

# Choosing Learning Disability Nursing

An aid to recruiting the learning disability  
nursing workforce of the future

2019

Developing people  
for health and  
healthcare

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## Introduction

This guide has been designed to help in the recruitment of learning disability nurses and is available for use by schools, colleges, universities, and service providers. It uses and provides links to a number of resources that have been produced recently with similar aims.

Learning Disability nursing is celebrating its 100th year as a profession. However there is a reducing number of people entering the profession of learning disability nursing at a time when there are growing needs and increasing opportunities to work in a variety of settings. This guide summarises the valued contribution learning disability nurses make and signposts routes for a career in learning disability nursing.

We would like to thank the huge range of people who contributed to this recruitment guide, both directly and indirectly.

### Careers in Learning Disability Nursing – an RCN Video

<https://youtu.be/D3o-xhDvg-U>



Celebrating 100 years of learning disability nursing #RNLD100

## What is learning disability nursing?

**“ Learning disability nurses work to provide specialist healthcare and support to people with a learning disability and/or autism, as well as their families and staff teams, to help them live a fulfilling 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 social care settings.

People with learning disability and/or autism are also more likely to suffer from mental health problems. As a profession, nurses are uniquely trained to support and care for people with learning disability and/or autism.



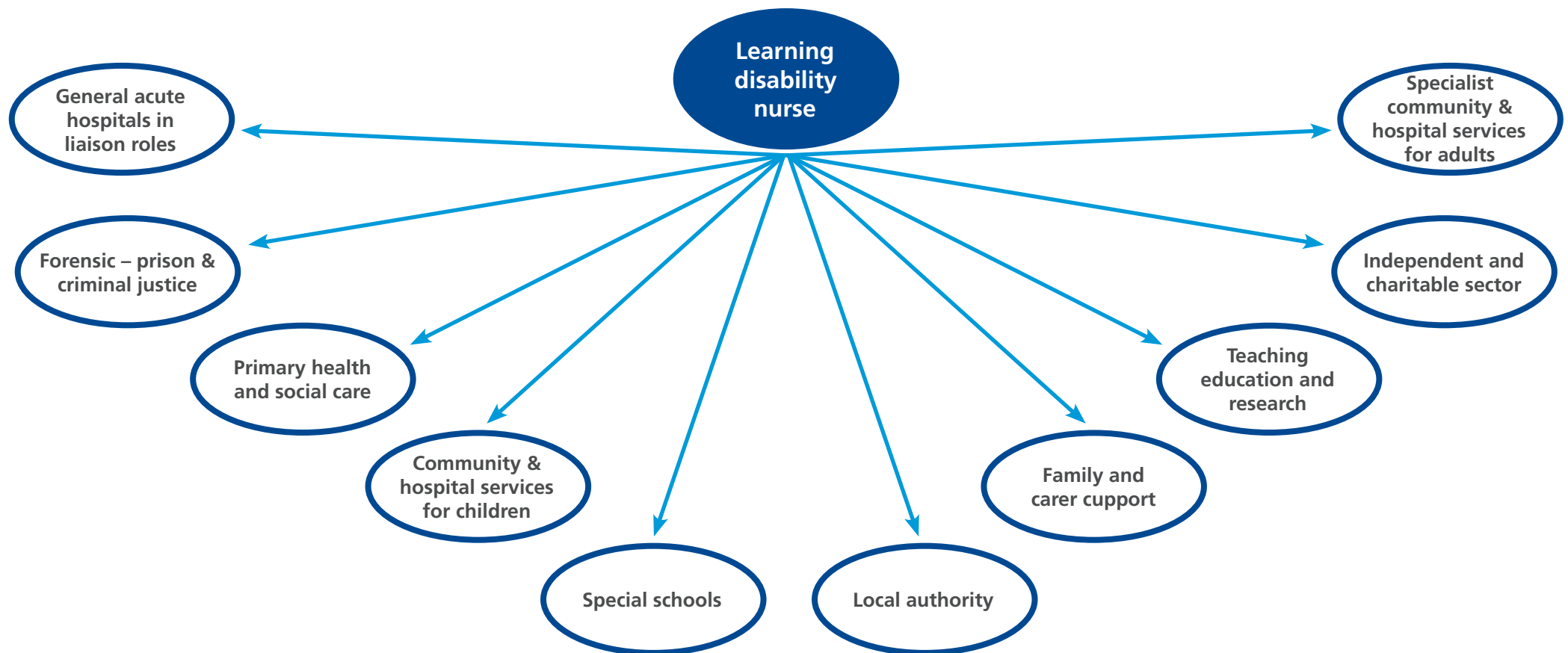
The main areas of the role of a learning disability nurse involve:

1. Improving or maintaining a person's physical and mental health
2. Creating opportunities and reducing barriers so people can live an independent life
3. Supporting the person in living a fulfilling life
4. Supporting families
5. Teaching the skills to find and keep work
6. Providing care and coordinating care across agencies

## A career in learning disability nursing

The role of the learning disability nurse is holistic and versatile; looking after individuals across the whole life span; working with their families and with multi-disciplinary teams, across health and social care and the voluntary sector; to improve the lives of people with a learning disability.

This creates a wide and exciting range of career opportunities.



## Why choose learning disability nursing?

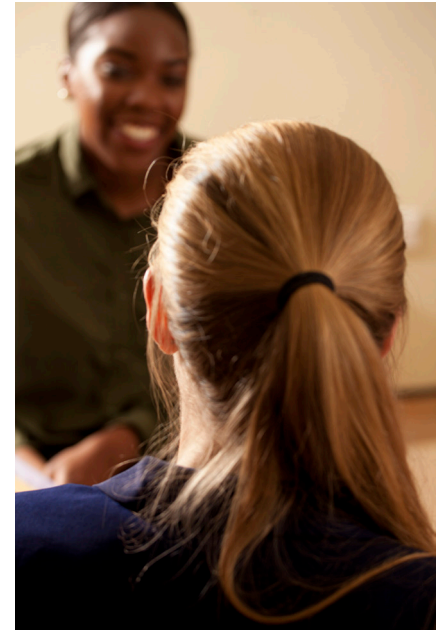
The role of the learning disability nurse is central to supporting people with learning disability and/or autism, particularly those with complex needs.





The role of a learning disability nurse includes:

- undertaking comprehensive assessments of health and social care needs
- developing and implementing care plans
- working collaboratively with people with learning disability, their families and other health and social care professionals
- providing nursing care and interventions to maintain and improve health and promote wellbeing
- providing advice, education and support to people and their carers throughout their care journey
- enabling equality of access and outcomes within health and social care services
- providing education and support to promote healthy lifestyle and choices
- acting to safeguard and protect the rights of people with learning disabilities when they are vulnerable and in need of additional support.





## What do learning disability nurses provide ?

**“ Learning disability nursing is quite different to other branches of nursing. It is about enabling each person to reach their full potential.”**

**Sarah Trute**

Community Behaviour Specialist

Information on nursing careers can be found at:

Health Education England

Health Careers

[www.healthcareers.nhs.uk/explore-roles/nursing/roles-nursing/learning-disability-nurse](http://www.healthcareers.nhs.uk/explore-roles/nursing/roles-nursing/learning-disability-nurse)

## Routes to becoming a learning disability nurse

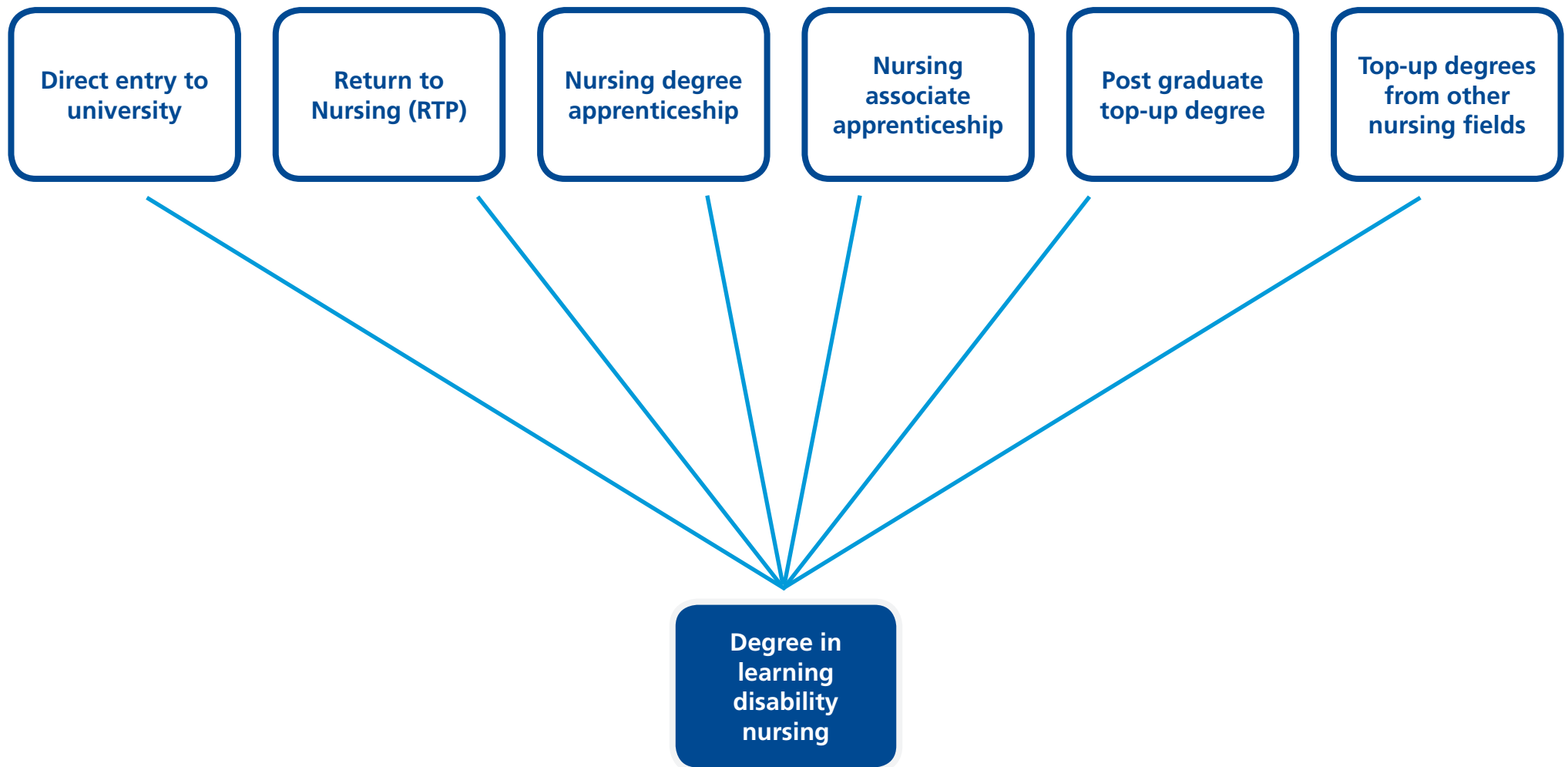
To become a learning disability nurse you will need to train and study at a degree level. Entry requirements vary depending on where you'd like to study. For more information go to [www.ucas.com](http://www.ucas.com)

Alternative routes to gaining your degree are also available, for example nursing degree apprenticeships are being developed. There are also increasing opportunities for current healthcare support staff to apply for nursing associate apprenticeships which can then lead onto nursing degree apprenticeships.

For more information

[www.healthcareers.nhs.uk/explore-roles/nursing/roles-nursing/learning-disability-nurse](http://www.healthcareers.nhs.uk/explore-roles/nursing/roles-nursing/learning-disability-nurse)

## Routes to becoming a learning disability nurse



## Learning disability nurses – personal stories

*"The best thing about being a learning disability nurse is gaining a person's trust and being able to passionately advocate for them."*

*I am most proud of being able to tell people what I do. There are many people who don't know that learning disability nurses exist. I feel it is very important to inform everyone about us and for them to know we actually do make up a vital part of the NHS!!"*

Andrea Miles

*"What is the best thing about being a learning disability nurse? Knowing that we are making a positive difference to a person's life, either by listening, caring, empowering, educating, talking or just being there for moral support."*

Lisa Burgin

*"As a learning disability nurse I help and support people to make sure their rights to a good quality of life are upheld. This can be from small actions, like signposting to other services or larger endeavours like helping someone improve their physical health or supporting their mental health in times of crisis."*

Mel Richardson

*"The best thing about being a learning disability nurse is the quality and breadth of knowledge, skill and compassion that they bring to the learning disability multiprofessional team."*

*And the thing I am most proud of is the way that all the disciplines complement and respect their colleagues' roles in ensuring the best possible care for people with learning disability."*

Anna Blain

## Mary's story

### Learning Disability Primary Healthcare Nurse

Mary has worked as a learning disability nurse for over 30 years in a number of different roles but now works as a primary care healthcare lead. The role involves working alongside GP practices, commissioners and other NHS services to facilitate better access for people with learning disabilities. In her role, Mary works with people with a learning disability, parents and carers and a wide range of health professions,. One of the most important aspects is education about the annual health check and making reasonable adjustments to improve health outcomes. Mary said "working as a learning disability nurse has equipped me with many skills that have proved to be transferable into all settings. The challenges and rewards of working in this role is the reason I have remained, seeing the benefits and watching people becoming empowered in managing their own health and well being."



### One person said

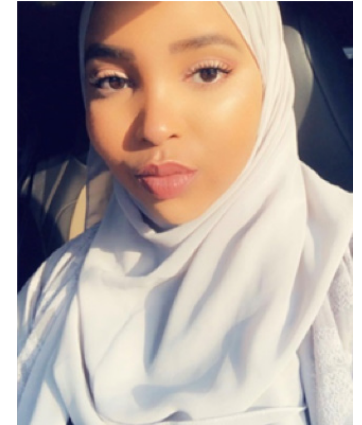
*"I had my health check today and I am in good health."*

## Siraad's story

### Project Development Nurse – Nursing Development Team

Siraad has been a Learning Disability Nurse since 2016, and started working in a CAMHS inpatient unit for deaf people; a unique national ward that emphasises therapeutic working into every aspect of the recovery process for children and adolescents who are Deaf or Hard of Hearing.

Siraad was the LD lead for the service, as many patients who came in had a mild/ moderate LD or Autism. She provides regular refresher training to the team to ensure our young people consistently receive high quality care. She has since moved to the Nursing Development Team, supporting the Band 2-4 nursing workforce through various trainings and conferences to promote continuous professional development. Siraad is the only LD Nurse in the team, and continues to champion the LD flag now through a wider network.



### Siraad says

*"Being in a clinical education role has provided me a great opportunity to use my skills and knowledge base to teach others about Learning Disabilities, and educate all our workforce on how to support them".*

## Ben's story

### Learning Disability Community Nurse

Ben has worked with people with learning disabilities for over 12 years qualifying as a Learning Disability Nurse in 2018. He currently works as a Community Learning Disability Nurse within a diverse integrated team within in a London borough that is enriched in culture and diversity.



The team aims to provide support to individual's development, promoting their independence, empowering them to have greater choice and control over their lives.

The nursing focus is on health promotion, health education minimizing the need for hospital admissions, breaking down the barriers to health inequality. Ben chose to be part of a community team as it provides the opportunity to engage with individuals in a person-centred, holistic approach, and building trust and establishing a rapport with people that enables you to change and save lives, shape futures, and alter people's perceptions on health.

### Ben says

*"People with learning disabilities are interesting and charming people, I am hugely proud to work as learning disability nurse; each day is totally different, it is highly rewarding and positive work."*



## Kate's story

### Learning Disability Acute Liaison Nurse

Kate initially training as a mental health nurse in 1984 and also qualified as a general nurse in 1986 and worked in institutions, residential homes and general hospitals. Kate now works as a learning disability nurse in an acute hospital. The service was set up in 2009 following the report "Death by Indifference" and the team supports people with a learning disability to have improved access to hospital services through specialist care planning. Kate's role includes staff education and liaising across services to improve quality of care and outcomes. Kate aims to ensure that the needs of people with a learning disability are considered in all areas within the hospital and that staff are aware of the need to make reasonable adjustments (if required) to achieve the same healthcare as everyone has the right to expect.



### Kate said

*"I often feel humble in the wake of the strength of the individuals that I come into contact with and life at work is very rewarding and never boring!"*

## Karina's story

### Learning Disability Nurse Consultant

Karina is in a newly created role for a large London NHS Trust. The role was created to improve the care and treatment that people with a learning disability and/or autism receive at the Trust and to progress and support learning disability nurses who work across its services. As a nurse consultant, Karina is involved in direct clinical care, in staff training, supporting learning disability champions, influencing strategy and policy and research. She is excited about the next stage of her work to employ a person with a learning disability to work along side her.



### Karina was asked why she became a learning disability nurse

*"I saw it as a direct way of immediately working with people with a learning disability and making a difference to their lives. I relish the challenge of communicating in a different way and the freedom and creativity that this entails. There is also a level of 'detective work' to understand how and why someone is thinking, feeling and behaving in a particular way."*

## Hannah's story

### Learning Disability Inpatient Nurse

Hannah works on an assessment and treatment inpatient service for adults with a learning disability, autism and mental health needs. Hannah said “I enjoy being a learning disability nurse because I feel like I am really able to make a difference in people’s lives.” Hannah is the project lead for Positive Behaviour Support (PBS) which makes a real difference to people’s lives. In her role, she works directly with service users on a day-to-day basis supporting several aspects of their lives depending on their needs. As a nurse, Hannah is able to support individuals along every step of their journey including through assessing individuals needs, supporting people with their physical health needs and medication needs, and ensuring their views are heard.



*“It gives me and the team great job satisfaction and pride when we are able to support the person to find a new community placement which meets their needs and move on from the ward to their new life.”*

## Denise's story

### Clinical Nurse Specialist CAMHS LD team

Denise has been a learning disability nurse for 16 years and has worked in a CAMHS (Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service) Learning Disability team for 6 years. The team works with children with a moderate to severe learning disability and associated mental health and behavioural issues.

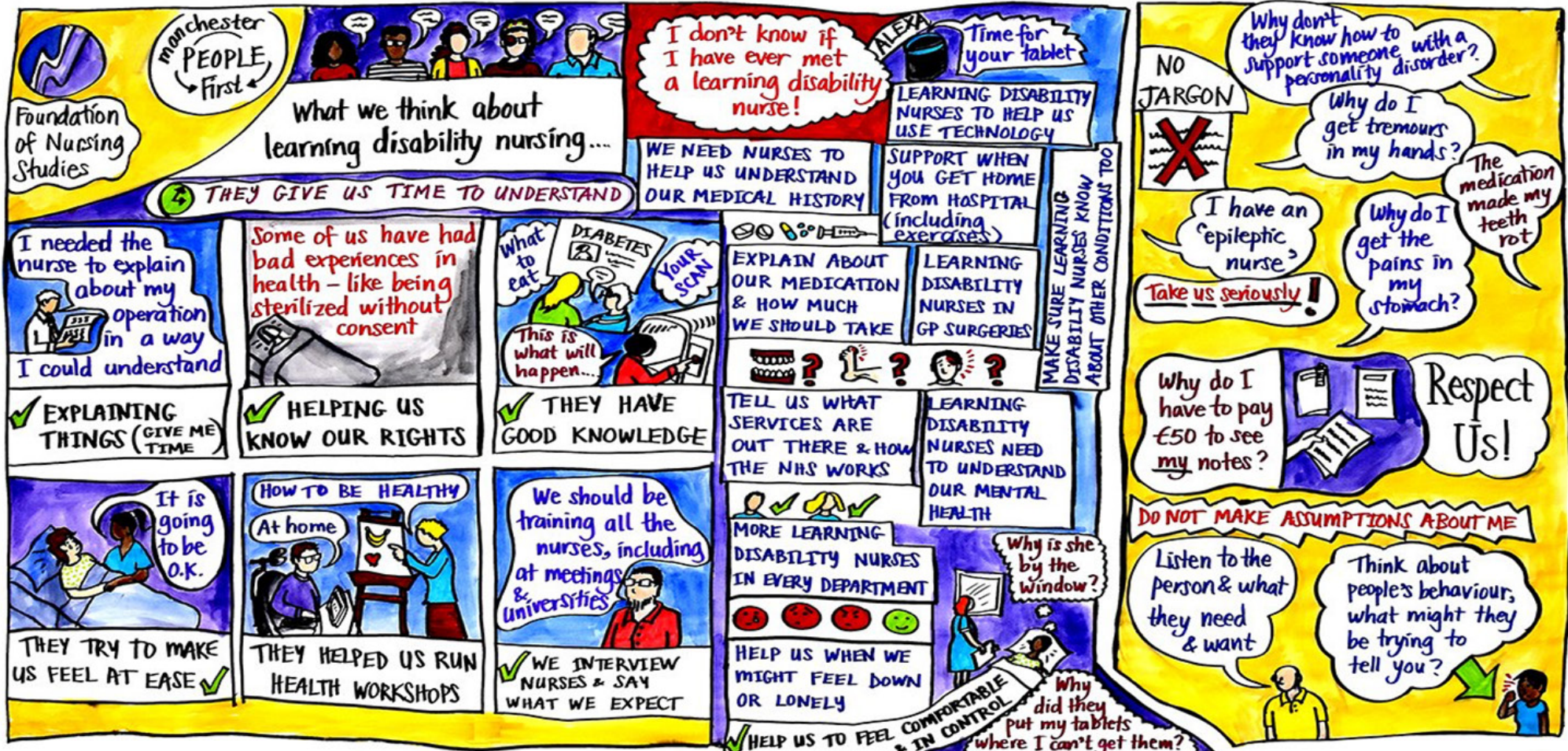


Denise loves working with families to help them understand the behaviours of the children and implement strategies that can support them across all settings. The team has close relationships with schools, social care and short break provisions and utilises PBS (Positive Behavioural Support) as the foundation to evidence based practice.

The best part of Denise's job is the close working with families when they start to understand and change the behaviours presented and can undertake activities as a family unit.



# Views from people with learning disability and their families



Learning Disability Nurses #CelebrateMe, Foundation of Nursing Studies, Manchester People First, November 2018, graphic facilitation by @MendoncaPen [www.penmendonca.com](http://www.penmendonca.com)

## Why learning disability student nurses chose their career

*I wanted to be more involved in advocating for and supporting people with a learning disability.*

*I want to become an expert in the art of learning disability nursing.*

*After years in social care I wanted to become an expert in my chosen field of learning disability nursing.*

*To help people with a learning disability to live their lives to their full potential.*

*To promote good practical person centred care helping people with everyday needs.*

*I want to breakdown the inequalities that individuals experience.*

*To empower the people I work with to allow them to live a full and independent life.*



## Why did we become learning disability nurses?

**This is nursing - Inspirational Stories and Experience**

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zs2a\\_VFchHI](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zs2a_VFchHI)





# LEARNING DISABILITY NURSING



**STARTING PAY**  
**£24,214**  
**AFTER TRAINING**

Starting salary for learning disability nurses in the NHS is Agenda for Change band 5 **£24,214** outside London. <sup>[1]</sup>



## Entry requirements

To become a learning disability nurse, you'll need to study for a degree level qualification in nursing through either a full-time course or a nursing degree apprenticeship. You'll typically need a minimum of five GCSEs at grade 4-9/C or above plus two or three A-levels or equivalent qualifications at level 3. [2]



3,244

learning disability nurses work in the NHS. [3]



# 94%

**94%** of nursing students get a job within six months of finishing their course. <sup>[5]</sup>



"The focus is not on 'making people better'. It's about enabling each person to reach their full potential, increase their independence and enjoy an improved quality of life." <sup>[4]</sup>

Sarah Trute,  
(community behaviour specialist)



Standard working week in the NHS is  
**37.5 hours** <sup>[6]</sup>



## 29 universities

across the UK run degree courses in learning disability nursing.<sup>[6]</sup>



## One university

runs a dual field course where you can combine learning disability nursing with child nursing. <sup>[6]</sup>



## Length of training

Training through a full-time university course usually takes **three years**. However, if you already have a degree in a relevant subject, you can often get recognition for this, enabling you to do the course in **two years**. A nursing degree apprenticeship usually takes **4 years**.<sup>[2]</sup>



### Skills and qualities needed

Patience, self-awareness and highly-developed, flexible communication skills are essential. You'll sometimes need to be assertive to ensure people with a learning disability do not suffer discrimination. Sensitive human interaction is also a core skill.<sup>[7]</sup>

Facts and figures taken from: [1] [www.healthcareers.nhs.uk/AFC](http://www.healthcareers.nhs.uk/AFC) [2] [www.healthcareers.nhs.uk/explore-roles/nursing/studying-nursing](http://www.healthcareers.nhs.uk/explore-roles/nursing/studying-nursing) [3] <https://files.digital.nhs.uk/56/C50BAD/NHS20Workforce%20Statistics%2C%202February%202019%20Staff%20Group%2C%2020Care%20Setting%20and%20Level.xlsx> [4] [www.healthcareers.nhs.uk/EXPLORE-ROLES/nursing/studying-nursing](http://www.healthcareers.nhs.uk/EXPLORE-ROLES/nursing/studying-nursing) [5] [www.healthcareers.nhs.uk/explore-roles/nursing/learning-disability-nursing/personal-characteristics-and-skills-required-learning-disability-nursing](http://www.healthcareers.nhs.uk/explore-roles/nursing/learning-disability-nursing/personal-characteristics-and-skills-required-learning-disability-nursing)

## References

'Connect for Change: an update on learning disability services in England' (Feb 2016) Royal College of Nursing  
'The Keys to Life: Unlocking Futures for people with Learning Disabilities' (March 2019) Scottish Government  
'Celebrate Me' report on learning disability nursing - Foundation of Nursing Studies (FoNS) – [www.fons.org](http://www.fons.org)  
Nursing and Midwifery Council – [www.nmc.org.uk](http://www.nmc.org.uk)  
University and Colleges Admissions Service – [www.ucas.com](http://www.ucas.com)  
Health Careers – [www.healthcareers.nhs.uk](http://www.healthcareers.nhs.uk)

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