

Pre-registration nursing & midwifery provision in Scotland

Introduction

Nursing and midwifery staff account for over 42% of the NHS Scotland Workforce.¹ Ten universities in Scotland are currently responsible for educating pre-registration nurses and midwives in Scotland.² In 2014-15 3,233 students commenced courses in nursing and midwifery³. The vast majority of these students, once graduated, will go on to provide high-quality care across a wide variety of settings to patients in Scotland's health and social care system. Others will choose to continue in education or to begin a career in research.

Across the UK, pre-registration nursing education is under intense scrutiny as a result of the ongoing Nursing and Midwifery Council (NMC) review of standards and widely acknowledged demographic and workforce changes. Scotland has its own strategic aims for improvements to nursing education albeit within the NMC framework.

This paper outlines the policy context surrounding discussion about pre-registration nursing curricula in Scotland and sets out the Council of Deans of Health Scotland's commitment to leadership in this area.

Pre-registration nursing education in Scotland

There is real diversity in Scotland's provision of pre-registration nursing education. Students can choose between a wide range of universities with different teaching and research profiles, histories and outlooks. Students enter at various stages in life with varied aspirations, interests and backgrounds and can choose to study for the pre-registration nursing degree at ordinary, honours or Masters level, over two, three or four years or in some cases part-time. A small number of graduate

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Purpose: This paper is the product of a Council of Deans of Health Scotland working group on pre-registration nursing. It sets out the current policy context for pre-registration nursing curricula and key commitments from Council of Deans of Health Scotland members.

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¹ Scottish Government (2014) [Setting The Direction For Nursing & Midwifery Education in Scotland](#).

² This excludes the Open University which also operates in Scotland

³ NHS Education for Scotland Nursing and Midwifery Annual Statistical Supplement 2014-2015 [Figures exclude Open University provision]

students take shortened courses. Universities in Scotland provide courses across the four fields of practice – adult, child, mental health and learning disability nursing as well as midwifery. The end point in all cases is a graduate nurse or midwife with a solid foundation of experience, knowledge and competence to enter the workforce and begin a career characterised by a wealth of different opportunities, pathways and challenges.

The role of the Council of Deans of Health Scotland

Members of the Council of Deans of Health Scotland are responsible for educating every nurse or midwife who undertakes their pre-registration education in Scotland, as well as those who go on to further study. That makes Council members the key collective source of expertise on how higher education in Scotland can meet the future requirements of registered professionals.

Pre-registration nursing policy context

Pre-registration nursing and midwifery education in all four UK nations is currently under a significant amount of scrutiny. The NMC, which regulates all pre-registration nursing education, is undertaking a major review of its Standards, which it is aiming to complete by the end of 2017. The NMC has highlighted unprecedented change in the health and care landscape in recent years particularly ‘changes in skill mix, with growing numbers of unregistered carers and blurring of professional boundaries, [which] are placing greater responsibility and accountability on the registered nurse for delegation, support and supervision’.⁴

The NMC review follows a number of high-profile recent reports underlining the rapidly changing role of nursing in the twenty-first century. This includes a number of reviews of nursing education in different UK home nations, such as *Setting the Direction for Nursing*



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⁴ NMC Council 27 January 2016, NMC/16/09, pp. 105-110, <https://www.nmc.org.uk/globalassets/sitedocuments/councilpapersanddocuments/council-2016/council-meeting-papers-20160127.pdf>

and Midwifery Education in Scotland (2014),⁵ *Raising the Bar* (2015)⁶ – an England-focused review co-sponsored by the NMC, and the Welsh *Aligning nursing skills – guidelines* (2015).⁷

Major trends in health and social care are changing the way care is delivered. The aging population, increased prevalence of long term conditions and mental health problems, advances in and increasing reliance on technology are all shifting the emphasis from acute care towards prevention, self-management and integrated care, which is increasingly being delivered in the community by multi-professional teams. This was clearly articulated in Scotland's *2020 Vision for Health and Social Care* (2011). This aspired to a future where:

'We will have a healthcare system where we have integrated health and social care, a focus on prevention, anticipation and supported self management. When hospital treatment is required, and cannot be provided in a community setting, day case treatment will be the norm. Whatever the setting, care will be provided to the highest standards of quality and safety, with the person at the centre of all decisions. There will be a focus on ensuring that people get back into their home or community environment as soon as appropriate, with minimal risk of re-admission.'⁸

To meet these challenges, registered nurses of the future will need to grow in their role as decision makers and leaders, embracing change and equipped to meet changing patient and population needs. New registrants need to be competent to work in specialist fields but have the core skills to work in diverse and demanding work settings, delivering care to individuals with a multiplicity of needs.



The Council of Deans of Health Scotland is proud of the diversity of provision of pre-registration nursing and midwifery in Scotland and of its strong graduate output.

⁵ Scottish Government (2014) [Setting The Direction For Nursing & Midwifery Education in Scotland](#).

⁶ Health Education England (2015), [Raising the Bar: Shape of Caring - A Review of the Future Education and Training of Registered Nurses and Care Assistants](#).

⁷ WEDS (2014) [Aligning Nursing Skills – Guidelines An All Wales Governance Framework 2014](#)

⁸ Scottish Government (2011) 2020 Vision for Health and Social Care

It is likely that nurses of the future will be expected to have even higher skills at the point of registration than is currently the case. More than ever before, universities must promote critical thinking, emotional intelligence, decision making, leadership, evidence based care and accountability.

It is important that universities are enabled to nurture talent, through routes such as Honours and Masters level pre-registration courses and by enabling pre-registrants to develop the skills needed to build on the existing knowledge base through future research. In view of the changing demands on nurses, the Council believes that Scotland should aspire towards an all-Honours profession.

Everyone Matters: 2020 Workforce Vision (2013) was developed in recognition of the vital role NHS Scotland staff have in supporting and driving changes to the healthcare system. The 2014 publication *Setting the Direction for Nursing and Midwifery Education in Scotland* went further, setting out six strategic aims to prepare a nursing and midwifery workforce for 2020 and beyond, several of which relate to pre-registration education:

NHS Scotland's *Setting the direction* (2014) - Six strategic aims for nursing and midwifery education in Scotland [Aims relating directly to pre-registration nursing are highlighted.]

Develop a sustainable national approach to post-registration and postgraduate education and continuing professional development

1. **Embed NHS Scotland values and professionalism in all aspects of nursing and midwifery education, research and practice**
2. **Deliver dynamic pre-registration nursing and midwifery education**
3. **Enhance the quality of the practice learning environment for staff and students**
4. Strengthen clinical academic collaboration to ensure that research and evidence underpin and drive improvements in quality
5. Develop and infrastructure to deliver efficient, responsible and sustainable education.

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The Council of Deans of Health has constituted a working group, including Scottish members, to develop its own *Future Nurse* document to feed into the NMC review of pre-registration standards. This discusses in detail the Council's initial views on the key outcomes of future registered nurse education across all four fields and will be published this year/has been published [link to follow] to stimulate further discussion and debate.

As *Future Nurse* points out, any changes to pre-registration curricula will need to be looked at alongside improvements to practice learning, reflection on mentorship and the role of those who supervise practice education, and work on the range and quality of practice placements available.

Looking ahead – the link with post-registration education

The aim of pre-registration nursing and midwifery education programmes is to develop graduates ready to join the NMC's professional register and start what will hopefully be a lifelong career as a registered nurse or midwife, progressing from novice to expert. However well-planned and delivered the pre-registration curricula, there is nevertheless a limit to what can be achieved within this initial period of education. Nurses need flexibility to build on their existing qualifications throughout their working lives.

The Council of Deans of Health Scotland is working with Scottish Government to develop a sustainable national approach to post-registration and postgraduate education and continuing professional development. This is absolutely crucial if our nursing workforce is to be fit for the future. Post-registration education will need to evolve to include greater emphasis on the benefits of post-registration preceptorship as well as the opportunities that allow experienced nurses to teach, lead and manage the future workforce.



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Commitments from members of the Council of Deans of Health Scotland

- The Council of Deans of Health Scotland is proud of the diversity of provision of pre-registration nursing in Scotland and of its strong graduate output.
- The Council is committed to ongoing engagement with NHS Scotland about the future of pre-registration nursing education in Scotland and, through the Council of Deans of Health, will continue to feed-in to the NMC's UK-wide review of pre-registration standards.
- The Council views pre-registration education as just the start of life-long education for nurses, providing the platform for the continuing professional development necessary for career progression, specialisation and leadership. The Council is committed to working with NHS Scotland to create clear career pathways for nurses and ensure that post-registration courses are available to serve the needs of the future workforce.