

Health and Social Care Industry Profile for Graduates

Overview

Estimated graduate starting salary: £10,000 - £30,000

Typical salary after training: £18,000 - £42,000

[Graduate Jobs in Healthcare](#)

The health and social care sector covers a multitude of professions. Some roles are more skilled than others and some are in higher demand. The main employer in this area is the National Health Service (NHS), but positions will also exist in the private sector. This is one of the largest employment sectors in the UK and is always in the media spotlight. It also offers challenging careers that you must be totally committed to in order to succeed - be sure to analyse your reasons for wanting to enter the profession before you embark on the long training process. Specific training and qualifications are necessary, as well as skills and qualities such as interpersonal skills, time management, patience, flexibility and the ability to work under pressure.

Health provision in the UK is at a critical stage in its cultural evolution. It is attempting to move from a hierarchical, bureaucratic, blame-ridden ethos to a more open learning culture where decisions are taken nearer the level of patient contact and mistakes can be openly admitted in the interest of improving services. Recent major advances in medicine mean that healthcare is being increasingly provided by teams of professionals with a range of different skills, each bringing their particular expertise when dealing with and caring for patients.

Increased patient choice and increased private sector involvement to achieve that choice are likely to dominate health provision over the next few years. Central to the development of patient choice will be the introduction of electronic patient records. There will also be a lifelong record of a patient's health and health care, allowing people to make their treatment preferences known to health professionals.

The General Social Care Council (GSCC) estimates that currently there are over 1 million staff working in social care. This figure excludes advice work, careers guidance, counselling and probation work. In 2003 the GSCC started to build a register of all social carers in the UK and they anticipate that the initial figures given will grow. Social care could become the largest employment sector in the country.

To get a picture of the scope of this social work sector it is useful to consider who its clients are. We are all likely to become clients of social care at one time or another, but here are some of the main groups:

- children or families who are under stress;
- people needing advice on choice of career, problems at work or the difficulties of unemployment;
- people who have problems with relationships;
- people with disabilities;
- people with emotional or psychological difficulties;
- people with financial or housing problems;
- people who have committed crimes;
- people with problems related to drugs or alcohol;
- older people who need help with daily living activities;

- social groups who are disadvantaged by poverty or other forms of social exclusion.

Since social care deals with so many issues, it operates in many settings. Social care may be offered in hospitals or health centres, in educational settings, in community groups in residential homes, advice centres or indeed, in people's own homes.

Social care works closely with healthcare, health education, education and the law.

It links to social research and policy and to the provision of direct support for people through funding. Increasingly, it links to the business sector with increased pressure on funding and a much greater level of participation in the private sector, providing various forms of social care.

Career path

Your career path will vary depending on the profession you decide to enter. The more you progress the more you begin to see the rewards for your effort. There are so many career opportunities on offer that it is very hard to generalise what the average graduate starting salary is in this area. However it is worth noting that although pay rates and benefits are on the increase in order to attract more people into the industry, it is still not a well paid area of work to seek employment in. To balance this out flexible working options are arranged, family-friendly working policies and childcare provision initiatives have been introduced and excellent support and career guidance are on offer.

As your experience grows you may be able to specialise in a certain aspect of your work in order to become an expert in your field. Alternatively a move away from this career path may be required in order to seek positions within healthcare research, marketing, sales or management. With so many different career options involved the working environments and job duties can be varied, however job satisfaction and recognition amongst fellow peers can be enormous.

Health provision is traditionally split between primary care, the first point of professional contact (eg, general practitioners, dentists, opticians and support occupations; occupational health, health education and promotion) for patients in the community, and secondary care, specialised treatment, normally carried out in hospital. Recent developments in primary care have been the introduction of NHS walk-in-centres and NHS Direct – a telephone advice service on personal health matters, which now also available online.

The NHS employs a vast variety of different categories of staff, which can be grouped roughly as follows:

- Doctors – including consultants, registrars, senior house officers and associate specialists.
- Qualified nurses – including midwives, health visiting staff, nurse consultants, nurse practitioners, modern matrons, nurse managers and bank nurses.
- Qualified scientific, therapeutic & technical staff (ST&T) – qualified health support professionals who are categorised into the following two groups:
 - Allied health professionals (AHPs) – chiropodists/podiatrists, dietitians, occupational therapists, orthoptists, physiotherapists, radiographers, and art/music/drama therapists.
 - Other qualified ST&T staff – clinical psychologists, pharmacists, pathologists, speech and language therapists, prosthetists and orthotists. This section also includes clinical and biomedical scientists specialising in disciplines such as genetics, immunology, biochemistry, audiology, medical physics, microbiology, haematology and toxicology.

- Qualified ambulance staff – ambulance paramedics and ambulance personnel.
- Support staff – all the above functions also require support staff, many of whom work in patient contact roles, including nursing assistants, nursing auxiliaries, nursery nurses, health care assistants and porters. Also included are clerical and administrative staff, for example medical secretaries and medical records officers, and maintenance and works staff.
- NHS infrastructure support - including areas such as personnel, finance, information technology, legal services, library services, health education and associated support services. It also takes in such areas as laundry, domestic services, catering and gardening, specialised management staff, and practice managers in the primary care sector.

Private healthcare encompasses a broad spectrum of activities including private hospital treatments, fixed price surgery, cosmetic surgery and dentistry, laser eye surgery, health insurance and screening, infertility treatment, psychiatric care, care of the elderly and private medical laboratories. The vast majority of dental work is now undertaken outwith the NHS.

Also significant and growing are the alternative therapies offered by practitioners in complementary medicine, principally acupuncture and acupressure, aromatherapy, Alexander technique, chiropractics, homeopathy, hypnotherapy, naturopathy, osteopathy and reflexology, although the options are constantly growing.

In social work some jobs are not open to new graduates because they require either appropriate professional qualifications or relevant experience. This at least is the pattern for direct client contact work, eg social work, advice work, careers guidance or counselling.

Graduates who want to work in the care sector, but in many of its supporting or business roles, eg software development, business management, finance or administration, can certainly apply directly to private social care organisations, to relevant government departments or to local authorities offering positions in housing, consumer advice, social service administration, etc.

There are also opportunities for anyone interested in special products and services for this sector. Examples include: computer systems - to monitor the safety of vulnerable people in their own homes; mobility aids; specially designed housing and furniture; and learning aids for children with learning disabilities. Many of the companies that offer these services don't run graduate recruitment programmes, yet may welcome approaches from graduates.

Qualifications and skills needed

Because of the strong scientific basis of many of the job functions in the health sector, the most common entry pattern is through a relevant vocational degree (or Nursing diploma).

If you are a graduate in a non-vocational subject, there are possible routes for you to retrain in the medical and scientific professions, but your choice will be considerably wider if you have a scientific degree background.

Social care offers many career options from those needing no formal entry requirements to those demanding degrees and/or specific professional qualifications. Many require considerable levels of relevant experience. Guidelines on the best ways in and routes to subsequent success are therefore quite general.

One important career decision when entering this sector is choosing whether you prefer face-to-face work with clients, or work behind the scenes. People who prefer face-to-face work should also think about the nature of the issues and problems they would feel comfortable dealing with.

Where not essential, a degree may be an advantage. Much social care work, e.g. paid counselling and advice work, is competitive and the reality is that most applicants will possess degrees or postgraduate qualifications.

Many health and social care sector careers have their own specific entry route consisting of a combination of experience and relevant qualifications. There are some personal qualities that all employers look for. These include:

- good listening skills;
- the ability to put people at ease;
- a concerned and supportive nature without becoming emotionally involved;
- the ability to accept limitations as to what you can do;
- the ability to work well with people from other organisations;
- the ability to understand and explain complex information;
- a willingness to do much of your own administrative work.

Anyone working directly with clients will have to have their applications approved by the Criminal Records Bureau.

For less client centered careers in health or social care, eg finance, human resources, IT systems development, marketing, catering or product design, each of these has its own entry route. Many are via a typical graduate entry route, joining a relevant company which will ask for an appropriate degree.

Each profession that provides direct care for, or contact with, clients has a management structure for senior professionals. It is worth noting that many of these professions - social work, careers guidance advice work or probating work - have rather flat pyramid structures, so there are not many management posts.

Many employees in this sector do gain additional qualifications, such as management diplomas or counselling and therapy qualifications, enabling them to make sideways as well as upwards moves.

Not all positions will require a related degree so you must check the requirements of each post in detail before you apply. Your ability to listen and follow instructions meticulously will be of importance. You should have a desire to experience life long learning, the ability to work effectively in a team based environment and want to work in a sector where making difference in people's lives is key. It is also worth mentioning that some work experience is also a good idea and this can be either work shadowing or volunteering. This may not always aid your application for a particular post but it will show your enthusiasm for the sector and real motivation to help others.

Sources for further information

National Health Service Direct www.nhsdirect.nhs.uk

National Health Service Alliance www.nhsalliance.org

British Acupuncture Council www.acupuncture.org.uk

British Association of Social Workers www.basw.co.uk

British Dentistry Association www.bda-dentistry.org.uk

British Dietetic Association www.bda.uk.com

British Psychological Society www.bps.org.uk

Department of Health www.doh.gov.uk

Royal Society of Public Health <http://www.rsph.org.uk/>

Source: <http://www.grb.uk.com/healthcare-industry-profile>