

# Thinking about a career in nursing?





## What is nursing?

Nursing offers a diverse and rewarding career that really makes a difference. Nurses act as leaders, carers and clinicians, taking responsibility for the care they provide to patients.

Nurses have a very important role in public health - supporting patients to follow advice and recommendations, whether this is making sure they take their medication, follow through with an exercise regime or change something in their lifestyle such as stopping smoking or losing weight.

Experienced nurses find fulfilling careers in positions of responsibility, often running nurse-led clinics, or taking leadership roles at executive level. It is possible to develop your career in clinical, research, education and management roles.

A typical day in nursing is busy and diverse; nurses don't just work in hospitals. There are opportunities to work in GP surgeries, clinics, nursing and residential homes, occupational health services, voluntary organisations, the pharmaceutical industry, or in the military.

All qualified nurses must choose from one of four fields as part of their nursing degree - adult nursing, children's nursing, mental health nursing or learning disability nursing.





## Nursing Fields

### Adult nursing

Adult nurses work with patients over 18. They can work in hospitals or in community settings such as people's homes, health centres or nursing homes. Once qualified, they can take extra courses to specialise in areas such as cancer care, women's health, accident and emergency, critical care, practice nursing, health visiting or school nursing.

### Children's nursing

Children's nurses work with children and young people up to 19 years old, and can work in a variety of settings, from specialist baby care units to adolescent units. Children react to illness in a very different way to adults, and children's nurses are specially trained to understand their needs. Children's nurses also support, advise and educate parents and carers. Once qualified, they can specialise in areas such as health visiting, school nursing, intensive care, child safeguarding and cancer care.

### Learning disability nursing

Nurses who qualify in this branch of nursing help people with learning disabilities to live independent and fulfilling lives. They may work with people in supported accommodation, or with those who need more intensive support - for instance, in hospitals or in specialist secure units for offenders with learning disabilities. There is also the opportunity to specialise in areas such as epilepsy management or working with people with sensory impairment.

### Mental health nursing

Mental health nurses plan and deliver care for people living at home, in small residential units or in specialist hospital services. Nurses working in this field need enhanced communication skills to support families and carers. They work with other health care professionals to ensure patients with mental illness get the specialised care they need. They may develop expertise in areas such as rehabilitation, child and adolescent mental health, substance misuse or working in secure settings.



## RCN Definition of Nursing

### Definition of Nursing (expanded version)

Nursing is a safety-critical profession founded on four pillars: clinical practice, education, research and leadership\*.

Registered nurses use evidence-based knowledge, and their professional and clinical judgement to assess, plan, implement and evaluate high-quality person-centred nursing care.

The work of registered nurses consists of many specialised and complex interventions. Their vigilance is critical to the safety of people, the prevention of avoidable harm and the management of risks regardless of the location or situation.

Compassionate leadership is central to the provision and co-ordination of nursing care and informed by its values, integrity and professional knowledge. Responsibility includes leading the integration of nursing work that is emotional, physical, organisational and cognitive to meet the needs of people,

organisations, systems and populations.

Registered nurses are decision makers. They use clinical judgement and problem-solving skills to manage and co-ordinate the complexity of health and social care systems. They do so to ensure people and their families can improve, maintain or recover health by adapting, coping and returning to live lives of the best quality, or to experience a dignified death.

They have high levels of autonomy within nursing and multi-professional teams, and they delegate to others in line with the NMC Code.

\*For some, the leadership pillar will involve management responsibilities.

For more  
information

SCAN ME 





# Applying for a nursing or midwifery degree in Northern Ireland

You will need to apply online via UCAS for a degree in nursing or midwifery via the two universities in Northern Ireland. Alternatively, if you work in one of the HSC Trusts, you may be able to apply via the Open University.

Each of the universities has specific entry requirements. You will need to research what qualification levels and subjects they require at each level to ensure you are eligible to apply. If you are interested in becoming a nurse or a midwife, **we recommend you check out these requirements even before choosing your GCSE or equivalent level subjects**, e.g., you may require a pass in mathematics GCSE (or equivalent) and a science subject.

Please note however, that these requirements could change and you **will** need to check again closer to the time of application.

If your application is successful, you may also need to complete an occupational health check, receive necessary inoculations, and undergo a paid enhanced disclosure check.

## Queen's University Belfast

Information on entry requirements and the application process can be found on the School of Nursing and Midwifery website.  
Scan this QR code to access it directly:



## Ulster University

Information on entry requirements and the application process can be found on the School of Nursing and Paramedic Science webpages.  
Scan this QR code to access it directly:



## Open University NI

If you are employed by Health and Social Care in Northern Ireland, there is another potential pathway to nursing via The Open University.  
For more information, scan this QR code:



## Useful Links

NI Direct: Nursing and Midwifery



RCN: Become a Nurse



NIPEC - Nursing & Midwifery Careers



Becoming a nurse in Northern Ireland





## Funding and fees in Northern Ireland

### Student bursary

- If you are from Northern Ireland, you can apply for a **non-income-assessed bursary** to study pre-registration nursing **in Northern Ireland**.
- The bursary is intended to assist with daily living costs you will accrue while on training. It is awarded for each year of the three-year course.
- It's normally paid in monthly instalments and students who started their degree course in 2024/2025 received £5,165 per year.
- **Receipt of the bursary means you will not be eligible to apply for a student maintenance loan** from Student Finance Northern Ireland.
- **The Department of Health will pay your tuition fees directly to the university.**
- Application forms for the bursary are usually sent through after your course place has been confirmed.

\*For additional information on the bursary and other potential allowances you may be eligible for, including if you are not originally from Northern Ireland, please check the webpages noted in the Reference list below.

\*You will not be eligible for the bursary if you plan to study for a degree in nursing or midwifery in England, Wales or Scotland. Instead, you should apply for tuition fee loan, maintenance loan and grant via your *Student Finance Northern Ireland* office using a PN1 or PR1 form.

\*There is also a non-fee option to study nursing via the UK Armed Forces. More information on this can also be found in the Reference links below.

### References (Useful Links)

#### [NI Direct Health Professional Courses](#)

Provides additional information on other financial support which may be available to anyone who has lived in Northern Ireland for 3 years and information on potential support which may be available to students from EU countries who are studying in Northern Ireland.



#### [BSO HSCNI Nursing Bursary Administration](#)

The Bursary Administration Unit administers Nursing and Midwifery bursaries to pre-registration students studying at Queen's University Belfast and University of Ulster Magee Campus.



#### [Army Nurse Pathway](#)

These links have been included to show another potentially financially accessible option to study nursing.

This option requires joining the armed forces and studying outside Northern Ireland.

[Navy Nurse Pathway](#)



\*This information is subject to change, so please check the relevant sites when you are applying for current facts and figures



## How much will I earn?

When you graduate from a nursing degree and start working as a nurse in Northern Ireland, you will enter on the Band 5 pay scale. The tables below outline the current pay scales from Band 5 on for nursing (figures taken from link noted at bottom of page).

Band	Entry	Progression After	Intermediate	Progression After	Top
Band 5	£31,049	2 Years	£33,487	2 Years	£37,796
Band 6	£38,682	2 Years	£40,823	3 Years	£46,580
Band 7	£47,810	2 Years	£50,273	3 Years	£54,710

Band	Entry	Progression After	Intermediate	Progression After	Top
Band 8a	£55,690	2	£58,487	3	£62,682
Band 8b	£64,455	2	£68,631	3	£74,896
Band 8c	£76,965	2	£81,652	3	£88,682
Band 8d	£91,342	2	£96,941	3	£105,337
Band 9	£109,179	2	£115,763	3	£125,637

For up to date earning figures for a career in nursing, check here:

<https://jobs.hscni.net/information/8/pay-bands-in-health-social-care>





Royal College  
of Nursing  
Northern Ireland

## Follow us!



[rcn.org.uk/northernireland](http://rcn.org.uk/northernireland)



[RCNNorthernIreland/](https://www.facebook.com/RCNNorthernIreland/)



[@rcn\\_ni](https://www.instagram.com/rcn_ni)



[@the\\_rcn](https://www.tiktok.com/@the_rcn)

17 Windsor Avenue, Belfast BT9 6EE , Tel: 02890 384600