

Your first job after university

When the time comes to apply for your first job after your health-related course, you can expect the selection process to be demanding, whether or not you want to work for the organisation you've trained with.

You may be asked to attend an assessment centre, and the application process will assess whether you have the right values as well as the skills for the job.

Physiotherapists walking in corridor

Completing the application form

It's a good idea to make the most of any information sessions on job applications and interview techniques that your careers service or tutors provide.

Take time to prepare and make sure you read all the supporting documents and instructions for applicants carefully before starting to fill in your application form. Organisations that advertise health roles will be very explicit about both the skills and values they are looking for. They may also provide guidelines on how they wish the information to be presented, such as a maximum number of words for the supporting information section.

Essential and desirable skills

You'll need to show you have the necessary requirements for the post you're applying for. These are usually listed in the person specification which sets out the essential and desirable qualifications, knowledge, experience and skills for the role. You must show you have the essential requirements and make sure you take the opportunity to show which of the desirable elements you have too. This is what employers look for when they're shortlisting applicants.

The essential skills, knowledge and abilities that health employers are likely to ask for are:

The application process will assess whether you have the right values as well as the skills for the job.

- verbal and non-verbal communication skills
- evidence of critical thinking and problem solving

- empathetic, caring and sensitive approach to patients, relatives and carers
- awareness of patient dignity and respect
- awareness of current healthcare issues
- ability to work on own initiative without supervision
- time management, ability to manage and prioritise own workload
- ability to work under pressure
- good team working
- sound understanding of personal and professional accountability
- ability to embrace change and innovation
- interest in facilitating learning and development of others

It's a good idea to list the skills, knowledge and abilities that are asked for in the supporting information section of your application, with examples of how you can demonstrate how you meet each one. If space is limited, you may have to use examples of situations that illustrate more than one skill.

Some job vacancies will clearly show how each essential skill, knowledge or ability will be assessed during the selection process, such as through an application form, assessment centre, interview, test, references or your portfolio.

Before your final placement, take a good look at [NHS Jobs](#) ^[1] for real examples of person specifications. This will give you an idea of the wide range of skills and qualities you'll most likely need to demonstrate in future applications. Ensure you have examples of these skills, either work or non-work related, and use your last placement to fill in any gaps.

Make sure you mention any extra-curricular experience, such as care responsibilities, a part-time job, participation in sport, or even organising a family event. Employers are often just as interested in what you have learned from an experience and the skills you have developed, as the experience itself.

Values

You'll need to show that you can demonstrate the values of the organisation you are applying to. Some organisations will explicitly list their values and ask you to demonstrate them, while others will provide a link to their website where the values will be clearly stated.

The application instructions will likely include statements such as: "Demonstrate how your experiences to date have enhanced your ability to provide compassionate care in line with our trust values of excellence, ambition, innovation."

Interviews

Each employer in the health sector will have its own approach to interviews. However, most NHS trusts use value-based interviews, whether you're asked to attend an interview or an interview as part of an [assessment centre](#) ^[2].

See the box below about values-based interviews.

?Reflection

Get used to using self-reflection techniques to constantly self-assess what you have done on placement. The more you practise this, the easier it will be to do this in front of a stranger at interview.

Get together with your fellow students to help you prepare, for example working together to practise interview skills.

"It's good to get into the habit, every day, of reflecting on what you have done and how you have performed tasks – if you do this it is more likely you will express yourself succinctly and articulately in an interview situation."

Matthew Richards, recruitment, King's College Hospital NHS Foundation Trust

• **Values-based interviews**

You'll be asked questions about a number of different values. As well as any values that the specific organisation you're applying to may have, if you're applying for a job in the NHS, interviewers will assess you to check if your personal values align with those of the [NHS Constitution](#) [3] and of the specific trust you are applying to.

Most interviewers will ask you to talk about your past experiences to demonstrate your values and personality. They'll also be interested to find out how you learn and reflect in a given situation and why you make certain choices.

In some cases you may be asked how you would respond in a hypothetical situation. It's good to link this imagined situation to one you have experienced in the past that went well.

Tips to perform well in value-based interviews

Research and understand the values of the individual organisation you are applying for. These will usually be clearly stated on the job vacancy details or can be found on the organisation's website.

This is an example from a vacancy on the [NHS Jobs website](#) [4]:

Vision and values

Our vision is for patients and carers who use Trust services to feel that they receive "Outstanding Care Delivered by Outstanding People".

Our values are Caring, Safe and Excellent.

...X Trust looks to recruit individuals who embody our values and share a true desire to put service users at the heart of everything they do.

Before you apply for a vacancy with the trust you need to ensure that you are committed to our vision and values and that you are able to demonstrate them throughout the

recruitment process.

"The best way to prepare is to identify a trust's values and how they could be demonstrated in day-to-day situations."

Matthew Richards, recruitment, King's College Hospital NHS Foundation Trust

Typical NHS trust values can be shown in situations where you have demonstrated:

- compassion
- openness
- problem solving
- striving for excellence
- putting patients first
- using your initiative
- being innovative
- ensuring patient safety

• If your application is unsuccessful

Take some time to reflect on how your application went, check through your application form and ask for feedback from the employer you applied to.

If you didn't get shortlisted for an interview/assessment centre, this could suggest your initial application didn't demonstrate that you had the right skills and experience, or it could be that there was more competition from applicants who exceeded not just the essential but also desirable criteria of the person specification.

Feedback can help you make better applications in the future.

Source URL: <https://www.healthcareers.nhs.uk/career-planning/career-planning/study-and-training/considering-or-university/support-university/your-first-job-after-university>

Links

[1] <http://www.jobs.nhs.uk/> [2] <https://www.healthcareers.nhs.uk/career-planning/career-planning/study-and-training/considering-or-university/support-university/your-first-job-after-university/assessment-centres> [3] <https://www.healthcareers.nhs.uk/about/working-health/nhs-constitution> [4] <https://www.jobs.nhs.uk/>