



An introduction to **occupational health:**

A guide for DOccMeds and others entering the sector



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The Society of Occupational Medicine (SOM) welcomes all health professionals interested in occupational health as members. Benefits include:

- Monthly e-bulletins, free webinars, mentoring (at <https://ohcareers.info/>), a free legal helpline, peer support, and access to regional group meetings
- The Occupational Medicine journal (nine editions per year) – an international peer-reviewed publication, which provides up-to-date research and information
- Access to medical appraisals and indemnity insurance for occupational medicine doctors
- Free appraisal toolkit and access to professional indemnity insurance for occupational health nurses
- Career support, with regular job adverts, workplace visits, an annual careers fair and CPD opportunities
- Campaigning and advocacy for occupational health and medicine
- Money-saving discounts.

Conferences are useful for staying up to date with new research and industry trends. They are advertised on the SOM website under 'Events'.

The SOM also provides guidance on finding work experience and shadowing. Do look at <https://www.som.org.uk/careers> for information about careers events, courses and training.



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1. Introduction

Working in occupational medicine offers a unique and rewarding opportunity to bridge the gap between healthcare and the workplace. It is a specialty unlike any other, focusing on an advisory role that supports individuals, organisations and workforces in managing work-related and general health issues. This work not only benefits employees but also contributes to the success and sustainability of businesses and communities.

The Diploma in Occupational Medicine (DOccMed) is a vital stepping stone for medical practitioners who are either exploring occupational medicine or enhancing their practice by incorporating it. It is particularly popular among general practitioners (GPs) who wish to expand their portfolio by offering occupational health services to local companies. However, any GMC-registered doctor can take the DOccMed exam. These practitioners play a pivotal role as the first point of contact for employees experiencing illness or suspected work-related conditions, supporting them to stay in work or return to work as part of a broader societal benefit.

The SOM and the Faculty of Occupational Medicine (FOM) are committed to supporting professionals pursuing occupational medicine qualifications, guidance and education. To achieve the DOccMed certification, candidates must complete an approved training course and pass both the MCQ and the oral portfolio assessments within five years. Thousands of doctors across the UK have taken this step, equipping themselves with the skills and knowledge to deliver high-quality occupational healthcare.

As the professional organisation representing occupational health practitioners, the SOM welcomes all health professionals interested in this vital field.

This toolkit has been designed to offer diploma doctors practical advice, resources and insight into key aspects of occupational medicine. Whether you are new to the field or looking to deepen your expertise, this document will serve as a valuable companion on your professional journey.

The SOM remains dedicated to supporting its members in making a meaningful impact on workplace health and well-being. Together, we can promote a healthier, more productive workforce and champion the essential role of occupational health in society.

Join at:





2. Getting Started in Occupational Health

- **Network** early on, as it will open opportunities. Events by the SOM or the FOM are a great opportunity to meet with doctors, trainees and industry leaders. They provide insight into potential roles coming up in the industry and help build connections prior to applying.
- Link or work with an **occupational health company** as an independent contractor or join as an employee. Look for companies on the 'Find an OH Provider' page: <https://www.som.org.uk/find-oh-provider-company>. Use **SOM regional and special interest groups** to network with closely related colleagues. (Join as an SOM member to attend.)
- Sign up to recruitment websites, as some posts are available to them before they go live on websites.
- Some posts in occupational medicine do not require a diploma prior to starting. For example, in the oil and gas industries, you can attend a virtual OEUK workshop to become accredited to perform OEUK medicals for candidates working offshore. This is open to GMC-registered doctors. This could be a great way to step into the occupational health field whilst studying for the diploma – and help you assess whether you are interested in it. Some companies recruit medical officers (GMC-registered doctors without a diploma) and supervise you in getting trained for the diploma. (This tends to be smaller companies.)
- Functional assessment is also a career worth considering. This sector comprises several industries, although the main areas doctors work in are insurance medicine and benefits medicine. The DVLA also employs doctors, and there is crossover here with aspects of occupational medicine. The aim of functional assessment is to determine how illness and long-term health conditions affect a person's ability to complete specific tasks, actions or functions and is intrinsically linked with both occupational medicine and work and health in general.

What are recruiters looking for?

A **CV** that highlights your **education, career history** and any **occupational health experience**, such as shadowing. Have you tailored your CV to emphasise relevant OH skills and experiences? Is your CV concise and easy to read? (Note the SOM offers a mentorship scheme.) Be prompt and responsive in communications, such as emails, especially when arranging interviews. Have you confirmed the interview details and any necessary documents? Are you prepared to follow up?

At the interview

- **Be prepped.** Research the company thoroughly and show interest in joining the organisation. What do you know about their values or services? How does their approach align with your professional goals?
- **Demonstrate your CPD.** Show your commitment to occupational health (OH). Have you been reading articles from the SOM? How would you answer the question "What's currently topical in occupational health?"
- **Highlight your OH experience.** Have you done any shadowing or spoken with other OH doctors? Have you joined groups with others interested in OH? What did you learn from your diploma case study? What aspects of OH interest you, and what are your long-term goals?



- **Explain your current role.** Consider what tasks in your current role relate to OH. For instance, do you write reports or work to deadlines? Do you have a solid understanding of how the Equality Act applies to OH? Think about how you would structure an OH report. When would you seek input from others? How would you manage a complex case?
- **Reflect on your role as a team player.** How do you support your colleagues? Do you proactively share knowledge or help? How would you collaborate with multidisciplinary teams, such as HR or physiotherapists, to ensure a comprehensive approach to cases?

3. Supervision and Clinical Governance

Clinical governance covers activities that maintain and improve the quality of patient care. It includes quality assurance, quality improvement, and risk and incident management. The SOM has an audit group, who can give you an idea of what is required, but the group does not conduct audits on companies themselves.

Clinical supervision is a formal process that provides professional support and learning for practitioners. It is a non-judgemental way for practitioners to develop their skills and keep up with the latest developments in care.

Clinical governance frameworks include:

- A focus on quality
- Implementing evidence-based practice
- Input into the research and development agenda
- Taking the lead in the monitoring and delivery of the quality of care
- Ensuring policies and procedures are in place to safeguard patients and service users, which may include complaints procedures and safeguarding policies
- Policies and processes around complaints/safeguarding.

Clinical supervision can be conducted in groups, as one-to-one or as peer supervision. These meetings can look like:

- An individual presenting a predetermined topic
- An individual presenting a personal development topic
- The group discussing issues raised from an audit of practice
- The group discussing a clinical case and how care can be improved.



Linking clinical governance and clinical supervision

As part of the clinical governance framework, organisations wishing to engage in clinical supervision will need to:

- Encourage a culture of openness and honesty
- Encourage multidisciplinary working
- Ensure staffing levels create an opportunity to manage change effectively
- Provide useful support mechanisms for staff
- Encourage staff involvement in decision-making
- Provide staff with appraisal systems that work
- Develop open lines of communication and access to information.

If you are joining an OH company, this will be provided. If you are setting up independently, you may wish to consider SEQOHS accreditation. The standards include ensuring that 'arrangements are in place for access to more specialised advice and escalation, when indicated, to an occupational physician on the GMC specialist register.' Regardless of accreditation, we strongly recommend establishing such an arrangement or collaborating with a qualified professional who can provide the necessary support.



4. Case study: Dr Nadia Masood, OHP

"Before committing to the DOccMed course, I wanted to be absolutely sure this was the right path for me - especially since I was self-funding it. I reached out to multiple Occupational Health Physicians (OHPs), using contact details provided by the Society of Occupational Medicine (SOM). Speaking to professionals already in the field gave me invaluable insights into what the role involved and helped confirm my decision to move forward.

"Once I was confident, I signed up for the course and started actively networking. I made a conscious effort to connect with as many people in occupational medicine (OM) as possible, particularly on LinkedIn. This included recruiters, as I wanted to keep my options open for future job opportunities. I reached out to people, introducing myself and explaining that I was working towards my exam and keen to explore roles in the field. At the same time, I updated my CV to highlight my existing skills and achievements that were relevant to OM.

"Before even completing the Diploma, I was invited for an interview and was fortunate to be offered a role with Medigold. This was a huge step forward, as it allowed me to gain hands-on experience in the field while still working towards my qualification.

"I officially started working as an OHP in September 2024 and sat my exam in November 2024. By December, I received confirmation that I had passed - an incredibly rewarding moment after all the effort I had put in."

Takeaways for anyone considering this path?

1. **Do your research** Speaking to experienced professionals before committing to the course was invaluable. It helped me understand the realities of the job and confirmed that this was the right move.
2. **Network, network, network** LinkedIn was a game-changer. Reaching out to people in the field, including recruiters, opened doors and created opportunities I wouldn't have found otherwise.
3. **Be proactive** Don't wait until you have the qualification to look for jobs. Expressing interest early and demonstrating enthusiasm can put you on employers' radars before you even sit the exam.
4. **Leverage your existing skills** Even if you're coming from a different background, highlight transferable skills in your CV. Employers value experience that can be applied to occupational health.
5. **Stay focused** Balancing study with a new job was challenging, but having a clear goal kept me motivated. The hard work paid off, and I'm now working in a role I truly enjoy.





4. Case study: Dr Iain Kennedy, GP

"I believe having the DOccMed has made me a better GP. And being a GP (of the self-employed, independent contractor variety – with employees) has given me experience of the more common clinical and employment scenarios I am presented with in occupational medicine. Our attached medical students from the University of Aberdeen also get a taster of what it is like to have a portfolio career.

"The DOccMed has opened several avenues beyond routine NHS work, which makes my professional life as a doctor varied and more interesting. I have been an approved doctor with the Maritime and Coastguard Agency for 19 years, doing health surveillance medicals for merchant seafarers. I also provide independent medical assessments for the motor car repairs industry and hand-arm vibration syndrome (HAVS) assessments for electric power sector workers and whisky distillery workers.

"I work one half day a week in occupational medicine, and another GP in my practice works two half days. The fees companies typically pay are reasonable, and enough to keep other GPs in the partnership sweet. This year (2024), I am undertaking online training via The Royal College of Surgeons of Edinburgh, followed by a course in Plymouth next year to become an Approved Medical Examiner of Divers (AMED). Early in 2025, I am embarking upon training at King's College London on the Basic Course in Aviation Medicine (BCAM) as I begin the process to become an aeromedical examiner (AME)."





5. Setting up your practice

Once you have obtained the diploma and acquired experience, further down the line you can decide whether you would like to set up your practice or continue to work as an employee or contractor for an established company.

Step 1. Do you want to work on your own either as a limited company or as a sole trader, or build a larger practice? If the latter, you may want to consider a business partner – someone who understands how to write business plans and tenders – and working closely with another occupational physician (so you can have holidays without letting your clients down!).

Step 2. Consider how you will gain clients – will you self-advertise or focus on building strong reputations within the sector? Networking via the SOM and the FOM is an effective way of developing your profile. You can also post regularly on LinkedIn about topics that interest you.

Step 3. Give your business a name, develop a website, get a business bank account and a reputable accountant – preferably one who understands your business or is in a large practice with partners with a broad understanding of tax issues, specifically pertaining to occupational medicine. This can include IR35, which you should understand if you are working as a subcontractor, and VAT, which may apply to some areas of your work.

Step 4. Be aware of pitfalls such as client expectations which do not match your own. Many clients do not have a clear understanding of the role of occupational health, therefore having a written contract will be helpful in making clear what you do and do not offer. Have specific KPIs (key performance indicators) which cover time from referral to appointment, time from appointment to receipt of management report, and feedback on health surveillance. You may wish to include an ethics clause or at least to discuss the ethical issues around occupational medicine with your client before you start to work for them.

Step 5. Have a diverse portfolio. The value of not having all your eggs in one basket cannot be overestimated. Even if you specialise in one area, try to diversify so that if there are difficulties in each area (such as banking or aviation), your business will survive. Having public clients such as local NHS hospitals or local government will be helpful.

Step 6. Consider finding a mentor – this could be your appraiser or another senior person in the business who can guide you. The SOM hosts a mentoring site at <https://ohcareers.info/>

Step 7. Consider issues such as GDPR – should you be registered with the Information Commissioner's Office? Should you be using your own secure online OH system? Do read the FOM ethical guidance.

Step 8. SEQOHS/industry kitemarks such as ISO tend to be expensive, but many large tenders will stipulate that these are required. If you have a business manager, this may be a major part of their work.

Step 9. Are you going to have premises or will you engage a virtual office to field calls?

Step 10. Finally – because we are all getting older – consider your pension. If you have a limited company and earn over the threshold, you and everyone you employ will need a company pension.



6. Professional development and training

Specialty training in occupational medicine

Specialty training in occupational medicine starts at ST3 level and takes **four years full time**. Applicants should have an **MBBS** (or equivalent), and they should have undertaken training in specialties such as surgery, psychiatry, IMT, general practice, public health, anaesthetics/ACCS, radiology or paediatrics.

Applicants who have not undergone two years of UK core/specialty training must submit a Certificate of Completion of Common Professional Capabilities at the time of application and have at least 24 months' experience (not including foundation-level experience) in the same speciality area, by the advertised start date.

The **person specification** and **entry criteria** for occupational medicine ST3 2024 recruitment can be found at <https://medical.hee.nhs.uk/medical-training-recruitment/medical-specialty-training/person-specifications/person-specifications-2024/occupational-medicine-st3-2024>. Prospective applicants can apply on the ORIEL portal at <https://www.oriel.nhs.uk/Web>

The **Faculty of Occupational Medicine** (FOM) has a detailed guide for prospective trainees, including how to become a consultant in occupational medicine. See [Prospective trainees](#).

Training posts can take place in the **NHS**, in **industry** and in the **armed forces**.

Training in the NHS

- The National School of Occupational Health manages the national recruitment for occupational medicine for NHS ST3 vacancies. The process runs twice a year.
- The Occupational Medicine ST3 listing is published via [NHS Jobs](#) and [Oriel](#).

Training in industry

- Industry employers can advertise their training vacancies. Most use <https://www.bmj.com/careers/>
- Any industry candidate will be required to attend a **national recruitment interview** to ensure they are "appointable". This is called benchmarking, to maintain consistent standards.

Training in the armed forces

- The armed forces have their own recruitment process. Their candidates are also required to attend a national recruitment interview for benchmarking.

Specialty training in occupational medicine requires trainees, in approved training posts, to pass **two examinations** (the Part 1 MFOM and the Part 2 MFOM), a **research project** (e.g. a dissertation, a substantial audit) and **workplace-based assessments**.

The **Part 1 MFOM** is taken in ST3 year. Candidates who have passed the DOccMed MCQ exam are exempt from the Part 1 MFOM.

Further information can be found at <https://www.fom.ac.uk/> and at the National School of Occupational Health website <https://eastmidlandsdeanery.nhs.uk/occupational-health/national-school-occupational-health>



Additional qualifications

After obtaining the **Diploma in Occupational Medicine** (DOccMed), you can train to become an **appointed doctor** for ionising radiation or work in compressed air for example. Information on how to become an appointed doctor can be found at <https://www.hse.gov.uk/doctors/information.htm>

The **Diploma in Aviation Medicine** (DAvMed) is designed for doctors who wish to practise aviation medicine. Speciality training in occupational medicine is required. Please see <https://www.fom.ac.uk/education/examinations/diplomas/davmed> for more information.

The SOM advertises **HAVS courses**. The @Work Partnership has a Certificate in Hand-Arm Vibration Syndrome (HAVS) course.

Portfolio Pathway (CESR) entry to the Specialist Register

An option for entering the Specialist Register, following a DOccMed, is the **CESR Pathway**, now known as the **Portfolio Pathway**. More information regarding the Portfolio Pathway can be found on the Faculty of Occupational Medicine website <https://www.fom.ac.uk/education/cesr>

The application process requires **considerable time commitment**. The submitted documentation needs to provide evidence of achievement of capabilities, as described in the **GMC-approved Occupational Medicine Curriculum**, which is expected to relate mostly to the last **six years** of professional experience.

Before entering this pathway, you will need to have completed, as a minimum, **both** foundation years **and** at least two years post-foundation clinical experience. While it is not essential to have obtained any postgraduate diplomas before entering this pathway, you will need to provide equivalent evidence of capabilities of core training in any recognised specialty or general practice. You can submit your evidence to the FOM for consideration before gathering evidence for a Portfolio Pathway/CESR application later.

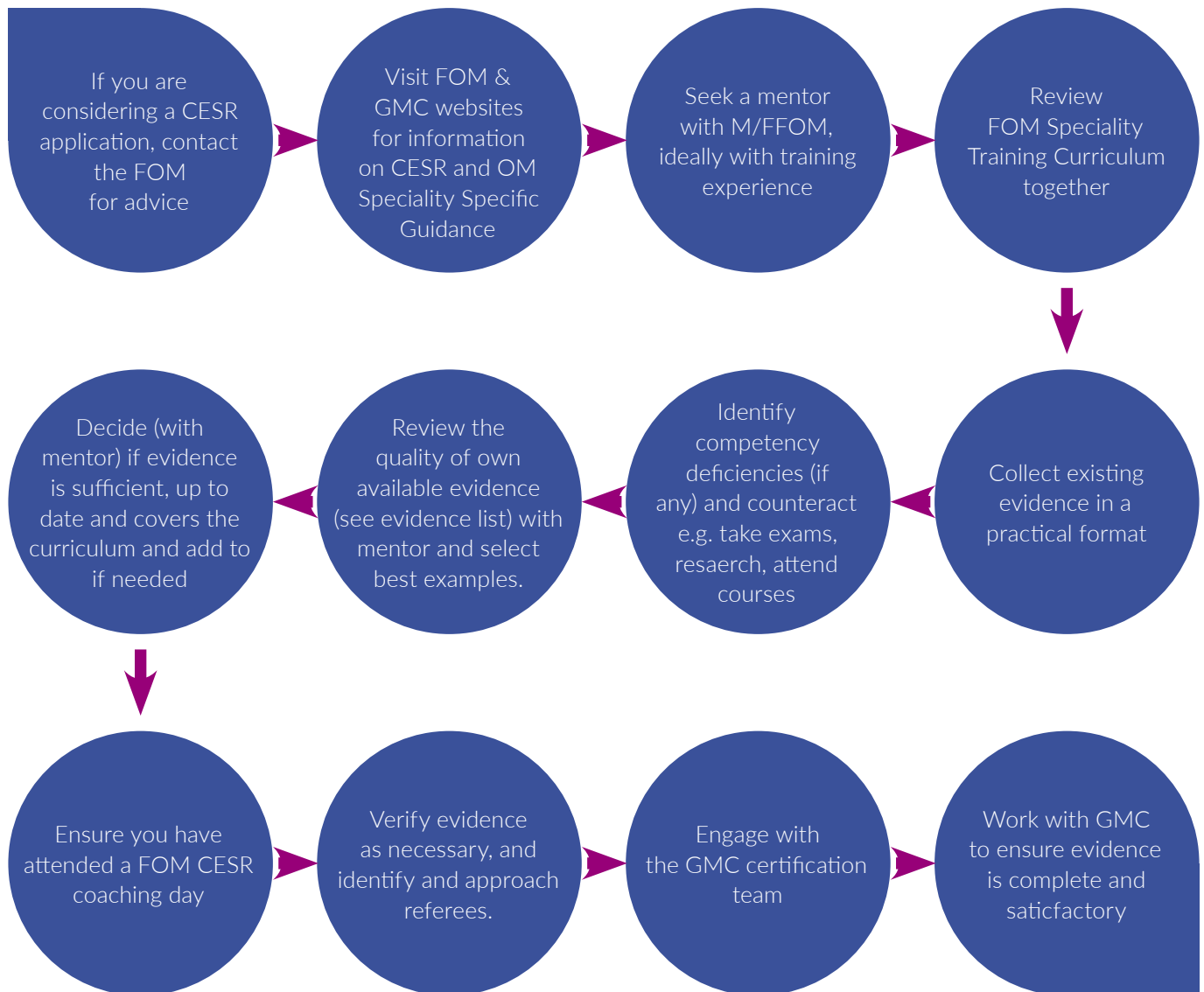
Job options

There are various options available for those wanting to pursue a career in OH after gaining the diploma qualification. Some of the options are listed below:

- **NHS work:** You can try contacting local OH departments to see if there is any availability to take on part-time work.
- **Corporate providers:**
 - > Some OH providers offer supervision schemes for those who have no prior OH experience. Health partners Optima Health and Medigold Health have previously advertised these posts.
 - > A comprehensive list of OH providers can be found on the SOM website at <https://www.som.org.uk/find-oh-provider-company>
- **Independent work**
- **Freelance/ad hoc:** This can be slightly harder to come by, but if you sign up with an OH recruiter, they will inform you if work becomes available. (Some recruiters are mentioned below.)
 - > [Occupational Health Staffing](#)
 - > [Occupational Health Jobs UK](#)
 - > [gel resourcing](#)



Occupational medicine speciality training pathways flowchart



From *Speciality Training Handbook in Occupational Medicine*

<https://www.fom.ac.uk/education/speciality-training/current-trainees/training-handbook-2022-curriculum>



7. Quality assurance and accreditation

The following standards and minimum requirements are designed to be applied within a **UK accreditation scheme**. They articulate the expectations of a **safe, effective, quality** occupational health service. Therefore, services not participating in accreditation may also find them useful. These are **professional standards** for occupational health services.

A **standard** is something considered by an authority or by consensus as a basis of comparison in measuring or judging adequacy or quality. These standards have been developed by the Faculty of Occupational Medicine with other occupational medical and nursing professional bodies, commercial occupational health providers, employer and worker representative bodies, and government agencies.

Minimum requirements are intended to be well defined and easy to understand. They must be met to satisfy the standards. Many of the minimum requirements relate to statutory or professional responsibilities.

Examples of suitable evidence are the records that applicants can use to demonstrate they meet the standards and the minimum requirements. The examples are indicative and only illustrate the kind of information that can be used.

Accreditation will be a voluntary and cyclical process. Accreditation provides independent validation that an occupational health service has demonstrated competence measured against the standards and is fit for purpose. Accreditation is not an endpoint. It drives continuous improvement, allowing occupational health services to self-assess their services and performance against standards, identify improvement areas and take remedial actions.

More information can be found here: <https://www.fom.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/standardsjan2010.pdf>

Here are some tips for maintaining **high standards of practice** and **continuous improvement**:

- **Conduct risk assessments.** Regularly assess work processes, equipment and the working environment to identify and mitigate potential hazards.
- **Communication.** Encourage open communication to foster a culture of employee well-being.
- **Monitoring and evaluation.** Regularly monitor and evaluate health and safety practices to identify areas for improvement.
- **Streamline auditing and inspections.** Audits and inspections are a staple part of the continuous improvement process. It is essential to receive the information included in reports as quickly as possible so that you can respond to potential hazards and vulnerabilities before it is too late.



8. Resources and tools

For more information, visit <https://www.fom.ac.uk/education/examinations/diplomas/doccmcd>.

This page includes:



[Portfolio template](#)



[Reading lists](#)



[Example exam papers](#)



[Additional information](#)



[Information on working part-time](#)

There are lots of books available, but make sure they are in date because laws and regulations change. The [recommended reading list on the FOM website](#) is a good starting point. Some books (e.g. Oxford Handbook of Occupational Health, 3rd edition, 2002) can be accessed for free online via Open Athens or via your NHS institution/library.

General exam advice

- Questions are mostly best fit rather than yes or no – therefore, learning to interpret the wording of the questions is key.
- Ensure you know your portfolio inside out.
- Be familiar with your IT set-up prior to the exam.

Free online/PDF guidance

- Good Occupational Medical Practice (FOM, 2017) – good overview and concepts, especially for exams: https://www.fom.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/GOMP_2017_Web.pdf
- Equality Act 2010: guidance <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/equality-act-2010-guidance>
- HSE A-Z topics page – useful topics and downloadable PDFs <https://www.hse.gov.uk/doctors/guidance.html>
- Approved codes of practice:
 - > Appointed doctor guidance (ionising radiation, asbestos, lead, COSHH, compressed air)
 - > Back pain and manual handling (managing upper limb disorders at work, DSE, and ART, RAPP and MAC tools)
 - > Drugs and alcohol misuse at work
 - > Pregnancy
 - > Noise
 - > RIDDOR
 - > Sickness absence



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- Assessing fitness to drive – a guide for medical professionals (DVLA, 2024) – <https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/66c8b0d0e39a8536eac052f4/assessing-fitness-to-drive-august-2024.pdf>
 - ACAS (Advisory, Conciliation and Arbitration Service) – advice on employment law, dispute resolution

Interactive tools and checklists to aid practitioners in their daily practice

- HSE website for MSK assessments/tools – ART, RAPP, MAC
- HSE ready reckoner and calculator for vibration and noise

Additional revision sources

- MCQ books – MCQ Clare Fernandes; MCQ Nick O’Keeffe
- OH books – Fitness for Work; Oxford Handbook of Occupational Health 3e (3rd edition), <https://academic.oup.com/book/42075>
- Ethics Guidance for Occupational Health Practice – 8th Edition (on the FOM website)
- Occupational Health Academy course, which offers MCQ, and portfolio recorded sessions, and a portfolio weekend webinar

Examination fees

For more information on examination fees, visit <https://www.fom.ac.uk/membership/subscriptions>



9. Peer support and networking

Peer support and networking in the workplace and in the wider field is important for those working in occupational health. It can benefit not only your everyday experience of work but open career opportunities as well.

Peer support and healthy working relationships in the **workplace** have been shown to be positively correlated with job performance, job satisfaction and role clarity.² Peer support was viewed as being a valuable resource for dealing with the stressful demands of home and work life.

In the wider field, **peer support and networking** provide many benefits, such as:

- Sharing knowledge of the sector
- Learning about specific tools or resources
- Bringing new experiences and interests to your peer group
- Meeting new people within your peer support
- Finding out about conferences, training or events
- Strengthening support and encouragement for those working in the sector.

Peer support and networking opportunities

- Join professional associations such as the SOM.
- Attend conferences.
- Participate in online forums.
- Establish mentorship relationships and peer support groups.
- Reach out to those working in occupational health on forums such as LinkedIn.

Meet people working in occupational health in your area!

The SOM has regional groups, which provide local relevant educational events to develop members' knowledge. There are also excellent networking opportunities through social events and workplace visits. These contribute to your CPD requirements. For more information about SOM regional groups, visit:



2. Agarwal, B., Brooks, S. K., and Greenberg, N. (2020). [https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/pdf/10.1177/2165079919873934#:~:text=Evidence%20further%20suggests%20that%20peer,positive%20coping%20strategies%20\(e.g.%2C%20exercise](https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/pdf/10.1177/2165079919873934#:~:text=Evidence%20further%20suggests%20that%20peer,positive%20coping%20strategies%20(e.g.%2C%20exercise)



10. Frequently asked questions

Which course is right for me?

Approved courses include the University of Manchester, Optima Health, the Royal Society for Public Health, TOPHS, Newcastle OHS, the University of Glasgow, and EOPH. When choosing a course, it is important to consider your time, availability, learning style and costs. For example, some courses are short and intensive, whereas others are spread over months. Take some time to decide what learning experience is best suited to you.

What if I am an overseas candidate/international member of the SOM?

Being an international member means you have the requisite skills and experience but have been practising in a different environment under different laws governing the practice of occupational health. As an overseas candidate, you will not have a work permit to practise in the UK, which is quite different from having a licence to practise. This presents a challenge when adapting to the UK and may require a short period of adjustment. This could be through resources to help, shadowing other doctors, or employment in moderate or large organisations where support from other colleagues is available. We encourage providers to acquire a sponsor licence, through which a certificate of sponsorship would be issued to support the work visa application process for international talent. This can be obtained via the [UK government website](#).

Indemnity

It is important to get suitable **indemnity cover**, and this will depend on the scope of practice.

You may have to enquire with indemnity providers to see what the individual requirements are. The DOccMed is considered an **entry-level diploma** into the speciality and as such indemnity providers will usually require the clinician to have **adequate supervision** before offering indemnity. Alternatively, they will offer indemnity if the individual has enough experience in the OH field. MDDUS, for example, will offer indemnity if the physician has a minimum of two years' OH experience before setting up independent practice.

If you work for the **NHS or for corporate companies**, supervision should not be a problem. However, be mindful if you are setting up independent practice. If you are an SOM member, you can get a **MDDUS discount**.

