

RCN Policy Unit

Policy Briefing 15/2007

Two consultations from Modernising Nursing Careers

**A Review of Pre Registration Education by
the Nursing and Midwifery Council
(UK - wide)**

**Towards a Framework for Post Registration
Nursing Careers by the Department of
Health for England (England only)**

November 2007

Introduction

On November 1st 2007 two consultations were published which have major implications for the nursing profession in the future. The purpose of this briefing is to summarise these consultation documents, provide background and contextual information, and support members in formulating their views during the consultation process.

*A Review of Pre-Registration Education*¹ by the Nursing and Midwifery Council (NMC) deliberates issues regarding the content and academic level of pre-registration nurse education.

*Towards a Framework for Post-Registration Nursing Careers*² lays out Department of Health proposals for a post-registration nursing careers framework for England. Wales, Northern Ireland and Scotland may choose to adopt or adapt this framework, or establish country specific career pathways for nursing in the future. However the RCN has decided to create a single briefing for the two consultations because we understand that members based outside of England may be interested in examining the consultation proposals plus they give in a broadest sense an indication of a direction of travel for the nursing profession (which is broadly compatible with RCN policy documents on the future for nurses and nursing³).

As a member in England you have the opportunity to respond to both consultations on the nursing career journey from pre registration student to advanced nursing practice. So, for example, your views on the role and function of nurses at advanced practice levels is likely to influence your feedback on the preparatory content required in UK pre-registration training programmes.

As a member in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland you can still read and reflect on both consultations but must bear in mind that, at this stage, you are only being asked to comment on the content and structure of UK pre-registration nurse education. We understand that you may need to consider how post-registration nursing careers might look in the future where you work in order to answer the pre-registration consultation fully, but the Department of Health proposals for a post-registration career framework do not relate to Northern Ireland, Wales or Scotland at this time.

¹ <http://www.nmc-uk.org/aArticle.aspx?ArticleID=2641>

² http://www.dh.gov.uk/en/Consultations/Liveconsultations/DH_079911

³ RCN (2004) *The Future Nurse: The RCN Vision Explained* RCN : London

To further help your understanding of the issues involved there are also two papers on the RCN website policy pages at http://www.rcn.org.uk/aboutus/policy/projects/future_nurse_future_workforce_project/modernising_nursing_careers *Pre – Registration Nurse Education: The NMC Review and the Issues*⁴ gives a brief history of nurse education and considers the need for change whilst *Ensuring A Fit For Purpose Future Nursing Workforce*⁵ by Jill Macleod Clarke sets out the rationale for change and a vision of how nursing could be organised in the future. Both are applicable to the UK.

A Review of Pre – Registration Education

The NMC review of pre registration education needs to be read, and thought through, in terms of how the content of pre registration nurse education can prepare nurses for future practice and the competencies they will need at a broad, and a specific, level. The NMC review asks a range of questions such as:

- Diploma or degree at exit level registration?
- Access to pre registration nurse education including step on and step off processes and shortened courses
- The balance between academic and practice experience learning
- Community experience and exposure pre registration
- The current four branch preparation of adult/child/mental health/learning disabilities – is it viable and fit for purpose in terms of preparation for future practice?
- Shared learning across the health care professions and within nursing
- European Directives and their implications
- Post registration consolidation – should there be a mandatory year of supervision?

Commentary, Issues and Questions

The RCN position on academic exit level for pre registration nurses education is that of an honours degree⁶. That is, an all graduate nursing

⁴ RCN (2007) *Pre Registration Education: The NMC Review and the Issues* RCN: London

⁵ Macleod Clarke, J (2007) *Ensuring A Fit For Purpose Future Nursing Workforce* RCN: London

⁶ RCN (2007) *Op Cit* – provides a background and discussion on this issue

profession at the point of registration. The RCN also recognises health care support workers (HCSWs) who work within nursing teams alongside registered nurses as members of the nursing family⁷, and would want those who wish to become registered nurses to be supported to do so. The consultation document raises this in regard to access to, step on and step off points within, and shortened pre registration education courses. It would be helpful to the RCN to receive both suggestions and real life examples of how best this could work.

Movement towards an all graduate nursing profession will raise some economic issues, especially in England, about the amount and type of bursaries students receive. And there will be a wider question of how pre registration nurse education is, and should be, funded and commissioned. The RCN is currently preparing a paper on both topics that will be available to members on this policy page web site in the near future.

There are a number of other very key issues for pre registration education raised. These are considered in detail in the RCN policy briefing paper on pre registration nurse education⁸ including the fit of the current four pre registration branches and whether these should be changed, modified or replaced – and if so how and with what. This is likely to be a contentious area within which RCN members may have different views. Similarly the consultation question regarding whether there should be a fourth mandatory year to consolidate and support student learning (and how this might work and be funded).

Towards A Framework For Post Registration Careers

The starting point for this consultation document is twin fold:

- Develop clear career pathways for nurses from first registration through to advanced practice
- Align nursing career pathways with the patient care pathway, health care needs for *nursing* expertise, and how health care services will be managed and delivered in the future

As such the document proposes a radical departure from how nursing careers are today – which do not have a trajectory that is clear cut but are fairly ‘hit and miss’, and based on a traditional assumption and service

⁷ RCN 92004) *Op Cit*

⁸ RCN (2007) *Op Cit*

model in which registered nurses' careers begin in a hospital setting⁹. As Jill Macleod Clarke puts it:

“Nursing is largely organised and practised as it always has been”¹⁰

The consultation document proposes five career pathways in:

- Children, family and public health
- First contact, access and urgent care
- Supporting long term care
- Acute and critical care
- Mental health and psychosocial care

It is intended that nurses would major in one pathway although there would be scope to both work in different domains following initial registration and develop core competencies in cross – cutting themes such as:

- Health promotion
- Preventative, long term conditions management or crisis monitoring
- Safeguarding vulnerable people and those in need
- End of life care
- Holistic care

Themes of education, research, management and leadership, and policy analysis also cut across and the boundary between community and hospital nursing becomes much less distinct.

Advanced practice¹¹ is at the pinnacle of each pathway with consultant nurses or nurse practitioners (exact titles may vary) leading nursing care. Health care support workers and assistant practitioners would also be aligned to these career pathways.

The framework also encompasses the development of particular *specialist* expertise with designated client groups within each of the pathways. For example with:

⁹ Although learning disability and mental health nursing have of course moved from being a hospital based profession.

¹⁰ Macleod Clarke, J (2007) *Op Cit*

¹¹ The level of advanced practice will be standardised and regulated in the future following publication of a White Paper on professional regulation.

- children and young people *within* supporting long term care or acute and critical care
- disease specific long term conditions such as multiple sclerosis *within* supporting long term care
- forensic mental health or addiction disorders *within* mental health and psychosocial care

Post registration education would most likely be organised on a modular basis in the future – a ‘pick and mix’ approach but leading to academic accreditation.

Commentary, Issues and Questions

Some key domains of practice for nursing expertise now and in the future are captured in this consultation. Such as supporting people with long term conditions which is an area prime for the development and leadership of *nursing* skills and interventions. For example in self- help and self – care, symptom control, palliative care. However at the moment we do not prepare nurses to work in this specific domain, even though it is a recognisable, important and growing area of health need. People with long term conditions are generally nursed within a portfolio of other nursing work, for example by district nurses, general practice nurses, community children’s nurses, or by nurses working with people with disease specific long term conditions such as parkinsons disease or multiple sclerosis.

First contact, access, and urgent care taken together also compose another domain of practice that nurses are not specifically prepared to work in – even though as health services evolve nurses will increasingly need to lead services in walk-in centres, poly clinics, minor injuries units, general practice and emergency care. They therefore need a broad level of competencies in assessment, diagnosis, referral and treatment that span client groups such as the elderly, children and those with mental health issues.

But the key question remains - are these the right career pathways and/or the only ones? It is appreciated that the pathways to date lack detail, of necessity because they are not yet of course agreed. So the reader really needs to imagine the future – think through the patients, service users and clients you currently work with and how a reorganisation of nursing care delivery might best serve and benefit them. What are the key roles clinical nurse leaders should undertake? Are there alternative frameworks, amendments or additions that you think should be made? Are the terms clear and will they be understandable to patients and the health care team?

These pathways are also not intended to be, or become, silos from which nurses cannot venture forth and expand practice. Or indeed combine work across pathways. For example nurse practitioners in general practice, which may be a key future role for nurses, often combine first contact work with work supporting long term conditions. Therefore, in addition to the questions above, how can we ensure there is flexibility to these (or any other) career pathways so that we do not unwittingly restrict nurses and nursing practice?

It is also important that colleagues in the health care team broadly accept these pathways in order that they are adopted and cemented into health care service delivery. They do fit with the 'Darzi' review of NHS services in England¹² but what are the levers that can transform these career pathways – or the consensus view on what those should be – into real live nursing practice? In other words how can we implement policy at a national level into accepted practice and a very local level right down to the 'hands on' contact? Your ideas on this are welcome.

Thirdly there is a wider question of funding – how career pathways should be funded in terms of the numbers of advanced practice post and post registration education in general. These are questions on which particularly RCN members who head service development or are educationalists may have views and expertise.

The Key Questions

The two consultations together cover a wide terrain of topics for discussion and debate. The key questions that appear to underpin the issues and on which it might be helpful to focus:

- How should pre registration nurse education be organised in terms of content? In particular should we continue specialisation at the pre registration level? Or should the four pre registration branches be changed, modified or replaced? Are there alternatives you would suggest?
- Are the post registration career pathways outlined in the consultation document the right ones? Can you suggest alternative or additional pathways?

The Consultation Process

We have reproduced the questionnaires which are within both consultation documents (as Appendix 1 and 2) and we invite members to complete

¹² Department of Health (2007) *Our NHS, Our Future: The NHS Next Stage Review Interim Report*. Department of Health, London.

these questionnaires and send to the RCN to ensure we represent your views. This is vitally important in order that we influence the future of the nursing profession for several decades to come so please do take the time to do this.

The links to the questionnaires are on the Policy section of the RCN website at

http://www.rcn.org.uk/aboutus/policy/projects/future_nurse_future_workforce_project/modernising_nursing_careers . There is also a blank sheet for members to give us any other views or comments (Appendix 3).

In order that the RCN may fully represent your views and RCN Council has sufficient time to consider and endorse the final response, the completed questionnaires should be sent by post to Jane Naish, Policy Adviser, Policy Unit, Room 209, 20 Cavendish Square, London W1G 0RN or alternatively can be sent to us via e-mail as an attachment to policycontacts@rcn.org.uk by **Friday January 11th 2008**. The final response to both consultations will be published on Policy section of the RCN website after this time.