

Northern Ireland implementation of the NMC post-registration standards for Specialist Community Public Health Nursing (SCPHN) and Community Nursing Specialist Practice Qualifications (CNSPQ) programmes.

Frequently Asked Questions

Introduction

In September 2022, the Nursing & Midwifery Council (NMC) published new standards for post-registration programmes¹ along with standards of proficiency for specialist community public health nursing (SCPHN)², and community nursing specialist practice qualifications (SPQ)³.

These programme standards must be read with the NMC standards framework for nursing and midwifery education⁴ and NMC standards for student supervision and assessment⁵, both of which apply to all NMC approved programmes.

The NMC standards for prescribing programmes⁶ are also applicable to the SPQ programmes.

These new evidenced based standards set out the necessary knowledge and skills nurses and midwives will need, so they can provide the highest standard of specialist community, and public health nursing practice, in health and social care environments that are constantly changing and evolving.

The purpose of this document is to provide answers to frequently asked questions on the Northern Ireland (NI) implementation of the NMC Post-registration standards and how they relate to SCPHN and SPQ fields of practice.

NB: The same principles and processes will be applied to all NMC approved community nursing SPQ programmes as well as non-community nursing SPQ programmes.

¹ Available from: [nmc standards for post registration](#)

² Available from: [nmc standards of proficiency for specialist community public health nurses](#)

³ Available from: [nmc standards of proficiency for community nursing spqs](#)

⁴ Available from: [nmc standards framework for nursing and midwifery education](#)

⁵ Available from: [nmc standards for student supervision and assessment](#)

⁶ Available from: [nmc standards for prescribing programmes](#)

1. Who do the standards affect?

The standards have implications for registered nurses and midwives, students, employers, educators and all who support students on post-registered programmes.

2. What are the different fields of SCPHN and community nursing SPQ practice?

Within SCPHN, the fields of practice are:

- Health Visiting
- School Nursing
- Occupational Health Nursing (currently not offered in NI.)
- Public Health Nursing (currently not offered in NI.)

Within community nursing SPQ, the fields of practice are:

- SPQ Community Children's Nursing
- SPQ Community Learning Disabilities Nursing
- SPQ Community Mental Health Nursing
- SPQ District Nursing
- SPQ General Practice Nursing
- SPQ Health and Social Care Practice (currently not offered in NI.)

3. What is SPQ Health and Social Care Practice?

The new NMC SPQ in Health and Social care practice annotation does not specify a particular field of community nursing practice. It can be applied to community nurses working in different settings including potential new roles that are emerging in the community.

4. How will the standards be implemented in Northern Ireland (NI)?

The Chief Nursing Officer (CNO) commissioned Northern Ireland Practice and Education Council (NIPEC) to lead on the implementation of the NMC post-

registration standards. In partnership with key stakeholders, NIPEC have led a regional approach to oversee and ensure the out workings of the new NMC post-registration standards are cohesively embedded into education and practice by September 2024.

5. What do the new post-registration standards mean for those already with a SCPHN or SPQ qualification?

Professionals who already have one of these qualifications will retain them as they are currently annotated to their NMC registration.

The old NMC standards for specialist education and practice (NMC, 2001) that apply to non-community SPQs were withdrawn on the 31st August, 2023. This means that the NMC will no longer approve non-community SPQ programmes. Students who successfully complete a non-comm SPQ programme will not have this qualification annotated on the NMC register,

Annotations on the NMC register will remain in place for registrants who already hold a non-community SPQ against the old standards.

6. Will the Independent/Supplementary prescribing qualification be integrated into all the post-registration programmes?

In NI, the CNO agreed that SPQ programmes will be seamlessly integrated with the with the proficiencies set out in the NMC standards for post-registration programmes (2023)¹ and the Royal Pharmaceutical Society's (RPS) Competency Framework for all Prescribers (2021)⁷.

Students must meet the criteria to enroll on a prescribing programme as set out in the NMC standards for prescribing programmes (NMC, 2023)³. (See question 7).

The CNO agreed that the independent/supplementary prescribing qualification will not be integrated into the SCPHN programmes until a review of Health Visiting and School Nurse roles within NI has taken place.

7. What are the entry requirements for the SPQ programme?

All applicants wishing to apply for a SPQ programme must:

- be an NMC nurse (level 1) capable of safe and effective practice at the level of proficiency appropriate for the SPQ programme before being considered as eligible to apply for entry

⁷ [RPS English Competency Framework 3.pdf \(rpharms.com\)](#)

- hold a BSc Hons/ BSc degree or provide evidence of successful completion of academic study at level 6.

Applicants must also confirm that they are;

- of good health and character
- not undergoing any live formal professional, criminal or internal investigation, disciplinary hearings or serving a live disciplinary warning or formal underperformance procedure.

Applicants applying for the SPQ programme with the integrated independent/supplementary prescribing qualification must be registered with the NMC for a minimum of one year prior to application for entry onto the programme.

They must also be capable of safe and effective practice at a level of proficiency appropriate to the programme to be undertaken and their intended area of prescribing practice in the following areas:

- Clinical/health assessment
- Diagnostics/care management
- Planning and evaluation of care.

8. What are the entry requirements for the SCPHN programme?

All applicants wishing to apply for a SCPHN programme must:

- be an NMC nurse (level 1) or midwife capable of safe and effective practice at the level of proficiency appropriate for SCPHN programme before being considered as eligible to apply for entry
- hold a BSc Hons/ BSc degree or provide evidence of successful completion of academic study at level 6.

Applicants must also confirm that they are;

- of good health and character
- not undergoing any live formal professional, criminal or internal investigation, disciplinary hearings or serving a live disciplinary warning or formal underperformance procedure.

9. If I don't hold a BSc Hons/BSc degree, how can I provide evidence of successful completion of academic study at level 6?

Approved Education Institutions (AEI's) in NI who currently provide post-registration SCPHN and SPQ education programmes have mechanisms in place to support students who need to evidence level 6 study and other prior learning. Please contact the education provider for more information.

10. If I wish to fund myself on to a SCPHN or SPQ programme, how can I seek access to and be supported on the programme?

Programme places will be openly available and advertised across all relevant platforms, to enable eligible NMC registered nurses and or midwives including NHS, non-NHS, self-employed or self-funded/sponsored applicants to apply for entry onto an NMC approved SPQ or SCPHN programme or non-approved SPQ programme.

Community and non-community SPQ programmes:

- Ulster University provide a range of community and non-community SPQ pathways. These are provided as a Postgraduate Diploma in Specialist Nursing Practice with integrated Independent/Supplementary Prescribing. Applicants can apply to this programme at: postreg@ulster.ac.uk
- Queens University, Belfast, provide a range of non-community SPQ programmes which will be updated to reflect the NMC post-registration standards.
- Open University do not currently provide specialist practice post-registration programmes.

Applicants who successfully meet the AEI entry criteria for the SPQ programme, may be offered a commissioned practice learning placement by an HSC Trust. Following shortlisting, the HSC Trust will apply an assessment method within their selection and recruitment process.

If a self-funded placement is requested, the relevant AEI will liaise with the applicant's preferred HSC Trust/s to explore and confirm if a practice learning placement can be accommodated.

SCPHN Programmes:

Ulster University provide both Health Visiting and School Nursing programmes. These are provided as a Postgraduate Diploma in Specialist Community Public Health Nursing. Applicants can apply for the programmes at: postreg@ulster.ac.uk

The Health Visiting and School Nursing programmes are advertised on <https://jobs.hscni.net/> each year. Applicants are expected to apply via this route and

attend for an interview. Successful applicants may be offered an HSC Trust commissioned practice learning placement.

If a self-funded placement is requested, the AEI will liaise with the applicants preferred HSC Trust/s to explore and confirm if practice learning placement can be accommodated.

11. Has the length of the SPQ and SCPHN programmes changed?

- The length of the new SPQ programmes is 49 weeks which includes 90 practice learning days (an increase of 15 days) delivered in blocks of various lengths.
- The length of the SCPHN programme is 52 weeks which includes 130 days practice learning days (an increase from 128 days) delivered in blocks of various lengths. There is now a 60/40 balance of practice/theory.
- The course duration for both SPQ and SCPHN are inclusive of annual leave.

12. I currently hold a SCPHN/CNSPQ qualification. How will the new post registration standards affect me?

You can use the new standards as a resource for revalidation, engaging in reflective learning and supervision sessions or completing your appraisal conversations. The standards can be used to help identify gaps in your professional knowledge or skills in relation to your scope of practice and can help you plan future continuous professional development activities.

If you supervise or assess SCPHN or SPQ students, you should access the relevant preparation resources. (See question 16).

Standards for Student Supervision and Assessment

13. Has the NI Model to support the Standards for Student Supervision and Assessment been updated to reflect the new post-registration standards?

Yes, the NI Model for Future Nurse Future Midwife, Standards for Student Supervision and Assessment (DoH and NIPEC, 2021) was updated in 2023 to include the NMC standards for post-registration and the NMC standards for

prescribing programmes. It is now called the ‘The Standards for Student Supervision and Assessment - The Northern Ireland Model (DOH and NIPEC, 2023)⁸.

The NI Guide for those Responsible for Student Supervision and Assessment in Practice (2023)⁹ was also updated to reflect the new NMC post-registration standards. Both the Model and the Guide provides details on the roles and responsibilities of Practice Supervisors and Practice Assessors and how they can provide a good learning experience for students during their practice placements. It also includes details on the regional approach to the Practice Assessor database, the roles of the HSC Trust Practice Education Teams or equivalent and link lecturer/practice tutors.

14. Who can be a Practice Supervisor for SCPHN and SPQ students?

All NMC registered nurses and midwives are capable of supervising students, serving as role models for safe and effective practice. They must understand the proficiencies and programme outcomes that the student is required to achieve.

The Practice Supervisor must:

- have undertaken a period of preceptorship in line with the NMC principles for preceptorship as a SCPHN or a SPQ or
- evidence prior learning and relevant Practice Supervisor experience that enables them to facilitate effective evidence-based learning opportunities for SCPHN or SPQ students.

The student undertaking an NMC approved independent/supplementary prescribing qualification as part of a SPQ or stand-alone prescribing programme must have at least one practice supervisor, who is a registered health care professional and a registered prescriber. They must have the skills to supervise and educate in order to help the student meet the outcomes of the NMC Standards for Prescribing Programmes⁶ and the RPS Competency Framework for all Prescribers (RPS, 2021)⁷.

15. Who can be a Practice Assessor for SCPHN and SPQ students?

Practice Assessor for SCPHN students.

The student should be assigned to a Practice Assessor who is an experienced registered SCPHN qualified in the same field of the programme the student is undertaking. If this is not achievable; in agreement with the AEI and practice learning

⁸ Available from: [nipec: ni nmc post-reg-standards project](https://www.nipec.ni.nhs.uk/nmc-post-reg-standards-project)

⁹ Available from: [nipec: ni nmc post-reg-standards project](https://www.nipec.ni.nhs.uk/nmc-post-reg-standards-project)

partners, the student should be assigned to a registered SCPHN who has extensive experience in the student's intended field of SCPHN practice.

Practice Assessor for SPQ students.

The student should be assigned to a Practice Assessor who is an experienced registered SPQ nurse for the programme the student is undertaking. If this is not achievable; in agreement with the AEI and practice learning partners the student should be assigned to a registered nurse (without a SPQ qualification) who has extensive experience in the student's intended field of SPQ practice.

All Practice Assessors for both SCPHN and SPQ programmes must also have:

- undertaken a period of preceptorship in line with the NMC principles for preceptorship (NMC, 2022) as a SCPHN or SPQ or
- be able to evidence prior learning and relevant Practice Assessor experience that enables them to engage in fair, reliable and valid assessment processes in the context of SCPHN or SPQ practice.

Practice Assessor for Independent/Supplementary prescribing qualification.

- The student undertaking an NMC approved independent/supplementary prescribing qualification as part of an integrated SPQ/prescribing programme, or as a stand-alone prescribing programme, must be assigned to a Practice Assessor who is a registered healthcare professional and an **experienced** prescriber with suitable equivalent qualifications for the programme the student is undertaking (NMC,2023).
- The RPS Competency Framework for Designated Prescribing Practitioners (2019)¹⁰ define **experienced** prescriber as an active prescriber who would normally have at least 3 years' recent prescribing experience.
- An active prescriber consults with patients and makes prescribing decisions based on clinical assessment with sufficient frequency to maintain competence. Reflects and audits prescribing practice to identify developmental needs.

16. How will I be prepared to take on the roles of Practice Supervisor and Practice Assessor for SCPHN and SPQ students?

All healthcare professionals undertaking the roles of Practice Supervisor and Practice Assessor must complete the relevant preparation and update programmes

¹⁰ [A Competency Framework for Designated Prescribing Practitioners](#)

in order to gain an understanding of the proficiencies and programme outcomes that the student is aiming to achieve.

This includes:

- Standards for Student Supervision and Assessment - an overview
- Standards for Student Supervision and Assessment - Roles and Responsibilities
- Curriculum Update – aligned to the standards of proficiency for the NMC programmes that the student is undertaking
- Overview of relevant practice assessment documents

The above programmes will be available in both the AEI's and practice environments and will be offered via e-Learning or face to face platforms.

Healthcare professionals new to the Practice Supervisor and Practice Assessors' roles must also undertake an eLearning Practice Supervisor/Assessor (New to Role) programme: available at [learn hscni net signin](#) . This course will need to be taken once only.

Non-NMC registrants who are acting as Practice Assessors and Practice Supervisors for students on the independent/supplementary prescribing elements of the integrated prescribing/SPQ programme must undertake a regionally agreed AEI preparation programme to enable them to fulfil this role.

Following completion of the preparation programmes all health care professionals must sign a self-declaration form to evidence their ability to meet the NMC Standards for Student Supervision and Assessment.

17. Can a Practice Supervisor be a Practice Assessor at the same time?

In exceptional circumstances, the same person may fulfil the role of the Practice Supervisor and Practice Assessor. The rationale being that there may only be one individual in the Practice Learning Environment (PLE) who can fulfil both roles.

In such instances, the Practice Education Facilitator, nominated person and the AEI will need to evidence why it is necessary for the Practice Supervisor and Practice Assessor roles to be carried out by the same person and recorded in the practice assessment document. This request will be considered, discussed and agreed with the AEI in advance of the student commencing the programme.

Students undertaking a SPQ programme with integrated prescribing may have to have two nominated Practice Assessors during their practice placement. One Practice Assessor to assess the NMC SPQ proficiencies and one Practice Assessor

to assess the RPS prescribing competencies. (See question 15). This will be the case until there are enough Practice Assessors who have a SPQ with the integrated prescribing qualification.

18. Will the Practice Assessment Document (PAD) /ongoing record of achievement change?

The PAD has been updated to reflect the NMC post-registration standards and relevant proficiencies and competencies for each programme.

This should provide opportunities for students to evidence their practice learning against the SCPHN or SPQ proficiencies and RPS competencies, alongside the provision for constructive practice feedback, action plans and reviews. AEI's will provide advice and guidance on the relevant changes that have been made to the PAD.

20. What is the process to escalate a concern regarding a student's progress?

Any concerns raised about a student in the practice learning environment should be managed in a timely manner in line with the guidance in the Standards for Student Supervision and Assessment: The Northern Ireland Model (2023) and if appropriate refer to the NMC Raising Concerns: Guidance for Nurses, Midwives and Nursing Associates document¹¹.

If using the Hub and Spoke model where the Spoke practice learning experience is a different organisation to the Hub, any concerns that arise will be managed by the nominated person and the link lecturer/practice tutor who will be the first point of contact.

¹¹ Available from: [nmc. raising concerns guidance for nurses and midwives](#)

NB. This is a living document which we will updated as required.



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