

# **Your Rough Guide to Working and Volunteering Overseas**

Volunteering and working overseas can be rewarding experiences. Working with new partners, organisations and individuals in new locations and clinical settings gives you a sense of achievement and helps you develop new skills, learning and life-time friendships. Not only are you contributing to practice in ophthalmology overseas, but also learning to appreciate practice in the UK and helping you vitalise and sustain a career that could last for 35 years.

There are primarily two ways to prepare for volunteering and working abroad – through linking with organisations/institutions or charting your way as an individual. What's important is to be clear about why you want to do it, whether it is about making an impact by supporting communities in developing countries with additional skills and expertise, or you just wish for a change of lifestyle and scenery and the experience of working abroad in another country.

Choose a country, region or culture you are drawn to, or have a personal interest in. A good place to start is by organising an exchange planning visit:

- Find someone who knows both UK and overseas parties to help you facilitate your trip
- Make sure there is a pre-arranged timetable with contact names and telephone/mobile numbers ahead of the trip
- Listen and learn, taking notes at meetings. Writing down everyone's full names. A report is often needed for a funder; try and write it on the way home while everything is fresh. Take good photos – get permission first!
- Follow up with an exchange visit to the UK; making time to be a good host
- Develop a three-year activity plan and memorandum of understanding (MoU)
- Raise funds to carry out the agreed activities

Whatever you chose to do, you can be certain that there will be personal and professional benefits for both overseas and UK colleagues, their institutions and importantly the patients.

Visit the same place on repeated trips with an aim of developing relationships.

## **Institution to Institution volunteering**

By working with recognised organisations or programmes, you have the benefit of a more structured process and identified countries where support and training is welcomed.

A link programme (institution to institution) benefits the UK institution by offering staff development and job satisfaction through 'hands on' work in a developing country, improving teaching skills, morale and increasing the status of the UK partner as an instrument for change in global eye care.

## **VISION 2020 LINKS Programme**

The [VISION 2020 LINKS Programme](#) is managed by the International Centre of Eye Health and works with overseas institutions like the College of Ophthalmology of Eastern, Central and Southern Africa (COECSA). Being part of an organised hospital to hospital partnership means that a proven process can be followed but you will need support from your trust.

When using a LINKS programme you can:

- Prepare your case for volunteering/working abroad as you will need trust senior management support
- Ensure you have a committed team and co-ordinator
- Think about a start-up fund
- Read up on the country, its health system and your partner institution
- Carry out a needs' assessment and priority objectives with your partner institution
- Work out your aims and objectives in collaboration with the partner institution
- Arrange an exchange planning visit well in advance

## **Individual volunteering and working abroad**

There's never a perfect time to do it and there are all sorts of reasons to put it off like your career in the UK, family or finances. If you are going it alone, you should prepare and plan well in advance.

As an individual volunteer, you can:

- Speak with like-minded people, including senior management in your hospital
- Share your aims, motivation and commitment
- Find a potential overseas partner through personal contacts, V2020 LINKS Programme or THET
- Use the readily available information from these organisations as there are tried and trusted methods of getting the process started. It will help make your trip a success and avoid pitfalls

## Prepare for take off

- Be aware of risks and security
- Check entry requirements for passports and visas
- Arrange professional registration if necessary
- Look up health advice – immunisations and prophylaxis
- Arrange medical and travel insurance
- Book flights and arrange to be picked up at the airport
- Accommodation (use partner's local knowledge)
- Currency (usually USD plus local currency once in country)
- Facilities, infrastructure, expertise, knowledge
- Research what exists: is there something already happening that you can build on
- Equipment. Many units are not well equipped, and often clinical staff are desperate for basic diagnostic tools such as a direct ophthalmoscope. The "Arclight ophthalmoscope", being robust, light and very cheap is ideal, again both to use and leave as a gift

Often more sophisticated equipment has broken down or lost a spare part. If you liaise with the place where you are going, you might be able to find out what needs repairing or replacing and get some training from your local equipment repairer here before you go

- Short term courses & symposia.
- VISION2020, IAPB, ICEH, AAO online courses

#### Medical registration & Indemnity

You need to find out whether the local GMC equivalent has a registration process for visiting professionals. This is something your host partner should explore for you. Many countries will accept UK GMC registration but there may be a fee for temporary registration however if this requires you to visit the national medical council in person after arrival in the country, you should budget one whole day for obtaining this approval document.

#### **GMC certificate of good standing**

<https://www.gmc-uk.org/registration-and-licensing/managing-your-registration/certificates/request-a-certificate-of-good-standing-from-us>

MDU / MPS / MDDUS will consider case-by-case basis.

#### Prepare for landing

- Keep a copy of the itinerary, flights, passport, insurance, telephone numbers etc.
- Organise a reputable local pick up at the airport
- Book appropriate accommodation, and don't assume that the local host will act as a travel agent
- Take feedback forms and ensure that they are completed before departure (see below)

#### Prepare for while you're there

- Go for as long as you think you can
- Take some text books. Although most parts of the world now have some sort of Internet access, it is often not good or reliable, and people working in the developing world, especially people such as ophthalmic assistants, ophthalmic clinical officers, and ophthalmic nurses who do the bulk of the work where there are few ophthalmologists, greatly value appropriate textbooks. If you could take some out and leave them there, they would be much appreciated
- Aim for knowledge and skills transfer
- Focus on sustainability.
- Focus on quality of outcomes
- Be safe.

#### Cultivate:

- Passion, Patience, Energy, Optimism, Creativity, Inclusiveness
- Joy of service, Productivity, Patient centred approach, Quality improvement cycles

### Health advice (for hot climates)

- There is good advice online eg at <https://www.masta-travel-health.com/>
- Immunisations: yellow fever
- Malaria prophylaxis: Malarone is the best, but most expensive. Doxycycline is more affordable. Lariam (Mefloquine) can have unwanted psychological side-effects (especially unwelcome in a new environment)
- DEET 50% spray from a local pharmacy or supermarket is helpful for spraying clothes at dusk
- Basic medical kit

### Listen and Learn about the work, culture and people

- Agree next steps and timeline during each visit
- Planning and communication are the mainstay of a successful partnership
- You have two ears and one mouth. Listen, and ask more questions than you give answers.
- You will be learning initially
- Let your overseas partner also teach you
- Be sensitive to needs & culture
- Help local staff undertake audit of their surgical outcomes using existing audit tools (eg. Post-op cataract visual outcomes and complication rates) utilising WHO benchmarks
- Being mindful that change in another culture requires patience and understanding

### What to do when you get back

Share with colleagues, family, friends.

### Follow FCO and travel guidance

#### Information and Advice

- Can be obtained from a number of sources:
  - First hand from others who have worked/volunteered overseas
  - THET or VISION 2020 LINKS manuals (see below)
  - College website - International Committee section  
<https://www.rcophth.ac.uk/professional-resources/international-strategy/>
  - International Association for the Prevention of Blindness (IAPB)  
<https://www.iapb.org/>
  - World Health Organization (WHO) <https://www.who.int/>
  - International Council of Ophthalmology <http://www.icoph.org/>

### What not to do

Medical or surgical tourism: turning up and performing very new and advanced surgery is not necessarily a good idea (how will patients be followed-up?). Similarly, there are ethical considerations in travelling simply to perform many cataract surgeries in a technique that is

new to you (e.g. mSICS). Be mindful of cultures, local practices, and the hard work already being done.

Assume that you know best. You don't.

Assume that you have nothing to offer. You do.

## Resources

### **1. THET International Health LINKS Manual**

<https://www.thet.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/08/Links-Manual-In-Full-Low-Res-72dpi.pdf>

### **2. VISION 2020 LINKS Toolkit**

[LINKS toolkit for overseas partners](#) (PDF 1.2Mb)

### **3. Academy of Medical Royal Colleges: ACADEMY STATEMENT ON VOLUNTEERING (2016)**

Retrieved from: [www.aomrc.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2016/05/AOMRC\\_Statement\\_2013-03-25\\_Volunteering\\_health-professionals\\_global\\_health\\_development.pdf](http://www.aomrc.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2016/05/AOMRC_Statement_2013-03-25_Volunteering_health-professionals_global_health_development.pdf)

### **4. International Centre for Ethics (2013). Helping or Hurting? The Ethics of Voluntourism. Ethical Enquiry.** Justice and Public Life, Brandeis University.

<https://www.brandeis.edu/ethics/ethicalinquiry/2013/May.html>

### **5. BMA advice on volunteering abroad.** <https://www.bma.org.uk/advice/career/going-abroad/volunteering-abroad>

### **6. IAPB Africa Human Resources for Eye Health Strategic Plan 2014-2023**

[Strategic Plan for 2014-2023 – Vision for Africa, Phase 1: 2014-2018](#)

7. A multimedia training programme for eye health workers especially appropriate for Africa is available from “world medical education” free of charge.

8. **Reporting form templates:** [Training visit feedback questionnaire](#) (Word 50Kb), [Sample visit report](#) (Word 220Kb), [Annual Report Template](#) (Word 220Kb)

9. **Open Educational Resources** – such as “Ophthalmic Epidemiology” (<https://open.lshtm.ac.uk/>)

### **10. Degree programs:**

MSc Public Health for Eye Care (LSHTM), MPH, MBA

On-line For example:

<https://www.lshtm.ac.uk/study/courses/short-courses/free-online-courses>

## Further Resources:

ICEH	<a href="https://iceh.lshtm.ac.uk/">https://iceh.lshtm.ac.uk/</a>
AAO Global Sight Alliance	<a href="http://www.globalsight.org/">http://www.globalsight.org/</a>
IAPB	<a href="https://www.iapb.org/">https://www.iapb.org/</a>
Cybersight	<a href="https://cybersight.org/">https://cybersight.org/</a>

### NGOs (NGOs may also offer support)

AAO Foundation	<a href="http://www.aao.org/foundation">http://www.aao.org/foundation</a>
Andean Medical Mission	<a href="http://www.andeanmedicalmission.co.uk">http://www.andeanmedicalmission.co.uk</a>
Brien Holden Vision Institute	<a href="http://www.brienholdenvision.org">http://www.brienholdenvision.org</a>
Carter Centre	<a href="https://www.cartercenter.org">https://www.cartercenter.org</a>
CBM	<a href="https://www.cbm.org">https://www.cbm.org</a>
Charity Vision	<a href="http://charityvision.net">http://charityvision.net</a>
Eyesee	<a href="http://www.eyeseemission.org/">http://www.eyeseemission.org/</a>
Fred Hollows (New Zealand)	<a href="https://www.hollows.org.nz">https://www.hollows.org.nz</a>
Fred Hollows Foundation (Aus)	<a href="http://www.hollows.org/au/home">http://www.hollows.org/au/home</a>
Global Sight Alliance	<a href="http://www.globalsight.org">www.globalsight.org</a>
Hawaiian Eye Foundation	<a href="http://hawaiianeyefoundation.org">http://hawaiianeyefoundation.org</a>
Helen Keller International	<a href="http://www.hki.org">http://www.hki.org</a>
Himalayan Cataract Project	<a href="https://www.cureblindness.org">https://www.cureblindness.org</a>
ICO	<a href="http://www.icoph.org">www.icoph.org</a>
Korle Bu (Ghana) / Moorfields	<a href="http://www.moorfields.nhs.uk/content/moorfields-west-africa">http://www.moorfields.nhs.uk/content/moorfields-west-africa</a>
Light for the World	<a href="https://www.light-for-the-world.org">https://www.light-for-the-world.org</a>
Lions Club International	<a href="http://www.lcif.org/EN/our-work/sight/index.php">http://www.lcif.org/EN/our-work/sight/index.php</a>
Foundation	<a href="http://www.lvpei.org">http://www.lvpei.org</a>
LV Prasad	<a href="https://www.mercyships.org.uk">https://www.mercyships.org.uk</a>
Mercy Ships	<a href="http://gbr.orbis.org">http://gbr.orbis.org</a>
Orbis	<a href="https://www.rotary.org/en">https://www.rotary.org/en</a>
Rotary	<a href="http://second sight.org.uk/New/Pages/Home.shtml">http://second sight.org.uk/New/Pages/Home.shtml</a>
Second Sight	<a href="http://www.seva.org/site/PageServer">http://www.seva.org/site/PageServer</a>
SEVA Foundation	<a href="https://sightforall.org">https://sightforall.org</a>
Sight for All	<a href="https://www.sightlife.org">https://www.sightlife.org</a>
SightLife	<a href="http://www.sightsavers.org">http://www.sightsavers.org</a>
SightSavers	<a href="https://www.uniteforsight.org">https://www.uniteforsight.org</a>
Unite for Sight	<a href="http://www.visionaidoverseas.org">http://www.visionaidoverseas.org</a>
Vision Aid Overseas	<a href="http://www.worldsightfoundation.com">http://www.worldsightfoundation.com</a>
World Sight Foundation	

### Travel Grants & Awards

It may just be easier and simpler in the first instance to fund yourself.

However, there are many travel grants available.

Pharmaceutical and ophthalmic equipment companies may support trips.

- Sir William Lister and Dorey Bequest Travel Awards.
- Trevor Roper Award.
- Beyer Travel Scholarship.

<https://www.rcophth.ac.uk/professional-resources/awards-and-prizes/>