Standards of proficiency for midwives and Standards for pre-registration midwifery programmes

Consultation supporting information - January 2019
Introduction

We are currently in the second phase of our programme of change for education. This programme is a review and update of all our education and proficiency standards. This is critical in our role for better and safer care which is at the heart of what we do. This phase includes the following elements:

- Draft standards of proficiency for midwives and
- Draft standards for pre-registration midwifery programmes.

We recommend you read this document alongside the draft standards and:

2.1 Part 1: Standards framework for nursing and midwifery education and
2.2 Part 2: Standards for student supervision and assessment.

We are monitoring the impact of exiting the EU on our education programme requirements. Currently we must include the EU minimum training requirements in our programme standards. If we leave the EU and if this no longer applies, we will consider the impact on our standards and if necessary consult on any changes.

Our vision – for the standards of proficiency and programme standards

Our new standards of proficiency for midwives should prepare the future midwife for safe and effective practice now and towards 2030. Our aim is that our draft standards of proficiency are able to prepare midwives at the point of registration to care for women, newborn infants, partners and families across all settings.

Our vision for the future midwife standards is that they should:

- be based on research and evidence
- meet the current and future needs of women, newborn infants, partners and families
- be aligned with the requirements of the maternity strategies of the four countries of the UK, and
- incorporate the recommendations from key reports and enquiries.

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1 Parts 1 and 2 were published in May 2018.
Our new standards of proficiency for midwives and the standards for pre-registration midwifery programmes should:

- be unambiguous, clear and concise, using consistent language
- be accessible to the public
- anticipate likely future conditions for midwifery practice
- be appropriate for all four countries of the UK
- be informed by evidence, taking full account of national and international evidence and data, and the recommendations of key reports
- allow for flexible and innovative approaches to programme delivery
- have a core focus on safety, needs, views, preferences and experiences of women, newborn infants, partners and families in all settings
- draw on a human rights-based approach, promoting equity, diversity, and inclusion
- encompass and promote multi-agency, inter-disciplinary and team working across a range of settings
- be outcome focused, measurable and assessable, considering what a midwife needs to know, and be able to do at the point of initial registration.
Our approach

Draft standards of proficiency for midwives

Our work developing the proposed proficiencies started in April 2017 and has been led by Professor Mary Renfrew. It has been supported by a thought leadership group (TLG) made up of midwives representing different stages and settings of midwifery careers, multidisciplinary professionals, government, policy makers and advocacy groups. This group includes student midwives and midwives representing each of the four countries of the UK.

Our Council agreed that the framework for quality maternal and newborn care (QMNC) published in the Lancet series on midwifery should be the foundation for the development of these draft standards of proficiency. The framework is highly regarded and widely used internationally, is evidence based and outlines the essential needs of all childbearing women, babies and families globally. Use of the framework underlines our ambition to develop midwifery standards in a format which is bespoke and familiar to midwives.

These draft standards of proficiency have been developed through an extensive and rigorous process of evidence review and of engagement with people across the UK.

These standards recognise the evolving evidence base, developments in policy, and changes in the wider health and care context. As a result, there is an increased emphasis in these standards on midwives’ roles in public health and health promotion, understanding social and health inequalities, improving postnatal care, mental health, infant feeding, continuity of care and carer, delivery of care over a period of time, the early stages of building family relationships, working with colleagues and leadership, including transfer of care.

The new standards of proficiency will support future midwives to provide continuity of care, and to provide safe and effective care across settings including the home, community, midwifery-led units, and hospitals. They reflect what the public can expect midwives to know and be able to do in order to deliver safe, effective, respectful, kind, and compassionate midwifery care for all women, newborn infants and families.

There is a strong focus on effective working with multidisciplinary and multi-agency colleagues to pro-actively anticipate, prevent, and manage clinical and social complications, and to develop strength and flexibility in responding to stressful situations.
Draft standards for pre-registration midwifery programmes

A UK-wide reference group, chaired by Professor Gwendolen Bradshaw, led the development of the draft standards for pre-registration midwifery programmes that underpin the draft standards of proficiency for midwives.

These draft standards follow the Standards of education and training framework approved earlier in March 2018 by our Council and published in May 2018. The standards for pre-registration midwifery programmes follow the same outcome based format as for other programme standards that the Council have approved.

A recurring theme from some of our early stakeholder engagement has been whether the current length of midwifery education programmes and the approach to preceptorship are sufficient for midwives in the future to have the required level of proficiency and confidence to practice autonomously at the point of registration. This will be explored as part of our public consultation.

These draft standards will enable midwifery educators in both academic and practice settings to develop innovative approaches to midwifery education. This allows for more robust student learning and assessment while enabling more opportunities for student midwives to gain experience and apply their knowledge when practising midwifery skills across a range of settings.

Drivers for change and supporting evidence

The standards for pre-registration midwifery education were last updated in 2009. Since then, there have been significant changes to the context in which midwives provide care. Women’s needs are now more likely to be complex due to changing demographic and population health profiles, including rising numbers of women experiencing obesity and diabetes, and women becoming pregnant at an older age.

Similarly, since 2009, high profile failings in maternity care have increased public scrutiny of midwifery and maternity services. Although there are many examples of safe, quality midwifery care, the findings from public enquiries into these failings has reinforced the need to develop new standards that are fit for purpose in terms of the knowledge, skills and attributes required to provide safe, effective and compassionate care at the point of registration.
What we’ve done so far

We have been able to build on the earlier independent evaluation of existing pre-registration standards for both midwives and nurses that we commissioned IFF Research to carry out in 2014. This highlighted the need to rectify the known shortfalls in the 2009 standards in relation to key areas such as public health, mental health, and socio-demographic factors that impact on quality, safety, and women and family-centred care.

We have sought to build on the successful approach taken with future nurse and our new Standards framework for nursing and midwifery education.

We have reviewed current research evidence, reviews and reports across the four countries of the UK to identify the recommendations and requirements. These informed the new draft standards. Recommendations for the NMC from different national reports have been addressed in these draft standards.

Our draft standards reflect current best national and international evidence on the health, well-being, needs, views, and preferences of women, newborn infants, partners and families. They are in alignment with the recommendations of government reviews of maternity services and midwifery in the four UK countries.

We have taken into account the changing context in which midwives work and practice in the UK. Positive changes in the wider context include increased involvement of women, their partners and families in decisions about their care, moves to increase continuity of carer and choice for women in regard to the place of birth, and a clear focus on improving the quality of care across maternity services.

We have also considered the current and evolving challenges for the midwifery and maternity context in the UK include changing population health profiles which result in more complex health challenges, growing poverty and inequalities, the clear need to improve services after birth and for women’s and children’s mental health and well-being.

We commissioned the University of Dundee to carry out literature reviews of current evidence and the literature based around three key areas: effective education; standards development; and the needs of women, babies and families. The review has presented an evidence base to inform the specific knowledge and skills that midwives need at the point of registration.

We reviewed our own fitness to practise data to establish recurring themes that can be addressed, by ensuring clarity and emphasis in our new draft standards of proficiency. Although the data is small in number and we are limited by the amount of detail that can be extracted currently, the themes resonate with the views found through our engagement.
We have carried out extensive engagement with over 500 individuals and organisations. We have engaged with a broad range of stakeholders including women, partners and families, midwives, student midwives, educators, employers, the Chief Nursing Officers and Chief Midwifery Advisers, Lead Midwives for Education (LMEs), membership organisations, advocacy groups and organisations representing women, babies, partners and families, and other health and social care professionals across the four countries of the UK.

Our engagement has included: workshops, focus groups, meetings, webinars, a roundtable discussion, thought leadership group meetings and an online virtual thought leadership group. We also used social media including a Twitter chat with #WeMidwives, an online community for midwives.
How to respond to this consultation

Everyone is welcome and encouraged to respond to all areas of the consultation. But we know some people will want to respond to specific questions relating to certain areas of our standards. Therefore, the questions are arranged in a way that introduces each specific subject area we are consulting on and signposts areas that may be of interest to you.

We encourage everyone to respond online to the independent research company, Pye Tait, which is collecting all the responses and will do the independent analysis on our behalf.

If you need an alternative way to respond, please contact us at consultations@nmc-uk.org