



## **Project Initiation Document.**

# **Review and Development of a Regional Midwifery Career Pathway and Role Frameworks for Northern Ireland**

**Date: 31 March 2026**



## Purpose


This Project Initiation Document serves as the foundational blueprint for the development of a comprehensive midwifery career pathway for Northern Ireland.

This document articulates the rationale for developing a robust and comprehensive midwifery career pathway acting as a road map for career mapping, skills development and professional growth. The document meticulously outlines the project plan, specifying key objectives such as delivering career pathways and a framework that midwives can use for career planning, employers for workforce development and educators and educational commissioners to map training needs. The project's ambitions, methodological approach, resource needs, timeline, measurable milestones, dissemination and implementation process and a clearly defined governance structure ensuring accountability and oversight will be clearly articulated.

This project initiation document represents a formal and binding agreement signifying the shared commitment and collaborative partnership between the Chief Midwifery Officer's office (CMidO), and the Northern Ireland Practice and Education Council for Nursing and Midwifery (NIPEC) towards the successful delivery of this vital framework.

## Introduction

The CMidO, in setting the strategic direction for midwifery practice in Northern Ireland, has commissioned NIPEC to lead on the review and development of a regional career pathway and framework for midwives in Northern Ireland. This new career development model for Midwifery will structure pathways around three core areas: clinical practice, operational management and education and research. NIPEC will undertake this programme of work in




partnership with the Department of Health CNO Group in collaboration with a range of key stakeholders across the wider Health and Social Care system and Educational and Research System in Northern Ireland.

## Background

Promoting the health and wellbeing of women and babies is at the heart of maternity care across Northern Ireland and all women and babies have the right to safe, quality care and services that are equitable (Renfrew, 2024). Midwifery care contributes significantly to enabling the best start in life and the promotion of developmental, psychological and social wellbeing (NMTG, 2020). One of the key strategic themes within ‘Shaping our Future’ (DoH, 2023) is to stabilise the Nursing and Midwifery workforce to ensure that safe and effective care is provided to women and babies and to develop a workplace that ‘*enables human flourishing*’. In order to achieve this, an emphasis is placed on ensuring the right person is in the right place at the right time with the right knowledge to optimize the experience of health care for each individual (NMTG, 2020).

The Renfrew Report (2024) was commissioned as an Independent Report by the Department of Health in light of concerns raised about the safety of maternity services in Northern Ireland. This Report identified that socioeconomic deprivation is a significant impacting factor on health and wellbeing in Northern Ireland alongside increasing co-morbidities in pregnancy and increased rates of induction and caesarean birth. This combination of factors has led to a situation where midwives are working in conditions where services are fragmented and often cannot consistently offer the level of quality of care that they wish to provide.

Renfrew (2024) identifies that Northern Ireland does not currently have all the necessary structures and processes in place to ensure equitable, regional improvements in both care




and services. This is supported by RQIA (2023) which highlights the importance of maximising stability and resilience within the maternity workforce to help reduce reliance on agency and locum staff and ensure there are 24-hour safe staffing levels. RQIA highlights the importance of attracting and retaining talented staff members which signposts the importance of midwifery career pathways to nurture and develop talent within the midwifery workforce. This project aligns with the NI Government's wider Reset Plan and supports the implementation of the Neighbourhood Model of Care by strengthening workforce capability, sustainability, and community-focused service delivery.

The Nursing and Midwifery Retention Report (DoH, 2022) highlights the need to focus on safe staffing and the valuing of staff to promote retention in the workforce. The recent Birthrate Plus study (2022) has identified shortfalls in midwifery staffing levels across Northern Ireland which is currently being addressed by the Department of Health through increased levels of pre-registration midwifery studentships; and the Maxwell Report (2022) has provided strategic guidance towards developing post-registration education commissioning to assist in the future proofing of the workforce.

A key recommendation from the Renfrew Report identifies the need for a unified approach to education and training of staff and the development of a midwifery career pathway that classifies regionally defined midwifery roles and responsibilities, which benchmark with other UK countries, and also offers opportunities for clinical academic career pathways to help build capability for the whole workforce [Renfrew, 2024, Recommendation 32, p256]. This builds on the recommendations from NMTG (2020) to ensure that the right person is in the right place with the right knowledge and skills.

Following recommendations within the Maxwell Report (2022), post-registration Nursing and Midwifery education is currently being reconfigured within Queen's University Belfast. The focus is on increased options for midwives to individualise an educational pathway



through micro-credentialling . This process will help midwives to develop and structure their unique career pathways. The new Advanced Practice MSc Programme will be available to midwives September 2026, which will offer a clear pathway for those midwives who are clearly achieving across the four pillars of practice (Clinical Practice; Education and Learning; Leadership and Research and Development).

Establishing a Regional Career Pathway and Role Frameworks for Midwives will:

- Help to improve the quality and safety of maternity services by ensuring standardisation and consistency in role expectations and competencies of midwives across all Health and Social Care (HSC)Trusts
- Provide midwives with structured career progression routes which will enhance career satisfaction
- Ensure that all roles are in alignment with NMC Standards and can be benchmarked to other UK Country standards
- Assist healthcare systems to anticipate future workforce needs considering readiness, stability and future focused development of staff.
- Ensure education commissioning cycles align with service need and associated staff development.
- Promote the development of more senior midwifery career roles by offering a clearer and more rewarding career structure
- Promote a more agile workforce through recognising competencies that are transferable across roles outlined within the three core pathways
- Ensure that all midwives have equity in access to education and career progression regardless of where they work



## Project Aim

The aim is to design and implement a core career pathway that incorporates role frameworks for midwives in and across clinical, operational management and education and research roles. that supports professional development from entry level to senior practice and leadership roles which will improve workforce sustainability and quality of care for women and babies.


## Project Objectives

### Phase 1

To scope the *current* service model to clarify the existing midwifery workforce structure.


This will include:

- a) Creating a comprehensive list of current midwifery job roles across all HSC Trusts which will include liaising across all HSC Trusts in Northern Ireland to establish core roles, identify any regional variations and overlaps in service provision

- 
- b) Scope the key messages from the Renfrew Report and gather views from Senior midwives in Northern Ireland with regards to a vision for a midwifery career framework moving forward and complete a comprehensive literature search of existing models and frameworks for midwifery across all parts of the United Kingdom keeping in mind changing trends and any new emerging Reports of significance.
  - c) Present the role titles and key capabilities for levels 2-9 within the three core pathways to a broad scope of senior midwives across Northern Ireland for agreement prior to moving towards core competencies.

## Phase 2

- a) Using the Nationally agreed [Levels of Practice framework](#), clearly define the core competencies for every midwifery role from level 2-9. Defining these roles will enhance high-quality care and support to women at every stage of their pregnancy journey and transition to parenthood.
- b) Develop a learning and development matrix that will support midwives and maternity support workers at every level to avail of the most appropriate learning and development opportunities by signposting to various resources.
- c) To develop and promote regionally agreed career pathways for midwives which will include role frameworks for every level of practice. Each of the 3 core pathways will be addressed: Clinical; Operational Management and Education and Research. The initial focus will be on the Clinical Career Pathway with consideration to the other two pathways as the project progresses.

- 
- d) To develop job plans and job descriptions for each of the identified roles within the framework

## Project methodology

This project will employ a rigorous methodology that integrates co-production and co-design throughout. The project will be carried out in two phases. This approach will offer an informed grounded understanding of the service and the midwifery roles within it. A synthesise of evidence from both phases will provide a robust evidence-based career pathway and role framework for midwives that acts as a career planner for individuals and talent identifier for the HSC Trusts and partners.

What we need to include:

- a) Establish a robust governance structure and reporting mechanism which will enable effective representation across identified workstreams which reflects the timescales outlines in the project plan to meet the overall objectives.
- b) A comprehensive literature search of existing midwifery models and career frameworks across the United Kingdom
- c) Co-design will be utilised throughout and all scoping exercises will be undertaken by the working group, membership of which will include registered midwives in hospital and community settings; specialist midwives; consultant midwives, service users, education providers from QUB and CEC, Department of Health and Union representation; to identify the core competencies for the specific clinical roles within midwifery practice
- d) Establish writing subgroups for each role pathway developed from the Working Group – the NIPEC SPO and Project lead will be responsible for chairing the groups

and leading the development of the core competencies, education and experiential requirements and job descriptions.

- e) Merge the newly created midwifery role pathways into the main NIPEC website and embed across the NI Nursing and Midwifery Careers website

## Risk Management and Mitigation

Risk	Mitigation
Staff resistance to change	Provide clear and consistent communication Ensure wide engagement of stakeholders and incorporate co-design throughout
Timelines may extend due to the size of the tasks involved and the phased approach required to deliver this project.	Provide realistic timelines throughout which allow for full development of each phase of the project. Recognise the need for flexibility within each section and report early to CMidO and NIPEC if any concerns in relation to timelines.
Resource spend	Provide realistic objectives and timelines. Review these processes regularly and escalate to the CMidO and NIPEC if there are concerns regarding resource spend.
Staff shortages and challenges with attending workshops	Plan workshop dates well in advance; liaise to find best times and date with managers; encourage managers to have alternative individuals available should sickness/absence occur



## Resources

Every reasonable effort will be taken to work within the identified resource allocation with early escalation to the CMidO and NIPEC with regards to any concerns raised. The key resources utilised will include:

*Human Resources:* NIPEC Project Lead; HoMs; Consultant Midwives; Registered Midwives; Education teams; project administrative support

*Financial Resources:* workshop and materials costs; staff backfill for participation time; digital resource development costs

*Material Resources:* digital platform costs; dissemination materials

## Engagement and Communication Plan

For each of the phases undertaken, the engagement and communication plan will be:

- Project Steering group to meet every 6-8 weeks throughout the project length. Detail from the Steering group will be communicated directly to the CMidO and NIPEC.
- Hold monthly Working Group meetings which will then provide updates on progress to the Project Steering Group
- Workshop events throughout the project will provide stakeholder engagement
- Writing groups will include relevant stakeholders
- Publish quarterly newsletters to disseminate progress following workshops and strategic developments within the project



## Dissemination and Implementation

This dissemination and implementation plan will ensure that the midwifery career pathway is effectively communicated, adopted and sustained which will support workforce development and improve the quality of care provided to women and babies. The active participation of all stakeholders will be essential to the successful design, implementation, and overall success of the new career framework for midwifery.


Elements in each phase of the project will include:

- Regular updating at Senior Midwifery Forums
- Developing accessible resources that will be available through the NIPEC website
- Utilising communication channels such as the Intranet; email bulletins and regular newsletters to update midwives.
- Hosting workshops and Q&A sessions with midwives across Northern Ireland to promote engagement
- Piloting the pathway in selected maternity units – integrate into appraisal systems and personal development plans
- Ensuring ongoing leadership support and visibility
- Promoting a culture of career progression and lifelong learning and integration into the pre-registration curriculum in relation to Leadership

## Equality and Governance Screening

The aim is to ensure that the proposed midwifery career pathway is equitable and inclusive for all staff and complies with legal and regulatory frameworks. Please refer to Appendix 4 for an Equality and Human Rights Screening Template.

For Governance screening, the following should apply:

- 
- The career pathway should support safe clinical practice which is evidence based
  - All roles must adhere to the NMC Code and all role competencies must align to the NMC Proficiency Standards for Midwives [2019]
  - There must be compliance with data protection policies such as GDPR and confidentiality in all workforce and patient data must be maintained.
  - All processes must align with organisational human resource policies
  - Findings should be reported to the Steering Group.

## Evaluation

Evaluation of the success of the project will include testing the final role pathways with clinical midwives across Northern Ireland. HR managers and workforce leads will also test the final role pathways for accuracy. Consideration to the ongoing need for evaluation will be accounted for.

Key performance indicators would include:


- Review of staff retention rates
- Uptake of advanced midwifery practitioners
- Usage and traffic to the resource



## **Appendices [separate document]:**

1. References
2. Draft Terms of Reference for Project Steering Group
3. Stakeholders
4. Equality and Human Rights screening template

Proposed Timeline: indicative programme for estimate purposes only



For further information, please contact

**NIPEC**

4<sup>th</sup> Floor James House  
2-4 Cromac Avenue  
BELFAST  
BT7 2JB

Tel: 0300 3000066  
[enquiries@nipec.hscni.net](mailto:enquiries@nipec.hscni.net)