Students studying less vocationally focused degrees in the Arts & Humanities or Social Science departments often look on at students studying subjects such as medicine, nursing and midwifery with a sense of envy; how great it must be to have a career path mapped out in front of you with a strong likelihood of getting a job shortly after graduating, whilst they feel they have little idea where their degree will take them after they finish.

Of course as you know, the reality can be far different. While having a clear post-graduation route to go down can be a great option, and you presumably had some interest in following this given your choice of degree, you may be wondering whether the traditional option of becoming a nurse or midwife isn’t for you.

One of the most common reasons that students on these courses wish to seek alternative career routes is that they find the work involved to pursue a career in nursing or midwifery too difficult. This can be because they’re having difficulty passing the necessary exams, or due to the demanding nature of the work involved. If one or both of these is applicable to you, then don’t worry – you’re certainly not the first on your course to feel this way!

**Alternative careers in the NHS**

The NHS is the largest public sector employer in the country, and employs over a million people in an incredibly wide-ranging amount of roles. This goes to show that while you may have decided that a career as a nurse or a midwife isn’t for you, there’s no shortage of alternative options in the healthcare sector.

An entry level nurse or midwife in the NHS can expect to be within the Band 5 scale, which incorporates salaries between £21,000 - £28,000. If you’ve not completed your studies then gaining a position within this pay grade might be difficult, but there are a number of positions available at Band 4 level, which covers salaries between £19,000 - £22,000 which you’ll be in a strong position to apply for given your previous experience. These positions include, but are by no means limited to, Healthcare assistant, Community care assistant and Nursery nurse.

It may initially feel disappointing to be starting at a lower level than the one that you envisaged being at when you started your course. But if you are looking to progress with an employer then there’s worse places to be than the NHS, who detail their active commitment to career development on their careers website - [https://www.healthcareers.nhs.uk/career-planning/developing-your-career](https://www.healthcareers.nhs.uk/career-planning/developing-your-career). There’s also a useful table - [https://www.healthcareers.nhs.uk/sites/default/files/medium_spotlight_images/NHS%20career%20framework.jpg](https://www.healthcareers.nhs.uk/sites/default/files/medium_spotlight_images/NHS%20career%20framework.jpg) - that clearly sets out the type of roles that fit into different pay bands, and the possible progression routes through these.

And even if you decided that you didn’t want to pursue a career directly related to healthcare, the NHS offers plenty of alternative opportunities, employing thousands of people across the country in roles such as clinical support, administration, finance and support services to name just a few. The NHS also offers traditional graduate management training schemes in finance, human resources and general management – while your experiences as a trainee nurse or midwife won’t be enough in itself to get you a place on these competitive schemes, your interest in healthcare combined with the skills you’ve learnt from both your course and other areas will make you a strong candidate. There’s a useful section of the NHS Careers website relating to careers in the wider healthcare team [https://www.healthcareers.nhs.uk/explore-roles](https://www.healthcareers.nhs.uk/explore-roles) (scroll down to the Wider Healthcare Team section) as well as a handy table showing the range of roles that exist within this, and the pay bands that they fit into - [https://www.healthcareers.nhs.uk/about/careers-nhs/nhs-pay-and-benefits/agenda-change-pay-rates](https://www.healthcareers.nhs.uk/about/careers-nhs/nhs-pay-and-benefits/agenda-change-pay-rates).

**Alternative careers outside of the NHS**

A Career Change [http://www.acareerchange.co.uk/CaringEducationCategory.html](http://www.acareerchange.co.uk/CaringEducationCategory.html)

An overview of a range of jobs and careers that fall under the Caring & Education sector, and what training and experience you would need before pursuing these.

Prospects – what can I do with my degree – nursing [http://www.prospects.ac.uk/options_nursing.htm](http://www.prospects.ac.uk/options_nursing.htm)

Given the high numbers of graduates who go onto work as a nurse, a lot of this page understandably focuses on this as a result. However, the page links through to very detailed job profiles not so closely related to your degree, which are well worth a look.


Online tools which suggest possible careers based on your preferences, priorities & values, which can be useful if you’re unsure about which career route to take, and can give your fresh ideas that you may not have thought of before, which you can then go on to research.

**Returning to nursing and midwifery**

Return to Nursing [https://www.healthcareers.nhs.uk/i-am/returning-health-career/returning-nursing](https://www.healthcareers.nhs.uk/i-am/returning-health-career/returning-nursing)

Return to Midwifery [https://www.healthcareers.nhs.uk/i-am/returning-health-career/returning-nursing](https://www.healthcareers.nhs.uk/i-am/returning-health-career/returning-nursing)
It's never an easy decision to turn away from a career path that you've started along, particularly in vocationally-based courses such as nursing and midwifery. If you are considering pursuing a different route but you're worried however, then it may re-assure you to know that you are by no means turning your back on the profession for good. Intensive return to practice (RTP) courses are commonplace across the country for both professions, particularly for nursing, and may come with a number of benefits such as having course fees and expenses paid. And while there's no absolute guarantee you'll find work at the end of these courses, and that the situation won't have changed by the time you decided to return to the profession, there's likely to always be a need for nurses and midwives, putting you in a strong position.

Copyright © 2015 The Careers Group, University of London

The Careers Group believes that all information provided in this publication is correct at the time of publication.

This material can be provided in alternate formats. Please discuss your requirements with a member of staff.