

Telephonist/switchboard operator

Telephonists/switchboard operators are a key point of contact for our patients in making sure they and their families can speak to relevant departments about their care.

Working life

As a telephonist/switchboard operator, you're usually the first point of contact for anyone who phones a hospital, clinic, health centre or NHS trust. You'll operate switchboard equipment to receive calls and pass them on to the correct person or department.

typist-female-on-phone

People who call might be anxious or upset so as the telephonist/switchboard operator, you may have to calm them down or reassure them. Some calls are urgent so you may have to contact emergency services or deal with an emergency situation according to the agreed procedures.

Some telephonists/switchboard operators are also [receptionists](#) ^[1], dealing with patients, families and visitors to the building face-to-face, as well as phone calls.

Apprenticeships logo

In a large building such as a hospital or headquarters building, as a telephonist or switchboard operator, you may spend all your time dealing with phone calls. In a smaller organisation such as a clinic or health centre, you may have other duties such as:

- booking patients in for appointments
- filing
- photocopying
- inputting data
- ordering stationery
- booking patient transport

Your job title might reflect their other duties, for example:

- receptionist/telephonist
- clerk/telephonist
- switchboard operator/receptionist
- admin assistant
- clerical officer

As well as dealing with callers, telephonists/switchboard operators have contact with healthcare staff and other admin staff.

Entry requirements, skills and interests

There are no set entry requirements to become a telephonist or switchboard operator. Employers usually expect good literacy, numeracy and IT skills. They may ask for GCSEs or equivalent qualifications.

Employers often ask for relevant work experience. Even where this is not specified, it would be an advantage if you have worked in customer service or admin.

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Personal characteristics

Telephonists/switchboard operators need to:

- be friendly and welcoming
- be patient and understanding
- follow instructions and procedures
- work accurately and methodically
- work in a team but use their own initiative
- use IT/communications equipment
- work with all types of people
- deal with people who may be angry or upset
- be confident using the phone

Skills required

- organisation skills
- good communication skills
- IT skills
- excellent customer service skills
- good telephone skills

Training and development

You will get the training you need to do the job. This includes an introduction to the department, how to use the IT and phone equipment and the procedures to follow. You may also have training in customer care.

You may be offered the chance to take qualifications such as NVQs or those from:

- the Association of Medical Secretaries, Practice Managers, Administrators and Receptionists ^[2] (AMSPAR)
- the British Society of Medical Secretaries and Administrators ^[3] (BSMSA)

Some telephonists/switchboard operators become members of AMSPAR or BSMSA. Both AMSPAR and BSMSA offer training, online forums and newsletters so staff can network with others working in this field.

• Pay and conditions

Administrative staff in the NHS are paid on the Agenda for Change ^[4] (AfC ^[5]) pay system. As a telephonist/switchboard operator, you'll typically be on AfC ^[5] band 2. With further training and qualifications, you may be able to apply for team leader or junior supervisory level posts at band 3 for example. Telephonists/switchboard operators work standard hours of around 37.5 a week. Some staff may work shifts, which could involve nights, early starts, evenings and weekends. Terms and conditions will be different for administrative staff working outside of the NHS.

• Where the role can lead

With experience, you could become a team leader, coordinating the work of a team of staff. With further experience, you could become a manager, responsible for the staff in a department.

Some telephonists/switchboard operators move into specialist roles such as medical secretary or PA ^[6]. Others move into areas such as finance ^[7] or HR ^[8].

You may also have the opportunity to move into informatics ^[9], specialising in electronic data, or into IT.

• Job market and vacancies

Most NHS trusts advertise their vacancies on [NHS Jobs](#) ^[10]. Some advertise on their own websites. You can find a list of NHS organisations [NHS Choices](#) ^[11].

Jobs in GP surgeries and health centres are often advertised locally.

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 NHS values apply in your everyday work.

[Find out more about NHS values.](#) ^[12]

Find a vacancy

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• Further information

- [Association of Medical Secretaries, Practice Managers, Administrators and Receptionists](#) ^[13]
- [British Society of Medical Secretaries and Administrators](#) ^[14]

Other roles that may interest you

- [Call handler/emergency medical dispatcher](#) ^[15]
- [Administrative management](#) ^[16]
- [Medical secretary/personal assistant](#) ^[17]
- [Practice manager](#) ^[18]

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Links

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