Quality assurance of nursing, midwifery and nursing associate education

Annual update 2018-2019

What we do

We're the independent regulator for nurses, midwives and nursing associates. We hold a register of around 700,000 nurses, midwives and nursing associates who can practise in the UK.

Better and safer care for people is at the heart of what we do, supporting the healthcare professionals on our register to deliver the highest standards of care.

We make sure nurses, midwives and nursing associates have the skills they need to care for people safely, with integrity, expertise, respect and compassion, from the moment they step into their first job.

Learning does not stop the day nurses, midwives and nursing associates qualify. To promote safety and public trust, we require professionals to demonstrate throughout their career that they are committed to learning and developing to keep their skills up to date and improve as practitioners.

We want to encourage openness and learning among healthcare professions to improve care and keep the public safe. On the occasions when something goes wrong and people are at risk, we can step in to investigate and take action, giving patients and families a voice as we do so.

Contents

Foreword

I am pleased to present our annual update on our education quality assurance (QA) activity for the 2018–19 academic year, covering the QA of nursing, midwifery and nursing associate education.

This has been an exceptionally important and busy year for our QA activity. With the introduction of our new education standards last year and having become the regulator for nursing associates, we have begun the process of approving every institution and programme against these outcomes-focused standards through our new gateways-based approach to approval.

The new gateways approach has removed the need for institutions to first become an approved education institution (AEI) before seeking approval of a programme. Institutions now undertake a more streamlined process to achieve both at once. People are at the centre of our QA activity, and under our new QA Framework we have now introduced lay visitors to work alongside our registrant visitors on all pre-registration approvals to ensure that the service user voice is appropriately reflected. We also require people who use services and carers who have been involved in developing the programmes at institutions to be present at approval events.

Having introduced our new QA Framework and approach last year we have liaised closely with the sector, including the Council of Deans of Health to seek their feedback on our approach, and have actively made changes in response to feedback to ensure we are being proportionate, targeted and robust.

Alongside approval of programmes we have continued to develop our data driven approach to monitoring institutions which we will operationalise next year. This will enable us to be more targeted in the way in which we make regulatory interventions whilst taking appropriate action to work with AEIs and their practice learning partners where we have concerns, and reducing regulatory burden.

Professor Geraldine Walters, CBE
Director of Education and Standards

Executive summary

1. Our quality assurance (QA) framework is one of the ways that we ensure better, safer care. Each year we reflect and report on the outcomes of our QA activity to ensure that students are being equipped with the relevant knowledge, skills and learning experience to practise safely at the time they join the register and that they can build on throughout their career. We also continuously look for ways to improve our approach to QA by improving our processes.

2. At the time of writing this report, the number of approved education institutions (AEIs) had increased from 83 to 86, covering 1,087 approved programmes. This year 56 institutions have sought approval for programmes under our new standards.

3. Alongside programme approval we continue to monitor institutions through our annual self-reporting process and concerns mechanisms. Of the 82 AEIs who had been approved for over a year and therefore were required to undergo annual self-reporting, 21 did not initially provide assurance that our standards were being met. However, this was due to not appropriately updating us on changes that had been made as a result of recommendations at approval events or updating us on open concerns cases rather than a failure in learning or care. After resubmission all 82 institutions provided assurance.

4. We continue to monitor institutions throughout the year, and make regulatory interventions where we have concerns. We are proactive in making the best possible use of our intelligence by promoting information sharing and collaborating both internally with our Regulatory Intelligence Unit and Employer Link Service, and externally with other regulators and key organisations

Introduction

5. The Nursing and Midwifery Order 2001 (the Order) sets the legislative context for the QA of nursing, midwifery and nursing associate education. Our standards comply with our legislation and provide necessary requirements for the education and training of nurses, midwives and nursing associates, and the proficiencies they have to meet to join our register.

6. This annual update examines the QA activity we have undertaken and the key themes and risks that have emerged from our QA of approved education institutions and their practice placement partners in the 2018–19 academic reporting year (from 1 September 2018 to 31 August 2019) for nursing, midwifery and nursing associate education.

7. Our role in education plays a very important part in how we meet our overall objective of better, safer care. In the 2018–19 academic reporting year our QA of education comprised of three key activities.

- **Approval of education institutions and education programmes.**

- **Annual self-reporting.**

- **Responding to concerns.**

8. Last year we published our new standards for nursing and midwifery education, as well as a new QA Framework, outlining changes to the way in which we quality assure institutions.

Part one:
approval of nursing, midwifery and nursing associate education programmes

9. Under our QA Framework (2018) education institutions no longer have to first obtain approved education institution (AEI) status before seeking approval of their programmes. This process has now been streamlined into one gateway process, where approval of the institution is granted at the same time as approval of a programme.
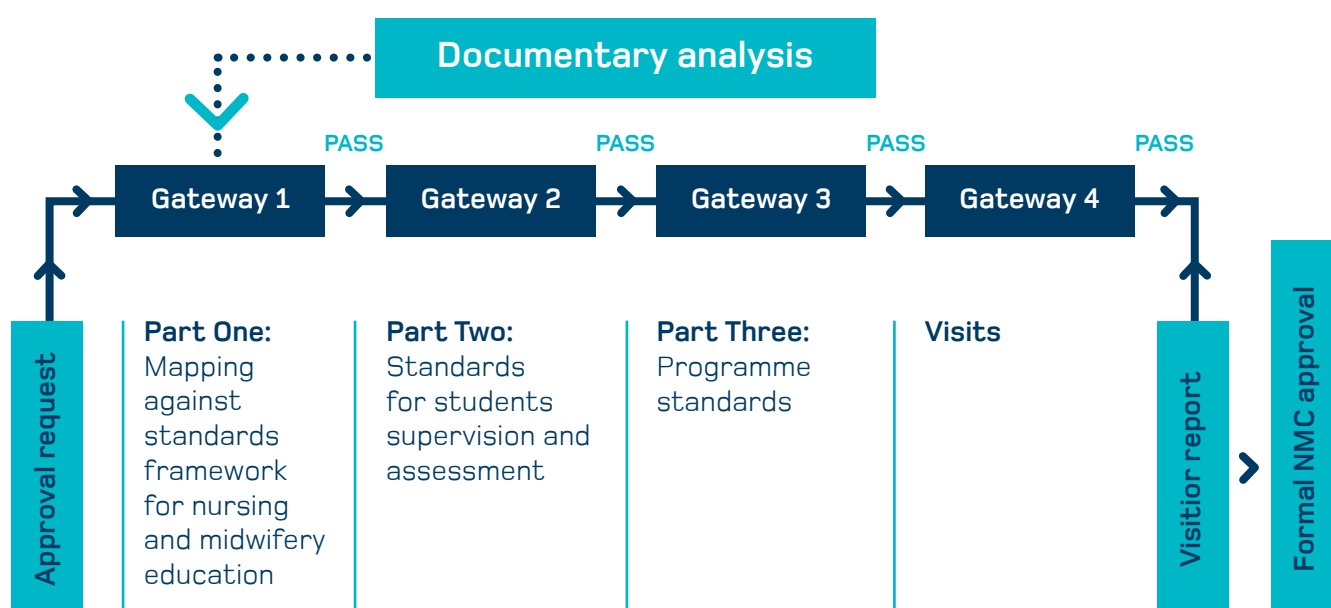
Approval of education institutions

10. There are currently 86 AEIs across the UK, with three new AEIs being approved during the period of 1 September 2018 to 31 August 2019: University of Roehampton, University of Winchester and University of Aberdeen.

11. A summary of AEIs and approved programmes has been included in table one. A full list of all AEIs is shown in table two.

Table one – AEI summary data

Total number of NMC AEIs	86
Total number of NMC approved programmes	1,087
Number of AEIs approved to run pre-registration nursing programmes against pre-2018 standards	80
Number of AEIs approved to run pre-registration nursing programmes against 2018 standards	37
Number of AEIs approved to run pre-registration midwifery programmes	55
Number of new education institutions approved to be an AEI during the reporting year	3
Number of AEIs approved to deliver pre-registration nursing for the first time	3
Number of AEIs approved to deliver pre-registration midwifery for the first time	2
Number of AEIs approved to deliver pre-registration nursing associates	32

Table two – List of approved education institutions and those under new programme monitoring

* New institution   [ ] New programme monitoring

ENGLAND
Anglia Ruskin University
University of Bedfordshire
Birmingham City University
University of Birmingham
University of Bolton
Bournemouth University
BPP
University of Bradford
University of Brighton
Brunel University London
Buckinghamshire New University
Canterbury Christ Church University
University of Central Lancashire
University of Chester
City University London
Coventry University
University of Cumbria
De Montfort University
University of Derby
University of East Anglia
University of East London
Edge Hill University
University of Essex
University of Exeter
University of Gloucestershire
University of Greenwich
University of Hertfordshire
University of Huddersfield
University of Hull
Keele University
King's College London
Kingston University & St George's University of London
Leeds Beckett University
University of Leeds
University of Leicester
University of Lincoln
Liverpool John Moores University
University of Liverpool
London South Bank University
Manchester Metropolitan University
University of Manchester
Middlesex University
University of Northampton
Northumbria University
University of Nottingham
The Open University

ENGLAND (continued)
Oxford Brookes University
University of Plymouth
University of Portsmouth
University of Reading
University of Roehampton**
University of Salford
Sheffield Hallam University
University of Sheffield
Southampton Solent University
University of Southampton
Staffordshire University
Suffolk, University of (formerly University Campus Suffolk)
University of Sunderland
University of Surrey
Teesside University
University of West London
University of West of England in Bristol
University of Winchester**
University of Wolverhampton
University of Worcester
University of York

NORTHERN IRELAND
Queens University Belfast
University of Ulster at Jordanstown

SCOTLAND
University of Aberdeen**
University of Abertay Dundee
University of Dundee
Edinburgh Napier University
Glasgow Caledonian University
University of Edinburgh
University of Glasgow
University of Highlands and Islands
Queen Margaret University
Robert Gordon University
University of Stirling
University of West of Scotland

WALES
Bangor University, School of Healthcare Sciences
University of Cardiff
University of Glyndwr
University of South Wales
Swansea University

Approval of education programmes

12. The largest amount of activity this year has been approving institutions against the new framework for nursing and midwifery education and the nursing, nursing associate and prescribing programme standards in England with institutions in Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland having opted for approval in 2020. These approvals were done through the gateways process outlined above. At each gateway the submitted documentation is reviewed by the visitors to ensure our standards are met. A summary of gateway submissions has been included as table three.

Table three – Approvals through gateways one and two by institutions

	Total number of institutions	TOTAL NUMBER OF PROGRAMMES		
		NA	RN	Prescribing
EIs who submitted Gateway one	56			
EIs who had Gateway one rejected initially	20			
EIs who submitted Gateway two	54			
EIs who had Gateway two rejected initially	23	20	17	14
EIs who had Gateway three rejected initially	6	3	3	2
EIs who have had a Gateway four approval visit	54	35	44	26

13. 56 institutions submitted Gateway one for an approval visit during the 2018–19 academic year. 36 institutions met Gateway one: **Standards framework for nursing and midwifery education** on the first submission. 20 institutions were rejected due to insufficient evidence to meet the standards, in particular due to lack of documentary or narrative evidence to support how the standards would be met. Of these 20, 18 met all the standards on re-submission, and two institutions have deferred their approval visits until the next academic year.

14. Of the 54 institutions who successfully passed Gateway one, 23 institutions covering multiple programmes were initially rejected at Gateway two: **Standards for student supervision and assessment** due to lack of evidence or narrative. All of these institutions passed Gateway two after resubmitting the evidence.

15. At Gateway three, six education institutions were initially rejected covering eight programmes, seven programmes have since re-submitted, and had their Gateway four approval visits, and one has deferred their approval for that programme until 2020.

16. At Gateway four, for the 54 institutions who had visits, this covered 105 different courses. The recommended outcomes of these programmes include: 10 recommended for approval; 93 recommended for approval after conditions were met; and, two recommended for refusal of approval. Further information on conditions can be found below.

17. Where themes have been identified for rejections at the different gateways we have shared lessons learned with the sector through webinars, and presentations as well developing supporting information which is published on our website.

18. Alongside the approval of programmes against the new standards, three new providers for midwifery programmes were also approved: University of Highlands and Islands, University of Bolton and the University of Lincoln. An SPQ District Nursing programme was also approved at London South Bank University.

19. We continue to monitor approvals of programmes and we are on target to meet our key performance indicator (KPI) for number of AEIs approved against the new standards this year. Our external KPI for making a decision around programme approval once we have received the visitors' report is 20 days. We have met this 100 percent, with the average time being only seven days.

Nursing associates

20. In October 2018 we published the **Standards for pre-registration nursing associate programmes**. Due to the delay in the Institute for Apprenticeships publishing the apprenticeship standard for nursing associates we saw a number of institutions defer their initial requested visit dates. However, we have had 35 programme approval visits, with 32 programmes being approved and one programme being recommended for refusal. The remaining institutions are currently meeting their conditions. There are currently a further 20 institutions seeking approval of a nursing associate programme. We continue to liaise closely with the Department for Health and Social Care and Health Education England in relation to the number of nursing associate approvals.

21. Due to the delay in the apprenticeship standard being published by the Institute for Apprenticeships we appreciate that this increased the urgency in relation to the timelines of approvals to allow programmes to start. We have therefore been very mindful of this and have taken steps to ensure that we turnaround final decisions quickly – on average we have responded within seven days of the approval report being received, compared to our published KPI of 20 days, which has been met 100 percent.

Degree apprenticeships

22. We have continued to see an increase in demand for degree apprenticeship routes to our register. During the 2018–19 academic year a further 11 institutions are now delivering nursing degree apprenticeships, bringing the total to 34.

23. Out of the 32 approved nursing associate programmes, 29 have been approved with apprenticeship routes.

24. Three visits also took place to approve midwifery degree apprentice (MDA) routes in approved midwifery programmes. These took place in the higher education pilot sites that were selected by Health Education England (HEE): University of Greenwich, University of West London and University of Bedfordshire.

Conditions

25. Where visitors identify that our standards are not met, they can either set conditions, or where significant concerns are raised recommend refusal of the programme. The institution must meet these conditions, which are approved by the visitor before we will approve the programme.

26. Conditions are categorised against five key risk themes. In order of the most frequently occurring conditions the risk themes were:

- Selection, admission and progression.
- Effective partnership working: collaboration, culture, communication and resources.
- Practice learning.
- Assessment, fitness for practice and award.
- Education governance: management and quality assurance.

27. The conditions set during this period included the following:

- Appropriate patient and service user involvement in selection and admission.
- Effective and robust collaboration with practice learning partners.
- Clarification of recognition of prior learning processes.
- Sufficient academic and practice partner resource.
- Explicit information on how the programme is run, including assessment.
- Ensuring consistent programme documentation.

28. In table four, we have summarised all conditions assigned to AEIs following approval events within the 2018–2019 academic year.

Table four (A) – Summary of programme approvals and major modifications with conditions

	Total	NA	RN	Prescribing	RM	RtP	SCPHN	SPQ
Programmes recommended for approval without conditions	69	5	19	1	38	3	2	1
Programmes recommended for approval after conditions were met	114	31	42	26	10	2	0	3
Programme recommended for refusal	2	1	1	0	0	0	0	0

Table four (B) – Total number of conditions at approval events against key risk themes

Key risk theme	Total
Selection, admission and progression	**59**
Effective partnership working: collaboration, culture, communication and resources	**47**
Practice learning	**46**
Assessment, fitness for practice and award	**34**
Education governance: management and quality assurance	**31**

Refusals

29. Visitors have currently recommended two programmes for refusal – one nursing associate, and one nursing programme. Where we receive a recommendation to refuse a programme, the institution can make observations on the report before we receive it. The QA Board then reviews the evidence. Where we are minded to refuse the programme the institution then has a further calendar month to make any additional observations before we make a final decision.

30. Should concerns be raised in relation to current students we would liaise closely with the AEI to ensure appropriate measures have been put in place.

Stakeholder engagement and changes to our processes

31. We continually work with AEIs to review our QA activity to ensure that it is appropriate, proportionate, targeted and transparent. We routinely work with different stakeholders to gather their viewpoints including a survey of every AEI which has gone through approval. The themes emerging from this survey are considered quarterly at the QA Board. Alongside surveys we have also held a number of round table events with the Council of Deans of Health in the different countries and worked closely with them to respond to any feedback.

32. As we introduced a new QA Framework in 2018 we have made a number of changes to our processes in response to feedback:

- Improved communication targeted at institutions seeking NMC approval for the first time.

- Provided increased clarity during the gateway approval process that institutions could sign-post between standards and evidence rather than duplicating their submissions.

- Introduced a new streamlined targeted process for institutions to add new employer apprenticeship partners on approved apprenticeship programmes.

- Developed further supporting information for the sector on our website, alongside sharing key themes for institutions being rejected at the different gateways to help inform future approval activity.

Part two:
monitoring and concerns

Annual self-reporting

33. AEIs are required to undertake and submit an annual self-assessment and self-declaration of their current NMC approved programme(s). The self-assessment provides an opportunity for AEIs and their practice learning partners to give examples or case studies of notable or innovative practice, and enables them to indicate any areas of provision that they are aiming to enhance. The self-declaration requires the AEI to confirm that all approved programmes continue to meet the NMC standards; that all programme modifications have been notified to the NMC; and, that all key risks are controlled.

34. The AEI annual self-assessment reports are reviewed and we may require AEIs to resubmit their report and provide further detailed evaluative information if the evidence provided cannot assure us that all criteria have been met.

35. All 82 AEIs, who had been approved for more than a year, and were therefore required to undertake annual self-reporting at the time, submitted their self-assessment reports for the 2018–19 reporting year. The University of Exeter, a new AEI, submitted a self-assessment report, however NMC programme delivery did not commence until September 2019. 21 AEIs (26 percent) did not provide assurance in their self-assessment report that key risks were controlled or managed. This is an increase from the previous year's outcome which was 16 percent.

36. Whilst there was an increase in institutions not providing assurance, the principle reason was the failure to report details on action(s) taken to address the recommendation(s) from programme approval/modification events held between 1 September 2017 and 31 August 2018. This was the case for 17 out of 82 AEIs. The remaining four institutions did not provide updates on open concerns cases.

37. The 21 AEIs resubmitted their self-assessment reports, which have been reviewed and assurance is now provided that NMC key risks are controlled or mitigated in 2018–19.

38. 75 AEIs provided a variety of examples of good practice. One particular example which met our criteria of notable or innovative practice is from London South Bank University where they run hearing loss workshops which are co-produced with people who use services and students to ensure sensory deprivation is thoroughly embedded in NMC curricula. Next year we will be hosting a number of webinars to share the good practice identified with the sector.

New programme monitoring and enhanced scrutiny

39. As we move towards a data driven approach to QA we have introduced a period of new programme monitoring for all new AEIs, or existing AEIs running a new pre-registration programme. New programme monitoring lasts until the first students from the programme join our register. This gives us the opportunity to work more closely with new programmes and institutions who we have not worked with before, and therefore have less information on to inform our data driven approach. As part of new programme monitoring programmes must submit self-reports to us twice a year, both of which are followed up by a telephone call by a member of the QA team. In 2018–19, 36 institutions were placed under new programme monitoring covering 32 nursing associate programmes, three nursing programmes and one new AEI not yet running a pre-registration programme. A summary table of institutions under new programme monitoring has been included in table two. The first new programme monitoring will take place from November 2019.

40. As part of the new data driven approach to monitoring institutions, which will be implemented more fully next year, we have also introduced a similar process to new programme monitoring for currently approved programmes referred to as enhanced scrutiny. Enhanced scrutiny will be applied where we have concerns based on the data we have – for example if there is a trend that over time student attrition on a programme is continuing to increase. In 2018–19 no programmes were placed under enhanced scrutiny.

Part three:
responding to concerns

41. We continue to monitor AEIs and their practice learning partners to ensure compliance with our standards. When risks emerge AEIs and their practice learning partners must respond swiftly to manage and control risks appropriately. AEIs should email exceptional reports to us and we take action when these risks are not being effectively managed and controlled locally. We also gather intelligence directly from system regulators, media scanning and whistleblowing, as well as through our Regulatory Intelligence Unit (RIU).

42. Once we receive a concern through any of those methods they are then graded as:

- minor – risks to our standards not being met are minimal and unlikely to impact on the student learning environment and public safety

- moderate – risks to our standards not being met with possible impact on the student learning environment and public safety

- major – risks to our standards not being met are high with possible impact on the student learning environment and public safety

- critical – risks to our standards not being met are high with potential significant impact on the student learning environment and public safety.

43. During 2018–19 we received a total of 109 concerns, with 65 being categorised as minor, 36 as moderate, five as major and three as critical. A full summary of concerns can be found in table five. In the table we note where the concern has first been raised with us, and whilst a large proportion are from our RIU rather than initially from the AEI directly, this is primarily due to the efficiency of the RIU in highlighting concerns. In these circumstances we routinely subsequently also receive an exceptional report from the AEI to highlight the same concerns and their actions as we would expect. Where we do not hear from the AEIs involved we follow this up with them and remind them of our expectations. In the future institutions failing to exceptionally report areas of identified concern will be monitored as part of our data driven approach to QA, and could be placed under enhanced scrutiny.

44. Similarly to previous years, most of the exceptional reports continue to relate to issues in practice environments, including adverse system regulator reports and their impact on student learning, supervision and assessment and escalation of student concerns, and what actions have been undertaken locally to manage those concerns.

45. Once a concern has been categorised there are a number of different regulatory interventions we can take to ensure the programmes continue to meet our standards ranging from no further action where we have sufficient assurance from the institution, through to carrying out an extraordinary review, which can lead to us withdrawing approval of a programme. A summary of regulatory interventions can be found in Annexe five.

46. Where we identify serious adverse incidents and concerns regarding an AEI or practice placement and local risk measures are limited, we may decide to conduct an unscheduled extraordinary review. This measure may be necessary if there are concerns that present a risk to public protection, and if it is deemed that the AEI is either unaware or unable to put adequate measure in place to control the risk. No new extraordinary reviews took place during the 2018–2019 academic year. For the three critical items currently open, all have had regular calls from the senior team, with two having multiple face to face meetings, including with other regulators and government bodies to secure ongoing assurance. This ongoing assurance has also involved requesting appropriate action plans, and contingency plans for removing students. The critical items are reviewed monthly at our internal QA Board.

47. As part of our role as a dynamic regulator, we continue to proactively share intelligence internally with our Regulatory Intelligence Unit and Fitness to Practise colleagues as well as externally where appropriate with other professional and system regulators

Table five (A) – Number of concerns opened by source of concern and grading

	Exceptional reporting	System regulator	Media scanning	Whistleblowing	Regulatory Intelligence Unit	Total
Minor	36	3	1	3	22	**65**
Moderate	17	4	3	2	10	**36**
Major	1	0	1	0	3	**5**
Critical	0	0	2	0	1	**3**
						109

Table five (B) – Regulatory interventions taken for concerns

	Closed with no further action	Email for clarification	Call from QA officer	Action plan requested	Call from Senior Team	Face to face meeting	Extraordinary review	Total
Minor	7	48	2	6	2	0	0	**65**
Moderate	0	24	0	11	0	1	0	**36**
Major	0	2	0	1	2	0	0	**5**
Critical	0	0	0	0	1	2	0	**3**
								109