



# *International Humanitarian and Health Work*

**Toolkit to Support Good Practice**

July 2003

# Foreword

Many NHS staff from a broad range of disciplines participate in international development programmes and respond to humanitarian emergencies. Such work can be of deep and lasting value to the people of the countries concerned. It can also provide individuals with personal inspiration, refreshment, and perspective, which can add to their professional development and growth as well as benefiting the NHS when they return. At present, such work is usually arranged on an ad hoc basis and the degree to which NHS staff are able to participate depends on a range of factors, including the ability of their employer to release them.

This toolkit is designed to help strengthen the capacity and capability of the NHS in England to assist with international development and humanitarian emergencies, and to help provide more equitable access to these opportunities. It builds on previous guidance (EL (95) 69) and experiences and developments since that guidance was issued in June 95.

A number of key organisations and professional bodies helped us to develop this toolkit including the Department for International Development, Royal Colleges, the Faculty of Public Health and a number of non-governmental organisations. I am grateful for their input into this valuable piece of work, which is an outcome of dedicated efforts of the Department of Health steering group established for this purpose.

I hope this toolkit will be useful to wide range of healthcare professionals in the country.



**Sir Liam Donaldson**  
**Chief Medical Officer for England**

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# 1 Introduction

The key purpose of the toolkit is to raise the awareness of the issues surrounding the release of the health professionals from the NHS to work abroad on humanitarian and health development initiatives and the benefits that such work could bring to NHS, patients and professional development of individuals. The toolkit has explored the key HR and other relevant issues and come up with some good practice guidelines and resources to facilitate the individuals and organisations who get involved in such international work.

The NHS benefits substantially from the training opportunities and breadth of experience on offer in international work, in which healthcare professionals are either involved on their own initiatives or through their employers. Therefore this toolkit provides information and best practice advice to both individuals and employers on the practical human resources and governance issues. The toolkit is also designed to ensure that there is a good understanding of the range of opportunities on offer and the skills and competencies that international work requires.

## 2 Background and Context

There are many different opportunities to assist with international development. They can be very short term, or involve medium to long term contracts. They range from urgent responses to humanitarian emergencies to planned appointments advising on health service development or on specific programmes.

Employers are typically Non Governmental Organisations (NGOs), although the World Health Organisation and governments also commission important development and relief programmes. See the resources section for further details of these.

It is difficult to measure the exact scale and scope of this work, but a 1997 joint survey by International Health Exchange (IHE) and People in Aid<sup>2</sup> of 116 aid agencies identified 729 appointments of expatriate health professionals made in one year. IHE has over 600 people (about 50% UK based) on its various registers, and this figure has been fairly stable over the last few years. Many agencies strive to recruit in-country expertise, and the building of local capacity is usually a critical feature of most overseas placements.

### Emergency work

Globally, the World Health Organization has technical responsibility for all the health aspects of disaster reduction and humanitarian assistance. Its emergency and humanitarian department maintains an intelligence network for advanced planning of emergency responses. At the time of writing there are 18 specific crises. They include Iraq, the Balkans Humanitarian Crisis, the Great Lakes Crisis (Congo, Burundi, Rwanda) and Afghanistan. The WHO website<sup>3</sup> contains an immense wealth of material on current crises, as well as providing access to public health resources, emergency management essentials and guides to other resources. The International Federation of the Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC) is the world's largest humanitarian organisation, and plays a critical role in humanitarian emergencies. The Department for International Development is the lead UK Government department responsible for humanitarian assistance to people affected by disasters overseas.

Humanitarian emergencies typically require rapid mobilisation of a workforce already skilled in dealing with these emergencies, and there is a growing recognition and emphasis on post-conflict recovery, often after the international media spotlight has moved. Initial international experience has typically been acquired by working on development projects

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2 "The Human Face of Aid: A Study Of Recruitment By International Relief And Development Organisations In The UK", International Health Exchange and People in Aid, January 1997

3 World Health Organization Emergency and Humanitarian Department  
[www.who.int/cha/disasters](http://www.who.int/cha/disasters)

## Development work

There are projects and placements in most developing countries, and there are a wide variety of NGOs and governments involved in this work. The International Health Exchange is a good starting point and provides a comprehensive list of NGOs active in this field. Appendix 1 gives some more details about some of these.

Most projects place great emphasis on local capacity building, and require at least two years post qualification experience. There is particular demand at the moment for

- HIV/Aids workers
- Public Health skills and expertise
- Primary care professionals

But almost all health disciplines including management and support are in demand. Doctors and nurses are in roughly equal demand. Expertise in management is very useful but also a product of the experience. Language skills are also advantageous.

Expatriates are typically employed for periods of six months to two years. Aid and development agencies typically offer three different kinds of contract: 'volunteer', 'salaried' and 'consultancy'. 'Volunteers' will usually be paid a modest living allowance. More senior positions may be shorter-term 'consultancy' posts, and will involve considerable programme management expertise

Volunteering e.g. with VSO and similar agencies is a useful way of acquiring the initial international experience that is often a pre-requisite of other international positions. Humanitarian emergencies can also create immediate needs for particular skills.

# 3 Benefits

## Benefits to patients and NHS

“The ultimate beneficiaries from UK professional health workers gaining international experience are NHS patients in the UK”

Liam Donaldson, Chief Medical Officer

Improving Working Lives<sup>4</sup> provides specific advice and argues that well constructed career breaks schemes can:

- Reduce the loss of trained and experienced people who may leave and not come back.
- Provide a better return on the investment in training.
- Have employees return from career breaks refreshed and with a richer quality of experience.
- Prevent “burn-out” in mid-career.

Development and humanitarian work provides particularly relevant holistic learning and individuals can be personally motivated and inspired by these experiences, thus contributing to all four of the pillars identified in “Human Resources in the NHS”<sup>5</sup>. There are particular benefits in supporting multicultural work, and delivering care to diverse patient groups in the UK. There are two British Medical Journal articles<sup>6, 7</sup> that provide more detail.

## Professional benefits

“The RCGP recognises that the experience gained overseas by VSO doctors contributes significantly towards their professional development and that they return to general practice in the UK with enhanced clinical, organisational and managerial skills which are of great benefit to their patients and profession”

Royal College of General Practitioners<sup>8</sup>

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4 “Working Lives: Programmes for Change – Career Breaks”, Department of Health  
[www.doh.gov.uk/iwl/careerbreak.pdf](http://www.doh.gov.uk/iwl/careerbreak.pdf)

5 “Human Resources in the NHS”, Department of Health  
[www.doh.gov.uk/hrinthenhsplan/hrinthenhsplan.pdf](http://www.doh.gov.uk/hrinthenhsplan/hrinthenhsplan.pdf)

6 “Bringing it Back to Blighty”, Nick Banatvala and Annie Macklow-Smith, *BMJ* 1997; 314

7 “Working Overseas: From Individual To Organisational Strategy” Nick Banatvala and Ivan Scott, *BMJ* 2001 323:2

8 “Statement on Overseas Work”, Royal College of General Practitioners  
[www.rcgp.org.uk/rcgp/international/os\\_work\\_exp.asp](http://www.rcgp.org.uk/rcgp/international/os_work_exp.asp)

Overseas experience can be very valuable for rapid learning to:

- Prioritise and allocate scarce resources.
- Plan, monitor and audit.
- Develop project management skills and disciplines.
- Conduct health needs assessment for local populations.
- Integrate primary and secondary care.
- Manage change.
- Thinking on your feet and making things happen.
- Manage yourself, finances and organisations.
- Train, teach and develop human resources.
- Work in multidisciplinary teams and provide leadership.
- Liaise between different sectors and localities.

The Royal College of Nursing recognised the benefits to professional nursing practice of international experience in its 1996 publication “The Benefits of Overseas Experience”<sup>9</sup>

## Personal benefits

“It is immensely valuable for personal inspiration, motivation, and sense of perspective”  
Ken Jarrold, Chief Executive, County Durham and Tees Strategic Health Authority”

“I’ve never met anyone who’s regretted it. And it really does change your life.”  
Nurse volunteer, Medecins sans Frontieres

“Enriched self-esteem, self-reliance and a sense of personal achievement are other personal benefits – 95% of VSO volunteers would recommend it to a friend.”

Managers and clinicians can find the experience immensely challenging, and fulfilling. Many describe how they have re-discovered their original sense of vocation.

Aid agencies stress the personal resourcefulness that is needed to work in difficult circumstances, in remote locations and in unfamiliar cultures with little direct peer support.

The top ten ‘softer skills’, according to recent research by Demos<sup>10</sup>, acquired by international volunteers are:

- Global awareness.
- Adaptability – coping with complexity and uncertainty.
- Interpersonal skills – team-working and collaboration.

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9 “The Benefits of Overseas Experience’, Royal College of Nursing, 1996

10 “Human Braccia: Skills, Employers and International Volunteering”, Thomas,G, Demos, 2001  
[www.demos.co.uk](http://www.demos.co.uk)

- Handling responsibility, including leadership through communication and empowerment.
- Stress management through more balanced perspectives.
- Self-assurance.
- Problem solving including coping with adversity.
- Exchanging skills.
- Strategic thinking.
- Sense of humour.

These are critical 'higher order' skills for tackling the complexity of modernising and transforming health services for the benefit of patients. They are also critical for personal career development.

## 4 Human Resource Checklist

The main employers for clinicians and health managers are likely to be individual NHS organisations, and independent contractors. However, the Department of Health and its agencies, Special Health Authorities, local authorities and universities are also likely to be significant employers. This toolkit cannot clearly deal with all individual circumstances, but provides a checklist of some of the issues to consider.

### Checklist for organisations

- Consider how to recognise the value of international work for professional development, improving workforce retention, and promoting working with diversity.
- Determine how this recognition can be turned into practical support for individuals. This should provide equity of opportunity for staff to benefit from the development afforded by international work.
- Consider the scope for implementing new or review existing career break, study leave, or secondment policies, as recommended in *Improving Working Lives*, which explicitly recognise the value of international work. Specific advice is available – see resources section.
- Consider designating an officer with specific remit and expertise in developing career break options.
- Determine how to make the best out of new skills acquired through international experience.
- Consider possible continued networking arrangements with e.g. an NGO such as Voluntary Services Overseas or with health organisations in developing countries (e.g. Oxford Radcliffe Hospital NHS Trust has a twinning arrangement with Kimberley Hospitals in South Africa sponsored by the European Union, and the Department for International Development).
- Consider involvement in wider town/city networking initiatives with other local partners. The Local Government International Bureau provides extensive advice and information, and financial support is available from the EU town twinning initiative.

### Checklist for individuals

#### Seeking a position

- Think through potential international work in context of personal and professional aspirations, and make it an integral part of development plans. Discuss with existing mentors and professional supervisors, and be clear about personal and professional goals. Seek international mentor from those with international experience. Most Royal Colleges have international departments or committees.
- Build international links and contacts through hosting international visitors, and through other learning opportunities.

- Investigate international work options through professional networks and e.g. International Health Exchange. Apply to their register if interested. (They also maintain international registers on behalf of some professional bodies).
- Investigate potential employers and types of project and placements on offer. Appendix 1 provides a brief overview of some of them, and there are further references in the resources and further information section. See also<sup>11</sup>.
- Check out your employer's career break or secondment policies. Seek advice where necessary on implications for continuity of employment and right of return. Make clear written agreements with your employer, especially about continuity of employment (that affects statutory employment rights and pensions).
- Examine learning and training opportunities to tackle particular skill/experience requirements.
- Consider the use of special leave and annual leave. If you are a GP, consider the use of extended study leave.
- Some development projects can provide assistance for families and dependents. Humanitarian emergencies are not usually suitable locations for families and dependents.

## Before going abroad

- Ensure personal professional supervision and appraisal arrangements are in place, both within employing organisation and with UK employers and professional bodies. The new Department of Health appraisal on-line appraisal portal (see resources section) will be increasingly useful.
- Be clear with your overseas employer about salaries, allowances, and expense arrangements. Ensure clarity with your UK employer about salary arrangements and increments.
- Investigate pension scheme implications and options. Continued membership of the NHS scheme may be possible. See appendix 2 on NHS pension scheme.
- Check out potential liability and benefits for personal tax and national insurance. See Inland Revenue leaflets on "Residents and Non-Residents Liability to Tax in the United Kingdom".
- Contact appropriate professional indemnity organisation, and secure letter of confirmation of cover if necessary.
- Take practical steps to protect and maintain personal health. See MDU leaflet<sup>12</sup> and Department of Health advice<sup>13</sup>.
- Check levels of health insurance and practical health arrangements associated with placements e.g. what will happen with needlestick injuries when working in remote locations where there is high HIV/AIDS prevalence. The People in Aid survey<sup>14</sup> of NGOs provides useful information, if a little dated, on the different level of benefits that different NGO schemes offer.

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11 "The Medics Guide to Work and Electives Around the World", Wilson M, London, 2000  
See also the accompanying website [www.medicstravel.co.uk](http://www.medicstravel.co.uk)

12 "Staying Health Abroad (electives)", Medical Defence Union, 2001  
[www.the-mdu.com](http://www.the-mdu.com)

13 "Health Advice for Travellers", Department of Health  
[www.doh.gov.uk/traveladvice/information.htm](http://www.doh.gov.uk/traveladvice/information.htm)

14 "Under Cover", People in AID, 1998

- Ensure that personal life insurance, personal effects insurance, and if necessary conflict zone insurance are adequate.
- Develop personal security awareness. The Foreign Office website provides both current security information and “travellers tips” on a country-by-country basis. The International Health Exchange runs a three-day residential course on Risk Management in Developing Countries.
- If you do not have UK residential status, but are currently working in the NHS, check with Home Office on visa and residence implications.
- Contact professional body who may have some forms of support for international work, and may also be willing to waive professional fees, or even offer scholarships or similar.
- Ensure practical arrangements for contacting professional support network whilst on placement (e-mail etc.).
- See Royal College of Nursing website for their own personal checklist for working abroad.

# 5 Developing and sustaining skills for international work

This section provide some more details about different skill levels, and how progress from level to level can be made

Three levels of skill for international work can be distinguished:

1. Those who want professional development in international work and can contribute within a supervised structure
2. Those with some international experience who can make a significant contribution
3. Those with significant international experience who can function as senior consultants

Language skills can be useful and important at all levels, and can affect possible locations and the kinds of opportunities that will be available.

## Level One

*(Those who want professional development in international work and can contribute within a supervised structure)*

Requirements clearly vary from agency to agency, and project to project, but step one typically requires

- Initial professional qualification and registration
- A minimum of two years post-registration experience
- A commitment to the aims of the project
- Personal resourcefulness

Agencies also value

- Team working
- Cultural sensitivity
- Languages
- Commitment to transferring skills

Voluntary Services Overseas is probably the largest recruitment agency for these posts, and VSO sends about 150 health professionals overseas each year. CIIR, Skillshare International and United Nations Volunteers also have significant programmes.

There may also be immediate vacancies and opportunities arising in particular humanitarian emergencies.

## Level Two

*(Those with some international experience who can make a significant contribution)*

For these postings agencies value:

- The track record of previous international expertise
- Country specific expertise
- Specific clinical expertise
- Some management expertise

Most emergency humanitarian programmes require at least this level of experience and expertise.

## Level Three

*(Those with significant international experience who can function as senior consultants)*

Substantial international experience and expertise is a pre-requisite, and Programme Management expertise would normally be expected

## Moving up levels

Formal mechanisms to support personal development up these levels are rudimentary, and there is no one recommended career path. Continuing to develop overseas experience is critical, but some UK based mechanisms have also been identified

- Informal or formal mentoring arrangements
- Support or returned volunteer networks maintained by the international agencies
- Formal training or development courses (see training resources section)
- VSO accredited fellowships in conjunction with the Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists, the Royal College of Paediatrics and Child Health, and the Faculty of Public Health
- International Registers at the Faculty of Public Health, and Royal College of Physicians
- International Health Exchange Registration
- RCN is establishing a network for nurses working in relief and humanitarian sectors. The RCN International Affairs Offices provides an advice and information service for RCN members working and studying outside the UK, including information briefings and advice leaflets
- Educational awards and travel scholarships from Royal College of Nursing
- Royal College international committees or equivalent (the Royal Colleges International Forum maintains an overview)
- Formal training schemes like the Royal College of Paediatrics and Child Health

- The Royal College of General Practitioners International Development Programme, International Mentors, and travel scholarships
- Royal College of Midwives international exchange programme for midwives and students
- British NGOs for development (BOND) promotes mutual learning and the sharing of knowledge, experience and ideas, in order to improve the quality of UK NGOs' performance in international development.

## Developing further capacity

NICARE in Northern Ireland has been very pro-active in promoting international collaboration, and this has produced several “twinning” arrangements for on-going collaboration.

Small scale local bi-lateral working undertaken at local level can produce real practical benefits, e.g. Rochdale midwives became actively involved in an existing civic twinning link with a province in Pakistan, through visits, donating surplus equipment, hosting visits and fund-raising. They have learnt useful lessons for their work with the Pakistani and other local communities in Rochdale, while helping to improve services for the community in Pakistan.

The matrix on the next page shows the relationship between career stage and international skill level for an individual. It shows what development opportunities could be most relevant at each career stage. It also highlights the role that experienced international workers can play in developing both formal (e.g. through Royal College) and informal support networks.

### Matrix:

	<b>Level 1</b> <i>Little international experience</i>	<b>Level 2</b> <i>Some international experience</i>	<b>Level 3</b> <i>Significant international experience</i>
Pre-qualification/ early stage	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Clarify personal goals</li> <li>• Seek mentors</li> <li>• Consider VSO or similar</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Clarify personal goals</li> <li>• IHE registration</li> <li>• Consider VSO or similar</li> </ul>	Not applicable
Mid career – training and development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Seek mentors</li> <li>• IHE registration</li> <li>• Accreditation issues</li> <li>• Royal College training placements</li> <li>• Travel awards</li> <li>• Consider VSO or similar</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• IHE registration</li> <li>• Accreditation issues</li> <li>• Royal college training placements</li> <li>• Seek other positions</li> </ul>	Not applicable
Established career	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Seek mentors</li> <li>• Targeted training</li> <li>• Supervised in-country experience</li> <li>• Travel awards</li> <li>• Shadowing of level 2/3</li> <li>• IHE registration</li> </ul>	In demand <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• IHE registration</li> <li>• Supervisory roles</li> <li>• Mentoring</li> <li>• Consultancy roles</li> </ul>	In demand <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Needed to develop further capacity</li> <li>• Mentoring</li> <li>• Continuing professional development</li> <li>• Senior consultancy roles</li> </ul>

Significant improvements in capacity could be achieved by the development of international experience in those with established careers.

## 6 Quality Assurance

Each employer will have their own systems and processes for supporting good practice and good quality health and health care. People in Aid have drawn up a handbook of good human resource practice for NGOs, and internationally the SPHERE standards are an important development.

### Responsibility and accountability

Individual health professionals have an ethical and professional responsibility to their professional organisation for their own practice and professional development, whilst the employing or volunteering agency has responsibility for the governance and quality of their systems and processes.

In emergency work, the Sphere Humanitarian Charter and Minimum Standards in Disaster Response sets out what people affected by disasters have a right to expect from humanitarian assistance. The cornerstone is the Humanitarian Charter, which is based on the principles and provisions of international humanitarian, human rights and refugee law, and on the principles of the Red Cross and NGO Code of Conduct. There are minimum standards in five core sectors – water supply and sanitation, nutrition, food aid, shelter and site planning, and health services.

Humanitarian employers have sought to improve responsibility and accountability through the creation of the Active Learning Network for Accountability and Performance in Humanitarian Action<sup>16</sup>, who have pioneered systematic evaluations and meta-analyses of humanitarian programmes, and drawn attention to some of the weaknesses in present evaluation practice.

### Medical Revalidation and Appraisal

The introduction of revalidation by the General Medical Council is still subject to legislation but is expected to require that all doctors wishing to hold a licence to practice should provide evidence of their continuing professional development under 7 general headings every 5 years. These competencies are described in more detail in the GMC booklet ‘Good Medical Practice’.<sup>17</sup>

Normally, appraisals will be recognised as good evidence for re-validation purposes. Doctors employed overseas should seek evidence from appraisals or equivalent evidence from their employer, professional supervisor or professional peers. See<sup>18</sup> for more details about revalidation.

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15 “The Sphere Project: Humanitarian Charter and Minimum Standards in Disaster Response”. Oxford, UK: Oxfam, 2000. Currently being revised. See [www.sphereproject.org/new\\_index.htm](http://www.sphereproject.org/new_index.htm)

16 Action Learning Network for Humanitarian Programmes  
[www.alnap.org/pubs/pdfs/ar2002\\_keymessages.pdf](http://www.alnap.org/pubs/pdfs/ar2002_keymessages.pdf)

17 “Good Medical Practice” General Medical Council, 3rd edition May 2001, [www.gmc-uk.org/standards/good.htm](http://www.gmc-uk.org/standards/good.htm)

18 Appraisal and Re-validation Website [www.revalidationuk.info](http://www.revalidationuk.info)

There is an Appraisal Toolkit<sup>19</sup> (SCHIN, 2002) under construction which is based on the principle that a single portal should be available to appraising and appraisee GPs in the NHS. This on-line resource brings together advice, guidance, best practice, practical tools and access to a community of peers in the appraisal domain. The content should be validated and kept up to date, and supported by links to 'face to face' forums and communities. Discussions are underway to ensure that this can be used by UK medical personnel when working overseas (subject to any local difficulties in gaining Internet access).

The Department of Health has issued further specific guidance on appraisal to public health medicine consultants.<sup>20</sup>

## Registration Renewal and PREP requirements (Nursing and Midwifery)

The Post Registration and Education Practice (PREP) Handbook<sup>21</sup> details the practice and continuing professional development standards and activities necessary for re-registration every three years. The Nursing and Midwifery Council Standards state explicitly that professional practice and appropriate continuing education outside the UK can be used to maintain registration. A properly constructed overseas placement should provide rich opportunities for reflective learning and satisfying these requirements

## Health Professions Council

The Council has decided that Continuing Professional Development will be linked to registration but will not come into effect for at least 3 years. The Council's website contains details of the results of the consultation in summer of 2002.

## Performance Issues

Where possible, appraisals should be shared with main employers, so that appropriate personal and professional development plans can be agreed and supported.

Where there are causes for concern, each employing agency should have its own systems and processes. There are a wide range of circumstances and degrees of seriousness, which require different responses. These responses can include:

- Informing the individuals main employer (in case of secondments, career breaks etc.).
- Informing the relevant professional bodies.
- Ensuring that issues are raised in appraisal, and appropriate training needs identified.
- Informing professional registers.
- Informing mentors and other support mechanisms.
- Seeking assistance from the National Clinical Assessment Authority.
- Informing police if necessary.

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19 Appraisal Portal, Department of Health and Sowerby Centre for Health Informatics [www.appraisals.nhs.uk](http://www.appraisals.nhs.uk)

20 "Further Guidance On Appraisal For Consultants In Public Health Medicine", Department of Health, 2002 [www.doh.gov.uk/appraisal/phconsult.htm](http://www.doh.gov.uk/appraisal/phconsult.htm)

21 "The PREP (Post Registration Education and Practice) Handbook", Nursing and Midwifery Council, Revised edition, April 2002 [www.nmc-uk.org/cms/content/publications](http://www.nmc-uk.org/cms/content/publications)

# 7 Resources for Further Information

## Government Department and Agencies

- **British Council**

The Council's work in health demonstrates British excellence in the health sector as well as promoting and maintaining exchanges and partnerships with influential overseas partners.  
[www.britishcouncil.org](http://www.britishcouncil.org)

- **Department of Health**

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

- **Department for International Development (DFID)**

The UK Government department working to promote sustainable development and eliminate world poverty.  
[www.dfid.gov.uk](http://www.dfid.gov.uk)

- **Foreign and Commonwealth Office**

Provides both current security information and “travellers tips” on a country by country basis  
[www.fco.gov.uk](http://www.fco.gov.uk)

- **Health Protection Agency**

The recently established HPA will not only play an important role in dealing with national but also international challenges related to health protection in this globalisation era. It has already heavily involved internationally in SARS epidemic. Its professional workforce is well respected internationally and helping other countries including WHO to building international alliances to combat communicable diseases and other threats.  
[www.hpa.org.uk](http://www.hpa.org.uk)

- **Health Development Agency**

The HDA operates in the European and global context, and connects with international partners in developing standards, developing and disseminating the evidence base for public health, and in capacity development.  
[www.hda-online.org.uk](http://www.hda-online.org.uk)

- **NICARE**

As the Northern Ireland focus for health and social services activity overseas, Nicare aims to assist the international advancement of health and social services and thus provide increased educational, training and development opportunities for the province's health and social services.  
[www.nicare.com](http://www.nicare.com)

- **World Health Organization**

The World Health Organization is the United Nations specialized agency for health. WHO's objective is the attainment by all peoples of the highest possible level of health. A comprehensive set of resources, and a potential source of international employment.  
[www.who.int](http://www.who.int)

## National and International Professional Bodies

(Further information can be obtained from the booklet "Introduction to The Royal Colleges' International Forum" produced by the Royal Colleges' International Forum – see below for contact details)

- **British Medical Association**

The International Department advises members on working abroad, runs the International Committee, and hosts seminars on working abroad.  
[www.bma.org.uk](http://www.bma.org.uk)

- **Faculty of Public Health**

Faculty is actively involved in all aspects of international health activities including advocacy, education, training and standards through its international committee and value and promotes the international experience of its members. The president is also steering the international agenda by establish formal links with reciprocal bodies from number of Commonwealth and other countries recently, in order to set an example of good practice for international collaboration in public health.  
[www.fphm.org.uk](http://www.fphm.org.uk)

- **International Confederation of Midwives**

The International Confederation of Midwives (ICM) is a world-wide organisation of national midwives' associations, with 80 member associations from 65 countries. The Safe Motherhood Initiative is central.  
[www.internationalmidwives.org](http://www.internationalmidwives.org)

- **International Council of Nurses**

The International Council of Nurse is a federation of national nurses' associations (NNAs), from over 120 countries. It's mission is to represent nursing worldwide, advancing the profession. Its website also documents known international nursing partnerships.  
[www.icn.ch](http://www.icn.ch)

- **Royal Colleges International Forum**

Aims to promote liaison with organisations within and outside the United Kingdom for the advancement of healthcare training and practice internationally. Secretariat supplied by RCGP.  
[www.rcif.rcsed.ac.uk](http://www.rcif.rcsed.ac.uk)

- **Royal College of General Practitioners**

Very active, and publishes regular international newsletter. The RCGP is committed to the development of family medicine internationally and welcomes the opportunity to work in partnership with organisations overseas.  
[www.rcgp.org.uk](http://www.rcgp.org.uk)

- **Royal College of Midwives**

See especially their advice on “Thinking of Working Abroad” (available on website)  
[www.rcm.org.uk](http://www.rcm.org.uk)

- **Royal College of Nursing**

See especially publications on working abroad.  
[www.rcn.org.uk](http://www.rcn.org.uk)

- **Royal College of Paediatrics and Child Health**

Active international committee, international paediatric training scheme and international David Baum fellow.  
[www.rcpch.ac.uk](http://www.rcpch.ac.uk)

- **World Organisation of Family Doctors (WONCA)**

[www.globalfamilydoctor.com](http://www.globalfamilydoctor.com)

## Non Governmental Organisations

This section concentrates mainly on the major NGOs who are employers of health personnel.

- **British NGOs for Development**

BOND is the network of more than 270 UK based voluntary organisations working in international development and development education.  
[www.bond.org.uk](http://www.bond.org.uk)

- **British Red Cross**

The British Red Cross maintains a register of suitably qualified Doctors/Nurses to work overseas in a medical capacity. Such work is organized in liaison with one of the two main constituent bodies of the International Red Cross: the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) and the International Federation of the Red Cross/Red Crescent Societies (IFRC).  
[www.redcross.org.uk](http://www.redcross.org.uk)

- **Catholic Institute for International Relations**

International Cooperation for Development (a programme of CIIR) has been placing workers in projects in developing countries for over 30 years. There currently have around 100 skilled professionals including primary care and public health professionals working in Latin America, the Caribbean, Africa, and the Middle East.  
[www.ciir.org](http://www.ciir.org)

- **Healthnet International**

The Netherlands-based HealthNet International aims at supporting peace, reconciliation and local capacity by improving health care in areas of chronic crisis and post-conflict situations.  
[www.healthnetinternational.org](http://www.healthnetinternational.org)

- **International Health Exchange**

International Health Exchange supports initiatives to bring about sustained improvements to people's health in developing countries by providing appropriately experienced people to organisations requiring their skills.

[www.ihe.org.uk](http://www.ihe.org.uk)

- **Médecins du Monde**

Médecins du Monde is a medical, humanitarian, non-governmental organisation which, for over 20 years, has relied on the commitment of volunteer health professionals to come to the aid of vulnerable people in the world.

[www.medecinsdumonde.co.uk](http://www.medecinsdumonde.co.uk)

- **Médecins Sans Frontières**

Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) is an international humanitarian aid organisation that provides emergency medical assistance to populations in danger in more than 80 countries.

[www.uk.msf.org](http://www.uk.msf.org)

- **Mercy Ships**

Mercy Ships is a global charity serving people of all faiths. Following the example of Jesus, Mercy Ships welcomes volunteers who have the time to devote to the work of bringing hope and healing to the world's poorest peoples.

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

- **Merlin**

Merlin (Medical Relief International) works in the most difficult spots around the world in extra difficult circumstances: wars, epidemics, natural disasters, weakened population, migration problems, vulnerable groups.

[www.merlin.org.uk](http://www.merlin.org.uk)

- **Oxfam**

Oxfam GB is a development, relief, and campaigning organisation dedicated to finding lasting solutions to poverty and suffering around the world.

[www.oxfam.org.uk](http://www.oxfam.org.uk)

- **People in Aid**

A global network of relief and development agencies which are committed to best practice in the support and management of their staff. People In Aid publications contribute to best practice in human resource management and development, and many are available free on their website.

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

- **Save the Children**

Save the Children is the leading UK charity working in over 70 countries to help children in the world's most impoverished communities.

[www.savethechildren.org.uk](http://www.savethechildren.org.uk)

- **Skillshare International**

Skillshare International works for sustainable development in partnership with the people and communities of Africa and Asia. It does this by sharing and developing skills, facilitating organisational effectiveness and supporting organisational growth.

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

- **United Nations Volunteers**

The United Nations Volunteers programme is the UN programme that supports human development globally by promoting volunteerism and by mobilizing volunteers. Every year some 5,000 UN Volunteers from more than 150 different nationalities actively support the programmes of the United Nations and its specialized agencies.

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

- **Voluntary Service Overseas**

VSO is an international development agency that works through volunteers in over 40 countries across the developing world. Experienced professionals from a variety of different sectors share their skills and experience with local communities in the developing world making a difference in tackling poverty by helping people to realise their potential.

[www.vso.org.uk](http://www.vso.org.uk)

## Personal circumstances

- **Inland Revenue**

“Residents and Non-Residents Liability to Tax in the United Kingdom”, Booklet IR20

[www.inlandrevenue.gov.uk/pdfs/ir20.htm](http://www.inlandrevenue.gov.uk/pdfs/ir20.htm)

“Social Security Abroad”

[www.inlandrevenue.gov.uk/pdfs/nico/ni38.pdf](http://www.inlandrevenue.gov.uk/pdfs/nico/ni38.pdf)

- **NHS Pensions Authority**

The NHS Pensions Agency is the administration centre for 1.6 million NHS Pension Scheme members and pensioners.

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

## Training and development

(This is not a comprehensive listing)

- **International Health Exchange**

Short courses on Public Health in Emergencies, Nutrition in Emergencies, Culture, Communication & Health, Humanitarian Aid: Principles & Practice. Also runs short courses on risk management in developing countries.

[www.ihe.org.uk](http://www.ihe.org.uk)

- **Liverpool School of Tropical Medicine**

Offers an intensive 6 week programme leading to a Diploma in Humanitarian Assistance in partnership with Merlin, NutritionWorks, International Health Exchange, Red-R Engineers for Disaster Relief, Oxfam. Also offers a short course in Evaluation Of Health Programmes In Complex Emergencies.

[www.liv.ac.uk/lstm/dha](http://www.liv.ac.uk/lstm/dha)

- **London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine**

See, in particular wide range of training courses and DFID sponsored evidence bases on HIV/AIDS, malaria, TB, safe motherhood, population and reproductive health.

[www.lshtm.ac.uk](http://www.lshtm.ac.uk)

- **Royal Free and University College Medical School**

5 day courses on Cross-Cultural Primary Care.

[www.ucl.ac.uk/primcare-popsoci/courses](http://www.ucl.ac.uk/primcare-popsoci/courses)

- **Medical Students International (MedSIN)**

MedSIN is an independent, student organisation that raises awareness and action for humanitarian and global health issues locally and internationally. Formed in 1997 MedSIN actively support responsible international health collaborations i.e.: exchanges, additions to the medical curriculum and participation in community health projects.

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

- **The International Health and Medical Education Centre (IHMEC)**

The International Health and Medical Education Centre was established in 2000 to meet the growing demand from staff and students for the inclusion of international health in the medical curriculum. The centre began teaching Special Study Modules to first and fifth year medical students in 2000. The first intercalated BSc in International Health began in September 2001.

[www.ihmec.ucl.ac.uk](http://www.ihmec.ucl.ac.uk)

- **Royal College of Physicians**

The Diploma in Tropical Medicine and Hygiene (DTMH) examination is intended to test the knowledge required of physicians who wish to practise medicine effectively in developing countries. It is recommended that candidates attend an approved course of study at either the London School of Hygiene & Tropical Medicine or the Liverpool School of Hygiene & Tropical Medicine for a period of not less than three months.

[www.rcplondon.ac.uk/professional/exam/exam%5Fdip%5Ftropics.htm](http://www.rcplondon.ac.uk/professional/exam/exam%5Fdip%5Ftropics.htm)

## Other helpful Resources

- **BMJ Careers International**

A subset of BMJ careers. You can submit an electronic form about what it is like to work or train in that country or use the posted submissions for your own information.

[www.bmjcareers.com](http://www.bmjcareers.com)

- **EU town twinning**

A website aimed at promoting and active and engaged EU citizenry. Support is available to encourage, in particular, the creation of twinning links in regions where this type of activity is not yet widespread, and in the accession countries. Actively encourages Europeans to link with towns/cities outside of Europe.

[http://europa.eu.int/comm/dgs/education\\_culture/towntwin/index\\_en.html](http://europa.eu.int/comm/dgs/education_culture/towntwin/index_en.html)

- **Local Government International Bureau**

The Local Government International Bureau International Partnerships and Projects team seeks to support and promote all kinds of international cooperation by providing advice on a range of linking issues from establishing a partnership to funding and programmes. An extensive website with good practice examples.

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

- **Institute for Health Sector Development**

The Institute for Health Sector Development (IHSD) is a centre of expertise in international health sector reform and development. IHSD engages with governments, institutions and other partners to analyse sector problems and provide practical assistance for sustained reform effort. Since 1994, the Institute has been contracted to manage the DFID Health Systems Resource Centre (HSRC) for the Department for International Development of the British Government. For more information see:

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

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

- **The Association of Anaesthetists of Great Britain and Northern Ireland**

See especially GAT handbook on organising a year abroad available on

[www.aagbi.org/pdf/gat\\_organising\\_year\\_abroad\\_2002.pdf](http://www.aagbi.org/pdf/gat_organising_year_abroad_2002.pdf)

- **HealthNet International**

The Netherlands-based HealthNet International aims at supporting peace, reconciliation and local capacity by improving health care in areas of chronic crisis and post-conflict situations.

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

- **Royal College of General Practitioners**

International Family Medicine Development Programme.

[www.rcgp.org.uk/rcgp/international/idp\\_info.asp](http://www.rcgp.org.uk/rcgp/international/idp_info.asp)

- **Royal College of Nursing**

“General Advice on Working Abroad”

[www.rcn.org.uk/rcn\\_extranet/rcn\\_direct/pdf/working\\_abroad\\_general\\_2002.pdf](http://www.rcn.org.uk/rcn_extranet/rcn_direct/pdf/working_abroad_general_2002.pdf)

- **ESRC Future Governance programme**

Learning to Make Policy: the emergence of knowledge-based aid.  
[www.hull.ac.uk/futgov](http://www.hull.ac.uk/futgov)

- **John Snow International UK**

John Snow International (UK) is a non-profit making company dedicated to promoting and protecting the health of individuals and communities throughout the world. We provide expertise on a wide range of public and international health issues to governments and donors, complemented by our affiliation with John Snow Incorporated.  
[www.jsiuk.com](http://www.jsiuk.com)

- **Medical Missionaries Association Healthserve**

MMA HealthServe exists to enable Christian Healthcare Professionals to work in the developing world. They do not send anyone themselves but seek to link up individuals and opportunities.  
[www.healthserve.org](http://www.healthserve.org)

- **Medical Protection Society**

MPS is the largest mutual medical protection organisation operating internationally/  
[www.mps.org.uk](http://www.mps.org.uk)

- **Relief Web**

ReliefWeb is a project of the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA). The purpose of this effort is to strengthen the response capacity of the humanitarian relief community through the timely dissemination of reliable information on prevention, preparedness and disaster response. Includes section on humanitarian vacancies.  
[www.reliefweb.int](http://www.reliefweb.int)

# Appendix 1: Further details of projects, placements, skill pre-requisites for some of the main agencies

(This is not a comprehensive listing of opportunities or organisations, but is a selection designed to give a better idea of the range of opportunities and commitments involved. This is only for guidance purpose and it is advised that any interested individual must contact the relevant body for more up-to-date information or any changes in regulations if interested in any such international work.)

## Médecins Sans Frontières UK

### Overall purpose

MSF is an international medical aid agency which aims to deliver independent humanitarian aid wherever it is needed. MSF was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 1999.

### Approach

Médecins Sans Frontières was born out of the exasperation of a group of French doctors working in desperate conditions in the Biafra War at the end of the 1960s and early 1970s. They were determined to create a movement to deliver humanitarian aid wherever it is needed, and to speak out about the plight of the victims.

### Types of placement

MSF is increasingly active in areas of conflict where the medical facilities are inadequate. Placements in these areas can be dangerous but strict security policies ensure that risks to project workers are minimized.

The medical activities vary with each project, ranging from simple curative work and mother-child care, to surgery and epidemic control. In some cases, MSF projects may be similar to a primary health care programme, helping to build up a medical infrastructure.

### Duration of placements

MSF provides emergency relief but aid projects can go on for many years. The rapidly changing conditions can make it impossible to plan more than a few months or even weeks ahead, but the majority of people on missions abroad are given a volunteer contract covering a specific period (usually 9 to 12 months)

## Skills required

Although MSF is pre-eminently a medical organization, it also depends on support from its technical staff, such as logisticians, building engineers and water and sanitation experts. On average, for every expatriate posted to a specific project there are seven local workers. MSF UK continuously recruits from the UK and Ireland through its office in London, to work on MSF projects in over 80 countries.

## Training

Varies with placement and position

## Terms and conditions

The volunteer will receive approximately £500 per month. MSF will meet all the costs of living and accommodation in the project country. MSF will reimburse travel expenses to and from the home country. Travel expenses incurred at the request of MSF for the purpose of (de-) briefing will also be reimbursed.

MSF will take out an insurance policy for each volunteer to cover health insurance, professional liability, private liability, repatriation, flight insurance, accident insurance

The volunteer is entitled to 4 calendar weeks of paid holiday each year. For periods of service of less than one year, the amount is paid pro rata. If it is decided to extend a one year contract by six months, the volunteer will receive a return ticket to the home country plus an extra week's holiday.

## Website

[www.uk.msf.org](http://www.uk.msf.org)

# Merlin

## Overall purpose

Merlin exists to respond to medical emergencies in the most vulnerable parts of the world. UK based.

## Approach

Work in partnership with national health structures, communities and other I/NGOs.

A needs-led response

Promote of social justice, safety and equity

Link relief and development

An ethical and accountable approach.

## Types of placement

Currently working in Afghanistan, Dem. Rep. Congo, Kenya, Liberia, Russia, Sierra Leone, Tajikistan, and Georgia

Programmes targeted at Tuberculosis, Malaria, Lassa Fever, HIV / AIDS and Supporting Health

Currently recruiting e.g. project medical director, programme developer, reproductive health team leader

## Duration of placements

Varies with placement and position

Skills required

Varies with placement and position

## Training

Merlin is committed to professionalism and high quality provision of health care in international relief work. We provide a range of professional training courses in the health, management and support aspects of disaster relief work. Our aim is to enhance the quality of relief programmes, and to give individuals opportunities for their professional and personal development

Currently, Merlin provides three day courses in

- Management in Relief in Emergencies
- Public Health in Relief and Emergencies
- Nutrition in relief and Emergencies

## Terms and conditions

## Website

[www.merlin.org.uk](http://www.merlin.org.uk)

## Red Cross

### Overall Purpose

The International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement is the world's largest independent humanitarian organisation and the largest aid agency. The Movement is guided by seven fundamental principles: Humanity, Impartiality, Neutrality, Independence, Voluntary Service, Unity and Universality.

### Approach

The British Red Cross Society (BRCS) recruits UK “delegates” to form part of a multi-national team which works alongside the volunteers and staff of the local National Society in the programme country. The delegates may be heavily involved operationally, but will work with their local National Society counterparts, and thus reduce the expatriate presence over time.

### Types of placement

The BRCS maintains a register of suitably qualified Doctors/Nurses to work overseas in a medical capacity.

The International Committee of the Red Cross is mainly concerned with the medical activity in or close to areas of armed conflict. The work concentrates on the care of the victims of war, military, para-military and civilians. In such situations an element of personal risk must be accepted.

The International Federation of the Red Cross/Red Crescent Societies (IFRC) undertakes longer-term projects in developing countries in relation to Community Health. These posts require doctors and nurses with Public Health experience. The IFRC also has many emergency relief and rehabilitation programmes.

### Duration of placements

Usually for three months to one year but this can be extended depending on the prevailing circumstances. However, contracts can range from one month to 2 years plus in length depending on the role.

### Disciplines

BRCS tends to recruit to the register surgeons, anaesthetists, RGNs, public/community health nurses, operating theatre nurses, surgical Ward Nurses, finance delegates, relief delegates, logistics experts, disaster preparedness delegates, water sanitation engineers, organisational/development specialists and programme managers.

### Skills Required

It is necessary to be physically fit and mentally robust. There is a need to be resilient and adaptable to fit in well as a member of an often multi-national team. Strong interpersonal and team working skills are also essential. Candidates must be over 25 years old, and the preferred upper age limit for a first overseas mission is 60 years.

Surgeons and Anaesthetists accepted to work in ICRC hospitals must be broadly trained and be competent to act without supervision across a wide spectrum. Because of these requirements candidates must have a higher degree and be Fifth-Year Specialist Registrar or above level. A knowledge of the management of war wounds is clearly advisable.

Increasingly, ICRC surgical structures provide the full range of emergency surgical care as well as the usual district general hospital facilities. Therefore, the need for other Medical and Surgical specialties can arise.

Nurses must be experienced in Surgical/Operating Theatre Nursing. Having a knowledge of Intensive Care/Accident and Emergency nursing is advantageous.

Doctors accepted to work for the IFRC must have an extensive knowledge of Community/Primary Health Care.

Nurses working in development programmes for the IFRC must have experience in Community Health, Tropical Diseases and have a degree in Public Health. A Midwifery qualification is an advantage in many situations. The IFRC also has relief and refugee programmes with requirements for nurses.

The training and supervision of local staff is a key area of many missions.

Nurses must be Registered General Nurses or Midwives with the UKCC, and have a minimum of three year's post graduate experience.

It is preferable to have some overseas experience, particularly in areas of deprivation or disaster.

BRCS is unable to assist medical students with elective periods overseas.

## Training

BRCS may invite surgeons to attend an ICRC surgical workshop at Cartigny, near Geneva, which takes place once a year.

BRCS in association with the Chelsea and Westminster Hospital are running a pilot course of practical training for surgeons wishing to refresh the surgical skills required for undertaking humanitarian work overseas.

## Terms and conditions

Fixed term, salaried basis.

Delegates can be accompanied depending on the position, country and length of contract.

## Website

[www.redcross.org.uk](http://www.redcross.org.uk)

# Voluntary Service Overseas

## Overall purpose

VSO is an international development agency that works through volunteers. Qualified and experienced professionals from a range of backgrounds share their skills with communities and organisations across the developing world.

## Approach

Volunteers are selected for their professional skills and personal qualities. Committed to learning, they help empower individuals, communities and organisations, building self-esteem, skills and confidence to develop lasting solutions to poverty

## Types of placement

VSO's health programme recruits over managers and over 18 different health professions: the VSO website contains an on-line database of a selection of job opportunities that is searchable by country or by skill area/profession.

## Duration of placements

90% of VSO volunteers make a commitment to go overseas for two years. A limited number of shorter placements – lasting from 6 to 12 months – are available where VSO believes that volunteers can do a useful job in a shorter timescale.

## Skills required

The specific requirements for qualifications and experience are set by VSO partners – the overseas employers. In most cases, these qualifications are mandatory to obtain a work permit in the country where you will be working, so the majority of placements call for a recognised qualification and two years post qualification experience

## Disciplines

VSO recruits a full range of health professionals and support disciplines. VSO also urgently needs professionals who have experience of working with HIV/AIDS whether in the UK or overseas. A social work/counselling background is often necessary.

## Training and support

Volunteers attend courses on 'Preparing for Change' and 'Volunteers and Development' before departure. If required, VSO offers a number of professional skills adaptation courses. There is language and cultural awareness training on arrival in the country of the placement.

During the placement, conferences and workshops may be arranged to share knowledge and good practice. Volunteers can continue their learning by working through VSO's 'Learning from Development' self-study course. VSO in-country staff will visit volunteers regularly during the course of their placement.

Volunteers are expected to take responsibility for their own well-being. Local VSO programme offices will provide essential professional and personal support. However, the main source of support will come from the local employer and the local community. In a medical or security emergency, VSO offices will arrange swift repatriation to the home country, to the nearest adequate medical facilities, or to a place deemed 'safe'.

## Terms and conditions

VSO provides return flights and arrange visas and permits. There is a system of grants to support volunteers in preparation, during the placement, and in resettlement. Volunteers also receive a living allowance while overseas.

Accommodation is provided – this will be either shared, or a house/flat on your own.

National Insurance contributions will be paid by VSO whilst overseas.

Volunteers are covered by VSO's medical expenses and personal accident insurance policies.

Non-volunteering partners can accompany volunteers overseas if they cover their own travel costs and all other expenses (except health insurance against major contingencies, for which VSO will pay), and if suitable accommodation is available. To help partners prepare for life overseas, VSO recommends they attend certain pre- and in-service briefing courses. Whilst VSO welcomes applications from individuals from children, there are practical issues that we ask volunteers to consider (e.g. cost of educating children, access to medical facilities etc). With the exception of health insurance, VSO is unable to provide any financial support for dependant children.

VSO accepts applications from couples where both partners want to volunteer, but suitable opportunities are much more limited. In all cases, VSO respects local laws and culture.

[www.vso.org.uk](http://www.vso.org.uk)

# Appendix 2: NHS Pension Scheme

## – further advice

(This is only for guidance purpose and it is advised that any interested individuals must contact the NHS Pension Agency for more detailed information considering their personal circumstances or any changes in regulations near the time.)

NHS staff working overseas may be able to maintain their NHS Pension Scheme (NHSPS) membership for their period of overseas work. Separate arrangements exist for those members on unpaid leave and for those who have resigned from their NHS post.

NHS membership can only be maintained for a limited period and where the member has given an undertaking to return to the NHS.

### Members on unpaid leave

Regulation P2 of the NHS PS Regulations 1995 allows members on unpaid leave to continue to pay their employee contributions throughout their period of overseas employment.

The period of leave must be authorised by the NHS employer.

Contributions will be based on the member's pensionable pay immediately before the absence started. The NHS employer is obliged to pay the employer contributions throughout the period of absence.

### Resignation from NHS post

If a member resigns from their NHS post and goes to work overseas, it may be possible to approve their overseas employment using a provision known as a Section 7(2) Direction under the Superannuation (Miscellaneous) Provisions Act 1967.

Members must apply to remain in the NHS PS within 3 months of starting their new job and have contributed to the NHS PS at some time during the previous 12 months.

Section 7(2) Directions are granted in the following circumstances:

- a) where the member takes up employment under arrangements made with the Overseas Development Administration, an appointment for services overseas under British Technical arrangements
- b) where doctors and nurses take up posts
  - in the service of the United Nations Organisation or its specialised agencies, e.g. the World Health Organisation, or
  - in any other organisation approved by the Minister, or

- c) where doctors and nurses take up posts with organisations such as Oxfam, Save the Children and other British Aid Organisations

Organisations such as the Voluntary Service Overseas and British Red Cross hold their own Section 7(2) Directions. Therefore any member going to work abroad with these organisations may apply to remain in the NHS PS.

Members going to work abroad for any other overseas employer can make their own application for continued NHS PS membership. Each application is considered by the NHS Pensions Agency on its own merits, having regard to the nature of the overseas employment but the employment would be expected to:

- have the agreement of sponsorship of the individual's last NHS employer
- be connected with the provision of healthcare in the charitable sector – not for commercial/private sector
- be for a limited period only. Cover is not provided for those pursuing a career overseas

Applications will also be considered for any overseas employment in developing or war torn countries.

Under the terms of a Section 7(2) Direction, cover is not provided for NHS Compensation for Premature Retirement or NHS Injury Benefits.

## Contributions

Members employed by the British Red Cross will have their contributions deducted from their salaries in the usual way and the Red Cross will pay the employer contributions.

Members employed by Voluntary Services Overseas do not receive a salary and VSO will pay both the employee and employer contributions based on the member's voluntary allowance.

Most other overseas workers will be expected to pay both the employee and employer contributions based on their salary at the end of their last NHS post. The NHS Pensions Agency will calculate the amounts owing and the member may pay the contributions by cheque or standing order.

## Applying for a Section 7(2) Direction

If requested, Voluntary Services Overseas will apply for continued NHS PS membership on the member's behalf.

British Red Cross will arrange for their employees to complete an application form

Members can make individual applications by sending a letter advising the name of their last NHS employer and the date they ended this employment to the NHS Pensions Agency, enclosing a copy of the contract of their overseas employment.

## Cessation of NHS Pension Scheme membership whilst working overseas

Where continuation of NHS PS membership is not possible, the following applies:

### **Less than 2 years membership**

If the member has less than 2 years NHS PS membership, a refund of contributions will be payable immediately on request or automatically after a break in NHS PS membership of more than 12 months. If the member then rejoins within 12 months, without taking a refund of contributions, their membership will link up and a refund will not be necessary.

If a refund of contributions has already been taken but the member then rejoins within 12 months of leaving, their membership can still be linked up by repaying the refund of contributions within 6 months of rejoining.

A refund may not be necessary if the member rejoins the NHS PS within 12 months of completing an overseas course of study or training that will benefit the NHS. The member will need to have their break in membership approved by the NHS Pensions Agency.

### **Membership of 2 years or more**

If the member has at least 2 years NHS PS membership, leaves to work overseas but rejoins the NHSPS within 12 months, their membership will link up and the total membership will be used in the calculation of benefits at retirement.

If the member leaves to work overseas for a period of more than 12 months, their NHS PS membership will be automatically preserved. On rejoining the NHS PS they will continue to accrue membership. At retirement, benefits will be calculated using their total membership and final pensionable salary, unless it is more favourable to base benefits on each separate period of membership using pay at each date of leaving plus cost of living increases.

### **Buying Additional Membership**

It will normally be possible for members to buy back any NHS PS membership lost as result of working overseas by paying additional voluntary contributions monthly, or if rejoining after a break in service of more than 12 months, by a lump sum payment. The lump sum payment must be paid within 12 months of rejoining the NHS PS.

Making additional voluntary contributions to the NHS Pension Scheme Money Purchase arrangements or Stakeholder pension can also increase benefits. The Pensions Agency recommends members seek independent financial advice before investing in either of these products.

Further information about all of the options mentioned above can be obtained from

NHS Pensions Agency  
Hesketh House  
200–220 Broadway  
Fleetwood  
Lancs FY7 8LG  
or from the NHSPA website: [www.nhspa.gov.uk](http://www.nhspa.gov.uk)



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