



Health visitor

Job description

A health visitor is a qualified nurse or midwife with post-registration experience who has undertaken further training and education in child health, health promotion, public health and education. Health visitors work as part of a primary healthcare team, assessing the health needs of individuals, families and the wider community. They aim to promote good health and prevent illness by offering practical help and advice.

The role involves working within a community setting, often visiting people in their own homes. It primarily involves supporting new parents and pre-school children. Working as a health visitor may also include tackling the impact of social inequality on health and working closely with at-risk or deprived groups. There may be variations in the role in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, which may include working with adults from the wider community.

The health visiting service is dynamic and health-focused and able to respond flexibly to a range of service and community needs. Health visiting is underpinned by four principles that guide and direct professional practice. These are the search for health needs, creating awareness of health needs, influencing policies affecting health and the facilitation of health-enhancing activities.

Typical work activities

Activities vary according to the nature of the individual role but may include:

- using specialist healthcare interventions to meet the health-related needs of individuals, families, groups and communities as well as assessing and evaluating their effectiveness;
- working as part of a primary care trust team, which may also include GPs, midwives, community nursery nurses, health visitors' assistants, healthcare assistants and community staff nurses;
- advising and informing new parents on issues such as feeding, sleeping, safety, physical and emotional development, weaning, immunisation and other aspects of childcare;
- leading and delivering the [Healthy Child Programme](#), providing support from early pregnancy to a child's early weeks and throughout their childhood - providing a gateway to other services as required;
- working in partnership with families to develop and agree tailored health plans addressing individual parenting and health needs;
- managing parent and baby clinics at surgeries, community and Sure Start Children's Centres and running specialist sessions on areas such as baby massage, exercise and child development;
- working collaboratively with children's centres, schools, preschools and action groups in the local community;
- providing emotional support regarding issues such as postnatal depression, bereavement, disability, family conflict and domestic violence;
- supporting government initiatives to tackle child poverty and social exclusion, such as [Sure Start](#);
- agreeing local health action plans as well as managing and leading interdisciplinary teams involved in their delivery;
- diagnosing minor conditions and prescribing low-level medication;
- supporting and training new health visitors and support staff;
- maintaining and updating client records;
- collecting, collating and analysing data to ensure that specific health targets are being met and creating health policies regarding the provision of healthcare;
- planning and setting up health promotion displays;
- generating and maintaining effective interactions with relevant external agencies, including other healthcare professionals, social services, local housing departments, the police, teachers and probation officers, and utilising appropriate referral procedures;
- maintaining the standards and requirements of professional and statutory regulatory bodies, adhering to relevant codes of conduct, understanding the legal and ethical responsibilities of professional practice and maintaining the principles and practice of client confidentiality.

Further information on the way health visitors work can be found at [NHS Careers](#). Information on careers for health visitors in other areas of the UK can be found at:

- [NHS Scotland](#)
- [NHS Wales](#)
- [Health and Social Care in Northern Ireland](#)

Salary and conditions

- Health visitors are paid on Band 6 of the NHS [Agenda for Change pay scale](#). Newly qualified entrants normally start at

£25,528 rising to £34,189 with seniority.

- Team managers and health visitor specialists can earn up to £40,157 per year on Band 7 of the NHS pay scale.
- High cost area supplements are payable for inner London (20% of basic pay), outer London (15%) and fringe areas (5%), subject to minimum and maximum payments.
- Extra allowances can sometimes be earned for additional responsibilities and length of service.
- Working hours are usually 9am to 5pm. However, the job can involve some evening work at clinics, drop-in centres and support groups. Health visitors involved with project work and development activities are required to work the hours dictated by the project.
- The job generally involves home visits to see clients.
- Opportunities exist for career breaks, part-time work and job-sharing as well as bank work.
- At present, men are under-represented in this area of work. The workforce is mainly female.
- Posts are available throughout the UK. There is currently a shortage of NHS health visitors, which has led to a drive to recruit 4,200 more by 2015. Flexible patterns to recruitment and training are being introduced to encourage this. More information is available directly from the [NHS Primary Care Trusts](#).
- Health visitors usually visit clients within a specific geographical area of a primary care trust. They also hold clinics and support groups in regional surgeries, medical centres and community venues such as children's centres, so mobility and a driving licence are essential.
- There is no uniform, but there is a dress code. Most health visitors wear appropriate and comfortable clothing, but casual items such as jeans, trainers and shorts are discouraged.
- Working with families and young children, including those at risk, means that the job can be stressful and challenging. Risk to personal safety may be an issue, depending on the role.
- Travel within a working day is frequent, but absence from home overnight and overseas work or travel is uncommon.

Further information on working conditions can be found at [The Community Practitioners' and Health Visitors' Association \(CPHVA\)](#) and the [Nursing Times](#).

Entry requirements

There is currently a shortage of NHS health visitors, particularly in some London boroughs. Increasing the number of health visitors has been made a priority, and the government has set a target of recruiting 4,200 by 2015 by direct recruitment as well as retraining others from related professions.

In order to become a health visitor, you must first be a qualified and registered nurse or midwife but there is no specific minimum period of post-registration service required before beginning training. For information on training in nursing or midwifery see [adult nurse](#) and [midwife](#).

Subsequent training as a health visitor involves taking approved post-registration training in specialist community public health nursing/health visiting at degree level. This usually takes one year full time or the equivalent part time. Courses may be completed in a shorter period where credit is given for prior learning or experience. Search for relevant courses at [NHS Careers Health Visitor Course Finder](#).

Pre-entry experience that demonstrates a commitment to working in the community or is directly relevant to the work of a health visitor is useful. Experience of working with children, obstetrics, midwifery, paediatrics or community and health promotion is advantageous.

Most student health visitors are seconded onto a course by an employer, generally a local health authority, although a small number do fund themselves. Funding in Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland is slightly different with support coming through the Welsh Assembly, the local health board or the local health board trusts respectively. Further information about funding, secondments and sponsorship is available from [The Community Practitioners' and Health Visitors' Association \(CPHVA\)](#) or by visiting the websites of the local health authority. Competition for traineeships is high, so you may need to apply in more than one year to gain a place on a course.

Applicants for training programmes need to show evidence of the following:

- an interest in health and social issues and in developing programmes that will improve public health;
- an approachable personality and the ability to get on well with and gain the trust of people of all ages and backgrounds;
- excellent communication, questioning and listening skills as well as the ability to interpret body language and other non-verbal communication;
- interpersonal sensitivity, empathy, patience and tact;
- the ability to work independently and autonomously as well as in multidisciplinary teams;
- good time management, organisational skills and the ability to prioritise a varied workload;
- influencing skills and the ability to motivate people to make lifestyle changes;
- the emotional maturity to deal with potentially distressing issues and challenging situations;
- a willingness to take responsibility and to make appropriate professional judgements with confidence.

Before joining a trust of [The National Health Service \(NHS\)](#), you will be required to undergo a series of pre-employment checks including occupational health and [Disclosure and Barring Service](#) checks.

For more information, see [work experience and internships](#) and [search courses and research](#).

Training

To work in the UK, all nurses, midwives and specialist community public health nurses (including health visitors) must register with

the [Nursing & Midwifery Council \(NMC\)](#) and pay an annual registration fee. They must renew their registration every three years and have undertaken at least 450 hours of relevant work and 35 hours' professional development in that period. Various activities are recognised as professional development including conference or seminar attendance, distance learning study and personal research.

Post-entry training varies between trusts, with each providing its own training to support professional development. Generally, training involves a system of mentorship for the first year. There are various courses, both in-house and external, that you may wish or be encouraged to attend by your trust in areas such as child protection, positive parenting, nutrition, immunisation, postnatal depression and domestic violence.

Depending on individual trusts, there are other opportunities to develop areas of professional interest through post-registration degrees or research projects. Sponsorships, grants and scholarships are available through a number of charities, academic institutions and professional bodies, and research can also be self-funded. There are also opportunities to get involved in projects aimed at improving or enhancing specific areas of healthcare services. [The Community Practitioners' and Health Visitors' Association \(CPHVA\)](#) has details and also publicises open training courses.

Career development

The [Health Visitor Implementation Plan 2011-2015](#) sets out the government's vision for the future direction of health visiting. This will involve a greater concentration on working with families, children and babies, tackling issues including child protection, domestic violence, building the confidence of new mothers and supporting the [Healthy Child Programme](#). While many of the existing career structures will remain, this new focus for the work will undoubtedly give rise to new specialisms within the profession.

Currently many health visitors remain in the frontline role throughout their career but there are two main routes they can progress onto using the skills acquired as a practising health visitor. These roles are team manager or health visitor specialist. Health visitor team managers carry out the role of a health visitor but also have additional responsibilities managing and providing clinical supervision to teams of health visitors and other community staff. Relevant experience plus education to postgraduate diploma level is usually required for this role.

Health visitor specialists work with communities, families and individuals with specific health and social needs, which may include undertaking specialist service planning and working with other agencies. They also provide training and clinical supervision to health visitors and students. Specialist learning to Masters degree level (or equivalent) is required for this role.

The emphasis now is for health visitors to work as part of multidisciplinary teams that may straddle a range of professions both within the health service and outside, particularly within education and social services. Much of the new provision will operate through Sure Start Children's Centres as the emphasis will be on ensuring that all children and new parents are given the best opportunities to make a successful start.

Some health visitors may move into strategic or clinical governance roles in a range of contexts or pursue careers within the education of nurses and other health visitors. In addition to having relevant experience there may be a requirement to undertake further study, often at Masters degree level. Job profiles of many of these areas can be found on the [NHS Careers](#) website.

For professionals with relevant experience, there are opportunities to work abroad in health services and voluntary organisations.

Details of qualifications and experience required for the more advanced careers within health visiting can be found on the [Nursing & Midwifery Council \(NMC\)](#) website.

Employers and vacancy sources

Health visitors are employed mainly by [The National Health Service \(NHS\)](#) within primary care trusts in a range of settings. Some are attached to general practices and undertake home visits throughout the practice area as well as see patients within the surgery. The role may also involve organising and attending clinics and sessions in community and children's centres.

In some areas, it is possible to work as a member of a staff 'bank' and provide cover for vacancies. It may also be possible to find work through specialist nursing agencies.

Universities and other academic institutions employ experienced health visitors to work as lecturers or tutors. It is also possible to work with new health visitors in a tutoring role.

There are limited opportunities to work within the charitable/voluntary sector.

Sources of vacancies

- [Search graduate jobs](#) on this site.
- [NHS Jobs](#)
- [Nursing Times Jobs](#)
- [Nursing Standard](#)
- [NHS Professionals](#)
- [nmc4jobs](#)

There are a number of specialist recruitment agencies which will handle both temporary and long-term vacancies. Trainee positions are usually advertised by the trusts of the National Health Service (NHS) between January and March in preparation for a September/October start. See [NHS Primary Care Trusts](#) for your regional trust and contact them for further details.

Get tips on [job hunting](#), [CVs and covering letters](#) and [interviews](#).

Related jobs

- Adult nurse
- Community development worker
- Counsellor
- Health promotion specialist
- Learning disability nurse
- Mental health nurse
- Midwife
- Paediatric nurse
- Social worker



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