



**5 steps about working  
as a Veterinary  
Surgeon in the UK  
that you might be  
getting wrong**

~ with Andreia Dias



## Hi! My name is Andreia Dias...

I'm an unconventional Veterinary Surgeon dividing her time between clinical practice in Scotland (for now) and supporting other fellow Vets moving and adjusting to a life and career in the United Kingdom.

I graduate in Portugal at the very end of 2014 and was working in private clinical practice in Scotland by the Spring of 2015. I

have gone from private clinical practice, to a rotating internship at a referral University hospital, to a hiatus and then occasional locum shifts in different areas of Scotland.

I have struggled with feelings of inadequacy, failure, guilty, lack of knowledge and poor performance. I have also saved several animals lives and made some owners very happy (yay for chocolates!), witnessing some episodes short of miracles. I have fought working conditions and I have fought myself in the way. I have almost given up and I have now aligned my life with my career. Hint for you – it's a bad idea to start aligning your career without thinking about your life!

On my path to constantly improve myself, my skills and my person, I have stumbled on this project, UK VetMove. Initially, it was a support community for those going through the move. Something I created with colleagues that had moved and others that were interested in doing the same.

It's now much closer to my heart than that! I now strive to help and support anyone that wants to change careers and move to the UK, but making sure that this is the right choice for them and, if they are still convinced about it, then I want to make sure they achieve the most successful career they want without sacrificing more of their time and life than they need to.

For that, I created personal programs to achieve successful jobs and learn the tools of the trade in the UK, which are often quite different from what is seen and practised "back home". If you are considering moving to and working in the UK and want to become successful in a structured and

accelerated way, we can discuss your current situation and devise a plan for working together through a free strategy call (you can see my availability and book a call [here](#)).

For those interested in adventure and trailing the road alone, the website [www.ukvetmove.com](http://www.ukvetmove.com) aims to compile and redirect you to all the information you could possibly need and the blog will also give you some idea about the world of Veterinary Medicine in the UK. You can always discover more inside the [Facebook Group](#)!

See you around!

~*Andreia Dias*

1.

## **You need to be proficient in English to work as a veterinary surgeon**

You would think that, if you are mildly proficient in English, you can speak to anyone in the UK, right? Well, not really. Knowing English doesn't mean you understand the language of the region you want to move to.

See, while everyone in the UK speaks "English", you were probably not really taught anything apart from what is called the "Queen's English". How posh does that sound? (Do you even know the word "posh"?).

Truth is, if you are ok with English, you will probably be more than fine anywhere in the UK. If you're a visitor!

However, if you want to have a professional role, you need to become comfortable with your level of English. You should at least be able to have a normal conversation about a mundane topic without much muttering, staggering or questioning the other person. Talking is very important. You do this every day for several hours when you're working in the UK! Understanding and speaking the language allows you to go through with a successful application, communicate with colleagues and, more importantly, with the clients. And you want to get that right!

Complaints against veterinary surgeons are mostly due to poor communication or even lack of communication between vet and client, and they can be really costly for your career and the practice you work in. The good news is, we often have a fairly proficient level of English anyway, or it's easy enough for us to better ourselves with some study and practice.

When I started working, this was one of the things I feared the most - getting people on the phone while I was on call with a problem that I couldn't understand. I have to say, unfortunately, it happened to me more than once, especially as I was getting used to the accent. The clients end up getting frustrated because you are asking the same questions all over again (and they give you the same answer that you are unable to understand...).

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But once I started to understand this, then it's such a strong tool to connect with the clients! Suddenly you're speaking the same language, the client sees you as someone that understands them and the barrier comes down! And let me tell you, there's nothing a practice wants more than a vet whom the clients like!

Understanding the language, the accent, the technical terms and the local dialect will really help you in going through an application and also succeed in your role.

So, apart from learning English (obviously!), what can you do?

- *Talk* to people in English, either colleagues/friends or by attending special groups or classes, particularly online (often free!)
- *Visit* countries that speak English. If you're a travel fan and if you can, obviously! Training your ear to understand different accents will help you adjust quicker when you do move
- If you have a place you want to move to, try to find out what the local accent or dialect sounds like (for instance, get to grips with the Scottish or Irish accent if you want to work in one of those places)

## 2.

### **You should spend the money to register with the RCVS *even if you don't have a job offer***

Yes, you may consider the fee expensive, but you have to do it if you want to work. The fee is not really much compared to what you earn as a vet... Some locums will charge that amount of money for *one* day of work! You can't do that if you don't register, and if you don't register, then you are not likely to get a job in the UK. No job, no career in the UK, no dream come true. *You don't look for a job and then register. You register, then look for a job.*

Registering can be easier than what you might think - some papers here, a translation there, pay the fee, and off you go! This is what happens in the majority of the European countries.

If you are not in one of those and you need to sit the examination, then the story's a bit different, because it truly is an expensive fail should you not pass the examination. You should look for help to prepare the examination if you have to sit it, otherwise you might end up losing a lot of time and money, not to mention the opportunities you would have gotten if you had passed the examination on the first go.

Make sure you do get help if you're not sure about how the RCVS registration takes place. I asked for the papers I thought I needed, but in the end turned out I didn't actually need all of them and so I waited longer to get my registration done. So even though most things are explained, it can still get confusing and messy...

But the thing is, once you get this underway (it doesn't even have to be completed!), you are then at a much better position when it comes to applying for jobs and you are now likely to start hearing back when you send in those applications.

So, while maybe you do need to get some of your savings or work for a bit to be able to pay for the fee, it's well worth it in exchange for the possibility of a career in the UK!

### 3. Finding a job is not as hard as you think!

Not really, it isn't! There are online portals that *anyone* can access, regardless of where they are, which contain over 200 job applications. Combining several of those together, you are likely able to find well over 400 different placements all around the UK. Not to mention the several hundred placements recruitment agencies have to fill. You see, there is a bit of a recruitment crisis in the UK, where you have either very experienced (and settled) vets or very young and inexperienced vets.

But! Finding the **right** job isn't easy! If you apply for the wrong jobs and get one of those, then you are probably going to contribute to this problem because you will end up leaving the profession or go back home (which is why vets with a moderate amount of experience are a scarce resource).

The demands of clinical roles in the UK are often more significant than what foreign vets are used to, and this has been leading to a degree of dissatisfaction and disillusionment within the veterinary profession in the UK, leading to the diversification of several members of the profession (which, coincidentally, tend to be the ones with a moderate amount of experience). If it's something that professionals trained in the UK find hard to cope with, it's no surprise that it would be even harder for foreign vets.

The good thing, though, is that if you have gone through the process of moving and working abroad, that already shows that you are resilient (c'mon, it's not something that is done lightly and definitely not a change for the faint of heart!).

And if you are able to spot the right opportunities and get them, then you become a valuable member of the team and someone the employer wants to keep happy! Happy vet = happy clients = money flowing in for the business.

However, don't believe that you can get *any* job. It's still more expensive to hire and pay for a vet that is going to do a poor job or get the clients and the practice into trouble than to wait to find someone that fits the role!

So it's not hard to find lots of offers available, but choosing the right offers is harder, requires a lot of clarity and can really be the best thing you do for your career!

## 4.

### **Applying for a job in the UK is not done the same way as applying for a job back home**

Well, if you want to just send in your translated applications, go ahead. Just be aware you probably won't be getting the job.

Since you are not in the UK market, you might not understand how it works. Your strengths and weaknesses from "back home" might very well be different in the UK. What the employers want is most likely a fair bit different. This is something that is hard to grasp until you get in the market, unless, of course, you have someone to help you understand this beforehand or support you during the process. Otherwise, you will slowly learn it by applying and usually getting rejected, and with experience and feedback you start to understand what you were missing. Unfortunately, you would have been rejected and failed to secure the roles you'd applied for.

On the other hand, you might end up succeeding with your application but getting a job that is not what you want. There are places that are desperate enough to get a vet and promise the world, but fail to deliver (sometimes they promise way less than "the world" and still fail to deliver!). You should also be aware of "referrals". The recruitment crisis is leading to recruitment agencies and also vets to earn nice fees for "referring" capable vets - and some will do whatever it takes to get you to take that job, even if it's not really appropriate for you.

Unfortunately, I know from experience that this is not always a good idea. When your expectations are not matched and you don't receive support, you get disappointed very quickly and this can also have a severe impact on your perceived self-esteem and self-worth as a veterinary surgeon. And leaving your first job 3 months after you started it doesn't look that good on your CV, does it? It's certainly going to pop up at your next job interview!

Of course, some rules of job applications are the same, however you then have another problem - did you actually learn them? I certainly didn't during Vet School! See, back home it's easy enough to get a job without a super application. You spend some time at the practice you

are interested in, show the staff what you can do, and then ask if they have a job and apply with your CV if they do.

For the most part, you can't do this in the UK. First, for that you have to already be here, and that might not be your case. Second, you still usually have to go through an application process, but if you screw that up and someone else shows up that is a better fit for the role, then you're going to miss on it.

But getting this is a key piece. It will allow you to apply for *any* job and, therefore, you can **choose** the jobs you want to apply for. This is *powerful*.

Don't underestimate the power of understanding the UK clinical market when it comes to creating your job application. This understanding can automatically get you to be perceived as a top candidate!

5.

**Deciding to move to the UK and creating a budget is the first step, but that's exactly it - the first step**

The harder and scarier thing is **actually moving**. Until then, you've only done *some* planning and taken *some* action.

Yes, budgeting is quite important and fundamental, but there's a bit more to it. You need to take into consideration travel expenses and your location. You need to think about whether you are going to any place that fits certain requirements, or you've visited an area of the country that you particularly liked and want to move there. You need to take into consideration the amount of work available in the area, how easy it is for you to get there, how close you are to international airports and the cost of living in that area. And whether you want to secure a job first, or are willing to move before you get it.

There are also a bunch of other bureaucracies that you won't be able to sort out until you actually move, so you might not have thought about them or even be aware that you need to get them sorted. This can delay things a bit for you (and we're talking about receiving your salary here) if you move with a job offer on the table and don't have time to sort everything out in advance. It can also be a bit of a stressful period when you're trying to find out about what else you need to do and you need it done in a short period of time, but then it takes longer than you expect (we've all been there, right?).

Now, moving can be the best thing you do for your career. It's a lot easier to get a job when you are able to visit the practices you want to work in! Certainly in my case, moving before getting a job offer was what really allowed me to get one at all... And living in the area before starting to work allowed me to have everything in place for my first job (and understand the people!).

Knowing beforehand what you need to deal with, such as how to deal with your health, pensions and becoming taxable, can help you plan for these as well, relieving your stress load on those initial weeks after the move. So deciding to move to the UK is really only the first step of the move. The action takes place after you've made that decision!

## Bonus - A word about Brexit

As you are likely aware, Brexit relates to the UK leaving the European Union as a member state. This will take place in 2019 and that means the rules regarding pretty much everything will see some changes. The climate has brought over some fears to the high volume of foreign vets that work in the UK regarding what will happen to their right to work and live in the UK. The truth is, we don't know what will happen, but the veterinary profession in the UK is one relying heavily on foreign workers and failing to protect their right to work and live in the UK can result in a severe public health crisis. So both the RCVS and the BVA are lobbying to try to protect veterinarian rights as hard as they can.

Nonetheless, it's likely that several changes will take place. For instance, it's possible that the RCVS will no longer be able to provide direct recognition of all European diplomas and end up doing so just for Veterinary Universities that have passed the European Association of Establishments for Veterinary Education (EAEVE) evaluation, requiring you sit the examination for the rest. This is NOT what is happening at the moment, so you can see *that you have an incredible window of opportunity up until 2019 if you are thinking about moving.*

On the other hand, I also wanted you to be aware of other more general implications of Brexit. Again, although everything is still a bit of a question mark, I want you to understand the situation with Scotland and Northern Ireland. In both regions, the vote against Brexit won, but due to the voting system, Brexit was still the overall winner.

So now please keep in mind that Scotland will very likely go through another referendum to become independent. In the last referendum in 2014, 55% of the voters wanted to stay in the UK and 45% wanted to become independent, but one of the key pillars of the "stay" campaign was that Scotland was part of the European Union and becoming independent would mean they had to apply for membership again. That referendum also had one of the highest turnout in the UK, so my bet is that the second referendum is going to be similar. **This means that there's a real possibility that Scotland becomes an independent country.** If you move to Scotland, you might find

yourself out of the United Kingdom in a couple of years. Or not, we don't know! But you want to be aware of this possibility!

Regarding Northern Ireland, the topic is a bit more tricky. Politics!... Northern Ireland has a land border with the Republic of Ireland. If the Northern Ireland is to be part of the UK, then some sort of border control will have to take place to avoid illegal immigration for "the European Union" (aka Republic of Ireland) to the "UK" (aka Northern Ireland). And this border control doesn't currently happen even though there is a border. Border control can risk the Good Friday Agreement (long story short, an agreement that has helped establish peace between the two "Irelands" and within the Northern Ireland. Yes, we're talking IRA, the Irish Republican Army, here). **So, there is also the possibility that, if the people of Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland agree, Northern Ireland leaves the UK, unites with the Republic of Ireland and the island becomes a unified Republic of Ireland.** That belongs to the European Union. See what's going on here? The problem, however, is quite a bit more tricky, because chances are a good part of the citizens of Northern Ireland actually don't want to leave the UK (that's why they're still part of it!), but they might also not want to leave the European Union. Bit of a tension here!!! And please bear in mind that terrorist attacks by the IRA in Northern Ireland really didn't happen that long ago and you were likely born when they did. **Long story short, many people have seen Brexit as a threat to peace in Northern Ireland.**

The reason why I'm telling you all of this is so that you are aware of possible long-term implications of your move, should you decided to move permanently or for a fairly long period of time.

Despite all of this, Brexit can be an opportunity for foreign veterinary surgeons, and especially the period before it happens. It seems that recruitment is getting harder, so you have less competition, and there's a true lack of veterinary surgeons in most areas (especially public health!). This seems to be a period of time where there's a fairly high demand for veterinary surgeons that is not being met by the same level of supply! If you are serious about a career move, this is potentially one of the best times to do so!