If you are comparing private healthcare clinics in England, the Care Quality Commission (CQC) is one important part of your checks—not a guarantee that a clinic is right for you. The CQC regulates health and social care services in England. It registers providers for regulated activities, inspects some services and publishes information about its findings.

For people looking into medical cannabis, the checks can feel especially confusing. “Legal” might mean that a patient can possess a medicine lawfully, that a doctor can prescribe it, or that the product has entered the UK through a lawful supply chain. Those are different questions, and a CQC registration does not answer all of them.

This guide explains the **cqc role england clinics** patients should understand, what clinic inspection findings can—and cannot—tell you, and practical ways to **verify clinic status** before sharing personal information or paying for care.

What is the CQC?

The Care Quality Commission is the independent regulator of health and adult social care in England. Its legal responsibilities include registering providers that carry out regulated activities, monitoring services and taking regulatory action where required. The CQC’s remit is England; Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland have their own regulatory systems.

Depending on the service, CQC work may include reviewing information, inspecting premises or assessing how care is delivered. The CQC can publish a rating for a service it has assessed, but not every provider has a current rating. A missing rating does not, by itself, prove that a clinic is unsafe or unregulated. It does mean you should check what the register actually says and ask the provider about its position.

What the CQC regulates

The CQC registers providers for particular regulated activities, rather than simply approving a business name or a treatment. A clinic may deliver more than one service, and registration details can include the provider, its registered locations, the activities it is authorised to carry out and any conditions on its registration.

That is why it is worth checking the exact legal entity and service involved. A clinic’s website, trading name, prescriber and medicines supplier may be separate organisations. A registration entry for one company does not automatically cover every associated business or every service offered under a brand.

What CQC registration does—and does not—mean

CQC registration is relevant to whether a provider is registered for regulated activities in England. It is not a blanket endorsement of a clinic, a particular doctor, a medicine or a treatment outcome. Nor does it prove that every prescription is clinically appropriate or that every part of a clinic’s supply chain is lawful.

Keep these checks separate:

- **Provider regulation:** Is the provider registered with the relevant regulator for the service it offers?
- **Prescriber status:** Is the clinician appropriately qualified and, where required for the treatment, on the relevant specialist register?
- **Clinical suitability:** Has a clinician assessed your history and decided that treatment is appropriate?

- **Medicine and supply:** Is the product prescribed and supplied through a lawful route?
- **Your own circumstances:** Do you understand the restrictions on possession, travel and use?

In other words, CQC status is one useful part of due diligence, not a substitute for the others.

Medical cannabis: what changed in 2018?

On 1 November 2018, changes to UK controlled-drug regulations allowed certain cannabis-based products for medicinal use to be prescribed in limited circumstances. The change followed a review and a decision by the Home Secretary. It did not legalise recreational cannabis, create a general right to obtain cannabis, or allow any doctor to prescribe any cannabis product.

The key point is that the change created a controlled medical route. A qualifying medicine must be prescribed by an appropriately qualified specialist doctor, and prescribing should follow the applicable law and clinical guidance. A clinic's CQC status alone does not make a prescription lawful.

Who can prescribe?

For cannabis-based products for medicinal use, specialist prescribing is central. Patients should check that the prescribing doctor is a specialist doctor in the relevant field and is listed on the General Medical Council's (GMC) Specialist Register. The GMC register can help you verify a doctor's registration and specialist status.

A GP cannot initiate a medical cannabis prescription under this specialist-only route. A GP may be involved in a patient's wider care, such as receiving information or helping coordinate treatment, but that is not the same as starting the prescription. Ask the clinic who will assess you, who will prescribe, and how they will communicate with your NHS GP if you consent.



What remains illegal or restricted?

The 2018 change did not make recreational cannabis lawful. It remains unlawful to possess cannabis without lawful authority, and supplying or producing cannabis outside the relevant legal framework remains

prohibited. Patients should also avoid self-prescribing: you cannot make a medicine lawful simply by deciding to take it, and a private clinic cannot bypass the specialist prescribing requirements.

Importing cannabis or cannabis products without the required legal authority is also not made lawful by the 2018 change. There can be specific rules for people travelling with prescribed controlled medicines, and requirements may depend on the destination and the medicine. Check official guidance before travelling; do not assume that a UK prescription permits you to import a product or carry it across a border without further steps.

So when someone asks whether medical cannabis is “legal”, it is better to clarify what they mean: lawful possession under a valid prescription, lawful prescribing, lawful supply, or travel and import rules. Each is a separate issue.

NHS and private access: what patients should expect

Medical cannabis access through the NHS is limited. NHS prescribing is generally considered only in particular clinical circumstances, and National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE) guidance sets out recommendations for specific products and indications. For example, NICE guidance addresses products including cannabidiol for certain forms of epilepsy and nabiximols for some people with multiple sclerosis. Eligibility depends on the clinical details and the relevant guidance; it is not a general NHS service for any condition.



Some patients therefore explore private clinics. Private access is not automatic: clinics commonly require a clinical assessment, relevant medical records and review by a specialist prescriber. A clinician may decide that treatment is unsuitable, or may discuss other options. Private treatment also involves costs, which can include consultations, follow-ups and medicine charges. Ask for a clear breakdown before committing; “starting from” prices rarely tell you the full expected cost.

Private care does not remove legal or professional requirements. A private clinic still needs an appropriate clinical process, and the prescriber remains responsible for their decisions. Before choosing a provider—including a company such as Releaf—check the specific clinic and clinicians rather than relying on brand recognition or advertising.

How to verify clinic status and review clinic inspection findings

Use the CQC's official provider search rather than treating a logo on a website as proof. Search the provider's exact legal name and, where relevant, its location. Then compare the register entry with the clinic's website and the documents you are asked to sign.

1. **Find the legal provider name.** Ask the clinic for the name of the company responsible for your care, not just its trading brand.
2. **Search the CQC register.** Check whether the provider is registered, which regulated activities are listed, and whether any conditions apply.
3. **Check the service and location.** Make sure the entry relates to the service you intend to use. A different company in the same group may have a separate registration.
4. **Read available reports.** Look at the date, scope and findings of any inspection or assessment. Note whether the report concerns the current provider and service.
5. **Verify the prescriber separately.** Use the GMC register to check the doctor's registration and specialist status. Ask who will make the prescribing decision.
6. **Ask about the care pathway.** Clarify assessment, follow-up, urgent support, record sharing and what happens if treatment is not suitable.
7. **Get costs and terms in writing.** Ask about consultation fees, repeat appointments, medicine charges, cancellations and any ongoing commitments.

How to interpret clinic inspection findings

Inspection findings are evidence about a service at a particular time and within a particular scope. Read beyond a headline rating. A report may describe strengths, areas for improvement, regulatory action or changes since the assessment. Check the date and whether the provider has since responded or updated its service.

Equally, do not assume that a high rating means a clinic is clinically suitable for you, or that a lower rating automatically tells the whole story. Use findings to generate questions: How does the clinic handle complaints? How are records kept? What happens if a patient has a side effect? Who provides out-of-hours advice? A responsible clinic should be willing to explain its processes clearly.

Some services may not have a CQC rating, and the CQC's register may not resolve every question about a particular online or remote service. If the position is unclear, ask the provider to explain which legal entity delivers your care and why it considers its regulatory arrangements appropriate. You can also contact the CQC directly for information about its register and remit.

Using Trustpilot and SimilarWeb carefully

Independent information can help you build a fuller picture, but it should not replace regulator and clinician checks. Trustpilot can show patient feedback and how a company responds to reviews. Read a range of recent reviews, look for recurring themes, and remember that reviews are self-selected and do not verify clinical quality or legal compliance.

SimilarWeb is a website traffic and audience-estimation tool. It may help you understand a website's approximate online reach or compare web activity, but it cannot confirm a clinic's CQC registration, the qualifications of its doctors, or the safety of its treatment. Treat both tools as context, not proof.

If you have concerns about a solicitor's advice on healthcare or controlled-drug issues, a firm such as Irwin Mitchell may be one source of legal support. A solicitor can explain legal questions, but legal advice is distinct from clinical advice and from the CQC's regulatory role.

A short checklist before you book

- Have I checked the clinic's exact legal provider name on the CQC register?
- Do I understand what the CQC entry does—and does not—cover?
- Have I verified the prescriber on the GMC register and checked specialist status?
- Has the clinic explained why the treatment may be suitable, and what alternatives exist?
- Do I know the full likely costs and follow-up arrangements?
- Have I understood the rules on possession, supply and travel or importing?

The bottom line

The CQC matters theukrules.co.uk because it helps patients check whether a provider carrying out regulated health services in England is registered and what the regulator has reported about its care. But it is only one part of a safe decision. For medical cannabis, also check the specialist prescriber, the clinical pathway, the lawful supply route and the practical costs.

Take time to verify the details before booking. A careful clinic should welcome reasonable questions—and you should never have to rely on a rating, a review, a website statistic or a brand name alone to decide whether care is right for you.