

Professional Nurse Advocate Standards for Education and Training Programmes and Modules

CLINICAL PROFESSIONAL RESOURCE



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Introduction

The **Professional Nurse Advocate (PNA) programme** is a clinical and professional leadership programme which aims to equip nurses with the skills and knowledge to deliver restorative clinical supervision to their colleagues and teams across the NHS in England; lead quality improvement initiatives to improve patient care; and contribute to positive cultures of learning.

The nationally funded programme (launched by NHSE in March 2021) provides senior nurses with the skills to listen and understand the challenges and demands of fellow colleagues, then to lead support and deliver quality improvement initiatives in response to them.

An evaluated version of this programme already exists for midwives, where successful implementation has enhanced staff wellbeing, retention, and improved patient outcomes. At the time of writing these standards, an independent implementation evaluation of the PNA role is nearing completion, and preliminary findings suggest positive experiences of nurses accessing restorative clinical supervision, organisational benefit, and increased feelings of empowerment for those trained as PNAs.

The PNA training programme works to embed the four functions of the **advocating for education, quality and improvement (A-EQUIP) model**:

- restorative clinical supervision (restorative)
- monitoring, evaluation and quality control (normative)
- personal action for quality improvement
- education and development (formative).

There has been extensive national uptake in England by education institutions and employer organisations to support, develop and implement the PNA role. However, with various providers delivering PNA training, there are notable variances in the delivery and learner experience of these programmes.

NHS England has sought to create standards for PNA education and programme delivery in England to address this challenge. The Royal College of Nursing (RCN) was commissioned to work with stakeholders to produce these standards. By creating these standards, education institutions have a universal framework to align programmes towards, establishing enhanced levels of quality assurance.

A rigorous approach was undertaken to inform the content of these standards. Initially, the project consultant undertook a literature search to explore the published literature on PNAs. In addition, other unpublished reports and learning outcomes were sought and reviewed. The standards were mapped and aligned, and informed further by broader documentation and literature. The RCN positioning on clinical supervision is incorporated throughout.

Part 1: Standards framework for PNA education

- Mapped against: **NMC education framework**.
- Informed by: **professional nurse advocate implementation guide**.
- Aligned with: **The Frameworks for Higher Education Qualifications of UK Degree-Awarding Bodies**.

Part 2: Standards for PNA programme and modules

- Mapped against: **NMC future-nurse proficiencies** and **NMC programme standards for nursing**.
- Informed by: **professional nurse advocate implementation guide**, **The Code**, PNA published literature, current HEI learning outcomes, and views of multiple stakeholders.
- Aligned with: **The Frameworks for Higher Education Qualifications of UK Degree-Awarding Bodies**, RCN quality assurance framework and RCN Accreditation standards.

Extensive stakeholder engagement has taken place to inform the content of the standards:

- three large group workshops were held to agree on the contents of the standards for part 2
- two smaller workshops were held to develop the nuances and provide more detail to the content of the standards (parts 1 and 2)
- written comments on the penultimate draft were sought and provided by stakeholders
- multiple one-to-one discussions took place with members of the stakeholder group.

Part 1: Standards framework for professional nurse advocate (PNA) education

Introduction

Professional nurse advocates provide professional clinical leadership within their clinical settings. This includes the facilitation of restorative clinical supervision to other nurses and health care staff, leadership of quality improvement projects and the development of cultures of learning. PNA training is a nurse-specific, continuing professional development. Building on established standards for nurse education, these standards have been mapped to the NMC's [Standards framework for nursing and midwifery education](#).

Furthermore, the [Professional Nurse Advocate implementation guide](#) provides context to the specific standards required for PNA training programmes. Finally, informed by both existing frameworks, Part 1: Standards framework for PNA education is presented.

Standard 1: Learning culture

The learning culture must be ethical, open and honest, conducive to safe and effective learning that respects the principles of equality and diversity and where innovation, education and teamwork are embedded.

Requirements: approved education institutions, and the employing organisations, must:

- 1.1. demonstrate that the safety of people is a primary consideration in all learning environments
- 1.2. prioritise the wellbeing of people by promoting critical self-reflection and safe practice, ensuring the limitations and boundaries of a PNA are explicit to all
- 1.3. ensure learners and educators understand how to raise concerns or complaints and are encouraged and supported to comply with local and national policies without fear of adverse consequences
- 1.4. ensure any concerns or complaints are investigated and dealt with effectively
- 1.5. ensure concerns or complaints affecting the wellbeing of people are addressed immediately and effectively
- 1.6. ensure incidents are thoroughly investigated and learning reflections and actions are recorded and disseminated
- 1.7. ensure the learning culture is fair, impartial, and transparent, fosters good relations between individuals and diverse groups, and complies with equalities and human rights legislation
- 1.8. promote programme improvement and advance equity of opportunity by effectively using information and data
- 1.9. ensure programmes are designed, developed, delivered, evaluated and co-produced with PNAs and other relevant stakeholders
- 1.10. work with service providers to demonstrate and promote the continuing professional development of PNAs
- 1.11. support opportunities for research collaboration and evidence-based improvement in education and service provision.

Standard 2: Educational governance and quality

Education providers must comply with all national legal and regulatory requirements relevant to and reflective of the areas in which learning takes place.

Requirements: approved education institutions must:

- 2.1. comply with all relevant legal, regulatory, professional and educational requirements for the roles and responsibilities of a registered nurse undertaking the duties of a PNA
- 2.2. ensure modules and learning programmes are designed to meet the learning outcomes relevant to the PNA training programme/module
- 2.3. ensure that recruitment and selection of learners is open, fair and transparent and include measures to understand and address underrepresentation (institutions' responsibility outside the national PNA learner recruitment process)
- 2.4. have robust and transparent processes to undertake annual equality impact assessments of PNA training programmes and modules
- 2.5. demonstrate (where necessary), a robust process for recognising prior learning and how it has been mapped to the programme learning outcomes and proficiencies
- 2.6. provide learners with the information and support required to understand and comply with relevant local and national governance processes and policies in all learning environments
- 2.7. confirm that learners meet the required programme outcomes in full, demonstrating their eligibility for a level 7 academic award (or national equivalent), as per [The Frameworks for Higher Education Qualifications of UK Degree-Awarding Bodies](#)
- 2.8. have the capacity, facilities and resources to deliver safe and effective learning opportunities and practical experiences for learners as required by their PNA programme/module learning outcomes (organisations must provide time for learners to undertake the training through continuing professional development policies and processes. Approved education institutions should offer practical learning opportunities in classes/skills labs where this is not possible)
- 2.9. proactively identify and act on any areas for improvement, measuring programme performance and outcomes against these standards (parts 1 and 2) and other recognised quality frameworks in education, as per [The Frameworks for Higher Education Qualifications of UK Degree-Awarding Bodies](#)
- 2.10. appoint appropriately qualified and experienced nurse educators for the PNA programme delivery
- 2.11. identify training programme/module leaders to confirm that each learner has met all learning objectives by the end of their programme
- 2.12. ensure appropriately qualified, experienced external examiners consider and report on the quality of theory and practice learning.

Standard 3: Student support

Students must be provided with the learning opportunities they need to achieve the desired proficiencies and programme outcomes.

Requirements: approved education institutions, together with the employing organisations, must ensure that all learners:

- 3.1. have access to the resources they need to achieve the programme outcomes required for the role of PNA (organisations must provide time for learners to undertake the training through continuing professional development policies and processes. Approved education institutions should offer practical learning opportunities in classes/skills labs where this is not possible)
- 3.2. are provided with timely and accurate information about curriculum approaches to teaching, supervision, assessment, and other information relevant to their programme
- 3.3. are enabled to learn and are assessed using a range of methods, including remote and face-to-face learning, appropriate for meeting the PNA training programme/module
- 3.4. are supported by their employers to impart their PNA learning into practice during their programme
- 3.5. have clear policies and processes to pause, interrupt or extend submission periods
- 3.6. have their diverse needs respected and considered across all learning environments, with support and adjustments provided per equalities and human rights legislation, and best practice
- 3.7. are protected from discrimination, harassment and other behaviour that undermines their performance or confidence
- 3.8. are provided with information and support which encourages them to take responsibility for their own mental and physical health and wellbeing, knowing and maintaining their personal and professional limitations as PNAs
- 3.9. are provided with the learning and pastoral support necessary to enable them to prepare for reflective and reflexive professional nurse advocacy within clinical practice
- 3.10. receive constructive feedback throughout the programme from others, including PNAs with experience in the programme to promote and encourage reflective learning
- 3.11. have opportunities throughout their programme to give feedback on the quality of all aspects of their support in both theory and practice.

Standard 4: Educators and assessors

Those who support, supervise and assess PNA learners must be suitable, prepared and skilled; and receive the necessary support for their role.

Requirements: approved education institutions must ensure that all educators and assessors:

- 4.1. comply with all standards and requirements in parts 1 and 2 of *Professional Nurse Advocate Standards for Education and Training Programmes and Modules*
- 4.2. act as professional role model
- 4.3. receive relevant induction, ongoing support and access to education and training, including equality and diversity training

- 4.4. have supported time and resources to enable them to fulfil their roles and other professional responsibilities
- 4.5. respond effectively to the learning needs of individuals
- 4.6. are supportive and objective in their approach to learner supervision, support and assessment
- 4.7. are expected to respond effectively to concerns and complaints about learner performance (ie, attendance and quality of work) in learning environments and are supported in doing so
- 4.8. receive and act upon constructive feedback from learners and the people they engage with to enhance the effectiveness of their teaching and assessment
- 4.9. share effective practice and learn from others.

Standard 5: Curricula and assessment

Providers must implement curricula and assessments that enable learners to achieve the outcomes required to practise safely and effectively as PNAs.

Approved education institutions, and the employing organisations, must ensure the following:

- 5.1. curricula fulfil Part 2: Standards for PNA training programme and modules by providing learning opportunities that equip learners to meet the learning outcomes
- 5.2. curricula remain relevant in respect of the contemporary PNA and A-EQUIP agenda
- 5.3. curricula are developed and evaluated by suitably experienced and qualified educators and practitioners, who are accountable for ensuring that the curriculum incorporates relevant learning outcomes
- 5.4. curricula are co-produced with PNAs with relevant experience to the programme
- 5.5. curricula provide appropriate structure and sequencing that integrates theory and practice at level 7 complexity (or nationally equivalent) with a module minimum of 15 credits
- 5.6. curricula are structured and sequenced to enable learners to effectively manage their theory and practice learning experience
- 5.7. summative assessment is fair, reliable and valid to enable learners to demonstrate they have achieved the outcomes of their programme
- 5.8. work and network with other approved education providers to ensure curricula and assessment continuity, limiting learner experience variance nationally
- 5.9. adjustments are provided according to relevant equalities and human rights legislation for assessments in theory and practice
- 5.10. learners' self-reflections contribute to and are evidenced in assessments
- 5.11. assessment of practice and theory is weighted appropriately to the training programme/module
- 5.12. each learner will have access to a supervisor (trained PNA) provided by their employing organisation.

Part 2: Standards for professional nurse advocate training programmes and modules

Introduction

The following standards set out the minimum programme criteria to be expected through the provision of PNA training by approved education institutions and, where relevant, employer organisations.

Central to the A-EQUIP model, restorative emphasises the supportive aspects of supervision, including personal development, improving stress management and mitigating burnout (NHS England, 2021). In addition, restorative clinical supervision adopts a non-judgemental approach, providing a psychologically safe space to explore the emotional effects of professional practice (Jones, 2022).

PNA's must understand their role when facilitating restorative clinical supervision. PNA's support a culture of autonomy, belonging and contribution (King's Fund, 2020) to inspire continuous improvement and enable nursing staff in all positions to innovate and improve practice (NHS Leadership Academy, 2011).

Professional accountability is central to all aspects of the PNA role. This is underpinned by the principle that individuals and organisations are responsible for their actions and may be required to explain them to others (NMC, 2018).

Personal and professional growth is critical to the role of a PNA, the process by which a nurse manages their learning throughout their career. Continuous learning helps ensure nurses' skills and knowledge are contemporary and ensures nurses practice within professional boundaries.

1. Selection, admission and progression

1.1. Professional nurse advocate (PNA) application criteria

- 1.1.1. Learners must hold an active NMC registration.
- 1.1.2. Learners must be employed in a registered nursing role.
- 1.1.3. Learners must practice within a health care setting that provides NHS or NHS-commissioned services.
- 1.1.4. Learners must provide evidence of holding a level 6 certificate in education (ie, BSc Hons in Adult Nursing) or above (as per standard 4.15 of [The Frameworks for Higher Education Qualifications of UK Degree-Awarding Bodies](#).)
- 1.1.5. Those without a level 6 certificate in education must provide evidence of prior learning; where approved, education institutes must support learners to attain the skills and knowledge to study at level 7 (or equivalent).

1.2. Restorative clinical supervision experience

- 1.2.1. Ideally, learners should have prior experience receiving restorative clinical supervision from a trained PNA. (We understand that some learners may have yet to gain prior experience with restorative clinical supervision. However, this must be a desirable expectation.)
- 1.2.2. They can access clinical supervision (restorative, formative and normative) by a PNA (where available) according to their individual learning needs, proficiency and confidence.
- 1.2.3. Where practical, approved education institutions and employer organisations must ensure applied learning experience of the broader elements of PNA training. (As per standards 3-5. For example, undertaking a quality improvement project, quality audit or teaching within practice.)

1.3. Professional nurse advocate (PNA) selection

- 1.3.1. A learner within a registered nursing role who fulfils the criteria listed above can be nominated by their line manager to apply for the PNA training programme.
- 1.3.2. A central recruitment process will be followed to determine the learner's suitability for PNA training.
- 1.3.3. If the selection process is successful, learners will be assigned to an approved education provider to undertake the training.

2. Facilitating clinical supervision using a restorative approach (restorative)

The standard: evaluate the relevant evidence to understand the function of restorative clinical supervision to promote critical reflection of emotions and practice within personal, professional and ethical frameworks.

Requirement: approved education institutions, and employer organisations, must ensure:

- 2.1. learners can systematically evaluate the historical and contemporary theory and research underpinning A-EQUIP, including the restorative, normative and formative functions of clinical supervision (Proctor, 2010, p. 23-33)
- 2.2. learners comprehensively apply the theoretical underpinnings of restorative clinical supervision and the processes by which it is embedded within the role of a PNA
- 2.3. learners can critically reflect on the limitations of restorative clinical supervision in supporting the emotional and psychological wellbeing of others, as well as independently recognise and manage the personal emotional impact of facilitating restorative supervision
- 2.4. learners demonstrate self-direction in tackling and solving unpredictable challenges within complex personal, professional and ethical policies and frameworks
- 2.5. the development of the PNA role and the facilitation of restorative clinical supervision are embedded within clinical governance arrangements, including board-level oversight.

3. Enabling nurses to undertake personal action for quality improvement

The standard: critically appraise the role of the PNA in contributing to continual development and innovation in care so that quality improvement becomes part of everyone's practice.

Requirement: approved education institutions, and employer organisations, must ensure:

- 3.1. learners know how to comprehensively support staff through a continuous improvement process that builds personal and professional clinical leadership, improves quality of care, and supports professional revalidation
- 3.2. learners can systematically identify and critically apply high-quality nursing research and support to innovate and use evidence in practice; enabling PNAs, and those who work with them, to develop new knowledge, improve nursing practice and transform patient care and experience
- 3.3. learners can comprehensively apply quality improvement methodologies enabling them to systematically evaluate, change and improve the quality of care and services as part of every nurse's responsive practice.

4. Monitoring, evaluation and quality control (normative)

The standard: critically evaluate quality activities in how they may promote and improve patient safety, better care outcomes and enhance mechanisms for professional accountability.

Requirement: approved education institutions, and employer organisations, must ensure:

- 4.1. learners can critically apply the methods and processes of high-quality care: patient safety, the effectiveness of care and patient experience; to promote an environment where everyone feels responsible for maintaining and improving the quality of care
- 4.2. learners can support colleagues to prevent and reduce risks, errors and harm occurring to patients, while enhancing patient outcomes, through nursing care provision
- 4.3. learners have a comprehensive knowledge of all relevant legal, regulatory, professional and educational requirements for the responsibilities of a nurse undertaking the role of a PNA.

5. Promoting the education and development of nurses (formative)

The standard: through critical reflection, identify approaches to personal and professional growth in self and others to promote continuing development and education.

Requirement: approved education institutions, and employer organisations, must ensure:

- 5.1. learners can systematically and rigorously critique nursing practices based on the professional principle that nurses continually learn, develop and grow their skills and knowledge
- 5.2. learners can critically integrate theory, learning and education into their day-to-day professional practice
- 5.3. learners have comprehensive knowledge to support other nurses to learn and develop throughout their careers.

Glossary

Approved education institutions (AEIs): is the status awarded to an institution, part of an institution, or combination of institutions, that works in partnership with national, regional or organisational implementation lead for PNAs. AEIs will have assured commissioning and accrediting bodies that they are accountable and capable of delivering the PNA training programme or modules.

Curriculum: this term refers to the lessons and academic content taught that are specific to the PNA training programme or modules.

Educators: in the context of the NMC Standards for education and training, are those who deliver, support, supervise and assess theory, practice or work placed learning.

Equalities and human rights legislation: prohibits unlawful discrimination based on age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex, sexual orientation and other characteristics. Anti-discrimination laws can be country-specific, and there are some legally binding international protections. Learning environments include any environment in terms of the physical location where learning takes place and the system of shared values, beliefs and behaviours within these places.

Learners: are any individual enrolled on a PNA training programme or module at post-registration level, whether full time or less than full time.

Learning outcomes: are measurable achievements, skills, abilities, knowledge or values that the learner will be able to demonstrate after the education is complete.

Patients: are people accessing health or social care services. In some settings, other terms are used instead of the patients, such as service users, residents and clients.

Practical experience: is through practical learning opportunities in classrooms and/or skills laboratories. See simulation below.

Quality assurance: are NMC processes for making sure all AEIs continue to meet their requirements and their approved education programmes comply with their standards.

Recognition of prior learning: is a process that enables previous certificated or experiential learning to be recognised and accepted as meeting some programme outcomes and requirements; this means it includes both theory and practice achievement.

Simulation: is an educational method which uses a variety of modalities to support students in developing their knowledge, behaviours and skills, with the opportunity for repetition, feedback, evaluation and reflection to achieve their programme outcomes and be confirmed as capable of safe and effective practice.

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This is an RCN standards for nursing education publication. Standards for nursing education are evidence-based consensus documents that guide decisions about developing the content and delivery of learning for nursing practice.

Description

There has been extensive national uptake by education institutions and employer organisations to support, develop and implement the role of the professional nurse advocate (PNA). However, with various providers delivering PNA training, there are notable variances in the delivery and learner experiences.

To address this challenge, NHS England commissioned the RCN to work with stakeholders to create standards for PNA education and programme delivery. These standards offer education institutions a universal framework to align their programmes towards, and to establish enhanced levels of quality assurance.

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Evaluation

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