



**Summary report on scoping  
review for future model to  
support delivery of the regional  
Maternity Support Workers  
education programme in  
N. Ireland.**

**December 2024**

## **Introduction**

This paper provides a summary of the steps that have been taken to explore the options that are available for a new sustainable model to support the delivery of the regional Maternity Support Worker (MSW) education programme in N. Ireland (N.I.).

## **Context**

The MSW role was established in Northern Ireland in 2009, to provide support to midwives in the delivery of safe and effective care to women and their families. In conjunction with this, the first regional MSW education programme was developed in 2010 which has continued to be delivered successfully for 15 years.

In 2021 the Chief Nursing Officer (CNO) and the Director of Workforce Policy Directorate (WPD) Department of Health, (DoH) commissioned the Northern Ireland Practice Education Centre (NIPEC) to evaluate the existing education and training provision for MSWs together with the infrastructure to support the delivery of the programme. This work included: -

- Review of the Maternity Support Workers Education Programme and
- Development of regionally agreed MSW Standards, MSW competencies and an Induction and Development Pathway and relevant Job Description.

The above work was completed in 2022 with a set of recommendations to support the full adoption and implementation of above outputs. This was approved by the CNO Business Group and the Strategic Midwifery Sub Committee of the Central Nursing and Midwifery Advisory Committee (CNMAC) in late 2023, with an agreement that a new sustainable model and infrastructure to support the preparation and education of MSWs should be developed that complies with quality assurance and educational governance requirements. In addition, alternative options should be considered to provide wider participation and equity of access for MSWs who would like to progress their career.

## **Current MSW education programme**

The existing MSW education programme is provided on an annual basis, from September to June to 25 MSW (approximate). The programme is operationally managed through the Vocational Workforce Assessment Centre (VWAC) in the Southern Health and Social Services (SHSCT) with one peripatetic assessor delivering the key elements of the MSW programme and completing the practical assessments with all MSW trainees. In addition, the HSC Clinical Education Centre (CEC) provide support in delivering specified education components within the programme.

There are many benefits to the current model for the delivery of the regional MSW education programme , however a number of challenges have arisen over time which need to be considered. See Table 1.

**Table 1. Benefits and challenges of the current MSW education programme.**

<b>Benefits</b>	<b>Challenges</b>
MSW education programme equips MSW trainees with the knowledge and skills for the MSW role in N.I.	Over reliance of one peripatetic assessor supporting the coordination and management of the MSW education programme raises operational and governance issues.
MSW education programme well established in N.I. and highly valued by HSC midwifery workforce.	Unplanned leave of the peripatetic assessor will disrupt the continued delivery of the MSW programme, therefore risking the professional development of MSWs in N.I.
MSW education programme supports the professional development of MSWs to meet the recruitment needs of new MSWs within the midwifery workforce.	<p>The programme does not support widening access to enable career progression for MSWs.</p> <p>Nursing Assistants have opportunities to access an education pathway towards a BSc Nursing qualification, however none of the AEIs in N.I. provide a route for MSWs to progress to a BSc Midwifery qualification.</p>
Accomplished peripatetic assessor who coordinates, manages and delivers the MSW education programme.	
MSWs receive a Regulated Qualifications Framework (RQF) Level 3 Diploma qualification upon completion of the education programme.	
<p>CEC has always provided input into the MSW programme, however in October, 2022, CEC confirmed that they were unable to support the MSW programme beyond the 2022/2023 academic year.</p> <p>In response to requests from CNO, CEC agreed to extend their existing arrangements to support the delivery of the MSW education programme for the academic years 2023/24 and 2024/25.</p>	

## March 2023

The Chief Midwifery Officer (CMO) (DoH) requested NIPEC to seek alternative options for a model and infrastructure that will support the delivery of the MSW education programme in its entirety as well as provide career progression opportunities for MSWs.

## Time Line (March 2023 -December 2024)

The time line below provides the details of the scoping work carried out by NIPEC in partnership with representatives from key stakeholder organisations (Table 2) to explore the options of a new sustainable model for the delivery of the regional Maternity Support Worker (MSW) education programme in N. Ireland (N.I.) and provide opportunities for MSW career development and progression. (Appendix A)

**Table 2:** Representatives from key stakeholder organisations involved throughout the scoping work.

<b>Representatives</b>	<b>Role Title</b>	<b>Stakeholder Organisations</b>
Fiona Bradley	Senior Professional Officer, Project Lead.	Northern Ireland Practice and Education Council for Nursing and Midwifery (NIPEC).
Mark Browne	Workforce and Policy Directorate Representative.	Department of Health (DoH).
Dawn Ferguson	Assistant Director of Nursing, Workforce and Education.	Southern Health and Social Care Trust (SHSCT).
Donna Gallagher	Professional Lead, Nursing.	Open University (OU)
Caroline Keown	Chief Midwifery Officer.	Department of Health (DoH)
Linda Kelly	Chief Executive.	Northern Ireland Practice and Education Council for Nursing and Midwifery (NIPEC).
Maureen Ritchie	Midwifery Support Officer.	Department of Health (DoH).
Janine Stockdale	Senior Lecturer in Midwifery (Education).	Queens's University, Belfast (QUB).
Una St Ledger	Professional Lead, Nursing.	Open University (OU).
Tracey Welch	Vocational Workforce Development Manager.	Vocational Workforce Assessment Centre, Southern Health and Social Care Trust (SHSCT).

## **Options considered in the preliminary stages of scoping work.**

The following options were explored and considered prior to the commencement of the scoping work.

- Foundation degree being made available for MSWs in N.I. as a pathway into a BSc Midwifery programme (similar to University of the West of Scotland). Queens University, Belfast, (QUB) do not provide a foundation degree for access to a midwifery degree programme and in addition, the RQF Level 3 Diploma in Maternity Healthcare Support does not meet the entry criteria requirements into the QUB BSc midwifery programme
- Apprenticeships models (similar to Health Education, England (HEE), Maternity Support Worker Level 3 curriculum which aligns to the requirements of the Senior Healthcare Support Worker Apprenticeship Standards). Nursing and midwifery apprenticeship programmes are not available in N.I.
- Delivery of the full MSW programme by the CEC. This does not align to CEC's corporate objectives/business plan.

### **April 2023**

- In partnership, WPD and DoH developed a Business Case, outlining the different options, along with the benefits and risks to support the continuation of the MSW education programme.
- The most favourable option was:
  - An additional 1.0 wte Band 6 Midwife (Peripatetic Assessor) to support delivery of the regional education programme to Maternity Support Workers and deliver all theoretical and practical components of the MSW Programme, including the education components normally provided by the CEC
  - Post-holder to undertake training to attain Peripatetic Assessor Qualification.

### **May to August 2023**

- Open University (OU) in partnership with QUB proposed an alternative education model to support both the MSW education programme and providing a career pathway into the QUB BSc midwifery programme. Details of this model included:
  - Trainees to complete the K104 module (which would cover the generic fundamentals of the MSW education programme)

- An annual MSW Summer School provided by QUB (four midwifery masterclasses in within one-week period)
- Completion of an MSW Skills Passport (adapted from the NMC approved 'Midwifery Skills Passport' currently used in the BSc (Hons) Midwifery programme)
- Trainees would be assigned a specific OU associate lecturer/tutor who would oversee, coordinate and manage the delivery of the K104 module
- MSW trainees would be aligned to midwifery practice supervisors who would be identified and supported by OU for the duration of the MSW education programme
- MSW students who wish to progress and consider midwifery as a career pathway, could progress to complete the K102 module
- The Certificate in Health Care Practice K104 and K102 (120 academic credits) along with GCSE Mathematics and English would fulfil QUB entry requirements for entry on to the BSC midwifery programme.

OU also agreed to explore with their Human Resources Department the potential of a specific Midwifery Practice Tutor (Academic Assessor) for the K104 module which would provide the necessary professional credibility and longevity to the programme.

### **August 2023**

The MSW Standards, core competencies and skills were approved at the CNO Business meeting. OU and QUB to progress with cost implications for the new proposed education model (as above) with the possibility of this being in place by 2024/25.

### **October 2023**

NIPEC presented the MSW Standards, revised MSW education programme, MSW core competencies and skills and at the Strategic Midwifery Sub Committee of CNMAC in mid-October. All relevant HSC policy and guidance documents to be updated to reflect the new resources.

### **December 2023**

All representatives from the key stakeholder organisations were informed that due to governance and accountability reasons within both universities, it would not be possible to proceed with the proposed education model. In addition, it was difficult to source an awarding body for the proposed education programme.

## **January 2024**

The above exploratory work was presented to the CMO outlining the challenges. QUB proposed a solution, to explore the potential of writing a Level 2 standalone module that would deliver the MSW programme.

## **March 2024**

The CMO presented a short summary report to the CNO providing an update on the scoping work that had been completed along with the challenges. In response the CNO requested the CEC to extend their existing arrangements to support the delivery of the MSW education programme for the academic year 2024/25 with the funding arrangements to be obtained from the Service Level Arrangement between the CEC and the HSC Trusts. WPD was contacted for additional funding to cover a part-time resource for the MSW programme.

QUB took forward exploratory work into QUB developing a hybrid model in partnership with a regional FE College for the delivery of an MSW education programme. Both the Academic Affairs Dept (QUB) and the Head of School in a FE College welcomed the opportunity to explore this model.

## **April 2024**

CNO and WPD provided approval for preliminary scoping work to be explored with a FE College and QUB.

## **May 2024**

The FE College confirmed that it was not possible to provide the MSW education programme that is regulated by ProQual (Awarding Body).

## **June 2024**

Examination of the Level 3 and Level 4 ProQual programmes was carried out with the Vocational Workforce Assessment Centre in SHSCT.

A marked difference was noted in the ProQual Level 4 units which required a higher level of knowledge and application with an increased focus on management skills.

The benefits of modifying the existing MSW programme to a ProQual Level 4 programme would provide the MSW trainees with increased academic credibility and offer them a potential pathway to the BSc midwifery programme.

The risks to this higher-level programme could be that the programme could be academically challenging for some MSW trainees and in addition it would not equip them with the necessary clinical knowledge and skills for the MSW role.

## **July 2024**

New proposals were made for MSWs wishing to progress their professional development. These included MSWs gaining support from their respective employing HSC Trust to remain in paid employment while completing a further programme of study, such as

- The current T01 programme in OU or
- An ACCESS programme in a FE College

## **September 2024**

The MSW Standards were launched by the Minister of Health and the Chief Midwifery Officer on the 19<sup>th</sup> September 2024. [NIPEC-Standards for maternity support workers | Department of Health](#).

## **Status quo (December 2024)**

In agreement with the CMO, NIPEC have completed the assigned work related to the Maternity Support Workers. All the regionally agreed MSWs resources have been transferred to the DoH and the HSC Trusts. The Regional MSW Group has been updated on the status quo related to the MSWs which includes the following:

- Delivery of the revised MSW education programme is in progress for the academic year 2024/25
- Each HSC Trust has nominated a named midwife as a link person to support the MSWs on the MSW programme and work in partnership with the SHSCT VWAC teaching team
- Recurrent funding has been secured for a second Peripatetic Assessor to support in teaching, supervising and assessing the regional MSW education programme
- CEC have agreed to provide continual support to the MSW programme
- Work has begun to upskill existing MSWs across the HSC Trusts on two new clinical competencies
- The regional MSW Group continues to provide oversight of the MSW education programme and infrastructure
- DoH are now beginning regional exploratory work to review and develop Widening Access opportunities across the HSC. This work will include MSWs.

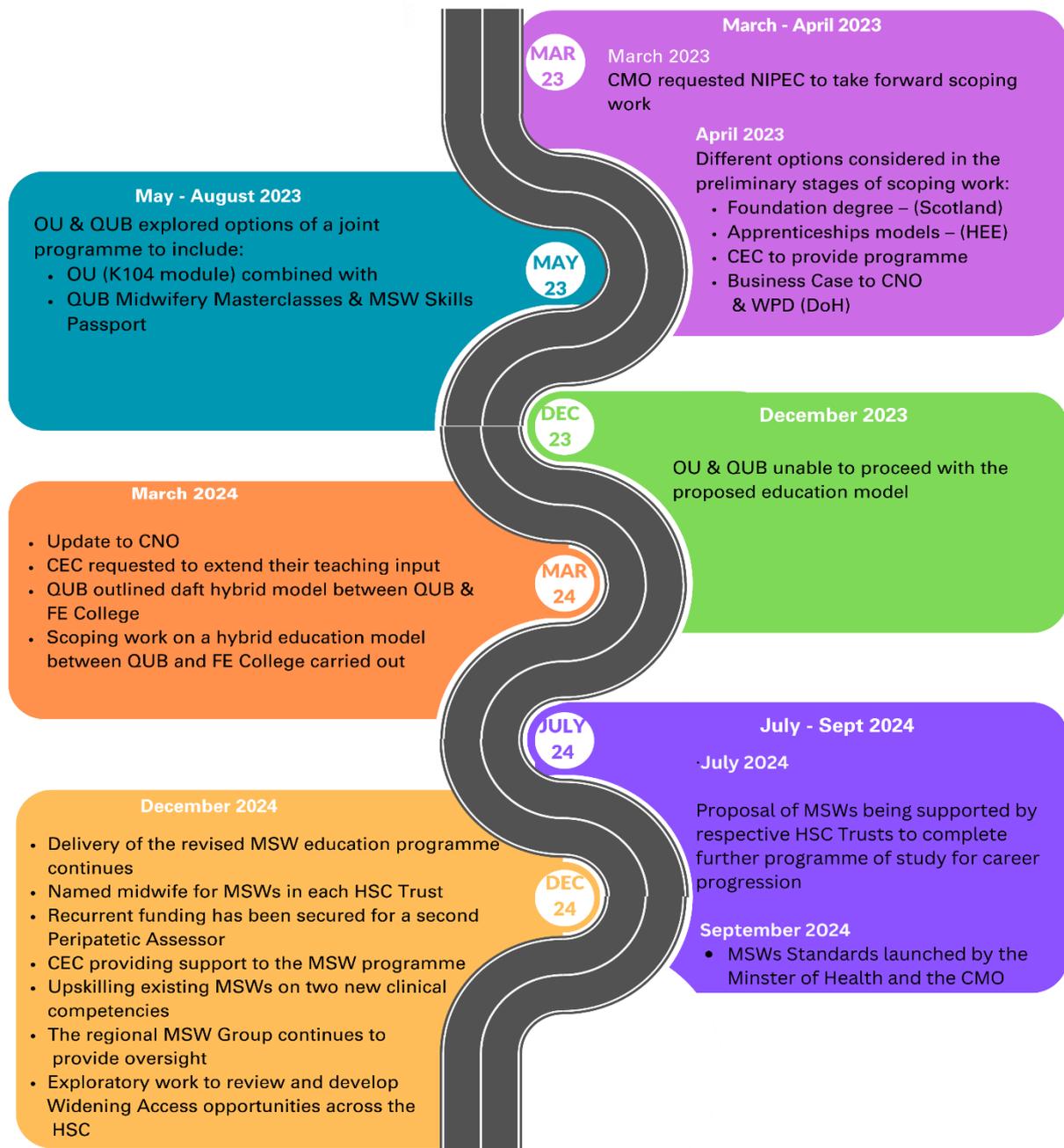
NIPEC would like to acknowledge and thank all our partners and stakeholders who engaged and contributed to this work.

## Appendix A

# Future Education Delivery Model for Maternity Support Workers



The following steps in the time line outline the scoping work NIPEC carried out in partnership with representatives from key stakeholder organisations to explore the possible options and identify a new sustainable model for the delivery of the regional Maternity Support Worker (MSW) education programme in N. Ireland with opportunities to enable MSW career progression.





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