement their new-found skills. The Medical Training Initiative fits well with the World Health Organization (2009) Code of Practice on International recruitment of health personnel with its aim to '...protect and strengthen the health systems of developing countries'.

There have been concerns that the competencies and skills learnt in the UK may not be recognized in or appropriate to the graduate's home country (Voluntary Service

Overseas, 2010). The Royal College of Physicians works with international partners to ensure that qualifications and competencies learnt in the UK are recognized and applicable when the graduate returns home. Before appointment, the international medical graduate's employer must guarantee a post for him/her to return to after his/her time in the UK. As with UK graduates, doctors on the Medical Training Initiative scheme have to keep e-portfolios to track their experience and performance, tailored both to their educational needs and the documentation required in their home country. After satisfactorily completing their training in the UK, international medical graduates receive a certificate from the Royal College of Physicians of London stating their specialties and the competencies they have achieved while in the UK.

In an unpublished survey of international medical graduates coming through the Royal College of Physicians of London sponsorship schemes, international medical graduates were asked to describe how they had implemented the skills learned in the UK. The throughput and triage system of an emergency department in Khartoum has been turned around as a result of one international medical graduate putting into practice skills learnt in the UK.

## The way forward...

The Medical Training Initiative scheme is still in its early stages, but represents a way forward for the NHS and the development of health systems abroad. There may be difficulties: some doctors may feel misplaced in the NHS, some may be looking to the scheme as a route to settlement which it is not, some may be seeking highly specialized posts offering for example endoscopic ultrasound or endoscopic retrograde cholangiopancreatography which may not be available, some may see UK experience as a route to careers in the other western countries or the Middle East rather than in the country that trained them, and some, particularly

those post MD, may not be prepared for the amount of general medical work that UK posts entail.

Some trusts may be put off by the uncertainties and delays inherent in the matching process of the scheme, and some specialties have yet to establish Medical Training Initiative schemes. But overall the Medical Training Initiative scheme offers a middle way, benefiting the NHS and international graduates and builds on the UK's millennium development goals offering a robust scheme with the aim of adding knowledge to the wider global workforce.

For further information on the Medical Training Initiative scheme and forms for submitting posts to the scheme contact [international@rcplondon.ac.uk](mailto:international@rcplondon.ac.uk). **BJHM**

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## KEY POINTS

- The Medical Training Initiative supports the UK's international development objectives by promoting circular migration and benefits developing nations by supplementing training for their physicians.
- The Royal College of Physicians partners with international institutions to identify highly skilled physicians to come and gain further training in the UK.
- Training posts for these international trainees are funded by the NHS and can be deanery posts or trust grade posts.