

**Consultation on the time limits for
completion of education across all
NMC education standards**

January 2015

Aims of this consultation

- 1 This consultation proposes an amendment to our standards for the training of nurses and midwives. The proposed change is the removal of the current mandatory maximum time limits allowed for the completion of pre and post-registration programmes, to allow for unforeseen interruptions.
- 2 The consultation outlines the current requirements and our approach and seeks the views of stakeholders to inform a decision.

Our current requirements for education

- 3 Requirements for the education of nurses and midwives are set down in our *Standards for pre-registration nursing education* (NMC, 2010),¹ and *Standards for pre-registration Midwifery education* (NMC, 2009).² Requirements for the education of prescribers are set down in *Standards of proficiency for nurse and midwife prescribers* (NMC, 2006).³ Requirements for the education of specialist community public health nurses are set down in *Standards of proficiency for specialist community public health nurses* (NMC, 2004).⁴
- 4 Our overriding objective is to protect the public and ensure that those who enter our register have met the requirements for safe and effective practice as a nurse or midwife, having completed a full education programme. A maximum time limit for programmes was originally included in our pre-registration standards to ensure that the knowledge and skills that a student had acquired throughout their training period remained contemporary.
- 5 The statutory instruments of our predecessor organisations stated this requirement, so this position was bound in the legislation at the time.⁵
- 6 The current requirements for the maximum length of training is dependent on which programme is undertaken. The table below shows the programmes that currently have maximum time periods for completion and states the expected length and currently allowed maximum periods to take into account unexpected interruptions. However, it is important to point out that not all of our standards explicitly state a time limit for completion so we have not applied this requirement consistently.

¹ <http://standards.nmc-uk.org/PublishedDocuments/Standards%20for%20pre-registration%20nursing%20education%2016082010.pdf>

² http://www.nmc-uk.org/Documents/NMC-Publications/nmcStandardsforPre_RegistrationMidwiferyEducation.pdf

³ <http://www.nmc-uk.org/Documents/NMC-Publications/NMC-Standards-proficiency-nurse-and-midwife-prescribers.pdf>

⁴ <https://www.nmc-uk.org/Documents/NMC-Publications/NMC-Standards-of-proficiency-for-specialist-community-public-health-nurses.pdf>

⁵ 1969 Statutory Instrument 1675, Nurses and Midwives, The Nurses Rules Approval Instrument 1969, Statutory instrument Number 873, Nurses, Midwives and Health Visitors, The Nurses, Midwives and Health Visitors Rules Approval Order 1983.

Course	Expected length	Current maximum
Standards which specify a maximum time limit for completion of the programme		
Standards	Normal duration	Maximum completion time limit
Pre-registration nursing (full-time)	Three years	Five years
Pre-registration nursing (part-time)	Not stated	Seven years
Pre-registration midwifery (full-time)	Three years	Five years
Pre-registration midwifery (part-time)	Not stated	Seven years
18 month midwifery post-registration programme (full-time)	18 months (78 weeks)	Two years and six months (132 weeks)
18 month midwifery post-registration programme (part-time)	Not stated	Three years and six months
Nurse and midwife prescribing	One year	Two years
Specialist community public health nurse	78 weeks	156 weeks
Standards which do not specify a maximum time limit for completion of the programme		
Standards for specialist education and practice qualifications	Not stated	Not stated
Standards to support learning and assessment in practice	Not stated	Not stated
Standards for the preparation of supervisors of midwives	Not stated	Not stated

- 7 The current requirements do not allow for any flexibility beyond the maximum timescales outlined above. Students who do not complete within these timescales would currently be required to start their training again from the beginning,

irrespective of their personal circumstances. We do not have any discretion to waive these limits.

- 8 Current evidence suggests that the vast majority of students complete their programme of education within the expected timescales. Only a small number of students extend their period of study to the maximum permitted. However, we are aware that a number of students each year fail to complete within the maximum time limits.
- 9 Within the set limits, approved education institutions currently have responsibility for the student journey. This includes the management of absence, sickness, disciplinary matters and other interruptions.

Why we are revisiting time limits

Equalities legislation and the delivery of our approved programmes

- 10 The Equality Act 2010 requires organisations to demonstrate that all of their functions comply with anti-discrimination requirements and ensure fairness. Our policy reflects this, while requiring that the processes of approved education providers are robust and that those entering our register are fit to practise.
- 11 We continually review our approaches to regulation and ensure they are compliant with legislation. We look for where we could do more beyond this basic requirement by ensuring we act fairly. In relation to the requirements for completing programmes, we are concerned that there is little flexibility for students who need to take longer than the specified time to complete a programme. The result of this is that certain students may be perceived to be disadvantaged, if unforeseen events require longer study periods than are currently allowed for.
- 12 Examples of such interruptions may include:
 - 12.1 consecutive pregnancies;
 - 12.2 illness; or
 - 12.3 having to undertake medium or long-term caring responsibilities for a family member.

Consistency within the healthcare sector

- 13 Other health professional regulators such as the General Medical Council and the Health and Care Professions Council do not specify a timescale for completion of their pre-registration programmes. The management of interruptions to, and completion of programmes, is the responsibility of the education institution. In addition to this, the institution ensures all students meet the educational standards required to enter the register.

Our proposal for change

Removal of the completion timescale criteria from our standards

- 14 We are proposing that responsibility for management of completion timescales should be devolved to approved education institutions, and the maximum completion time limits removed from our standards. We believe that approved education institutions are well placed to judge the impact of interruptions on an individual's standard of proficiency and professional readiness to enter the register.
- 15 Approved education institutions are already required to comply with equalities legislation and this expectation is outlined in our standards and quality assurance framework⁶.

How this would still protect the public

- 16 This proposal would not have any impact on the level of proficiency required to complete a programme and enter our register. A student's entry to the register would remain subject to them meeting all of the proficiencies within the relevant education standards, and completion of a full pre-registration programme. Education providers would be required to demonstrate that they had robust procedures in place. This is to ensure that students completing programmes were fully competent to enter the register, regardless of the length of time taken to complete their studies.
- 17 As part of an ongoing quality assurance of education provision, we would monitor the requirements set down by approved education institutions. We would record the requirements of academic regulations relating to the length of programmes, and would monitor the completion times of students.

Conclusion

- 18 This consultation seeks to find a balance between our duty to protect the public and the legal duty to comply with equalities legislation and ensure fairness.
- 19 We are interested to hear the views of stakeholders to help us understand the implications of our proposals.

Consultation questions

Question 1: The following changes are proposed to the NMC's standards for the training and education of nurses and midwives:

- We are proposing the removal of maximum completion time limits from NMC standards.
- We are also proposing that responsibility for management of completion timescales should be devolved to approved education institutions.

⁶ <http://www.nmc-uk.org/Educators/Quality-assurance-of-education/Quality-assurance-framework/>

How far do you agree or disagree with the proposed changes outlined above?

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree
- I don't know

Please explain your answer.

Question 2: We believe that the proposals would not have any impact on public protection for the following reasons:

- A student's entry to the register would depend on them meeting all of the requirements of our registration standards and completing a full registration programme.
- The approved education institutions would, as now, have to be assured that in awarding a qualification a student has demonstrated the necessary contemporary knowledge and skills required in that programme. The student would still need to demonstrate safe and effective practice to meet our registration criteria.

How far do you agree or disagree that the proposed changes will not impact public protection?

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree
- I don't know

Please explain your answer.

Question 3: How far do you agree or disagree that the proposed approach strikes an appropriate balance between the NMC's responsibilities to ensure public protection while ensuring equality and fairness (as laid out in equalities legislation)?

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree
- I don't know

Please explain your answer.

Next steps and how to respond

This consultation will run from midday on 15 January 2015 until midday on 12 March 2015. To respond to this consultation, please complete the consultation survey on Survey Monkey at www.surveymonkey.com/s/L9PYXN6. Alternatively, you may choose to complete a form available on our consultation web page and return it to consultations@nmc-uk.org.

- 20 After the consultation has closed, we will analyse your responses and use these to inform the approach we should take. We will then present our findings to our Council with a recommendation for how to proceed.
- 21 Should the consultation results lead the Council to agree with the proposals set out above, we would remove the time limits for completion of our approved education programmes in our standards and inform approved education institutions of this in time for the next academic year, 2015–2016.