

Application forms

An RCN guide for health care assistants and assistant practitioners

Whether you're applying for a first job, or moving to a more senior position, the RCN is here to help you get that perfect role



Royal College
of Nursing

Where to look for jobs

Job titles for HCAs can vary. When searching for jobs, use the terms 'nursing assistant', 'health care assistant', 'health care support worker', 'care assistant', 'support worker', 'nursing auxiliary' or 'assistant practitioner'.

Vacancies are typically advertised in local newspapers and at Job Centre Plus (England and Wales) and Job Centres (Scotland and Northern Ireland).

NHS jobs in England and Wales are usually advertised online at www.jobs.nhs.uk. You can also sign up to receive email alerts of jobs that fit your search criteria. Jobs are advertised online in Scotland at **www.jobs.scot.nhs.uk** and in Northern Ireland at **www.hsrecruit.com**

Many nurse recruitment agencies also advertise jobs on their website and through regional local offices. RCN members can also find country-wide jobs in the RCN Bulletin, visit **www.rcnbulletinjobs.co.uk**

Who employs HCAs and APs?

The NHS is the biggest employer of HCAs and APs, with diverse and varied opportunities. In acute hospitals, HCAs and APs work in accident and emergency, midwifery services, critical care, medical, surgical and specialist wards and clinics. In the community, they work in people's homes, in GP practices or with specialist teams such as health visitors, school nurses or in the prison service.

HCAs and APs are also employed in private hospitals, residential care/nursing homes and hospices, and with the armed forces.

Temporary opportunities are available through NHS Professionals and private agencies.

Completing application forms

HCA and AP jobs, particularly in the NHS, can be highly sought after, so you need to make sure that you take time, care and attention when completing application forms. Many employers will offer the opportunity to gain vocational qualifications in care or a specialist area. This can lead to secondment to a foundation degree, with career progression to an assistant practitioner or senior care assistant role. Some may offer progression to a pre-registration nursing or operating department practitioner qualification. Whichever level of education is offered as part of the job, you'll need to demonstrate that you're a safe bet for the employer's investment.

Always start an application by looking closely at the job description and person specification. If you are not provided with this information, contact the employer directly and try to find out what they are looking for in an ideal candidate. You can then check that you meet all the requirements of the post and think about how you will demonstrate this on your application form.

If you are completing a paper application form, write it out in pencil first and then go over it in black ink.

Standard sections on application forms

Personal information

Make sure that you only give details that you are happy to share. For example, you may not wish to give your work number if you are not happy to be contacted there.

For the NHS and some other jobs, if you consider yourself to have a disability, you can request that you are guaranteed an interview if you demonstrate that you meet all the minimum criteria listed in the

person specification. This can be helpful in getting you shortlisted. If this scheme applies, it will be stated on the application form.

Monitoring information

RCN members can obtain advice on how to present information within application forms from RCN Welfare Rights and Guidance on 0345 408 4391, or Immigration Service, on 0345 456 6766.

For NHS jobs, information provided in the 'personal information' and 'monitoring information' sections of the application form should not be seen by the shortlisting panel. The decision on whether to select you for interview will be based on the information you provide in the 'application for employment' section.

Qualifications and employment history

Start with details of your most recent qualification and job, work backwards chronologically.

Fill in all of the requested information, giving a brief summary of your job responsibilities and duties where asked. You can expand on this information in the 'supporting information' section of the form.

Additional information

The 'supporting information' section of the form, where you are required to give more detail about why you are applying for the job and why you should be appointed, requires careful thought, preparation and attention to detail. Go through the job description and person specification thoroughly and make sure that you provide evidence to show how you meet all the requirements of the post.

If you are completing a paper application form, try to provide a typed statement on a separate piece of A4 paper stapled to the form. If this is not possible, make sure your handwriting is as neat as possible.

References

Employers will usually wish to approach two referees who can comment on a period covering at least three years of your employment/training. They will expect the referee to have a position of authority (preferably with line management responsibility for you) and be able to comment on your work experience, competence, personal qualities and suitability for the post. If you are a student you can provide details of a lecturer, but the employer will still want to contact your most recent employer if applicable. If you have not been in employment for a considerable length of time, you should still try to contact your most recent employer for a reference, but if it is not possible to find an employer referee, RCN members can seek advice from RCN Welfare Rights and Guidance on **0345 408 4391**.

Remember to approach your referees for permission to use them before they are contacted by the employer directly.

Declarations

Make sure you sign the form, if it is paper, or tick any relevant boxes for online forms, and that you read any declarations carefully.

Health assessment form

You will usually be asked to complete a health questionnaire. This should be sent to the occupational health department and will remain confidential to that service. If you have declared any issues related to your health you may be called for an interview with an occupational health nurse, who will check that your and others' health and safety will not be compromised by the role to which you have applied.

Case study: Supporting statement for an Assistant Practitioner, band 4 position on a surgical ear, nose and throat ward

I am applying for band 4 position on Lewis ward as I am very keen to progress in surgical nursing, having been employed on this ward for three years as a senior health care assistant. I believe I meet the requirements listed on the person specification as follows:

Qualifications

I have been fortunate to benefit from the trust's excellent development programme, which has enabled me to gain an NVQ level 3 in care qualification and secondment to complete a foundation degree at Cresswell University, where I gained excellent results in all assignments. I have recently completed the A1 assessors course and have assessed health care assistant colleagues completing their NVQ level 2 competencies.

Experience

I have worked in acute health care for the last ten years, holding positions on both medical and surgical wards. I have extensive head and neck experience and frequently accept delegated responsibilities from senior colleagues. For example, on each shift I am allocated a group of up to six patients, where I am responsible for pre-surgery preparation or providing post operative care. I monitor and record vital signs, reporting adverse findings to senior colleagues. I also prioritise a busy workload, delegating to health care assistants where required, and ensure that I communicate effectively with anxious or distressed relatives.

Practical and intellectual skills

I have been assessed as competent to perform clinical procedures such as minor dressings, tracheostomy care, venepuncture and female catheterisation and have extensive experience in these areas. I am also experienced in delivering mouth care, monitoring infusion rates and providing discharge advice.

I enjoy working in a team and contribute actively to team handovers and meetings. For example, I recently suggested that we rearrange our stock cupboard, having assessed that it was a health risk to staff. I was given responsibility for this, which has received positive feedback from colleagues.

I am able to present information clearly in writing and to record patient progress using the PAS computer system.

I am able to establish good relationships with patients and endeavour to provide emotional support to those coming to terms with facial disfigurement. I liaise regularly with the hospital counsellor and ensure that both patients and relatives are referred to appropriate support services.

I understand the audit cycle and have attended study days on this topic. I have actively participated in recording data for the ward's audit of post operative mouth care.

Disposition/attitude

I am a highly motivated and enthusiastic team player who is passionate about delivering high quality care. I believe that colleagues would describe me as conscientious, courteous and punctual. I aim to respect and value the rights of a diverse range of colleagues, patients and relatives.

Some common mistakes

These may seem obvious, but happen frequently, at all job levels.

- **Copying and pasting irrelevant information** from one application to another. For example, you may be using information from a previous application, but inadvertently transport: 'I am applying for a job on Preston ward....as I really enjoy working with older people...' when in fact you are applying for a job in a children's outpatients department.
- **Using out of date terminology**, such as 'geriatrics' instead of 'older people', or 'handicapped people' instead of 'people with disabilities'. Make sure you use the same terminology as that used by the employer.
- **Grammatical errors.** If this is not your strong point, or English is not your first language, get someone whose opinion you trust to proof read the form before submission. Always use the spellcheck function.
- **Not doing what is asked.** If you are asked to complete in black ink, or to provide most recent job first, make sure that you do!
- **Making your supporting statement too short or too long.** Have you covered all the areas mentioned in the person specification for the job in a way which is easy for the employer to tick off their checklist for the ideal candidate? Is the information concise, but detailed? Make sure the employer does not have to wade through reams of information to get to the relevant points.
- **Not providing concrete examples of your experience.** For example, instead of writing 'I am a good communicator', back up this statement with a concrete example of how you have used

your communication skills effectively (see sample supporting statement above).

- **Submitting the form close to the closing deadline.** Often employers will close the vacancy once they receive a certain number of forms, so try to send the application well before the initial deadline.
- **Pressing the 'send' button before you have completed the application.** If you are not confident with computers get someone to help you so that you don't lose vital information or press the 'send' button before you are happy with the end result.
- **Not explaining gaps.** Make sure you explain gaps in employment, or a short career history, evidence can include unpaid work such as voluntary work, caring for a sick relative or relevant skills obtained through leisure interests.

RCN members can obtain further guidance, advice or feedback on getting the perfect job by calling **RCN Welfare Rights and Guidance on 0345 408 4391**.

Membership of the RCN also offers an abundance of further support and information both online and over the telephone, and a whole host of learning and development opportunities to help you progress with your career, including HCA specific workshops, funding towards study days or conferences, and the largest nursing-related library in Europe.

To join the RCN or for more information and advice, **call RCN Direct on 0345 772 6100** or visit **www.rcn.org.uk/membership**

Also in this series: The RCN guide for HCAs and APs to **writing a CV** and the RCN guide for HCAs and APs to **interview skills**.

The RCN represents nurses and nursing, promotes excellence in practice and shapes health policies.

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