

Guidance for the introduction of the Essential Skills Clusters for Pre-registration Nursing programmes.

The NMC has a duty under the Nursing and Midwifery Order 2001¹ to set standards for education programmes and to keep these under review. For pre-registration nursing these are set out within the *Standards of proficiency for pre-registration Nursing Education* (NMC 2004) (*Nursing Standards*)

The guidance that follows will enable education providers and those providing supervision and mentorship to pre-registration nursing programmes to introduce the NMC Essential Skills Clusters (ESCs) in Annexe 2 to support the achievement of the *Nursing Standards*. The ESCs can be used from the date published but must be incorporated into programmes for all new students commencing from September 2008.

Why is the NMC introducing Essential Skills Clusters?

The ESCs have been developed as an outcome of the Review of fitness for practice at the point of registration²; they aim to provide clarity of expectation for the public and profession alike and seek to address some of the concerns about skill deficits arising from the Review.

The consultation supported the introduction of ESCs for specific areas of practice to complement the existing NMC pre-registration outcomes and proficiencies for better ensuring entry to the branch programme and subsequently to the register, so that new qualifiers are capable of safe and effective practice. The need for a progression point between CFP and Branch was reinforced.

Existing NMC outcomes and proficiencies, as initially identified within the *Nursing Standards*, were broadly defined. The approach was intentional, providing opportunities at local level for commissioners, education and placement providers, to shape the curriculum. Whilst there are strengths in this approach, there were also weaknesses and key practice requirements can be overlooked. ESCs may help to address this and others might be added in the future. The ESCs will remain under review and be monitored and evaluated through NMC QA processes. The ESCs will form an addendum to the current *Nursing Standards* with any updates being made available through the NMC website.

What are Essential Skills Clusters for Nursing?

The ESCs are UK-wide generic skills statements set out under broad headings that identify skills to support the achievement of the existing NMC outcomes for entry to the branch, and the proficiencies for entry to the register. These *Nursing Standards* continue to exist and are unchanged.

The ESCs do not set out a definitive syllabus or a common assessment of practice document and these will continue to be for programme providers and their partners to determine. The ESCs are generic and applicable to all four branches of nursing. Those identified for entry to the register should be addressed within the context of the

¹ Statutory Instrument 2002 No. 253 The Nursing and Midwifery Order 2001.

² Consultation relating to the Review of fitness for practice at the point of registration can be viewed at www.nmc-uk.org by selecting 'Consultations' and then 'Past Consultations'.

branch field of practice. The focus has been on identifying skills that are essential rather than identifying all component skills relating to a specific area of practice. The clusters do not encompass all the skills needed to be proficient as a nurse; what they do is to address potential areas of deficit so that the public can be assured that they are identified and assessed within every pre-registration nursing programme across the UK.

ESCs are being introduced for: care and compassion, communication, organisational aspects of care, infection prevention and control, nutrition and fluid maintenance, and medicines management.

The nursing Essential Skills Clusters (ESCs) identify skills that:

- are under broad headings fundamental to best practice
- relate to all nursing fields of practice
- reflect patient expectation of new qualifiers in specific areas
- complement existing NMC outcomes and proficiencies
- are required to be incorporated within all pre-registration nursing programmes
- require specific testing
- require to be demonstrated before entry to the branch programme and prior to registration
- will be subject to ongoing monitoring and review

How are the ESCs set out?

The first column includes a statement of patient/client expectation (patient/client has been used throughout to include all service users). This is followed by two columns, the first of which sets out essential skills to be demonstrated before entering the branch programme, the second column identifies those to be achieved by the end of the branch programme. The medicines management ESC has an additional column of indicative content.

The numbers and letters appearing under each subsection within these two columns, identify how the skills map to the respective outcomes and proficiencies within the NMC *Nursing Standards* (see *Annexe 3*) and to the *Code*. Whilst it is essential that the ESCs should interface with competencies, standards and benchmarks developed by others, limited mapping reduces complexity and ensures that the ESCs are focused on supporting the achievement of the NMC *Nursing Standards*. Providers will need to make their own links between the ESCs and local commissioner requirements.

Within the ESC for medicines management, indicative content provides guidance to support changes in medicines legislation. Indicative content therefore is not identified for the remaining ESCs.

Summative health related numerical assessments are required to test skills identified (*) within the ESCs that encompass baseline assessment and calculations associated with medicines, nutrition, fluids and other areas requiring the use of numbers relevant to the field of practice:

- For entry to the branch, programme providers will use the ESCs to inform the nature and content of the assessment, including whether to assess through simulation. They will determine their own pass mark and number of attempts.

- For entry to the register, programme providers will use the ESCs to inform the nature and content of numerical assessment in the branch programme where a 100% pass mark is required and all assessment must take place in the practice setting. The number of attempts is to be determined by the education provider.

How will the Essential Skills Clusters be used?

The ESCs must be in place for **all new students** commencing nursing programmes from September 2008 although providers may introduce the ESCs earlier should they wish to do so.

From September 2008:

- Essential Skills Clusters must be integrated into existing approved pre-registration programmes in a way that they remain visible and identifiable. It will be for programme providers to determine how these are used, incorporated and assessed.
- providers approving new programmes (or re-approving existing programmes) must demonstrate the integration of ESCs into the curriculum and how they are to be used, incorporated and assessed. The application of the ESCs will be evaluated through ongoing NMC quality monitoring.

The ESC skills statements have not been pre-tested for reliability or validity and may not be suitable for directly assessing competence. It is for programme providers to determine and demonstrate how these are integrated, applied and assessed within local assessment schemes.

Many of the ESC skills will already be evident in currently approved programmes. The majority of providers should be able to make minor modifications to incorporate any requirements into existing programmes through their own internal programme development processes without the need for NMC involvement. Should a more major modification be required then providers should contact the NMCs respective quality assurance agent for advice.