

Careers in Healthcare

Routes into health

Introduction

This information leaflet has been produced by Skills for Health for those who advise people on career options relating to the health sector. It will be helpful to careers advisers, HR and line managers, supervisors, and anyone else who offers information, advice and guidance to prospective and existing employees, trainees and those seeking work.

In this guide you will find information on

- Choosing a career in health
- Where to find information on careers in health
- Personal exploration – online tools and resources
- Work based routes
 - Apprenticeships
 - Employment and pre-employment schemes
 - Widening access
- Graduate routes
 - Graduate entry
 - Undergraduate entry

Explore further and you will find out about the variety of ways a person can start or develop a health related career and links to relevant information and further sources of support.

The information leaflet is one of a series which are on the Skills for Health website. These cover topics such as qualifications, signposting and referral, supporting people in their learning, funding and much more.

Visit www.skillsforhealth.org.uk/careersinformationandadvice to access them.

Choosing a career in health

There are many pathways to a career in the health sector. Employers are creating more flexible ways to get the right person with the right skills into the right job. These days a chosen entry route does not have to dictate future progression pathways once someone is employed in the health sector. For example, a person could:

- Enter directly into employment
- Undertake vocational training and then progress into roles requiring higher levels of training
- Progress through a secondment to do a Foundation Degree, or other professional training

If an individual is clear about which profession they want to follow, it will help focus the number of entry routes. Clearly, someone wanting to qualify as a doctor would need to complete a university medical degree course followed by foundation training. However, in most cases, there is often more than one way for someone to achieve their goal. See the sections below where you will find links to both health sector specific and general sources of information, advice and guidance.

Health sector priorities and workforce trends

Healthcare is a constantly developing sector and changes in the way health services are organised and provided have a significant impact on career pathways.

To advise individuals effectively, you need to be aware of labour market information (LMI) and wider health sector reforms, such as the development of new roles and qualifications.

Did you know?

Tasks that were once the remit of registered professionals such as nurses or occupational therapists might now be performed by Assistant or Associate Practitioners, under the supervision of registered staff.

Keep up to date with health sector LMI and other workforce career developments by visiting Skills for Health's [Labour market intelligence](#) web resources. These include workforce data, skills and qualifications, and occupational, demographic, economic and social trends.

An individual's qualifications and experience

This is probably the most significant factor that will influence the chosen pathway. An individual with few or no relevant qualifications or experience should consider [volunteering](#) or gaining [work experience](#) to strengthen their applications for job or

study opportunities. It will also enhance applications to university level health programmes.

Where to find out about careers in health

NHS Careers

[NHS Careers](#) is a specialised service offering information on careers in the NHS in England. It has a website, literature and supporting services for NHS employers, schools, colleges and careers advisers. [NHS Scotland](#) and [NHS Wales](#) also offer services, highlighting their national opportunities.

Northern Ireland has an integrated health and social care service. [The Department for Health, Social Services and Public Safety](#) has information on careers in health and personal social services, available from the website. Those interested in exploring careers can contact the Careers Service NI. The Nursing Careers Service provides information on careers in nursing and midwifery.

'Step into the NHS'

A dedicated interactive website for young people from NHS Careers.

Health Learning and Skills Advice line

This is a specialist service providing careers IAG to staff within the health sector or those considering a career in the health sector. There is a telephone helpline (**08000 150 850**), and users can email an adviser and book a callback facility (England only).

Interactive resources and tools

A small number of NHS regions in England have interactive tools. For example, '[A Day in the Life](#)' in the South West and the Strategic Health Authority's [careers site](#) in the North East.

Meet the professionals

Some websites offer an insight into careers in health by video interviews with professionals and interactive tours. For example, [icould](#), [Careers Box](#) [Medical Careers](#), [Get inside medicine](#) and [Talking Jobs](#).

It might be helpful for people to contact the professional association or body of the career they are interested in. A list of the main ones is on the [NHS Careers](#) website.

Get to know the role

Several additional websites provide career and occupational profile information for health sector jobs and careers. For example, Next [Step](#), [Careers Wales](#), [My World of Work](#) from [Skills Development Scotland](#), [Careers NI](#) and [Prospects](#)

Open days and summer schools

University and colleges that offer healthcare courses often have open days and some will have summer schools. These can help people to explore the latest in health sector learning, career pathways and qualifications. [What Uni.com](#) lists the open days.

Lifelong Learning Networks

Funded to develop vocational progression routes in England, there are different [groups](#) throughout the country, for example, the South East London Lifelong Learning Network. The groups have IAG as one of their focus and many include health and social care works areas. However, funding has been withdrawn for some areas at this stage.

Personal exploration – online tools and resources

In addition to the specialist tools often available via careers services, schools, colleges and universities, there are also many online tools which are freely available (ie without charge or subscription) to help individuals explore and plan their career options.

Healthcare specific

- [Career mapper](#) is a healthcare specific tool aimed primarily at young people in England
- [4 stage career planning model](#), for those considering a career in medicine and includes interactive self assessment and decision making tools
- [What can I do with my degree?](#) enables users to explore their options by degree subject and could be used to help individuals explore what to study at university or as a postgraduate tool
- [Nursing careers](#) have a personality quiz for those considering nursing
- [A Taste of Medicine](#) – from St George’s University of London, illustrates a range of careers in healthcare supplemented with videos and teachers’ notes.
- Association of the British Pharmaceutical Industry ([ABPI](#)) includes case studies with some videos on careers in various clinical and scientific health careers

Generic tools

- [Health Learning and Skills Advice Line](#) links to Next Step information on career planning and enables users to identify skills through the Skills Health check.
- [Careers Wales](#), [Skills Development Scotland](#), [My world of work](#) and [Careers NI](#) provide online tools via their websites (Careers NI use external tools which are free to access via their site, once users have registered)

- Prospects offer several useful tools specifically aimed at graduates but which will be useful for a wider user group. [Prospects planner](#) is one example. See further links below
- [UCAS](#) website provides access to the Stamford Test, a short questionnaire which can help to match interests and abilities to possible higher education subjects.

Work based routes

Apprenticeships

Employers are increasingly turning to Apprenticeships to develop their staff and recruit from the local community.

Existing or new staff recruited into the health sector may be able to access specialist Apprenticeship training which can help them to progress further in their careers:

- The number of progression routes, after the Apprenticeship stage, is growing
- Some universities and higher education institutions are recognising these qualifications as suitable entry requirements onto degree level courses
- Apprenticeships can be the gateway to professional registration in a number of health sector careers, or into new roles such as Assistant Practitioner.

Why are Apprenticeships increasing?

- Apprenticeships are supported by the government as a way to improve the skills of the UK workforce
- Employers need to tackle the ageing workforce, and the Apprenticeship programme offers them another route to develop their entire workforce's skills
- Availability of Apprenticeships varies across the UK. See links table below
- Availability of Apprenticeships in different areas of the country is determined mainly by local workforce plans and priorities. Apprenticeships may be targeted where there are recruitment challenges, perhaps due to a shortage of skilled labour in certain job roles.

Explore the table below for key sources of information about Apprenticeships in the health sector.

See Skills for Health for information on the benefits of apprenticeships, apprenticeship frameworks and job roles for apprentices plus more!	Attracting and training the future workforce
Getting good people into hard-to-fill entry level posts	Apprenticeships in England and Wales
A Day in the life working and progressing in the NHS in the South West	Modern Apprenticeships in Scotland

Opportunities for young people including apprenticeships, advanced apprenticeships	Apprenticeships in Northern Ireland
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Employment and pre-employment schemes

Getting a job in the health sector is the way many people begin their career pathway. For those with little or no relevant work experience or qualifications, direct employment into a job can provide a route to further learning and career development, whilst being able to earn a living.

Employment schemes

Some NHS trusts or other healthcare organisations partner with a range of organisations (such as Jobcentre Plus and local colleges) to develop employment schemes aimed at groups such as the unemployed.

These schemes combine training and skills with practical work experience in a healthcare setting. They may lead to a guaranteed interview for a post within the trust. They are sometimes known as 'Pre-employment Schemes' or 'NHS Employability Programmes'.

Skills for Health has developed a [Sector Employability Toolkit \(SET\)](#) to support health sector employers and partnership organisations develop their own pre-employment programmes which meet local workforce needs.

Recruitment toolkit delivers £900,000 savings for Cwm Taf Local Health Board

Skills for Health's Sector Employability Toolkit dramatically improved recruitment to hard-to-fill posts while reducing turnover and sickness rates.

Read the [Cwm Taf](#) case study to find out how opportunities have grown for long term unemployed people to become part of the local healthcare workforce.

The [Skills Academy for Health](#) has also developed a range of these programmes.

They aim to address issues such as social exclusion, poverty and disadvantage in local communities and to improve employability, enabling healthcare employers to create a workforce that is more representative of the local community.

[Elaine's story](#) is another good example of how a pre-employment scheme operates. Across the UK there is a range of national schemes aimed at supporting entry to employment.

Across the UK there are several national schemes aimed at supporting entry to employment. Skills for Health has developed a [Health Sector Pre-employment Programme](#) building on the existing Sector Employability Toolkit. It focuses on supporting young people (18 – 24 years) in moving into initial entry level posts and sustainable employment within the health sector. The programme aims to contribute to growing the workforce for the future by providing a progression pathway into Level 2 qualifications and Apprenticeship Frameworks

[Jobcentre Plus](#) will have information on available opportunities.

Widening access

There are a range of tools and resources which have been developed specifically as part of widening access/participation activities.

Some of the links will provide access to websites which, whilst no longer active, still provide access to useful tools and resources.

Health Learning and Skills Advice Line	Next Step for those changing work direction
Access Northern Ireland	Skills Development Scotland
Careers Service Northern Ireland	DELNI promoting learning and skills in Northern Ireland
Diverse routes into higher education in Scotland	Educational Guidance Service for Adults
Scottish Wider Access Programme	University of Scotland Widening Participation
Widening participation in Education in the West of Scotland	Widening participation in further and higher education in the North of Scotland
University and college open days	The Times Good University Guide
Making applications to UK Higher Education	Search, review and compare subjects at UK universities
Directgov Education and learning	Aimhigher (closes July 2011) supported entry to university and included a healthcare strand of work.
Talking Jobs is producing a suite of healthcare related lesson plans (subscription required)	Your Future has information on such as courses and progression maps in the East Midlands

Graduate routes

Undergraduate entry

Career pathways in the health sector are constantly evolving and developing in response to new ways of working, new technologies and new job roles.

Did you know?

Certain tasks which used to be carried out by doctors are also now the responsibility of some nurses, e.g. prescribing medication. By 2013 all nursing programmes will be degree only. This means that in 2011 universities will begin to phase out nursing diplomas.

Whilst there are many job roles in the health sector which require a degree qualification, career pathways are no longer clearly divided between academic and vocational routes. Combining academic learning with practical application in the workplace is not new in healthcare careers. However, the development of the [Career Framework for Health](#), along with significant changes to qualifications and learning pathways, have resulted in a range of options.

For example, entry to undergraduate courses can be across a range of routes. Learners may undertake the [Diploma in Society Health and Development](#) for 14-19 year olds or follow an [apprenticeship](#) route, gaining a vocational qualification or decide that they want to take 'A' levels or Highers. For mature students, entry may be via a competence based qualification studied in the workplace or an [Access to Higher Education](#) course. The [Open University](#) also offers a range of first level courses for those who want to progress with their education.

With such a range of options, it is important to check the university's entrance as well the professional regulatory requirements. This can be done through the [Health Professions Council](#) (HPC) or the appropriate regulatory body such as the [Nursing and Midwifery Council](#). NHS Careers has a [course finder](#) which enables a search for clinical courses, which are recognised by professional bodies.

[What can I do with my degree?](#) enables users to explore what types of careers may be available with particular degree subjects.

Graduate entry

Many people in the healthcare workforce enter the sector after completing a university degree or diploma. There are three main entry routes for graduates: graduate training programmes; fast track courses; direct entry into employment.

Graduate training programmes / schemes

The NHS in England, Wales and Scotland, the health and social care service in Northern Ireland and larger independent health sector employers offer graduate training programmes.

Some will be specific to a job role, such as the NHS Graduate Management Training Scheme, whilst others will provide graduates with time to explore the organisation and branch into a range of areas. Some health sector organisations may offer graduate recruits a pathway to achieving professional or technical qualifications whilst working, such as in an accountancy role.

- NHS Careers services in [England](#), [Wales](#) and [Scotland](#) can provide information on NHS graduate schemes
- In Northern Ireland, find out about programmes for graduates by contacting [The Beeches Management Centre](#) and also see the foundation degree case study about Jennifer Mills
- The [NHS Institute for Innovation and Improvement](#) provides information on all the leadership programmes available in England, including the NHS Graduate Management Training Scheme
- [Prospects website](#) offers information for those exploring graduate opportunities
- Look at Skills for Health's PDFs on the [independent healthcare sector](#) and the [voluntary sector](#)

Fast track / accelerated courses

A graduate with a relevant degree (for example in a science subject) who wants to become a registered practitioner can sometimes take a shortened version of undergraduate training in order to become qualified e.g. science graduates wanting to qualify as a doctor, nurse or therapist. [NHS Careers](#) provides information on accelerated programmes and a course finder to enable a course search.

[Medical Careers](#) provides information and advice on the Accelerated Graduate Entry Programme (GEP) for the medical profession, including the application process.

Direct entry into employment

[What can I do with my degree](#) in England is a site where graduates can explore current job vacancies in the NHS by degree subject. Graduates in other UK countries may also find this a useful tool. There are many other recruitment sites where graduates can search for vacancies across the health sector. See the guide on Health Sector Jobs for further information.