
Quality assurance framework for nursing, midwifery and nursing associate education

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Introduction

To make sure **people** have confidence in the care they receive we must ensure that nursing, midwifery and nursing associate education and training is high quality and meets our standards.

Nursing and midwifery **education quality assurance** (EdQA) ensures that **education institutions**, in partnership with their **practice learning partners**, are meeting our standards for education and training. This helps us to know that **students** who have successfully completed an approved programme are meeting the standards of proficiency that we require before they join our register. It's one of the ways we fulfil our duty to protect the public.

We quality assure and approve education institutions who wish to run nursing and midwifery education and training for the first time so that they become **approved education institutions** (AEIs). We approve new programmes to be run and quality assure modifications to existing programmes. We monitor AEIs and the programmes they deliver in a variety of ways to ensure they continue to meet our standards.

If we identify that an AEI isn't meeting our standards, we will work with them to make the necessary improvements, so that the standards are met and students receive appropriate education and training. This is essential to maintain public confidence in our role in pre-registration nursing, midwifery and nursing associate education and NMC-approved post-registration education and encourages the education institution to remain accountable for meeting our standards.

The framework

Our framework sets out our strategic approach to EdQA. It shows what we do, who we engage with and what we expect of AEs and practice learning partners that manage and deliver professional education and training.

The framework is intended mainly for people who are interested in our work in quality assurance, particularly those who are involved in designing, developing, managing and delivering nursing and midwifery education¹. Like our standards, the framework is outcome-focused and is informed by the ways in which health, care and professional education are changing.

People are at the centre of our work, and we are committed to ensuring that a range of voices and experiences are reflected in nursing and midwifery education and training and throughout EdQA activity. That includes people who use services, their families and carers, students and professionals. We'll listen and act appropriately when we get feedback. We believe this is essential for instilling confidence in the way in which nurses, midwives and nursing associates are prepared for professional practice and is part of our commitment to being a person-centred regulator.

Our approach gives us the flexibility to assure new and flexible models of educational programme delivery, which may involve local partnerships, blended learning and work-based approaches.

The framework enhances our ability to recognise issues early, making use of data from different sources so we can proactively focus on areas where we know there are risks, or where data suggests that we should focus our attention.

¹ We've used the phrase 'nursing' in this document to apply to the work of nurses and nursing associates. Nursing associates are a distinct profession with their own part of our register, but they are part of the nursing team.

Our education and training standards

Our standards for education and training are set out in three parts:

[Part 1: Standards framework for nursing and midwifery education](#)

[Part 2: Standards for student supervision and assessment](#)

Part 3: Programme standards:

- [Standards for pre-registration nursing programmes](#)
- [Standards for pre-registration midwifery programmes](#)
- [Standards for pre-registration nursing associate programmes](#)
- [Standards for prescribing programmes](#)
- [Standards for post-registration programmes](#)
- [Standards for return to practice programmes](#)

All education programmes must enable students to gain the necessary knowledge and skills to meet their intended standards of proficiency:

- [Standards of proficiency for registered nurses](#)
- [Standards of proficiency for midwives](#)
- [Standards of proficiency for nursing associates](#)
- [Standards of proficiency for prescribers](#)
- [Standards of proficiency for specialist community public health nurses](#)
- [Standards of proficiency for community nursing specialist practice qualifications](#)

Our quality assurance service provider (QASP)

The Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) is our appointed QA service provider and carries out activity on our behalf.

QAA will undertake the quality assurance assessment and visit education institutions and practice learning environments. They will gather the information we need to make regulatory decisions and will make recommendations to us based on this information.

Delivery of QA of education

Our role includes:

- setting the strategic direction and policy for EdQA, ensuring that people are at the centre of our approach, embedding that approach and maintaining the [QA link](#) - the online portal that AElS access to submit documentation
- commissioning and overseeing effective and proportionate operational delivery
- make decisions about approving, monitoring and withdrawing approval of programmes
- effectively using data and intelligence from wide ranging sources to inform EdQA that protects the public
- sharing intelligence appropriately with others both within and outside the NMC
- using evidence from EdQA activity to influence the strategic context for education to enhance public protection and strengthen stakeholder relations.

Our QASP's role includes:

- recruiting, training and managing the performance of EdQA visitors
- scheduling and organising processes and visits
- make recommendations to the NMC based on EdQA activity
- sharing and updating the information and documentation that govern processes, including their handbook and NMC specific website
- seeking the views of people – including the public, people who use services, carers, families and students
- supplying and maintaining EdQA data relating to AElS and practice learning partners and reporting to us.

How we quality assure

Part of the NMC's role² is to set standards for education and training that enable students to achieve our standards of proficiency before joining the register³. We also make sure that AEs and practice learning partners are meeting the standards and requirements we set⁴.

This framework, our regulatory approach and our QASP's handbook set out the evidence education institutions need to demonstrate to assure us that they meet our standards when we decide to give approval⁵.

Our regulator, the **Professional Standards Authority** (PSA), defines right touch regulation as being proportionate, consistent, targeted, transparent, accountable and agile. We've aligned our framework to these principles.

We believe that it's best to realise the professionalism of those joining our register through education and training that's underpinned by effective partnerships between education institutions and their placement learning partners at all levels. Our approach focuses on how effective those partnerships are.

We've set the standards for pre-registration nursing and midwifery education as degree level entry professions and nursing associate education as a foundation degree level entry profession. Education institutions seeking approval of programmes and AEs delivering programmes must have the relevant degree awarding powers (or have access to those powers through formal agreement with another degree-awarding institution).

Our standards for education and training apply to all AEs and their practice learning partners that are running NMC approved programmes.

They aim to provide AEs and practice learning partners with the flexibility to develop innovative approaches to professional education while being accountable for local delivery and management, in line with our standards.

² Article 15(1) of the **Nursing and Midwifery Order 2001** (the 'Order')

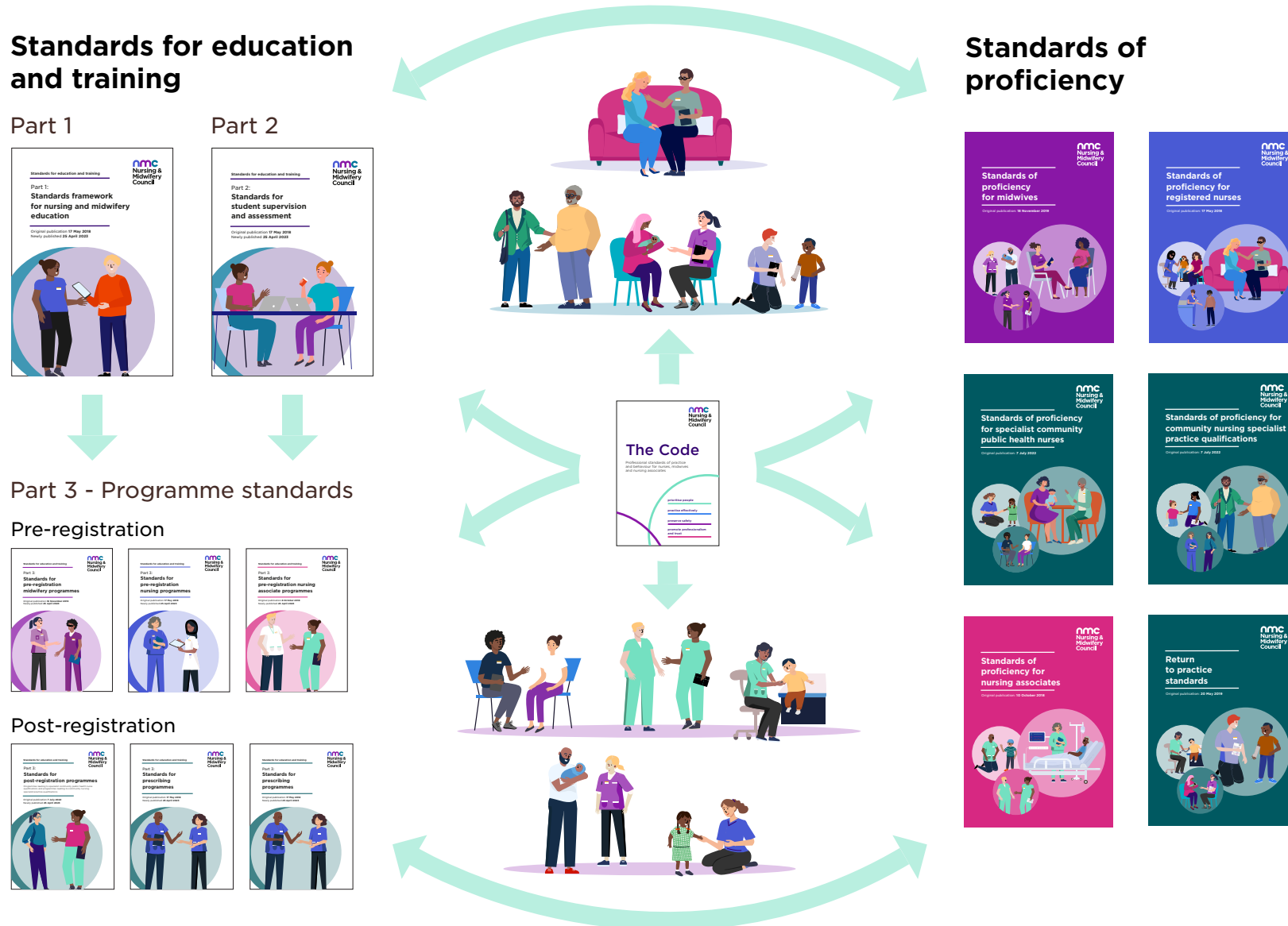
³ Article 5(2) of the Order

⁴ Article 15(2) (b) of the Order

⁵ Article 15(8) of the Order

How our standards work together

The relationship between the different sets of standards is shown in the diagram below.



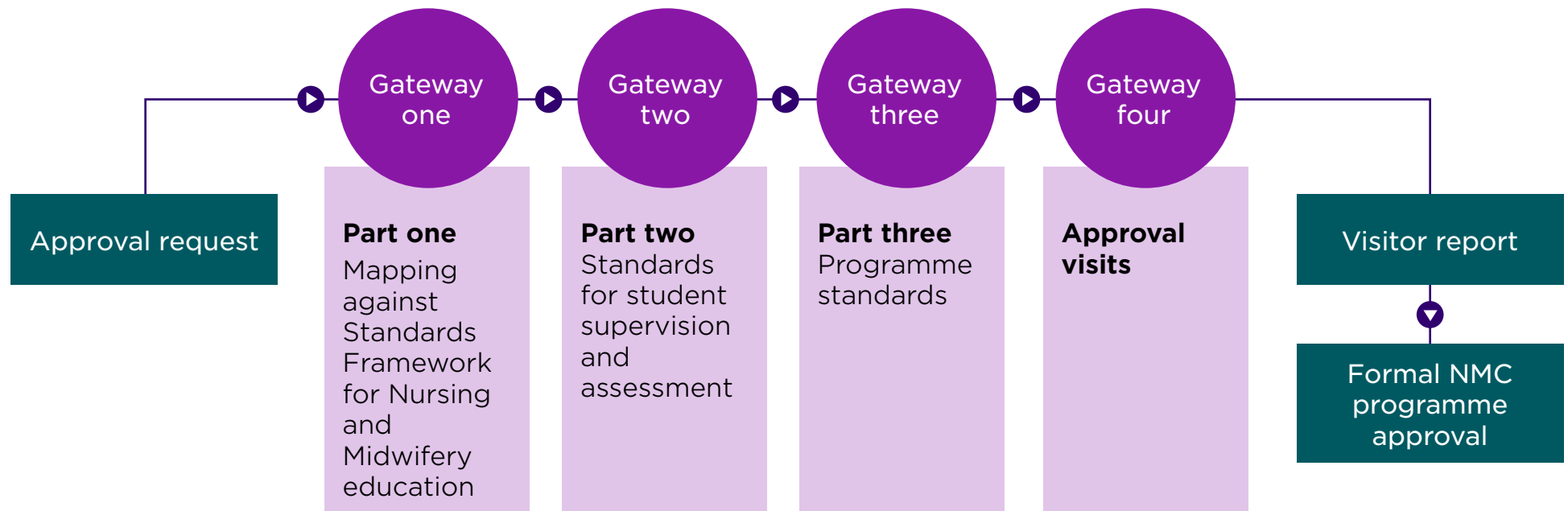
A gateway approach to approval

Our framework aligns the structure of our standards to how we approve education institutions and new programmes.

Using a gateway model enables us to take a proportionate yet robust approach to EdQA for education institutions that want to implement the NMC standards, gateway by gateway. Each gateway has to be met before proceeding to the next gateway. Through this model, we can differentiate the approval process between education institutions, depending on whether the institution is already running approved programmes.

An education institution that's new to nursing and midwifery education (or is wishing to return to nursing and midwifery education) and is seeking approval, must submit their initial proposal to us. Once we've had assurances about the education institution's proposal we'll begin our preliminary checks. We'll share this information with our QASP, which will conduct the EdQA through the gateways on our behalf.

Process of programme approval



	Part one Standards framework for nursing and midwifery education	Part two Standards for student supervision and assessment	Part three Programme standards	Approval visits
1st programme approval New education institution	Included	Included	Included	Included
1st programme approval Existings AEIs	Right touch	Included	Included	Included
Subsequent approvals	Not applicable	Right touch	Included	Included

Gateway 1: Standards framework for nursing and midwifery education

After we've screened their initial proposal, new education institutions will provide evidence for seeking approval of a programme for the first time. EdQA visitors will review the evidence to ensure compliance with these standards.

Gateway 2: Standards for student supervision and assessment

All existing AEIs, new education institutions and their practice learning partners will provide the evidence to tell us how they will meet these standards. EdQA visitors will analyse the documents.

Gateway 3: Programme standards

All existing AEIs, new education institutions and their practice learning partners will submit evidence to show how they will meet the relevant programme standards. EdQA visitors will analyse the documents.

Gateway 4: Approval visit

Representatives from existing AEIs and new education institutions and their practice learning partners will come together for the approval visit. We also expect members of the public/people who use services and existing students (where applicable) to attend.

We aim to minimise the burden on AEIs and their practice learning partners by taking part in conjoint approval visits with AEIs and/or other regulators where possible, but we do so with clarity about our respective roles. EdQA visitors will engage with the presenting panel and representatives from the AEI and its practice learning partners.

They'll make recommendations to us in a report about whether our standards are met. The NMC EdQA Board will then decide whether to approve the programme.

How we'll QA pre-registration nursing programmes

The gateway approach to **pre-registration nursing programme** approval applies to all AELs. AELs and practice learning partners will identify the routes within their pre-registration nursing programme they're seeking to approve. This may include undergraduate, postgraduate, work-based and blended learning. This may also include an apprenticeship route in England.

Existing AELs and their practice learning partners may want to transfer current student nurses onto any new or modified programme. If so, they'll need to provide the evidence to support this proposed transfer at Gateway 3. Visitors will look at the evidence to make sure it confirms how all standards will be met through the transfer. We also expect transferring student nurses to engage with visitors during Gateway 4: Approval visit.

How we'll QA pre-registration midwifery programmes

The gateway approach to **pre-registration midwifery programme** approval applies to all AELs. AELs and practice learning partners will identify the routes within their pre-registration midwifery programme they're seeking to approve. This may include undergraduate, postgraduate, work-based or blended learning. This may also include an apprenticeship route in England.

Existing AELs and their practice learning partners may want to transfer current student midwives onto any new or modified programme. If so, they'll need to give us the evidence to support this proposed transfer at Gateway 3. Visitors will look at the evidence to make sure it confirms how all standards will be met through the transfer. We also expect transferring midwifery students to engage with visitors during Gateway 4: Approval visit.

How we'll QA pre-registration nursing associate programmes

We became the regulator for nursing associates in England on 12 July 2018. Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales may seek to adopt the nursing associate role in the future, but currently our legislation reflects that we're regulating nursing associates only in England. As a consequence, we only have powers in respect of the regulation of nursing associate education in England – we can't approve **nursing associate programmes** in other parts of the UK.

The gateway approach to pre-registration nursing associate programme approval applies to all AELs. AELs and practice learning partners will identify the routes within their pre-registration nursing associate programme they're seeking to approve. This may include undergraduate, work-based or blended learning. This may also include an apprenticeship route.

Existing AEs and their practice learning partners may want to transfer current student nursing associates onto any new or modified programme. If so, they'll need to give us the evidence to support this proposed transfer at Gateway 3. EdQA visitors will look at the evidence to make sure it confirms how all standards will be met through the transfer. We also expect transferring nursing associate students to engage with visitors during Gateway 4: Approval visit.

How we'll QA post registration programmes

Prescribing programmes

The gateway approach to all **prescribing programme** approval (V100, V150 and V300) will apply to all AEs and their practice learning partners.

Specialist practice qualification programmes and specialist community public health nursing programmes

The gateway approach will apply to all specialist community public health nursing programmes and community nursing specialist practice qualification programmes.

Return to practice programmes

We published our latest Return to practice standards in May 2019. Our registration and revalidation requirements set out the minimum number of practice hours that a nurse, midwife or nursing associate must undertake to remain on, or re-join, our register.

People unable to meet these practice hours requirements who wish to remain on, or re-join, our register must successfully complete an NMC approved Return to practice programme or undertake and pass the NMC test of competence.

The gateway approach will apply to all Return to practice programmes.

Programme modification

AEs may submit requests for major modification to approved programmes. How we manage these depends on the extent of change, as detailed in the QASP handbook.

Depending on the reason for the major modification request, any major modification to approved programmes will follow the previously described gateway approach at the relevant gateway.

AEs will manage and record minor modifications in case we need to review their decisions and their impact on our original approval of the programme. Additionally, AEs will report on their minor modification decisions as part of the annual self-reporting process.

Programme endorsement

AEIs may choose to deliver parts or all of their approved programmes in specific locations outside the UK which we call **endorsement**⁶. This only applies to the Channel Islands and the Isle of Man. The UK-based AEI is accountable for this local delivery outside of the UK as part of their overall assurance to us and should use comparable programme arrangements.

Evidence of how the programme meets our standards in all the above non-UK settings must include, but is not limited to, evidence of strategic and operational partnerships with practice learning partners, resources, risks and controls. The requirements for endorsement are in the QASP handbook.

Refusal of approval

Education institutions and AEIs seeking approval of institutions and/or programmes will provide us and the QASP with the evidence, information and assistance that we may reasonably need⁷. If an education institution or AEI seeking approval refuses a reasonable request for information, we may refuse approval⁸. Institutions and programmes will need to meet all of our standards for us to grant approval. We'll assess this at each of the gateways. If our standards are not being met, then we may refuse approval.

Withdrawing approval

If we find that an AEI or its practice learning partners aren't meeting (or won't meet) our standards or requirements, we'll initially work with the AEI to help them put steps in place to address the concern.

However, if a concern for public protection remains, we'll tell the AEI that we plan to withdraw their approval, specifying the extent of the withdrawal⁹. We'll explain the reasons for withdrawing approval in writing. We'll give the AEI a month from the day we tell them of our plans to make any observations and objections¹⁰.

We'll take no further action until the deadline, or until the AEI submits any observations or objections. We'll acknowledge any correspondence we get within five working days. If the AEI can't assure us that it's mitigating and managing the risks, we'll write to the AEI, specifying the date that we're withdrawing approval.

6 Article 15(7) of the Order

7 Article 17(4) of the Order

8 Article 18 of the Order

9 Article 18 of the Order

10 Article 18(4) of the Order

Programme monitoring

Monitoring review visits

In recent years we've been focusing on programme approval in line with new standards that the NMC Council approved. As this period has come to an end we will be engaging with **stakeholders** on our future approach to routine programme monitoring. We will, however, continue to respond to known or emerging risks to the safety of people who use services, the public and students, or risks to compliance against our standards.

Annual self reporting

All AEIs, in partnership with their practice learning partners, are expected to submit an annual self-assessment report and confirm that they continue to meet our standards across all approved programmes.

Thematic review reporting

Thematic reviews focus on particular aspects of nursing and midwifery education and training, enabling us to gain a deeper understanding of issues, risks and areas of good practice that we can respond to, act on and disseminate when we engage and report on our activity.

New programme monitoring

New programme monitoring applies to both new AEIs and AEIs delivering new programmes that have not been run by that institution before.

We'll apply **new programme monitoring** from approval of the programme until the first group of students register with us. This is proportionate and will ensure that new providers are supported to meet the required standards and expectations and have direct access to the NMC for clarification and/or support if needed. As part of new programme monitoring, we'll ask for regular updates that tell us how the new programmes are progressing. We'll follow up on these updates. This information will inform our future approach to risk-based monitoring. If concerns arise, we'll work with the AEI in line with our regulatory approach document and the QASP handbook and, if necessary, may proceed to an extraordinary review monitoring visit.

Enhanced scrutiny

When we have a concern regarding an AEI or a programme, we may apply **enhanced scrutiny**. As part of this enhanced scrutiny, we'll ask for regular updates that provide us with evidence of how the AEI in partnership with their practice learning partners are addressing the issues we have raised with them. This information will inform our future approach to risk-based monitoring. If further concerns or complaints arise, we'll take action in line with our regulatory approach document and the QASP handbook and might proceed to undertaking an extraordinary review monitoring visit.

Extraordinary review monitoring visit

We carry out additional quality assurance work when we believe nursing and midwifery education providers are not meeting our standards. It might be necessary for us to carry out an **extraordinary review monitoring visit** of an AEI in relation to one or more approved programmes, which may also include visits to selected practice learning providers in certain circumstances.

This could be, for example, when there is an adverse incident that presents a risk to public protection, or if an approved education institution (AEI) is seen to be either unaware of the incident or not to have effectively managed the risks. The AEI will be informed in writing in advance of the focus of the extraordinary review monitoring visit. The EdQA visitor review team will work to a specific review plan for the intended activity for both AEIs and their practice learning partners.

How we report on QA

We publish a [list of approved programmes](#) and we publish our EdQA approval outcome reports. We also publish monitoring reports, and we share quarterly and annual reports on EdQA with our Council. These demonstrate part of our commitment to transparency and information sharing.

How we use data

We may collect information about individuals if they work for an AEI or practice learning partner or take part in our EdQA processes. We'll collect the individual's name and contact information. If they're taking part in one of our visits, we'll also collect details of their professional experience.

During EdQA reviews, education institutions and their practice learning partners may give visitors a significant amount of supporting documentation. This documentation sometimes contains personal information such as the CVs of academic staff or minutes of meetings. The only people who'll read this personal information are those who need to see it as part of our EdQA activity. We occasionally share personal information with third parties in line with our [guidance](#) and [privacy notice](#).

Normally, we process personal information because we have a legal obligation to do so or because it is necessary for the exercise of our statutory functions or any other functions in the public interest.

Responding to concerns in nursing and midwifery education

One aim of EdQA is to make sure that people are protected when students care for them as part of their education and training. To protect the public, we act on concerns when someone raises them to us.

In this context a concern could be:

- an incident that may affect the safety of people who use services and/or the public
- a notification that an AEI or practice learning partner that delivers approved nursing and midwifery programmes is not meeting our standards
- whistleblowing, or
- a complaint.

The need to protect the public guides how we respond to concerns. We assess the nature of possible risks and combine that with the assurance we receive from AEIs and practice learning partners about how they manage risks when they arise. Our response to concerns ensures that there are measures in place to protect the public when issues affect nursing or midwifery education.

How we respond to concerns

Exceptional reporting by AEs and practice learning partners

When risks emerge, AEs and their practice learning partners must respond swiftly to manage, mitigate and control risks appropriately.

We'll act when these risks are not being effectively managed and controlled locally. AEs should always tell us about any concerns regarding any approved programme, in particular an issue which might affect the student learning environment, the student journey or where there may be a safety concern for members of the public or people who use services. If there's the potential that our standards are not being met, an [exceptional reporting form](#) should be completed and emailed to exceptional.reporting@nmc-uk.org.

Whistleblowing

Our duties around managing and acting on information provided through whistleblowing are set out in the Public Interest Disclosure Act 1998. Our guidance on whistleblowing is available [on our website](#).

Responding to concerns and handling complaints about a programme or an AE

If concerns are raised with us about education and training, where issues affect an education institution or [practice learning environment](#), patient safety, or meeting our education standards, we have a role in investigating. Specifically, we can speak directly to education providers to ensure they're following approved processes.

We'll also make sure that concerns and complaints are dealt with in a fair and consistent manner. Please [see our guidance](#) for more information.

Responding to concerns and handling complaints about our QASP

If concerns are raised about our QASP, we'll look into them, and – where appropriate – act. We'll make sure that we deal with concerns and complaints fairly and consistently. We won't consider complaints regarding the judgement of visitors delivering EdQA activity. Please [see our website](#) for more details.

Glossary

Approved Education Institutions

(AEIs): the status awarded to an institution, part of an institution, or a combination of institutions that work in partnership with practice learning providers after we've approved a programme. AEIs will have assured us that they're accountable and capable of delivering approved education programmes.

Degree apprenticeship: The pre-registration degree apprenticeship programme routes and post-registration apprenticeship programme routes in England only will enable people to be educated and train to become a professional in a specific NMC qualification through an apprentice route.

Students undertaking NMC programmes that follow an apprenticeship route will be released by their employer to study part-time in an AEI and will be educated and trained in a range of practice learning settings. They will be expected to achieve the same standards as other student nurses. When on an approved programme they are identified as NMC pre or post-registration students.

Education institutions: institutions seeking our approval of a programme for the first time.

Educators: in the context of our standards for education and training, educators are those who deliver, support, supervise and assess theory or practice learning.

Education Quality assurance

(EdQA): Our processes for making sure all AEIs and their practice learning partners comply with our standards.

Employer link service (ELS): Our ELS liaises with employers, listens to feedback, takes part in local health and care sector forums, advises on decision making for referrals, and offers inductions for directors of nursing and midwifery on fitness to practise and wider core regulatory functions.

Enhanced scrutiny: A process to allow the AEI to demonstrate how they have addressed issues raised with them or their programme and how they continue to meet the standards and requirements.

Endorsement: This is the process of approving the delivery of part of an already approved UK programme for delivery outside the UK.

Extraordinary review monitoring

visits: Reviews conducted to identify if the AEI and practice learning placements continue to meet our standards, if concerns or intelligence suggest that an AEI or a programme in partnership with their practice learning partners is no longer meeting our standards and requirements.

New programme monitoring:

A process to allow the AEI to demonstrate how they and their new programmes meet the standards and requirements. New institutions and new pre-registration programmes will undergo new programme monitoring from approval through to the first group of students completing the programme.

Nurse and midwife prescribing programmes:

The programme that a registered nurse and/or midwife in the UK completes to acquire the proficiencies needed to meet our criteria for a prescribing annotation on our register.

People: individuals or groups who receive services from nurses, midwives, or nursing associates, healthy and sick people, parents, children, families, carers, representatives, also including educators and students and others within and outside the learning environment.

Practice learning/employer partners:

Practice learning/employer partners are organisations that provide practice learning experiences for students, for example NHS Trusts or Health Boards, GP surgeries, or care homes. AEIs are responsible for working with practice learning/employer partners to manage the quality of their educational programmes. Overall responsibility for the day-to-day management of the quality of any educational programme lies with the AEI in collaboration with practice learning/employer partners who provide opportunities for practice learning experiences (such as placements) to nursing and midwifery students.

Practice learning environments:

Includes any physical location where learning takes place as well as the system of shared values, beliefs and behaviours in these places.

Pre-registration midwifery programme:

The programme that a student midwife in the UK completes to acquire the proficiencies needed to meet our criteria for registration.

Pre-registration nursing programme:

The programme that a student nurse in the UK completes to acquire the proficiencies needed to meet our criteria for registration.

Pre-registration nursing associate programme:

The programme that a nursing associate student in England completes to acquire the proficiencies needed to meet our criteria for registration.

Professional Standards Authority

(PSA): The independent body that helps to protect the public through their work with organisations that register and regulate people working in health and social care. They regulate the NMC along with other health and social care regulators.

QA Link: The online portal that AEIs will access to submit documentation i.e. during the approval gateway process.

Stakeholders: Any person, group or organisation that has an interest or concern in the situation in question, and may affect or be affected by its actions, objectives or policies. In the context of our standards for education and training this includes students, educators, partner organisations, patients, families, carers, employers, other professionals, other regulators and education commissioners.

Students: Anyone enrolled onto an approved education programme.

The Nursing and Midwifery Order 2001 (the Order):

Legislation that establishes us and sets out our primary purpose of protecting the public, our structure, and our functions and activities.

What we do

Our vision is safe, effective and kind nursing and midwifery practice that improves everyone's health and wellbeing. As the independent regulator of more than 826,000 nurses and midwives in the UK and nursing associates in England, we have an important role to play in making this vision a reality.

We're here to protect the public by upholding high professional nursing and midwifery standards, which the public has a right to expect. That's why we're improving the way we regulate, enhancing our support for colleagues, professionals and the public, and working with our partners to influence the future of health and social care.

Our core role is to **regulate**. We set and promote high education and professional standards for nurses and midwives across the UK, and nursing associates in England and quality assure their education programmes. We maintain the integrity of the register of those eligible to practise. And we investigate concerns about professionals – something that affects very few people on our register every year.

To regulate well, we **support** nursing and midwifery professionals and the public. We create resources and guidance that are useful throughout professionals' careers, helping them to deliver our standards in practice and address challenges they face. We work collaboratively so everyone feels engaged and empowered to shape our work.

We work with our partners to address common concerns, share our data, insight and learning, to **influence** and inform decision-making and help drive improvement in health and social care for people and communities.

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