Nurse - Mental Health

Registered nurses (mental health) care for patients with a range of mental health conditions, in hospital or in the community. They assess each patient's needs, and work with the patient to help them cope with daily life and deal with their condition.

The Work

You could be:

- working with patients who suffer personality disorders such as schizophrenia, or patients who have problems with drug and alcohol abuse, or eating disorders
- working out care plans for patients with GPs and other health care professionals
- assessing the patient's progress
- giving injections and medicines and checking their effects
- leading therapy sessions with groups of patients, perhaps using role play
- arranging and taking part in social activities for patients
- running support groups for patients and their families
- helping to calm down a patient who gets distressed or aggressive
- keeping records of patients' treatment and progress.

Pay

Nurses working for the NHS are paid on the Agenda for Change pay scale. The current pay scales are from April 2026. A newly qualified nurse is on Band 5, £34,494 to £42,977 a year. A senior (charge nurse) or specialist nurse is on Band 6, £43,169 to £52,603 a year.

Conditions

- You might work in a psychiatric hospital or a psychiatric unit in a general hospital.
- You could be a community psychiatric nurse and spend most of your time visiting patients at home.
- It can be emotionally and, sometimes, physically demanding work.
- You would have to work shifts and unsocial hours.
- You might be able to work part time.

Getting In

To become a registered nurse (mental health) you need a degree in nursing (SCQF Level 9-10).

- Entry requirements for degree courses are usually 3-4 Highers plus subjects at National 5, including English and Maths or a science subject. Courses last 3-4 years, depending on the institution.
- Several Scottish universities also offer degree courses specialising in mental health nursing. Check with individual institutions for entry requirements.
- An Access to nursing course may also give entry. However, always check that the course is accepted by the college or university you want to go to before you apply.

- You will require a satisfactory criminal record check from Disclosure Scotland to show that you are suitable for this type of work. Contact Disclosure Scotland for details on the type you would need.
- You should have a good level of physical fitness. You will undergo health screening.
- When you complete your training you must register with the Nursing and Midwifery Council (NMC).
- Previous experience in a paid or voluntary role in a health care setting would be an advantage.
- A driving licence is useful and may be necessary.

Jobs are mainly in the National Health Service (NHS), in psychiatric hospitals, in the community, in drug dependency and other social work units, in nursing homes and in prisons. You could also work in private hospitals, for agencies, or for the armed services. You can find NHS job vacancies in Scotland by visiting NHS Scotland Recruitment.

What Does It Take

You should be:

- able to get on well with people from all backgrounds
- very observant and able to act on your own initiative
- a good listener and communicator
- patient, tactful and understanding
- willing to take responsibility for others
- resourceful and able to cope with emergencies
- able to empathise with patients and be supportive
- emotionally strong and able to remain calm in stressful situations
- able to work in a team environment.

Training

- Once you have gained your NMC registration, training is on the job. There are ongoing requirements for education and skills development.
- During your first year as a qualified nurse you would get extra support and guidance through the Flying Start Programme.
- To continue working as a nurse you must renew your registration with the NMC every three years.

Getting On

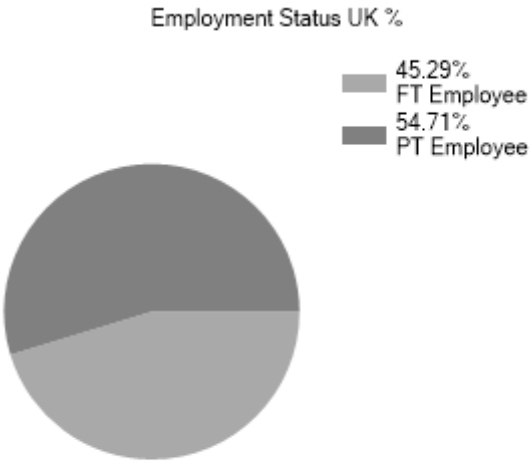
- With further learning and experience you could progress to senior, advanced or consultant level.
- To renew your NMC registration you must keep your skills and knowledge up to date, by undertaking at least 35 hours of relevant Continuing Professional Development (CPD) and 450 of practice hours every three years. Full details can be found on NMC website.
- Once you have gained experience, there are a wide variety of specialisms you may wish to go into. These include substance misuse, forensic mental health, early intervention, dementia care, children and young peoples' mental health, or community mental health.
- You might become manager of a team of staff supporting clients in the community.
- British nursing qualifications are recognised in many overseas countries, so you could work abroad.

Contacts

NHS Scotland Careers
Website: www.careers.nhs.scot
Website (2): jobs.scot.nhs.uk

Nursing and Midwifery Council
Tel: 020 7637 7181
Email: UKenquiries@nmc-uk.org
Website: www.nmc.org.uk
Facebook: www.facebook.com/nmcuk

Statistics



Past Unemployment - Scotland

No Claimant statistics available for Scotland.

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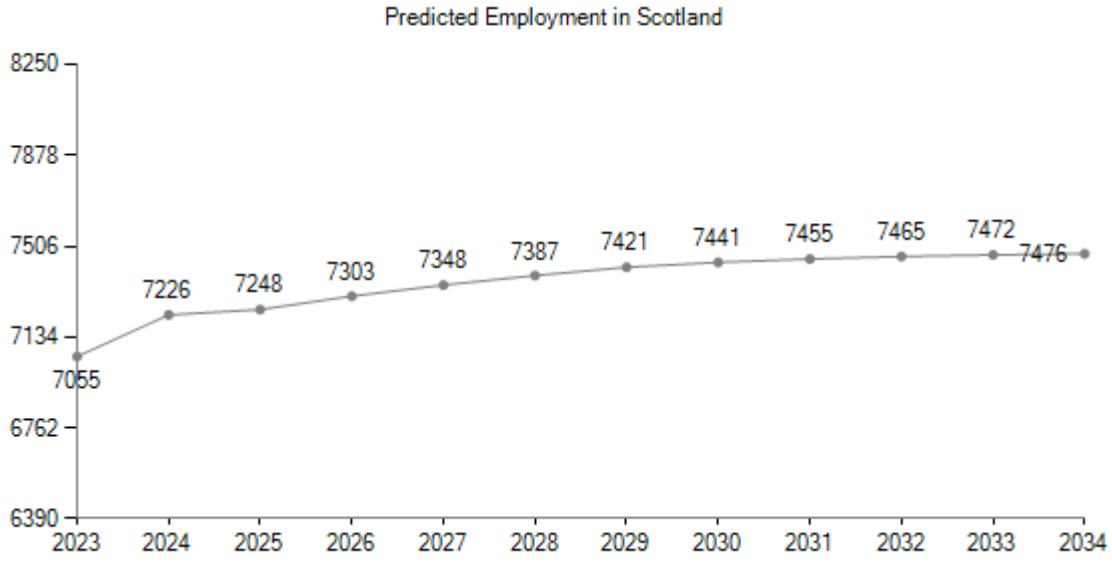

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