

Getting experience

Get some work experience ideas, how to find them and how to make the most of them.

Getting experience can put you on the road to an NHS career. Many NHS jobs and training courses, such as university degrees and apprenticeships, need some level of experience. While for others, you'll need to demonstrate that you've looked into the role you're interested in and have some understanding of what it involves.

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Ways of getting experience

Getting some experience can be really important in finding an NHS career. Here are some of the different things you can do.

- **work experience placements.** The placement could be a day or two, a week or fortnight or a few hours each week. It is worth remembering that during and since the COVID-19 pandemic, you might find it more difficult to find them.
- **volunteering.** Volunteers work alongside staff doing worthwhile tasks. Although you're not paid, any expenses may be reimbursed. You don't have to volunteer full time. It could be a one-off project or a weekly commitment that you could fit around your work or studies. It could form part of your gap year either in the UK or overseas.
- **paid part- or full-time work.** Any paid experience in the right sort of environment can be valuable, particularly if you receive training.
- **a supported internship.** Supported internships (such as with Project Choice) provide a mix of work placements and study days at college, usually for people aged between 16 and 24
- **other ways** in which you can gain relevant experience include caring for a friend or relative who is sick or disabled

The greater and more varied the experience you have the better, so you could, for instance, do a placement as well as some volunteering.

Alex Townsend

Podiatrist

I started looking at degrees when I was about 16 and knew I wanted to do something in healthcare so I set about doing work experience in various different settings including physiotherapy, dentistry and orthopaedics.

[Read Alex's story](#) ^[3]

Getting some relevant experience is one of the most important things you can do to help you find a career in health.

Relevant experience

Ideally you should try to gain experience in the area of health that interests you. However, any experience can be useful because just being in a health environment can give you an insight into the work. If you're [considering a university course](#) ^[4], make sure you find out what sort of experience they're looking for. Contact them or visit their website. It's best not to assume!

Thousands of organisations provide healthcare in one way or another. You could consider gaining experience at:

- an NHS or private hospital, clinic or health centre
- a charity or social enterprise (such as one that supports people with long-term health conditions, disabilities or older people, or that provide first aid, eg St John Ambulance or the Red Cross)
- a residential care home or day care centre

Your role could be to support patients or clients directly, or staff in general, or it may be behind the scenes.

• Finding an opportunity

If you're looking for a work experience placement:

- if you're a student, find out whether your school or college has a list of suitable employers that have taken on work experience students in the past

- ask your teachers or specialist staff at your school or college if they know of any suitable opportunities
- contact suitable employers yourself (you could telephone, email or write)
- ask any contacts you have who work for suitable employers to find out whether you could do a placement at their workplace
- if you live in the north east, find out who to contact at the NHS trusts offering work experience opportunities ^[5]
- if you're 16-30-years-old, register with The King's Trust ^[6] who run regular courses with the NHS, including work placements

If you want to volunteer, you could find an opportunity through:

- take a look at the NHS Volunteering website ^[7]
- NHS Jobs ^[8] - you can also find some of the current volunteering opportunities below
- an organisation you belong to, such as your school or college, Guides or Scouts
- a scheme, such as the Duke of Edinburgh Award
- a specific charity or voluntary organisation
- the National Citizen Service ^[9] (if you are aged 16 or 17)

You can ask about suitable volunteering opportunities at:

- local organisations that provide NHS healthcare ^[10] services
- your local volunteer centre ^[11]

You can also search online for suitable volunteering opportunities through:

- Do-it ^[12]
- TimeBank ^[13]
- Volunteering Matters ^[14]
- The National Council for Voluntary Organisations (NCVO) ^[15]
- NHS Jobs ^[16]

Just some of the current volunteering opportunities are below.

Find a vacancy

Enter your location or postcode

Show results within

Search

- **Fundraising Volunteer**

Dartford, DA2 8DA

Salary:

Negotiable

Type:

Voluntary

Employer:

Dartford and Gravesham NHS Trust

[Apply now on NHS Jobs for Fundraising Volunteer job \(opens in a new window\)](#) ^[17]

- **Outpatients Volunteer**

Dartford, DA2 8DA

Salary:

Negotiable

Type:

Voluntary

Employer:

Dartford and Gravesham NHS Trust

[Apply now on NHS Jobs for Outpatients Volunteer job \(opens in a new window\)](#) ^[18]

- **Daytime Volunteer**

Cambridge, CB2 0QQ

Salary:

Negotiable

Type:

Voluntary

Employer:

Cambridge University Hospital NHS Foundation Trust

[Apply now on NHS Jobs for Daytime Volunteer job \(opens in a new window\)](#) ^[19]

- **Volunteer Car Driver**

Gloucester, GL4 3SN

Salary:

Negotiable

Type:

Voluntary

Employer:

Emed Group

[Apply now on NHS Jobs for Volunteer Car Driver job \(opens in a new window\)](#) ^[20]

- **Volunteer Car Driver**

Redhill, RH1 5YP

Salary:

Negotiable

Type:

Voluntary

Employer:

Emed Group

[Apply now on NHS Jobs for Volunteer Car Driver job \(opens in a new window\)](#) [21]

- **Volunteer Car Driver**

Lydney, GL15 4PA

Salary:

Negotiable

Type:

Voluntary

Employer:

Emed Group

[Apply now on NHS Jobs for Volunteer Car Driver job \(opens in a new window\)](#) [22]

- **Chaplaincy Volunteer Whitehaven**

Whitehaven, CA28 8JG

Salary:

Negotiable

Type:

Voluntary

Employer:

North Cumbria Integrated Care NHS Foundation Trust

[Apply now on NHS Jobs for Chaplaincy Volunteer Whitehaven job \(opens in a new window\)](#) [23]

- **Dementia Buddy Volunteer**

Dartford, DA2 8DA

Salary:

Negotiable

Type:

Voluntary

Employer:

Dartford and Gravesham NHS Trust

[Apply now on NHS Jobs for Dementia Buddy Volunteer job \(opens in a new window\)](#) [24]

- **Volunteer Car Driver**

Chichester, PO20 2FR

Salary:

Negotiable

Type:

Voluntary

Employer:

Emed Group

[Apply now on NHS Jobs for Volunteer Car Driver job \(opens in a new window\)](#) ^[25]

- **Volunteer Coordinator (Walsall)**

Walsall, WS5 4NL

Salary:

£26000.00

Type:

Permanent

Employer:

Acorns Children's Hospice Trust

[Apply now on NHS Jobs for Volunteer Coordinator \(Walsall\) job \(opens in a new window\)](#) ^[26]

- **Caring Companion Volunteer**

Dartford, DA2 8DA

Salary:

Negotiable

Type:

Voluntary

Employer:

Dartford and Gravesham NHS Trust

[Apply now on NHS Jobs for Caring Companion Volunteer job \(opens in a new window\)](#) ^[27]

- **Volunteer Car Driver**

Woking, GU23 7LN

Salary:

Negotiable

Type:

Voluntary

Employer:

Emed Group

[Apply now on NHS Jobs for Volunteer Car Driver job \(opens in a new window\)](#) ^[28]

- **Volunteer Car Driver**

Reading, RG30 1DZ

Salary:

Negotiable

Type:

Voluntary

Employer:

Emed Group

[Apply now on NHS Jobs for Volunteer Car Driver job \(opens in a new window\)](#) [29]

- **Volunteer Car Driver**

Farnborough, GU14 8EH

Salary:

Negotiable

Type:

Voluntary

Employer:

Emed Group

[Apply now on NHS Jobs for Volunteer Car Driver job \(opens in a new window\)](#) [30]

- **Volunteer Car Driver**

Bristol, BS31 1SX

Salary:

Negotiable

Type:

Voluntary

Employer:

Emed Group

[Apply now on NHS Jobs for Volunteer Car Driver job \(opens in a new window\)](#) [31]

- **Volunteer Car Driver**

Salisbury, SP2 8NW

Salary:

Negotiable

Type:

Voluntary

Employer:

Emed Group

[Apply now on NHS Jobs for Volunteer Car Driver job \(opens in a new window\)](#) [32]

- **Volunteer Car Driver**

Bristol, BS2 0UQ

Salary:

Negotiable

Type:

Voluntary

Employer:

Emed Group

[Apply now on NHS Jobs for Volunteer Car Driver job \(opens in a new window\)](#) [33]

- **Volunteer Car Driver**

Littlehampton, BN17 7HE

Salary:

Negotiable

Type:

Voluntary

Employer:

Emed Group

[Apply now on NHS Jobs for Volunteer Car Driver job \(opens in a new window\)](#) [34]

- **Volunteer Car Driver**

Burgess Hill, BN6 9ZJ

Salary:

Negotiable

Type:

Voluntary

Employer:

Emed Group

[Apply now on NHS Jobs for Volunteer Car Driver job \(opens in a new window\)](#) [35]

- **Purple Butterfly volunteer**

Rotherham, S60 2UD

Salary:

£1.00

Type:

Voluntary

Employer:

The Rotherham NHS Foundation Trust

[Apply now on NHS Jobs for Purple Butterfly volunteer job \(opens in a new window\)](#)

[36]

- **Volunteer Coordinator (Worcester)**

Worcester, WR5 3EZ

Salary:

£26000.00

Type:

Permanent

Employer:

Acorns Children's Hospice Trust

[Apply now on NHS Jobs for Volunteer Coordinator \(Worcester\) job \(opens in a new window\)](#) ^[37]

- **Volunteer Car Driver**

Hailsham, BN27 4EL

Salary:

Negotiable

Type:

Voluntary

Employer:

Emed Group

[Apply now on NHS Jobs for Volunteer Car Driver job \(opens in a new window\)](#) ^[38]

- **Volunteer Car Driver**

Bristol, BS37 5QX

Salary:

Negotiable

Type:

Voluntary

Employer:

Emed Group

[Apply now on NHS Jobs for Volunteer Car Driver job \(opens in a new window\)](#) ^[39]

- **Volunteer Car Driver**

Mansfield, NG18 5BY

Salary:

Negotiable

Type:

Voluntary

Employer:

Emed Group

[Apply now on NHS Jobs for Volunteer Car Driver job \(opens in a new window\)](#) ^[40]

- **Volunteer Car Driver**

Slough, SL2 5DT

Salary:

Negotiable

Type:

Voluntary

Employer:

Emed Group

[Apply now on NHS Jobs for Volunteer Car Driver job \(opens in a new window\)](#) ^[41]

- **Chaplaincy Volunteer - Carlisle**

Carlisle, CA2 7HY

Salary:

Negotiable

Type:

Voluntary

Employer:

North Cumbria Integrated Care NHS Foundation Trust

[Apply now on NHS Jobs for Chaplaincy Volunteer - Carlisle job \(opens in a new window\)](#) ^[42]

- **Meet and Greet Volunteer**

Dartford, DA2 8DA

Salary:

Negotiable

Type:

Voluntary

Employer:

Dartford and Gravesham NHS Trust

[Apply now on NHS Jobs for Meet and Greet Volunteer job \(opens in a new window\)](#) ^[43]

- **Pets As Therapy Volunteer**

Exeter, EX2 5AF

Salary:

Negotiable

Type:

Voluntary

Employer:

Devon Partnership NHS Trust

[Apply now on NHS Jobs for Pets As Therapy Volunteer job \(opens in a new window\)](#) ^[44]

- **Pets As Therapy Volunteer**

Dartford, DA2 8DA

Salary:

Negotiable

Type:

Voluntary
Employer:
Dartford and Gravesham NHS Trust
[Apply now on NHS Jobs for Pets As Therapy Volunteer job \(opens in a new window\)](#) ^[45]

- **Speech after Stroke Support Volunteer**

Maryport, CA15 8EJ

Salary:
Negotiable

Type:
Voluntary

Employer:
North Cumbria Integrated Care NHS Foundation Trust
[Apply now on NHS Jobs for Speech after Stroke Support Volunteer job \(opens in a new window\)](#) ^[46]

- **VtC Admin Support Volunteer - Outpatients, Cumberland Infirmary**

Carlisle, CA2 7HY

Salary:
£24465.00

Type:
Voluntary

Employer:
North Cumbria Integrated Care NHS Foundation Trust
[Apply now on NHS Jobs for VtC Admin Support Volunteer - Outpatients, Cumberland Infirmary job \(opens in a new window\)](#) ^[47]

- **Volunteer to Career Ward Support Ward 5 West Cumberland Hospital**

Whitehaven, CA28 8JG

Salary:
£24937.00 to £26598.00

Type:
Voluntary

Employer:
North Cumbria Integrated Care NHS Foundation Trust
[Apply now on NHS Jobs for Volunteer to Career Ward Support Ward 5 West Cumberland Hospital job \(opens in a new window\)](#) ^[48]

- **Volunteer to Career Ward Support Ward 4 West Cumberland Hospital**

Whitehaven, CA28 8JG

Salary:

Negotiable

Type:

Voluntary

Employer:

North Cumbria Integrated Care NHS Foundation Trust

[Apply now on NHS Jobs for Volunteer to Career Ward Support Ward 4 West Cumberland Hospital job \(opens in a new window\)](#) ^[49]

• **How experience will benefit you**

No matter how you gain experience, there are many benefits. It will, for example:

- provide you with the experience needed for entry to training in certain health careers
- allow you to find out more about a career that interests you and decide whether or not it's right for you
- give you the opportunity to develop some transferable skills (ie skills that are useful in any job, such as communication and teamwork)
- develop your self-confidence, empathy and respect for others
- give you something to put on your applications and to talk about in interviews to show your commitment, motivation and potential
- give you the satisfaction of making a difference to patients or clients and staff

• **Making the most of your experience**

When undertaking your experience opportunity:

- if you're unsure about anything, ask
- make sure you turn up on time
- look clean and tidy
- follow health and safety procedures
- offer to help people out
- ask people questions about their roles (only when they have time, of course)
- make some notes so that you will be able to recall what you have done and learned

When you come to submit applications and go for interviews for courses and jobs, make the most of any experience you've gained. Explain:

- what role you have performed and the kind of tasks undertaken
- what you have learned from the experience
- any relevant skills you have developed
- how the experience has reinforced your commitment to your chosen career

• But I can't find suitable experience

If you can't find the kind of experience you would like or there are limits on what you are able to do for the career you are interested in (because of health and safety, patient privacy etc), other options include:

- **shadowing** someone in a health career. This would give you the chance to see what they do on a day-to-day basis and ask questions
- **talking to someone** in a health career. Prepare questions in advance to find out what they do, how they got started and what qualifications they needed and so on
- **seek alternatives**. See whether experience has to be gained in a health setting. For example, would experience of customer care in another sector be acceptable for the course or career you're considering?

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