

**The Nursing and Midwifery Council  
(NMC) during the Covid-19  
transition; Information pack.**

10 July 2020

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## Introduction

This pack provides the latest information about the work of the Nursing and Midwifery Council (NMC) during the coronavirus pandemic, including our actions as we transition from the emergency towards ongoing management of Covid-19 in health and social care.

As the independent regulator of nurses and midwives across the UK, and nursing associates in England, we have played an active role in expanding and supporting the nursing and midwifery workforce during this challenging time. We made a series of [operational changes](#) in response to the pandemic, in order to prioritise our core regulatory functions and ensure we continue to regulate nurses, midwives and nursing associates effectively.

As we move from the emergency into recovery, and as health and social care transitions towards a new normal, the NMC is gradually introducing changes to support the nursing and midwifery workforce to provide the best and safest care to people. We are now resuming areas of our work that we had been required to pause during the emergency, in accordance with government guidelines. We will continue to work collaboratively to ensure that the people on our register have the knowledge and skills to deliver safe, kind and high quality care to people.

If you have any questions about the detail contained in this pack then please get in touch using the information provided under [contact us](#).

## The temporary register

As you will be aware, the Government introduced emergency legislation that enabled the NMC to create the Covid-19 temporary register. This means we have temporarily registered fit, proper and suitably experienced people, so that they can practise if they want to and feel able to do so during the Covid-19 emergency.

When we opened the temporary register on 27 March, 7,510 nursing and midwifery professionals appeared on it. There are now over 14,000 professionals on the temporary register.

The latest published breakdown of the temporary register (data as of 8 July 2020):

	<i>Country of address</i>					
	<b>England</b>	<b>Northern Ireland</b>	<b>Scotland</b>	<b>Wales</b>	<b>Not given</b>	<b>UK</b>
<b>Midwife</b>	651	14	74	26	-	765
<b>Nurse</b>	11,063	283	1,381	583	36	13,346
<b>Midwife; Nurse</b>	120	4	11	4	1	140
<b>Total</b>	11,834	301	1,466	613	37	14,251

The temporary register will remain open as long as the Secretary of State for Health declares Covid-19 to be an emergency. We continue to work collaboratively with the Department of Health and Social Care and the Devolved Administrations to make any decisions in relation to the temporary register, including the future transition out of the emergency situation. Further information on the temporary register can be found on our website [here](#) and later in this pack [here](#).

## Registration data report

On 9 July we released our annual registration data report. The report was due to be published in May 2020 but had been delayed by the impact of the pandemic on our work.

[The report](#) shows the number of people on our permanent register has grown considerably, rising from 698,237 as of 1 April 2019 to 716,607 by 31 March 2020. This rise has been driven primarily by a mix of those joining and staying from the UK, and those joining from countries outside the EEA.

While the report acknowledges the Covid-19 temporary register, these nurses and midwives are not counted in the overall numbers on the permanent register or the detailed analysis in the report.

## Arrangements for students and Approved Education Institutions

### Temporary standards

At the beginning of the emergency, we set [temporary standards](#) for our Approved Education Institutions (AEIs) and their practice learning partners to support all their nursing and midwifery students throughout this emergency period. These emergency standards were facilitative, not directive, so that AEIs could choose whether or not to adopt them.

Our temporary emergency standards have enabled:

- student nurses and midwives in the final six months of their nursing and midwifery programmes to complete their training in appropriate placement settings
- students in the second year, first six months of their final year of pre-registration nursing and midwifery programmes, and those in the first year of post-graduate nursing and midwifery programmes to spend up to 80% of their year in clinical placements
- first year undergraduate students to complete their first year with up to 100% of their year in theoretical learning – the required clinical hours will be met across the rest of their programme.

At our Council meeting on 2 July, it was agreed that in order to support students and AEIs in this new transitional phase, we will introduce recovery education standards that provide a more stable learning environment for nursing and midwifery students in all years and ensure current final year students can qualify and become fully registered professionals on time. More information from our Council papers can be found on our website [here](#).

### Future Midwife standards

At our Council meeting on 2 July, it was also agreed to extend the time AEIs have to develop midwifery education programmes against our new Future Midwife standards to September 2022. We recognise that the pandemic has resulted in university time and resources that would have previously been spent on developing future curriculums being used to adapt current learning practices. It was agreed that providing an extended deadline, where it is needed, is fair to AEIs and ensures that these new curriculums can be co-created effectively. More information from our Council papers can be found on our website [here](#).

## Arrangements for overseas candidates

### OSCE test centre reopening

Due to the pandemic our three objective structured clinical examination (OSCE) test centres closed on 23 and 24 March. The centres have remained closed and we have not been conducting OSCEs for overseas candidates.

The test centre senior management teams across all three sites have assessed the physical risks associated with re-opening and, based on this risk assessment, they have developed a social distancing plan/Covid-19 management plan. The NMC has accepted these plans and the centres have started to implement them ahead of the agreed re-opening date of 20 July.

In order to support both candidates and the test centres, and to ensure the process is as fair as possible, all overseas applicants can book their tests but priority appointments will be given to those currently on the temporary register. Once candidates have successfully passed their OSCE and completed the application process, they will join the permanent register. All conditions of practice related to anyone previously on the temporary register will no longer apply to them. We will work with applicants, test centres, employers and other stakeholders to support this process and to make moving from the temporary register to the full register as easy as possible.

### Moving from the temporary register to the full register

We recognise that overseas applicants have made a significant contribution to health and social care throughout the pandemic. The vast majority of the over 2,400 overseas applicants on the temporary register, who are currently working with conditions of practice, have indicated that they want to transition to the full register and take advantage of the opportunities that this provides.

Our regulations require that we assess the suitability of overseas recruits to meet our standards and requirements, to provide assurance that they are capable of safe and effective practice in the UK. For non EU/EEA applicants, the two-part test of competence is our current means of providing that assurance in relation to all overseas applicants in a fair, proportionate and consistent way.

We have considered and reviewed other options for facilitating this transition, but we have concluded that there are no better alternatives to the current method of OSCE provision. All of the other options that meet our standards and provide the necessary level of assurance for permanent full registration, could not be developed quickly and cost-effectively in order to guarantee they would be in place before the possible closure of the temporary register.

It was therefore decided that reopening the test centres had to be a priority during this current phase of the pandemic. Opening the test centres ahead of the temporary

register closing gives us the opportunity to test applicants in a phased approach and to facilitate a smooth transition to a post-emergency landscape.

We do not currently have an estimated date for the closure of the temporary register as this will be decided by the government when they assess that the Covid-19 pandemic is no longer an emergency situation. However, our conversations with the Department for Health and Social Care have assured us that due to the risk of a second surge and the possibility of localised outbreaks, the temporary register is unlikely to be closed within the next few months.

We are committed to making sure the reopening of the OSCE centres is carried out effectively and that eligible applicants from the temporary register and others ready to take their test are registered swiftly and safely. This will take a collective effort from the centres themselves, the NMC, system leaders and employers.

### **Equality and diversity**

We also recognise that many of the candidates for the OSCE are from black, Asian and minority ethnic backgrounds (BAME) and that BAME people have been disproportionately affected by Covid-19. We know how important it is that people feel safe and supported when taking their OSCE test and when going to work which is why this has been a key consideration in all of our risk assessments

We are establishing a short-life task force involving all of these groups together with the representative bodies to oversee the implementation of the reopening of the OSCE centres, resolve practical issues that arise and ensure capacity and demand is planned and supported in the months ahead. We will share the membership of the task force soon.

We have a [dedicated webhub page for overseas candidates](#). This outlines how our overseas registration process has been impacted by Covid-19.

## Arrangements for the professionals on our permanent register

### Fitness to practise

At the start of the coronavirus pandemic, we identified four essential fitness to practise services that we must continue to deliver:

1. Logging and risk assessing any new referrals, and any new information on existing referrals
2. Interim order applications and review hearings
3. Substantive order review hearings
4. High Court or Court of Sessions interim order extension applications.

We made the decision to cancel all other listed hearings until the end of June which was then extended until the end of August. We also committed to only contacting individuals and employers where we felt we needed information to enable us to manage immediate risk to the public. This has necessitated us pausing our casework operations in a significant number of fitness to practise cases.

We have however continued to receive new fitness to practise referrals throughout the pandemic. 1205 new referrals were received and logged from April to June. We have also continued with hearing activity in our priority service areas, holding 525 virtual panel hearings from 23 March.

Now, as all four countries of the UK are continuing to recover from the pandemic and embark on 'a new normal', we will shortly resume our casework operations and plan to begin holding some of our hearings in person from September 2020. We will be working in accordance with government guidelines to ensure that those attendees asked to attend our centres are welcomed into a COVID-secure environment.

Our [Employer Link Service](#) will continue to be available to support employers around particular challenges they may have in engaging with the fitness to practise process during this time. They will be building our understanding of how ready people are to engage and we will be mindful of that in our operational planning.

To continue to ensure that our fitness to practise processes are as efficient as possible during this time, we will encourage all employers to contact our ELS as a first step before making a new referral. ELS will be able to discuss the fitness to practise concerns and will advise how we may progress the referral in the current situation.

Further information about this is available [on our website](#).

## Post registration standards review

As part of the review of all of our educational standards, we are now focusing on post registration qualifications. We are starting by looking at the post registration qualifications relating to community and primary care; reviewing our existing Specialist Community Public Health Nurse (SCPHN) and Specialist Practitioner Qualification (SPQ) post registration standards to ensure they equip our registrants with the knowledge, skills and attributes needed to lead, care and support people now and in the future.

We originally started this work at the end of 2019 but had to pause due to Covid-19. We have now started engagement activity for this review. We are hosting a number of webinars on each of the different areas of this review. We have already hosted webinars on the SCPHN core standards and the SPQ standards for community nurses, and the upcoming webinars are:

- Bespoke standards for SCPHN school nurses (10 July)
- Bespoke standards for SCPHN occupational health (15 July)
- Bespoke standards for SCPHN health visitors (21 July)

Anyone interested in attending future webinars can sign up to attend on our website [here](#).

We are also inviting people to complete an initial feedback survey on what should be included in the standards and what we need to consider. We are asking for feedback by 31 July 2020 and the link is [here](#).

Given the ongoing social distancing restrictions, we will continue to use digital methods such as online meetings to help shape our thinking for the development of new draft standards for consultation. We plan to formally consult on these standards either later this year or early in 2021. We aim to introduce these new standards in September 2021.

## The impact of Covid-19 on ethnic minority nurses, midwives and nursing associates

Our chief executive and registrar, Andrea Sutcliffe CBE, [has written to](#) the professionals on our register about the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on ethnic minority nurses, midwives and nursing associates.

Andrea's message makes it clear that this pandemic has exposed and exacerbated deep-seated inequalities in our society and we are looking at how we can support efforts to address them. The message also reiterates that the Code states clearly the principles of treating people with kindness, fairness and without discrimination, bullying or harassment. These principles are exactly how we expect those on our register to be treated by others too.

Following this message, we set out to our Council what action we plan to take as an immediate response to the issues raised by Black Lives Matter, and the ongoing work

we will pursue to address the concerns raised by our colleagues, professionals and the public. This includes reviewing how we will use our standards to address health inequalities for BAME communities, as well as how we recruit and train NMC staff. More information from our Council papers can be found on our website [here](#).

## Other updates

### **Renew Normal: people's commission on life after Covid-19**

NMC Chief Executive, Andrea Sutcliffe CBE, has joined a special commission set up by the charity and think tank Demos to review what life in the UK should return to once the pandemic emergency has ended.

Andrea's role in the commission will help to ensure the views of nursing and midwifery professionals and everyone working in or using health and social care services, informs the debate on what society should look like after Covid-19. She is one of eleven commissioners who will listen to what is shared and help develop a set of proposals for the future, with the hope of creating lasting change

Demos has launched an open platform for people to share their stories, experiences and ideas on life after Covid-19 and how the country should change after the crisis. Anyone interested in submitting to the commission can do so [here](#). Further information on the commission's work can be found [here](#).

## Further Information

Previous packs with additional information can be found on our website here;

- [25 June](#)
- [15 June](#)
- [22 May](#)
- [13 May](#)
- [27 April](#)
- [20 April](#)

## Frequently asked questions

We are monitoring the queries we are regularly being asked by registrants and stakeholders and collating a list of responses to frequently asked questions. A full list of our FAQs in relation to Covid-19 can be found on [our website](#).

## Contact us

If people in your networks have any general queries about the NMC, they can contact us at 020 7333 9333. If they have questions about our temporary register they should email [tempreg@nmc-uk.org](mailto:tempreg@nmc-uk.org) or call 020 7637 7181.

As a key stakeholder of the NMC, our stakeholder relations team is also here to support with your queries and any feedback you have on our work. You can contact the team at [stakeholders@nmc-uk.org](mailto:stakeholders@nmc-uk.org).

If you are a parliamentarian, civil servant or elected official, our public affairs team will be able to answer any queries. You can contact the team at [publicaffairs@nmc-uk.org](mailto:publicaffairs@nmc-uk.org).