

Workforce and Education Reform Programme



International Recruitment

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Title of Project:	Workforce and Education Reform Programme Short title: International Recruitment
Date:	23/02/2023
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<p>Executive summary</p> <p>In response to the growing demand on healthcare services in England, Health Education England (HEE) funded the allied health professional (AHP) bodies with a Workforce Education Reform (WFER) programme. This is to ensure each profession and its workforce is prepared and in alignment with recent publications, such as the AHP Strategic Framework for England and the NHS Long Term Plan (LTP). The Royal College of Podiatry (RCPod) is a four nation organisation. Therefore, the College has made this a piece of work for the four nations it supports, ensuring no disparity between podiatrists trained in any of the four nations.</p>	

International recruitment

A HEE report in 2020 predicted an increase in demand for podiatry of 9% by 2025 – just to meet the core requirements of the NHS. When considering podiatry-related services, such as falls prevention, this figure increases to 19% (1). A reported fall in podiatry students by 40% between 2019 and 2020 equates to a diminishing supply of podiatrists. This, combined with an increasingly ageing profession, was identified by the SAKS report as a key concern(2). The SAKS report described that the further decline of the NHS workforce is partly due to ageing, with 20-30% expected to retire in the next five years. Report recommendations included recruiting students, flexible educational approaches, such as apprenticeships, and improving the retention of podiatry staff. It stated that priority should be given to the diminishing supply of podiatrists, especially in an ageing profession and in the face of increased demand.

The AHP Strategy for expansion of the AHP workforce has three key priorities: securing a future supply, bridging the gap between education and employment and development of the current workforce (3). Ethical international recruitment is a key component of achieving this. Successful programmes have been demonstrated by nursing and other AHPs, where a steady pipeline of international recruits has been sustained. This is required to support the profession of podiatry.

Project aims and method

Project aims included the creation of profession-specific resources to support the education, scope of practice and pastoral care of international recruits. Working collaboratively with national and regional teams, this would actively support international recruitment within the AHPs.

The following tasks were carried out:

- Stakeholder engagement and project scoping to identify the current position, potential gaps and to identify how the RCPod could best support the process of international recruitment for podiatry
- Conducted literature reviews of nursing and AHPs web content and current guidance for international recruitment
- Organised webinars and reached out to the podiatry profession to inform the views and current position, collated members views of the benefits and attractions of working in England and reached out for international podiatrists to be introduced to the project
- Held national project involvement and regional meetings to collaboratively review positions, share resources, and disseminate updates of the project
- Conducted and collected interviews and case studies of internationally qualified podiatrists and international podiatrists that have studied and remained in the UK; aiming to demonstrate process, drivers and reflect on challenges and to inform exploring alternative countries for potential scoping in future projects
- A focus on pastoral elements and how international recruits could be better supported with social and cultural elements which may improve the retention and the sustainability of the supply of international podiatrists to England.

Project scoping results: The current position nationally

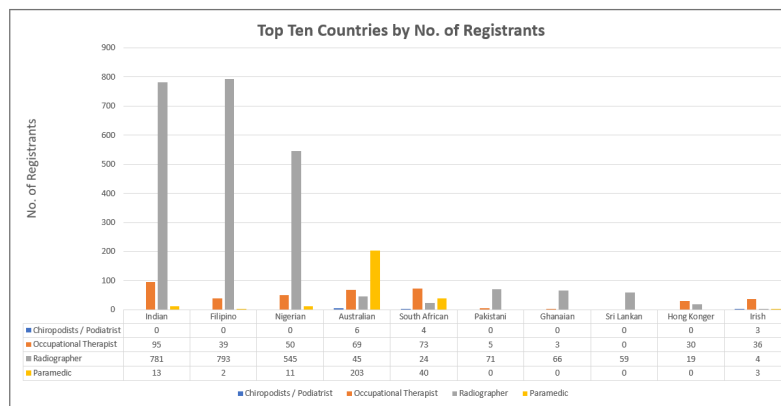
Most NHS staff in England are British. It is reported that 16.5% are not, with 220,000 out of 1.4 million staff being of non-British nationality in 2022(4). There are currently just 21 internationally qualified podiatrists registered with the HCPC in the UK. On review of the supply data, 13 podiatrists



were recruited last year (mainly from Australia, South Africa and Ireland) compared with greater numbers achieved in Occupational Therapy, Radiography and Paramedics.

AHP IR SUPPLY ROUTES: HCPC REGISTRANTS

Data sourced: Year to September 2022



Country of primary qualification	Age bracket	20-24	25-29	30-34	35-39	40-44	45-49	Grand Total
Australia				7				7
Italy						1		1
Malta				1				1
New Zealand			1					1
Republic of Ireland			1					1
South Africa				3	1		1	6
Spain			2	1				3
United States of America						1		1
Grand Total		4	12	1	2	1	1	21

Identification of demand for podiatry

Stakeholder engagement identified the current demand for podiatrists locally. A pilot proposal was distributed to trusts and a bidding process initiated. Approximately 40 trusts were contacted and a request for over 100 podiatrists was received, demonstrating a high need for additional staff. The true national picture, however, cannot be presented, as national vacancy data could not be obtained during this project.

Results

Current ethical opportunities and the current international recruits within podiatry in England

Scoping exercises previously carried out by national teams reviewed equivalent study, degree, and skillset to the UK (including local anaesthetics and prescription-only medicines) where qualifications would be equal to enable meeting HCPC and employment standards. The countries identified are:

- Spain
- Canada
- USA
- Australia
- Malta
- Portugal
- South Africa.

The scoping that the project officer carried out through podiatry networks and universities involved utilising international recruits from the following countries. The exercise demonstrated their career journeys and their focus on career progression, their motivations, drivers and challenges and recommendations for international recruitment in podiatry. These participants were either internationally qualified podiatrists who moved to England or international podiatrists that trained within England. These case studies will form part of the resources as a deliverable of this project.

- South Africa
- Australia
- Belgium
- India
- Portugal
- Cyprus
- Spain.

Results: Themes and highlights of the case journeys

Motivations and general positives by the international recruits

- General themes of motivation to move to or remain in England to practice and gain experience in multidisciplinary team working, to enhance skills in multiple areas of clinical practice (surgery, MSK, diabetes, wound care) and to create career progression opportunities
- Strong example of upskilling from Belgium where local anaesthetic and nail surgery stand alone modules were required to match employability and HCPC standards; these modules were carried out by the University of Huddersfield
- Evidence of advancing practice in profession-specific areas from international recruits. South Africa and Australia in podiatric surgery; MSK and podiatric surgery from Spain and Portugal; MSK from Cyprus; research and academia from Australia; clinical leadership in the NHS from South Africa; Masters-level training and aspirations in Podiatric Surgery from India.
- Strong example of a Spanish podiatrist who embarked on a Podiatric Surgery Masters programme and has used this to progress in first contact role/advancing clinical practice
- Autonomy in practice is better than some countries
- Advanced techniques and clinical skills (casting, independent prescribing, injection therapies, ultrasound, and imaging)
- Research opportunities
- Multiple references to the culture, the language and the proximity to Europe for travel
- Supported training in the NHS alongside pension and holiday pay/sick/maternity pay.

Negatives and challenges reported by the international recruits

- Lengthy and costly if delays are in process with HCPC or with a visa
- Course fees noted as higher here than in Belgium
- Continuity of care by HCPC in the initial 6-months period was lacking
- NHS workload is heavy and low staffing issues can make working in the NHS challenging
- Driving is challenging in rural areas – not so in central cities where tube/tram options are available
- A lack of previous NHS experience was cited; in six-15 job application rejections - in one case the rejection came with an offer of shadowing to gain experience
- Racism
- Weather and lack of family support.

Recommendations

Recommendations by international recruits

- Most internationally qualified podiatrists advocate initially working for a locum company to build up NHS experience make contacts and friends to work for different trusts; after which, generally an attractive package is offered
- Training in England appears to have less barriers for international recruits in terms of the required English language levels required and success in job applications
- It appears more recent job interviews have embraced international recruits and removed 'essential NHS experience' from the criteria; historically this was a barrier
- Potential recruits to evaluate practicalities of relocation, with support structure in place and good financial planning
- General opinion is that interview technique is similar internationally; that knowing your organisation, job description and requirements and getting a feel for the corporate culture are the same in England as they are internationally
- Recommending that development of the English language and cultural differences, tone, body language, colloquialisms, and local language differences would be helpful.

Results: Themes from stakeholder engagement, webinars, and national and regional collaborative working

A general consensus within the podiatry profession that engaged with this project was that the Royal College of Podiatry could maintain a main pool of resources to inform applicants and providers regarding the process, and benefits of international recruitment. It was felt that the RCPod could provide links and support to the wider national pools of resources.

As the main membership body with access to a wide range of podiatrists, the RCPod could highlight career journeys and demonstrate the attractiveness of podiatry in England and the four nations.



Career development and vast opportunities in clinical, research and leadership roles and public health can be demonstrated, as well as highlighting where potential improvements are needed.

The current pilot study for active international recruitment of podiatrists into England is the Spanish pilot with a second scoping scheme occurring with South Africa, both of which the project officer has engaged with national and regional teams to support the process.

Results

The current position with Spanish international recruits pilot study

Selection of the pilot proposal was carried out on a regional basis and three regions were confirmed to be successful; the Southwest, Thames Valley and Lancashire and South Cumbria/Northwest were successful for the supply of international recruits. The main driver for the Spanish podiatrists to consider working in the UK was professional development, with practice in Spain being predominantly in the private sector. Multi-disciplinary and alternative systems of care and personal development with experience of the culture and language were also identified drivers.

The process, albeit successful in securing numbers of podiatrists of interest with 33 applications, had substantial delays and this resulted in dropout rates and a reduction in numbers. Of the 33 applicants, 27 were successfully offered a place, with 23 accepting and 10 withdrawals. This was seen to be largely due to additional study to pass the English language tests. These are slowly filtering through to the three chosen regions of England. The scoping and recruitment process of this pilot study identified three main barriers to the international recruitment of podiatrists in the UK.

1. English language
2. Local anaesthetic
3. Prescription only medicines.

Scoping of the countries within the EU identified these main gaps in education and qualifications in some countries. This impedes on successful recruitment and meeting the employability and HCPC standards to practice in the UK, thus reducing the number of potential countries for recruitment. The lessons learnt from this process was to amend future process and screen English language at application rather than post-interview.

Initial Process of the pilot study

1. Submission of interest by potential applicant
2. Interview
3. English language
4. Exam
5. HCPC registration application.

September 2023: Podiatry International Recruitment Support Programme

The South East of England and the University of Southampton have been successful in grant funding to provide continuous professional development to their international recruits. As part of this project, the RCPod has facilitated joined-up working, bringing together the three regions of international recruits to participate in a summer school. With an emphasis on clinical upskilling in multiple areas, this will also provide the opportunity for pastoral support and development with the cohort. This is intended to support 15-20 Spanish podiatrists and is intended to take place in September 2023.

Ongoing scoping: South Africa

During the latter part of this project, a scoping exercise from the midlands HEE to South Africa was carried out to provide background information for a potential campaign to recruit podiatrists to the UK. Discussions included developing more links with the UK, to share research and to develop podiatry in South Africa. The South Africa degree profiles appear equivocal to England, and this is further supported with two case journeys where no upskilling was necessary to meet HCPC and employability standards in England.

The deliverables for the project

HEE's strategic aim is to encourage and support AHP international recruitment. This includes trained staff residing in the UK, international recruits from abroad and refugee AHPs. The creation of

literature and resources for the international recruitment of podiatrists would support this workstream. This includes:

- International qualified podiatrists of recruitment processes to work in the UK
- Podiatry managers regarding the processes and information to support retention
- Encourage and inform international students studying within the UK to carry out early careers' development working in the UK.

This will be in the form of two online packages – one to inform potential recruits (divided into two subsections; students studying in the UK and International qualified podiatrists) and the second to inform podiatry managers. The aim is to provide comprehensive information and resources and pastoral care guidance and to promote these resources throughout the wider profession with a targeted social media campaign.

Case study collection for access via the webpage (with links to national resources such as Stay and Thrive), as inspirational material and examples of how individuals have succeeded as international recruits in the UK and also to highlight personal challenges in process as learning points for readers.

Promotional material will be created based on case study candidates for international dissemination via social media (head shots and quotations with links to the RCPod's international recruitment webpage).

A summer school voiceover presentation will be made to welcome the recruits to the Royal College of Podiatry, discuss and introduce the membership benefits and will highlight that one of the membership benefits includes the potential to develop networks through the College. The creation of an international recruitment network would be of value within the profession, and this will provide information and highlight the process and potential to do this for this cohort.

Recommendations

The release of national workforce vacancy data will enable appropriate planning per region and inform regarding demand for specific neighbourhoods. For example, rural working for international recruits would be isolating, when support is necessary in pastoral and professional areas, and this would potentially impact on retention. Identification of vacancy numbers, locations and comparison with population health needs data would inform planning.

The main lesson learnt in the pilot study is an amendment of the process and to screen at application for English language to reduce drop out and extensive delays. This should be considered for future recruitment programmes.

The discrepancy of educational standards could be seen as an incentive for international recruitment to the UK to upskill. This would open the potential for neighboring European countries with limited levels of skills in podiatry to be recruited. Particularly in developmental roles to support upskilling, which would backfill the support workforce while the recruit developed to meet the standards.

From the scoping exercise in South Africa, the key recommendations included:

1. Support from the UK for visiting lecturers and academics to the support research and build on the value of podiatry in South Africa
2. To consider developing student exchange or learner return scheme
3. A smoother HCPC process for South African applicants and in-country campaign learning is that there is limited availability of international podiatrists on a global scale and a co-ordinated approach to recruitment is required.

Based on case studies provided my future recommendations are to consider the drivers for international recruits choosing the UK for work.

1. MDT working and exceptional experience within our NHS when in some countries the work is largely in the private sector
2. The opportunities for advancing practice, academic progression, and research available are a main motivation for work in the UK
3. The superior training for podiatrists and how this compares within Europe; some countries lacking in local anaesthesia and prescription-only medicines. There is an opportunity for these recruits to upskill, backfill the support workforce in development roles while completing stand alone modules. Some HEIs have expressed an interest in providing. Therefore, scoping the potential closer to home with this in mind and with the support of the HEI's is a strong future recommendation moving forward with a nationally co-ordinated in-country recruitment campaign.



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HCPC

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