Staff from outside the UK make a significant contribution to the care of patients in the NHS. We benefit greatly from their expertise and the import of new knowledge and skills. In return, many staff take the training and techniques learned in the NHS back to their home countries.

International recruitment can be a legitimate part of an organisation’s strategy to keep workforce supply and demand in balance. It exists alongside other solutions including:

- UK trained staff
- apprenticeship schemes
- skill mix reviews
- service reconfiguration
- local recruitment campaigns
- recruitment and retention premia
- temporary staffing and talent management initiatives.

International recruitment tends to be used to fill skilled positions in certain geographical areas or where national shortages exist.

This short guide will help you plan your approach to an international recruitment campaign. It provides prompt questions and gives suggestions which you will want to discuss and agree locally to ensure your campaign meets your objectives. Detailed process guidance on the immigration rules is available at www.nhsemployers.org/immigration. We also signpost to relevant information throughout the guide.

Implications of the EU referendum

We are aware that following the result of the EU referendum in June 2016 there are a number of questions around the implications on the NHS workforce. At the time of publication, current arrangements around recruitment and employment of individuals from within the EU remain the same.

NHS Employers will publish news of any developments in this area on our website as they arise and will make sure you have all the support and information you need throughout this process.

Timescales

International recruitment campaigns are not a quick fix for your workforce supply challenges. It can take anywhere between six and 12 months for individual staff to start work with you after you’ve made the decision to undertake campaign activity. This needs the full support of your trust and dedicated individuals to make it a success.
Planning
Prepare a business case and plan that includes the following elements:

- Details about your supply issues.
- Your overall strategic plan and how you anticipate international recruitment supporting it.
- The numbers and skills needed.
- How you are going to coordinate the campaign activity. Will you set up a project team? Are you going to use the services of an agency?
- The resources you’ll need to coordinate activity from within the trust – clinical and pastoral.
- How social networking sites like LinkedIn and Twitter can help your strategic plan.
- Where you are looking to recruit from within the European Economic Area (EEA) or outside?
- Whether you will offer a relocation package – help with costs of flights or accommodation.
- The type of pastoral support you will put in place – pre-employment, induction and beyond.
- How you will engage with your current staff to build support for the recruitment activity to help with the integration further down the line.
- How you plan to evaluate your campaign, to inform further international recruitment activities you may undertake in the future.

Ethical approach
If you’re looking to recruit from outside the EEA, familiarise yourself with the World Health Organization Code of Practice on ethical international recruitment, available on our website at www.nhsemployers.org/immigration. Also, please read the information on our website about the countries, or areas of countries, where you cannot undertake direct and targeted recruitment. This is because these countries are also receiving government aid and we have made a commitment to support their developing health needs. There is nothing to prevent an individual from anywhere in the world applying for work in the NHS if they choose to do so, but employers must not actively target these developing countries.

Use of agencies
Most employers choose to contract with an agency or agencies to help them with their campaign activity. The NHS Collaborative Procurement Partnership manage a framework for agencies providing international recruitment services. This framework can be used by NHS trusts across the regions of the four NHS procurements hubs to recruit nursing and nursing-related staff from overseas (EEA and non-EEA).

Further information about the NHS procurement hubs can be found on the NHS London Procurement Partnership website at www.lpp.nhs.uk.

A list of agencies who have been checked against the ethical code requirements is available at www.nhsemployers.org/immigration.

The number of people you are looking to recruit will determine the procurement or tendering exercise you will need to go through locally. Whatever the number, you will need to draw up a clear specification and have up-to-date job descriptions.
Most organisations that use agencies agree a fixed rate for each person that is successfully recruited. The costs can vary depending on volume and the services you are wanting the agency to undertake, as well as whether the recruitment is within or outside of the EEA.

Even when you use an agency, you will need to ensure you have a dedicated contact at the trust who can liaise with the agency and your recruiting managers.

In many cases, the agency will undertake the initial sift of candidate applications or CVs. You may also want the agency to ask the potential candidates to undertake a range of tests or activities that are both values and competence related. This could be done in advance of your team of experienced recruiters flying out to do the final stage of selection before offering posts. Find out more about values-based recruitment at www.nhsemployers.org/recruitingforvalues.

Post-selection and pre-employment
As part of your agreement with the agency, we advise that you are clear about who will be liaising with the new recruits between the offer of employment and the relocation.

Consider using technology, like Skype or FaceTime, to maintain contact and start engagement between new recruits and members of the team.

Depending on what you have agreed to provide for your new recruits, there may be tasks for the coordinator to organise, such as flights, accommodation and induction programmes.

EEA vs. outside of EEA – immigration rules and professional registration
Recruitment activity within the EEA does not attract any restrictions of movement or employment for individual professionals, except within Croatia. Professional regulators will issue registration to professionals registered with the equivalent body in an EEA country. However, it is important to consider that professional regulators are now permitted to ask for evidence of English language competence from EEA trained professionals before awarding registration. Check the language competency requirements with the appropriate regulator.

If you are going outside of the EEA, do you have a sponsorship licence with UK Visas and Immigration (UKVI) and the ability to issue certificates of sponsorship to international healthcare professionals? Also consider that there is a permanent limit on migration through Tier 2 (General) which places an annual restriction on the number of migrant workers admitted to the UK from outside the EEA. You will be required to apply to UKVI for a restricted certificate of sponsorship from the limited allocation. Further restrictions to the Tier 2 (General) immigration route will be put in place during 2016/17 with implications for non-EEA recruitment activity. For more information, visit www.nhsemployers.org/immigration for detailed information around immigration rules, including quick guides and flow charts.

You will also need to familiarise yourself with the process for non-EEA candidates to obtain professional registration. Check the registration process and associated timescales with the relevant professional regulator so you can factor this into your planning.

Language competency
You must be satisfied that any potential employee has the required level of communication skills for the role. Registration by a regulatory body alone does not guarantee that the individual has the clinical or language skills to perform a particular role. You remain responsible for ensuring that candidates have the necessary skills as part of the recruitment process. Our Language competency good practice guidance for employers can help you apply language competency assessments – see the back page of this guide for web link.
Pastoral support

International recruitment can be very successful if planned and supported effectively. The pastoral support provided can make a big difference to new staff who will need bank accounts, National Insurance numbers, somewhere to live, access to shopping, public transport and maybe schools. Having staff available to help them and introduce some coordinated social activities has proved very helpful in supporting integration into teams. If a recruiting agency is involved with your international recruitment, it needs to be clear from the start which elements of arrival/pastoral support are covered by your agreement. Be clear about which things you will be responsible for and what the individual recruits will be expected to do for themselves.

Our *Working and training in the NHS* guide for international medical graduates about coming to the UK and working in the NHS that covers a lot of these issues. Please find the link on the back pages of this guide - you may find it useful to use this with all new international recruits.

We would also suggest that you are prepared for people to leave – even if you’ve done a great job through recruitment and induction. Some people can’t adjust or settle, they might want to move to another part of the UK or perhaps only had plans to come and work for 12–18 months before returning home. Having good two-way communication channels may encourage people to be open about their future aims to help you with your planning.

Checklist – Research and planning

**Research and planning**

- Consider the number of staff you require.
- Consider what the specific skills, competencies and qualifications are needed to perform the role.
- Prepare a business case which outlines the objectives, benefits, risks and costs of an international recruitment campaign.
- Familiarise yourself with the World Health Organization Code of Practice on ethical international recruitment if you are looking to recruit from outside of the EEA.
- Research the country you have decided to target.
- Work out your deadlines as it will most likely take longer to find candidates overseas.
- Consider whether you will use the services of a recruitment agency.
- Set up a project group and put in place the resource you think you’ll need to coordinate activity from within the trust.
- Find out if you need to take any additional steps to recruit an individual from overseas, for example immigration and professional registration processes.
- Consider informing UK Visas and Immigration (UKVI) and the relevant professional body ahead of any large volume recruitment activity, so they can plan for an increased number of applications.
- Decide if you will offer a relocation package for your new recruits.
- Form a comprehensive plan for induction and pastoral support.
- Think about how you will engage with your current staff to build support for the recruitment activity from the start of the process.
Checklist – Recruitment process

☐ If you are using an agency to help you, make sure you are clear about each other’s responsibilities.

☐ Ensure you have a dedicated contact at the trust who can liaise with the recruitment agency and your recruiting managers throughout the process.

☐ Establish if you want to ask potential candidates to undertake tests or activities that are both values and competence related as part of the selection process.

☐ Consider how you will apply language competency assessments.

☐ If you are using an agency be clear about who will be liaising with the new recruits between the offer of employment and the relocation.

Checklist – Induction and retention

☐ Consider using technology, such as Skype or FaceTime, to keep in touch with your new recruits in the period between the offer of employment and the relocation.

☐ Design an induction programme for your new recruits – you might want to consider including information about the NHS and an explanation of some of the cultural and working differences.

☐ Be mindful that you may need to adapt your training for staff from abroad if they are unfamiliar with the technical language or equipment that they will be using.

☐ Produce a welcome pack for your new recruits – you could include information on the local area such as transport links, directions to the workplace, a map and details of nearby facilities.

☐ Consider the circumstances of your new recruits – they may need to look for housing, visit schools or support their family.

☐ Consider other practicalities like arranging for someone to meet your new recruits at the airport. Will you provide support to help them find accommodation? Will you provide a meal voucher or basic groceries for their first night in the UK?

☐ Involve your existing staff as much as possible in the induction process. A social event can be a nice way to help your existing staff and new recruits to get to know each other.

☐ Consider what additional one-to-one mentoring support your new recruits may need to adapt to the cultural and working differences of the NHS.
Related resources

Case study: Gloucestershire Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust - training programme for overseas qualified nurses  
www.nhsemployers.org/case-studies-and-resources/2016/02/training-programme-for-overseas-qualified-nurses

See our briefing on using social media in the recruitment process  

Language competency good practice guidance for employers  

Working and training in the NHS  

Case study: Kent Community Health NHS Trust: International recruitment – a community trust perspective  

We regularly add to our case studies section so do check back for more examples of international recruitment campaigns.
NHS Employers

The NHS Employers organisation is the voice of employers in the NHS, supporting them to put patients first. Our vision is to be the authoritative voice of workforce leaders, experts in HR, negotiating fairly to get the best deal for patients.

We actively seek the views of employers on key workforce issues and use our expertise to support them to develop a sustainable workforce, improve staff experience and provide high quality care to patients. We influence workforce policy at regional, national and European levels and turn policies into practical workable solutions.

We use our expertise to keep employers up to date with the latest workforce thinking and expert opinion; provide practical advice and information. We generate opportunities to network, learn from each other and share knowledge and best practice. We work across the health [and care] system to engage with and support national organisations and the arms-length bodies in the delivery of their mandates.