

Students: Thinking about your career



Foreword

As a nursing student embarking in your final year of study you are most likely feeling stressed, anxious, worried and excited for your new career all at the same time. This is an important time to reflect on what you have achieved so far and to recognise the challenges that are ahead of you. You have already worked extremely hard to get to where you are today and should be proud of your successes. Working as a registered nurse is a challenging but rewarding career and we are fortunate to listen to and share the experiences of those we care for.

Thinking about a career after university can be daunting and can often cause concern, but it is important to remember that every registered nurse started as a student whether it was two or twenty years ago and it is through experience and knowledge that we can become confident in our profession.

The message we want to share with you is: you can do it! There may be times when you feel like you will never reach your end goals, but do not give up; stay determined and stay motivated and you will reach those goals. Everyone needs advice and guidance at some point in their education and this is why this booklet has been made: to help you get through this final year and to keep you on track to achieving registration.

You are the future of nursing and you have the power to make the difference. Good luck in your future career.

The RCN

Wide horizons

On the day you join the nursing register, you enter a world a world of possibilities and opportunities. Your nursing qualification can take you most places on the planet, working with the young or the old; with the well or the dying; with individuals or whole communities; in hospitals, homes or schools; on ships, planes or in battle zones; as a hands-on nurse, a manager or a – well, you get the picture.

But where do you start? Here are

- Think hard about all that you have experienced in your nursing career so far. Which aspects have you enjoyed the most and why? Was it the team? The environment? The variety of skills required for the job? Also, consider how your strengths match your preferred options.
- Reflect on the things you have least enjoyed and why – was it the speciality itself or other factors such as staff shortages?
- Talk to colleagues, peers, your tutors and mentors to get real experiences of various roles.
- Make the effort to find out about those fields you haven't yet covered. Gather a variety of role descriptions from job adverts and list the pros and cons of each role. Consider all the practical aspects such as hours of work, support with education and future job security.
- Don't forget to look at the less obvious employers such as charities, hospices, prison services, blood transfusion services and occupational health service providers.
- Try to gain some shadowing experience or an informal visit, as even a day can provide an insight into future career opportunities. Visiting a potential employer can also be useful to make sure it's the right role and environment for you.
- Be mindful of your job security and look into growth areas where there are more opportunities – for example, working with older people, management of long-term conditions and community-based roles.
- Are there rotational posts for newly registered nurses where you work? These offer an ideal opportunity to sample a range of specialist areas while gaining competences and developing your career along the way.
- Finally, make sure your personal development plan includes some career objectives, and do seek

Need some help?

The RCN Careers Service offers a wide range of helpful resources at: rcn.org.uk/careers

For those members who need additional guidance, we offer one-to-one careers coaching.

Applying for jobs

Once you have an idea of the sort of role you're looking for, it's time to put maximum effort into the job application process. Remember that as an RCN member you can access our CV feedback service and sample CV's online rcn.org.uk/careers

Your CV

While many jobs simply ask that you complete an application form, it's also useful to create a CV that you can add to your portfolio to present to prospective employers and useful contacts.

Successful CVs are logical, accurate and concise. Most importantly they're tailored to the people reading them – so make sure you adapt yours accordingly, using relevant key words for the job you're applying for.

There's no perfect format for a CV but you can use the following sections to create one that's easy to follow.

Personal details

Include your name, address, preferred contact telephone number and email address.

Opening statement

Provide a short paragraph to open up your CV and tell your prospective employer a bit about you. Always tailor this section to the job you're going for.

You could include:

- Your personal qualities
- A brief overview of your academic and/or professional experience/history
- What you think you'd bring to the role
- Your career objective

Employment/experience

Working backwards, list the placements you have undertaken while training, with dates and names of employers. Describe what you've achieved and the skills you gained, giving specific evidence of your competences. If you had any other work experience prior to your nurse training, summarise it with a list of job titles and dates held.

Education

Applying for jobs

Application forms

Applying for jobs

Supporting statement

Here's a sample supporting statement for a newly registered nurse applying for a post on a respiratory ward.

I am applying for a post on Beatrice ward as I have a strong commitment to meeting the needs of patients and families affected by respiratory conditions. I developed my interest in this field during a ten-week management placement on a respiratory unit, where I particularly enjoyed teaching patients how to manage and control their symptoms through careful use of inhalers.

Applying for jobs

I always refer learners to relevant resources such as teaching packs, and check their understanding of the topic by asking questions, supervising their practice and giving constructive feedback.

I also enjoy promoting patients' health, and teaching about the importance of healthy eating and smoking cessation. I have learnt how to prioritise a

Interviews

Before the interview

- Eat something – this will help settle your nerves.
- Have one last look at your interview paperwork, but don't try to cram.
- Leave plenty of time to get there.
- When you arrive, don't be embarrassed to ask for a glass of water or the opportunity to freshen up.
- Take deep breaths to help control adrenaline.
- Employ logic to beat nervous thoughts: any interview question should be treated exactly as you would treat a job situation, because that's exactly what the job represents.
- And remember... that is also your opportunity to confirm that you want to work for the organisation.

During the interview

Interviews

Questions to ask

At the end of an interview, you may be given the opportunity to ask questions. Now the hardest part of the interview is over, you may want to get out of the room as soon as possible. But remember that an interview is a two-way process – you need to find out whether this is the right job for you.

Questions that may help you to find out more about the organisation and also impress the panel include:

“

What support is available for newly registered nurses?

What do you offer in terms

”

Difficult interview questions

What are your weaknesses/development needs?

Turn a negative into a positive. For example: “In the past, I have had a tendency to try to take on too much, but I have dealt with this by learning how to delegate responsibilities, prioritise by writing lists and planning my day in advance, and attending a time-management course.” Remember as you will be new to the job, you can discuss possible weaknesses in terms of support that will help you adapt, including a good induction programme, or a short course on skill development, such as IV

Please give an example of a work situation that didn't work out very well

To avoid dwelling on weaknesses, focus on the past, rather than the present and finish with what you learnt from the experience. For example: “As a junior student, I didn't fully appreciate the importance of advocating for the patient. A junior doctor was trying to take blood from a patient and found it very difficult to find a vein. The patient was anxious and moving their arm around, clearly in a lot of pain. Eventually the doctor had to give up and a more senior doctor took blood. Now that I have more experience I can see that that if the doctor had used a pillow to support the patient's arm he would have had more success. I would now have no

Interviews

hesitation in intervening much earlier to suggest that the patient have a break and that a more experienced person, such as the hospital phlebotomist, should take the blood.”

Please give an example of a work situation that didn't work out very well

To avoid dwelling on weaknesses, focus on the past, rather than the present and finish with what you learnt from the experience. For example: “As a junior student, I didn't fully appreciate the importance of advocating for the patient. A junior doctor was trying to take blood from a patient and found it very difficult to find a vein. The patient was anxious and moving their arm around, clearly in a lot of pain. Eventually the doctor had to give up and a more senior doctor took blood. Now that I have more experience I can see that that if the doctor had used a pillow to support the patient's arm he would have had more success. I would now have no hesitation in intervening much earlier to suggest that the patient have a break and that a more experienced person, such as the hospital phlebotomist, should take the blood.”

What would you do if you were the only registered nurse on the ward when:

- a patient falls out of bed?
- a member of the domestic staff cuts themselves on broken glass?
- you notice that some drugs are missing?

The interview panel will want to know that you have common sense, and that patient safety and wellbeing are your priorities. For many scenarios there is a similar process that involves:

- assessment of the situation
- taking appropriate action following procedures and guidelines
-
-
- evaluating and learning from the

STAR

Tell us about a national initiative in nursing/health care

You don't need to be an expert on every aspect of health care development and policy. Read summary documents on major initiatives. Telephone the RCN Customer Service Centre on 0345 772 6100 to get free publications on clinical areas and use the RCN website to update yourself on all major nursing initiatives.

What do you understand by the term 'equality and diversity at work'?

Try to avoid saying "treating everybody in the same way" as this can appear over-simplistic. This question is usually about equality of access to services and treating colleagues with support and respect. It is also about being self-aware and how your own background, upbringing and culture may affect your interactions with those who are different from you.

fr th y ú

Assessment centres

Increasingly, organisations use more than an interview to assess a job applicant's suitability for a post. An assessment centre consists of one or more activities to enable the selection panel to decide who best meets the requirements of the job.

be a daunting prospect, but as long as you prepare beforehand, you can gain a much better insight into your strengths and development needs. If you perform less well in one area you may be able to make up points in another area. Employers that use this form of selection have often invested a great deal of money and resources to ensure that they provide a fair selection process. Such employers will often provide written feedback with analysis of your scores and rationale for the marks given. Others will provide face-to-face feedback before you leave.

Here are some of the more commonly used assessment techniques:

Tests of numeracy and literacy skills

Numeracy tests often include drug calculations. Literacy tests may include a written comprehension of a text, where candidates are tested on their ability to understand and summarise information and write clearly.

Written scenarios/case study exercises

These often test clinical competences and nursing knowledge. For example, you may be given a clinical scenario and a series of questions to answer, or a care planning exercise.

Objective Structured Clinical Examination (OSCE)

This is an assessment of clinical competence, where components of the competence are tested individually. Often simulation techniques are used, using mannequins, for example. You may be asked to demonstrate how you would safely assess and manage a patient presenting a problem.

Presentations

You may be asked to present on a topic, either sent in advance of the assessment date or given on the day, with time allowed to prepare the presentation beforehand.

Group discussion about a topic

You may be given a topic to discuss, or a problem to solve. Often employers are testing communication skills, checking that you interact well with others and listen, as well as contribute, to the task. Success depends on contributing enough, without dominating and interrupting the discussion. It is helpful to stay positive throughout and to reflect on what has been discussed periodically.

Role-play exercises

You may be asked to work with other candidates to show how you would respond to a professional scenario. Sometimes actors, or one of the assessors, will play the role of a patient or client.

You should behave as you normally would in your nursing role.

Psychometric tests

Psychometric tests are structured assessment methods. They may include aptitude or ability tests, personality questionnaires, or a combination of both. Employers may be keen to look for certain values or attitudes which are necessary to providing compassionate, dignified care.

Preparing for an assessment centre

- You will be assessed against the criteria outlined in the job description and person specification, so it is important that you know these
- Read the guidance notes carefully. Make sure you take spare pencils, stationery etc if asked to bring these.
- Visit the employer's website so you know as much about the organisation as possible.
- Reflect on your own style and its impact on potential group activities. If you are naturally very talkative, remind yourself that you may need to focus more on listening. If you are very quiet, remember that you will
- on the assessors.
- Reflect on your "best self": think of a time when you have worked really well in a team or when your contribution was valued by colleagues or patients. Think about the skills

you used in that situation and the behaviours you displayed.

- If you have a disability that may affect your performance in any activities, make sure you let the employer know beforehand.
- Plan your outfit and make sure you look clean, smart and professional.
- Make sure you plan your journey and how long it will take, allowing for delays.
- Get plenty of rest the day before as it will be quite tiring.

At the assessment centre

- Be positive and enthusiastic, but don't act. Try not to see the other
- Assume that you are being assessed at all times.
- Have good eye contact with the people you meet and smile when
- Make sure you read all the information relevant to each task and listen carefully to any instructions. If there is anything you are not clear about, ask one of the facilitators.
- Take opportunities to have a break and take refreshments, where offered, as these will help keep up your stamina throughout the day.

After the interview

Congratulations – you’ve been offered the job!

Employers will usually make you a conditional offer first. They will then follow up with a Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) check (the new name for Criminal Records Bureau and the Independent Safeguarding Authority). In Scotland the checking and barring service is operated by Disclosure Scotland.

You will also be asked to complete a health questionnaire, which will be assessed by an occupational health professional. You may need to meet with an occupational health nurse or doctor if you have any specific health or wellbeing needs. They will also assess whether any reasonable adjustments should be made on the basis of a disability.

The employer will also follow up references and check your NMC registration details, if applicable.

If you have any concerns about any of the above, the RCN will provide you with guidance and support.

You didn't get the job – not a problem

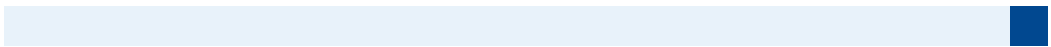
Employers will usually make you a conditional offer first. They will then follow up with a Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) check (the new name for Criminal Records Bureau and the Independent Safeguarding Authority). In Scotland the checking and barring service is operated by Disclosure Scotland.

You will also be asked to complete a health questionnaire, which will be assessed by an occupational health professional. You may need to meet with an occupational health nurse or doctor if you have any specific health or wellbeing needs. They will also assess whether any reasonable adjustments should be made on the basis of a disability.

The employer will also follow up references and check your NMC registration details, if applicable.

If you have any concerns about any of the above, the RCN will provide you with guidance and support.





a gi iss ne s sa rg

If you chose to disclose a disability on placement, hopefully your experience was a good one. It's important that you get the adjustments you need to be able to be your best once you move in to work and to do that you will need to disclose again. Here are our top tips.

- Celebrate it! Your insight into life as a patient or being disabled can add a new dimension to your understanding of the world. You can also use your experience to help others. #

a lit it. youo
ne s sa rk

- Don't put it off. It is best to get adjustments in place as soon as possible, and they do take time to arrange. Delaying can cause stress and worry that exacerbate the

l u p e a t isw

- Be honest and open. Telling a new employer about a disability can

be practical, positive, and bring solutions. Think about what you need to get from the conversation.

- Know your rights. It's illegal to treat someone differently at work because they have a disability. If you have a disability, you are entitled to reasonable adjustments at work by law.

The Royal College of Nursing
20 Cavendish Square
London W1G 0RN

Publication code: 009 793

