Careers in nursing

Caring, compassionate, committed
Make a difference with a career in health
A career for you

There are more than 350 roles in health, and many of them are part of a wider team which works alongside other health professionals for the benefit of patients and the public. As well as the NHS itself, a great many large and smaller organisations provide healthcare and work to prevent ill health in the UK. These include public and private sector organisations, community interest companies, social enterprises and charities, and you could work for the NHS or any one of these other organisations in a health role.

Some roles give you direct contact with patients, while in others you are part of a vast support network vital to delivering healthcare and preventing ill health, and good team-working is essential. Some jobs are in hospitals, others are based in the community: increasingly, health and social care services are integrated or co-ordinated in order to provide a seamless service for people with a range of needs.

We actively recruit people of all ages, backgrounds and levels of experience, including people who have worked in other sectors or who bring life experience from outside the world of work. This helps us to understand the different needs of patients, families and carers, and to provide the best possible service every day.

NHS values and the 6Cs of compassionate care

To apply for any job in the NHS or in an organisation that provides NHS services, or for a course with clinical placements in the NHS, you’ll need to show how you think the values of the NHS Constitution would apply in your everyday work.

The NHS Constitution values are:

1. Working together for patients
2. Respect and dignity
3. Commitment to quality of care
4. Compassion
5. Improving lives
6. Everyone counts

These values may also be promoted as the 6Cs of compassionate care, which are:

1. Care
2. Compassion
3. Competence
4. Communication
5. Courage
6. Commitment

Find out more about the NHS Constitution and the 6Cs at:

- www.healthcareers.nhs.uk/nhsconstitution
- www.healthcareers.nhs.uk/6Cs

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Your career in nursing

If you want to work in an environment that’s interesting, rewarding and challenging, a career in nursing will give you plenty of scope to do exactly that.

Nurses work with people of all ages and backgrounds in a variety of settings, such as patients’ homes, communities and hospitals.

Some nurses begin their career in support roles, where vocational training is available through a Care Certificate, and go on to do an academic nursing degree at a university. Whether or not you begin in a support role or apply direct to university, the degree involves undertaking clinical learning in a hospital, in people’s homes and other community care settings.

If you decide to be part of the NHS, you’ll benefit from flexible working arrangements, excellent benefits and a wealth of opportunities to develop your career up to consultant nurse level. There are few professions that offer so much in terms of job satisfaction and support, while giving you the chance to enhance people’s lives during their times of need.

FAQs

What do nurses do?
Nurses work as part of a team and provide direct patient care. Nurses work in a variety of settings, including patients’ homes, communities and hospitals.

What are the different fields of nursing?
When you first train as a nurse, you’ll need to study for one of the four fields of nursing: adult, children’s (paediatrics), learning disabilities or mental health. A small number of universities run ‘dual field’ nursing degrees, in which you can combine two of the fields during a four-year degree. Use our course finder to search for nursing degrees at: www.healthcareers.nhs.uk/courses

How can I train to become a midwife?
Midwifery is a separate profession from nursing. See our Careers in midwifery booklet and visit the Health Careers website to find out more about a career in midwifery: www.healthcareers.nhs.uk/midwifery

What qualifications do I need to become a nurse?
Each university sets its own entry requirements to get on to a full-time degree in nursing, but as a general guide, you’ll need at least five A-C grade GCSEs (including English, maths and a science subject) and at least two (preferably three) A-levels. Many universities require A-level biology. Alternative qualifications at level 3 are sometimes accepted by universities.

Use our course finder to get a list of universities approved to run degree programmes in nursing: www.healthcareers.nhs.uk/courses

Can I get any accreditation for my care experience and previous studies?
You may be able to get some accreditation for previous relevant experience and/or study, and if you can do this, you can complete the nursing programme in a shorter time (up to a year less than a standard three-year programme). Use our course finder to identify universities that offer accelerated programmes in nursing: www.healthcareers.nhs.uk/courses

Is there financial help to support me while I’m training to be a nurse?
If you are an eligible student on an approved pre-registration degree programme in nursing, currently you may receive financial help from the NHS. However, changes to these arrangements are proposed from 2017.

Visit the NHS Student Bursaries website for more information: www.nhsbsa.nhs.uk

For more information about working in nursing, visit www.healthcareers.nhs.uk/nursing

Or if you have any questions, you can call our helpline on 0345 60 60 655 or email advice@healthcareers.nhs.uk
Which role is right for you?

People from all walks of life and with all types of health problems depend on the professional skills and care of nurses. A combination of people skills and initiative is essential for the hands-on care that all nurses are required to provide.

It’s a highly responsible job, and challenges will be part of your career, making each day different. Knowing how to deal with the unexpected comes with experience, training and the support of colleagues, including doctors, therapists, assistants and healthcare scientists, who form multidisciplinary teams where learning never stops.

Nurses can choose to work in a variety of settings from patients’ homes, schools, care homes and specialised areas such as prisons. They can also combine a clinical career in education, management or research. As a public health nurse, your role would be to promote healthy lifestyles, reduce the likelihood of physical and mental ill health and support people who have long-term illness or learning disabilities. Whatever field appeals to you, there’s plenty of scope to move around, work in different settings and progress your career.

Whether working in the community or hospital environment, nurses at all levels are relied upon to listen to people, recognise their needs and respond in a way that puts the individual first.

Healthcare is continually developing. To improve the care you provide, you’ll need to keep up to date with the latest research and evidence, especially if you choose to take on additional responsibility such as being able to prescribe.

The four fields of nursing

There are four main fields of nursing:
- adult nursing
- children’s (paediatric) nursing
- learning disabilities nursing
- mental health nursing

Working within one of these fields will allow you to focus on the needs of a particular client group.

More opportunities to work in the community

As healthcare increasingly moves away from hospitals and into the community, the settings in which you can work will expand and change. Nurses are central to this change, and future career options are likely to include a greater amount of community-based roles for specialist nurses working to support patients with long-term conditions at home.

Some nurses will work in GP practices and in locations, such as care homes, clinics, community hospitals, surgeries and schools, as well as in health promotion to encourage people to live healthily and prevent illness. Others may choose to work in hospitals.

Some of these roles will be outside of the NHS, as more organisations (including social enterprises, private healthcare providers and charities) provide NHS services to patients.

As hospital stays become shorter, demand for district and other community-based nurses is likely to increase. New opportunities are emerging for nurses, including those who are newly qualified, to work in general practice and the community as a district nurse, school nurse or health visitor. There are also more opportunities for senior nurses to lead and manage multidisciplinary teams as clinical managers. Find out more about clinical management in our Careers in management booklet or from the Health Careers website at: www.healthcareers.nhs.uk/management

Whatever your chosen specialty, you will be required to keep your skills and knowledge up to date through continuing professional development (CPD). In the NHS, you will benefit from the flexibility, support and learning opportunities on offer throughout your career.

For more information about a career in nursing, visit: www.healthcareers.nhs.uk/nursing
Nursing roles at a glance

This section provides information about the work involved in the four main fields of nursing as well as specialist roles you may be interested in after qualifying.

You can find more detailed information about all the nursing roles listed below on the Health Careers website at www.healthcareers.nhs.uk/nursing

There are also short videos about some of the roles on our YouTube channel: www.youtube.com/NHSCareers

The four main fields of nursing

Adult nursing

Adult nurses treat and care for adults of all ages with all types of health conditions. They manage numerous priorities and use caring, counselling, managing, teaching and all aspects of interpersonal skills to improve the quality of patients’ lives, sometimes in difficult situations. Roles may be based in hospital wards, clinics and, increasingly, in community settings. You may work shifts to provide 24-hour care.

Your work as an adult nurse will involve:
• being part of a busy, multidisciplinary team that includes doctors, radiographers, physiotherapists and many others
• using your initiative and high levels of observation
• working in a fast-changing, demanding environment
• assessing what is best for the patient and acting on your decision
• a willingness to take responsibility for people’s wellbeing

Children’s (paediatric) nursing

Children’s nurses treat and care for children and young people from birth to 18 years of age. Children and young people can present with a wide range of conditions, and children’s nurses deal with a range of situations including babies born prematurely, teenagers who have sustained accidents and injuries, and life-threatening or critical illnesses which can result in the death of a child.

Children’s nurses work in partnership with the child or young person, their parents and carers to plan and deliver care. They work with other professionals, such as GPs, physiotherapists, speech and language therapists and health visitors to ensure young people enter adulthood in good health. Health problems can affect a child’s development and it’s vital to work with the child’s family or carers so that he or she does not suffer additionally from the stress of being ill.

Children’s nurses work on wards in hospitals, in specialist areas such as children’s intensive care, or in day care centres, child health clinics and in the child’s home. Like other fields of nursing, care is becoming more community-based. You may work shifts to provide 24-hour care.

Your work as a children’s nurse will involve:
• being able to handle the challenges posed by caring for someone who is sick and may be too young to express what’s wrong
• knowledge and ability to understand that a child or young person’s health can rapidly take a turn for the worse
• sensitivity and the ability to communicate without words
• the confidence to work in partnership with the patient’s family or carers
• teaching the child’s parents or carers what may need to be done to carry on with treatment at home
Learning disability nursing

Learning disability nurses work with patients, and often with their family or carers, to provide specialist healthcare to people with a learning disability and help them to pursue a fulfilling life. For example, they might teach someone the skills to find work to help them to lead a more independent, healthy life where they can relate to others on equal terms.

Learning disability nurses work as part of a team alongside GPs, psychologists, therapists, teachers and social workers. If you work in a residential setting, you may work shifts to provide 24-hour care.

Your work as a learning disability nurse will involve:
• a great deal of patience, sensitivity and excellent interpersonal skills
• a willingness to be adaptable, flexible and prepared to act as an advocate for those you support to ensure that they do not suffer discrimination
• the ability to work in a demanding and stressful environment, where progress can be slow at times
• great satisfaction when someone has learned a new skill or can demonstrate confidence in themselves thanks to your intervention

Mental health nursing

As many as one in four people will have a mental health problem at some point in their life, regardless of their age or background. Conditions range from personality and psychological disorders to neuroses and psychoses.

Nurses who choose to specialise in mental health – a complex and demanding area – work with GPs, psychiatrists, psychologists, therapists and others to help care for patients with mental illnesses. Increasingly, care is given in the community, with mental health nurses visiting patients and their families at home, in residential centres, in prisons or in specialist clinics or units. You may work shifts to provide 24-hour care.

This is a valuable role that provides much reward and satisfaction.

Your work as a mental health nurse will involve:
• autonomy in planning and delivering patient care within the healthcare team
• opportunities to specialise in areas such as alcohol and drug misuse
• excellent communication skills and an ability to empathise with people and understand their problems
• liaising with a patient’s family and listening to and advising those who care for the patient
• dealing with occasional aggression in a sensitive and effective way

Specialist nursing roles

These are roles you may choose to take up after qualifying in one of the four main fields.

District nursing

District nurses visit people of all ages, often in their own homes, GP surgeries or a residential or care home. Some patients may have dementia, others may have disabilities, be recovering after a hospital stay, or have a terminal illness. You may work shifts to provide 24-hour care.

You’ll need to qualify and work as a registered nurse and then complete a degree-level specialist practitioner programme in district nursing, which usually lasts for one academic year, before you can become a district nurse. Funding or sponsorship may be available from your employing trust.

This is a rewarding role as you can work one-to-one with patients and their families on an ongoing basis, which enables you to develop a trusting relationship while you improve their quality of life.
General practice nurses work in GP surgeries as part of a primary care team that is likely to include doctors, nurses, therapists and pharmacists. In smaller practices, you may be the sole nurse, whereas in larger surgeries, you may share duties with general practice nurse colleagues. You may also be required to work flexibly, including some evenings and weekends. As the range of healthcare services provided in the community increases, the role of the general practice nurse is likely to expand and change.

To become a general practice nurse, first you will need to qualify and have gained experience as a registered nurse.

This role offers much scope and variety for those who have highly developed communication skills, enjoy working flexibly and are organised. Depending on your experience, you could run clinics, which will demand attention to detail, initiative and plenty of confidence. You’ll be employed by GP practices and may be able to work part-time. As a general practice nurse, you will be able to apply for senior positions such as nurse practitioner, where you can manage your own caseload.

Your work as a general practice nurse will involve:
- treating small injuries
- assisting with minor operations carried out under local anaesthetic
- health screening
- family planning
- running vaccination programmes, for example protection against flu
- managing well woman clinics
- supporting the healthcare team in its monitoring of conditions such as diabetes, high cholesterol and high blood pressure.

Health visitors are registered nurses or midwives who have done additional training in community public health nursing to work with families of children under five in a specific geographical area. They work with parents who have new babies, offering support and informed advice from pregnancy until the child starts school at age 5. All new parents are entitled to a health visiting service, regardless of their situation and number of children, but a more intensive service is provided to families who would benefit from more health visiting support and time. The service provided to each family will vary according to an assessment of their needs.

Health visitors are usually based in settings such as GP surgeries, children’s centres, community or health centres. They visit parents at home and run groups with colleagues such as nursery nurses, children centre staff and voluntary organisations. This is a role that will appeal to those who like to work in teams or have sole responsibility for a caseload of families from the local area and want to work with autonomy, while remaining part of a healthcare team. You’ll have opportunities to progress and manage a team of health visitors or to other management roles.

You’ll need to qualify and be a registered nurse or midwife to start the Specialist Practitioner Health Visitor/Specialist Community Public Health Nurse (SCPHN/HV) postgraduate training programme. The programme usually lasts a minimum of one year full-time and there are also some part-time courses available. If you have a degree, you could seek accreditation for your prior learning to enter a two-year graduate-entry pre-registration nursing programme followed by the one-year SCPHN/HV programme.

You may receive financial support from your employer, although this can depend on which course you take and where you live.

Pre-school children and their families will be your key focus, and your work as a health visitor will involve:
- supporting new parents and families in the care and development of their babies and pre-school children
- providing practical public health help and advice to people of all ages and backgrounds, aiming to prevent illness and promote good health
- working independently and being highly organised
- being confident and using your skills to deal with people in a variety of situations, some of which may be challenging.
Neonatal nursing

Neonatal nurses focus on the care of newborn babies who are born prematurely or need specific care in the first few months of their life. They may care for healthy infants, provide focused care for premature or ill newborns, or work exclusively with seriously ill newborns in a neonatal intensive care unit. You may work shifts to provide 24-hour care.

Often, premature babies have respiratory problems (which can be life-threatening if they are not treated promptly and monitored), birth defects, infection, health malformations and problems requiring surgery. For both the neonate and their family, admission to the neonatal unit is a stressful time which needs to be recognised when planning and providing holistic care. Family-centred care is essential, where the parents and carers are regarded as equal partners in their baby's care.

Your work as a neonatal nurse will involve:
• being a source of support to the baby’s family at a stressful and emotional time
• taking an active role in the multidisciplinary team looking after the child
• a strong level of empathy
• competence to operate in a busy, technical environment

Neonatal nursing training programmes are part of continuing professional development (CPD) and are normally studied as modules by registered nurses and midwives. As with other types of nursing, there are opportunities to progress to management, research and education, as well as into nurse consultant roles.

Prison nursing

Prison nurses are employed by the prison service, private providers or by the NHS to care for and treat patients who are in prison. Many prisoners suffer from substance abuse or have mental health problems, making nursing in this environment challenging. By improving mental and physical health, the care provided by prison nurses may help to lower re-offending rates, and therefore have a positive impact on prisoners, their families and the wider public.

A background in mental health nursing may help. As with other types of nursing, you can undertake further training and apply for management roles. As a prison nurse, you may work shifts to provide 24-hour care. There are also job opportunities for nurses elsewhere in the criminal justice system such as police custody suites and immigration centres.

Your work as a prison nurse will involve:
• delivering care and treatment within a custodial setting
• developing positive relationships with prisoners and treating them with compassion
• developing excellent interpersonal skills
• treating and caring for individuals with substance abuse or mental health problems
• understanding the particular problems faced by your patients and those working in prisons
School nursing

School nurses work with schools and local communities to support the health and wellbeing of school-age children, young people and their families. School nurses work closely with pupils, parents, carers and teachers, offering support and advice on a range of issues from obesity to sexual health. They play a vital role in children’s development, carrying out immunisations and screening programmes, and managing medical conditions such as asthma and diabetes. They work closely with other agencies, such as social services, acting as a point of contact for child protection issues.

Nurses in this key role are usually employed by a primary care provider, local health authority, community trust or by individual schools.

It is possible to go straight into this role after qualifying as a registered nurse. However, experience of working with children, in child protection or health promotion, will be beneficial.

Many school nurses will also work towards the Specialist Practitioner – School Nursing/ Specialist Community Public Health Nurse qualification at degree and Master’s level.

Your work as a school nurse will involve:
- carrying out screening programmes
- raising awareness of and providing information on issues that could have a negative effect on health, such as smoking and drug and alcohol abuse
- administering immunisations and vaccines
- promoting healthy living and safe sex
- running health promotion or drop-in surgeries
- using excellent communication skills
- supporting children and young people with medical needs, such as asthma, diabetes, epilepsy or mental health problems and disability
- working in partnership with teachers and families, contributing to social education and citizenship classes and providing training to teachers on healthcare issues
- adopting a non-judgemental approach and building trust with children and young people

Find out more about the different nursing roles at: www.healthcareers.nhs.uk/nursing
Entry route
Degree in adult nursing

How I got into the role
While at school I hadn’t really considered doing a degree, but training and working as a hospital dental nurse showed me I could achieve more than I realised. This encouraged me to study for my degree in adult nursing.

After qualifying, I worked on an adult neurosurgery department and high dependency unit, caring for patients with spine or brain injuries. The thought of nursing patients like this seemed scary at first, as they seemed so complex, but I was soon enjoying the challenge. It’s fast-paced, with so much to learn.

While in my first role, I helped set up a nurse-led clinic aimed at getting the best pain relief possible for patients with long-term back and leg problems. We were the first nurses to set up something like this in the area and the data we collected at the clinic was published in a medical journal. I hadn’t thought I’d be published so soon after qualifying.

What I do
After three years of working on the neurosurgery ward, I was promoted and asked to develop a brand new role: neuroscience nurse practitioner. I started to take on some of the responsibilities previously handled by other healthcare professionals such as doctors, including assessing patients before an operation.

Three years later, I was promoted again to advanced neuroscience nurse practitioner. Now I lead a 14-strong team of specialised nurse practitioners and work as a senior manager. While I still see patients every day, I also look at other issues, such as ways to reduce how long patients have to stay and how to improve patient outcomes. I work with everyone from anaesthetists and surgeons to specialist nurses and GPs.

The best bits
Probably the best thing about a nursing degree is how it opens up career paths. As a graduate nurse you can quickly specialise in some really exciting roles, if you put the work in. The opportunities I’ve had have been amazing: I’ve already taken two postgraduate degrees.

Real-life stories

Name
Clare Barton

Job title
Advanced neuroscience nurse practitioner, North Bristol NHS Trust

“It’s fast-paced, with so much to learn.”
Learning disabilities nursing

Name
Sarah Trute

Job title
Community behaviour specialist – learning disabilities, Surrey and Borders Partnership NHS Foundation Trust

Entry route
Diploma in learning disability nursing*

How I got into the role
On leaving school with GCSEs, I got a job as a PA, then as a project manager, working in the health and social care sectors. My job was strategic and interesting, but I never saw how my work directly affected people.

Going from senior project manager to newly-qualified nurse involved a drop in pay, but it has definitely been worth it. Given my interest in autism and special needs, I chose to study for a learning disability nursing diploma at Kingston University, supported by a bursary and holiday temping jobs.

What I do
Learning disability nursing is quite different to other fields of nursing. The focus is not on ‘making people better’ but enabling each person to reach their full potential, increase their independence and enjoy an improved quality of life.

The best bits
My role is very people-oriented. Working with staff teams and managing risk can be challenging at times, but it’s very rewarding to see a client benefit from their positive behaviour support plan.

I’ve helped one client who self-harms to learn a safer way to express her feelings, which has been very effective.

Mental health nursing

Name
Chris Dzikiti

Job title
Modern matron, East London NHS Foundation Trust

Entry route
Nursing diploma*

How I got into the role
I decided to leave my career in banking after being inspired by my cousin’s enthusiasm for nursing. My first placement in elderly care was fascinating – the patients were as interested in me as I was in them. Before I finished my diploma training, I was already planning my career.

I wanted a challenging specialty where I’d really get to know my patients. Mental health seemed perfect: the patients love to talk, and the nurses don’t wear uniforms.

To gain the right skills, I studied part-time for my nursing degree and then took a Master’s in Transcultural Psychiatry, which gave me an insight into how mental disorders and their treatment can be influenced by cultural and ethnic factors.

I also spent a year as unit manager in a private hospital, which really opened my eyes to financial management.

What I do
Two years later, these skills helped bring me to my current position as modern matron for a mental health unit. Our team includes ward managers, nurses, psychologists and psychiatrists, and my budget is just over £2 million.

I also do lots of training on mental health issues. I presented at a conference hosted by the National Association of Psychiatric Intensive Care Units, and was recently appointed honorary lecturer at City University. It’s amazing how much confidence this career can give you. Ten years ago I never thought I’d give a lecture to 200 people. Now, I feel I can do anything and talk to anyone.

The best bits
Throughout my career, I’ve been careful to maintain my patient focus and still get involved with new admissions. People lose so much when they suffer from mental illness: jobs, relationships, physical health, even the ability to look after themselves. It’s incredibly satisfying to help someone get their life back, watch them regain their skills and give them hope and aspirations.

Friends of mine say they’ve never changed someone’s life for the better. I have. On Sundays, they dread going to work the next day. I can’t wait.

*Nursing diplomas are no longer available. You now need to take an approved degree in nursing.
**District nursing**

**Name**
Suzanna Whitwell

**Job title**
Tissue viability nurse, Milton Keynes Community Health Services

**Entry route**
Degree in nursing, now completing a district nursing qualification

**How I got into the role**
My ambition to be a nurse began in childhood. During the various placements on my degree course, I realised that working in the community came closest to my idea of what nursing is about. In my last community placement as a student, I was given my own caseload to work with under supervision. I really loved it.

After qualifying, I worked in A&E for a short period. Then I got a job as a community nurse with a primary care provider. After two years, I moved to my current role and am now being sponsored by my employer to study for a community specialist practitioner degree.

**What I do**
I am now part of a new tissue viability team in district nursing, providing care to patients in their own homes. This involves teaching and advising community staff around policies relating to wound care. My experience in district nursing has been really useful to my current role, as a large part of my work involved wound care. I work closely with other community colleagues, especially district nurses, to continue to develop and improve practice and standards.

I’m learning more about management and team leadership, and about the implications of the policy shift towards more community-based care. Once finished, I will be a qualified district nurse and a team leader, which is quite special for someone of my age.

**The best bits**
I like the greater autonomy you have in the way you treat and manage patients as a nurse in the community. Patients feel less stressed and anxious than in hospital wards and there is close teamwork with a wide range of other professionals in health and social care. The regular hours are also a plus point – I might work one weekend in four or five but otherwise it’s a normal working day.

You need very good interpersonal skills and a wide knowledge base. In the community, you have the opportunity to look at people holistically; you have to be aware of their whole home situation, not just their condition. In future, it’s going to be more and more important that people are well looked after in their own homes.

**General practice nursing**

**Name**
Nadia Halley

**Job title**
Senior practice nurse, NHS Thurrock Clinical Commissioning Group

**Entry route**
Degree in nursing

**How I got into the role**
My mother trained to be a nurse and told me a lot about it as a career. She taught me lots of practical nursing skills too. I volunteered in India in the early 1990s, working for a charity that provided medical and nursing care for people living in slums. It was then that I decided to train to be a nurse myself and returned to England to start my training.

After qualifying in 2005, my first job was a community nurse before progressing to a district nurse role when the team I was in changed to an integrated care team. Working in the community, I developed a wide range of skills, including palliative care, wound care and liaising with hospitals and other care providers. In my team, we also provided a rapid response service during the evenings. After I qualified, I also spent some time in Malawi, using my nursing skills to help people.

**What I do**

After 18 months, I started an apprenticeship as a practice nurse part-time, working as a community nurse the rest of the week. I began specialising in managing diabetes and have been a full-time practice nurse in various clinics in Essex since 2009. I am now the senior practice nurse at Acorns PMS in Grays.

A typical day could see me doing routine work like childhood immunisations, cytology and ear syringing, electrocardiograms and wound care. And I also look after people with conditions like diabetes and patients who may self harm or are homeless.

**The best bits**
I love working with the wide range of people who walk through my door every day!
School nursing

Name
Anthony Daniel

Job title
School nurse, Stockport NHS Foundation Trust

Entry route
Degree in nursing

“My work is very holistic.”

How I got into the role
I qualified as an adult nurse in 2007 and worked on a renal ward for nearly a year before becoming a school staff nurse with Stockport NHS Foundation Trust. Initially, I worked in a special school for children with severe and profound learning difficulties before I transferred to mainstream school nursing. Since then I have worked in a variety of educational settings including pupil referral units, primary and secondary schools.

I completed my specialist community public health nursing qualification in 2011, and have since become a band 6 school nurse covering both primary and secondary schools.

What I do
Being a school nurse means no two days are ever the same and I enjoy the variety of work the job offers. I handle everything from safeguarding to immunisations and running health promotion sessions and drop-in clinics.

My work is very holistic and I look after the health and wellbeing of both young people and their families. When I’ve assessed a young person for, say, a drugs or alcohol issue, I signpost them to where they can get specialist support. As a school nurse, you’re that first port of call.

The best bits
There are lots of opportunities for lifelong learning and career progression in school nursing. You can specialise in child protection or take on a specialist school nurse role in asthma, diabetes or epilepsy, for example. You can also move up into more senior roles, usually starting at band 5 and working up to band 8.

Most days I leave work with a sense of fulfilment and satisfaction that I’ve helped a young person and their family.

Getting started in nursing

To work as a nurse in the UK, you must hold an approved pre-registration programme qualification in nursing, which allows you to register with the Nursing and Midwifery Council (NMC). You can start your career at various levels, and be assured of practical support as you progress.

For more information about careers in nursing, including entry requirements and training, visit www.healthcareers.nhs.uk/nursing

Work placements and volunteering
Doing volunteer work or arranging a work placement is the best way to find out if a health profession is right for you. It will give you experience of the working environment, show you the kind of work you would be doing and the people you would be helping, and give you the opportunity to talk with people who are already doing the job.

The number and type of work placements or volunteering opportunities available vary, depending on where you are in the country. Experience doesn’t always need to be gained in the NHS either, so think about the independent health sector, charities and other organisations where you could provide care for people as a way of gaining experience.

Cadet schemes and apprenticeships
Some healthcare organisations offer apprenticeships or cadet schemes in nursing or health and social care. These consist of placements at support worker level for around two years while providing the opportunity to work towards a relevant vocational qualification.

Apprentices and cadets are normally exposed to several areas of healthcare through their placements. Although the experience will enable you to work towards a vocational qualification, it will not usually count towards professional nurse training. Instead, an apprenticeship or cadet scheme aims to get you to the appropriate level so that you can apply to start a pre-registration nursing programme. However, it’s always worth checking with the provider to find out what progression routes are available after the apprenticeship, especially if it’s a higher apprenticeship.

For more information about opportunities in your area, talk to your local healthcare and voluntary organisations. You can also find more information on gaining experience at www.healthcareers.nhs.uk/experience

Speak to your careers adviser, call us on 0345 60 60 655 or email advice@healthcareers.nhs.uk to find out more.
Assistants and healthcare assistants

As a clinical support worker or healthcare assistant, you’ll provide vital assistance to healthcare professionals for diagnosing, treating and caring for patients. These roles are highly responsible and rewarding, with a direct impact on patients’ lives. They also offer an ideal entry route to many health careers, including nursing, for people with commitment and enthusiasm rather than academic qualifications.

Another route into nursing is to study for a foundation degree, which is usually a part-time qualification and often run in conjunction with further education colleges. Someone on a foundation degree could secure a healthcare assistant role, then apply for a position as an assistant practitioner and work their way up to a place on a part-time pre-registration nursing programme.

The role of assistant practitioner is a senior support role for staff who have worked in the NHS, and have the academic ability to cope with the demands of vocational study and the potential to go on to professional training. They will find that their experience is an advantage when they apply for a place on a pre-registration nursing programme.

Professional training

Nursing programmes are available at both undergraduate and postgraduate level. After completing your degree, you must register with the Nursing and Midwifery Council before you can practise.

Undergraduate degree

When you are selecting your pre-registration degree, you will usually need to choose one of the four fields of nursing: adult, children’s (paediatric), learning disability or mental health. A limited number of universities now offer the chance to train for two fields on the same course.

All nursing degrees consist of academic study (taught across all four fields of nursing) and practice learning placements relevant to the chosen field. If, for example, you choose to go into mental health nursing, the practice learning placements will be mainly concentrated in that environment, and will focus on patients with mental health problems. However, certain aspects of training will be common to all fields of nursing, and there will often be opportunities to study alongside students on other healthcare courses.

All applicants must be numerate, be of good character and health and, above all, be passionate about providing compassionate care to patients. Undergraduate degrees are available on a full-time and part-time basis.

Full-time degree

If you have appropriate qualifications, you can apply directly to universities to undertake a full-time pre-registration degree in nursing. These courses are at least three years long and are a combination of 50 per cent academic study and 50 per cent supervised work placements in hospitals and the community.

There is no national minimum academic entry requirement for nursing degrees. It is up to each university to decide what they will accept, but on the whole, degree programmes usually require applicants to have at least five A-C grade GCSEs (including English language or literature and a science subject) and two A-levels (or equivalent). In reality, you are likely to need three A-levels or equivalent qualifications at level 3.

If you have no formal educational qualifications and/or did your secondary education some time ago, you can take an Access to Higher Education course which teaches skills around study and confidence in how to deal with the academic demands of a university course.

Access courses tend to be run by further education colleges around the country and are often linked to a specific university course. In such cases, you may be interviewed by someone from the college as well as the university. You may be guaranteed a place on the university course on successful completion of an Access course.

You should always check what each university requires before embarking on an Access or other course.

Universities will usually look for applicants to provide evidence of relevant care or customer service experience. A number of NHS regions are piloting formal pre-nursing degree care experience placements, in which applicants are employed by the NHS in support roles for several months. This helps them to confirm whether or not nursing is right for them. Check with each university to find out what their precise requirements are and whether they are involved with such pilot schemes.

For more information about clinical support worker roles, visit the Health Careers website at: www.healthcareers.nhs.uk/clinicalsupport
Part-time degrees

Part-time pre-registration nursing degree courses are provided by some universities and normally last for five or six years. They are typically available to those working as an experienced healthcare assistant or assistant practitioner with qualifications at level 3. Those studying part-time courses could receive assistance from their employers in terms of study leave or financial support. This varies between employers.

Graduate entry (accelerated) programmes

Some universities will accredit an applicant’s previous theoretical and practice learning (such as a relevant degree or relevant practical experience) against the requirements of the pre-registration programme. This may mean that the student can complete the course in a shorter time. Up to one third of a three-year programme can be accredited in this way.

These programmes are typically offered at postgraduate diploma and Master’s level.

Funding

If you are an eligible student on an approved pre-registration nursing programme, currently you may receive financial help from the NHS. However, changes are proposed from September 2017.

For more information about student funding, visit the NHS Student Bursaries website at: www.nhsbsa.nhs.uk/students

Registration

You must ensure that your pre-registration nursing programme leads to registration with the Nursing and Midwifery Council (NMC), or you won’t be eligible to practise as a nurse in the UK. Check with your university or college.

For a list of approved institutions running nursing courses leading to registration, visit: www.healthcareers.nhs.uk/courses

Next steps and progressing your career

If you want to work in health, it’s important to find out as much information as you can about the qualifications you need and the opportunities that are available.

If you need a degree, you usually need to apply through UCAS. UCAS provides details of the universities offering courses. Each university will be able to tell you what they look for in applicants.

If you are already working but are thinking about a change of career, consider volunteering in your spare time. This is a great way to find out if you like the work, and can sometimes lead to a more permanent position.

Here is a checklist of things you should be doing, whether you’re still at school, studying for your degree or looking for a change of career:

- Have you explored routes into nursing from your current situation? For example, are apprenticeships available as a way of gaining relevant experience before applying for a pre-registration programme?
- Have you found out which universities offer the field(s) of nursing you are considering?
- Will you want to specialise in a particular area of nursing and if so, what sort of training is needed for this?
- Are there any particular skills or experience that will improve your chances of getting into nursing?
- Have you enquired about opportunities to volunteer or do relevant work experience?

Whatever position you’re in now, the Health Careers service can help. Call us on 0345 60 60 655, email advice@healthcareers.nhs.uk or visit our website at www.healthcareers.nhs.uk

To search for jobs with organisations providing NHS services, visit www.jobs.nhs.uk

For job vacancies with other health organisations, visit www.gov.uk/jobsearch

For job vacancies in local government, visit www.lgjobs.com
Here are some other things you can be doing, depending on where you are right now:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Where are you now?</th>
<th>What should you do now?</th>
<th>Who can help?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Studying for your GCSEs | Visit [www.stepintothenhs.nhs.uk](http://www.stepintothenhs.nhs.uk)  
- Check what your likely exam grades/results will be.  
- Explore routes into your chosen career – will you need a degree or other qualification before you join, or will the NHS train you on the job? Can you start as an assistant?  
- Are there any particular skills or experience that will improve your chances of getting into your chosen career?  
- Find out if you need any specific A-levels, or equivalent qualifications.  
- Explore the availability of apprenticeships in nursing. | Subject teachers  
Your careers adviser  
Professional bodies  
Health Careers  
National Careers Service |
| Studying for A-levels or another course at your school or a local college | As GCSEs, plus:  
- Investigate which universities offer the degree course you want.  
- Investigate any further qualifications you might need for your chosen role.  
- Search the NHS Jobs website at [www.jobs.nhs.uk](http://www.jobs.nhs.uk) and speak to your local trust to get an idea of current vacancies.  
- Enquire about volunteering or work experience.  
- Explore the availability of apprenticeships in nursing or in support roles. | Subject teachers  
Your careers adviser  
UCAS  
Health Careers  
Professional bodies  
NHS Jobs  
National Careers Service |
| At university | As A-levels, plus:  
- Take advice on whether it’s a good idea to switch your degree course.  
- Complete your current degree and look for postgraduate courses. | University careers service  
Health Careers  
Professional bodies  
NHS Jobs |
| Looking for a new career | As A-levels, plus:  
- Find out if you will need to retrain before you apply for new roles or if the NHS will train you while you are working. | Health Careers  
Jobcentre Plus  
Professional bodies  
NHS Jobs  
UCAS  
National Careers Service |

The NHS is committed to offering development and learning opportunities for all full-time and part-time staff. If you work for the NHS, no matter where you start, you’ll have access to extra training and be given every chance to progress within the organisation. You’ll receive an annual personal review and development plan to support your career progression.

You will also be encouraged to extend your range of skills and knowledge and take on new responsibilities through the Knowledge and Skills Framework (KSF). The KSF is available on the NHS Employers website: [www.nhsemployers.org/SimplifiedKSF](http://www.nhsemployers.org/SimplifiedKSF).

Other organisations that provide healthcare and work to prevent ill health will offer similar development opportunities and the chance to review your work. It’s a good idea to discuss career development with any employer you are considering.
Benefits of working in the NHS

As a nurse in the NHS, you will enjoy one of the most competitive and flexible benefits packages offered by any employer in the UK and a wealth of opportunities to develop your career. You will join one of the country’s most respected organisations and one which has the values of compassionate care and staff wellbeing at its very heart.

If you work as a nurse in the private or voluntary sectors or another public sector organisation, your pay and benefits will vary depending on your employer.

Your pay as a nurse in the NHS

Most jobs are covered by Agenda for Change (AfC) pay scales, except doctors, dentists and very senior managers. The NHS job evaluation system determines a points score, which is used to match jobs to pay bands and determine levels of basic salary. Each pay band has a number of pay points. Staff will normally progress to the next pay point annually until they reach the top of the pay band.

You could start your career at AfC band 2 as a healthcare assistant or clinical support worker (nursing), rising to band 5 as a registered nurse and then to nurse consultant at bands 8a–c.

For more information on AfC pay bands, visit: www.healthcareers.nhs.uk/pay

One of the UK’s best pension schemes

The NHS Pension Scheme is one of the most generous in the UK. Every new employee automatically becomes a member, unless you choose to opt out.

Other employment benefits for NHS staff

Everyone employed under the NHS Agenda for Change pay system is entitled to:

- a standard working week of 37.5 hours
- holiday entitlements of 27 days per year, plus eight general and public holidays, rising to 33 days after ten years’ service
- pay enhancements to reward out-of-hours, shift and overtime working
- career and pay progression based on the application of knowledge and skills
- annual personal development review to support career aspirations
- occupational health services
- study leave for sponsored courses

Many of these benefits apply across the whole of the NHS, although local organisations may offer additional benefits such as cycle to work schemes and nurseries. Many local shops, restaurants and services offer discounts to health staff too, including most gyms and leisure centres. Health Service Discounts is an employee benefit provider for many NHS organisations and offers discounts and deals for NHS staff on shopping, holidays and financial services from well-known brands: www.healthservicediscounts.com

Get more information about the benefits and opportunities offered by the NHS at www.healthcareers.nhs.uk/payandbenefits

Health and wellbeing at work and your work-life balance

The NHS is committed to helping staff to stay well, including serving healthier food, promoting physical activity, reducing stress, and providing health checks covering mental health and musculoskeletal problems.

The size and diversity of the NHS means we can offer you a range of flexible working and retirement opportunities. Part-time roles and job-share opportunities are often available, as well as term-time only, evening and weekend positions. Many people take an extended break to look after young children or other dependants who need special care, or to study full-time.

As well as advice and support for people looking after sick or elderly relatives, the NHS provides a range of childcare services for employees, including:

- nursery care
- after-school and breakfast clubs
- holiday play schemes
- emergency care

You can find more information on health and well-being at work at www.nhsemployers.org/healthyworkplaces
Health career framework

This health career framework has been designed to improve career development and job satisfaction for NHS employees. It encourages individuals to learn new skills and take on extra responsibility within their own area, while others retrain and move in to different roles. The real-life story on page 19 describes how Clare Barton has progressed in her nursing career.

You can follow her career path in the white boxes on the diagram below, alongside other potential paths in the different areas of the NHS. The diagram below gives an illustration of a variety of health careers and where they may fit on the health career framework. It is not exhaustive; details on other careers can be found in the relevant booklets and on the health careers website.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ambulance service team</th>
<th>Support workers</th>
<th>Senior healthcare assistants/technicians</th>
<th>Assistant practitioners/Associate practitioners</th>
<th>Practitioners</th>
<th>Senior practitioners/specialist practitioners</th>
<th>Advanced practitioners</th>
<th>Consultant practitioners</th>
<th>More senior staff</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Patient transport service driver</td>
<td>Emergency medical dispatcher</td>
<td>Control room duty officer</td>
<td>Paramedic</td>
<td>Specialist paramedic</td>
<td>Advanced paramedic</td>
<td>Consultant paramedic</td>
<td>Clinical director of service</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| Allied health professions | | | | | |
|--------------------------|----------------|-----------------------------------------------|------------------------|----------------|------------------------|-----------------------|-------------------|----------------|
| Therapy clinical support worker | Rehabilitation assistant | Assistant clinical psychologist | Dietitian | Senior occupational therapist | Specialist speech and language therapist | Consultant radiographer | Director of therapies |

| Dental care team | | | | | |
|------------------|----------------|-----------------------------------------------|------------------------|----------------|------------------------|-----------------------|-------------------|----------------|
| Dental nurse: supporting the dentist in all aspects of patient care | Dental hygienist | Dental therapist | Dental technician | Senior dental technologist | |

| Healthcare science | | | | | |
|-------------------|----------------|-----------------------------------------------|------------------------|----------------|------------------------|-----------------------|-------------------|----------------|
| Pharmacy dispensing assistant | Newborn hearing screener | Critical care technologist | Cardiac physiologist | Senior biomedical scientist | Specialist respiratory physiologist | Consultant clinical scientist (medical physics) | Director of regional genetics services |

| Management | | | | | |
|-----------|----------------|-----------------------------------------------|------------------------|----------------|------------------------|-----------------------|-------------------|----------------|
| General office manager | Payroll manager | Project manager | Head of accounts | Associate director of children’s services | Director of human resources |

| Midwifery | | | | | |
|-----------|----------------|-----------------------------------------------|------------------------|----------------|------------------------|-----------------------|-------------------|----------------|
| Healthcare assistant (maternity) | Maternity support worker | Midwife | Community midwife | Head of midwifery | Consultant midwife | Director of maternity services |

| Nursing | | | | | |
|---------|----------------|-----------------------------------------------|------------------------|----------------|------------------------|-----------------------|-------------------|----------------|
| Nurse cadet | Healthcare assistant (nursing) | Auxiliary nurse | Enrolled nurse | Staff nurse: providing nursing care to patients in hospital | Senior staff nurse: caring for patients with spine and brain conditions on an adult neurosurgical ward | Advanced neuroscience nurse practitioner: assessing patients with neurological conditions before an operation | Lead advanced neuroscience nurse practitioner: clinical leadership and management of service delivery models in neurological nursing | Director of nursing |

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Wider healthcare team</th>
<th>Support workers</th>
<th>Senior healthcare assistants/technicians</th>
<th>Assistant practitioners/Associate practitioners</th>
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</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Porter</td>
<td>Maintenance assistant</td>
<td>Security officer</td>
<td>Medical secretary</td>
<td>Catering manager</td>
<td>Chaplain</td>
<td>Head of estates</td>
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