

Career Tracks Paramedics

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 as a paramedic, 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 paramedic?

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.

Your career as a paramedic

From giving life to dealing with death and everything in between, paramedics have a highly responsive role and work in a range of emergency and non-emergency settings, either alone or with an emergency care assistant. They are often the first healthcare professional at a scene of an accident or emergency and need to assess the patient's condition and make potentially life-saving decisions, use hi-tech equipment and intravenous drips or drugs or oxygen. Paramedics are also trained to undertake the assessment and management of a range of less serious illnesses and injuries.

You'll work with and support a diverse range of people and situations, from someone who has had a road traffic accident, fallen down the stairs, from a ladder to people suspected of having had a stroke or heart attack, or moving very sick babies to a specialist unit. You may need to support friends or relatives who are with the patient, or members of the public who may have witnessed an accident. Some people may be upset and highly distressed, others may be angry and aggressive. You could be treating someone at the roadside, on a building site, in the workplace, in their own home or at a wide range of other venues and locations.

Why be a paramedic?

A career as a paramedic means you'll be working with people at some of the most vulnerable points in their lives when they may be badly hurt or severely traumatised. Your reasons for wanting to become a paramedic will be unique to you. You may:

- ▶ be inspired to find out more after coming into direct contact with a paramedic if a member of your family, or you yourself, have needed emergency treatment.
- ▶ want a career doing something that really matters and makes a difference to someone by supporting them in their moment of need.
- ▶ want a career that is highly rewarding and provides real job satisfaction.
- ▶ want plenty of variety in your career and opportunities to progress or specialise in a particular area within your chosen career.

Sounds like you? Read on.



What qualifications, qualities and skills will I need?

You will need to be:

- ▶ able to understand situations quickly, show initiative and be quick thinking and decisive
- ▶ able to follow procedures and have excellent attention to detail
- ▶ able to work alone or as part of a team
- ▶ calm and patient in stressful situations and able to work well under pressure
- ▶ confident, reassuring and sensitive to the situation when dealing with other people's strong emotions
- ▶ prepared to go into unpredictable and unknown situations and work with all types of people.

If you want to work as a paramedic you must have successfully completed an approved qualification in paramedic science and be registered as a paramedic with the **Health Care Professions Council (HCPC)**.

You will also need:

- ▶ good communication, listening and people skills
- ▶ a caring personality able to show empathy, honesty and integrity
- ▶ excellent organisational and driving skills, with a clean manual driving licence
- ▶ confidence using hi-tech machinery and equipment
- ▶ a **DBS (Disclosure and Barring Service) check**
- ▶ a good level of physical fitness as you are likely to have a fitness assessment before being accepted to join an ambulance service trust and work as a paramedic.

Case study

From bike courier to paramedic

Sam left school with few qualifications and no clear idea of what he wanted to do as a career. He worked in catering for a few years and eventually became a bike courier, delivering packages across London. However, a cycling incident that left him needing urgent medical attention gave him the idea for a new path in life. Sam was impressed by the paramedical team that swiftly came to his rescue (and the NHS staff that tended to him in hospital) and decided to pursue a career as a paramedic. This meant returning to education to gain GCSEs in maths and English language.

He started studying online with NEC whilst still in recovery finding the flexibility allowed him to work from home. Due to his life changing experience, he was highly motivated and determined to succeed. After a year of hard work, Sam received high passes in both subjects leading him to pursue A levels in biology and chemistry. He is now working as a student paramedic and enjoying his new career.



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 a career as a paramedic

There are both vocational and academic routes to qualifying as a paramedic. The first step is to take a course approved by the Health Care Professions Council (HCPC). You could choose to:

- ▶ Take a full-time qualification in paramedic science at university and then apply to an ambulance service trust as a qualified paramedic. There are HCPC approved full-time degree courses, Diploma of Higher Education (DipHE) and foundation degree programmes in paramedic science and paramedic practice. A **full list of approved courses** is on the HCPC website.
- ▶ Become a student paramedic with an ambulance service trust and study for a qualification in paramedic science whilst you work under supervision.
- ▶ Apply for a degree level apprenticeship in paramedic science with an ambulance service trust.

All approved courses must meet the HCPC's **standards of education and training** but programmes can vary in their content, how they are structured, and how they are taught and assessed.

Whichever route you choose, entry to train as a paramedic is very competitive. It may help if you have volunteered as a community first responder with an ambulance service trust or an organisation like **St John Ambulance**, the **British Red Cross**, or have experience working as an Emergency Care Assistant in the ambulance service.

Studying to be a paramedic at university

Universities set their own entry requirements so check with the university where you plan to study. You are likely to need five GCSEs at grades 9-4 (grades A-C) including English, maths and a science plus two or three A levels including a science subject, or equivalent qualifications, plus experience of working in a healthcare or first aid role either paid or voluntary. Applications to study for a paramedic science qualification through a full-time university course are made through **UCAS**. Full-time courses take between two and four years and include a mix of theory and practical experience through placements with ambulance service trusts.

If you study for a paramedic science degree full-time at university, you will join the ambulance service as a qualified paramedic and will then have training to introduce you to the ambulance service trust.

Working as a student paramedic

Training as a student paramedic covers everything you need to become fully qualified as a paramedic. Student paramedic schemes recruit once a year, or sometimes only once every two years, and ambulance service trusts set their own entry requirements for student paramedics. You are likely to need at least five GCSEs at grade 4 (grade C) or above including maths, English and a science subject, or an equivalent qualification with a high level of health or science content, plus a full manual driving licence with at least two years' driving experience. Many applicants have higher qualifications as entry to student paramedic schemes is so competitive. You should also be prepared to gain extra qualifications on your driver's licence so that you can drive larger vehicles and carry passengers.

The length of the training varies between ambulance service trusts but is usually between two and five years depending whether you are training full- or part-time.

Apprenticeships

A degree level apprenticeship in paramedic science offers an additional route to qualifying as a paramedic. To get on to an apprenticeship scheme you will need to apply for a position as an apprentice with an ambulance service trust. Search for an apprenticeship on the **NHS Jobs** or **Find an Apprenticeship** website.

Paramedic training across the UK

Scotland

To train to become a paramedic with the **Scottish Ambulance Service** you must first qualify as an ambulance technician. You will then be able to train as a paramedic when a vacancy to do so becomes available. The Scottish Ambulance Academy, run by the Scottish Ambulance Service and based at the School of Health at Glasgow Caledonian University, provides training for all paramedics employed by the Scottish Ambulance Service. **Find out more about training to become a paramedic in Scotland.**



Northern Ireland

Northern Ireland's *Paramedic in Training Programme* equips students with the essential theoretical and practical skills to meet the HCPC standards and practice as a paramedic in Northern Ireland. The two-year programme includes a combination of classroom learning, written exams, practical assessments, practice placements and ambulance driver training. **Find out more about the Paramedic in Training Programme.**



Wales

To work as a paramedic with the Welsh Ambulance Service NHS Trust you need to be at least 18 years of age and have a minimum of five GCSEs at grade 4 (grade C) or above including English or Welsh, maths and a science subject. You'll need to study a two-year full-time course at Swansea University leading to a Diploma in Paramedic Science. Experience of working in the Welsh Ambulance Service as an ambulance care assistant or emergency care assistant could be beneficial if you plan to apply to become a paramedic in the Welsh ambulance service as could the ability to speak, read and write in Welsh. **Find out more about working for the Welsh Ambulance Service NHS Trust.**

Other training

Wherever you are training to become a paramedic you will be trained to drive an emergency vehicle and to resuscitate and/or stabilise patients using sophisticated techniques, equipment and drugs.

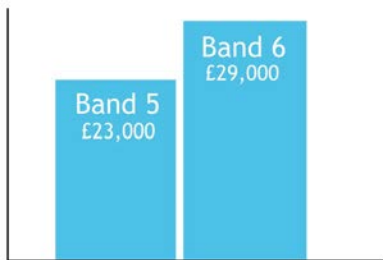
How NEC can help you become a paramedic

We offer a wide range of GCSE and A level courses to support you in applying to become a paramedic whether through an academic or vocational route, including A level Biology, GCSE English Language and maths, and IGCSE Biology. We also offer chemistry, physics, combined science and double science at IGCSE and chemistry and physics at A level. Visit our website for full details and fees for these courses www.nec.ac.uk.

Q & A: Working as a paramedic

1. How much do paramedics earn?

Paramedics working for the NHS start at Band 5 on the **Agenda for Change Pay Scale** as part of their learning programme and progress to Band 6 after two years. Currently (October 2019) the Band 5 starting salary, based on working 37.5 hours per week on a shift pattern, is around £23,000 and the Band 6 starting salary is around £29,000.



2. What do paramedics do day-to-day?

Paramedics' shifts cover 24 hours a day, seven days a week, every day of the year. Every shift will be different as you respond to emergency calls, assess patients' individual conditions and make potentially life-saving decisions about the treatment they need and whether this can be done at the scene of the emergency or if they need transferring to hospital. Every day you'll be dealing with a wide range of people in physically and emotionally demanding situations.

3. What treatments and techniques do paramedics use?

As a paramedic you'll make key clinical decisions and use hi-tech equipment as part of your day-to-day work. This could include defibrillators and ventilators to resuscitate and stabilise patients, spinal and traction splints or oxygen and intravenous drips. You may need to carry out small surgical procedures such as inserting a breathing tube or to dress wounds, support broken bones, give medication and injections, or even deliver a baby.

4. What administrative tasks do paramedics do?

An important part of your job will be keeping accurate records of patients' treatment, checking, cleaning and decontaminating the ambulance and its first aid and emergency equipment, and maintaining the stock of the drugs in the ambulance.



5. Where do paramedics work?

Paramedics are usually the senior member of the two-person ambulance crew, supported by an emergency care assistant or ambulance technician, but you could work alone using a motorbike, emergency response car or even a bicycle. You could be based at a hospital, health centre, GP surgery or other setting but when responding to emergency calls may go to a patient's home or workplace, a school, community or roadside setting. You could be based in a control centre providing advice over the telephone.



6. Which other professions do paramedics work with?

As a paramedic you could choose to work for an NHS ambulance service trust, a private ambulance service, in a critical care role like the Air Ambulance, at a GP practice or walk-in centre, or in a hospital emergency department. As such you'll work closely with a range of other healthcare teams and professionals including GPs, occupational therapists, mental health teams, diabetes specialists, doctors and nurses. You'll also work alongside other emergency services such as the police, fire service and coastguard.

7. How many paramedics are there in the UK?

In 2018 there were around 26,000 paramedics in the UK but the numbers of practising paramedics fluctuate. In 2013 there were around 32,000 but in 2016 there were only around 20,000. (Source: *Statista*)



Related career choices

Emergency care assistant - you'll respond to emergency calls alongside a paramedic and help them to care for patients and where necessary get them to hospital. You're likely to need five GCSEs at grades 9-4 (grades A-C) including English and maths to apply directly to an ambulance service trust or for an Emergency Care Assistant Apprenticeship.

You could decide to work in a control room as a **call handler/emergency medical dispatcher** or other **role within the ambulance service**.

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.



Job prospects and career progression

Paramedic is one of the allied health professions. A career in an allied health profession makes you highly employable. It gives you the flexibility to live and work anywhere in the UK and enables you to help people every day.

Once registered as a paramedic with HCPC you'll be expected to keep your skills and knowledge up-to-date by continuing to attend training courses. You'll also need to pay an annual retention fee to keep your name on the register.

With additional skills and qualifications you can become an experienced paramedic allowing you to move into roles where you can take on more responsibility and carry out more treatments. You could become a team leader supervising the work of paramedics and emergency care assistants; become a manager responsible for several emergency teams; join a specialist team like the Air Ambulance or Stroke service, or a Hazardous Area Response Team (HART). You could move into education, training or research.

Protecting the professionalism of paramedics

The Health Care Professions Council (HCPC) publishes a **Standards of Proficiency for Paramedics** which sets out what a student paramedic must know, understand and be able to do by the time they have completed their training in order to register with HCPC and practise as a paramedic.

Professional bodies

Once qualified you can join the College of Paramedics, the recognised professional body for paramedics and the ambulance profession in the UK. They provide information about becoming a paramedic - including a **Digital Career Framework** which includes information and case studies on the diverse role of a paramedic; and run courses, conferences and seminars where qualified paramedics can continue their professional development and update their skills and ideas.



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 to university, how to apply for an apprenticeship, finance and support, making and tracking your university application.

The NHS

NHS Jobs lets you search for job roles and apprenticeships by postcode and job title and to see salary levels.

NHS Health Careers includes information on your career options, pathways, skills and training plus real life stories from practising paramedics.

Volunteering

▶ **Ambulance service trusts**

If you have the necessary skills, you could volunteer as a Community First Responder with your local ambulance service trust and respond to life-threatening emergencies in your community alongside the ambulance.



In 2019, The King's Fund published a **report on volunteering opportunities with the ambulance service.**

Find out more here.

▶ **St John Ambulance**

The UK's leading first aid charity, providing first aid in communities, keeping people safe at events and working alongside the NHS in response to 999 calls through volunteering.

▶ **British Red Cross**

A charitable organisation that works according to the principles of international humanitarian law and the statutes of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement.

▶ **Do-it**

A national database of volunteering opportunities, searchable by postcode and organisation. A possible source of volunteering opportunities.

How NEC can help you fulfil your ambition to be a paramedic

Essential GCSE qualifications

You'll need maths, English language and at least one science to be eligible to train as a paramedic. Click below for information about studying these essential GCSE qualifications with NEC:

GCSE Maths

GCSE English Language

IGCSE Biology

IGCSE Chemistry

IGCSE Physics

IGCSE Combined Science

IGCSE Double Science

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.

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.

Qualifications gaps at A level

If you plan to take a full-time qualification in paramedic science at university and 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. If you're planning to study a paramedic science at university, you'll need two or three A levels including a science. Click below for information about studying A levels with NEC:

A level Biology

A level Chemistry

A level Physics

NEC's full range of A levels

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.

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 as a paramedic, 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.

