Summary of the Nursing and Midwifery Council (NMC 2008) Standards to support learning and assessment in practice (SLAiP).

1. Background


The NMC has developed a standard to support learning and assessment in practice. The standard takes the form of a developmental framework for 4 stages: registrants, mentors, practice teachers and teachers. There is an additional role of sign-off mentor. This framework came into effect in September 2007 and was updated in 2008. Additional circulars provide any amendments.

This paper will focus on the mentor and sign-off mentor role for nurses and midwives. Those not yet qualified mentors should be working at the level of registrant and may undertake appropriate preparation to meet the requirements for mentors.

2. Key terms:

Mentor: “A registrant who has met the outcomes of stage 2 and who facilitates supervises and assesses students in the practice setting”

Sign-off mentor: “Mentors are required to meet specified criteria in order to be able to sign-off a student’s practice proficiency at the end of an NMC approved programme. All midwife mentors will have met the requirements through their preparation programme”

Competency: “the skills and abilities to practice safely and effectively without the need for direct supervision. Competencies are achieved incrementally throughout periods of practice experience during a programme…”

3. Overview of the framework to support learning and assessment in practice:

There is a single developmental framework to support learning and assessment in practice. It takes into account the NHS knowledge and skills framework, available at:


It defines and describes the knowledge and skills that registrants need to apply in their practice to support and assess students undertaking NMC approved programmes leading to registration or a qualification that is recordable on the register.

The NMC has identified outcomes for mentors, practice teachers and teachers so that there is clear accountability for making decisions that lead to entry to the register.

**See Appendix 1 for outcomes for mentors and Appendix 2 for sign-off mentor criteria**

Students on NMC approved pre-registration education programmes leading to registration on the nurses’ part of the register, must be supported and assessed by mentors. Pre-registration nursing mentors who assess NMC competencies must have a mark on the register appropriate to the branch programme that the student is undertaking. A sign-off mentor who has met additional criteria must make the final assessment of practice and
confirm to the NMC that the required proficiencies have been met. All midwifery mentors should meet the sign off mentor criteria.

**Fitness for practice**

Those who make judgements of students have been appropriately prepared to assess performance to against the relevant NMC (2004) standards of proficiency for pre-registration nurses, NMC (2009) Standards for pre-registration Midwifery education and the new (2010) standards for pre-registration nurse education available at:

For nurses: http://www.nmc-uk.org/Educators/Standards-for-education/
Post qualifying/specialist course standards for education are also on this site

Mentors who sign-off all or part of a programme leading to registration are accountable to the council that the students are fit to practice and that they will have the necessary knowledge skills and competence to take on the role of registered nurse or midwife. Registration provides a licence to practice and is the prime means of protecting the public.

Individuals who are assessing competence must have met the NMC SLAiP (2008) standards to stage 2 or be supervised by a mentor who has met these outcomes.

Developmental stage 1 reflects the NMC (2008) The Code applying to all registrants in nursing and midwifery

“you have a duty to facilitate students of nursing and midwifery to develop their competence” (NMC 2008:5)

**4. Domains and outcomes**

There are eight domains in the framework, each with outcomes (see appendix 1) identified at the four developmental stages. For mentors it is stage 2. The domains are:

1. Establishing effective working relationships
2. Facilitation of learning
3. Assessment and accountability
4. Evaluation of learning
5. Creating and environment for learning
6. Context of practice
7. Evidence based practice
8. Leadership

**5. Mentors are responsible and accountable for:**

- Organising and coordinating student learning activities in practice
- Supervising students in learning situations and providing them with constructive feedback on their achievements
- Setting and monitoring achievement of realistic learning objectives
- Assessing total performance including skills, attitudes and behaviours
- Providing evidence as required by programme providers of student achievement or lack of achievement
- Liaising with others (e.g. mentors, sign-off mentors, practice teachers) to provide feedback, identify any concerns about the students performance and agree action as appropriate
Providing evidence for, or acting as sign-off mentors with regard to making decisions about achievement of proficiency at the end of a programme.

6. Principles underpinning the framework (principles a-d only apply to mentors)

Principle A

The NMC registrants who make judgements about whether a student has achieved the required standards of proficiency for safe and effective practice must be on the same part or sub-part of the register as those which the student is intending to enter.

The NMC recognises that, as part of interprofessional learning and working, others will contribute to learning and assessing in practice. To ensure public protection, only those who are NMC sign-off mentors or practice teachers may confirm overall achievement of proficiency that demonstrates that students are fit for practice (i.e. sign-off mentor).

The mentors or practice teachers who sign-off proficiency must have a mark on the register that corresponds with the branch programme that the student is studying.

Other mentors may be involved in developmental assessment, where the student is gaining a breadth of experience but where learning is not intended to demonstrate competence as a nurse or midwife.

Principle B

NMC registrants who make judgements about whether a student has achieved the required standards of proficiency for safe and effective practice must have developed their own knowledge, skills and competency beyond that of registration through continuing professional development – either formal or experiential learning, as appropriate to their support role.

Principle C

NMC registrants who make judgements about whether a student has achieved the required standards of proficiency for safe and effective practice will have professional qualifications at an appropriate level to support and assess the students they mentor/teach, i.e. they must hold professional qualifications equal to, or at a higher level than, the students they are supporting and assessing.

Principle D

NMC registrants who make judgements about whether a student has achieved the required standards of proficiency for safe and effective practice must have been prepared for their role to support and assess learning, and met NMC defined outcomes, and that such outcomes have been achieved in practice and, where relevant, in academic settings, including abilities to support interprofessional learning.

The NMC has agreed that it will approve mentor and practice teacher preparation programmes in order that they can be assured of consistency of preparation for supporting learning and assessment in practice. Preparation programmes for teachers are already approved by the NMC and will continue to be so.
7. **NMC requirements:**

**Supporting student learning**

Each student has a named mentor for each period of practice learning (arranged at least 1 week before the placement starts)

Mentors should not normally support more than 3 students at any point in time

At least 40% of the student’s time must be supervised but the mentor (and one hour each week protected time in the final placement for the sign-off mentor)

An on-going achievement record (practice assessment document) including comments from mentors must be passed from one placement to another to enable judgements to be made on the student’s progress

The mentor should have access to a network of support and supervision to assist them in fulfilling their responsibilities and making complex judgements such as failing a student. (this can be other mentors, link lecturers etc)

8. **Assessing learning in practice**

Mentors will have been prepared to assess student performance and will be accountable for their decisions to pass or fail. Failing students may be difficult. All assessment decisions must be evidence based

Most assessment of competence should be taken through direct observation of practice. Simulated experiences or Observed Structured Clinical Examinations (OSCEs) may be used when appropriate (e.g. Basic Life Support)

Mentors should be involved wherever possible when competence is assessed through simulation.

Mentors should consider how evidence from various sources might contribute to making a judgment on performance and competence.

Mentors should seek advice and guidance from a sign-off mentor or a practice teacher when dealing with failing students.

9. **Signing off proficiency (sign-off mentor role)**

The NMC had identified progression points where a student may not progress without a formal decision that they have met the outcomes or competencies of a previous part of the programme

Mentors must keep sufficient records to support and justify their decisions on whether or not a student is proficient/competent (i.e. there is an audit trail). This includes giving regular feedback to the student and keeping records of guidance given.
Sign-off mentors must have time allocated to reflect, give feedback and keep records of student achievement in their final period of practice learning. This will be equivalent of an hour per student per week. This is so that students have effective feedback and so that the ultimate decision on their proficiency is not unexpected. This allocated time may be greater earlier in the placement.

Only sign-off mentors must sign-off proficiency at the end of a programme, unless the mentor is being supervised by a sign-off mentor (who should then countersign that proficiency has been achieved). This final assessment draws on evidence of assessment over a sustained period of time. The sign-off mentor may use the practice assessment document and other evidence to see has been achieved, demonstrated and maintained. This sign-off of practice must be confirmed by the examining boards of the programmes.

10. Preparation of mentors and sign-off mentors

Mentors who have obtained previously approved programmes do not need to repeat such preparation are advised to map their current qualifications against the new standards and meet any outstanding outcomes through continuing professional development (CPD)

Anyone holding a qualification not approved by the NMC (e.g. NVQ assessor) must use AP(E)L and must undertake further education to ensure they meet the standard. This can be done by academic, work-based learning or a combination of both. All preparation programmes will include work based learning to enable new knowledge skills and competencies to be applied in practice.

**Preparation programmes** (Locally this is module 44124 “facilitating and assessing placement learning”) must be:

- At a minimum of level academic level 2 (module 44124 is at academic level 3)
- A minimum of 10 days (5 of which must be protected learning time)
- Include learning in both academic and practice settings
- Include relevant work based learning e.g. experience and reflect upon mentoring a student under supervision from a qualified mentor)
- Normally be completed within 3 months

11. Review and maintenance of mentor/sign-off mentor qualifications

The NMC requires all mentors to maintain and develop their knowledge, skills and competency through regular updating. Mentors should continually demonstrate knowledge, skill and competency on an on-going basis.

The purpose of annual updating is to ensure mentors:

- Have current knowledge of NMC approved programmes.
  Mentors can access information regarding programmes from the Placement Learning Unit webpages available at [http://shsc.brookes.ac.uk/plu/mentoring-courses](http://shsc.brookes.ac.uk/plu/mentoring-courses)
- Are able to discuss implications of changes to NMC requirements
- Have an opportunity to discuss issues relating to mentoring, assessment of competence and fitness for safe and effective practice

**Placement providers must ensure that**

- Each mentor and practice teacher is reviewed every three years (triennial review) to ensure that only those who continue to meet the NMC’s mentor/practice teacher requirements remain on the local register.

- Mentors who meet the NMC criteria for signing-off proficiency in practice are annotated on the local register. Midwives will be assigned this level of responsibility at the end of their preparation programme.

- Arrangements are in place for appraising mentor performance, addressing concerns where appropriate, and for adding and removing individuals from the local register, including mentors identified as having met the NMC criteria to be able to sign-off proficiency.

**Triennial review of Mentors**
The nature of the triennial review of mentors and is for the placement providers to determine, possibly as part of performance appraisal. In order to be maintained on the local register the individual must have evidence of having:

- Mentored at least two students with due regard within the three year period

- Participated in **annual updating**, to include an opportunity to meet and explore issues relating to assessment and supervision with other mentors

- Explored as a group activity the validity and reliability of judgments made when assessing practice in challenging circumstances

- Mapped ongoing development in their role against the current NMC mentor standards

- Been deemed to have met all requirements needed to be maintained on the local register as a mentor or sign-off mentor

- see mentor profile and portfolio of evidence [http://shsc.brookes.ac.uk/plu/nmc-standards](http://shsc.brookes.ac.uk/plu/nmc-standards)

**12. Local register of mentors and sign-off mentors**

**Placement providers are responsible for:**

- Ensuring that an up-to-date local register of current mentors is held and maintained

- Ensuring that it has currency by regularly reviewing the register and making amendments to add or remove names of registrants as necessary.

- Education providers should use the register to confirm that there are sufficient mentors and practice teachers to adequately support the number of students undertaking the range of NMC approved programmes currently being offered.
• Mentors who are designated as being able to sign-off proficiency at the end of a programme, to be known as ‘sign-off mentors’, must be annotated as such on the local register.

• While all mentors may assess individual competencies only those who have met additional NMC criteria to be a sign-off mentor are entitled to sign-off for practice. All midwifery mentors will have met this criteria

13. Supporting students who have a disability

All mentor should received disability equality training. The learning environments should enable students to be confident that there disclosure of their specific need will not lead to discrimination. Consideration should be given to allocating time to mentors to meet the special needs of students with disabilities


14. Allocated learning time for mentor activity

Mentors are primarily employed to provide care for patients and clients. All students must be supervised at all times (directly or indirectly). Being a mentor requires a commitment

Whilst in the practice setting at least 40% of the student’s time must be spent being supervised (either directly or indirectly) by the mentor or practice teacher. Mentors will need time when undertaking work with a student to explain, question, assess performance and provide feedback to the student in a meaningful way.

Sign-off mentor criteria (see appendix 2)

All midwives will be sign off mentors.

The NMC had identified progression points where a student may not progress without a formal decision that they have met the outcomes or competencies of a previous part of the programme

Mentors must keep sufficient records to support and justify their decisions on whether or not a student is proficient/competent (i.e. there is an audit trail). This includes giving regular feedback to the student and keeping records of guidance given.

Sign-off mentors must have time allocated to reflect, give feedback and keep records of student achievement in their final period of practice learning. This will be equivalent of an hour per student per week. This is so that students have effective feedback and so that the ultimate decision on their proficiency is not unexpected. This allocated time may be greater earlier in the placement.

Only sign-off mentors must sign-off proficiency at the end of a programme, unless the mentor is being supervised by a sign-off mentor (who should then countersign that proficiency has been achieved). This final assessment draws on evidence of assessment over a sustained period of time. The sign-off mentor may use the student passport (portfolio) and other evidence to see has been achieved, demonstrated and maintained. This sign-off of practice must be confirmed by the examining boards of the programmes.

## Domain 1. Establishing effective working relationships:
Demonstrate effective relationship building skills sufficient to support learning, as part of a wider inter-professional team, for a range of students in both practice and academic learning environments

- Demonstrate an understanding of factors that influence how students integrate into practice settings
- Providing on-going and constructive support to facilitate transition from one learning environment to another
- Have effective professional and inter-professional working relationships to support learning for entry to the register.

## Domain 2. Facilitation of learning:
Facilitate learning for a range of students, within a particular area of practice where appropriate, encouraging self-management of learning opportunities and providing support to maximise individual potential

- Use knowledge of the student’s stage of learning to select appropriate learning opportunities to meet their individual needs
- Facilitate the selection of appropriate learning strategies to integrate learning from practice and academic experiences
- Support students in critically reflecting upon their learning experiences in order to enhance future learning

## Domain 3. Assessment and accountability:
Assess learning in order to make judgements related to the NMC standards of proficiency for entry to the register or for recording a qualification at a level above initial registration

- Foster professional growth, personal development and accountability through support of students in practice
- Demonstrate a breadth of understanding of assessment strategies and the ability to contribute to the total assessment process as part of a teaching team
- Provide constructive feedback to students and assist them in identifying future learning needs and actions. Manage failing students so that they may either enhance their performance and capabilities for safe and effective practice or be able to understand their failure and the implications of this for their future
- Be accountable for confirming that students have met, or not met, the NMC competencies in practice and as a sign-off mentor confirm the students have met, or have not met, the NMC standards of proficiency in practice and are capable of safe and effective practice

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<tr>
<th>Domain 4. Evaluation of learning:</th>
<th>Determine strategies for evaluating learning in practice and academic settings to ensure that the NMC standards of proficiency for registration or recording a qualification at a level above initial registration have been met</th>
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<td>Contribute to the evaluation of student learning and assessment experiences – proposing aspects for change as a result of such evaluation</td>
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<td>Participate in self and peer evaluation to facilitate personal development and contribute to the development of others</td>
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<th>Domain 5. Creating an environment for learning:</th>
<th>Create an environment for learning, where practice is valued and developed, that provides appropriate professional and inter-professional learning opportunities and support for learning to maximise achievement for individuals</th>
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<td>Support students to identify both learning needs and experiences that are appropriate to their level of learning</td>
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<td>Use a range of learning experiences, involving patients, clients, carers and the professional team, to meet defined learning needs</td>
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<td>Identify aspects of the learning environment which could be enhanced – negotiating with others to make appropriate changes</td>
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<td>Act as a resource to facilitate personal and professional development of others</td>
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### Domain 6. Context of practice:
Support learning within a context of practice that reflects health care and educational policies, managing change to ensure that particular professional needs are met within a learning environment that also supports practice development

- Contribute to the development of an environment in which effective practice is fostered, implemented, evaluated and disseminated
- Set and maintain professional boundaries which are sufficiently flexible for providing inter-professional care
- Initiate and respond to practice developments to ensure safe and effective care is achieved and an effective learning environment is maintained

### Domain 7. Evidence based practice:
Apply evidence-based practice to their own work and contribute to the further development of such a knowledge and practice evidence base

- Identify and apply research and evidence based practice to their area of practice
- Contribute to strategies to increase or review the evidence-base used to support practice
- Support students in applying an evidence base to their own practice

### Domain 8. Leadership:
Demonstrate leadership skills for education within practice and academic settings

- Plan a series of learning experiences that will meet students defined learning needs
- Be an advocate for students to support them accessing learning opportunities that meet their individual needs – involving a range of other professionals, patients, clients and carers
- Prioritise work to accommodate support of students within their practice roles
- Provide feedback about the effectiveness of learning and assessment in practice.

### Appendix 2: Sign-off mentor Criteria

See other information on SOM at [http://www.hls.brookes.ac.uk/peu/nmc-standards](http://www.hls.brookes.ac.uk/peu/nmc-standards)

| 1. | Identified on the local register/database as a mentor |
| 2. | Registered on the same part of the register as the student |
| 3. | Working in the same field of practice as the student |
| 4. | Have clinical currency and capability in the same field of practice as the student |
| 5. | Met the NMC requirements to remain on the register |
| 7. | A working knowledge of current programme requirements, practice assessment strategies and relevant changes in education and practice |
| 8. | An understanding of the NMC registration requirements and their contribution to this |
| 9. | An in-depth understanding of their accountability to the NMC for the decision they make to pass or fail a student when assessing proficiency requirements at the end of a programme |