

Following the coastal path

Opportunities abound in coastal areas for optical professionals looking to get ahead in their career or for a change of lifestyle

The attractions of life by the sea are sufficient for many people to pack up from the stress of the city and relocate, even if it means shifting to a less attractive job. However, optical professionals are in the privileged position of being able to get ahead in their careers from such a move because a shortage of candidates for the roles offered.

'Coastal regions do pose a particular challenge when recruiting for professionals, especially optometrists,' comments Sally Litchfield, recruitment and development business partner at Vision Express. 'These locations don't seem to have the same appeal as working in big city centre locations such as London, Birmingham or Glasgow. A lot of newly qualified optometrists will have gone to university in these cities and want to remain there. The pool of potential candidates is smaller in the coastal locations which means we have to look further afield to recruit.'

Professional benefits to be found in these sorts of coastal areas can include higher salaries, relocation packages (including bonuses and logistical support) and career advancement.



According to Dominic Lindsey, professional resourcing partner at Boots Opticians, the coastal areas that are most difficult to recruit candidates to are the South West, East Anglia and the North East. As a consequence these are the places that offer the greatest benefits to people prepared to locate there.

'From a career progression point of view the opportunities for people in coastal areas are huge,' says Lindsey. 'Some people look at it as early as their pre-reg year; we have pre-regs who go out to coastal areas in order to secure a Boots training position. A person in the later stages of their career is more likely to be attracted by the quieter pace of life and enjoy rural environments.'

Even if you are not after the quiet life, there are plenty of advantages to life in a coastal region. A better

work-life balance can be achieved and in working in smaller settlements allows a greater connection with the local community.

'For people looking to relocate to coastal regions, work-life balance is one of the most common reasons why,' says Litchfield. 'What are typically holiday destinations or activities for some, can become part of day to day life for those who choose to make the move.'

In order to make a successful move, Lindsey feels that it is important candidates are open to a different style of day-to-day practice.

'It can be quite a change from city centre practices. There is often more time with patients and demands of those patients will be different.'

To get a better sense of whether a move could work for you, read the following three case studies.



Escaping the traffic

Optometrist Eilidh Hodge recently relocated from Woolwich, London to Broadstairs on the Kent coast.

'It was by chance I came to work for Tesco. I received an email indicating an opportunity at my local store, Port Glasgow in Scotland, where I would be sole optometrist. This challenge and a change in environment intrigued me so I took the plunge and applied and luckily enough got the job.

'Working within the supermarket environment is different but has given me so many varied opportunities including a nine-month transfer to a new London store in Woolwich and then to Broadstairs on the sunny Kent coast.

'I decided to move to the coast as it gave me and my partner the best of both worlds; we are living by the sea in a slightly slower pace of life but close enough to London or even France for a day out.

'Working in a more remote place like Broadstairs has increased my job satisfaction 10-fold. I missed how my old practice in Port Glasgow was attracting regular patients and in small places word-of-mouth can be our main source of advertisement. In London things were more transient and it was difficult to strike up a rapport with patients.

'I have settled in quickly and away from work I am looking at doing some of the sports I haven't done for years, like kayaking and maybe even trying out kite boarding which all happens on the beach across from our flat.

'Rent and buying tends to be cheaper on the coast, especially

compared to London where I used to rent a bedroom for the same cost of renting a two-bedroom flat with balcony on the sea now.

'I would certainly recommend people to consider a relocation to the coast. Who wouldn't want to swap the noise of traffic and sirens for birds and waves lapping on the beach?'

Domiciliary opportunity

Optometrist Paul Cheshire moved to Exeter in Devon six months ago to work for the Outside Clinic, having previously worked in a mobile optometry position covering London and parts of the South East.

'I moved around to different places in my previous job but I was generally in a small testing room doing 20-24 sight tests every day. In those circumstances it is difficult to truly help you patients as much as you would like.

'In my new role I feel a lot more comfortable. The professional development is amazing and I get to work with the approach that every patient is different and my job is to find a unique solution for them.

'Doing domiciliary work is tremendously satisfying, especially when you bring people back into society by giving them better vision, so professionally it has been a brilliant move for me.

'The training I received from the Outside Clinic was beyond anything I've had before; it involved having another optometrist and a national trainer out with me for the first week. The equipment is amazing and allows me to adapt my test for different patients and environments.

'I have had time to get involved with the local optometric committee and the company has given me a couple of days off to go down to Plymouth University and show the students how to do domiciliary work.

'I am now working across Dorset, Devon, Cornwall and Somerset.



Eilidh Hodge



Paul Cheshire

NEW FRIENDS IN THE EAST

Optometrist Peter Healy managed to relocate, along with two friends, from Dublin to Norwich with Boots Opticians.

'In my final year in college I decided I wasn't ready to fully let go of what was four years of a very enjoyable social life. Thankfully, a couple of my friends felt the same way so we decided it would be a good idea to get jobs in the same location. Unfortunately Ireland didn't offer so many jobs in any one area. Norwich, on the other hand, did. Boots Opticians flew us over for two days to experience some of the practices and have a look around Norwich itself.

'Since moving to Norwich I have made many new friends through work and socialising in general. I have also joined a football team which is a fantastic way of meeting new people.

'On the other hand, I must say the move itself was stressful at times, but well worth it once accommodation, bank accounts and other details were arranged.

'If you are an optometrist that would like a balance between professional and social life, then I would highly recommend the move. Norwich has provided my friends and I with work in the same area, with the benefits of a fantastic social life.'

Every day is different and I can be working anywhere from a block of flats to a farm – I get in my car and visit people in their homes.

'Working in rural environment is vastly different to working in London and has allowed me to address my work-life balance. Working in a city can mean you are physically and mentally exhausted to enjoy free time. Last weekend I went kayaking on the ocean, the weekend before that I did sailing and surfing, and the weekend before that I was walking on Dartmoor.' ●

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