Nursing and Midwifery Careers

Background

There are over 67,000 registered nurses and midwives in Ireland (An Bord Altranais Annual Report 2007, p28) Click here to see report ... This number comprises men and women who trained under the traditional “apprenticeship” system, those who completed a pre-registration diploma in the period 1994-2001 and those who since 2002 have undertaken the four-year honours bachelor degree programmes provided by schools of nursing and/or midwifery in the higher education sector. There are also many nurses and midwives who have completed pre-registration education programmes in other jurisdictions.

Until the 1990s it was possible to complete a three-year certificate programme and then undertake one or more eighteen-month or two-year post registration programmes in another branch of nursing or midwifery. For example, an individual could complete the three-year pre-registration certificate programme in general nursing at one hospital, register as a general nurse, then undertake an eighteen-month pre-registration certificate programme in psychiatric nursing at another hospital and register as a psychiatric nurse.

The current pre-registration education programmes are Children’s and General Nursing (Integrated), General Nursing, Intellectual Disability Nursing, Midwifery and Psychiatric Nursing. Click here for a list of Nursing Courses in QualiFaX. Having completed one of these degree programmes, registered nurses and midwives may then undertake a higher diploma-level programme in children’s nursing, public health nursing, psychiatric nursing or midwifery, provided they meet the entry requirements of the course providers. Nurses and midwives may also undertake postgraduate-level courses relating to specialised clinical practice and management.

The main employers of nurses and midwives are voluntary service providers, public sector (Health Service Executive) providers and private providers.

Applying for pre-registration nursing education programmes

Five programmes are provided at pre-registration level. These are:

- Children’s and General Nursing (integrated)
- General Nursing
- Intellectual Disability Nursing
- Midwifery
- Psychiatric Nursing

Children’s nursing (not integrated with general nursing) programmes and midwifery programmes are also offered at post-registration level. Nurse tutor, public health nursing and nurse prescriber programmes are provided at post-registration level only.

Programme Level and Academic Award

The National Qualifications Authority of Ireland (NQAI) has placed the pre-registration honours bachelor degree programmes in nursing and midwifery at Level 8 (Honours Bachelor Degree) on the National Framework of Qualifications (NQAI, 2004). The academic award is Bachelor of Science (BSc).
Number of Places on Pre-Registration Programmes
All pre-registration honours bachelor degree programmes are provided in 13 higher education institutions (HEIs) in association with 57 main healthcare agencies (i.e., hospitals/clinical sites). All together there are 44 programmes with a total of 1,570 places in nursing and midwifery at pre-registration level:

- **Children’s and General Nursing (Integrated): 4.5 years leading to BSc and registration as a children’s nurse (RCN) and as a general nurse (RGN)** - 4 programmes, with a total of 100 places, in 4 HEIs in association with 4 main healthcare agencies
- **General Nursing: 4 years leading to BSc and registration as a general nurse (RGN)** - 14 programmes, with a total of 860 places, in 13 HEIs in association with 22 main healthcare agencies
- **Intellectual Disability Nursing: 4 years leading to BSc and registration as an intellectual disability nurse (RNID)** - 8 programmes, with a total of 180 places, in 8 HEIs in association with 10 main healthcare agencies/intellectual disability service providers
- **Midwifery: 4 years leading to BSc and registration as a midwife (RM)** - 6 programmes, with a total of 140 places, in 6 HEIs in association with 7 main healthcare agencies
- **Psychiatric Nursing: 4 years leading to BSc and registration as a psychiatric nurse (RPN)** - 12 programmes, with a total of 290 places, in 12 HEIs in association with 14 main healthcare agencies.

**Mature students**
Of the 1,570 places, a quota is allocated to mature code applicants. As a guide only, this is approximately:
- 15% for children’s and general nursing (integrated) programmes
- 15% for general nursing programmes
- 35% for intellectual disability nursing programmes
- 20% for midwifery programmes
- 35% for psychiatric nursing programmes.

**Making an application**
Application is made through the Central Applications Office (CAO), either on-line ([Click here for CAO site ...](#)) or by post. Before completing the Application Form, an applicant should carefully study the literature of the HEI/s, the CAO Handbook 2010 and any subsequent changes to these documents. If an applicant has any queries regarding her eligibility to be considered for a place on a nursing/midwifery programme, she is advised to consult the literature of the HEI/s and contact the admission office of the HEI/s.

The closing date for application to the CAO is 1 February 2010 (5.15pm). Late applications may not be submitted.

**Offers**
First offers of places to mature code applicants will take place in early July. If necessary, further offers may be made early August. First offers of places to FETAC (standard code applicants) will take place in early August. First offers of places to standard code applicants (excluding FETAC) are issued following the results of the Leaving Certificate Examination (Round One). Offers continue to be made, as needed, until mid-October. Offers will be issued by post and may also be viewed and accepted on the CAO website ([Click here for CAO site ...](#)).

For complete details of the application process to nursing/midwifery programmes for both school leavers and mature code applicants please see: Nursing/Midwifery, a Career for you, 2010 (Nursing
Career pathway options in nursing and midwifery

The four main career pathway options in nursing and midwifery are clinical practice, management, education and research.

1. Clinical practice – General or working in a specialist area (for example, emergency nursing in an acute general hospital; addiction counselling in a psychiatric hospital; positive behaviour support in an intellectual disability service; foetal assessment in a maternity hospital). See clinical career pathway for descriptions of clinical nurse/midwife specialist or advanced nurse/midwife practitioner roles.
2. Management – Nursing/Midwifery or Generic Health service
3. Education – Academic/Third-level or Service based
4. Research – Academic/Third-level or Service-based

Career options and decisions are influenced by a number of factors including personal and family circumstances, and timing and availability of opportunities and resources.

Clinical practice and the clinical career pathway

Many nurses and midwives remain at the front line of service delivery in acute general hospitals, public health care, psychiatric hospitals and intellectual disability services, to name but a few areas. Others will choose to specialise in a particular area of nursing or midwifery practice, gathering experience and undertaking specialised training and education. Some of these nurses may progress to being clinical nurse/midwife specialists or advanced nurse/midwife practitioners and practise with a higher level of autonomy than a generalist nurse or midwife. These posts require applicants to have completed a specified number of years in practice and to have obtained a relevant postgraduate qualification.

Clinical Career Pathway in Nursing and Midwifery: Required experience and educational preparation

Qualified Nurse or Midwife
- Entry qualification – certificate or diploma before 2002; B Sc (Hons) (level 8) after commencing 2002
- Main career options: clinical practice (including working in a specialised area of practice – emergency nursing in an acute general hospital, etc), management, education and research

Clinical nurse or midwife specialist
- Minimum 5 years’ post-registration experience including 2 years’ specialist experience
- Higher diploma (NQAI level 8) or higher level required from September 2010 (National Council Framework)
- Evidence of continuing professional development
- Can fulfil required competencies of job description for specific post
- Main career options: working in a designated clinical nurse specialist post (e.g., clinical nurse specialist in diabetes), advanced practice, management, education and research

Careers Centre, 2010). You can access a copy of this booklet either on-line at [http://www.nursingcareers.ie](http://www.nursingcareers.ie) or by contacting the Nursing Careers Centre on 01 – 6398566.
Advanced nurse or midwife practitioner

- Minimum 7 years’ post-registration experience including 7 years’ specialist experience
- Master’s degree (NQAI level 9) or higher level
- Can fulfil required competencies of job description for specific post
- Main career options: working in a designated advanced nurse/midwife practitioner post (e.g., advanced nurse practitioner in cardiology), management, education and research

For more information about the requirements for becoming a clinical nurse/midwife specialist or an advanced nurse/midwife practitioner please see:


Nurses and midwives initially pursuing the clinical career pathway should not be precluded from applying for a management post.

Management

Nurses and midwives may opt for a career in management. The front-line management roles are, in ascending order of seniority and responsibility, clinical nurse/midwife manager (grade 1), clinical nurse/midwife manager (grade 2) and clinical nurse/midwife manager (grade 3). The grade 3 posts are more likely to exist in bigger acute general hospitals. Above the clinical manager grades are assistant director of nursing, midwifery or nursing and midwifery and director of nursing, midwifery or nursing and midwifery. Acute hospitals are graded from Band 1 to Band 5 according to the number of beds and patient through-put, with Band 1 signifying the largest and busiest hospitals. A director of nursing in a Band 1 hospital will have a greater breadth of responsibility than her counterpart in a Band 5 hospital.

Nurses and midwives may also apply for and be appointed to generic health service management posts.

There are also management structures within nursing and midwifery education, both in the higher education and the service-based sectors, and within regional nursing and midwifery structures.

For information about national and regional nursing and midwifery structures [click here...]

Education

Until 2002 most nurse and midwife teachers (or tutors) were located in hospital-based schools of nursing or midwifery. With the transfer of pre-registration education programmes to the higher education sector, many teachers opted to transfer to schools of nursing and midwifery located in universities and institutes of technology around the country. This transfer took place in 2002. Those
teachers who chose not to transfer to the higher education sector are based in centres of nursing and midwifery education located in hospitals.

The third-level schools provide undergraduate and postgraduate education programme for nurses and midwives. The postgraduate programmes on offer include those leading to registration as a children’s nurse, public health nurse or nurse prescriber and those preparing nurses and midwives to practise as clinical nurse/midwife specialists or advanced nurse/midwife practitioners. Career opportunities for nurse/midwife lecturers may include progression to senior lectureships or professorships within the school of nursing and midwifery or to higher level posts within the institution (e.g., president, vice-president, etc).

Those nurses and midwives working in the hospital-based centres of education are likely to be involved in providing in-service and other training to nurses, midwives and healthcare assistants. They may also supervise the clinical components of nurses and midwives undertaking postgraduate programmes. Career opportunities may include progression to director of centre posts or to director of nursing posts.

**Research**

Formalised research posts are in their infancy here in Ireland. [To find out more about research opportunities click here](#) and read *Report on the Role of the Nurse or Midwife in Medical-Led Clinical Research* ([National Council for the Professional Development of Nursing and Midwifery, 2008](#)).