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Want to become a midwife?

What does a midwife do?

Being a midwife is more than just delivering babies. A midwife is usually the first and main contact for the woman during her pregnancy, throughout labour and the early postnatal period. She is responsible for providing care and supporting women to make informed choices about their care.

The role of the midwife is very diverse. She carries out clinical examinations, provides health and parent education and supports the mother and her family throughout the childbearing process to help them adjust to their parental role. The midwife also works in partnership with other health and social care services to meet individual mothers' needs, for example, teenage mothers, mothers who are socially excluded, disabled mothers and mothers from diverse ethnic backgrounds.

Midwives are responsible for their own individual practice and have a statutory responsibility to keep up to date with current knowledge. The title 'midwife' and the function of a midwife are protected in law. For more information visit: [NHS Health Careers](#)

Pay and conditions

Midwives work in all health care settings; for example in the maternity unit of a large general hospital, in smaller stand-alone maternity units, in private maternity hospitals, in group practices, at birth centres, with general practitioners and in the community. The majority of midwives practice within the NHS, working with other midwives in a team and other health care professionals and support staff. Midwives can also practice with social enterprise schemes and independently. There are a small group of midwives who do so. Once registered midwives can use their qualification to work in other health care settings such as special baby care units (SCBU) / neonatal intensive care units (NICU). Some midwives become specialists in areas such as diabetes or public health and perinatal mental health. There are also opportunities to work in research and or education. Midwives can be found practising in many areas and frequently go on to develop their professional expertise and education to higher levels.

Midwives provide woman centred integrated care, which requires them to work shifts, day and night duty, be prepared to take on-call rotas and travel between hospital or institution and mother's home. The majority of midwives' pay and working conditions are determined by the NHS pay system called [Agenda for Change](#). A newly qualified midwife's salary starts at £21,909 per year excluding payment for unsocial hours and on call rota. A midwife has the potential to earn up to £82,434 as a Senior Manager or Midwife Consultant.



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What are the entry requirements?

You enter the midwifery profession directly by undertaking a degree course leading to a midwifery qualification. The EU (European Union) requires that the degree is no less than three years (equivalent to 156 weeks full time)

Another route into midwifery is through a programme called the Pre-registration Midwifery short programme. This is for registered nurses on the Adult part of the Nursing and Midwifery Council (NMC) register who wish to undertake an additional programme of education and gain a second professional registration. The course comprises a minimum of 80 weeks full-time education and practice.

A list of universities that provide the pre registration degree in midwifery and the Pre-registration short programme can be found on the [NMC website](#).

The minimum requirement for degree courses is two A levels but each university will have its own specific criteria, so it is best to check with the individual institution.

Application to the long course (at least 3 years full time) degree route is through the University and Colleges Admissions Service (UCAS). If you are applying to do the shortened programme you can currently apply directly to the university. Which ever route you will gain a degree and Registered Midwife qualification.

Entry is very competitive, and many students have higher than the minimum requirements.

There is no “short cut” into midwifery, even if you have a degree you will still be required to complete either a three year programme or for registered nurses (adult) an 80 week programme.

Further information can be found at: www.nhscareers.nhs.uk

Why are university places so limited when there is a shortage of midwives?

Places on NMC approved degree programmes in midwifery at universities are purchased by the NHS. The number of places is decided by the NHS and based on perceived future workforce needs. The RCM is campaigning to increase the number of midwives in the NHS.

All student midwives must be supervised by a qualified midwife, mentor, during their clinical experience which is at least half their training programme. If you have too many student midwives in a maternity unit they would not be able to get sufficient experience or support.

What advice would the RCM give to make my application stand out?



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Although there is a national shortage of midwives, the competition for course places is really tough. It is not unusual for there to be 1,000 applicants for 30 places. The better qualifications and experience that you have, the better your chance of securing a place.

You will need to look at the university that you wish to apply to; it is advisable to attend any open evening/open day events they have for midwifery, as this is a great opportunity of getting information about the course and its specific requirements. It will also give you the opportunity to meet current students to find out what the course is really like and the midwifery lecturers to find out if you like the way the course is structured, where your clinical placements are likely to be and how much support you can expect when in placement.

Obtaining some work experience in a maternity unit or in a health or social care setting may also be helpful, or getting to have a conversation with a midwife. It can give you a better view of what the midwife's role is like or to develop an understanding of the wider health issues, and also give you an idea about whether you see yourself as a midwife. Some people do seek employment as a health care support worker, and this can be helpful in giving you an opportunity to work alongside midwives, and women and babies, and this gives a picture of what it might be like to be a midwife.

When you have received all the application documentation, it is important that you make every effort to complete the form correctly, neatly, legibly and truthfully. Make a copy and complete a draft first. It is a good idea to then get this looked at by someone else for spelling mistakes and errors and then, when you are happy with it, complete the final form. It is a very good idea to keep a copy of this as you are likely to be asked questions about your past experiences and any statements you have made on your application at your interview.

You will need to prepare a very strong personal statement to highlight your personal qualities and skills that would make you a good midwife – they will not expect you to be an expert on what being a midwife does, but will expect you to have done some preparation. Think about what skills and qualities a midwife will need and then identify what skills you have that will be of relevance.

Applications for degree programmes should be submitted to the UCAS in the autumn of the year before the course starts.

How do I prepare for the interview?

If you are invited for an interview, you should have some time to prepare for it, and you should be given some information about what it will entail. Interviews vary, but often involve some general discussions, group work and role-play. Some universities ask you to complete a timed written essay on a topic which you should have been given information about prior to the interview. You may also be asked to complete a short maths test to demonstrate an understanding of basic maths.



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As well as the above, there will be a one-to-one interview, usually with at least two interviewers who are likely to be a university lecturer and a practising midwife. To make the most of yourself during this interview, you should prepare in advance so that you are well informed about recent news related to midwifery, infant and other health care-related issues. This might mean watching the news and reading the papers for a few months beforehand and looking on the internet for useful websites. There are websites for women who are pregnant or who have recently had babies; these websites might give you an insight into what motherhood is like if you have not yet experienced this for yourself, or what it is like for others where you have.

All of this preparation will make sure you have a good understanding of the role of the midwife and what support they can offer new parents. Then, if you are asked what a midwife does, you will be less likely to respond “delivers babies” but will instead be able to demonstrate that you have a sound understanding of what the role actually involves.

The courses are demanding as you will be undertaking academic study whilst also working clinical shifts. You therefore need to be able to demonstrate that you have an understanding of the rigours and demands of the course, that you are able to organise your time effectively and that you have as much support as possible from your partner, family and friends.

You will need to demonstrate an understanding of what constitutes care and support in a formal, statutory environment, such as the NHS, as well as those formed from community initiatives. It is important that you are aware that the role and responsibilities of qualified nurses are different from those of qualified midwives. This is quite a complicated issue which revolves around what the midwife is legally able to undertake on their own responsibility (‘professional autonomy’), without needing medical direction or consent.

For further information visit www.studentmidwife.net

The university has turned down my application. What do I do next?

The competition for every midwifery student place is immense and there will be several other applicants also pursuing their dream of becoming a midwife. It is important to regard the whole application process as a positive learning experience. Try to get some feedback from the university if you can, and then address their comments and apply again.

How do I get work experience?

As you might imagine many people are applying to get some work experience prior to applying for a midwifery place. The best way forward is to contact the Head of Midwifery Services at your local maternity unit, and request a placement or shadowing opportunity, providing details of name, address, age and school. It is useful to make very clear that you are interested in a career in midwifery, and what point you



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are at in terms of that pathway. This puts you at an advantage over someone who makes a request because they are generally interested in working in a hospital or with babies.

Placements will vary in time, and you may be offered a day or a couple of days, or a week plus experience. It depends very much on the volume of other people, and whether there is a midwife that you could shadow and observe. Another choice would be to find a placement that would illustrate your skills in communication/working with people etc that you could then illustrate in applying those to maternity care. Things like volunteer work can be really useful especially as it helps to build confidence in talking to people.

What financial support will I be entitled to?

- England - If you start most midwifery pre-registration courses in England after 1 August 2017 you will probably take out maintenance and tuition loans rather than receiving an NHS bursary. This applies to courses starting in 2017 and will not apply to existing students. For up to date information on funding in England visit: [The Funding Clinic](#)
 - Northern Ireland - [Student Finance Northern Ireland](#)
 - Scotland - [Student Awards Agency for Scotland](#)
 - Wales - [Student Finance Wales](#)

Testimonials

- Hear from other midwives about they feel about their job.
<http://www.nhs Careers.nhs.uk/explore-by-career/midwifery/>
- Director for England RCM Jacque Gerrard talks about what's it like to be a midwife
<https://youtu.be/DBowj60Oh-0>
- Catherine Cummings, HoM and midwife explains why she chose midwifery as a career
<https://youtu.be/0lcYqZqafbl>

Useful Links

- NHS Health Careers: <https://www.healthcareers.nhs.uk/explore-roles/Midwifery/Midwife>
- [Agenda for Change: https://www.healthcareers.nhs.uk/about/careers-nhs/nhs-pay-and-benefits/agenda-change-pay-rates](https://www.healthcareers.nhs.uk/about/careers-nhs/nhs-pay-and-benefits/agenda-change-pay-rates)
- [www.studentmidwife.net: http://www.studentmidwife.net/](http://www.studentmidwife.net/)
- England - The Funding Clinic: <http://www.thefundingclinic.org.uk/>
- Student Finance Northern Ireland:
http://www.studentfinanceni.co.uk/portal/page?_pageid=54,1265897&_dad=portal&_schema=PORTAL
- Student Awards Agency for Scotland: <http://www.saas.gov.uk/>
- Student Finance Wales: <http://www.studentfinancewales.co.uk/>



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The Royal College of Midwives

The RCM is the only professional organisation and trade union dedicated to serving midwifery and the whole midwifery team. We provide workplace advice and support, professional and clinical guidance and information, and learning opportunities with our broad range of events, conferences and online resources.

The RCM promotes midwifery, quality maternity services and professional standards. We support and represent our members individually and collectively in all four UK countries. We influence on behalf of our members and for the interests of the women and families for which they care.

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