

Standards for education and training

Part 3:

Standards for return to practice programmes

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These updated standards were approved by Council at their meeting on 25 January 2023.

About our standards

Our standards for education and training includes the Standards framework for nursing¹ and midwifery education, Standards for student supervision and assessment, and programme standards specific to each approved programme.

Our [standards](#) for education and training are set out in three parts:

[Part 1: Standards framework for nursing and midwifery education](#)

[Part 2: Standards for student supervision and assessment](#)

Part 3: Programme standards:

- [Standards for pre-registration nursing programmes](#)
- [Standards for pre-registration midwifery programmes](#)
- [Standards for pre-registration nursing associate programmes](#)
- [Standards for prescribing programmes](#)
- [Standards for post-registration programmes: programmes leading to specialist community public health nurse qualifications and programmes leading to community nursing specialist practice qualifications](#)
- [Standards for return to practice programmes](#)

Supporting information for our [Standards for student supervision and assessment](#) is on our [website](#).

These standards help nursing and midwifery [students](#) achieve NMC proficiencies and programme outcomes. All nursing and midwifery professionals must practise in line with the requirements of [the Code](#), the professional standards of practice, values and behaviours that nurses, midwives and nursing associates are expected to uphold.

¹ We have used the phrase 'nursing' in this document to apply to the work of nurses and nursing associates. Nursing associates are a distinct profession in England with their own part of our register, but they are part of the nursing team.

Introduction

Our Standards for return to practice programmes set out the legal requirements, entry requirements, programme content, requirements for supervision and assessment and information on the credits/award for return to practice (RtP) programmes.

Nurses, midwives, and nursing associates seeking [readmission](#) to the register, who have practised for fewer than 750 hours in the previous five years, or 450 hours in the three years before their application for readmission to the register, must either successfully complete an NMC approved return to practice programme or pass an NMC test of competence² to be eligible to apply for readmission to the register.

Nurses, midwives and nursing associates approaching [revalidation](#) who have practised for fewer than 450 hours in the three-year period since their registration was last renewed (900 hours if dual registered) or since joining the register, must either successfully complete an NMC approved return to practice programme or pass an NMC test of competence before the date of application for renewal of their registration.

Individuals must complete an approved return to practice programme or pass an NMC test of competence to demonstrate that they meet the relevant proficiencies to remain on, or be readmitted to, the NMC register.

Public safety is central to our standards. Experienced nurses, midwives and nursing associates returning to practice are in this context students, and will be in contact with people throughout their education. It's important they regain confidence and update their skills and knowledge in a safe and effective way.

These programme standards should be read with our [Standards framework for nursing and midwifery education](#) and [Standards for student supervision and assessment](#), both of which apply to all NMC approved programmes. NMC [Approved Education Institutions \(AEIs\)](#) intending to deliver return to practice programmes must comply with all these standards to run an approved programme.

² A two-part test of competence: part one: a computer based test of knowledge, part two: an objective structured clinical examination.

Education providers structure their programmes to comply with our programme standards. They also design their curricula around the published proficiencies for a particular programme and students are assessed against these proficiencies to make sure they are capable of providing safe, effective and kind care that improves health and wellbeing.

Proficiencies are the knowledge, skills and behaviours that nurses, midwives and nursing associates need in order to practise. We publish standards of proficiency for the nursing and midwifery professions as well as proficiencies for NMC approved post-registration qualifications.

We believe that involving people who use services and members of the public in the planning and delivery of curricula will promote public confidence in the education of nurses. We expect the use of supportive evidence and engagement from people who have experienced care.

Curricula for RtP programmes will be flexible to accommodate mixed cohorts of returning nurses, midwives and nursing associates with a range of learning needs and prior experience as registered professionals.

RtP students are assessed against relevant proficiencies to make sure they are capable of providing safe, effective and kind care that improves health and wellbeing.

Our standards for education and training highlight the need for programmes to adopt an inclusive approach to recruitment, selection and progression, ensuring admissions and all other academic processes are open, fair, transparent and demonstrate an understanding of and take measures to address underrepresentation.

Through our [quality assurance](#) processes we check that education programmes meet all of our standards, that the programme outcomes relate to the proficiencies for particular qualifications and that the AEs and [practice learning partners](#) are managing risks effectively. We monitor risks to quality in education and training using internal and external intelligence. This intelligence gathering includes analysis of system regulators' reports.

Before any programme can be run, we make sure it meets our standards. We do this through an approvals process, in accordance with our [quality assurance framework](#).

Overall responsibility for the day-to-day management of the quality of any educational programme lies with the AEI in partnership with its practice learning partners.

Legislative framework

Article 19(3) of the [Nursing and Midwifery Order 2001](#) allows our Council to set standards for those who have not practised for, or during, a prescribed period, for them to undertake such education or training or to gain such experience as it shall specify in standards.

Article 19(4) of the Order states that for standards established under Article 19(3) our approval and enforcement for education and training (Part IV of the Order) can apply.

Returning to, and remaining on, the NMC register

Standards for return to practice programmes follow the student journey and are grouped under the following five headings:

1. Selection, admission and progression

Standards about an applicant's suitability for participation in a return to practice programme

2. Curriculum

Standards for the content, delivery and evaluation of the return to practice programme

3. Practice learning

Standards specific to learning for nurses, midwives and nursing associates that takes place in practice settings as part of a programme

4. Supervision and assessment

Standards for safe and effective supervision and assessment for return to practice programmes

5. Qualification or credits to be awarded and information on NMC registration

Standards which outline the award for each profession and how to apply to re-join the NMC register for those seeking readmission

1 Selection, admission and progression

Approved education institutions, together with practice learning partners, must:

- 1.1** confirm on entry to the programme that students are, or were, registered with the NMC
- 1.2** confirm on entry to the programme that students:
 - 1.2.1** demonstrate values in accordance with [the Code](#)
 - 1.2.2** have capability to behave in accordance with [the Code](#)
 - 1.2.3** have capability to update numeracy skills required to meet programme outcomes
 - 1.2.4** can demonstrate proficiency in English language
 - 1.2.5** have capability in literacy to meet programme outcomes
 - 1.2.6** have capability for digital and technological literacy to meet programme outcomes
- 1.3** ensure students' [health and character](#) is sufficient to enable safe and effective practice on entering the programme, throughout the programme and when submitting the supporting declaration of health and character in line with the NMC's health and character guidance³. This includes facilitating satisfactory and timely occupational health assessment and criminal record checks
- 1.4** ensure students are fully informed of the requirement to declare immediately any police charges, cautions, convictions or conditional discharges or determinations that their fitness to practise is impaired made by other regulators, professional bodies and educational establishments, and that any declarations are dealt with promptly, fairly and lawfully

3 [Guidance on health and character](#)

- 1.5** ensure the person responsible for directing the educational programme or their designated substitute is able to provide supporting declarations of health and character for students who have completed a return to practice programme
- 1.6** consider students' prior learning and experience in relation to the standards of proficiency, programme outcomes, and the students intended scope of practice upon readmission, and
- 1.7** support students throughout the programme in updating their abilities in numeracy, literacy and digital and technological literacy to meet programme outcomes.

2 Curriculum

Approved education institutions, together with practice learning partners, must:

- 2.1** ensure that programmes comply with the NMC [Standards framework for nursing and midwifery education](#)
- 2.2** comply with the NMC [Standards for student supervision and assessment](#)
- 2.3** ensure that programme learning outcomes reflect relevant standards of proficiency
- 2.4** design and deliver a programme that supports students to return to their intended area of practice
- 2.5** ensure that programmes delivered in Wales comply with legislation which supports use of the Welsh language
- 2.6** state routes within the return to practice programme that allow:
 - 2.6.1** nurses to be readmitted to, or remain on, the register in one or more of the specific fields of nursing practice: adult, children's, learning disabilities and mental health nursing
 - 2.6.2** midwives to be readmitted to, or remain on, the register as midwives
 - 2.6.3** specialist community public health nurses (SCPHNs) to be readmitted to, or remain on, the register as specialist community public health nurses
 - 2.6.4** nursing associates to be readmitted to, or remain on, the register as nursing associates
- 2.7** set out the content necessary to meet the programme outcomes for each field of nursing practice: adult, children's, learning disabilities and mental health nursing

- 2.8** set out the general and professional content necessary to confirm the relevant standards of proficiency and programme outcomes for each part of the register
- 2.9** ensure that specific content such as: safeguarding, consent, pharmacology and medicines administration and optimisation is included for the student to be readmitted to, or remain on, the register
- 2.10** ensure the curriculum uses a range of learning and teaching strategies which may include flexible or distance learning, which must be used effectively and proportionately to support learning and assessment
- 2.11** ensure technology and simulation opportunities are used effectively and proportionately across the curriculum to support supervision, learning and assessment, and
- 2.12** ensure that all return to practice programmes are of an appropriate length to support programme outcomes.

3 Practice learning

Approved education institutions, together with practice learning partners, must:

- 3.1** provide practice learning opportunities that confirm students can deliver safe and effective care in their intended area of practice to a diverse range of people
- 3.2** provide practice learning opportunities that confirm students meet the communication and relationship management skills and procedures in their intended area of practice, as set out in the relevant standards of proficiency
- 3.3** ensure that students experience a range of settings for their intended area of practice, demonstrating an ability to meet the holistic needs of people
- 3.4** take account of students' individual needs, personal circumstances and intended area of practice when allocating their practice learning including making **reasonable adjustments** for students with disabilities, and
- 3.5** ensure that students are **supernumerary**.

4 Supervision and assessment

Approved education institutions, together with practice learning partners, must:

- 4.1** ensure that support, supervision, learning and assessment provided complies with the NMC [Standards framework for nursing and midwifery education](#)
- 4.2** ensure that support, supervision, learning and assessment provided complies with the NMC [Standards for student supervision and assessment](#)
- 4.3** ensure they inform the NMC of the name of the person responsible for directing the education programme
- 4.4** provide students with constructive feedback throughout the programme to support their development
- 4.5** ensure throughout the programme that students meet the required standard of proficiency and programme outcomes to be readmitted to, or remain on, the register
- 4.6** ensure that students meet communication and relationship management skills and procedures
- 4.7** assess students to confirm proficiency in preparation for being readmitted to, or remaining on, the register
- 4.8** ensure that relevant proficiencies are recorded in a record of achievement which confirms these proficiencies and skills have been met, and
- 4.9** confirm students' safe and effective practice and suitability to be readmitted to, or remain on, the register.

5 Qualification or credits to be awarded and information on NMC registration

Approved education institutions, together with practice learning partners, must:

- 5.1** ensure that the minimum credits/award for a return to practice programme for nurses and midwives is at bachelor's degree level and post graduate masters level for Specialist Community and Public Health Nurse programmes
- 5.2** ensure that the minimum credits/award for a return to practice programme for nursing associates is at foundation degree level
- 5.3** notify students during and before completion of the programme how they apply to re-join the NMC register, and
- 5.4** notify students during and before successful completion of the programme that they have five years⁴ to reinstate their registration with the NMC. In the event of a student failing to re-register within five years they will have to undertake additional education and training or gain such experience as specified in our standards.

⁴ [Standards and guidance on the requirements for those who first apply for registration more than five years after being awarded an approved qualification](#)

Glossary

Approved Education Institutions

(AEIs): the status awarded by the NMC to an institution, or part of an institution, or combination of institutions that works in partnership with practice placement and workplace learning providers. AEIs will have provided us with assurance that they are accountable and capable of delivering NMC approved education programmes.

Educators: in the context of the NMC standards for education and training, educators are those who deliver, support, supervise and assess theory, practice and/or work placed learning.

Health and character requirements:

as stipulated in NMC legislation (Articles 9(2)(b) and 5(2)(b) of the Nursing and Midwifery Order 2001) 'good health' means that the applicant is capable of safe and effective practice either with or without reasonable adjustments. It does not mean the absence of a health condition or disability. Each applicant seeking admission to the register or to renew registration, whether or not they have been registered before, is required to declare any pending charges, convictions, police cautions and determinations made by other regulatory bodies.

Practice learning partners:

organisations that provide practice learning necessary for supporting pre-registration and post-registration students in meeting proficiencies and programme outcomes.

Quality assurance: NMC processes for making sure all AEIs and their approved education programmes comply with our standards.

Reasonable adjustments: are where a student requires a reasonable adjustment related to a disability. We also use it to mean adjustment relating to any protected characteristics as set out in equalities and human rights legislation.

Simulation: an educational method which uses a variety of modalities to support students in developing their knowledge, behaviours and skills, with the opportunity for repetition, feedback, evaluation and reflection to achieve their programme outcomes and be confirmed as capable of safe and effective practice.

Student: any individual enrolled onto an NMC approved education programme whether full-time or less than full-time.

Supernumerary: Students in practice or workplace learning must be supported to learn without being counted as part of the staffing required for safe and effective care in that setting. For employer-led return to practice, this includes practice placements within their place of employment; this does not apply when they are working in their substantive role.

Placements should enable students to learn to provide safe and effective care, not merely to observe; students can and should add real value to care. The contribution students make will increase over time as they gain proficiency and they will continue to benefit from ongoing guidance and feedback.

Once a student has demonstrated that they are proficient, they should be able to fulfil tasks without direct oversight. The level of supervision a student needs is based on the professional judgement of their supervisors, taking into account any associated risks and the student's knowledge, proficiency and confidence.

What we do

Our vision is safe, effective and kind nursing and midwifery practice that improves everyone's health and wellbeing. As the independent regulator of more than 771,000 nursing and midwifery professionals, we have an important role to play in making this a reality.

Our core role is to **regulate**. First, we promote high education and professional standards for nurses and midwives across the UK, and nursing associates in England. Second, we maintain the register of professionals eligible to practise. Third, we investigate concerns about nurses, midwives and nursing associates – something that affects a tiny minority of professionals each year. We believe in giving professionals the chance to address concerns, but we'll always take action when needed.

To regulate well, we **support** our professions and the public. We create resources and guidance that are useful throughout people's careers, helping them to deliver our standards in practice and address new challenges. We also support people involved in our investigations, and we're increasing our visibility so people feel engaged and empowered to shape our work.

Regulating and supporting our professions allows us to **influence** health and social care. We share intelligence from our regulatory activities and work with our partners to support workforce planning and sector-wide decision making. We use our voice to speak up for a healthy and inclusive working environment for our professions.



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