

NEC CAREER TRACKS: Nursing

Are you thinking about a career in nursing? This NEC Career Tracks guide tells you about the routes into the profession, the qualifications, qualities and skills you'll need, and how NEC can help you achieve your ambitions.

Nursing as a career

Nursing offers a wide range of career choices both in the UK and abroad. Nurses can choose to work with adults, including elderly people, children or newborn babies. They work on wards and in operating theatres in state-funded or private hospitals, in GPs' surgeries, in schools or businesses, in prisons and, increasingly, in the community. In the NHS, 300,000 qualified nursing staff and healthcare workers deal with over one million patients every 36 hours.

“ Being a good nurse is about having the knowledge, the physical skills, and that essential skill, compassion and emotional resilience. It's the combination of the three that makes nursing so special. ”

Janet Davies, Chief Executive and General Secretary, Royal College of Nursing

Why be a nurse?

Your reasons for wanting to become a nurse are unique to you. You may be:

- inspired to find out more after coming into direct contact with nurses, for example when you or a family member have been in hospital
- frustrated with life in an office in front of a computer screen, and with a growing desire to work with people and really make a difference
- looking for a career that is demanding and challenging, with plenty of variety and good opportunities to progress
- aware that you get a lot of satisfaction from helping others – perhaps you've always wanted to be a nurse, and the time is right to re-consider your career options

Sounds like you? Read on.

What qualifications, qualities and skills will I need?

If you want to study nursing, you'll need:

- a genuine interest in healthcare
- to be observant, organised and flexible
- to have studied formally over the last 12 to 24 months
- relevant work experience – volunteering, a work experience placement or being employed as a healthcare assistant



ROUTES INTO NURSING

Studying nursing at university

To study for a **nursing degree** you will typically need five GCSEs at grade C or above (grade 4 or above under the new GCSE grading from 2017), including English language or literature, maths and a science subject, plus two A levels or an equivalent level 3 qualification such as a BTEC. There are more than 70 universities in the UK where you can study nursing and midwifery. Many universities ask for A levels in science and social science subjects. Grade requirements and tuition fees vary from university to university so you should check the details with the universities where you are interested in studying.

There are four options available for students studying nursing at degree level:

Adult nursing	Children's nursing	Learning disability nursing	Mental health nursing
Working with adults of all ages who are suffering from one or more long or short-term physical health conditions.	From nursing a sick newborn to an adolescent road accident victim, children's nurses consider the care and support needed by the wider family.	A learning disability nurse improves or maintains a person's physical and mental health, and reduces barriers to them living an independent life.	A mental health nurse promotes and supports a person's recovery and enables them to have more involvement and control over their condition.

Undergraduate degree programmes last three years and are 50% theory, 50% practice. Practice is undertaken on placements in a hospital or other settings. Whether you are studying in England, Wales, Scotland or Northern Ireland, the maximum tuition fee a university can charge each year is currently (2017) £9,000. In England, Wales and Northern Ireland, you can take out a student loan to fund your studies. It can include a tuition fee loan and a maintenance grant to help with your living costs. From 2017, bursaries for student nurses and midwives are being replaced with loans.



CASE STUDY

How a riding accident at 18 led to a career in nursing

Anna Ellis left school at sixteen to work with horses. When she was 18, she had a riding accident and spent a long spell in hospital because of a broken pelvis. Once she'd recovered, she went to work in an office. Having children and putting her career on hold made her think again about how to earn a living. Looking back at her time in hospital as a teenager, she made the decision to become a nurse. She had already studied A levels with NEC and topped up her qualifications with maths GCSE. After a period of work experience as a part-time health care assistant, Anna was accepted to study for a degree in nursing. On qualifying, she worked in the community and at her local NHS Trust as a staff nurse in the oncology department.

Three routes into nursing if you don't have the qualifications you need to go to university

Apprenticeship		Access courses		Flexible learning	
<p>You can start work at an NHS Trust as an apprentice and work your way through the grades, from Health Care Assistant level 2, 3, and 4 then onto an eighteen-month foundation degree followed by a two-year degree course leading to a qualification as a registered nurse. An apprentice is employed 30 hours a week and completes a programme of training in addition to their commitment to their employer.</p>		<p>You can enrol for an Access to Nursing course with a higher education provider such as a college. Access courses usually run for twelve months and are very intensive. If you complete the course successfully, you should meet the entry criteria for nursing studies at degree level.</p>		<p>If you don't have recent evidence of study, have no A levels or have A levels in subjects not appropriate for nursing, flexible learning is a great way to get ready for degree level study. It's a particularly good choice if you need to carry on working or are caring for children or older family members. Some apprenticeship providers require or prefer candidates to have GCSE grade C/9-5 or above in English and maths.</p>	
PROS:	CONS:	PROS:	CONS:	PROS:	CONS:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Suitable if you want or need to carry on working part-time. • A levels are not essential. • You'll gain lots of practical, hands-on experience. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It takes six years or more to get qualified. • Places on foundation degrees are limited and competition is high. • You need the support of your manager. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Quicker than an Apprenticeship and enables you to assimilate a lot of theoretical information very quickly. • A clear start and end date, enabling you to apply to university. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A full time course so opportunities to work are limited. • It's a good idea to gain relevant work experience through volunteering or working in a support role. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • You can top up your grades and/or study new subjects without stopping work. • It's flexible and affordable and keeps your options open. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Juggling work or family commitments with studying is demanding. It's a good idea to gain practical experience while you are studying, through volunteering or relevant work experience.

Nursing associate

This is a new route into nursing. Nursing associates work alongside healthcare support workers and fully qualified nurses focussing on patient care. They learn on the job through an apprenticeship leading to a foundation degree.

How NEC can help you get into nursing

We offer a wide range of GCSE and A level courses to plug any gaps in your qualifications, including the essential GCSE English and maths subjects. Visit <https://www.nec.ac.uk/course-categories/gcses> for details of all our GCSE courses.

NURSING DEGREE APPRENTICESHIP

Nursing degree apprenticeships are a new way into nursing, designed by the government to open up the profession to more people. They begin in September 2017. Nursing degree apprentices will be responsible for assessing, planning, implementing and evaluating care and will be expected to show leadership qualities. Apprentices will start at different stages, depending on their qualifications and experience.

Pros:

- A good choice for people who don't want to take time out of paid employment to study full time at university.
- Applicants' numeracy and literacy skills will be assessed by the Nursing and Midwifery Council Approved Education Institution so GCSEs in English and maths are not a requirement for entry.

Cons:

- An apprenticeship won't suit people not living close to the universities of Derby, Gloucestershire, Greenwich or Sunderland, where the first apprenticeships will be offered.

CASE STUDY

From the Army to a nursing PhD

Jason Alcorn knew before leaving the army in 1997 he wanted a career that would give him the opportunity to help and care for people. He took further qualifications with NEC and a nursing entrance test to enable him to study for his nursing diploma once he left. He then joined The Mid Yorkshire Hospitals NHS Trust as a nurse in 2000, on the urology ward, and has since progressed his way up the career ladder, which has included completing a number of non-clinical secondments. He is now a Macmillan Uro Oncology Clinical Nurse Specialist in charge of his own team of six nurses. He has also completed a nursing PhD. He said: "When my non-clinical secondments came to an end I knew I wanted a change from being on a ward. The specialist nurse position came up, so I applied and was fortunate to get it. It was the best move I could have made."



FIND OUT MORE

Applying to university

The Complete University Guide, **What Uni** and **The Guardian University Guide** are just three of numerous sites available to help students with degree subject and university choice.

UCAS – all the information you need about how to apply for an apprenticeship, how to apply to university, finance and support, and making and tracking your university application.

The NHS

NHS Jobs – search for nursing roles by postcode and job title and see salary levels

NHS careers – career options and pathways, skills and training, and real life stories

Professional bodies

Royal College of Nursing – nursing union and professional body representing more than 435,000 nurses, student nurses, midwives and healthcare assistants in the UK and internationally.

The Nursing and Midwifery Council – the nursing and midwifery regulator for England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland.

Start learning about nursing

First Steps

www.rcn.org.uk/firststeps – is a free e-learning tool designed for healthcare assistants and assistant practitioners. It provides a good overview of what nursing involves for people thinking of going into the profession.

What next?

Here are two things to consider before making a decision about a career in nursing.

- Start where you are and realistically consider what you will need to do to meet entry requirements. If you are unsure, try and find an independent careers' adviser or talk to people already qualified.
- Think it through, weigh up the pros and cons and how they will affect you. Make a plan.

Remember, there are many options available but whichever one you choose, determination will help you succeed!



“The Code of the Nursing and Midwifery Council sets out the professional standards of practice and behaviour that all registered nurses and midwives in the UK must uphold.”

Read the Code at
www.nmc.org.uk

HOW NEC CAN HELP YOU FULFIL YOUR AMBITION TO BE A NURSE

Essential GCSE qualifications

You'll need English language or English literature and maths to be allocated a place on any approved nursing course.

Click here for details of these essential GCSE qualifications:

[English language GCSE](#)
[English literature GCSE](#)
[Maths GCSE](#)

About NEC courses

- NEC courses are designed by teachers, examiners and distance learning experts, so you can be certain that they cover the curriculum and are designed for independent study.
- NEC courses are delivered online through learn@NEC, so you can study at a time and place to suit you and be part of a national community of people studying with us.
- As an NEC student, you will have a personal tutor who is a qualified subject expert to support you in your studies, giving you feedback on assignments and preparing you for your exams.

Qualification gaps at A level

If you're planning to study nursing at university, you'll need A levels. Whether you're short of a subject to add to those you passed at school, or are aiming for a better grade in a subject you already have, NEC can help.

Click here for details of A levels relevant to nursing:

[Biology](#) [Psychology](#)
[Chemistry](#) [Sociology](#)
[Physics](#)

NEC science and social science A levels are the new Edexcel or AQA courses.

Distance learning is flexible

Learning to fit your lifestyle:

- Download and print the course materials and study wherever you are
- Read an e-book on your daily commute
- Watch a video or listen to a recording on your mobile phone or tablet

Course fees

NEC course fees cover:

- All course materials
- Tuition by a subject specialist
- Online diagnostic exercises and assessments
- Quizzes, videos and e-books

Whatever subject you want to study, you can sample our course materials before you sign up. When you've made your choice, you can enrol at any time and start studying when it suits you.

Visit www.nec.ac.uk to find out more.

“Being a children's nurse is really rewarding. When you help a child with a health problem, you know you're making a difference to someone's entire life. Interacting with children often means playing or having fun as you care for them, which makes it a great environment to work in.”

Sarah, Sheffield Children's Hospital

Disclaimer: the information in this Career Tracks was up-to-date when it was published at www.nec.ac.uk. If you are thinking of a career in nursing, you are advised to make direct contact with the organisations cited here, or call our Advice Team on 0800 389 2839.

NEC's Career Tracks provide an insight into the most popular career choices made by our students. As well as information on the qualifications you need for your chosen career, entry routes and training, NEC Career Tracks look at the personal qualities you will need and list websites where you can find out more.



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