

Foreword

It is vital that doctors considering a move to the UK (whether permanently or for a short term period of training) thoroughly research the information available about living and working in the UK before making plans to travel or take the GMC's PLAB test. Passing the test does not guarantee employment.

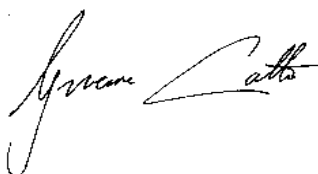
The GMC is a regulatory body, primarily involved in standard setting.

- We set the standards for medical practice in the UK
- We administer the PLAB test
- We charge fees that are designed to cover our costs. We do not seek to make a profit from running the test.

We have no role in manpower planning and we do not ration test places according to the level of jobs in the market. It is not the GMC's role to deny individual doctors the opportunity to demonstrate that they have the necessary competencies to work in the UK and to compete in the job market. Even if we could ration the number of test places, there would be no fair way of doing it.

However, we do believe it is important for doctors to have accurate and realistic information about their job prospects. To help doctors make an informed decision about coming to the UK we have introduced a monthly survey of past PLAB candidates, to measure their experience in gaining their first employment up to one year after taking the PLAB test. The results will be published on our website, and updated regularly.

I hope you will find the results of the first four surveys (covering doctors who passed the PLAB test in January, February, March and April 2003) helpful and that this information will continue to inform the debate about access to UK employment for doctors in training grades who have qualified abroad.



Professor Sir Graeme Catto

July 2004

GMC Survey of doctors who passed the PLAB test in January, February, March and April 2003

Introduction

In early 2004 the GMC initiated a regular survey of doctors who had passed the PLAB test. The survey is designed to collect information about the experience of those who have passed the test in gaining employment in the UK. All doctors passing the PLAB test from January 2003 will be surveyed one year on. This report analyses the survey results for doctors who passed the PLAB test in January, February, March and April 2003.

Response rate

1,535 doctors passed the PLAB test in the period from January to April 2003. All these doctors were sent a questionnaire (a copy is at Annex 1) by post. Table 1 analyses the response rate to the survey. We received 471 valid responses for analysis. The overall response rate to the survey was 31%, slightly lower than we had expected. Since around 95% of these doctors now hold registration, the low response rate cannot be attributed to ineffective or old addresses. We plan to develop an internet based response facility which we hope will increase the response rate for future surveys.

Table 1: Response rate, January to April 2003 cohorts

	January	February	March	April	Overall
Total doctors surveyed	289	575	365	306	1,535
Responses received	118	174	86	93	471
Response rate	41%	30%	24%	30%	31%

Sources used for information about the UK job market

We asked doctors about the sources of information they had consulted in researching the UK job market. Of the 471 doctors who responded to the survey, 441 answered this question. The results are analysed in table 2. Table 3 ranks the sources of information according to their reported popularity.

Table 2: Job research undertaken, January to April 2003 cohort

	Number	%
Research	394	84
No research	47	10
No response to question	29	6
Total	470	100

Table 3: Sources consulted for information about jobs in the UK

Publication	%
British Medical Journal	38%
PLAB advice to candidates	31%
Other - Contacts at colleges, BMA etc	14%
British Council website	12%
Dept of Health website	5%
Total Responses	100%

Elapsed time between passing PLAB test and securing employment

There has been some concern that doctors passing the PLAB test are finding it increasingly difficult to secure the offer of a first post. One important aspect of the survey was to establish how long doctors wait on average before securing their first post.

The GMC has some existing data that can inform this analysis. This is because in order to be granted registration for the first time a doctor must have been selected for employment. Of the 1,535 doctors who passed the PLAB test between January and April 2003, GMC records show that 1,466 (95%) have gone on to take up a period of registration in the UK. These results are summarised in table 4. Table 5 shows the results broken down over the year after passing the PLAB test. 77% overall obtained employment within six months of passing the PLAB test and 93% obtained employment within 12 months of passing the PLAB test.

Table 4: PLAB passes and registration, January to April 2003 cohorts

Number obtaining registration (out of the 1535 who passed PLAB 2) as at June 2004	1,466
Percentage of those who passed PLAB 2 who have obtained registration	95.5%

Table 5: Length of time to secure employment, all PLAB passes in January to April 2003 cohorts

Month	0-3 months	3-6 months	6-9 months	9-12 months	Over 12 months	No post at June 2004	Total
Jan 03 PLAB passes	165 57%	67 23%	30 10%	6 2%	11 4%	10 3%	289 100%
Feb 03 PLAB passes	193 34%	247 43%	42 7%	45 8%	16 3%	32 6%	575 100%
Mar 03 PLAB passes	116 32%	166 45%	30 8%	32 9%	7 2%	14 4%	365 100%
Apr 03 PLAB passes	102 33%	121 40%	39 13%	27 9%	4 1%	13 4%	306 100%
Total overall	576 38%	601 39%	141 9%	110 7%	38 2%	69 4%	1,535 100%

Note: Percentages do not necessarily add due to roundings

We asked doctors how long they waited between passing the PLAB test and securing their first employment in the UK. Table 6 summarises the results for the 467 doctors who responded to this question in the GMC survey. Of the doctors who responded 53% overall (January - 54%, February - 56%, March - 47%, and April 54%) obtained their first employment within 6 months of their PLAB pass. Of those who responded to the survey 88% overall (January - 89%, February - 89%, March - 84%, and April 87%) obtained their first employment within 12 months of their PLAB pass.

Table 6: Length of time to secure employment, respondents to the GMC survey in January to April 2003 cohorts

Month	0-3 months	3-6 months	6-9 months	9-12 months	Over 12 months	No post at June 2004	Total
Jan 03 PLAB passes	40 34%	24 20%	29 25%	12 10%	11 9%	2 2%	118 100%
Feb 03 PLAB passes	58 34%	37 22%	44 26%	13 8%	15 9%	4 2%	171 100%
Mar 03 PLAB passes	23 27%	17 20%	18 21%	13 15%	10 12%	4 5%	85 100%
Apr 03 PLAB passes	30 32%	20 22%	18 19%	13 14%	9 10%	3 3%	93 100%
Total overall	151 32%	98 21%	109 23%	51 11%	45 10%	13 3%	467 100%

Note: Percentages do not necessarily add due to roundings

Our questionnaire did not ask about the length of time specifically spent looking for work and it is likely that some doctors did not immediately look for work following passing the PLAB test. We plan to amend our questionnaire in future to capture this search time more accurately.

Type and Grade of post for first employment

We asked doctors about the type of appointment of their first post. Of those responding to the survey, 452 answered this question. Table 7 shows the results for the type of post and table 8 analyses the results by grade. Most posts were at SHO grade (74%) and marginally more were substantive posts (52%) as locum ones (42%).

Table 7: Type of post of first appointment, January to April 2003 cohorts

Type of appointment	Responses	Response %
Substantive	237	52%
Locum	189	42%
Honorary/ Supernumerary	25	6%
Other	1	0%
Total	452	100%

Note: Definitions in glossary

Table 8: Grade of post of first appointment, January to April 2003 cohorts

Grade of post	Responses	Response %
SHO	252	56%
PRHO	89	20%
Trust Doctor (SHO)	81	18%
Trust Doctor (HO)	13	3%
Clinical Fellow	10	2%
SpR	3	1%
HO	1	0%
Clinical Research Fellow	1	0%
Trust Doctor (SpR)	1	0%
Type 1 SpR	1	0%
Total	452	100%

Note: Definitions in glossary

Specialty of first post

We asked doctors about the specialty of their first post. Of those responding to the survey, 454 answered this question. Table 9 analyses the results. Medicine, Surgery and Psychiatry lead the way in terms of the specialties into which doctors secured their first employment. Of those responding to the survey 71% indicated that the specialty of their first post was their preferred choice.

Table 9: Specialty of first post, January to April 2003 cohorts

Specialty	Responses	Response %
Medicine	105	23%
Surgery	59	13%
Psychiatry	55	12%
Obstetrics & Gynaecology	44	10%
A & E	43	9%
Paediatrics	37	8%
Other	27	6%
Geriatric Medicine	24	5%
Orthopaedics	20	4%
Rotational	16	4%
Anaesthesiology	12	3%
Ophthalmology	6	1%
Urology	6	1%
Total	454	100%

Note: Percentages do not necessarily add due to roundings

Length of first post

We asked doctors about the length of their first post. Of those responding to the survey, 454 answered this question. Table 10 analyses the results. The survey results show that around 70% of doctors spent longer than three months in their first post. We plan to amend our questionnaire in future so as to collect more information about those who took up posts which were less than three months in duration.

Table 10: Period of first post, January to April 2003 cohorts

Length of first post	Responses	Response %
Less than 3 months	140	31%
Between 3 and 6 months	76	17%
Between 6 and 9 months	183	40%
Between 9 and 12 months	12	3%
Over 12 months	43	9%
Total	454	100%

Note: Percentages do not necessarily add due to roundings

Location of first post

We asked doctors about the location of their first post. Of those responding to the survey, 453 answered this question. Table 11 analyses the results. Around 60 % of respondents indicated that the location of their first post was their first preference.

Table 11: Location of first post, January to April 2003 cohorts

Location of first post	Responses	Response %
London	87	19%
Midlands	83	18%
North West	71	16%
Wales	45	10%
South East	43	9%
North East	34	8%
Scotland	32	7%
South West	25	6%
East Anglia	21	5%
Northern Ireland	12	3%
Total	453	100%

Note: Percentages do not necessarily add due to roundings

Application method

We asked doctors to indicate the method by which they had learned about their first post. Of those responding to the survey, 450 answered this question. The results are analysed in table 12 below. 90% of respondents had completed a clinical attachment before obtaining their first post in the UK.

Table 12: Application method, January to April 2003 cohorts

Application method	Responses	Response %
Direct application to an NHS trust	171	38%
Advertisement in medical press	148	33%
Through clinical attachment	41	9%
Through an agency	39	9%
Through BMJ website	28	6%
Other	23	5%
Total	450	100%

Note: Percentages do not necessarily add due to roundings

Securing subsequent employment

We asked doctors whether they had experienced a gap in employment between their first and second post, and if so how long this gap had been. Of those responding to the survey, 320 answered this question. Table 13 analyses the results. 56% of those responding reported that they found it easier to find their second post, compared with their experiences in finding a first post. This is supported by the shorter reported times spent waiting for a second post compared with the first post (discussed in table 6). We plan to amend our questionnaire for future surveys so as to collect more specific data for those who reported waiting less than three months for their second post.

Table 13: Length of time between first and subsequent post, January to April 2003 cohorts

Length of time	Responses	Response %
Less than 3 months	268	84%
Between 3 and 6 months	26	8%
Between 6 and 9 months	24	8%
Between 9 and 12 months	2	1%
Total	320	100%

Note: Percentages do not necessarily add due to roundings

July 2004

Glossary of terms

Clinical Fellow	This is a doctor holding a non-established academic post.
Clinical Research Fellow	This is a doctor holding a non-established academic research post.
Honorary or supernumerary	An honorary post is an unsalaried post. The doctor may receive funding from a grant, fellowship or bursary. A supernumerary post is a post that has been created by placements additional to the agreed number of trainees in approved training posts. A post may be both supernumerary and honorary.
Locum	A locum doctor is one who is standing in for an absent doctor, or temporarily covering a vacancy, in an established post.
Medicine	Non surgical branch of medical science.
PRHO	Pre-registration house officer. Also referred to as an 'internship'.
Rotation	This refers to the move from one post or specialty to another. In a period of employment a doctor may have one or more rotation.
SHO	Senior house officer. This is the level at which basic specialist training takes places. SHO posts are salaried hospital posts and contain both service and training elements. Doctors usually do a number of SHO posts in different specialties before concentrating on one specialty. Posts at this level will only be official training posts if they have approval from the relevant UK Royal College and the Postgraduate Dean.
SpR	Specialist registrar. This is the level at which higher specialist training takes place. SpR posts are salaried posts and last between 4 and 6 years. SpR posts have strict entry criteria. This may include passing the membership examination of the relevant Royal College. Experience at SHO level in certain specialties will also be required for entry to the grade. There are two different types of SpR posts referred to as Type 1 and Type 2 posts. SpR posts will only be official training posts if they have approval from the relevant UK Royal College and the Postgraduate Dean.
Substantive	A substantive post is an established permanent post.
Trust Doctor	Trust doctor posts are posts that do not have educational approval from the relevant UK Medical Royal College and that are not approved by the Postgraduate Dean. These posts may be at house officer (HO), senior house officer (SHO) or specialist registrar (SpR) level and will be referred to in the following way: Trust Doctor HO; Trust Doctor SHO or Trust Doctor SpR. Such posts are not credited towards basic or higher specialty training.

Type 1 SpR

Type 1 SpR posts lead to the award of a Certificate of Completion of Specialist Training (CCST). EEA and overseas doctors apply for Type 1 posts in open competition with UK doctors.

Links

General Medical Council - <http://www.gmc-uk.org>

BMJ Careers - <http://www.bmjcareers.com>

British Association of Physicians of Indian Origin (BAPIO) – <http://www.bapio.co.uk>

British Council - <http://www.britishcouncil.org>

Department of Health - <http://www.dh.gov.uk>

NHS Careers - <http://www.nhscareers.nhs.uk>

The Lancet – <http://www.thelancet.com>

Questionnaire

1. Did you undertake any research into job opportunities in the UK before applying for the PLAB test? If so, what did you use? (*Tick or circle*)

PLAB Part 2 Advice to Candidates	Department of Health website	British Medical Journal website
British Council website	Contacted by the British Medical Association	Other (please specify)

2. From the date that you passed the PLAB test how long did it take you to find your first post? (*Tick or circle*)

Less than 3 months	3 months	6 months
9 months	12 months	12+ months

3. What specialty was it in? (*Tick or circle*)

A & E	Geriatric Medicine	Medicine	Obstetrics and Gynaecology
Paediatrics	Psychiatry	Surgery	Other (please specify)

4. Was it your preferred choice? (*Tick or circle*)

Yes	No
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5. What grade was the post? (*Tick or circle*)

PRHO	SHO	SpR	Type 1 SpR	Trust doctor (HO)
Trust doctor (SHO)	Trust doctor (SpR)	Visiting registrar	Clinical fellow	Clinical research fellow
Other (<i>please specify</i>)				

6. Type of appointment (*Tick or circle*)

Substantive	Locum	Honorary/ Supernumerary
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7. What was the length of your first post? (*Tick or circle*)

Less than 3 months	3 months	6 months
9 months	12 months	12+ months

8. Where was your first post? (*Tick or circle*)

East Anglia	London	Midlands	North East	North West
Scotland	South East	South West	Wales	Northern Ireland

9. Was this your preferred location? (*Tick or circle*)

Yes	No
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10. How did you find the vacancy? (*Tick or circle*)

I answered an advert in the medical press	I applied directly to an NHS Trust	I went through an agency
Other (please specify)		

11. Had you completed a clinical attachment before your first appointment? (*Tick or circle*)

Yes	No
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12. Did you find it easier to find your second post? (*Tick or circle*)

Yes	No
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13. Did you have a gap of employment between your first and second post, if so how long was it? (*Tick or circle*)

Less 3 than months	3 months	6 months
9 months	12 months	12+ months

Thank you for completing this questionnaire. Within two weeks of receiving it please return it to us, using the enclosed envelope.