

Career Tracks Nursing

Where to start
What qualifications do you need
Career routes
Relevant training
How can NEC help

www.nec.ac.uk





Your future, your goals

Gain qualifications, start a career, change direction. Whatever your goal we'll help you achieve it.

At the National Extension College (NEC) we've been providing distance learning to help young people and adults learn to change their future for over 55 years. During that time, we've seen, on many occasions, how someone's life can be transformed by taking the right course at the right time.

Each year thousands of students, like you, from around the world, access our quality courses and expert tutor support to develop their knowledge and skills, and achieve their goals.

Some of our students need qualifications to go on to further or higher education. Some plan to take professional courses in areas such as teaching or healthcare and just need that essential GCSE or A level to make it happen.

Whatever your reason for studying, we look forward to welcoming you to NEC as a student.

This guide will give you an overview of how to embark on a career in nursing, what qualifications you will need, and how NEC can help.

For more information on the courses we offer, visit our website **www.nec.ac.uk**.

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Are you thinking about a career as a nurse?

This NEC Career Tracks guide tells you about the routes into the profession and looks at the qualifications, qualities and skills you'll need, and how NEC can help you.

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, children, newborn babies, people with a learning disability, or those with a mental illness. They work on wards and in operating theatres in state-funded or private hospitals, in GP's surgeries, in schools, businesses, prisons and in the wider community. In the NHS, 300,000 qualified nursing staff and healthcare workers deal with over 1 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, former Chief Executive and General Secretary of Royal College of Nursing

Why be a nurse?

Your reason for wanting to become a nurse will be 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
- ▶ be frustrated with working in front of a computer screen and want to work in an environment that offers different challenges every day
- ▶ be looking for a career that is demanding with plenty of variety and good opportunities for career progression
- ▶ be 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.



NHS bursary

In January 2020, the UK government announced the introduction of an NHS bursary benefiting those studying midwifery, nursing and other allied health care professions.

What is the bursary?

All students studying courses in relevant professions, from September 2020, will receive at least £5,000 a year to help cover living expenses. This is not a loan so will not have to be paid back.



Additional support

As well as the £5,000 per year afforded to all students, some students will be eligible for up to £3,000 more funding.

There is up to £3,000 additional funding, for:

- ▶ specialist disciplines that struggle to recruit, including areas such as mental health nursing
- ▶ an additional childcare allowance, on top of the £1,000 already on offer
- ▶ areas of the country which have seen a drop in people accepted onto nursing, midwifery and allied health courses over the past year



Can I get any further funding?

Depending on your personal circumstances, you may be eligible for other student funding. Receiving the bursary does not exempt you from applying for tuition fee loans or maintenance loans through the Student Loans Company.

Student Finance England

Student Finance Wales

For more information about additional funding available, visit the **UCAS website**.

Routes into nursing

What qualifications, qualities and skills will I need?

You will need:

- ▶ a genuine interest in healthcare
- ▶ to be observant, organised and flexible
- ▶ relevant work experience - volunteering, a work experience placement or being employed as a healthcare assistant
- ▶ to be able to demonstrate evidence of literacy and numeracy skills

You can find out about what you'll need if you are thinking about a career in nursing on the **Royal College of Nursing's** website.

Studying nursing at university - nursing degree courses

To study for a nursing degree you will typically need five GCSEs at grade 4 (grade C) or above including English language or English literature, maths and a science subject (usually biology or human biology), plus two A levels or an equivalent level 3 qualification such as a BTEC. There are universities across the UK where you can study nursing and midwifery. Entry requirements and tuition fees vary from university to university so it is always a good idea to visit the website of the university you are interested in attending. Students studying nursing at degree level can choose from four fields:

Adult nursing

Adult nurses work with adults of all ages from 18 upwards, who are suffering from one or more long- or short-term physical health conditions.

Children's nursing

From nursing a sick newborn to an adolescent road accident victim, children's nurses consider the care and support needed by the wider family.

Learning disability nursing

You'll work with people of all ages who have a learning disability to improve or maintain their physical and mental health, and reduce barriers to them living an independent life.

Mental health nursing

A mental health nurse promotes and supports a person's recovery, enabling them to have more involvement and control over their condition, and supports families and carers.

Some degree courses, known as a "dual field degree" allow you to study in two of these fields.

Nursing degree courses generally last three years. You'll study the theory and science of nursing at your university, and undertake placements in a hospital or community setting, where you'll learn the practical and caring side of nursing. You should check the financial package that will be available to support your study from the relevant funding organisation or the university you will be attending. To find out more visit the Royal College of Nursing website and **download their guide for anyone considering a career as a nurse.**

If you already have a degree in a relevant subject, you can often get a recognition of this - called an *Accreditation of Prior Experiential Learning (APEL)* - enabling you to complete your nursing degree course in two rather than three years.

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 healthcare 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.



The essentials

GCSE Maths

Maths is an essential skill, that we use everyday, in all areas of our lives. From adding up a weekly shop, to working out how to decorate a room – maths enables us to find patterns and structure, and opens up a wide range of opportunities.

Our **GCSE Maths online course** is written by experts in the field. Well-structured materials covering topics – such as fractions, decimals and trigonometry – will enable you to gain confidence in basic mathematical skills, before progressing to more challenging areas.

GCSE English Language

Gaining a GCSE in English language is vital for future career progression and a minimum requirement for many further education courses. However, it's not just a 'means to an end', this course will help you develop your reading and writing skills, and enable you to communicate and express your ideas more effectively.

Studying **GCSE English Language online** is a flexible way to gain key skills, that you'll use in all aspects of your life. Supported by a personal tutor, you'll explore the use of words in different contexts and gain a deeper understanding of the power and influence of the spoken and written word.

Other routes to becoming a nurse

Nursing degree apprenticeship

A **Nursing degree apprenticeship** is designed to open up the profession to more people. It enables applicants to train to become a graduate registered nurse and achieve the same standards as other student nurses, through an apprenticeship route.

Nursing degree apprenticeships generally last four years. For anyone who has previously completed the Nursing associate apprenticeship (see below), this training will count towards the degree level, reducing the length of your course. Find out more about Nursing degree apprenticeships on the **NHS Careers** website.

- ▶ 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 are assessed by the Nursing and Midwifery Council Approved Education Institution, aiming for a minimum Level 2 skill level.



- ▶ This is a new qualification so you will need to find an NHS organisation offering vacancies on the apprenticeship. You can do this on the **NHS Jobs** website or the **Find an apprenticeship** website.



Nursing associate apprenticeship

Nursing associates bridge the gap between healthcare support workers and fully qualified nurses. Their role focuses on patient care. **Nursing associate apprenticeships** generally last for two years and consist of academic learning one day a week and work-based learning in a specific healthcare setting the rest of the week. To become a nursing associate apprentice you'll need GCSE maths grade 4 (grade C) or above and GCSE English grade 4 (grade C) or above, or Functional Skills Level 2 in maths and English. Find out more about the role of a Nursing associate on the **NHS Health Careers** website.

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."*



Three routes into nursing if you don't have the qualifications you need for a degree level course

Healthcare Apprenticeship

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 a foundation degree followed by a 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.

- ▶ 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.

- ▶ It takes six years or more to get qualified.
- ▶ Places on foundation degrees are limited and highly competitive.
- ▶ You need the support of your manager.

Access courses

You can enrol for an Access to Nursing course with a higher education provider such as a college. Access courses usually run for 12 months and are very intensive. If you complete the course successfully, you should meet the entry criteria for nursing studies at degree level.

- ▶ 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 for university.



- ▶ 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.

Flexible learning

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 9-5 (grade C) or above in English and maths.

- ▶ You can top up your grades and/or study new subjects without stopping work.
- ▶ It's flexible and affordable and keeps your options open.

- ▶ 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.



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



Functional Skills

Functional Skills courses are accessible to learners of all ages, with Level 2 being a recognised equivalent to GCSE grade 4 (grade C).

Our Functional Skills courses take around 55 hours of study for each level compared to the 150 hours plus time for assignments that is suggested for a GCSE. Though Functional Skills qualifications may not be sufficient for everyone, they are accepted for those aiming to undertake the nursing associate apprenticeship. With assessment performed on demand, there is no need to structure your learning around exam sittings and set deadlines.

Maths Level 1 & 2

The course will start with an introductory assignment including a short diagnostic test, marked by the tutor. This will give a good idea of which level you should start with and tutors will highlight areas that you should focus on.

The maths functional skills courses cover numbers, measures, shapes, and handling data.

English Level 1 & 2

As with the maths courses, English functional skills start with an introductory assignment and diagnostic test.

The English functional skills courses cover reading, writing, speaking and listening.

For more information, visit www.nec.ac.uk.



Find out more

Applying to university

The **Complete University Guide** and **What Uni** can help you with degree subject and university choice.

UCAS has 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.

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 nurses and midwifery regulator for England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland.

Start learning about nursing

- ▶ **First Steps** - is a free e-learning tool 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 work in nursing

Essential GCSE qualifications

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

Click below for information about studying these essential GCSE qualifications with NEC:

GCSE Maths

GCSE English Language

GCSE English Literature

Functional Skills

If you're thinking of a nursing associate apprenticeship, we offer Functional Skills courses in English and maths.

Click below for details, including topics covered, fees and assessment:

Functional skills in English

Functional skills in maths

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** our online learning platform, 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.

Course fees

NEC course fees cover:

- ▶ all course materials
- ▶ tuition by a personal tutor who is a subject specialist
- ▶ online diagnostic exercises and assessments
- ▶ quizzes, videos, ebooks, and webinars.

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.

Qualifications gaps at A level

If you're planning to study 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 below for details of A levels relevant to nursing:

A level Biology

A level Chemistry

A level Physics

A level Psychology

A level Sociology

Distance learning is flexible

Learning to fit your lifestyle:

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

Disclaimer: the information in this Career Tracks was up-to-date when it was published in January 2020. If you are thinking of a career in nursing, you are advised to make direct contact with the organisations cited here or call our Course Advice Team on 0800 389 2839.

Career Tracks

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.

