

**Aimhigher Sussex**

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# Health and Social Work

Idea's of opportunities for those interested in a career within the Health and Social Work services and advice about what to do next.

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# Health and Social Work

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Whether you're in the first few years of secondary school or coming to the end of your school or college years, you will already have or soon be making decisions about your future. This leaflet is for those interested in careers in health and social work and will give you an idea of opportunities in these areas and advice about what to do next.

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# Health and Social Work

## The overview

Want to be a doctor, an engineer, a radiographer, a social worker, an acupuncturist, a psychologist or dietician? The range of opportunities in the health sector is so vast that almost any job you can think of will be represented in some way. However, all jobs form part of an industry that supports others and if this is important to you then you may well be suited to the health and social work sectors.

So what's attracting you to working in health and social work? And how much do you know?

**For example, do you know the answers to these questions:**

How much do you think you'll earn?

What kind of places might you work and who with?

What kind of hours might you have to put in?

How hard is it to get a job and are you the kind of person that suits this kind of work?

These are all important questions to answer! Think about what's important to you.

**For starters did you know?**

- The health sector is the largest employer in the UK, employing around 2 million people.
- The range of entry qualifications varies greatly from those with few qualification who work their way up the career path to those who start with a degree or higher level qualification.
- You could earn anything from £12,000 per year to over £100,000.
- Social workers are paid to train and are often recruited before they finish their degree.
- Many jobs in the health sector require professional registration. This means you won't be able to work without specific training and qualifications.

- You need to have personal qualities which include being flexible, empathetic and supportive of others.
- Many health and social work jobs are not office hours. You may have to work shifts including night time and early mornings.
- The range of places you might work includes hospital settings to the community or following your training you may take your skills abroad.

\* Source: The National Guidance Research Forum ([www.guidance-research.org](http://www.guidance-research.org)) and The Skills Funding Agency ([www.skillsfundingagency.bis.gov.uk](http://www.skillsfundingagency.bis.gov.uk)) and Skills for Health ([www.skillsforhealth.org.uk](http://www.skillsforhealth.org.uk)).



# Health and Social Work

## The Health Sector

The health sector is divided into three areas: public, private and the third sector. The public includes any publically funded organisations such as the National Health Service (NHS), then there are private independently owned companies such as private health care organisations and the third sector includes organisations which are neither public nor private such as community and voluntary groups.

The [www.skillsforhealth.org.uk](http://www.skillsforhealth.org.uk) website has lots of information on working in different areas of the health sector as well as leaflets on apprenticeships and cases studies. Visit the website and go to the 'resource library' tab in 'quick links'. Here you can search for careers in healthcare.

There are over 350 jobs across the health sector and many of these roles can be found in all three areas so for now we will focus on the NHS.

### National Health Service

Most people at some point will have come into contact with the NHS. Whether you have been to the doctor or called NHS Direct (both part of the NHS primary care service) or perhaps you have visited someone in hospital or been there yourself (part of secondary care – where you are referred to after attending a primary care organisation) the NHS is a key part of the UK's support system. Many of the roles within the NHS are clinical but there are also many support staff working to keep the NHS running. For a detailed list of potential careers visit [www.nhs.uk](http://www.nhs.uk) and go to the 'Careers A-Z' tab. For starters here are just some of the available positions:

**Ambulance Staff** – Includes those operating emergency call services and paramedics.

**Dental Staff** – Including hygienists, dental nurses and dentists.

**Doctors and Medical Staff** – They treat patients for illness and disease in surgeries, hospitals and other settings.

**Health Professionals** – These professions work with patients supporting them in their rehabilitation. It includes such jobs as speech and language therapists, psychologists and prosthetists.

**Nursing Staff** – They support the doctors and medical staff's work by delivering the recommended care.

**Midwifery Staff** – Support pregnant women before, during and after delivery.

**Healthcare Scientists** – Using scientific and technical skills they prevent, diagnose and treat illness.

**Health Informatics Staff** – The NHS relies on a comprehensive IT system operated and maintained by informatics staff.

**Management** – The NHS is a huge organisation and requires strategic planning and organisation which is delivered by its management staff.

**Wider Healthcare Team** – From catering to appropriate building construction to supplies the NHS relies on a variety of services.

**Complementary Therapists** – In more recent times the NHS has incorporated the use of complementary therapy such as osteopathy or acupuncture to support traditional methods.



**I am 16 and I'd really like to work in healthcare but I have no idea which role. What do you suggest?**



**Finding out what sort of role would suit you best involves a combination of self reflection, research and work experience. Consider your strengths both academically and personally. Are you likely to get very good GCSEs and A-Levels (or equivalent) perhaps in science subjects? If so you may want to aim for high level roles that require training such as medicine or research. But also think about what is attracting you to healthcare. If you want to directly support patients then maybe research is not for you. Have a look through the recommended websites above so you have a better idea of what is possible and as soon as possible secure work experience in a relevant area. It's vital to compare reality with what you think a role might involve.**



# Health and Social Work

## Social Work

### Social Work

Social work is all about supporting people in their day to day lives. You might be assigned to work with a family or an individual coping with issues such as mental health, low income, drug and alcohol abuse, parent/child relationship breakdown or independence problems in the elderly. You may be helping people with any of these issues and more. It is a very challenging area of work but is also very rewarding.

Above all you have to be interested in people, their welfare and want to make their lives better. This includes working with clients and a variety of services and professionals such as the NHS, schools, psychologists, lawyers and the police. Sometimes it will be up to you to make very important decisions such as those regarding the safety of a child. You can find out more about this area of work at [www.socialworkcareers.co.uk](http://www.socialworkcareers.co.uk) (download the 'careers in social work' booklet) and [www.gsc.org.uk](http://www.gsc.org.uk) (under 'become a social worker').

### Where Might you Work?

The health and social work sector is split between the NHS, the independent healthcare sector (such as private hospitals and hospices) and the voluntary sector (including community support groups).

Health professionals may find themselves working in a variety of locations such as hospitals, ambulances, nursing and residential care homes, doctors' surgeries and dental practices as well as complementary medicine practices, opticians and medical laboratories. You may also find yourself working on location for example providing emergency aid abroad or researching disease. Social workers are often based in an office and may spend time in the community, schools, hospitals and other settings depending on their specialism and employment.

### Qualifications you need to progress

So how do I become a.....?

Now you have a bit more of an idea about some of the different roles in the health and social work sectors but you might wonder what you need to study to do them.

It can be hard while you are at school to think about which subjects are best for your future plans. You might ask how you can make decisions now when you're not sure what you want to do. This is why it is a good idea to have a think about and do a bit of research into areas that you think might interest you so that you can make sure you keep as many options open as possible.

In the health sector for some jobs there are often specific entry requirements which means you may have to study certain subjects to a required level. It is important then if you have a particular career in mind that you check what these requirements are so you know what to aim for. A good place to look is on the [www.nhscareers.nhs.uk](http://www.nhscareers.nhs.uk) website under the 'explore by career' tab there is a careers A-Z. This is a really useful guide to all the health professions and includes the entry requirements from GCSE age onwards. The website [www.stepintothenhhs.nhs.uk](http://www.stepintothenhhs.nhs.uk) also has specific information for 14-19 year olds so is worth visiting. For social work visit [www.socialworkcareers.co.uk](http://www.socialworkcareers.co.uk) and click on the 'getting started' tab. You may also like to look at [www.connexions-direct.com/jobs4u](http://www.connexions-direct.com/jobs4u) which has more general careers information.

It is also very important is to combine your studies with as much relevant work experience as you can, more of that later.

If you are having trouble thinking about your future and the steps you need to take try working backwards!

For example Luke is 13 and is just starting to consider what subjects he'd like to study at GCSE. He has had some thoughts about his future and likes the idea of something to do with preventing people from getting ill. He enjoys and is good at maths and English particularly writing and also at the sciences especially chemistry and biology.

### Fast forward to the future

Luke enjoys English and the sciences. Right now he doesn't know about the career options open to him. By exploring future ideas the decisions he has to make now will become easier.

So Luke should: look through the professions under the headings of the National Health Service and the description of Social Work above to see if any areas interest him visit the recommended websites above and see if there are particular jobs that stand out then find out more about them on [www.connexionsdirect.com/jobs4u](http://www.connexionsdirect.com/jobs4u) and [www.nhscareers.nhs.uk](http://www.nhscareers.nhs.uk)

### Higher Education

As mentioned before websites such as [www.nhscareers.nhs.uk](http://www.nhscareers.nhs.uk) will give you an idea of the type of qualifications necessary for the jobs that interest you.

Luke liked the look of healthcare scientists work particularly biochemistry because it looks at ways to prevent disease and combines his two favourite school subjects. When he researched these from the sites above he discovered that students usually need a very good result in a life science degree such as biology or biochemistry and then further training. The website [www.ucas.com](http://www.ucas.com) has all the higher education courses available in the UK which you can browse through for ideas. Remember every university is different.

### School years

Luke is 13 so needs to think about GCSEs before his A-Levels and university. One way of checking which subjects are needed for specific university courses is on the [www.ucas.com](http://www.ucas.com) website. Checking the entry requirements of courses that interest you (these are listed in every course's entry profile) will help you choose the right subjects to study at A-Level or equivalent and help you be aware of what grades you need to aim for. For example some universities look for chemistry at A-Level along with another science to gain entry to biochemistry.

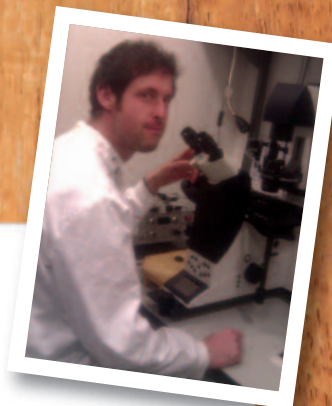
### Now!

For biochemistry Luke needs good grades in maths, English and at least the double award in science at GCSE. Even if Luke decides in the next few years that biochemistry is not for him these subjects will keep open other possibilities that interest him. He should make sure he has explored his interests and options as much as possible and to do this regularly as he may develop new interests.





## Job title: Research associate in Molecular Cell biology



**What do you do:** Post-doctoral molecular cell biologist at Imperial college london. I undertake cutting edge research to provide a greater understanding of molecular systems relating to human biology and disease.

**Best things:** Having total freedom to work as I like, on a subject that interests me. There is a broad scope to tailor your career to suit your specific areas in which you would like to work. The job itself has extremely flexible working hours and is also pretty well paid.

**Worst things:** There is a lot of pressure to publish in well respected journals as your career progresses. It's important to get this right as it's quite a competitive field. There are also lots of funding cuts but I guess that's the same for other places too. There aren't as many jobs around as I first thought there would be.

**Education:** PhD Cardiff University, MSc in Genetic Manipulation and Molecular Cell Biology, University of Sussex and BSc in Neuroscience at University of Sussex  
A-levels 3 sciences (all grade C) showing that A-levels aren't everything and you can still do well despite low grades. I got these at a pretty poor comprehensive school in South Wales. Don't let your background and your local resources hold you back, there is always a way to get through.

**Relevance of study:** My studies have always been mostly relevant to the career I ended up with, barring my BSc which was Neuroscience and not very related to molecular cell biology where I ended up working. Though this does highlight the scope for changing career path within the field of life sciences.

**Recommendations:** I would say that you have to be quite confident to work well in this area as it is so competitive. You also have to be a persistent problem solver too as you don't always get the right answers on the first attempt, even if there is a right answer! Being a scientist is more about plugging away at an idea until you make a conclusion, often not knowing whether it is right or not until large amounts of evidence have been gathered. It is hardly ever a one experiment and EUREKA! moment.

Study is extremely important, choosing the right modules at university and paying particular attention to the practical classes as these will teach you a lot of the basic skills that you will need for lab work.

I would also recommend trying to get some summer student places in labs at whichever university you attend. I neglected this but have since seen the advantage it is to students that now pass through labs I work in.

**What would you do differently?:** Luckily I am in one of those positions where I can say that there isn't much that I would change. I have completed an extremely successful PhD, with several publications and am now working in a field that highly motivates and excites me on a daily basis.

**What next?:** Onwards, upwards to bigger and better things. I am hoping to move on from my current position pretty soon to a second research associate position, this time somewhere with a sunnier climate. One of the brilliant things about this job is that it exists all over the world and there are no boundaries to you working in whatever country you choose. Then after that hopefully a fellowship or lectureship and forming my own research group so that I have scope to fully explore my own research goals.

# Health and Social Work

## What qualifications do I need?

### Taking your GCSEs options?

If you are under 13/14 then you are probably thinking about or doing GCSEs or their equivalent. It is very important to make sure you gain key skills in maths and English as these will make sure any options you are interested in will stay open. Consider whether you would prefer a more medical based role or a support role. The former may well require a minimum of double award science but if you can take all three separately all the better as it will prepare you for A-Levels of equivalent. Other than the subjects you are required to take, in order to help make decisions about the others, consider what you enjoy but also what might be useful for your future.

### Considering college/6th form options?

For those interested in the health and social work it's important to consider which subjects will provide evidence of your ability. Universities offering social work degrees (which is the official route to become a social worker) look for voluntary work experience in an appropriate area and are often not specific about the required subjects just as long as you do well enough to gain entry on to a degree course. However, as we have discussed with many health sector roles the requirements are specific so you must check before. For example to study medicine you must do chemistry at A-Level.

The following higher and further education providers are based in Sussex:

**University of Brighton** [www.brighton.ac.uk](http://www.brighton.ac.uk)

**University of Chichester** [www.chiuni.ac.uk](http://www.chiuni.ac.uk)

**University of Sussex** [www.sussex.ac.uk](http://www.sussex.ac.uk)

**The Open University** [www.open.ac.uk](http://www.open.ac.uk)

**Bexhill College** [www.bexhillcollege.ac.uk](http://www.bexhillcollege.ac.uk)

**BHASVIC** [www.bhasvic.ac.uk](http://www.bhasvic.ac.uk)

**Central Sussex College** [www.centalsussex.ac.uk](http://www.centalsussex.ac.uk)

**Chichester College** [www.chichester.ac.uk](http://www.chichester.ac.uk)

**City College Brighton and Hove** [www.ccb.ac.uk](http://www.ccb.ac.uk)

**Northbrook College** [www.northbrook.ac.uk](http://www.northbrook.ac.uk)

**Sussex Coast College Hastings**  
[www.sussexcoast.ac.uk](http://www.sussexcoast.ac.uk)

**Sussex Downs College** [www.sussexdowns.ac.uk](http://www.sussexdowns.ac.uk)

**Varndean College** [www.varndean.ac.uk](http://www.varndean.ac.uk)

**Worthing College** [www.worthing.ac.uk](http://www.worthing.ac.uk)

### What Next?

After school or college it can be hard to know what the best next steps will be. For starters if you are keen to stay in education there are around 50,000 courses to choose from in over 300 institutions. Some of these courses prepare you for a particular job (these are called vocational courses) while others provide a more general education.

People join the NHS at all sorts of different points in their career. There are opportunities to join at 16 and towards the end of your working life. When you join you will find yourself on a points system which awards a certain salary depending on your qualifications and role undertaken. So the better your qualifications before you join the more you will earn but there will be an upper limit for the particular job you do.

Some people prefer a more vocational route into a profession. This means rather than studying before you work you have a more hands on approach earlier in your training. This type of learning works well with many health professions. While it is possible to do apprenticeships that can lead into the health care sector they can still be quite difficult to get hold of. Have a look at [www.nhscareers.nhs.uk/details/Default.aspx?Id=501](http://www.nhscareers.nhs.uk/details/Default.aspx?Id=501) as well as the national website [www.apprenticeships.org.uk](http://www.apprenticeships.org.uk) and the Sussex based one [www.apprenticeships-in-sussex.com](http://www.apprenticeships-in-sussex.com).

Something else to consider is that sometimes qualifications needed to practice certain professions change. For example nurses now take on more duties



TIP

Some universities and colleges have summer schools where you can get more of a taster to what the course and university will be like and where it may lead.

that used to be done by doctors. As their necessary skill level has risen so have the entry requirements and from 2013 a nursing degree will be the minimum level needed to practice.

All FE colleges in Sussex have access to a career website called **www.talkingjobs.net** currently until November 2012, so ask careers staff for the log in details. Here you have the opportunity to view video interviews of a range of professionals talking about their work and how they got into it.

Make sure that you are also aware of the UCAS points you need for courses that interest you as you may need to aim for particular grades in the subjects you are taking (see the UCAS points box for more information). Universities will also require personal statements where you write about why you are suitable for the course you are applying for. They will look for evidence of your interest and dedication to the course and where it may lead in both your academic studies and also evidence from out of school activities such as work and volunteer experience. Those keen on medicine may also have to take either the UKCAT or BMAT which test for skills such as reasoning. You can find out more at **www.wanttobeadoctor.co.uk**. If you do come across a course that interests you and are not sure where it may lead have a look at the website **www.whatcanidowithmydegree.nhs.uk** as it makes suggestions as to where different degrees may lead in terms of the health sector.

The next steps section on the following page will help you in your decision making.

TIP

If you are concerned about paying for your course have a look at **www.nhsbsa.nhs.uk/Students.aspx**. It has information about funding for those wishing to study social work and other health sector jobs.

### UCAS points – What on earth are they?

UCAS stands for the Universities and Colleges Admissions Service. The qualifications you study and the grades you achieve in those subjects at school or college are turned into points which allow you to enter higher education. Universities and higher education colleges will ask for a certain number of points and often specific grades in certain subjects in order for you to gain entry to the course of your choice. For more information on your qualifications and UCAS points they could 'earn' visit **www.ucas.ac.uk/students/ucas\_tariff**.

It is worth getting to know the UCAS website at **www.ucas.com**. Click on the Student section to find out more about UCAS points and have a look at the courses available and the universities that offer them in the course search section. The entry profiles of each course also will tell you what the course will cover, what career opportunities it may lead to and what kind of student it may suit; which will all help you decide if it is right for you. If in doubt contact the university direct.



## Job title: Registered nurse

**What do you do:** Provide care for patients in intensive care unit.

**What's the best and worst thing about what you do?** The best part of my jobs is the day to day variety. We get everything in the unit from car accidents, critical illness to gunshot wounds so every day is different and so is every patient. I provide one on one care to patients who are critically ill so I really get to know the patients and their families. The worst parts are the shifts as we do nights much of the time, but once you get into a routine, even this is not so bad, especially if you get to work with a good team.

**University course studied and where:** I studied the Diploma in Adult Nursing in Preston but it is also possible to do a degree in nursing and soon this will be the only way to qualify as a nurse. The course is funded by the NHS and if you do the diploma you can still get a 7K bursary during your training.

**A-Levels/equivalent:** You will need a GCSE in maths at C or above which I had along with A-Levels. Some courses require A-levels or the equivalent (e.g BTEC) but will accept an access course also.

**How did you decide what you wanted to do?** I decided to do my nurse training after travelling and doing bar work where I was earning well below minimum wage. I also had some previous experience as a dental assistant which I enjoyed. I realised that nursing is a valuable skill and is also very useful for travel, especially in countries like Australia and the USA where many UK nurses end up.

**What do you recommend for someone interested in this career?** If you're interested in nursing I'd recommend getting some work as a healthcare assistant first. This will give you a good start with basic nursing skills and will tell you quickly if you would enjoy being around patients and their bodily functions. Much of the care nurses give means being very close to patients and experience as a healthcare assistant may help you decide if that's for you.

**What next?** I hope to continue working in ITU and then find work as a nurse on Accident and Emergence or a cruise ship, as they have small hospitals on board.





# Health and Social Work

## Next steps

### OK, so now what?

Hopefully this pamphlet will have given you some ideas about the possibilities in health and social work. But your job is not done yet! In order to discover the most suitable, satisfying and enjoyable path for you as an individual you need to open your eyes to opportunities and try out as many as possible. Try these next steps and see where they take you!

### Explore possibilities through research

Think about the subjects you are studying now and which ones you enjoy most. Also research any possible ideas you may have for your future to check if there are particular subjects you should consider studying. There is lots more information, advice and guidance out there to help you on your journey. Along with the websites mentioned throughout this pamphlet the following websites will start you off:

### General Career Research, Tools and Information

**[www.connexions-direct.com/jobs4u](http://www.connexions-direct.com/jobs4u)**

Great for finding out about different types of jobs, what they are like and qualifications needed. Check the Job Families section for career inspiration.

**[www.prospects.ac.uk](http://www.prospects.ac.uk)**

Other excellent job search website. Also has a section that helps you think about what different subjects will lead to. Go to Careers Advice – Options With Your Subject.

**[www.guidance-research.org](http://www.guidance-research.org)**

About market intelligence (information and statistics) about the Health and Social Work industries.

### Health

**[www.nhscareers.nhs.uk](http://www.nhscareers.nhs.uk)**

**[www.medicalcareers.nhs.uk](http://www.medicalcareers.nhs.uk)**

**[www.tasteofmedicine.com](http://www.tasteofmedicine.com)**

### Social Work

**[www.socialworkcareers.co.uk](http://www.socialworkcareers.co.uk)**

These are just some of the websites that can help you in your research. There are many more but remember not all information online is correct.

Also there are people that can advise you such as teachers, your school Connexions adviser, school careers adviser, Aimhigher representatives, parents and carers and friends as well as those you meet in work experience. All will have valuable advice to contribute to help you in your decision making process but remember some advice may be more impartial (for example your parents may have a more biased view of your future than a careers adviser).



### Sample your ideas with work experience

One way of seeing if your dream job won't actually turn out to be a nightmare is through work experience and perhaps more than any other profession volunteering and work experience is vital before you enter your first job in the health and social work sectors. Experience in a care setting is usually a requirement for medicine for example. Work experience is valuable for many reasons but perhaps the most important is it gives you the opportunity to see the reality of your dream.

Some other reasons why work experience is great:

- It helps you become industry ready. This means when you get your first job you are able to hit the ground running because you already have an understanding of the industry and what's expected of you. Work experience will provide you with your first introduction to your area of interest.
- It helps you meet people in your area of interest. This means you have contacts (people that can help you) and are able to network (communicate and find more people to help you secure more work experience or your first job).

A great first step and good practice for trying out your networking skills is to get in contact with your local NHS trust in your area to see if they will offer you a work experience placement or the very least let you come in and speak to some people working in the area that interests you. See **[www.stepintothenhhs.nhs.uk/work-experience.aspx](http://www.stepintothenhhs.nhs.uk/work-experience.aspx)** for further information. For those interested in social work try websites such as **[www.do-it.org.uk](http://www.do-it.org.uk)** and **[www.volunteering.org.uk](http://www.volunteering.org.uk)**. Also look out for community initiatives and the council website in your local area. If you are offered a placement make sure you make the most of it: speak to as many people as possible, offer to help and get involved. If you are seen as someone who listens and wants to be as 'hands on' as possible you are likely to be asked back or at least gain excellent references.

Content created by Miranda Glavin. Please visit **[www.careerelevation.co.uk](http://www.careerelevation.co.uk)**.







### Job title: Advertising Assessor

**What do you do:** I work for the MHRA (Medicines and Healthcare Products Regulatory Agency). The organisation is part of the Department of Health and is responsible for regulating medicines in the UK. My role is to regulate the advertising of medicines. I review advertisements before they are published and investigate complaints about medicines advertising.

**What's the best and worst thing about what you do?** It is interesting finding out about new medicines and researching how they work. We do this so that we can assess the claims in the adverts to see if they are telling the truth. I have to attend a lot of meetings and sometimes take notes for the meetings, which is probably my least favourite part of the job.

**University course studied and where:** BSc Biology - University of Sussex and MSc - Pharmaceutical Medicine - University of Surrey (which I am still doing).

**A-Levels/equivalent:** Biology, Chemistry, Maths

**Were the subjects you studied relevant to what you do now?** Yes, some of the statistics I need to look at were covered in my maths A-levels. Some of the principles learnt in the Biology and Chemistry A-level course are useful in my current job.

**How did you decide what you wanted to do? And if you didn't how did you end up where you are?** I knew after doing my Biology degree that I wanted to work in science but away from a laboratory. I applied for several roles and managed to get one at the MHRA. I have moved jobs within the MHRA and worked in different departments. This is my third job at the MHRA!

**What do you recommend for someone interested in this career?** The MHRA employs mainly Medics, Pharmacists and Scientists. The job roles suit people with an interest in medicines, who enjoy staying up to date with scientific affairs and issues and would like an office based job. Work experience from working in offices or working with health care professionals or in hospitals is useful.

**What would you have done differently if anything?** I may have taken my MSc course full time rather than trying to do an MSc part time while working full time. It has taken me much longer and has been much harder than expected!

**What next?** When I complete my MSc I would like to get a promotion within the Agency and possibly move into management. Later I may consider working for the European Regulators or the World Health Organisation or for a pharmaceutical company.



# Health and Social Work