



Career advice and interview tips for candidates seeking employment within NHS Lothian

NHS Lothian – for your career in healthcare

Contents

Introduction	1
Stage one – deciding which career is right for you	2
Qualifications.....	2
Stage two – research your chosen job.....	5
Stage three – applying for a job.....	6
Stage four – preparing for the interview.....	8
Prepare	8
Plan your journey.....	9
Create the right image	9
Gather the information requested	10
Prepare for questions you might be asked.....	10
Competency-based questions.....	13
Do you have any questions?.....	14
Stage five – on the day of the interview	14
When you arrive	14
The interview	14
Stage six – after the interview.....	16
Unsuccessful.....	16
Successful	16
Useful information sources	17

Introduction

The NHS offers excellent career prospects and a wide range of jobs – the National Health Service (NHS) careers website estimates that there are over 100 different jobs.

There are approximately 214,000 employees in health and medicine in Scotland (9% of the Scottish workforce) and the NHS employs most of them.

NHS Lothian employs more than 28,000 staff. There are around 800,000 people living in Edinburgh and the Lothians, which means our staff are caring for the second largest residential population in Scotland.

Some of the benefits of working for the NHS are:

- A minimum of 27 days annual leave (pro rata) increasing with service
- 8 public holidays (pro rata) per year
- Flexible, family-friendly working arrangements
- Access to the NHS pension scheme
- Access to staff benefits and promotions
- Equal opportunities in employment.

Stage one – deciding which career is right for you

You need to take many factors into account when deciding on a career choice:

- Skills
- Qualifications and achievements
- Interests
- Personal qualities
- Personal circumstances
- Health.

Some of these are more important than others. Think about what motivates you. What are your priorities: job satisfaction, money, terms and conditions, training, family, status?

Qualifications

When you think about qualifications you may think about paper qualifications and exam results but your skills and experience are equally relevant when it comes to career planning.

There are so many ways to get qualifications these days. It does not always mean you have to go back to school. Check out the different options to find one that suits you.

You might want to consider:

- Part-time studying
- Distance learning
- Full-time courses (college or university).

Throughout your life you learn new skills all the time. Thinking about things you have done and activities you currently do will help you identify what you have to offer.

For example, skills can be:

- Verbal communication: talking to/dealing with people
- Written communication: writing letters and emails
- Dealing with paperwork and numbers
- Problem solving: coming up with better ways of doing things
- Practical and mechanical: fixing or repairing things
- Information technology: using computers.

The Healthcare Academy pre-employment training will deliver core skills to enable the participant to move one step further into employment within NHS Lothian and beyond. The course is specifically run for the non-registered workforce.

The Healthcare Academy is a four-week part time course. If you are interested in applying or would like more information, please contact your Jobcentre Plus advisor.

The work placement team within NHS Lothian can also help you decide which career is right for you. Work placements refer to a period of work experience, which is unpaid and is part of a period of study or return to work initiative. For more information e-mail: **recruitment@nhslothian.scot.nhs.uk**

If you have family commitments, you need to take them into account when career planning. These could include financial obligations or caring responsibilities.

If a certain level of income or pattern of working hours is important to you, then you must be realistic and check this out when looking at career options.

When you are finding out more about possible jobs, check out the rates of pay, working patterns and conditions. Think about how these will affect your family circumstances.

If you're going back to work and you've got children, you may be able to get financial and practical help with childcare, such as tax credits or flexible working arrangements.

There are lots of websites that can help you and people you can talk to (refer to the contact details on page 17).

One group in particular that NHS Lothian deals with is Working for Families, a Scottish Government-funded initiative based in Edinburgh to help parents access employment or training courses within Edinburgh and West Lothian.

For more information visit their website at: **www.edinburgh.gov.uk/workingforfamilies** or telephone: **0800 432 0044**.

Another useful website to visit is Women onto Work (WOW) **www.womenontowork.org**

They are involved in the running of pre-vocational training courses for women who live in the Social Inclusion Partnership areas of Edinburgh, as well as city centre courses for black and minority ethnic women. They can be contacted by telephone on **0131 475 2622**.

Stage two – research your chosen job

A list of all NHS careers can be found at:

www.infoscotland.com (click on Site Map > Healthier Scotland > NHS Recruitment > Careers and jobs).

This is an NHS website and it will give a list of all jobs within the NHS, an outline of the role, qualifications and experience necessary and how to apply for vacancies.

www.careers-scotland.org also has a section on health and medicine and lists jobs within this area (click on Research a career > Find out about your chosen job or course > H > Health and Medicine).

Once you find out about your chosen job, you will know if you have the personal qualities and attributes required for the position.

Now you will have to search for vacancies across NHS Lothian.

The best place to find all our current vacancies is at **www.jobs.scot.nhs.uk** On the website all the vacancies are in categories to help with your search. Once you have found a job that appears of interest to you then you can click on the job title to find out more information about it.

In the job pack tab, the job description can be downloaded.

If after reading the job description and guidance you are still interested in applying for the vacancy, now is the time to apply for an application form.

Jobs are also advertised on the Jobcentre plus website, in local newspapers (Scotsman, Metro, Herald & Post, East and West Lothian Courier) and in specialist publications.

If you don't have access to the internet you can contact your Jobcentre Plus office and they will help you with your job search.

Stage three – applying for a job

At present there are three ways of applying for vacancies within NHS Lothian:

- 1. On-line.** If you have access to the internet you can apply on-line. Click on the Apply On-line tab and follow the instructions.
- 2. By telephone.** You can phone the Recruitment Hotline on 0845 60 33 444 and ask for an application pack to be sent to you. You will need to clearly state your full name, address and the reference number for the vacancy. You will then be sent an application form, advert, job description and guidance notes.
- 3. By e-mail.** If you have e-mail you can request a pack from recruitment@nhslothian.scot.nhs.uk. Again, you will be sent an application form, advert, job description and guidance notes.

Once you have the application pack, you should read through the job description and person specification to ensure you know what the job is about.

If you are still interested in applying then you will need to complete the application form. The NHS does not accept CVs (with the exception of doctors and dentists).

You have to ensure that your application form stands out from other applicants so it is important to make sure it is well presented and as complete as possible.

Some guidelines to follow for filling in an application form are:

- Find a quiet place to sit and complete the form
- Read through the full form completely before completing it
- Practice on a scrap piece of paper
- Keep it neat and tidy and check for spelling and grammar
- Work out what kind of skills the employer will be looking for – look at the job description
- The “Statement in Support of Application” part of the form will take time to complete. Do spend time on it as this is where you can show you are the best person for the job
- Don’t give one word answers – for example “I enjoy watching and playing football” tells more about you than just “Football”
- You are asked to supply the name, address and telephone number of two referees. One must be from your current or most recent employer. Let them know you have put their name down and check that they are happy to supply you with a reference
- If a section of the form doesn’t apply to you, write ‘not applicable’ rather than leaving it blank

- If possible, get someone to check over it for you before you send it
- Take a copy of the application form. This will help you remember what you wrote if you are interviewed and it will also help when completing future applications.
- Ensure the application is returned before the closing date by e-mail or post and the right postage is paid.

Further help on completing an application form and useful words and phrases to put in your application can be found at: **www.careers-scotland.org.uk** (click on how to apply > how to complete an application form).

Stage four – preparing for the interview

Getting invited to an interview means you've passed the first hurdle – your application must have made a good impression.

Prepare

Now you must prepare for the interview. Firstly, find out about the employer and the job. You could speak to people you know who work for NHS Lothian or find out if they have an information pack.

You could also check the website:

www.nhsllothian.scot.nhs.uk or perhaps arrange an informal visit to the department. Your prospective employer will note that you have taken the time to learn about their department and organisation.

Find out what the interview will involve to make sure you are prepared.

- If you have a disability, and in order to attend the interview you require special arrangements to be made, then indicate any special requirements needed when you phone to confirm you will be attending the interview
- Find out how long the interview is likely to last. This will give you an idea of how detailed it's likely to be. If a presentation is required, make sure it is completed in plenty of time and practice beforehand.

Plan your journey

- Consider a “dummy run” before the day of the interview or check how long the journey will take. Check if you will be able to park on site. On many NHS sites it is difficult to find parking spaces, so allow extra time for this
- If travelling by public transport find out bus routes and timetables
- Plan an alternative means of getting there – be prepared for the unexpected
- If you have a disability, check there are no obstacles or restrictions that would cause you problems or delay you.

Create the right image

Give yourself plenty of time to decide what to wear and get the clothes ready the day before. You don't have to buy a new outfit. Aim for a neat, clean and tidy appearance – if you look good it will help you feel good.

Gather the information requested

Bring items the employer has asked for: for example, qualification certificates, driving licence, passport, confirmation of eligibility to work in UK.

Take a copy of your application form to refer to. Finally re-read the job description and advert to make sure you haven't missed anything.

Prepare for questions you might be asked

Thorough preparation will give you the confidence to do your best at an interview. Listed below are popular interview questions and possible answers:

1. Why do you want to work here?

Mention the following:

- The good reputation of the organisation /department
- Any other good information you have heard about them
- That the job will give you the opportunity to do work that interests you.

2. Why did you leave your last job?

Be positive. Don't criticise your previous employer.

For example, if you left for health reasons, point out that you are now able to carry out all the duties for the job you are applying for.

If it is for career progression, mention this. If you were dismissed, say that you take responsibility for your actions and have learnt from the experience.

3. Have you done this kind of work before?

Yes – tell them the skills you have and how you can use them.

No – describe other work experience, which will help you learn the job quickly. Emphasise your interest and enthusiasm to learn.

4. What did you do in your present/last job?

Describe the following things:

- Skills and experience relevant to the new job
- Responsibilities
- How you worked with others (team work, etc)
- How long you were there
- If you worked with customers and, if so, how you got on with them.

5. What makes you think you are the right person for this job?

Tell the interviewer about the following:

- The skills and experience you have which are relevant to the job
- The personal qualities that you will bring to the job.

6. Why should I take you on?

Answer this question confidently and positively:

- Describe your skills and how relevant they are to this job
- Tell them you are enthusiastic and willing to learn
- Tell them you are hard working, reliable and capable.

7. What makes you a good team member?

Describe the skills needed, for example:

- Good communication skills
- Flexibility
- The ability to adapt to change
- The ability to co-operate with other people
- Having a good sense of humour.

Give examples of how you showed these in previous work situations or leisure activities.

8. What are your strengths and weaknesses?

Strengths – emphasise particular skills relevant to the job, giving good examples

Weaknesses – start by describing parts of your last job which you found difficult and then explain how you overcame these difficulties or be brief but honest ('I am a perfectionist' or 'I can sometimes be a little too enthusiastic').

9. How often were you absent from your last job?

- If you were hardly ever off work, say so
- If sick leave has been a problem then be honest – the information you supply can be evidenced through references. Explain why and reassure that you have sorted out the problem
- If you have had time off because of a disability, discuss this openly.

10. When was the last time you did something stupid / lost your temper?

Avoid describing a work example. Use something from your personal life that with hindsight you would not do again. Explain how you learned from the experience.

Competency-based questions

Competency-based questions are focused on actual experiences and ask specific questions that require you to give examples from past experiences.

Examples:

- Give an example of a time when someone has complained about your work or when you've known that someone wasn't pleased with your work
- Give an example of a time you had to work with a group of people on a project or another job

This allows the interviewer to explore in detail what you actually did, actually thought and actually felt.

Don't talk in broad terms – give specific examples. Briefly describe the background to the situation then specifically describe your responsibility, what you did and finally describe the outcome of your actions.

Do you have any questions?

This is almost always asked at an interview. Asking some questions can show you are interested. Some appropriate questions are:

- Who would I report to?
- What training will I get, if any?
- What would my first job be?
- When is the anticipated start date?
- How soon will I hear about the result of my interview?
- How many employees are there in the department?

Stage five – on the day of the interview

Give yourself plenty of time to get ready and make sure you've got all the relevant paperwork with you.

When you arrive

- Aim to arrive about 10 minutes early
- Report to the receptionist or whoever you were asked to report to
- Try and relax and keep calm. It is natural to be nervous. The interviewer might be just as nervous as you.

The interview

You will make an impression in the first few minutes. It takes this time for people to assess you and store this information.

Once an impression has been formed, it's seldom changed. It's important to make first impressions work for you.

If you are nervous, your voice may sound shaky. Practise deep, slow breathing. This will slow down your heart rate and help you avoid taking quick, shallow breaths.

Do:

- Enter the room confidently
- Smile
- Be polite and friendly
- Maintain eye contact with the person you are talking to. If there is more than one person on the panel look at the person who has asked the question and glance at the others occasionally as you reply.
- Answer questions as fully as you can, avoid just saying 'yes' or 'no'
- Ask if you don't understand a question
- Provide examples to prove your skills and achievements
- Tell the truth
- Speak clearly
- Sell yourself – get your good points across and be positive.

Don't:

- Sit down until the interviewer asks you to
- Fidget, slouch or fold your arms
- Swear
- Criticise your previous employers
- Interrupt
- Draw attention to your weaknesses
- Lie. Stay calm and stick to the facts.

At the end of the interview, thank the interviewer and shake their hand.

Stage six – after the interview

As soon as the interview is over, it is a good idea to go back over the interview while it is still fresh in your memory.

Ask yourself:

- Which questions did I answer well?
- Which questions did I answer badly?
- Did I answer questions fully?
- Is there anything I wish I had said?
- Is there anything I can do to improve my chances – learning new skills, gaining further experience, e.g. through voluntary work
- Did I highlight my special strengths?
- Did I talk about previous relevant experience?

Now you must wait. If you have not heard after a week or so, you could try to find out if the job has been filled.

Unsuccessful

There may have been a lot of competition for the job, so do not take it personally if you are unlucky this time. You could telephone the interviewer to receive feedback on your interview technique. This could be useful for improving your performance next time.

Successful

Congratulations! If you are currently working and wish to accept the job offer now is the time to inform your employer you will be resigning as soon as all your pre-employment checks are complete.

Some information in this booklet was obtained from:

- Careers Scotland
- Jobcentre Plus

Useful information sources

www.skillnetedinburgh.org.uk

www.rnib.org.uk

www.jobcentreplus.gov.uk

www.scottish-enterprise.com

www.careers-scotland.org.uk

www.linknetmentoring.com

