

OET Podiatry Candidate

From Alicante to the UK

Andrea Richarte Lopez

Home country: Spain

Now working at: Buckinghamshire Healthcare NHS Trust

Passed OET in 2022



A Health Education England (HEE) pilot programme into creating a pathway for Spanish podiatrists to work for the NHS led to an exciting career opportunity for Andrea Richarte Lopez.

"After high school, I knew I wanted to work in healthcare, but I wasn't sure in which field. When I found out about podiatry, I liked the look of it and I have been very happy with my choice," says Andrea of her decision to become a podiatrist back in 2017. To achieve her goal, Andrea completed a four-year podiatry degree at Universidad Miguel Hernández de Elche in Alicante.

On graduating, she took up a role in a private clinic in Spain. "In Spain, podiatry is largely treated privately and is a fairly new profession," says Andrea. Recognising that an international hospital setting could offer greater opportunities, Andrea was intrigued when her former university shared information about an HEE pilot programme offering a supported pathway to a job in England. Andrea leapt at this chance for career development. "I was excited by the fact that the UK would be a different environment and I would see how the profession works in a hospital setting that has more resources and greater continuity with patients."

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The HEE pilot programme

The HEE pilot programme, the foundation for OET Pathways, offered internationally qualified podiatrists a supported pathway to a job as a podiatrist in an NHS Trust in England. The programme included

assessment of current English language proficiency using OET Pulse, a diagnostic test; structured OET preparation; help with test bookings; support with visa and immigration; help with registering with the regulator (Health and Care Professions Council (HCPC)); and crucially, pending a successful interview, a job offer in England with ongoing support after employment.

"I was excited when they said they would train me for OET. You want to communicate well with patients and OET allows you to focus on the specific English you need for podiatry. It was also great that I could use OET for my job and my visa," says Andrea.

Preparing for OET

Supported by the teams at HEE and OET, Andrea prepared for her OET exam with OET Online, an official third-party preparation provider endorsed by OET. Training took place on Saturdays, with live, one-to-one lessons. Andrea was working and studying at the same time, so she used 'little gaps in her working day to study - in her surgery, for example if a patient failed to turn up.' Of her OET preparation, Andrea commented, "Of course, the preparation made a difference because they teach what they want you to do in the exam and how you must do it - vocabulary and expressions. I was so busy I could not have been successful on my own."

Sitting the test

Feeling prepared and with a positive attitude, Andrea travelled to Madrid to sit her paper-based OET. Praising the

supportive team at the test venue, Andrea reflected, "Even though it was an exam, I enjoyed it, it was fun. I just focused and did my best." Her best was good enough - Andrea passed the first time.

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Starting work

Now making her final preparations to travel to the UK, Andrea has been given details of her welcome package and induction programme and says she has been supported every step of the way by her new employer and by the project manager from the HEE pilot programme. "I can always count on them if I have any doubt or problem," she says.

And by happy coincidence, she even has a ready-made friend and colleague going with her to Buckinghamshire Healthcare NHS Trust - a fellow podiatrist from Madrid who she met at the OET test venue during the exam! Asked about having to take an English test to work as a podiatrist in England, Andrea says "OET is helpful with expressions and how to communicate with the patients, especially because the speaking exercises with tutors are based on real situations.

I will be working with English-speaking people, so I have to be able to communicate with them, asking what's happening, how are they feeling - meaningful conversations are crucial to good healthcare and so it's right that employers ask for an OET test as proof of your English skills."