

The Nursing and Midwifery Council: a programme of radical change

As nurses, we are experiencing a time of considerable change. No matter what our specialism is, the sectors of practice, education and research are all undergoing radical transformation to our existing ways of working that our regulatory body has woken to the idea that they can no longer exist in a world of governance with a mere tweaking of the status quo. Recently, I heard an inspirational presentation from our education lead at the Nursing and Midwifery Council (NMC) that I thought it worth sharing with you. The main proposals are being presented at Council on 24th May 2017 and can be accessed on their website (NMC 2017). I am sure that for some of you, this will not be news but perhaps we can all learn something from the recommendations to prepare us for the wider consultation.

It is worth reminding you of the function of the NMC. In addition to a number of other roles, they are employed to protect the public by setting education standards designed to identify the competencies required of a professional nurse and midwife. In total, the NMC approves approximately 1,000 programmes and 79 higher education institutions (HEIs) across the UK.

Between 2016 – 2020, the NMC set out on a trajectory of radical change for education, to modernise the standards set and ensure that qualified nurses and midwives are armed with the knowledge and skills required to practise both now and in the future (NMC 2017). Having reached the first draft review of the nursing standards, the NMC are currently reviewing the midwifery standards; in addition, they have recently started to review the education framework and in particular the role of mentorship and simulation. They will also refine the current quality assurance (QA) framework to avoid as far as possible overlaps with the approved QA processes of the higher education institutions (HEIs) and in addition, they will approve other standards at the post qualifying level.

So, in spite of an already extensive consultation process with selected nurses, students, educators, patients and the public and following approval from Council to proceed, the new nursing standards will be out for a full consultation with the wider profession and members of the public. Be sure to encourage your colleagues to send their comments back to the NMC as this will be your one opportunity to influence the preparation of the future Registered Nurse workforce. Following your comments, the standards will be refined and published early 2018, ready for implementation in September 2018. The process will be the same for the midwifery standards which will be published early 2019.

The new education framework will move to a single set of outcome focused standards for HEIs and practice placements. The idea is that these standards will be clear, measurable and encourage a more inter-professional learning environment (NMC 2017). Within the framework, the NMC will be working much more in partnership with the HEIs and as previously stated, they will try to avoid instigating parallel structures and processes. In particular, they will be thinking less about governing through quantifying processes eg 40% student/mentor contact and be much more focused on the HEIs' own evidence and satisfaction of quality output. The NMC propose to be much more flexible, moving to a more principles based approach, while retaining their oversight of safety to the public. Changes are being proposed in relation to such issues as mentorship, the governance of practice placements, assessment and simulation (NMC 2017). For example, the NMC are proposing to move away from 'mentors' and towards: 'practice supervisor, practice assessor

(nominated); academic assessor (nominated)', with a more flexible approach to their preparation and support (NMC 2017).

The NMC wishes to have greater consistency in the student experience across the country. With this in mind, they would like to move to a national practice assessment tool, just as they have achieved in the London area (Baillie et al 2016). The issue of simulation is also being considered. As you will be aware, the current requirements of utilising a maximum of 300 hours of high fidelity or classroom-based practice can be used against the 2,300 required practice hours, and now this magic figure of 300 hours is being questioned. The proposal is that simulation should not exceed half the total placement hours (NMC 2017). What do you think? Once the NMC go out to full public consultation Spring 2017, this will be your chance to engage.

Having previously sat on the periphery of this development, I have learned a great deal about the future NMC proposals to revolutionise their current education requirements of undergraduate nursing and midwifery students. The Council papers are well worth perusing and will give you much more detail than I could possibly present to you here. The education of our future profession does matter and so I would certainly recommend your scrutiny of these papers to enlighten you as to future developments and urge you to make your comments.

Baillie, L., Fish, J., Barclay, J., Case, D., Crussell, J., O'Brien, M., Icheke, V., Humphries, P., Thompson, S. and Mitchell, J. (2016) *Assessing nursing students in practice: a mixed method evaluation of a unified assessment document*. Accessed at:

https://www.heacademy.ac.uk/system/files/downloads/baillie-assessing_nursing_students.pdf on 19.4.17

Nursing and Midwifery Council (2017) Future Nursing Standards and Education Framework: Consultation. Item 7, Council meeting 24 May. Accessed at:

<https://www.nmc.org.uk/globalassets/sitedocuments/councilpapersanddocuments/council-2017/council-item-7-may-2017.pdf> on 19.5.17

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Professor Elizabeth Rosser

Bournemouth University

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