

Nursing and Midwifery Council (NMC) response to the Department for Work and Pensions and Department of Health consultation ‘Improving Lives: the work, health and disability green paper’

Introduction

- 1 The Nursing and Midwifery Council (NMC) is the independent professional regulator for nurses and midwives in the UK. We exist to protect the public. We do this by setting the standards which nurses and midwives must uphold to join and remain on our register and taking action in the public interest when those standards are not met.

Consultation response

- 2 We welcome the opportunity to respond to this consultation on work, health and disability. Our response is framed within the context of our remit as the professional regulator for nursing and midwifery. The consultation raises a number of issues which fall outside our remit and we do not address these in our response.

NMC comments

- 3 We have responded to the consultation questions which we feel are most relevant to our remit.

Q. 3.1 What support should we offer to help those ‘in work’ stay in work and progress?

- 4 We have answered this question in relation to helping nurses to stay in work, rather than in context of the nurses’ role in helping people within their care to stay in work.
- 5 The NMC is committed to protecting the public by ensuring that all nurses and midwives are capable of safe and effective practice. First, we set the bar for registration with us; an individual cannot work as a nurse or midwife in the UK without a valid registration with us.
- 6 When registered, the individual is bound by our Code of professional standards and behaviour, and every three years, the individual will need to ‘revalidate’ with us. This is to demonstrate that they are up to date with the latest safe and effective practice methods and are abiding by the Code. So, there is a continuing and proactive safeguard in place beyond initial registration with us.

- 7 We help support nurses and midwives to remain on the NMC register (and therefore in work) by providing alternative support arrangements to help them through our registration processes. For example we recognise that there may be some circumstances when nurses and midwives cannot meet the revalidation requirements because of a disability as defined by the Equality Act 2010. These arrangements aim to enable registrants to remain on the register while at the same time protecting the public.
- 8 There are situations where the standards of our Code are not met and there is a concern about a nurse or midwife's fitness to practise on the basis of health concerns. We have a fitness to practise function to investigate allegations and an adjudication process to decide whether to take regulatory action or not. This could result, in the most extreme cases, in the nurse or midwife being struck off our register to prevent them from working as a nurse or midwife. We make reasonable adjustments in our processes to enable the nurse or midwife to engage in the process without barriers.

Q 8.2 What expectation should there be on employers to recruit or retain disabled people and people with health conditions?

- 9 We expect nurses and midwives to be of sufficiently good health to be capable of safe and effective practice. This means that the individual is capable of safe and effective practice with the implementation of reasonable adjustments where necessary and does not mean the absence of a health condition or a disability. We never assume that the presence of a health condition or a disability will necessarily render a nurse or midwife incapable of safe and effective practice.
- 10 We expect the employers of nurses and midwives to make reasonable adjustments and advance equality of opportunity for disabled nurses in line with the Equality Act 2010 (and other relevant equalities legislation). Similarly, as an employer we endeavor to recruit and retain disabled people, this year we are implementing a People Strategy that will include objectives to improve inclusion and accessibility through our recruitment and retention processes.

Q .14.6 What is the best way to encourage clinicians, allied health professionals and commissioners of health and other services to promote work as a health outcome?

- 11 The NMC's overriding objective is to protect the public and ensure that those who come onto our register have met the requirements for safe and effective practice as a nurse or midwife, having completed the requisite education programme. To ensure this, all nursing and midwifery education programmes that lead to entry onto the register, and the education institutions that deliver them, are subject to approval and quality assurance by the NMC.
- 12 We set the standards of competence required for entry to the register and associated standards that underpin education governance and programme delivery. However, our role does not extend beyond the setting of standards into the setting of associated curricula that underpins programme delivery. Development of curricula is instead the responsibility of approved education institutions (AEIs).

- 13 Currently, our requirements for the pre-registration education of nurses and midwives are set out in our Standards for pre-registration nursing education (NMC, 2010) and our Standards for pre-registration midwifery education (NMC, 2009).
- 14 As part of our education strategic programme, we are setting out new standards of proficiency for the future registered nurse and the future registered midwife at the point of entry to the register. Our standards will be necessarily all encompassing and high level. However, given the changing shape of health and care both now and into the future, our new standards will provide a clear person centred focus, supported by an increased focus on public and population health.
- 15 Our new standards will also ensure that nurses and midwives are equipped to play a lead role in helping people to improve and maintain their mental, behavioural and physical health and wellbeing. Nurses will also need to support and enable people at all stages of their lives to manage and improve their current health, and prevent ill health.
- 16 Preparing both nurses and midwives through their education and training to take on a wider role in public health and person centred care will ensure that they are sufficiently well equipped to encourage health promoting behaviours, including highlighting the potential benefits of work to an individual's health.

Education strategic programme 2016-2020

- 17 Our Council's strategy identifies education as a key area of focus for us over the coming years. In 2016, we commenced a four year programme of reform of our education standards to ensure that they are fit for the future. This will include developing revised standards of proficiency for nurses and midwives of the future, and carrying out a review of our quality assurance (QA) function.
- 18 In addition, we are developing a new education framework and associated programme requirements. In doing so we will set out new standards for those institutions that deliver our programmes, and the programmes which they deliver.
- 19 We will take into account the potential implications of these reforms if implemented in the context of our planned education work programme.

Conclusion

- 20 We are happy to provide any further information or clarification.

14 February 2017