



RCN Professional Development Framework – Levels of Nursing

Advanced Level Nursing

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Introduction

The Royal College of Nursing (RCN) has worked with our members, including RCN Forums and Fellows, to define the levels of nursing beyond the point of registration: enhanced, advanced and consultant level nursing.

The Nursing and Midwifery Council (NMC) sets the standards of proficiency for the registered nurse (NMC, 2018). These standards represent the knowledge, skills, and behaviours that all nurses must have.

The NMC also sets the standards framework for nursing (and midwifery) education, to ensure that the standards of proficiency are met in practice (NMC, 2024).

Beyond the point of registration, the levels at which nurses work are evolving within all settings, including primary, secondary, and tertiary care, the independent sector and social care.

The RCN has developed definitions and standards for the enhanced, advanced and consultant levels of nursing to provide clarity for those aspiring to practice at these levels, as well as for employers and higher education institutions (HEIs).

Whilst consultant and advanced clinical practitioners have been recognised within nursing, previously they have not been defined clearly for all health care settings and nursing roles.

The new and updated definitions and standards will further clarify nursing levels and bring together country-specific frameworks. It is intended that through the use of a shared language, ambiguity can be removed, and the levels of practice can be recognised by service users and professionals.

The RCN is now working on bringing the same consistency of approach to defining supportive and assistive (or associate) roles within the nursing workforce.

Advanced level nursing

The concept of nurses working at a level significantly higher than that expected from the registered nurse, was first recognised in the UK in the 1980s, stimulated by increasing awareness of impressive examples of nursing innovation and impact within the USA. The RCN was a key driver in the recognition of an advanced level of nursing, with a definition and an education programme for nurse practitioners launched in 1990. Subsequently the governments of all four countries of the UK have published policy and frameworks on this topic (Skills for Health, 2010; DH, 2010; NLIAH NHS Wales, 2014; DHSSPS/NIPEC, 2016; Scottish Government, 2017; HEE, 2017; Institute for Apprenticeships, 2017; NHS Education for Scotland, 2021; Scottish Government, 2021a; and NHS Wales, 2023).

The International Council of Nurses (ICN, 2020) revisited its position statement first published in 2008 to produce broader guidelines on advanced nursing practice. It describes it as a field of nursing that extends and expands the boundaries of nursing's scope of practice, contributes to nursing knowledge and promotes advancement of the profession. The European Federation of Nurses Associations (EFN) has established a group which is utilising the ICN guidelines to work towards a consensus position as part of a global drive for a consistent approach to this level of nursing.

It has been noted that all publications to date, have focused on nurses and other health care professionals who are employed in clinical roles, with reference to titles such as advanced nurse practitioner (Nuffield Trust, 2023).

The following definition, standards and capabilities have been created through appraisal and synthesis of key content from the current RCN publications on *Advanced Level Nursing Practice* (2018) and pertinent past and current publications from the four countries of the United Kingdom (Skills for Health, 2010; DH, 2010; NLIAH NHS Wales, 2014; DHSSPS/NIPEC, 2016; Scottish Government, 2017; HEE, 2017; Institute for Apprenticeships, 2017; NHS Education Scotland, 2021, NHS Wales, 2023 and DH Northern Ireland, 2023;) and integration of relevant academic descriptors for this level (SEEC, 2021; QAA, 2014; SCQF, 2022 and Ofqual, 2023). The comprehensive College of Radiographers *Education and Career Framework for the Radiography Workforce – 4th edition* (2022) was used as a wider professional reference point. An RCN Levels of Practice Workstream group further developed the content for generic application across all contexts in which registered nurses work.

[Appendix I](#) provides extracts of key background information and relevant publications by the four countries of the UK and international sources.

Enhanced Level of Nursing definition: <https://www.rcn.org.uk/Professional-Development/levels-of-nursing/enhanced>

Consultant Level of Nursing definition: <https://www.rcn.org.uk/Professional-Development/levels-of-nursing/consultant>

Updated RCN position: Advanced level nursing

The RCN strongly supports the on-going development of advanced level registered nurses across all areas related to health and social care.

We are broadly supportive of the ICN and EFN stance in describing this level as requiring additional graduate education (minimum of a master's degree), an expert knowledge base, complex decision-making skills and competencies for advanced nursing, the characteristics of which are shaped by the context in which they practice (adapted from ICN, 2008 (cited in ICN, 2020)).

The RCN has built on the work to date and recognised that the concept of advanced level can and should be applied across all contexts in which registered nurses work, including leaders, managers, educators, and researchers, to ensure that all are valued and their ultimate impact on the quality of patient care is acknowledged.

In all contexts, the Principles of Nursing (RCN, 2023) and Standards of Proficiency for Registered Nurses (NMC, 2018) are the professional foundation of advanced level nursing.

The RCN has revisited its previous publications (RCN, 2018) and produced a new definition and core standards that apply to all registered nurses working at this level.

To optimise public protection, additional capabilities have been specified for registered nurses working at an advanced level who primarily provide direct-patient care.

Collectively, these are intended to inform and support all activities related to this subject. They replace previous versions.

New definition

Advanced level nursing describes a level which can only be delivered by registered nurses with substantial experience* and expertise**. This level can be applied to the full range of registered nurses' careers, and not solely particular roles or specific organisational contexts. The advanced level is differentiated from other levels by a registered nurse's expertise in applying highly developed theoretical and practical knowledge to complex, unpredictable, and sometimes unfamiliar situations, through use of critical thinking, high-level decision making and exercising professional judgement. It is underpinned by a comprehensive range of knowledge, skills, and capabilities within each of the four pillars of nursing, namely clinical practice, education, research, and leadership. These will have been developed through studying a full master's degree in a relevant subject area with experiential learning or by demonstrating equivalence***. Integration of all the capabilities across the four pillars****, together with critical reflection, is key to enable an advanced level nurse to function to their full potential and optimise their autonomy***** within their context of employment.

*** Experienced** - This term is used here to emphasise the fact that a registered nurse cannot progress to an advanced level as described in this definition and core standards, based purely on knowledge and skills acquired through education. Similarly meaningful learning from experience does not take place automatically according to the time served as a registered nurse (Rolfe et al., 2001). Rather, development of the expected level of expertise will require experiential learning describing an engaged learning process whereby people “learn by doing” combined with **critical reflection** incorporating testing, integration and refinement of theoretical and practical knowledge, skills, and behaviours in real-life situations, including those with that are less familiar, complicated, complex, unpredictable, challenging, and high risk (Dreyfus and Dreyfus, 1980). While Dreyfus developed this perspective within the field of Social Work, Benner researched and verified its application to nursing in her seminal work (Benner, 1984). From this she concluded that through relevant experience, key nursing attributes can be developed along the Novice to Expert continuum such as appreciation of the whole situation, the capability to establish priorities within this, and mastery from establishment of a comprehensive knowledge or skill in a particular subject or activity (Benner, 1984). Choperena et al., (2019) have echoed the importance of looking back to past experiences, creating space for dialogue, and bringing the worlds of theory and practice closer together, promoting nursing narratives as an effective vehicle to support this activity. In addition, please refer to the RCN resources on Clinical Supervision. [RCN position on clinical supervision | Royal College of Nursing](#)

As a guide as to the amount of time that it might take to achieve an advanced level, most post-qualifying master’s programmes are of three years duration. While not mandated, most universities expect applicants to have a minimum of two years nursing experience following their initial professional registration as an entry requirement.

**** Expertise** – can be defined as a hybrid of practical and theoretical knowledge which develops when a nurse tests and refines both aspects in actual situations to influence nurses’ judgement (Benner, 1984; McHugh and Lake, 2010). Knowledge and skills employed by the expert reflect a thorough understanding of the work context and situations that arise. Conversely, understanding practice shapes and organises knowledge (Hutchinson et al., 2016).

Benner’s seminal research (1984) identified five possible expertise levels: novice, advanced beginner, competent, proficient, and expert building on the continuum proposed by Dreyfus and Dreyfus (1980). Expert nurses recognise unexpected outcomes and can alert others to potential problems before they occur. Experts have an intuitive grasp of whole situations and can accurately identify the root of a problem and respond without wasteful consideration of ineffective possibilities. Because of their superior performance, expert nurses are often consulted by others and relied upon to be supervisors and mentors. A feature of expertise is the capacity to recognise subtle features of context and adapt accordingly.

A critical analysis of this concept for nursing by Hutchinson et al. (2016) suggested that the conditions required for development of expertise were time, experience and theory/knowledge and a conducive environment which facilitates perception and sensitivity to the reality, develops speed of reasoning and provides opportunities for complex performance.

*** Master's level modules are academic study at Level 7 or Scottish equivalent of Level 11 which has been formally ratified by a Higher Education Institution. This level equates to Level 7 in the European Qualifications Framework (European Commission, 2008).

A full master's degree award comprises of 180 credits where the majority are at Level 7 or Scottish equivalent of Level 11 which has been formally ratified by a Higher Education Institution. The majority for health and social care will be a Master of Science (MSc) but occasionally a Master of Arts (MA). The duration of these awards on a part-time basis is usually three years. Recognition of prior learning is normally available within these programmes.

In preparing this position, the RCN Levels of Practice group were mindful of the following:

From 2013 all new registered nurses have had to hold a minimum of a degree-level qualification to enter the profession in England, Northern Ireland, Wales, and Scotland provided by NMC-approved higher education institutions. Commonly these have also provided a postgraduate diploma option for existing graduates to become a registered nurse. Education for an advanced level of nursing therefore needs to be set higher.

The volume of learning involved in attainment of the full list of capabilities for advanced level nursing across all four pillars is such that the duration of part-time educational programmes needs to be three years.

In 2020, the ICN stated that all advanced practice nurses "have roles or levels of practice which require formal education beyond the preparation of the generalist nurse (minimum required entry level is a master's degree) (ICN, 2020, page 9).

There is currently variation in the educational requirements for advanced level nursing set by England, Northern Ireland, Wales and Scotland:

ENGLAND - The current position on education is captured in the Health Education England (2017) "Multiprofessional Framework for Advanced Clinical Practice in England". Within the definition it states that "This is underpinned by a **master's level award or equivalent** that encompasses the four pillars". Following publication, this resulted in central funding for Postgraduate Diploma Advanced Clinical Practice and full Masters awards. However more recently this has been devolved to regional level providing funding for a full Masters award and for some regions top-up funding for those needing to gain further academic credit to gain a full Masters. Alongside this the Advanced Clinical Practitioner Integrated Degree Apprenticeship (Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education, 2017) provides another funding route for nurses to gain a full Masters award. Irrespective of the source of funding, all university study is undertaken on

a part-time basis while working in a post where the knowledge and capabilities of advanced level are developed and applied.

NORTHERN IRELAND – In 2017 the Department of Health Northern Ireland commissioned an MSc Advanced Nursing Practice programme underpinned by their Advanced Nursing Practice Framework. Initially this was via a two-year MSc Advanced Nursing Practice programme to prepare Advanced Nurse Practitioners in three pathways: Primary care, Emergency Care and Children’s Nursing with the first graduates qualifying in 2019. Subsequently, this was expanded with routes commissioned in Adult Medicine & Older People, Mental Health and Critical Care. The Department of Health approves the university provision. New approaches to the commissioning process have recently been proposed, along with provision of ANP programmes that deliver a broad-based curriculum and incorporate the non-medical prescribing course by the Department of Health (2023) following an analysis of the current policy and arrangements.

WALES – NHS Wales (2023) state that “the practitioner will demonstrate Level 7 Education (MSc level or equivalent) and achievement through completion of an MSc Advanced Clinical Practice in their area of practice and maintenance of a portfolio of evidence to support the four pillars of advanced practice”. Health Education and Improvement Wales (HEIW) provides funding for Advanced and Extended Practice education with priority areas each year for the health boards and trust to target their spend.

SCOTLAND – The Scottish Government published Annexe A as a follow-up to the Transforming Roles paper on Advanced Nursing Practice (ANP) (Scottish Government, 2017) which stated that the academic education requirements were achievement of a Post Graduate Diploma in Advanced Clinical Practice as a minimum and should be working towards an MSc in a subject applicable to advanced nursing practice (Scottish Government, 2021b). Central funding was available from 2017-2021 to support implementation of the Transforming Roles agenda but is now at a local level.

Equivalence – this recognises that there has been variation in provision of funding and study leave across the UK which has resulted in some nurses being unable to complete a full Masters award, despite working at an advanced level. Some have studied a series of stand-alone credits or modules at master’s level, some may have undertaken academic programmes but not gained a full Masters award, while others may have gained awards that do not refer to advanced practice.

Methods for demonstrating equivalence have consequently been developed to enable an inclusive approach:

RCN Credentialing for Advanced Level Nursing Practice was established in 2017 to provide formal recognition of the level of expertise and skills of the individual advanced level nurse. One of the criteria for this is a relevant master’s degree qualification. However, there are pathways (models) within the arrangements to enable registered nurses with Nurse Practitioner education and those with master’s level modules to apply to demonstrate their expertise and equivalence against specific criteria to gain an RCN Credential.

Further information on Credentialing please access the following link:
rcn.org.uk/Credentialing

There are also country specific arrangements:

ENGLAND: NHS England, Centre for Advancing Practice currently provide an ePortfolio (supported) Route. This was specifically designed to enable recognition with the Centre of existing, experienced advanced practitioners, who are working clinical in advanced practitioner roles on a regular basis and who have completed their advanced practice experiential and education learning that enables them to demonstrate the capabilities outlined in the “Multiprofessional Framework for Advanced Clinical Practice in England” (HEE, 2017).

[ePortfolio \(supported\) Route - Advanced Practice \(hee.nhs.uk\)](https://hee.nhs.uk/ePortfolio-supported-Route-Advanced-Practice)

SCOTLAND: Scottish Government (2021c) recognised that there were highly trained, highly competent ANP’s, whose roles were established prior to the Scottish Government’s Transforming Roles programme. To avoid disadvantaging established ANPs it was recommended that a competence review process should be used to assess established ANPs against national definitions to match against the appropriate role and level of practice, and any professional development needs addressed. This would involve the ANP, their employer, with senior nursing teams providing appropriate oversight. To support the increasing numbers of ANPs within the workforce in Scotland three Academies were established – West, North and East of Scotland. These are taking a lead on governance including assessment of equivalence.

[Advanced nursing practice - transforming nursing roles: phase two - gov.scot \(www.gov.scot\)](https://www.gov.scot/advanced-nursing-practice-transforming-nursing-roles-phase-two)

WALES: HEIW advise that it is the responsibility of the employing organisation to ensure that those using the advanced title can demonstrate evidence of working at this level across the pillars of advanced practice (NHS Wales, 2023). The HEIW Portfolio Guidance (2023) explains the e-portfolio is the vehicle for individuals to evidence the four pillars to present at annual Professional and Development Reviews by an appropriate line manager and formal review is recommended every three years. Further detail is provided here:

heiw.nhs.wales/files/enhanced-advanced-and-consultant-framework/ and
[Portfolio Guidance for Enhanced, Advanced, and Consultant Clinical Practice in Wales \(nhs.wales\)](https://nhs.uk/Portfolio-Guidance-for-Enhanced-Advanced-and-Consultant-Clinical-Practice-in-Wales)

****** Relationship of the four pillars to each other** – The attributes of practice, education, research and leadership in relation to advanced and consultant nursing were first identified in action research conducted by Manley (1997). This was later described by NHS Education for Scotland as four pillars (2007). The concept of these areas as pillars has gained traction in subsequent publications

related to advanced practice, often illustrated as separate pillars with no visual articulation between each other. This has led to perceptions that nurses will always only be using one pillar at a time within their job plan and attempts to say that some of the pillars are less important or unnecessary for different roles. This reductionist approach undervalues the synergy that is created when the combined application of all four pillars and associated capabilities is utilised.

For example, an advanced level registered nurse working in a clinical facing role can use the knowledge and skills of the education, research, and leadership pillars to function in a far more effective, efficient manner with greater, sustained impact within complex, unpredictable contexts. Similarly, this applies to advanced level nurses working in education, in research and in leadership roles.

****** Autonomy** – this word is widely used as a defining characteristic of a profession (Friedson, 1970) and it is notable that with the professionalisation of nursing in the 1980s the importance of their ability to demonstrate autonomous practice has featured widely in the literature, nursing policy and regulatory standards (Skar, 2010). The dictionary defines autonomy as “The right or state of self-government, freedom to determine one’s own actions, behaviours etc”. Laperriere (2008) has added to this stating autonomy is not only freedom for action but also freedom for thought.

However, autonomy is a highly debated concept with arguments that no clinicians including consultant level doctors are able to truly work autonomously in a health and social care environment where clinical governance, evidence-based practice standards, ethical frameworks, organisational structures and management systems, and external quality assurance, regulatory, legislative and budgetary controls prevent true freedom to practice and self-governance. In addition, the shared decision-making model has challenged the power dynamic implied by the clinician’s autonomy to acknowledge the importance of the patients own autonomy (Entwistle et al., 2010). Clearly at its extreme there is a fine line between freedom to practice autonomously and total freedom of action, which can lead to unsafe, maverick practitioners.

Writers such as Cassidy and McIntosh (2014) have described a middle-ground where nurses autonomy can be expressed within conditions determined by their scope of practice and the set-up in which they work. Friedson (1994) called this the “zone of discretion” where the individual deploys their autonomy as micro-level power to utilise their knowledge and skills for making decisions and to enact their responsibilities in the complex context of health and social care. It would be impractical and highly inefficient for registered nurses to rely on others to sanction every decision and action that they take. Therefore, having the opportunity to utilise autonomy to the full within parameters set by the scope of practice, the organisation, their employment, professional code, and legislation amongst others, is key.

It is within this context that the word autonomy is used here.

Core standards for advanced level nursing

The knowledge base and skills for this level of nursing is influenced by the context in which individuals practice but all advanced level registered nurses will demonstrate the capability to:

- take full responsibility for and optimise their freedom to act, with commitment to, and evidence of, operating at the highest standards across all four pillars of advanced level nursing.
- apply a systematic, authoritative, and tacit**** understanding of current knowledge, advanced skills, and related issues in their field and at the interface of other fields. This includes current and emerging technology. They will proactively develop new skills and approaches in response to emerging knowledge and techniques.
- create an evidence-based judgement about a particular issue by integrating knowledge from new or existing sources, including those from other disciplines, and in situations with incomplete, contradictory, or limited information. This utilises their ability to interpret, analyse, evaluate, synthesise, and infer.
- demonstrate a holistic grasp of complex situations, perceiving the overall picture and alternative approaches, with a vision of what may be possible.
- communicate complex issues clearly and effectively to a wide range of stakeholders, selecting and applying a range of methods and approaches.
- demonstrate vigilance by systematically monitoring, assessing, proactively challenging situations, actions and behaviours and acting to maintain safety and minimise risk.
- work in a collaborative, compassionate way, promoting equality, respecting diversity, and ensuring inclusivity, taking responsibility for challenging behaviour that does not align with these values.
- extensive use of critical reflection in action and on action particularly in complicated, unpredictable, unfamiliar, and complex situations
- demonstrate reflexivity by recognising how their own actions, thoughts, feelings and values effect other people and situations.

****** Tacit** – This refers to the being able to understand the meaning of something that is implied or inferred without it being stated openly. Three types of tacit knowledge are tacit understanding of people and situations, routines, and rules that underpin intuitive decision-making which is? gained through lived-experiences, reflection on events and socialisation (Eraut, 2000). This relies on learning to read the situation, critical analysis, and higher-level processing of information to generate hypotheses or possible sources of action which can then be checked out against pertinent evidence and/or discussed with other people. This can be valuable in complex, high pressured contexts, where rapid interpretation and decision making is needed (Eraut, 2004).

All advanced level nurses will demonstrate the full range of capabilities listed under the following four pillars.

Four Pillars of Nursing



Clinical pillar

- Act as an expert nursing resource in their area of professional practice, including utilisation of clinical expertise.
- Role model high levels of nursing professionalism to people in the organisation and wider networks.
- Systematically apply an in-depth understanding of health and care policy, systems and structures, implications of changing population needs and the political, social, economic, legal, technical, and professional context of health care and proactively work to address issues that they encounter.
- Apply knowledge and skills to a broad range of professionally challenging unpredictable, complex situations, within and across teams.
- Critically analyse and synthesise complex problems across a range of areas, enabling innovative creative solutions to improve outcomes and enhance people's experiences.
- Constantly work, directly or indirectly, to improve the quality of services and care provided for people and/or populations.
- Promote service-user and public involvement to enhance care for people, populations, and service delivery.
- Provide direct advice to individuals and interprofessional teams in a wide range of situations.
- Contribute to the understanding of the impact of practice on global and/or planetary health by promoting and adopting environmental-friendly and sustainable approaches.
- Be proficient in use of digital technologies applicable in the workplace.
- Step into challenging situations, prioritising people using a values-based approach.
- Systematically applies an advanced awareness of professional and ethical values and the NMC Code to personal and strategic decisions, actions, responsibilities, outcomes, and dilemmas, whilst working with others to suggest appropriate solutions in unpredictably complex contexts.
- Advocate for people, services, and nursing.

Education pillar

- Demonstrate critical self-awareness, identifying their own personal development needs and take effective action to address them using a range of strategies including peer review.
- Share knowledge, experience and expertise with nurses and others at all levels, through strategies such as formal and informal teaching, facilitated reflective practice, skills supervision, coaching, mentoring and preceptorship.
- Act as a role model for advanced level nursing.
- Assess the needs of learners, recognising the individual's motivation, self-efficacy, and preferred learning-style, to develop personalised action plans.
- Deploy a wide range of teaching and learning strategies and resources, to support the development of people, underpinned by a knowledge of adult education theories.
- Evaluate the outcomes of teaching and learning activities and learner experience and adapt approaches accordingly.
- Design and develop projects and/or activities to strategically enhance others learning, work or practice within unpredictably complex contexts.
- Take responsibility for leading the systematic and critical evaluation of own and others' capabilities, performance, and development, applying strategic approaches and liaising with senior managers.
- Advocate for an organisational culture that supports continuous learning and development of the workforce, with effective succession planning.
- Where applicable, engage with higher education providers to support curriculum design, development, and delivery.
- Contribute to wider recognition of their area by publicising and disseminating significant achievements across the organisation and local/national audiences.
- Participate in the supervision, evaluation and assessment of nurses aspiring to work at an advanced level.

Research pillar

- Develop strategies and undertake activities that monitor and improve the effectiveness, impact, and value of their own and others work.
- Use, and enable others to use, a wide range of contemporary high-quality data, research, evidence-based professional practice, and valid and reliable tools and techniques, to proactively evaluate and sustainably improve current ways of working.
- Critically appraise and synthesise the information from a variety of sources such as outcomes of relevant research, quality improvement projects, evaluations, and audits.
- Select and adapt appropriate problem-solving strategies, methods, and techniques to design systematic investigations that define and critically evaluate problems, using specialist information and data in unpredictable and complex contexts.

- Use a range of strategies and techniques for knowledge mobilisation and dissemination of research findings.
- Contribute to and undertake activities, including research, that monitor and improve the quality of services provided by an organisation, taking immediate action when standards are not met.
- Propose and enact evidence-based changes to practices or procedures which impact beyond own work area.
- Source advice on research governance processes to ensure compliance.

Leadership pillar

- Demonstrate individual leadership via self-awareness, dynamism, self-motivation and adaptivity in own leadership style to optimise results.
- Display self-leadership by prioritising own workload and actions at times of competing demands.
- Make challenging decisions, taking responsibility for outcomes in unpredictably complex contexts.
- Demonstrate tactical leadership by working collaboratively with a broad range of people within and across an organisation and of external stakeholders and agencies.
- Apply advanced interpersonal, team and networking skills to enhance team performance.
- Use a range of negotiating and influencing skills to develop and improve on current ways of working and optimise outcomes and support a culture of safety.
- Demonstrate operational leadership including leading individuals, teams and/or different groups, they may or may not manage.
- Translate strategic decisions into operational practice.
- Systematically synthesise advanced and specialist information and ideas and formulate and develop innovative proposals to address strategic issues or opportunities in unpredictably complex contexts.
- Demonstrate leadership and innovation in work contexts that are challenging, unfamiliar, complex, and unpredictable and that require solving problems involving many interacting factors.
- Participate in local and regional networks and respond to local, regional and national developments.
- Develop robust governance systems by contributing to the development and implementation of evidence-based policies, processes, and standards.
- Ensure that national, and where applicable international standards, are applied as a minimum.
- Formulate plans and manage projects that translate strategy into action and evaluate change, outcomes, and impact.
- Work across professional, service, organisational, agency and system boundaries.
- Use financial acumen in developing appropriate strategies that enhance quality, productivity, and value.
- Proactively facilitate development of leadership skills in others within and across the organisation.

- Demonstrate strategic leadership by supporting the creation and development of environments, systems, and cultures in current approaches are continuously reviewed and improved.
- Deploy strategic competence by having the skill to decide when or when not to act.
- Horizon scan for opportunities across disciplines and organisations, seize and facilitate the creation of momentum to optimise effective and sustainable change.
- Lead innovation and service development utilising evidence-based approaches for quality improvement.
- Develop and sustain productive relationships and partnerships with a broad range of stakeholders, locally and regionally, to influence the strategic direction of organisational provision and outcomes for the benefit of people and/or populations.

Additional capabilities to those in the four pillars

To optimise public protection, registered nurses who primarily provide direct-patient care at an advanced level **must** also be able to demonstrate they have the capability to:

- manage a whole episode of care and/or caseload, relating to new or existing health problems. The episode may be over the immediate, short, or longer term, depending on the area of practice/setting and the nurses' knowledge, skills, and scope of practice.
- apply underpinning nursing and in-depth area-specific knowledge, skills, and behaviours to provide safe, effective assessment and care, including recognition of the causes, signs, symptoms, demographic variables, impact of physical and mental health conditions with their scope of practice, relevant pathophysiology, pharmacology and pharmacotherapeutics.
- source and operate in accordance with the current high-quality evidence-based resources and local and national guidelines where these exist.
- utilise skilled therapeutic, holistic, person-centred nursing care which recognises the importance of "seeing" the whole person, having the ability to fuse biomedical science with the art of caring.
- use a range of assessment methods including all the following:
 - nursing assessment, selecting and applying appropriate models and approaches
 - comprehensive holistic history taking
 - physical examination
 - mental health assessment
 - identification of risk factors and early signs of disease
 - evaluation of existing clinical conditions
 - and requesting, undertaking, interpreting diagnostic tests and investigations.
- critically appraise the development and impact of new health problems in the context of pre-existing co-morbidities, psychological status, and social circumstances.

- apply clinical reasoning to deal with differentiated and undifferentiated individual presentations and complex situations, synthesising information from multiple sources to make prompt, appropriate, evidence-based judgements and/or clinical diagnoses.
- optimise safety through appropriate assessment and management of risk.
- work in partnership with the nursing team and multidisciplinary team and with patients, carers, and families to make clinical decisions.
- initiate, monitor, evaluate and modify a range of evidence-based therapeutic interventions, treatments, therapies, and care. This may include prescribing depending on the scope of practice.
- monitor health outcomes and act accordingly in a timely manner.
- co-ordinate care to optimise patient outcomes and the patient, family, and carers' experience.
- work across professions, organisations, agencies, and systems
- educate a patient and their families/carers, critically selecting and applying strategies that optimise their understanding of their condition and short- and longer-term management options and/or support the multidisciplinary team to do so.
- facilitate co-production and engagement with people regarding strategies to manage their own health and wellbeing and to make informed choices.
- utilise opportunities for health promotion and health education, being aware of a patient's current health status, motivation, health beliefs, developmental stage, literacy, and capacity.
- critically appraise when to discharge or refer appropriately to other services and act on the decision.
- where appropriate, support patients, families, and carers to understand the plan for ongoing care or rehabilitation.
- advocate for patients, families and carers, colleagues, and services.
- delegate work to other member of the nursing and multidisciplinary team and take accountability for the delegated activity.
- develop practice in response to changing population needs and professional development.
- develop and update practice protocols/guidelines and procedures using high-quality contemporary evidence-based resources.
- take an active role in evaluation of significant clinical events, capturing the learning from these experiences to improve patient care and service delivery.
- advocate for and utilise patient, public, practitioner partnerships in the development of clinical pathways and service redesign.
- seek out and apply emerging high-quality clinical evidence-based resources and technology, such as genomics, to underpin and inform decisions made about care and treatment.
- critical understanding of their greater level of responsibility and autonomy, such as professional, ethical, and legal implications, when working at an advanced level, including awareness of the limits of their own competence.

APPENDIX I: Definitions related to advanced level nursing used to inform this work.

Pertinent documents were reviewed with key aspects of current publications summarised here.

It was noted that the RCN's previous definition and standards for advanced level nursing practice were created in 2018 and were presented within the following documents:

- *RCN Standards for Advanced Level Nursing Practice*
- *Section 1: The Registered Nurse Working at an Advanced Level of Practice.*
- *Section 2: Advanced Level Nursing Practice Competencies.*
- *Section 3: RCN Accreditation and Credentialing*

<https://www.rcn.org.uk/library/subject-guides/advanced-nursing-practice>

Alongside this a range of definitions associated with an advanced level were available which are summarised below in date order. These were taken from policy documents published by the four countries of the UK and the ICN *Guidelines on Advanced Practice Nursing (2020)*.

These were analysed and grouped into the following categories of:

- nurse-specific definitions
- multi-professional definitions that also apply to nurses.

Nursing specific definitions

DHSSPS Northern Ireland Practice and Education Council for Nursing and Midwifery (NIPEC) (2016) *Advanced Nursing Practice Framework*

<https://www.health-ni.gov.uk/publications/advanced-nursing-practice-framework#:~:text=The%20Framework%20enables%20a%20strategic%20and%20consistent%20approach,employers%20and%20managers%20of%20nurses%20including%20nurses%20themselves.>

An advanced nurse practitioner practises autonomously within his/her expanded scope of clinical practice, guided by the *Code*. Professional standards of practice and behaviour for nurses and midwives. The advanced nurse practitioner demonstrates highly developed assessment, diagnostic, analytical and clinical judgement skills.

Direct clinical practice is the first core competency of advanced nursing practice and is supported by three additional competencies:

- leadership and collaborative practice
- education and learning
- research and evidence-based practice.

Clinical practice and scope of role

- Work autonomously, using a person-centred approach within the expanded scope of practice.
- Undertake comprehensive health assessment with differential diagnosis and will diagnose.
- Prescribe care and treatment, or appropriately refer and/or discharge patients/clients.
- Provide complex care, using expert decision-making skills.
- Act as an educator, leader, innovator and contributor to research.

The advanced nurse practitioner will undertake comprehensive health assessments and will manage a range of illnesses and conditions that frequently present in the care settings within which the individual works. They will:

- practise autonomously within an expanded scope of practice.
- demonstrate a person-centred approach to care delivery.
- develop and sustain partnerships and networks to influence and improve health care outcomes and health care delivery.
- educate, supervise or mentor nursing colleagues and others in the health care team.
- contribute to and undertake activities, including research, that monitor and improve the quality of health care and the effectiveness of practice.

It must be noted that only those who meet the requirements of the role and who are employed as advanced nurse practitioners, will be able to use the title.

A review by the Department of Health Northern Ireland (2023) [doh-nipec-anp.pdf \(health-ni.gov.uk\)](https://www.health-ni.gov.uk/doh-nipec-anp.pdf) has recommended that the contents of the Advanced Nursing Practice Framework should be refreshed, broadening the scope to include the wider integrated health and care system and aligned to relevant education and regulation standards and requirements.

CNOD Scottish Government (2017) *Transforming Nursing, Midwifery and Health Professions' (NMaHP) Roles; Paper 2 Advanced nursing practice*
<https://www.gov.scot/publications/transforming-nursing-midwifery-health-professions-roles-advance-nursing-practice/>

Advanced nurse practitioners (ANPs) are experienced and highly educated registered nurses who manage the complete clinical care of their patients, not focusing on any sole condition.

ANPs have advanced-level capability across the four pillars of nursing:

- clinical practice
- facilitation of learning
- leadership
- evidence, research and development.

They also have additional clinical-practice skills appropriate to their role. Advanced practice represents a level of practice, rather than being related to a specific area of clinical practice.

ICN (2020) *Guidelines on Advanced Practice Nursing*

https://www.icn.ch/system/files/documents/2020-04/ICN_APN%20Report_EN_WEB.pdf

Advanced nursing practice (ANP) is a field of nursing that extends and expands the boundaries of nursing's scope of practice, contributes to nursing knowledge and promotes advancement of the profession.

An advanced practice nurse (APN) is a generalist or specialised nurse who has acquired, through additional graduate education (minimum of a master's degree), the expert knowledge base, complex decision-making skills and clinical competencies for advanced nursing practice, the characteristics of which are shaped by the context in which they are credentialed to practice (adapted from ICN, 2008). The two most commonly identified APN roles are clinical nurse specialist (CNS) and nurse practitioner (NP).

A nurse practitioner is an advanced practice nurse who integrates clinical skills associated with nursing and medicine in order to assess, diagnose and manage patients in primary health care (PHC) settings and acute care populations as well as ongoing care for populations with chronic illness.

A clinical nurse specialist is an advanced practice nurse who provides expert clinical advice and care based on established diagnoses in specialised clinical fields of practice along with a systems approach in practicing as a member of the health care team.

These statements provide a foundation for the APN and a source for international consideration when trying to understand advanced practice nursing, regardless of work setting or focus of practice. All APNs:

- are practitioners of nursing, providing safe and competent patient care
- have their foundation in nursing education
- have roles or levels of practice which require formal education beyond the preparation of the generalist nurse (minimum required entry level is a master's degree)
- have roles or levels of practice with increased levels of competency and capability that are measurable, beyond that of a generalist nurse
- have acquired the ability to explain and apply the theoretical, empirical, ethical, legal, care giving, and professional development required for advanced practice nursing
- have defined APN competencies and standards which are periodically reviewed for maintaining currency in practice, and
- are influenced by the global, social, political, economic and technological milieu.

(Adapted from ICN, 2008)

The degree and range of judgement, skill, knowledge, responsibility, autonomy and accountability broadens and takes on an additionally extensive range between the preparation of a generalist nurse and that of the APN. This added breadth and further in-depth practice is achieved through experience in clinical

practice, additional education, and a master's degree or beyond. However, the core of the APN remains based within the context of nursing and nursing principles. (Adapted from ICN, 2008.)

The ICN (2020) publication refers to integrated role domains, alongside clinical practice role of:

- professional development
- organisational leadership
- research
- education.

This definition has also been adopted by the European Federation of Nursing Association's advanced practice nursing working group, the RCN chairs this group.

Multi-professional definitions

Skills for Health (2010) *Career Framework (Version 2)*

https://www.skillsforhealth.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/Career_framework_key_elements-1.pdf

People at Level 7 of the career framework have a critical awareness of knowledge issues in the field and at the interface of other fields. They are innovative and have responsibility for development and changing practice and/or services in a complex and unpredictable environment.

Health Education England (2017) *Multi-professional Framework for Advanced Clinical Practice in England*

<https://advanced-practice.hee.nhs.uk/multi-professional-framework-for-advanced-clinical-practice-in-england/>

Advanced clinical practice is delivered by experienced, registered health and care practitioners. It is a level of practice characterised by a high degree of autonomy and complex decision making. This is underpinned by a master's level award or equivalent that encompasses the four pillars of clinical practice, leadership and management, education, and research, with demonstration of core capabilities and area specific clinical competence.

Advanced clinical practice embodies the ability to manage clinical care in partnership with individuals, families and carers. It includes analysis and synthesis of complex problems across a range of settings, enabling innovative solutions to enhance people's experience and improve outcomes.

Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education (2017) *Advanced Clinical Practitioner (Integrated degree) Standard ST0564*

<https://www.instituteforapprenticeships.org/apprenticeship-standards/advanced-clinical-practitioner-integrated-degree-v1-0>

Advanced clinical practitioners are experienced clinicians who demonstrate expertise in their scope of practice. Advanced clinical practitioners manage defined episodes of clinical care independently, from beginning to end, providing care and treatment from the time an individual (includes patients, service users, clients and customers) first presents through to the end of the episode, which may include admission, referral or discharge or care at home. They carry out their full range of duties in relation to individuals' physical and mental health care and in acute, primary, urgent and emergency settings (including hospitals, general practice, individuals' homes, schools and prisons, and in the public, independent, private and charity sectors). They combine expert clinical skills with research, education and clinical leadership within their scope of practice. Advanced clinical practitioners work innovatively on a one-to-one basis with individuals as well as part of a wider team. They work as part of the wider health and social care team and across traditional professional boundaries in health and social care.

NHS Employers – on website – article published August 2022

<https://www.nhsemployers.org/articles/advanced-practice-and-enhanced-practice>

By integrating into multi-professional teams, advanced practitioners provide clinical leadership and enable collaboration across the multi-disciplinary team through complex decision making and managing risk. This also gives organisations a flexible workforce to meet changing population, patient and service delivery needs. Advanced practitioners help to improve clinical continuity and provide high-quality care for patients. They enable workforce transformation to initiate a wider range of advanced clinical care being provided by a varied range of multi-professional clinicians rather than focusing on medical doctors as the sole providers of advanced clinical care. Advanced practitioners can accelerate access to care for patients and help to improve outcomes.

NHS Wales (2023) *Professional Framework for Enhanced, Advanced and Consultant Clinical Practice*, Health Education Improvement Wales (HEIW)

<https://heiw.nhs.wales/workforce/workforce-development/professional-framework-for-enhanced-advanced-and-consultant-clinical-practice/>

Career Framework Level descriptors for Advanced Practitioner:

- Demonstrates an advanced knowledge base, highly complex decision-making skills, clinical competence, and judgement in their area of specialist practice.
- Will exercise broad autonomy and judgement across a significant area of work.
- Can design and manage research to inform area of practice.
- Can critically analyse, interpret and evaluate complex information.
- Will initiate and provide leadership for complex tasks and processes within their own area of work and specialism.

- Can develop innovative practice and identify where service and quality improvements can be achieved.
- Will integrate clinical, education, and research findings in practice.
- Will be working at CQFW level 7.

NHS Education Scotland (2021) *Nursing, Midwifery and Health Professions (NMAHP) Development Framework*

<https://www.nmahpdevelopmentframework.nes.scot.nhs.uk/>

Level 7 – Advanced Practitioner

People at level 7 of the career framework have a critical awareness of knowledge issues in the field and at the interface between different fields. They are innovative and have a responsibility for developing and changing practice and/or services in a complex and unpredictable environment.

This definition is accompanied in the framework by key knowledge, skills and behaviours listed under four pillars of nursing: clinical practice, facilitating learning, leadership and evidence, research and development.

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Consultant Level of Nursing definition: rcn.org.uk/Professional-Development/RCN-Levels-of-Practice/Enhanced

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