

Regulated professions qualification pathways

Careers in nursing

General entry requirement

All routes into nursing typically require the below. Universities/higher education providers may accept a range of other qualifications and consider different entry levels.*

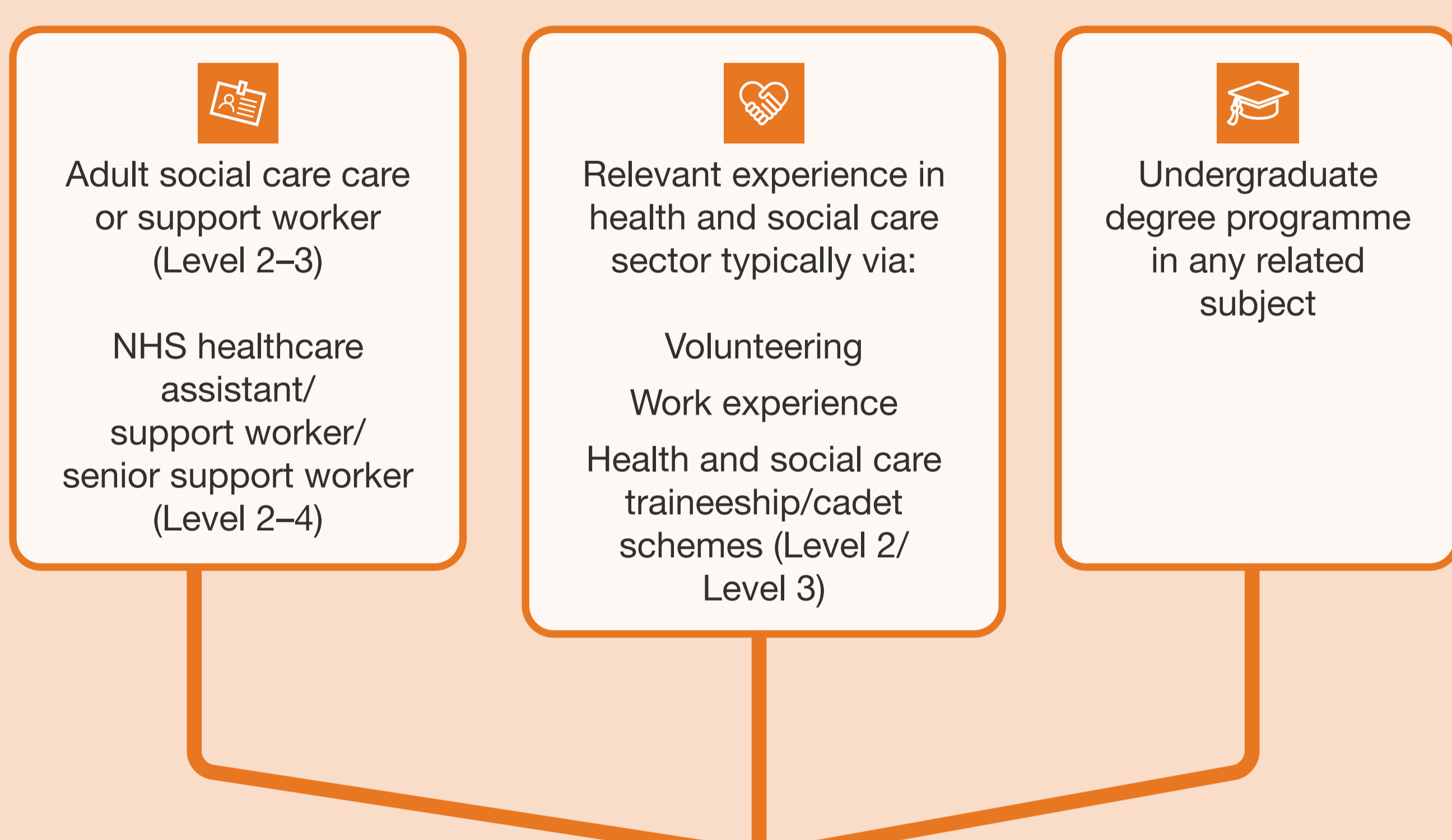


GCSE English and Maths at Grade C/4 or accepted UK equivalencies (including Level 2 Functional Skills).

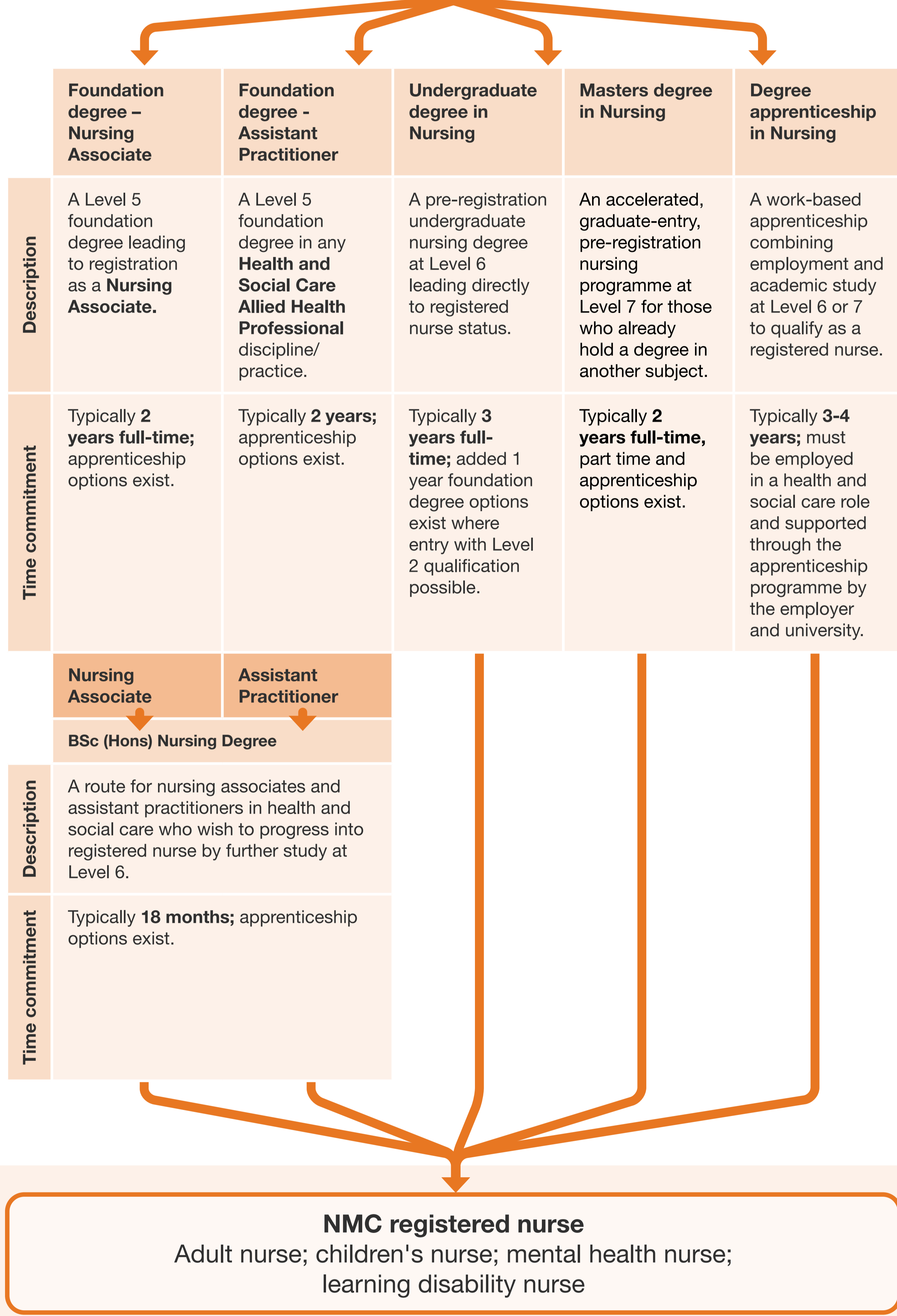
Level 3 qualifications are typically needed for entry into qualifying courses, but some routes consider prior experience and/or lower qualification levels.

Meet the Nursing and Midwifery Council (NMC) requirements for literacy, numeracy, health, and character.

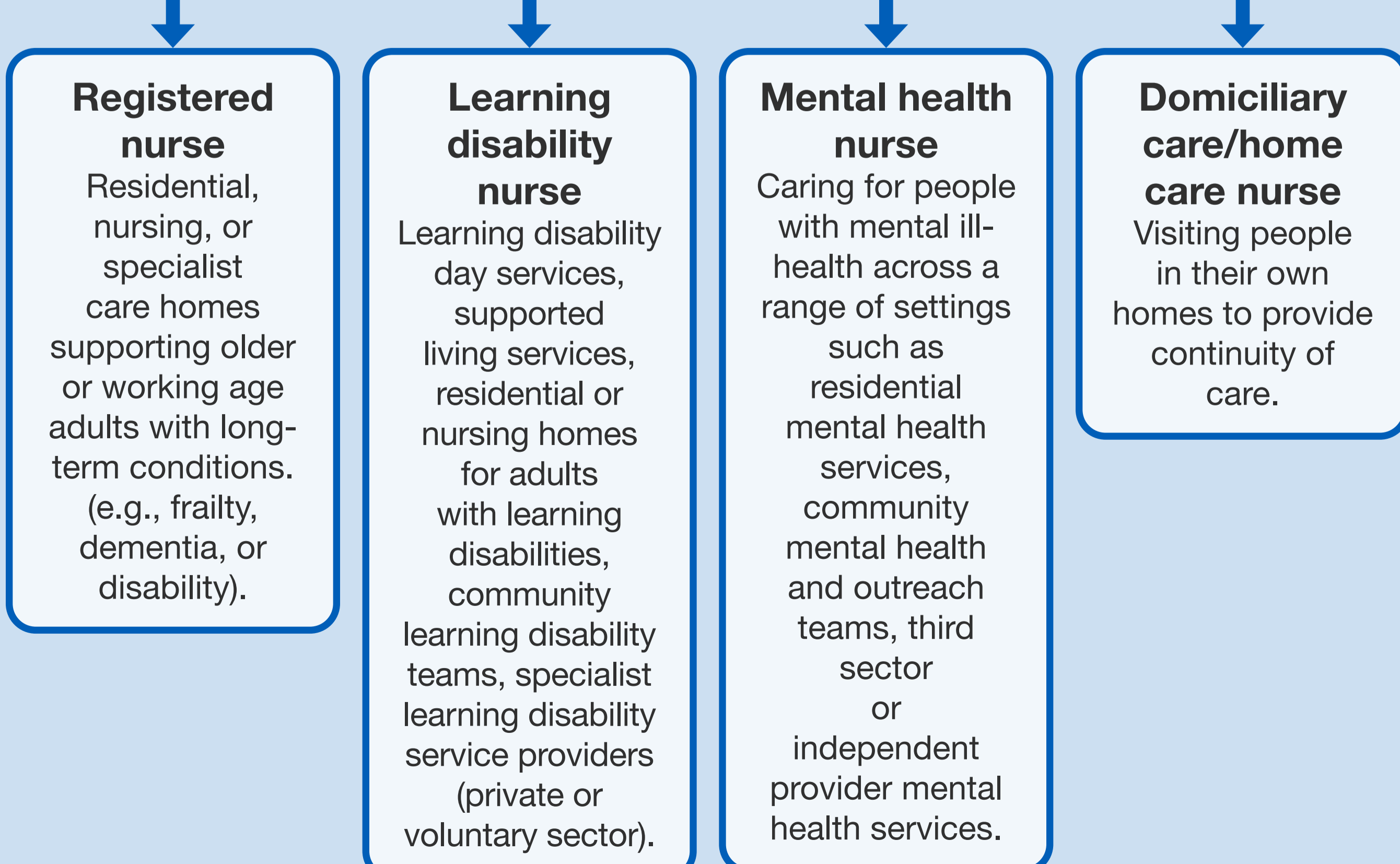
Where you might begin



How you could qualify



Examples of first roles in adult social care settings once qualified



*We recommend checking with relevant higher education institutes and individual providers for detailed and up-to-date entry requirements, as well as information on specific programmes.

Careers in nursing

Safiya's story – from Support Worker to Registered Nurse

Safiya began her career in adult social care after moving to the UK.

Safiya worked as a support worker in learning disability and community-based services, supporting people with a wide range of needs. Over time, she built strong, trusting relationships with the people she supported and developed confidence, resilience, and a deep commitment to person-centred care.

Although she enjoyed her role, Safiya had always been interested in nursing - particularly learning disability nursing. Her motivation was personal as well as professional, influenced by her experience of supporting a family member with a learning disability. However, at first, she couldn't see a clear pathway from her support worker role into nursing. Returning to full-time study to qualify didn't feel realistic.

With encouragement from her manager, Safiya began talking openly about her ambitions during supervision. Together, they developed a personal development plan to help her move closer to her aspirations to further her career in the sector. As part of her development, she was supported to complete Functional Skills qualifications in English and maths and achieved a Level 3 Diploma in Adult Social Care. She was also given opportunities to shadow registered nurses delivering care in the community, which helped her better understand the profession and reaffirmed for her that pursuing nursing was the right next step.

When her employer introduced a Learning Disability Nursing degree apprenticeship, Safiya knew this was the opportunity she had been waiting for. The apprenticeship allowed her to stay with the organisation in paid employment in her current role while completing her training, making it a viable option for her to progress.

During the programme, Safiya completed placements in both adult social care and NHS settings. She developed clinical skills, built confidence in decision-making, and gained experience working in multidisciplinary teams. While she valued her NHS placements, they also helped her realise that social care was where she wanted to build her career long-term. She valued the continuity of care, the autonomy of the registered nurse role in adult social care, and the opportunity to develop long-term relationships with the people she supports.

After qualifying, Safiya began her nursing preceptorship within her employer's learning disability service. With support from a clinical lead and her wider team, she continued to build her confidence as a newly qualified nurse.

Today, Safiya works as a learning disability nurse in adult social care. Her role includes clinical work, care planning, and co-ordinating support, but what she values most is the continuity of care she can offer. This long-term approach allows her to truly support individuals, advocate for their needs, and provide holistic, person-centred care. Seeing the lasting impact of her work on people's independence and quality of life is what makes the role so meaningful to her. While the work can be challenging at times, Safiya finds it deeply rewarding and takes real pride in the difference she makes in the lives of those she supports.

Could this be you?

If you're working in adult social care and feel ready for more clinical responsibility, nursing could be a natural progression. Degree apprenticeships make it possible to qualify while staying in work, building on the experience and values you already have. Safiya's journey shows that with the right support and determination, a career in nursing can grow directly from frontline care.

An employer story

A care organisation developing registered nurses from within

As a large provider operating multiple nursing homes, an organisation faced ongoing difficulties recruiting and retaining registered nurses. Competition from other healthcare employers and high turnover rates made vacancies hard to fill, placing pressure on services, and increasing reliance on agency staff. Leaders recognised that they needed a long-term solution in order to grow and sustain the workforce.

In response, the organisation began by offering experienced care staff the opportunity to develop skills in delegated healthcare activities under appropriate clinical supervision. Selected staff received additional training in areas such as monitoring blood pressure and oxygen levels, supporting medication administration, and recognising and escalating signs of deterioration.

This approach helped to strengthen clinical capacity within services while providing opportunities for individuals to build confidence and professional curiosity. For some of the care workers, the exposure to more clinical responsibilities sparked an interest in progressing further. With a better understanding of nursing practice, and the confidence that they could develop the required skills, several wanted to develop their careers to qualify.

In response, the organisation decided to create a dedicated progression route for its existing workforce. Working in partnership with a university and an NHS trust, it introduced a registered nurse degree apprenticeship pathway. This offered a realistic opportunity for staff who had already shown commitment and capability in enhanced roles to move into professional qualification. Apprentices remained employed throughout, combining academic study with structured, supported learning and practice in the workplace.

The organisation actively embedded appropriate levels of support throughout the programme. Apprentices were given protected study time alongside their existing role, where rotas were adjusted to enable attendance at university and completion of off-the-job learning requirements. Clinical leads and senior nurses were appointed as practice supervisors, ensuring apprentices received regular supervision and structured feedback. The appointment of an internal co-ordinator ensured that placements, both within social care services and in NHS settings, were planned and supported effectively.

Throughout the 3-year programme, apprentices applied new knowledge directly within services and gradually took on more responsibility. Upon qualification, many moved into registered nurse roles within the organisation, bringing continuity of care and a strong understanding of adult social care contexts. Some have since progressed into clinical leadership roles, further embedding expertise within the organisation.

By developing clear progression pathways from within its own workforce, the organisation has strengthened its workforce capability, improved retention, and created a talent pipeline grounded in adult social care values and practice.