A new fast-track diploma course has been launched as an alternative route into nursing for students without traditional qualifications.

The course, devised by Sheffield College and Sheffield Teaching Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust, is intended to ‘address a skills shortage in the health workforce and meet the future staffing needs of hospitals’.

The access to nursing (health professions) higher education diploma is a one-year course, starting in September, for people who are already employed by an NHS trust or healthcare organisation in a caring role.

Access courses carry the same weight as A-levels, so on completion diploma students can apply for a place on an undergraduate nursing degree course.

Candidates must have a grade C or higher in GCSE English and maths.

Sheffield Teaching Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust chief nurse Hilary Chapman said: ‘This is a vital step forward in ensuring that the nursing workforce of the future has the appropriate level of skills.’