

Guidance on professional conduct

For nursing and
midwifery students

We are the nursing and midwifery regulator for England, Wales, Scotland, Northern Ireland and the Islands.

- We exist to safeguard the health and wellbeing of the public.
- We set the standards of education, training and conduct that nurses and midwives need to deliver high quality healthcare consistently throughout their careers.
- We ensure that nurses and midwives keep their skills and knowledge up to date and uphold the standards of their professional code.
- We ensure that midwives are safe to practise by setting rules for their practice and supervision.
- We have fair processes to investigate allegations made against nurses and midwives who may not have followed the code.

The Nursing and Midwifery Council

Vision, mission and values

Our vision

To safeguard the public by ensuring nurses and midwives consistently deliver high quality healthcare.

Our mission

The Nursing and Midwifery Council (NMC) exists to safeguard the health and wellbeing of the public. We do this by maintaining a register of nurses and midwives, setting standards for education and practice, and giving guidance and advice to the professions. We aim to inspire confidence by ensuring that the nurses and midwives on our register are fit to practise, and by dealing swiftly and fairly with those who are not.

Our values

We are accountable

- We act in the best interests of people who use or need the services of nurses and midwives.
- We take responsibility for our actions and are open and transparent.

We are fair

- We act with integrity and can be trusted to use our powers responsibly.
- We are consistent in the way we deal with people and show consideration and understanding.

We are professional

- We are known for our expertise and work to high standards in all we do.
- We look for innovative solutions and learn from our mistakes.

We are progressive

- We provide strategic direction and lead the way in modern healthcare regulation.
- We build and maintain networks and work in partnership with others to fulfil our aims.

We are inclusive

- We respect and value everyone for their contribution, celebrate peoples' differences and provide equality of opportunity for all.
- We consult, encourage feedback, listen and respond to our stakeholders.

The NMC and you: Embracing excellence together

Welcome

You're enrolled on an education and training programme that's preparing you to enter a profession which carries with it great privilege and responsibility.

As a nursing or midwifery student, you should be proud of the profession you're preparing to enter into, and look forward to upholding the values and standards that have made the UK's nurses and midwives so well regarded across the world.

The NMC is here to safeguard the health and wellbeing of the public – we do this by helping nurses and midwives be the best they can be, providing rules, standards, guidance and advice. You can read more about us in the following pages.

It's important that, even as a student, you conduct yourself professionally at all times in order to justify the trust the public places in our professions. This can take some getting used to at first, but your tutors, mentors and the NMC are here to help you.

Throughout your course you'll learn about the behaviour and conduct that the public expects from nurses and midwives. You'll develop and be assessed on the knowledge, skills and attitude you need to become a registered nurse or midwife.

What's the purpose of this guidance?

This *Guidance on professional conduct for nursing and midwifery students* (the guidance) sets out the personal and professional conduct expected of you as a nursing or midwifery student in order for you to be fit to practise.

It's based on the strict standards set out in the professional code of conduct for qualified nurses and midwives, *The code: Standards of conduct, performance and ethics for nurses and midwives* (the code), which you'll be required to follow when you register with the NMC following your graduation.

You'll be working towards these standards during your pre-registration programme, so we recommend that you get hold of and read a copy of the code which is available at www.nmc-uk.org/publications/standards

What is the Nursing and Midwifery Council?

We are the UK regulator for the nursing and midwifery professions.

Our job as a regulator is to safeguard the health and wellbeing of the public.

We do this by:

- registering all nurses and midwives, and ensuring that they are properly qualified and competent to work in the UK
- setting the standards of education, training and conduct for nurses and midwives
- providing guidance and advice to help nurses and midwives keep their skills and knowledge up to date
- upholding the standards of the code. We use firm but fair processes to investigate any allegations made against nurses and midwives who may not have followed our rules, standards and the code.

The powers of the NMC are detailed in the Nursing and Midwifery Order 2001 (please visit our website for more information on this), and our work is governed by this and other associated legislation.

What does the NMC do?

Education standards

We set standards for the length and content of all pre-registration nursing and midwifery education and training programmes in the UK. All programmes are approved by the NMC and provided by NMC-approved higher education institutions (universities) in partnership with clinical placement providers.

The register

The NMC register enables anyone to check the registered status of nurses and midwives. Once you've successfully completed an NMC-approved education and training programme, you'll be eligible to join the register as a nurse or midwife.

The code

Our professional code is the foundation of good nursing and midwifery practice, and is a key tool in safeguarding the health and wellbeing of the public.

Fitness to practise

Being fit to practise means having the skills, knowledge, good health and good character to do your job safely and effectively. The NMC investigates all allegations made against nurses and midwives questioning their fitness to practise, including allegations of misconduct, lack of competence and ill health. Our main purpose in doing this is to safeguard the health and wellbeing of the public.

What do good health, good character and fitness to practise mean?

The NMC provides guidance on good health, good character and fitness to practise.

Good health is necessary to undertake practice as a nurse or a midwife. Good health means that a person must be capable of safe and effective practice without supervision. It does not mean the absence of any disability or health condition. Many disabled people and those with long-term health conditions are able to practise with or without adjustments to support their practice.

Good character is important as nurses and midwives must be honest and trustworthy. Good character is based on a person's conduct, behaviour and attitude. It also takes account of any convictions and cautions that are not considered to be compatible with professional registration and that might bring the profession into disrepute. A person's character must be sufficiently good for them to be capable of safe and effective practice without supervision.

Fitness to practise means having the skills, knowledge, good health and good character to do your job safely and effectively. Your fitness to practise as a student will be assessed throughout your pre-registration programme and, if there are ever concerns, these will be investigated and addressed by the university.

You should familiarise yourself with the student regulations and fitness to practise procedures in your university. Ask your tutor or mentor for more information.

When you have successfully completed your programme, your university will let us know that you have met the education and practice standards, and are of good health and good character. If you are deemed fit to practise you will then be eligible to apply to join our register.

For more information, see our publication *Guidance on good health and good character*, which is available from our website.

Your personal life counts too!

It's important that you're aware that your behaviour and conduct, both during your programme and in your personal life, may have an impact on:

- your fitness to practise
- your ability to complete your programme
- the willingness of your university to sign the declaration of good health and good character for you to become a registered nurse or midwife.

The following examples are common areas of concern when it comes to fitness to practise.

Aggressive, violent or threatening behaviour

- verbal, physical or mental abuse
- assault
- bullying
- physical violence

Cheating or plagiarising

- cheating in examinations, coursework, clinical assessment or record books
- forging a mentor or tutor's name or signature on clinical assessments or record books
- passing off other people's work as your own

Criminal conviction or caution

- child abuse or any other abuse
- child pornography
- fraud
- physical violence
- possession of illegal substances
- theft

Dishonesty

- fraudulent CVs, application forms or other documents
- misrepresentation of qualifications

Drug or alcohol misuse

- alcohol consumption that affects work
- dealing, possessing or misusing drugs
- drink driving

Health concerns

- failure to seek medical treatment or other support where there is a risk of harm to other people
- failure to recognise limits and abilities, or lack of insight into health concerns that may put other people at risk

Persistent inappropriate attitude or behaviour

- failure to accept and follow advice from your university or clinical placement provider
- non-attendance – clinical and academic
- poor application and failure to submit work
- poor communication skills

Unprofessional behaviour

- breach of confidentiality
- misuse of the internet and social networking sites
- failure to keep appropriate professional or sexual boundaries
- persistent rudeness to people, colleagues or others
- unlawful discrimination

Criminal offences

You have a duty to report to the university immediately if you have been cautioned, charged or found guilty of a criminal offence at any time before commencing or during your programme. Criminal offences, particularly those involving dishonesty, or the use of drugs or alcohol, are likely to raise questions about your fitness to practise.

Notes on this guidance

This guidance sets out the personal and professional conduct expected of you as a nursing or midwifery student in order for you to be fit to practise.

The guidance is based on the strict standards set out in the code, and you'll be working towards these standards during your pre-registration programme. It's therefore important that you get hold of and read a copy of the code, which is available from our website – www.nmc-uk.org/publications/standards If you have an effective registration with a regulatory body, you must adhere to that regulatory body's code as well as this guidance.

Advice for education and training providers

In relation to the NMC's role, this guidance has been approved and endorsed by the Council and should be adhered to. We expect education and clinical placement providers to include this guidance in the content of their pre-registration programmes, and to use it to determine a student's fitness to practise.

The NMC quality assures pre-registration programmes, and reports will recommend the inclusion of the guidance and commend institutions for good practice. To promote greater understanding of this guidance, we recommend that you discuss it early on with students, encouraging dialogue and debate on how and when it would apply in everyday settings.

Guidance on professional conduct

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Guidance on professional conduct for nursing and midwifery students

The four core principles of the code

Your conduct as a nursing or midwifery student is based on the four core principles we've set out in the code:

- Make the care of people your first concern, treating them as individuals and respecting their dignity.
- Work with others to protect and promote the health and wellbeing of those in your care, their families and carers, and the wider community.
- Provide a high standard of practice and care at all times.
- Be open and honest, act with integrity and uphold the reputation of your profession.

Make the care of people your first concern, treating them as individuals and respecting their dignity

Treat people as individuals

You should:

- 1 Treat people as individuals and respect their dignity.
- 2 Be polite, kind, caring and compassionate.
- 3 Not discriminate in any way against those for whom you provide care.
- 4 Recognise diversity and respect the cultural differences, values and beliefs of others, including the people you care for and other members of staff.

Respect a person's confidentiality

You should:

- 5 Respect a person's right to confidentiality.
- 6 Not disclose information to anyone who is not entitled to it.
- 7 Seek advice from your mentor or tutor before disclosing information if you believe someone may be at risk of harm.
- 8 Follow the guidelines or policy on confidentiality as set out by your university and clinical placement provider.
- 9 Be aware of and follow the NMC guidelines on confidentiality (available from our website www.nmc-uk.org).
- 10 Make anonymous any information included in your coursework or assessments that may directly or indirectly identify people, staff, relatives, carers or clinical placement providers.
- 11 Follow your university and clinical placement provider guidelines and policy on ethics when involved or participating in research.

Collaborate with those in your care

You should:

- 12 Listen to people and respond to their concerns and preferences.
- 13 Support people in caring for themselves to improve and maintain their health.
- 14 Give people information and advice, in a way they can understand, so they can make choices and decisions about their care.
- 15 Work in partnership with people, their families and carers.

Ensure you gain consent

You should:

- 16 Make sure people know that you are a student.
- 17 Ensure that you gain their consent before you begin to provide care.
- 18 Respect the right for people to request care to be provided by a registered professional.

Maintain clear professional boundaries

You should:

- 19 Maintain clear professional boundaries in the relationships you have with others, especially with vulnerable adults and children.
- 20 Refuse any gifts, favours or hospitality that might be interpreted as an attempt to gain preferential treatment.
- 21 Not ask for or accept loans from anyone for whom you provide care or anyone close to them.
- 22 Maintain clear sexual boundaries at all times with the people for whom you provide care, their families and carers.
- 23 Be aware of and follow the NMC guidelines on maintaining clear sexual boundaries (available from the advice section on our website www.nmc-uk.org).

Work with others to protect and promote the health and wellbeing of those in your care, their families and carers, and the wider community

Work as part of a team

You should:

- 24 Be aware of the roles and responsibilities of other people involved in providing health and social care.
- 25 Work co-operatively within teams and respect the skills, expertise and contributions from all people involved with your education.
- 26 Treat all colleagues, team members and those with whom you work and learn, fairly and without discrimination.
- 27 Inform your mentor or tutor immediately if you believe that you, a colleague or anyone else may be putting someone at risk of harm.

Provide a high standard of practice and care at all times

Recognise and work within your limits of competence

You should:

- 28 Recognise and stay within the limits of your competence.
- 29 Work only under the appropriate supervision and support of a qualified professional and ask for help from your mentor or tutor when you need it.
- 30 Work with your mentor and tutor to monitor the quality of your work and maintain the safety of people for whom you provide care.
- 31 Seek help from an appropriately qualified healthcare professional, as soon as possible, if your performance or judgement is affected by your health.

Ensure your skills and knowledge are up to date

You should:

- 32 Take responsibility for your own learning.
- 33 Follow the policy on attendance as set out by your university and clinical placement provider.
- 34 Follow the policy on submission of coursework and completion of clinical assessments as set out by your university and clinical placement provider.
- 35 Reflect on and respond constructively to feedback you are given.
- 36 Endeavour to provide care based on the best available evidence or best practice.

Keep clear and accurate records

You should:

- 37 Ensure that you are familiar with and follow our record keeping guidance for nurses and midwives (available from our website www.nmc-uk.org).
- 38 Ensure that you follow local policy on the recording, handling and storage of records.

Be open and honest, act with integrity and uphold the reputation of your profession

Be open and honest

You should:

- 39 Be honest and trustworthy when completing all records and logs of your practice experience.
- 40 Not plagiarise or falsify coursework or clinical assessments.
- 41 Ensure that you complete CVs and application forms truthfully and accurately.
- 42 Ensure that you are not influenced by any commercial incentives.

Act with integrity

You should:

- 43 Demonstrate a personal and professional commitment to equality and diversity.
- 44 Abide by the laws of the country in which you are undertaking your programme and inform your university immediately if, during your programme, you are arrested or receive any caution or warning or similar sanction from the police.
- 45 Inform your university if you have been cautioned, charged or found guilty of a criminal offence at any time.
- 46 Ensure that you are familiar with and abide by the rules, regulations, policies and procedures of your university and clinical placement provider.
- 47 Abide by UK laws and the rules, regulation, policies and procedures of the university and clinical placement providers with regard to your use of the internet and social networking sites.
- 48 Ensure that you are familiar with and follow our advice on the use of social networking sites (available from our website www.nmc-uk.org).

Protect people from harm

You should:

- 49 Seek help and advice from a mentor or tutor when there is a need to protect people from harm.
- 50 Seek help immediately from an appropriately qualified professional if someone for whom you are providing care has suffered harm for any reason.
- 51 Seek help from your mentor or tutor if people indicate that they are unhappy about their care or treatment.

Uphold the reputation of the nursing and midwifery professions

You should:

- 52 Follow the dress code or uniform policy of your university and clinical placement provider.
- 53 Be aware that your behaviour and conduct inside and outside of the university and clinical placement, including your personal life, may impact on your fitness to practise and ability to complete your programme.
- 54 Uphold the reputation of your chosen profession at all times.

Don't be afraid to ask for help

If you have any concerns about the issues raised in this document, your fitness to practise or your ability to comply with our guidance, you should ask your university tutor or clinical mentor for help straight away. They will be able to provide you with the support and advice you need before the matter becomes a more serious issue.

To make sure you're always able to get all the help and advice you need, familiarise yourself with the student support services available within your university and clinical placement provider.

These support services may include confidential counselling, disability advisers, mentors, occupational health services, personal tutors, professional bodies or trade unions, student groups or unions, or student health services.

You can also contact the NMC's **confidential** helpline on **020 7333 9333** and speak to our expert advisers about any worries or concerns you may have.

Further information

We hope that you've found this guidance helpful in understanding the important responsibilities you have as a student nurse or midwife.

Contact us

If you'd like to discuss any of these issues with us, please contact our confidential advice centre on **020 7333 9333** or by email at **advice@nmc-uk.org**

Visit our website

Further advice relating to this guidance and the code is available from our website, along with more information about the work of the NMC, events and our publications.

www.nmc-uk.org

Join our online community

www.nmc-uk.org/register-community

Connect with us on Facebook

www.facebook.com/nmcuk

Write to us

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Contact us

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