GETTING INTO NURSING & MIDWIFERY
A GUIDE FOR STUDENTS
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   Bridie Mullarkey
   Katy Ellis

Nursing and midwifery degrees are becoming more competitive every year, and admissions officers are looking for candidates who go above and beyond in the pursuit of their dream careers. From choosing the right university to getting relevant work experience, to crafting a great personal statement and performing well in your interviews – this handy guide will help you stay one step ahead during the application process.

Gap Medics offers hospital shadowing placements in exciting destinations around the globe. If you want to learn about international healthcare, gain insight into the workings of a hospital or get some experience that will really help your personal statement to stand out from the crowd, you can find out more about our programmes towards the back of this brochure.

As we speak to many students each day, we’re often asked for tips on applying to study nursing or midwifery - so we’ve created this guide to help you on your way to securing a place at the university of your choice.

Good luck with your application!
The Gap Medics Team
Most nurses and midwives work on the very front line of healthcare delivery, playing a crucial role in the diagnosis and treatment of patients. There’s often a lot of contact time with both patients and other healthcare professionals, and the work can be intense and stressful, yet highly rewarding. It’s not for everyone, so it’s important that you have a good understanding of the job and its demands before embarking upon years of study.

If you’re not sure, you may want to seek some relevant work experience before settling on a degree programme. By shadowing an experienced professional nurse or midwife, you’ll get a first-hand look at what your future career will entail – helping you to make a more informed and confident decision. Read more about obtaining work experience on page 14 of this guide.

WEEKLY PROGRAMME FEATURES:
- Specialised hospital departments
- Dedicated professional mentors
- Five days spent shadowing/observing
- Global health tutorials

PROGRAMME AVAILABILITY:
- Runs year-round
- 1-12 weeks available
- Average length of 2-4 weeks

“SERIOUSLY HAD THE BEST EXPERIENCE! I HIGHLY RECOMMEND THE PROGRAMME TO ANYONE THINKING ABOUT GOING! I’LL NEVER FORGET IT, IT’S REAFFIRMED THAT I’M DOING THE RIGHT DEGREE.”
- Tara Blake
  Iringa, Tanzania

Students learning how to use an oximeter
ESSENTIAL ATTRIBUTES

All good healthcare professionals share several key personality traits. They are:

Flexibility and adaptability
You’ll be required to work shifts, which may change at short notice. At times, you’ll be in high demand, and have to make difficult decisions in prioritising patient care.

Compassion and empathy
As well as caring for each patient, you’ll be required to provide support to patients’ families, often at emotional or stressful times. You must be able to empathise with others, regardless of how difficult they’re being!

ACADEMIC APTITUDE
Whilst nurses and midwives spend the majority of their time on practical tasks, they are required to go through rigorous academic training, too. The ability to memorise common drugs, doses and treatments is essential.

EDUCATION & TRAINING

Whether you want to become a nurse or a midwife, you’ll need to complete a degree in that particular field. An undergraduate degree will take three or four years full-time, depending on which institution you choose to study at.

If you already have a degree in a field which is related to healthcare, you may be eligible to apply for a masters in nursing, rather than undertaking a full undergraduate degree. This usually takes two years to complete. If you’ve completed a degree in nursing and want to specialise in midwifery, you may be eligible to apply for a fast-track course, which will take around 18 months to complete.

Choosing a Specialty

There are four branches of nursing - adult, paediatric, learning disability and mental health. All offer career opportunities in both hospitals and the community. There are also numerous sub-specialties of both nursing and midwifery in a wide range of departments including neonatology, cardiology, radiology and forensics.
There are plenty of nursing schools to choose from, so make sure that you apply to the institutions that provide the best match for you, your interests and your needs. Nursing courses in the UK are arguably some of the best in the world. Several universities, including Surrey, Southampton, East Anglia, Ulster and Chester, have a 100% employment rate upon graduation.

There are fewer universities offering midwifery courses than nursing, which makes demand for places high. Glasgow, Edinburgh and Liverpool are listed as the top universities for studying midwifery in the UK, according to The Guardian newspaper’s nursing and midwifery league table 2016.
PAYING FOR YOUR COURSE

Nursing and midwifery students beginning their courses before 1 August 2017 may be eligible for NHS bursaries in addition to student loans. According to the UK government website, students matriculating after this date will no longer receive NHS bursaries. Instead, they will have access to the same student loans system as students on non-healthcare courses.

More information about student finance for nurses and midwives can be found at:

www.nhsbsa.nhs.uk
www.gov.uk/student-finance

OTHER FACTORS

You may also want to look at factors such as the location of the university, transport links, university accommodation, student societies and the local hospitals, especially those used by the universities for teaching purposes.

UK NURSING & MIDWIFERY SCHOOLS

Abertay University, Dundee
Nursing

Anglia Ruskin University
Nursing and Midwifery

Bangor University
Nursing and Midwifery

University of Bedfordshire
Nursing and Midwifery

University of Birmingham
Nursing

Birmingham City University
Nursing and Midwifery

University of Bolton
Nursing

Bournemouth University
Nursing and Midwifery

The University of Bradford
Nursing and Midwifery

University of Brighton
Nursing and Midwifery

Bucks New University
Nursing

LEAGUE TABLES & COMPARISON TOOLS

Looking at university league tables is a great way to begin your research - they can tell you the best places to study your chosen course, the average entry requirements and where universities rank on results and student satisfaction. Some of the most trusted and popular league tables and comparison tools can be found at:

www.theguardian.com/education
www.timeshighereducation.com
www.thecompleteuniversityguide.co.uk
www.unistats.direct.gov.uk
www.university.which.co.uk
www.coursefinder.telegraph.co.uk
GETTING WORK EXPERIENCE

Getting work experience is important for students studying any subject, but particularly vital for those interested in medicine or healthcare. Having some relevant experience will not only cement your desire to work in healthcare, but will play an important role in strengthening your UCAS application and personal statement - and give you something interesting to talk about in interviews.

Other non-academic factors, such as volunteering and hobbies, are also important. So, even if you’ve got the required grades, you still need to work hard to make sure that you stand out as an excellent, well-rounded applicant.

I WASN’T SURE BEFORE I TOOK PART IN GAP MEDICS, BUT NOW I AM 100% SURE THAT I WILL LOVE EVERY DAY OF MY LIFE AS A MIDWIFE

- Sophie Donnelly
Iringa, Tanzania

PLACEMENT PACKAGE INCLUDES:
Observation in the hospital
Experienced personal mentors
Global health tutorials
Exclusive accommodation
Professional support 24 hours a day
Gap Medics t-shirt & wristband
Fresh local food

A student checking blood pressure
WORK EXPERIENCE

Finding work experience in UK hospitals is a great starting point, but it can be difficult to organise. Here are some tips:

Get in touch with the education department at your local NHS trust
Speak to hospitals and clinics directly
Visit the careers centre at your school or college
Know someone who works in healthcare? Ask if you can shadow them for a few days

Work experience overseas
Getting work experience overseas is a great method for developing your understanding of healthcare in the global context. Overseas nursing and midwifery placements also offer the opportunity for you to witness cases that you might not see at home. For example, tropical diseases such as malaria and dengue fever are much more prevalent in developing countries.

An awareness of the economic, social and environmental factors affecting healthcare in other countries will really help you to stand out from the crowd. Leaving your comfort zone and exploring diverse specialties is also likely to impress admissions officers. For more information about getting healthcare work experience overseas, check out the information on our placements towards the back of this brochure.

Volunteering
Volunteering is also a good idea; universities regard it as an important indication of your level of commitment to the profession. You can find out more information about volunteering by contacting organisations such as Volunteering Matters, Do It and the National Council for Voluntary Organisations. More information about volunteering opportunities can be found at:

www.gapmedics.co.uk
www.do-it.co.uk
www.volunteeringmatters.org.uk
www.sja.org.uk
www.ncvo.org.uk

Part-time jobs
Getting a part-time job caring for elderly, disabled or vulnerable people or working in the housekeeping department of a hospital will help demonstrate your dedication to a career in healthcare and, in turn, boost your university application.
When applying to study nursing or midwifery, both academic and non-academic factors are taken into consideration. There are no national minimum entry requirements for either discipline, so the following is just a guide – be sure to make additional checks with the higher education providers that you are applying to.

“I WROTE ABOUT MY PLACEMENT IN MY PERSONAL STATEMENT, AND I’VE ALREADY HAD TWO UNIVERSITY INTERVIEWS. BOTH TIMES, I’VE BEEN ASKED ABOUT GAP MEDICS.”

- Haydn Maclean
Morogoro, Tanzania
ENTRY REQUIREMENTS

As with most university courses in the UK, A Levels are the most popular route into studying nursing or midwifery. The majority of universities require two or three A Levels. A science subject is usually preferred. In terms of qualifications, most institutions require at least five GCSEs at grade C or above (usually including English language or literature and a science subject).

Other alternative qualifications to consider are a Level 3 BTEC in Health and Social Care or an access course. Always check with your chosen university on their specific entry requirements.

APPLYING TO UCAS

The standard method of application for an undergraduate degree in nursing or midwifery is via UCAS (Universities and Colleges Admissions Service). The first step is completing a UCAS form, with information about yourself and where you want to study. As part of your application, you will need to submit a personal statement and a reference, usually from a teacher.

Your UCAS form can be submitted online - the fee is £13 if you are applying for only one course, or £24 if you are applying to multiple courses, universities or colleges. The UCAS application deadline for students applying for nursing and midwifery is 15th January. You can apply for up to five courses.

WRITING YOUR PERSONAL STATEMENT

The purpose of writing a personal statement is to convince nursing and midwifery schools that your application deserves consideration. It’s your first chance to impress, so take the time to make sure it’s perfect! Talk about both academic accomplishments and extracurricular activities; anything that will support your application. It must not exceed 47 lines or be over 4000 characters - stick to these guidelines and keep revising your statement until you are completely happy with it.

Show your passion
Seize the opportunity to explain why you’re applying to study nursing or midwifery. What is it about this career that interests you? Discuss past motivations, future goals and what studying nursing or midwifery will help you to achieve.

Talk about your experience
If you’ve done work experience, highlight why you chose to work in a specific hospital department, or what it was that made you want to volunteer for a particular organisation. What did you gain from it and what skills did you develop? Show how your experience has cemented your passion for working in healthcare.

Highlight your best qualities
Discuss what qualities make you suitable for this career. Most nursing and midwifery schools are seeking well-rounded individuals with a range of different attributes, so make sure you include your hobbies and interests outside of the classroom, as well as your academic achievements. For example, having a part-time job can really convey your maturity and show that you can take responsibility. Even something like playing an instrument is worth mentioning, as it can illustrate your dedication and commitment. Bear in mind that there is no excuse for bad spelling or grammar. Make use of your computer’s spell-checker, and ask someone – ideally a teacher – to proofread it for you.
Securing work experience in a real clinical setting can be tough – that’s where we come in. Gap Medics is a specialist company dedicated to providing high-quality work experience placements in real hospitals and clinics. Every year, thousands of aspiring healthcare professionals travel from across the globe to attend our shadowing programmes in Tanzania, Thailand, Poland, Croatia and the Dominican Republic.

Our nursing and midwifery placements are tailor-made to offer you a unique insight into the rewards and demands of your dream career. Working closely with a professional mentor and learning alongside people with similar ambitions, you’ll discuss cases in wards, observe procedures in operating rooms and welcome new babies into the maternity clinic. We’ll help you discover, first-hand, what working in healthcare is really like. The experience you’ll get with us will focus your career goals, strengthen your university applications and help you stand out in interviews.

OUR VALUES:
- A great experience for every student
- Investment in local economies and local communities
- Eco-friendly building practices
- Commitment to sustainable food
- Constant improvement of our programmes
OUR PROGRAMMES

How it works

Gap Medics provides a unique opportunity for you to take a glimpse into your future career - helping you to make better, more informed decisions about your educational and professional goals.

Based on a highly effective combination of mentoring, observation and tutorial, our programmes help students to develop a meaningful understanding of the realities of working in healthcare. On a Gap Medics placement, you’ll spend five days per week shadowing an experienced professional in your chosen department, closely observing as they diagnose and treat patients. By providing clear guidance and support, your mentor will ensure that you get the most from your experience. To help you understand the social, cultural and economic factors behind what you see in the hospital each day, you’ll attend global health tutorials several times a week. These informal lectures are run by experienced healthcare professionals, and are a great opportunity to learn more about medical practice in the region where you are working.

Nursing placements

Our nursing programme will give you a firsthand look at what working on the front line of modern healthcare delivery is really like. Our nursing students regularly observe in OBGYN, A&E and outpatient. And - depending on the destination - you’ll have the chance to see a wide range of conditions and treatments, some of which you would never see in the UK.

Midwifery placements

Join us for a midwifery placement, and you’ll get an exciting look at the rewards and demands of this popular profession. Our midwifery students regularly witness natural births (at varying levels of complexity) and caesarean sections, as well as observe the daily care of women and newborns. You’ll have the chance to shadow in a range of departments including OBGYN, paediatrics and neonatology.

KEY BENEFITS:
Gain valuable experience
Focus career goals
Make informed choices
Meet like-minded students
Strengthen university applications
Stand out in interviews
COMMUNITY HEALTHCARE VOLUNTEERING

Although most of our programmes are not volunteering opportunities in themselves, many of our students wish to make extra contributions to the communities in which they work, and we’re happy to facilitate volunteering for them in their free time.

Our programme in the Caribbean goes one step further - here, we run an entire project that focuses on improving the medical resources available to poor communities living in the bateyes (villages that surround the Dominican Republic’s sugarcane plantations). Join us here, and you’ll spend your week volunteering in the heart of each community. You’ll meet with your mentor each morning and travel with them to one of the local bateyes to assist with the set-up and running of a pop-up clinic. You’ll visit several different communities to observe and support the delivery of essential healthcare in an extremely under-resourced environment. We’re not saying you’ll change the world overnight, but you can begin to make a real difference to the lives of people living and working in the Dominican Republic today.

Any student planning on joining us for work experience in Tanzania can add on a week of community healthcare at our Mafia Island destination. The demands on the health professionals of this rural Tanzanian island are colossal. In addition to shadowing health professionals within a regional hospital, you will have the opportunity to join local dispensaries, or Tanzanian clinics, on medical visits to the even more remote island communities surrounding Mafia. Whether by helping to unload medical supplies from a boat or lining patients up for their consultations, even the smallest efforts make a huge difference to the already hard-working professionals on Mafia Island.

COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT

Our placements are designed to be as positive for the local community as they are for you, so there are opportunities for volunteering at all of our destinations. In Tanzania, you can visit a local children’s home and spend time letting your hair down with the little ones who live there. In Thailand, students are sometimes able to offer English language classes to young children. As a commitment to keeping our beautiful surroundings clean, our students in Croatia spend an afternoon picking up litter along the coastline. Don’t worry - your placement coordinators understand that this is a thirsty endeavour, so at the end of the day you normally sit and survey your hard work from a beachside cafe!

Our students in Warsaw leave around three hours of their time free to help out at a local community centre. You can get involved in sports activities for children, participate in light redecorating or cleaning or assist with reading or activity groups for elderly members. Sometimes students spend this time helping at their hospital instead, completing small jobs on the grounds such as repainting fences or sweeping up leaves.

Whatever contribution you choose to make, it will be much appreciated by the local community and help to ensure that we always give something back.
THE GAP MEDICS EXPERIENCE

Joining a Gap Medics programme is not just about getting great work experience - it’s about meeting like-minded people from all over the world and having an incredible adventure! We have destinations on four continents, located in some of the most beautiful and exciting places in the world.

We provide a comprehensive service that allows students to focus on their experience, whilst giving family back home peace of mind. A safe, secure environment and great food are all part of the package. Our exclusive accommodation brings together the best elements of a hotel, a host family and a student house to create a fantastic communal living experience where it’s easy to make friends and have fun.

**Sleeping & eating**

We provide safe, secure and social student accommodation at all of our destinations. Designed to make sure you get the most out of your experience, our houses offer large social spaces, supportive staff teams, beautiful gardens and great food! Not only are our houses designed for your safety, they also make a great base for exploring the local area and making friends from all over the world. Each Gap Medics house has a full-time, experienced chef to keep everyone well fed, and a housekeeper to make sure you come home to a clean and tidy space at the end of each day.

**Safety & support**

We have a wealth of experience in providing successful hospital placements overseas. In 2010 Gap Medics was born in response to the ever-growing demand from medicine, nursing, midwifery and dentistry students looking for relevant overseas experience. Every year, thousands of students travel with us and have the time of their lives whilst on placement. We really know what we’re doing - and our student feedback shows that we’re doing it well!

When selecting new destinations for our programmes, we make extensive visits to the country in question to ensure that we’re satisfied that it meets our safety expectations. We monitor government travel advice from the British Foreign and Commonwealth Office each day to ensure that we have the latest information regarding all of our host countries.

Each of our houses has a full staff team who’ll be there to offer you round-the-clock support. As well as organising activities in the evenings and at weekends, they’re also there to make sure that your hospital placement is running smoothly, and help with any issues or questions that you might have. Our accommodation is exclusive to Gap Medics students and there are security staff around each property 24/7 to ensure that only our staff and students have access to the house.
To ensure that our students have a valuable, educational and exciting experience, we choose our destinations carefully. All of our programmes are located in small towns or friendly cities with low crime levels and a welcoming atmosphere - most are close to sites of incredible natural beauty or historical significance, which students can visit during their downtime. Each one has something unique and special to offer, so wherever students choose to visit, they’re guaranteed a great adventure.

East Africa
We have three destinations in mainland Tanzania: Iringa, Morogoro and Kilimanjaro. Each offers a secure small-town environment. Students are located a stone’s throw from some of Tanzania’s finest national parks, but away from the main tourist circuit so they can get a feel for real African culture. Our fourth Tanzanian destination, Mafia Island, is a tiny island located just off the east coast. Mafia offers the unique opportunity for students to learn about rural healthcare in an island community setting, witnessing how medical expertise is applied in such a secluded location and with limited resources.

South East Asia
Our programme in Thailand is based in the vibrant city of Phitsanulok, where ancient culture melds with modern civilisation. This relaxed and cheerful city dates back over many hundreds of years and serves as a bastion of Thai culture and tradition. Phitsanulok is one of our most exclusive and immersive programmes - only 12 places are available each week and students are provided with their own bedrooms in our beautiful Temple House.

Central Europe
Our two destinations in Poland, Warsaw and Krakow, are both a short budget flight from the UK, making them an excellent choice for students who prefer a quick, easy journey. Poland’s cosmopolitan capital of Warsaw offers culture and a real community vibe to students aged 16-17, while the historic city of Krakow caters toward our students aged 18 and over. Our home in Croatia can be found in Pula, a friendly seaside town located on the southern tip of the Istrian peninsula. Turquoise water, rugged beaches and pavement cafes make it an idyllic, laid-back location, with spectacular Roman ruins adding to the charm.

The Caribbean
With its stunning beaches and winding cobbled streets, it’s difficult to imagine a more beautiful location than La Romana, the base for our programme in the Dominican Republic. This eclectic coastal city is a hive of activity day and night, so you’ll be spoilt for choice when it comes to filling your downtime. Placements in La Romana can be arranged with English- or Spanish-speaking mentors, or a combination of the two. La Romana also serves as the base for our community healthcare programme.

AGES 16-17 DESTINATIONS: Morogoro, Kilimanjaro, Warsaw

AGES 18+ DESTINATIONS: Iringa, Phitsanulok, Krakow, Pula, La Romana

DESTINATIONS FOR ALL AGES: Mafia Island (island community project)
BRIDIE MULLARKY

My time overseas helped me to not only gain extensive experience in the field of mental health nursing, but also taught me a lot about life in general.

I was able to witness how different cultures perceive and treat mental health patients. This, in itself, was an eye-opening experience. It was also amazing working with the healthcare professionals in the hospital and interacting with patients every day.

When I finished university, I became a qualified mental health nurse. The amazing thing is that every time I went for a job interview, I was asked about my placement in Thailand and what it was like. I think that having something like Gap Medics on your CV really stands out and shows that you are organised, productive and passionate about a career in healthcare.

I have been at my new job for a year now and I’m loving it. My experience away regularly comes up in conversation. New students that come onto the ward always ask me about it, and I’ve encouraged them to go out and do it!

I had an amazing time abroad and met some incredible people who I still keep in touch with today. The time has flown by. I would do it all again if I could, and I would recommend anyone studying nursing to do the same.
STUDENT SUCCESS STORY

KATY ELLIS

“Gap Medics is an experience like no other. From the very moment I stepped off the plane in Tanzania, I knew I was going to have a blast! Not only did my placement provide me with invaluable midwifery healthcare skills but it also helped me to take up training to be a midwife in the UK.

My split nursing/midwifery placement at Morogoro Regional Hospital was incredible. Witnessing life being brought into the world is one thing, but being part of that process - holding a mother’s hand and reassuring her that everything was going to be okay - was something else.

The placement and my mentors taught me so much about what it takes to be a midwife and a nurse, and the passion and strength required to take on such roles. During my two weeks on placement, I was able to experience the harsh realities of midwifery and nursing as well as the truly wonderful moments of both professions. The placement was an unforgettable experience as it also brought me closer to the other students, too. We were able to share the most unbelievable experiences together, from observing multiple caesarean sections to the natural birth of breach twins!

I honestly can say I will never forget my experience with Gap Medics. It was the most eye-opening and wonderful two weeks away I’ve ever had.”

Although we have prepared this guide with the utmost care and attention, we do not guarantee that it is free from errors or omissions. Changes in circumstances after the time of publication may impact on the accuracy of information.