

Midwife

Job Description

Midwives provide advice, care and support for women, their partners and families before, during and after childbirth. They help women make their own decisions about the care and services they access. They care for newborn children, providing health education and parenting support for the first 28 days, after which care transfers to a health visitor.

Midwives are personally responsible for the health of both mother and child, only referring to obstetricians if there are medical complications, but are obliged by law to have a named supervisor of midwives to ensure safe practice. They work in multidisciplinary teams in both hospital and, increasingly, community healthcare settings.

Typical Work Activities

A midwife has a range of responsibilities, including the care of mother and baby, adhering to hospital policy and maintaining an awareness of issues such as health and safety. Typical work activities include:

- diagnosing, monitoring and examining women during pregnancy;
- developing, assessing and evaluating individual programmes of care;
- providing full antenatal care, including screening tests in the hospital, community and the home;
- identifying high risk pregnancies and making referrals to doctors and other medical specialists;
- arranging and providing parenting and health education for the woman, her partner and family members;
- encouraging participation of family members in the birth to support the mother and enhance both mother/baby bonding and family relationships generally;
- providing counselling and advice before and after screening;
- offering support and advice following events such as miscarriage, termination, stillbirth, neonatal abnormality and neonatal death;
- supervising and assisting mothers in labour, monitoring the condition of the foetus and using knowledge of drugs and pain management;
- giving support and advice on the daily care of the baby, including breast feeding, bathing and making up feeds;
- providing advice and guidance on a safe and timely transfer home;
- liaising with agencies and other health and social care professionals to ensure continuity of care;
- engaging in professional development to meet PREP (post-registration education and practice) requirements;
- participating in the training and supervision of junior colleagues.

Work Conditions

- Minimum starting salary for newly qualified midwives in The National Health Service (NHS) (www.nhs.uk): £19,683 at Band 5 (salary data collected Feb 08).
- Midwives usually progress to Band 6, which starts at £23,458, after a minimum of 12 months and a maximum of 24. Subject to attainment within the NHS Career Framework (www.skillsforhealth.org.uk/page/career-frameworks) salaries can rise to to £31,779 (salary data collected Feb 08).
- Range of typical salaries at senior level, e.g. those managing a team, research or teaching activities, or with specialist knowledge: £28,313 - £37,326 at Band 7 (salary data collected Feb 08).
- Roles and salary at consultancy level vary. The minimum salary at Band 8A is £43,335, although midwife consultants can occasionally receive as much as £75,114 at Band 8D (salary data collected Feb 08).
- 'Golden hellos' of £3,000 in total value have been introduced to encourage those considering a return to midwifery.
- Working hours typically include unsocial hours. The working week is usually 37.5 hours and is likely to include day and night shifts. Community and independent midwives are regularly on call 24 hours and you should expect to be part of an on-call rota at some point in your career.
- Midwives can work in maternity units of large hospitals, smaller stand-alone maternity units, private maternity hospitals, group practices, birth centres, general practices and in the community.
- Self-employment or working freelance is sometimes possible and a number of midwives will work in independent practice, which may offer more opportunity for continuity of care. Many midwives prefer to work part-time. Career breaks, assistance with accommodation and childcare facilities may be available.
- There is a very high percentage of women in the profession. Currently, around 0.4% of midwives in the UK are male.
- Midwives are appointed to jobs in all areas of the UK, but specialist roles may be focused in particular areas.
- The work can be physically and mentally demanding, and involves exposure to sensitive situations such as bereavement and domestic abuse.
- 25% of UK births in 2007 were to mothers born outside the UK.
- You may have to travel to patients' homes or attend births at day or night, but overnight absences from home and overseas travel are unlikely.

Entry Requirements

From September 2008, a degree in midwifery is essential for entry, as the former Diploma courses in midwifery have been discontinued. The three or four-year degree programme is open to graduates and Diplomates from all degree and HND courses, but life sciences may be preferred. Registered nurses can do a 12-18 month shortened course. Unlike nursing, there are no shortened graduate courses in midwifery for graduates in other disciplines.

Entry to midwifery training without a degree or HND is also possible. Applicants must have a minimum of five GCSEs (or equivalent) and at least two A-levels (or equivalent) for degree programmes. Check individual entry requirements with course providers. The Nursing & Midwifery Council (NMC) (www.nmc-uk.org) sets minimum requirements in literacy and numeracy.

Course entry is also possible through recognised access programmes or (in England) foundation degrees in healthcare or related subjects.

Applications for degrees and diplomas in England are made through the Universities and Colleges Admissions Service (UCAS) (www.ucas.com). Information on degrees in Wales is available from the National Leadership and Innovation Agency for Healthcare (Wales) (www.nliah.wales.nhs.uk) and applications should be made through UCAS. For applications to degree courses in Scotland, contact the Centralised Applications to Nursing and Midwifery Training Clearing House (CATCH) (www.nes.scot.nhs.uk/nursing/recruitment/Catch/). Details for individual institutions in Northern Ireland are available from the Northern Ireland Practice & Education Council for Nursing & Midwifery (www.nipec.hscni.net).

Acceptance on a course will be subject to satisfactory health clearance and criminal disclosure checks. Some medical conditions may exclude entry. If you are a student with special needs you will be asked to identify any additional requirements related to your disability.

Pre-entry experience in a caring role within health and social care is a distinct advantage. Many midwives with previous nursing experience believe that it came in useful when they started midwifery training. Useful voluntary experience for direct entrants might include supporting teenage parents, working with breastfeeding groups or charities dealing with issues like birth defects, bereavement or miscarriage.

You will need to show evidence of the following:

- an intuitive, caring, objective and flexible approach;
- strong teamworking and advocacy skills;
- a calm and alert manner, especially in stressful situations;
- the ability to react quickly and effectively;
- strength, stamina and physical fitness;
- a commitment to equal treatment for all women, irrespective of their background or circumstances.

Courses cover applied psychology and sociology as well as biological sciences and professional practice and most modules are continually assessed.

All midwifery students funded by The National Health Service (NHS) (www.nhs.uk) have their contribution to tuition fees paid in full by the NHS. Student midwives on diploma courses are eligible for a non means-tested bursary. Students on degree courses receive a means-tested bursary and are eligible for student loans. If you attend a course in Wales, Scotland or Northern Ireland, broadly comparable arrangements will apply, but you will need to consult the relevant national authorities for details. Non-European Union nationals may not be eligible for funding and may need a student visa to study. For study in England you can find detailed information, including eligibility criteria, in the leaflet Financial Help for Healthcare Students (www.nhs.gov.uk/squ/forms/booklets/students_financial_help.pdf), which is available from the NHS Student Bursaries (www.nhsstudentgrants.co.uk). Course providers can also provide further information on finance.

Gaining a place on a direct entry course to midwifery is highly competitive, so you should aim to apply early.

Training

Newly qualified midwives are often given a formal period of support under the guidance of a preceptor (an experienced professional colleague) who can offer support and guidance in the first few months of professional practice. They also have to present a practice portfolio annually to a supervisor of midwives to demonstrate their professional competence. The health sector generally has a commitment to continuing professional development and The National Health Service (NHS) (www.nhs.uk) provides access to post-registration training needs identified through the NHS Career Framework (www.skillsforhealth.org.uk/page/career-frameworks).

There are opportunities to extend your role by taking specialist courses in areas such as enhanced midwifery practice, family planning, teaching in clinical practice, and research.

There are also opportunities for further study at degree, Masters and PhD level.

Post-registration education and practice (PREP) is a set of standards that you are expected to meet to demonstrate that you are developing knowledge and competence and keeping up to date in your practice. They include a minimum of 35 hours' study activity every three years and the maintenance of a professional profile detailing professional development. You will be expected to meet them in order to renew your Nursing & Midwifery Council (NMC) (www.nmc-uk.org) registration every three years. More information on the specific requirements is published in the NMC's The PREP Handbook (www.nmc-uk.org/aFrameDisplay.aspx?DocumentID=1636).

Career Development

Midwives are able to work in a number of different healthcare settings to develop experience and knowledge, which can lead to a range of career paths. You could become a clinical specialist in an area such as home birthing, breast feeding advice, labour ward supervision or ante-natal screening. You might become a consultant midwife, dividing your time between midwifery practice, training and leading improvements in practice. Higher management opportunities exist as a head of midwifery services or a supervisor of midwives with the local supervising authority. You could also choose to go into teaching or research within a healthcare setting or a university.

In recent years, there has been a development in specialist roles in areas such as public health, parenting education, intensive care neonatal units, ultrasound and foetal medicine. There may soon be an increase in the number of home births, depending on the results of a current pilot project.

You can find opportunities for travel with job opportunities in both the EU and overseas, as well as working abroad for organisations such as Voluntary Service Overseas (VSO) (www.vso.org.uk). However, in some countries, midwives must also hold registered nurse status in order to practise, so you should check this before applying.

Typical Employers

The vast majority of midwives in England will be employed by The National Health Service (NHS) (www.nhs.uk), Hospitals and Acute Trusts, Foundation Trusts, or through Primary Care Trusts working in GP practices or in the community. The structure of the NHS is somewhat different in other parts of the UK.

Other types of employers include:

- private hospitals;
- independent practices;
- the armed forces.

Currently there is a national shortage of midwives and the government has announced a campaign to recruit 4,000 extra midwives by 2012. Areas that are particularly badly affected are London and the south-east, the east coast and east midlands.

Some midwives are self-employed. University hospitals also employ midwives in joint partnerships between the trust and the university to work in lecturer-practitioner positions, or to conduct research.

It is illegal for employers to discriminate against candidates on the grounds of age, gender, race, disability, sexual orientation or religious faith. For more information on equality and diversity in the job market see Handling Discrimination (www.prospects.ac.uk/links/discrimination).

Sources of Vacancies

- The National Health Service (NHS) (www.nhs.uk) trust vacancy listings and websites;
- The Health and Social Care Yearbook;
- Nursing Standard (www.nursing-standard.co.uk);
- Nursing Times (www.nursingtimes.net);
- NHS Jobs (www.jobs.nhs.uk);
- national and local press.

Recruitment agencies sometimes handle vacancies or may co-ordinate a bank of midwives.

Related Occupations

- Adult nurse
- Clinical cytogeneticist
- Counsellor
- Doctor, hospital
- Health visitor
- Mental health nurse
- Paediatric nurse
- Practice nurse
- Sexual health nurse
- Social worker

Information Sources

Bibliography

AGCAS and Graduate Prospects products are available from higher education careers services.

AGCAS Publications

[Handling Discrimination](#), AGCAS Information Booklet
[Health Sector](#), AGCAS Sector Briefing

Other Publications

Becoming a Midwife in the 21st Century, [Blackwell Publishing Ltd](#)
Careers and Jobs in Nursing, [Kogan Page](#), 2004
Careers Uncovered: Nursing and Midwifery, Trotman Publishing, 2006
The Health and Social Care Yearbook, [Beechwood House Publishing](#), Annual
Midwifery Digest, [Midwives Information and Resource Service \(MIDIRS\)](#), Quarterly
Midwifery Matters, [Association of Radical Midwives](#), Quarterly
Nursing Standard, Royal College of Nursing (RCN) Publishing, Weekly
Nursing Times, EMAP Healthcare, Weekly
Nursing Times (NT) Guide, [EMAP Healthcare](#), Annual
The PREP Handbook, Nursing & Midwifery Council (NMC), 2006
Working With Humanitarian Organisations: A Guide for Nurses, Midwives and Healthcare Professionals, [Royal College of Midwives \(RCM\)](#)

Websites

[Association of Radical Midwives](#), www.midwifery.org.uk
[Careers and Opportunities in NHS Scotland](#), www.infoscotland.com/nhs
[Criminal Records Bureau \(CRB\)](#), www.crb.gov.uk
[Financial Help for Healthcare Students](#), www.nhs.gov.uk/squ/forms/booklets/students_financial_help.pdf
[The National Health Service \(NHS\)](#), www.nhs.uk
[NHS Career Framework](#), www.skillsforhealth.org.uk/page/career-frameworks
[NHS Jobs](#), www.jobs.nhs.uk
[NHS Northern Ireland](#), www.n-i.nhs.uk/
[NHS Pensions](#), www.nhs.gov.uk
[NHS Scotland Jobs](#), www.jobs.scot.nhs.uk
[NHS Student Bursaries](#), www.nhsstudentgrants.co.uk
[NHS Wales](#), www.wales.nhs.uk/
[Nursing Times \(NT\) Live](#), www.ntlive.co.uk
[Voluntary Service Overseas \(VSO\)](#), www.vso.org.uk

Addresses

Centralised Applications to Nursing and Midwifery Training Clearing House (CATCH), PO Box 21, Edinburgh EH2 2YS
Tel: 0131 220 8660 URL: www.nes.scot.nhs.uk/nursing/recruitment/Catch/

Department of Health (DH), Richmond House, 79 Whitehall SW1A 2NS Tel: 020 7210 4850 URL: www.dh.gov.uk

Health Care Inspectorate (Wales), Bevan House, Caerphilly Business Park, Van Road, Caerphilly CF83 3ED
Tel: 029 2092 8850 URL: www.hiw.org.uk

Independent Midwives Association, PO Box 539, Abingdon OX14 9DF Tel: 0845 4600 105 URL:
www.independentmidwives.org.uk

Institute of Healthcare Management, 18-21 Morley Street, London SE1 7QZ Tel: 020 7620 1030 URL: www.ihm.org.uk

Midwives Information and Resource Service (MIDIRS), 9 Elmdale Road, Clifton, Bristol BS8 1SL Tel: 0800 581 009
URL: www.midirs.org

National Leadership and Innovation Agency for Healthcare (Wales), Innovation House, Bridgend Road, Llanharan
CF72 9RP Tel: 01443 233333 URL: www.nliah.wales.nhs.uk

NHS Education for Scotland, Thistle House, 91 Haymarket Terrace, Edinburgh EH12 5HE Tel: 0131 313 8000 URL:
www.nes.scot.nhs.uk

Northern Ireland Practice & Education Council for Nursing & Midwifery, Centre House, 79 Chichester Street, Belfast
BT1 4JE Tel: 028 9023 8152 URL: www.nipec.hscni.net

Nursing & Midwifery Council (NMC), 23 Portland Place, London W1B 1PZ Tel: 020 7637 7181 URL: www.nmc-uk.org

Universities and Colleges Admissions Service (UCAS), Rosehill, New Barn Lane, Cheltenham, Gloucestershire
GL52 3LZ Tel: 01242 222444 URL: www.ucas.com