Taking the next step in your nursing career

Introduction from Jenni Middleton, editor, Nursing Times

One of the things I love most about my job is the endless opportunities it gives me to meet nurses. Often I have a chance to speak to those at the very top of the profession, and that’s a privilege. But I equally cherish the occasions on which I meet those on their way to the top, progressing through this most important of professions.

Nursing Times Careers Live – our free jobs and careers fairs – are non-stop opportunities for me to meet the people who are rising through the nursing ranks. We created the fairs to help nurses take the next step in their careers, and to enable them to find out more about the types of organisations and roles which might suit them best.

This guide is another way in which we hope to support you as you climb up the career ladder. It contains a whole host of top tips, drawing on the expertise of many of the speakers at Nursing Times Careers Live. From how to map your career path, to understanding the educational opportunities out there, to finding ways to think about your next move when you’re already in a full time job – all this and more is covered in the pages of this guide.

I wish you every success as you seek to progress your career – and I hope to meet you soon at Nursing Times Careers Live

Jenni Middleton
Editor, Nursing Times

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Mapping your career path

It’s a classic interview question: where do you see yourself in five years’ time? If you’re applying for a new job, chances are you’ll have prepared a response. But it’s well worth knowing your answer even if you’re not due to face an interview panel any time soon.

Nursing may sometimes be criticised for a lack of clear career pathways, but that is not to say there aren’t multiple routes up the career ladder. Having a clear picture of what interests you and where you want to go can really help you grab opportunities as they arise – or to hunt them down.

Not sure how to develop that clear picture? Try thinking through the following:

Are you more interested in being a specialist clinician or a nurse manager?

- Specialist nurses have significant expertise in their specialty, and may lead a specific clinic or service. Additional qualifications mean they can perform tasks which might traditionally have been carried out by medics: ordering and interpreting tests and investigations, for instance, or prescribing medications. As well as serving as brokers of care – ensuring multiple professionals and organisations work together to the benefit of the patient – they may also have opportunities to get involved in service redesign.

- Nurse managers take responsibility for a specific ward, area, or for an entire organisation. Their role involves leading more junior members of staff, and at more senior levels they will have budgetary responsibilities. A role as director of nursing – or a divisional director of nursing – is what many think of as the most senior nurse manager role. But don’t forget some nurses go on to be chief executives of organisations.

Or would you be interested in teaching and academia?

- Academic nurses don’t only teach the next generation – they also conduct research into key areas of the profession. You might also consider a role as a clinical nurse educator. In this position, you would continue to deliver frontline care at the same time as supporting the education of more junior nurses.

How long does it take to move between bands?

How much experience is required to apply for a more senior nursing post can vary from role to role, and organisation to organisation. But here are some rough rules of thumb:

Moving from band 5 to band 6

- Generally you’ll need at least a couple of years’ experience at band 5 before you can apply for a band 6 role. You’ll need to be able to demonstrate some interest and involvement in leadership – some organisations may insist you have already completed your mentorship training; others will want you to be prepared to complete it in your new role.

Moving from band 6 to band 7

- Those at band 7 are very senior nurses – advanced clinical nurse specialist posts are typically in this band. To apply for jobs at this level, you’ll need several years’ experience. You will also be expected to have additional qualifications: in leadership, for instance, or specialist clinical training in your area of interest.
Educational options

Continuing professional development (CPD) is central to nursing. Our knowledge of how best to care for patients is continually evolving, and so it’s important nurses’ practice evolves as well.

To maintain your registration, you’ll need to complete at least 35 hours’ CPD every three years. But to advance your career, you will generally need to take on education above and beyond the minimum requirement.

Most nurses’ advanced education is gained via universities. You could study for individual modules covering certain clinical or leadership topics, or study multiple modules to gain a specific qualification – a post-graduate diploma or Master’s degree, for instance. Usually your employer will fund such study, though you will typically need at least a couple of years’ clinical experience before taking on advanced learning.

Of course, conferences, webinars and e-learning also offer plenty of opportunities to advance your knowledge. Again, employers should be able to support you to attend off-site conferences.

Personal Development Plans

Every nurse should have a personal development plan (PDP), which you will create with your manager and update at least yearly – often during your appraisal. The idea of the plan is to identify your learning and knowledge goals. These might be goals which help you develop in your current role, or which move you towards a more senior position.

If you are interested in taking on a specific university course, or attending a particular conference, be sure to mention it during your appraisal – and in your PDP review, if it’s separate.
Finding time, finding motivation, and other top tips

Nursing can be a busy and stressful job. That means it can be difficult to find the time and motivation to think about advancing your career – never mind applying for a new role. After all, who wants to think about work once they come home in the evening?

If you find time and motivation hard to come by, you may find it helpful to set aside a particular time in which you’ll work on developing your career. If you’re applying for new jobs, for instance, you may select two hours on a Saturday when you’ll hunt for roles and complete applications. If you’re interested in taking on a university course, or thinking through possible next steps for your career, you might decide to get up half an earlier one day to read up. Choosing a particular slot should make it easier to stay focused.

Other top tips for career progression:

- **Find a mentor or coach, and seek out shadowing opportunities.** All can help you develop. Check out our guide *Finding support to help you thrive* for more information. **Build a strong professional network.** Good connections with current and former colleagues make it far likelier you’ll hear about exciting opportunities early.
- **Get your job applications right.** Our guide to *Landing and loving your dream job* can help there.
- **Come along to Nursing Times Careers Live** These fairs are entirely free, run regularly across the country, and give you the chance to take time out to really think about what you want from your nursing career.

About Nursing Times Careers Live

*Nursing Times Careers Live* showcases the best nursing job vacancies, as well as offering a host of educational sessions on everything from revalidation to interview skills to shaping your career path.

The fairs are free to attend for all nurses and student nurses and held regularly throughout the year and across the country.

To find out more and to sign up for the next event, visit [https://live.nursingtimes.net](https://live.nursingtimes.net).