HSC Applicant advice for gaining work experience. During COVID

It is a difficult time to try and gain relevant experience in healthcare. The NHS is focusing on dealing with the pandemic, outreach programs have been put on hold, and most paid employment opportunities have been stopped too. In these circumstances, first time applicants to Nursing, Midwifery and the Allied Health Professions will all be in the same situation. All schools that teach the Health professions are aware that the opportunities open to you have been affected and will take this into account. Consequently, all schools of Health will have to adapt their expectations to the situation applicants find themselves in.

So, what can you do about this? Make sure to check the universities school website for updates on work experience. Additionally, keep in mind that clinical work experience is not generally a requirement for applying to train in health care, but it is important to show that you are able to work with people and appreciate the health and social care setting.

It is important to remember why the schools look for work experience in an application; this in turn can help you think of the numerous ways that you can demonstrate that you have acquired relevant experience. They want to see that you understand what a career in Health and Social care involves. Work experience, and other related experiences, are only as valuable as the way you talk about them and what understanding you take from them. While you will be expected to show some understanding of what it is like to be the professional of your choice, part of this involves demonstrating that you know what it is like to work in a responsible role, particularly with the general public.

What type of experience do I need? Work experience is any activity or life experience that helps you to prepare for the training to be a Health Care professional. This means any activity that allows you to demonstrate that you have:

- Had people-focused experience of providing a service, care, support or help to others, and that you understand the realities of working in a caring profession
- Developed some of the values, attitudes and behaviours essential to being a Nurse, Midwife or Allied Health professional such as conscientiousness, effective communication and the ability to interact with a wide variety of people. The values that schools are looking for are set out in the NHS Constitution
- A realistic understanding of Health and Social Care and in particular the physical, organisational and emotional demands of the career.

Practical ways to gain experience are:

Keep a reflective diary on what is happening in the news and online. Healthcare professionals are posting online about their experience of working during the pandemic. Listen to what they have to say and reflect on this. All healthcare professionals can be a valuable source of information and experience. After all, we all work as part of large teams involving many healthcare professions, so demonstrating that you have a sense of those professions and how they work together will help you in both your personal statement and interview. Remember that some media sources are more reliable than others and that sometimes ‘political spin’ is put on articles to help create a headline.

Volunteer in your spare time if you can, all forms of voluntary work can provide helpful work experience. Whilst volunteer work in the NHS might be disrupted at this time other schemes may still be in operation and worth exploring i.e. working with other people in a caring or service role, when undertaking any type of voluntary work. It is essential that you follow the Government’s guidelines on social distancing. Voluntary commitments to community groups (for example groups related to the work of churches, mosques and temples, or other groups such as Scouts or Guides) and online
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community support groups may also provide valuable experience of taking on responsibility, dealing with people and communicating effectively. It is likely that these sorts of volunteering opportunities will start to run again before healthcare related opportunities are available. Remember: it is what you learn about yourself, about other people and about how effective care is delivered and received that counts. What you did is only a small part of the story; it is how you communicate what you learnt which matters. Useful volunteering websites may include, but are not limited to:

- [The Do IT website](https://www.doit.org)
- [The Nextdoor website](https://nextdoor.com)