Learning disability nurse

Learning disability nurses work to provide specialist healthcare and support to people with a learning disability, as well as their families and staff teams, to help them live a fulfilling life.

Why choose learning disability nursing

There are many reasons why you should consider a career as a learning disability nurse. It offers you the chance to make a difference, a high degree of flexibility and a career with excellent employment prospects.

Working life

Children identified as having a learning disability are living longer, more fulfilled lives into adolescence, adulthood and older age. Learning disability nurses play a vital role working across the whole life span in both health and care settings.

Learning disability nurses teach someone the skills to find work, which can be significant in helping them to lead a more independent, healthy life.

The main areas of your role as a learning disability nurse involve

- improving or maintaining a person’s physical and mental health
- reducing barriers to them living an independent life
- supporting the person in living a fulfilling life

Learning disability nurses may also help people to learn the skills needed to find work. This can be significant in helping them to lead a more independent and healthy life where they can relate to others on equal terms.
Where will you work?

You will be supporting people of all ages with learning disabilities in a range of settings, including:

- people’s homes
- education
- workplaces
- residential and community centres
- hospitals
- mental health settings
- prisons

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- You may work shifts to provide 24-hour care.
- You’ll work as part of a team including GPs, psychologists, social workers, teachers, general practitioners, occupational therapists, speech and language therapists, and healthcare assistants.

‘Learning disability nursing is quite different to other fields of nursing. It’s about enabling each person to reach their full potential’. Sarah Trute, community behaviour specialist

Read Sarah’s story

How to become a learning disability nurse

To become a learning disability nurse you’ll need to train and study at a degree level. Entry requirements vary depending on where you’d like to study. You can find an learning disability nursing course to suit you using our Course Finder tool.

Want to find out more?

- Find out about the entry requirements for learning disability nursing
- Find out about the skills and personal characteristics of a learning disability nurse
- Find out about the training and development opportunities in learning disability nursing
- Find out about studying to be a nurse

Pay and conditions

Most jobs in the NHS are covered by the Agenda for Change (AfC) pay scales. This pay system covers all staff except doctors, dentists and the most senior managers. Learning disability nurses in the NHS will usually start at band 5 and work standard hours of 37.5 per week. With further experience, training and qualifications, they can apply for more senior posts.
Terms and conditions can vary for employers outside of the NHS.

- Where the role can lead  Expand / Collapse
  You could specialise in areas such as education, sensory disability or service management. You may want to work or move into management, teaching or clinical research.

  More information on training and development in learning disability nursing.

Nursing careers resource

A careers resource has been jointly developed by the Royal College of Nursing (RCN) and Health Education England (HEE) to help registered nurses and the clinical support workforce plan their health careers effectively. It shows different ways that you can develop your career from a band 5 role with case studies, videos and next steps.

  Visit the RCN/HEE careers resource for registered band 5 nurses

- Job market and vacancies Expand / Collapse
  There are more than 3500 learning disability nurses in today’s NHS.

  Most NHS organisations advertise their job and apprenticeship vacancies on NHS Jobs, including those that run NHS services. Some advertise on their own websites. You can search for NHS organisations on the NHS Choices website. If you're applying for a role either directly in the NHS or in an organisation that provides NHS services, you'll be asked to show how you think the values of the NHS Constitution apply in your everyday work.

  Find out more about NHS values.

- Further information  Expand / Collapse
  - Royal College of Nursing
  - Royal College of Nursing Learning Disability Nursing Forum
  - Nursing and Midwifery Council
  - UCAS

Other roles that may interest you

- Mental health nurse
- High intensity therapist
- Experienced paramedic
- Emergency care assistant