

# SO YOU WANT TO BE A MIDWIFE?

This material has been adapted from the following sources:

Royal College of Midwives  
[www.rcm.org.uk](http://www.rcm.org.uk)

NHS Careers  
[www.nhscareers.nhs.uk/](http://www.nhscareers.nhs.uk/)

Nursing and Midwifery Admissions Service  
[www.nmas.ac.uk/](http://www.nmas.ac.uk/)

Nursing and Midwifery Council  
[www.nmc-uk.org/nmc/main/splash.html](http://www.nmc-uk.org/nmc/main/splash.html)

Student Midwives Sanctuary  
[studentmidwives.co.uk/](http://studentmidwives.co.uk/)

International Confederation of Midwives  
[www.internationalmidwives.org](http://www.internationalmidwives.org)

## Midwives' role

The role of the midwife is very diverse and involves far more than the general image of the midwife delivering babies. Midwives also provide support to women, their babies, their partners and families from conception to the first phase of postnatal care. In recent years, the role has changed to provide a more 'woman-centred' service, and midwives are responsible for helping women to make informed choices and to provide them with support from one midwife or a team of midwives to provide continuity of care. As a consequence, midwives work in a variety of locations – the woman's home, birth centres, as well as hospitals and local clinics.

Midwives carry out clinical examinations and provide antenatal and postnatal education and support. They also work in partnership with other health and social care services to meet the needs of the individuals in their care, for example teenage mothers, those who are disabled or socially excluded or from diverse ethnic backgrounds.

Midwives are responsible for their own practice and have statutory responsibilities that regulate their standards of practice. These includes keeping up to date with current research and government legislation. As part of this, each midwife has a named Supervisor of Midwives who will help them update their knowledge and ensure that their practice is safe<sup>1</sup>.

For further information on the history of midwifery, please visit:  
[www.shef.ac.uk/~nmhuk/](http://www.shef.ac.uk/~nmhuk/)

## Qualities

The following qualities are essential to ensure that midwives can fulfil their role. Midwives need to be:

- Intuitive, kind, caring but maintain objectivity where this is needed
- Able to act as an advocate for women but take responsibility for their own actions
- A good team player that can work in partnership with other professionals and non-professional organisations and groups
- Flexible and able to adapt to the woman's circumstances and needs

- Prepared to look after all women, irrespective of class, creed, economic status, race or age
- Accepting of women as individuals and the circumstances in which they live
- Professional and be able to maintain accurate and contemporaneous records<sup>1</sup>.

To be a successful midwife, you should need to want to help people and should be a practical individual who can manage your time effectively. Midwives need to develop good communication skills and be able to work as part of a team, but also act as a leader if necessary<sup>2</sup>.

Midwifery involves hard work and demands commitment. Each day brings new challenges, the work is extremely rewarding and midwives can and do make a real difference to women's lives. Childbirth is a time of intense emotion for women, and the midwife needs to be able to remain calm and alert in times of stress and enable women to feel confident and in control<sup>2</sup>.

## Men in midwifery

The first male midwives appeared in the 16<sup>th</sup> century. In 1952, however, the Midwives Act prohibited men from midwifery until 1983 when legal barriers were lifted after a long legal battle and fierce opposition from existing female midwives and women in general.

Although according to the Nursing and Midwifery Council<sup>3</sup> 10.73% of midwives in practice in 2006 were men, male practitioners still face rejection and suspicion. However men who have succeeded in the profession and a growing number of women who have been attended by them argue that character, communication skills and a caring attitude towards women are more important than gender<sup>4,5</sup>.

## Entry requirements

There are two ways of entering midwifery. As a qualified nurse, you can apply for an 18-month **post-registration course** (now being referred to as the post-registration shortened course) or, if you have no nursing experience, you can take the **direct entry** route. This can currently be done to either **diploma** or **degree** level, although the diploma course will cease to exist in 2008.

Experience in a nursing or midwifery setting can give you an advantage, so it can be useful to ask your local midwifery unit if you can spend a few days with them. Many students get experience working as a nursing assistant for a few months, and some have been involved with organisations such as the NCT. All of this will help demonstrate to the selection or interview board that you know what the job involves and that you would give a commitment to complete the course<sup>6</sup>.

For more information on entry requirements visit [www.nhscareers.nhs.uk/midwife\\_entry.shtml](http://www.nhscareers.nhs.uk/midwife_entry.shtml)

## Direct entry midwifery courses

You can enter the midwifery profession directly by undertaking a course leading to a midwifery qualification. Midwifery courses are provided by a number of universities. You can currently access the courses at diploma or degree level.

**PLEASE NOTE: From September 2008 midwifery courses will be available as undergraduate programmes only at degree level – the diploma route will cease to exist.**

The course varies in length between 3 and 4 years, depending on the institution and offers 50% theoretical background and 50% hands-on practical experience with women and their families.

Midwifery courses are organised in modules, including biological sciences, applied sociology and psychology and professional practice among others. Each module is assessed, normally through continuous assignments, although some courses may include examinations<sup>1</sup>.

The minimum requirement for direct entry degree courses is currently two A levels (or equivalent – see below), with science being one of the preferred subjects. The course leads to a degree and a Registered Midwife qualification. There are four types of degree qualification – BA, BMid, BM and BSc<sup>7</sup>.

Application to the degree course is through UCAS:

UCAS  
Rosehill  
New Barn Lane  
Cheltenham  
Gloucestershire  
GL52 3LZ  
Tel: 0870 1122211  
enquiries@ucas.ac.uk  
[www.ucas.ac.uk/](http://www.ucas.ac.uk/)

Applications should be submitted the autumn of the year before the course starts and should normally be forwarded to UCAS between 1<sup>st</sup> September and 15<sup>th</sup> January.

Entry is very competitive with many students having higher than the minimum requirements. Each university will have its own specific criteria, so it is best to check with the individual institution<sup>1</sup>.

For further information on direct entry midwifery degrees and the universities that offer them, visit:

[www.nhscareers.nhs.uk/details/Default.aspx?Id=1947](http://www.nhscareers.nhs.uk/details/Default.aspx?Id=1947)

Or, to find universities, contact details and course codes:

[www.ucas.ac.uk/search/index.html](http://www.ucas.ac.uk/search/index.html)

For **alternative entry qualifications**, visit:

[www.nhscareers.nhs.uk/details/Default.aspx?Id=1943](http://www.nhscareers.nhs.uk/details/Default.aspx?Id=1943)

**For information on entry requirements for those educated outside the UK and Eire, please contact the NHS Careers Service:**

Tel: 0845 850 8866

[www.nhscareers.nhs.uk/](http://www.nhscareers.nhs.uk/)

**On completion of the course you must register your qualification with the Nursing and Midwifery Council (NMC), enabling you to practice.**

### **Pre-registration midwifery short programme**

This programme is for qualified and registered nurses who wish to train as midwives. On completion of the course, students are awarded both an academic and a professional qualification, through integrated study of theory and supervised midwifery practice. Supervised midwifery practice takes place in both community and hospital settings and programmes are a minimum of 78 weeks full-time<sup>7</sup>.

If you are a qualified and registered nurse wanting information about the pre-registration midwifery short programme, please contact the NHS Health Learning and Skills Advice Line on 08000 150 850.

## **Financial support and fees**

There are currently three main systems for funding student midwives in England. The situation in Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales is similar, although the individual country's funding body should be consulted (see below).

### **1) Non-means tested bursary**

There is a flat rate non-means tested bursary (between £5,432 and £6,352 - 2002/03 rates) available for all Diploma students. No contribution is required from students or their families. Additional amounts are given to Diploma students aged over 25 at the start of the course, and those with children.

### **2) Means tested bursary**

The income of the student, their parents or their spouse is taken into account when the level of bursary is calculated. Students who are studying for the pre-registration midwifery course at degree level are subject to a means tested bursary. The basic rate of the means tested bursary, inclusive of student loans, is somewhere between £3,485 and £5,430. There are also the same additional benefits available to student midwives as other students (eg student loans, older students' dependants allowances etc).

### **3) Seconded/NHS contracted places**

NHS Trusts fund a small number of students. This is often the case with pre-registration midwifery shortened courses (previously referred to as the post-registration 18-month course). These students are paid a salary by the Trusts and are offered employment on completion of their course<sup>8</sup>.

For students in England, advice on bursaries can be obtained from:

The NHS Student Grants Unit  
Hesketh House  
200-220 Broadway  
Fleetwood  
Lancashire  
FY7 8SS  
Tel: 0845 358 6655  
[www.nhspa.gov.uk](http://www.nhspa.gov.uk)

Students in other parts of the UK can find contact information on the RCM's student funding pages:

[www.rcm.org.uk/membership/pages/students.php?id=3](http://www.rcm.org.uk/membership/pages/students.php?id=3)

Information on the Royal College of Midwives' position on the funding of student midwives can be found at:

[www.rcm.org.uk/data/membership/data/rcm\\_on\\_students.htm](http://www.rcm.org.uk/data/membership/data/rcm_on_students.htm)

All fees for the Diploma and degree courses are paid for by the NHS. Overseas applicants will be subject to current residential requirements.

## **Salary, working conditions and benefits**

Midwives can work in a variety of health care settings; the initial focus on the course is towards birth in a normal setting. Early placements are therefore more likely to be in the community where the whole range of midwifery care takes place. Midwifery students will then work alongside a qualified midwife, their mentor, through the range of services available in the Trust they have been allocated to. This will mean working in the maternity unit of the local hospital, or in smaller stand-alone maternity units, in group practice, at birth centres, with general practitioners and in the community. The majority of midwives practise within the NHS, working with other midwives in a team and other health care professionals and support staff. Midwives also work in private maternity units or practise independently.

Midwives' pay and working conditions are determined by the new NHS pay and conditions system called *Agenda for Change*.

For further information on *Agenda for Change* and a full series of midwifery job profiles, visit: [www.rcm.org.uk/employment/pages/introduction.php?id=2](http://www.rcm.org.uk/employment/pages/introduction.php?id=2)

### ***Pay rates outside of London***

The salary scale for midwives working for the NHS normally ranges from £19,166 to £27,622.

The highest paid position in the profession is that of the Midwife Consultant, with an earning potential of between £35,323 and £60,880.

### ***London allowances***

Midwives working for the NHS in and around London are paid an extra allowance on top of their basic salary. This ranges from £3,383 pa for Inner London, £2,819 pa for Outer London and £846 pa for the Fringe Zone.

Further information on pay and allowances can be found on the Department of Health website:

[www.dh.gov.uk/Home/fs/en](http://www.dh.gov.uk/Home/fs/en)

### ***Leave and holiday entitlement***

#### *Student midwives*

Courses usually run for 40-45 weeks per year. Annual leave is 7-12 weeks per year, usually around Christmas, Easter and the summer, depending on the individual university.

#### *Qualified midwives*

Qualified midwives' leave entitlement is 27 days per year, plus eight general and public holidays, rising to 33 days after ten years' service

### ***Hours and shifts***

The nature of woman-centred care requires midwives to work shifts - day and night duty - be prepared to take on-call rotas and travel between hospital, institution, birth centre or mother's home.

#### *Student midwives*

As a student you will be introduced gradually to shift work during your clinical placements, as it is important for your clinical learning that you experience the full cycle of 'round the clock care', including weekends and night duty in some units.

## Qualified midwives

Full time work is 37.5 hours per week. Part time work and flexible contracts are often available, as some midwives prefer to work flexibly on a bank. Some midwives work more than the basic 37.5 hours a week through overtime or bank schemes, but this is a voluntary arrangement.

## Interviews

Interviews vary, but often involve some group work and role play, and sometimes written tests. Interviewers are looking for a mix of candidates that work well within a group, so it is important to participate in activities, without dominating the group.

They will almost always conduct a one-to-one interview. These are usually conducted by a university lecturer and a practising midwife. You must be well informed about recent news related to midwifery and health care, so make sure you watch the news and read the papers for a few months beforehand. It may even be worth subscribing to a midwifery journal or read a few books about midwifery and childbirth before you go. You can ask your local library for help if they do not have the books you need. Make sure you have a good understanding of the role of the midwife. If asked what a midwife does, it is better not to respond “delivers babies”, you need to show appreciation of what the job involves, which, as we hope you will now appreciate is a lot more than that! Worrying though this may be, you are likely to be told that for every place available on the midwifery course, there are three or four people applying. This is why you need to demonstrate that the place will be safe in your hands and why you are the one to offer it to<sup>9</sup>.

Many of the universities offer students what are called ‘clinical placements’ over quite a wide geographical area. It is very important that you know where you could be located and whether you have any choice in this, especially if you have family commitments. Once you have been accepted for, or started the course it is very difficult to change these placements.

Advice for applicants:

- Ensure you meet the requirements of the institute
- Understand the programme content
- Keep a copy of the application form
- Support your choice of course
- Ask questions
- Be clear about your commitment to the course.

For more information on working within the NHS, applying for courses and tips on interviews, visit the NHS **Guide for students** at [www.nhscareers.nhs.uk/explore\\_teachers\\_students.shtml](http://www.nhscareers.nhs.uk/explore_teachers_students.shtml)

## Post-registration career development

Once qualified, midwives are responsible for their own development. Specialist programmes, for example enhanced midwifery practice, family planning, teaching in clinical practice and research are available. Education programmes at Advanced Diploma, First and Higher Degree are provided.

These opportunities enable the midwife to further develop skills and knowledge, thereby enhancing midwifery practice.

Midwives can work in a variety of different health care settings and gain experience in all aspects of caring for mothers and babies. They have an option to develop their career in many ways, for example as a clinical specialist in the role of a consultant midwife, or in

management as a Head of Midwifery services or Supervisor of Midwives at local authority level. Some midwives may prefer to follow an academic career in education and research. Midwives have developed innovative specialist roles, for example in ultrasound, fetal medicine, intensive care neonatal units, public health, parenting education and many others. The opportunities are endless. There are also opportunities for midwives to work in the European Community or overseas with Voluntary Service Overseas<sup>1</sup>.

## Working abroad

Although the practicalities of employment vary from country to country, midwives are entitled to full registration in any country in the European Economic Area providing they are citizens of member states and they have completed primary training in a member state and hold a recognised qualification.

Midwifery posts are advertised in the midwifery, nursing and health service journals. There are also many useful publications in bookshops and libraries containing helpful advice about working abroad. If you are considering working in Europe you may wish to obtain a copy of "The Midwife in Europe" and the "EC Midwives Directives", both available from the RCM Bookshop, priced at £1, plus post and packing.

A valuable source of information is the Embassy or High Commission of the country in which you are interested.

Information on individual countries can be found through the International Confederation of Midwives (ICM).

[www.internationalmidwives.org/](http://www.internationalmidwives.org/)

In addition, many charities and organisations, such as Voluntary Service Overseas and Mediciens Sans Frontieres seek midwives for work in developing countries.

More in-depth information and advice on working as a midwife abroad, including taxation and insurance matters can be found on the Royal College of Midwives fact sheet entitled *Thinking about working abroad?*<sup>10</sup>

## References

1. Royal College of Midwives – Midwifery as a career  
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2. NHS Careers – Midwifery – Skills required  
[www.nhscareers.nhs.uk/midwife\\_skills.shtml](http://www.nhscareers.nhs.uk/midwife_skills.shtml)
3. Nursing and Midwifery Council – Statistical Analysis of the Register 2005-2006  
[www.nmc-uk.org/aFrameDisplay.aspx?DocumentID=2593](http://www.nmc-uk.org/aFrameDisplay.aspx?DocumentID=2593)
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5. O'Bryant C (2001). Portrait of a male midwife. *Midwifery Today* 58:Summer:33
6. Student Midwives Sanctuary – The course  
[studentmidwives.co.uk/pages/course3.htm](http://studentmidwives.co.uk/pages/course3.htm)
7. NHS Careers – Training to be a midwife  
<http://www.nhscareers.nhs.uk/details/default.aspx?id=1947>

8. Royal College of Midwives – Students – Student midwives' funding  
[www.rcm.org.uk/membership/pages/students.php?id=3](http://www.rcm.org.uk/membership/pages/students.php?id=3)

9. Student Midwives Sanctuary – The course – Interviews  
[www.studentmidwives.co.uk/pages/course4.htm](http://www.studentmidwives.co.uk/pages/course4.htm)

10. Royal College of Midwives – Thinking about working abroad?  
[www.rcm.org.uk/info/docs/workingAbroad2006.doc](http://www.rcm.org.uk/info/docs/workingAbroad2006.doc)