

NURSING ASSOCIATE HIGHER APPRENTICESHIP

Information for employers

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1. INTRODUCTION

Our Nursing Associate Higher Apprenticeship is delivered in collaboration with healthcare employers to develop apprentices towards achieving registration with the Nursing and Midwifery Council (NMC) as a Nursing Associate. More information can be found on the [OU Nursing Associate Higher Apprenticeship webpage](#).

Based on some frequently asked questions, this document sets out some key information for our employer partners supporting apprentices on this programme. This information is correct at the time of publishing and this document will be reviewed regularly. Please contact your Staff Tutor or Apprenticeship Programme Delivery Manager with any queries.

2. WHAT HAS CHANGED?

Following a Nursing and Midwifery Council (NMC) approval event held in May 2020, our updated Nursing Associate curriculum was approved by the NMC and launched in October 2020.

The updates to the curriculum, developed by expert OU academics, meet the new [NMC \(2018\) Standards for pre-registration nursing associate programmes](#) to help prepare apprentices to achieve the [NMC \(2018\) Standards of proficiency for registered nursing associates](#).

3. PROGRAMME OVERVIEW

The Nursing Associate Higher Apprenticeship consists of practice learning and theory learning across four modules as set out in the programme schedule, in accordance with the [NMC \(2018\) Standards for pre-registration nursing associate programmes](#). The clinical practice learning is delivered with supervision within the workplace and on placement with support from the OU.

Across the programme, the requirements include:

- A minimum 460 hours of supernumerary practice in alternative external practice placement areas
- A minimum of 460 hours in supervised practice in the primary practice setting (20% of the NMC programme hours, not contracted hours)
- 230 hours of protected learning time in practice
- 230 hours of protected learning time in theory
- A remaining 390 hours in practice in their Healthcare Assistant / Healthcare Support Worker role

On the OU's Nursing Associate Higher Apprenticeship programme, 770 hours of practice learning is needed during the first practice learning module (K*104), with a further 770 hours during the second practice learning module (K*211), as shown in the programme schedule.

This means across the whole programme, students will need to complete the following practice learning hours:

Nursing Associate Higher Apprenticeship	460 hours total in external placements	+	690 hours total in primary placement	+	390 hours total in 'practice' in any capacity	=	1540 hours total
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Demonstrated as a balanced split across the two practice modules, K*102 and K*211, this diagram represents how the practice hours would be allocated:

Module K*104	230 hours in external placements	+	345 hours in primary placement	+	195 hours in 'practice' in any capacity	=	770 hours
							+
Module K*211	230 hours in external placements	+	345 hours in primary placement	+	195 hours in 'practice' in any capacity	=	770 hours
							=
					Total number of practice hours achieved:	=	1540 hours

It is not a requirement for external practice placements to be spread evenly across K*102 and K*211, as long as 460 hours are evidenced in external practice placements for the whole programme, and 770 hours of practice learning achieved at each module. Should there be an unequal split of external placements, apprentices will need to complete the deficit in hours in supervised practice.

The following diagram provides an illustration of what an uneven split of external placements might look like:

Module K*104	150 hours in external placements	+	425 hours in primary placement	+	195 hours in 'practice' in any capacity	=	770 hours
							+
Module K*211	310 hours in external placements	+	265 hours in primary placement	+	195 hours in 'practice' in any capacity	=	770 hours
							=
					Total number of practice hours achieved:	=	1540 hours

Supplementing learning in practice, theory learning is delivered by the OU through online learning, tutorials, written assignments and wider reading. The ESFA funding rules require that this learning is undertaken off-the-job.

4. PROGRAMME SCHEDULE

The Nursing Associate Higher Apprenticeship has start dates in October and February each year. Comprising four 60 credit modules, the timelines for the standard Nursing Associate Higher Apprenticeship routes are as follows:

OCTOBER START - STANDARD ROUTE

Year 1												Year 2												Year 3	
O	N	D	J	F	M	A	M	J	J	A	S	O	N	D	J	F	M	A	M	J	J	A	S	O	N
Introducing health and social care (K*102) - 60 credits 590 Theory Hours												Healthcare theory for practice (K*234) - 60 credits 590 Theory Hours													
Introduction to healthcare practice (K*104) - 60 credits 170 Theory Hours and 770 Practice Hours												Developing nursing practice (K*211) - 60 Credits 85 Theory Hours and 770 Practice Hours													

FEBRUARY START - STANDARD ROUTE

Year 1												Year 2												Year 3	
F	M	A	M	J	J	A	S	O	N	D	J	F	M	A	M	J	J	A	S	O	N	D	J	F	M
Introducing health and social care (K*102) - 60 credits 590 Theory Hours												Healthcare theory for practice (K*234) - 60 credits 590 Theory Hours													
	Introduction to healthcare practice (K*104) - 60 credits 170 Theory Hours and 770 Practice Hours												Developing nursing practice (K*211) - 60 Credits 85 Theory Hours and 770 Practice Hours												

Key

	Theory module
	Practice module

Extended routes are also available, taking between 34 and 48 months.

5. OFF-THE-JOB TRAINING

A core principle underpinning the apprenticeship standard is '20% off-the-job training'. Off the job training can include academic study of module materials and typically allows students one day per week for study of module materials.

Off-the-job training is learning undertaken outside of the normal day-to-day working environment but within contracted hours and leads towards the achievement of an apprenticeship. The requirements for off-the-job training are that it must:

- Teach new knowledge, skills and/or behaviours which will contribute to the successful achievement of an apprenticeship
- Be relevant to the apprenticeship standard

For the Nursing Associate Higher Apprenticeship, the off-the-job academic training includes online learning, lectures, tutorials, writing assignments and wider reading.

6. PRACTICE LEARNING

6.1 The primary work base

Your apprentices' normal place of work within your organisation will be their primary base for the Nursing Associate programme.

As your apprentices' primary base, your organisation will need to meet the [NMC \(2018\) Standards for student supervision and assessment](#). These standards state the quality assurance requirements for practice placement experiences, practice supervisors and practice assessors in each placement setting.

As the primary practice base, your organisation must also have a satisfactory current learning environment audit with either the OU or another higher education institution (HEI). If your organisation does not have a current learning environment audit in place (as required by the NMC, 2018), a member of the OU nursing team will complete this in conjunction with practice colleagues. The learning opportunities available within your organisation need to be mapped to the [NMC \(2018\) Standards of proficiency for nursing associates](#) and the skills within Annexe A and B of these standards. This mapping exercise will assist with scoping the range of practice settings and practice learning opportunities required for the 460 hours of supernumerary practice in alternative external practice placement areas.

6.2 Protected practice learning

Protected practice learning time is defined as "time in a health or care setting during which students (apprentices) are learning and are supported to learn. Students (apprentices) must be supervised during protected learning time. The level of supervision required is a matter of professional judgement and will depend on the competence and confidence of the student (apprentice) and the risk associated with the intervention being delivered." ([NMC \(2018\) Standards for pre-registration nursing associate programmes](#)). You will need to ensure that protected practice learning time is accommodated for in order for your apprentices to have learning time with their practice supervisor or practice assessor, amounting to a minimum 20% of the total programme time.

The [NMC \(2018\) Supporting Information: Protected learning time in practice for nursing associate programmes](#) document provides an overview of protected practice learning time and some examples of how it can be provided in clinical practice settings.

Apprentices will be provided with a list of module activities that can contribute to protected learning time (theory) which should equate to 230 hours over the whole programme. Apprentices are also required to complete and evidence 230 hours of protected learning time (practice) and examples of this in the student handbook.

6.3 External practice placements

In addition to practice learning in the primary base, your nursing associate apprentices must undertake a minimum of 460 hours of supernumerary practice in external placement areas. The [NMC \(2018\) Standards for student supervision and assessment](#) define supernumerary as meaning that during these periods of practice learning, apprentices “are not counted as part of the staffing required for safe and effective care in that setting”.

External practice placement experiences must provide the opportunity for apprentices to gain learning opportunities and skills which they are unable to meet within their primary practice base in order that the apprentices meet the [NMC \(2018\) Standards of proficiency for nursing associates](#) by the end of the programme.

Nursing Associate apprentices must gain experience in all fields of nursing practice and across the lifespan within different health and care settings, including both inpatient and community settings. A ‘hub and spoke’ placement model can be used for this generic role, as nursing associate apprentices are required to gain experience of adults, children and young people, maternal care, learning disability, mental health, long term conditions, complex needs, older adult/dementia care, palliative/end of life care.

An example of an external practice placement is a nursing associate apprentice employed in a surgical ward at a hospital, undertaking a practice placement in the paediatric ward of the same hospital or a practice placement outside of the hospital, e.g. a community mental health team. This can also take the form of ‘insight days’, for example, a student may spend a day with a midwife.

Like the primary base, these external practice placement areas must also meet the [NMC \(2018\) Standards for student supervision and assessment](#) with access to practice supervisors and assessors.

Supernumerary external placement experiences will need to be arranged by your organisation in consultation with us, and formal agreements are required prior to learners starting the programme.

If apprentices go to other healthcare organisations for some of their external placements, there may be an expectation that your organisation enters into reciprocal arrangements for clinical placements, have honorary contracts or service level agreements in place, and that apprentices meet their mandatory and statutory training requirements.

The OU will introduce employers to contacts they have with local healthcare providers, however in some areas the OU has no presence, so the employer will have to negotiate with local healthcare providers and confirm an agreement on placement provision.

7. SUPPORT ON PROGRAMME

There is a shared responsibility for the support of Nursing Associate Higher Apprentices between the OU and your organisation.

7.1 Requirements for practice learning areas and supervision

Within the workplace, appropriate supervision will be needed according to the [NMC \(2018\) Standards for student supervision and assessment](#).

To meet the [NMC \(2018\) Standards framework for nursing and midwifery education](#), apprentices' primary base and external placement clinical areas are required to have a current learning environment audit in place. Learning environment audits look at the quality assurance of the clinical setting in terms of learning opportunities, Care Quality Commission (CQC) reports, availability of practice assessors and practice supervisors, compliance with staff appraisals and mandatory training. If your organisation does not have a current learning environment audit in place, a member of the OU Nursing Team will complete this in conjunction with practice colleagues.

It is important that there are enough trained and prepared practice assessors and practice supervisors available to support nursing associate apprentices on clinical placement, including cover for annual leave, sickness, special leave and staff leaving.

Practice supervisors are registered nurses, registered nursing associates or other registered healthcare professionals within the workplace who act as role models supporting and supervising nursing associate apprentices, whilst also providing feedback on their progress and achievement of proficiencies and skills.

Practice assessors are registered nurses or registered nursing associates within the workplace, with appropriate relevant experience, who make and document evidence-based assessments on nursing associate apprentices' conduct, proficiency and achievement.

A practice assessor cannot simultaneously be the practice supervisor for the same nursing associate apprentice.

Apprentices will need to evidence a minimum 1150 hours of supervised practice over the whole programme to meet NMC requirements. The level of supervision will depend on the confidence and competence of each individual apprentice based on the practice supervisor/assessor assessment.

7.2 Open University support

In addition to a designated academic and professional lead for healthcare and account management support, the OU will deploy expert staff to support you and your apprentices:

- **Practice Tutors/Academic Assessors** – Help to integrate learning into the workplace, supporting the delivery of practice-based learning modules across the duration of the programme. Apprentices, practice assessors and practice supervisors are supported using online approaches and face to face meetings, aligned with apprentices completing specified parts of their practice modules.
- **Academic Tutor/Module Tutor** – Facilitates learning within the theory modules at each stage of the qualification through personalised tuition, delivery of online tutorials, marking of assignments and detailed feedback.
- **Nursing Staff Tutor** – Supports employers to deliver the nursing associate apprenticeship to meet both organisational needs and the quality assurance requirements set down by the NMC with respect to practice learning requirements and learning environment audits.
- **Apprenticeship Programme Delivery Manager (APDM)** – Supports employers to deliver their apprenticeship programmes fulfilling organisational needs. Your allocated APDM provides regular management data on apprentices' progress.

In addition, The Open University provides the following support for apprentices:

- Access to the Student Support team, with a dedicated apprenticeships advice line
- Disability and accessibility support (27,237 people with disabilities studied with The Open University in 2018/19)
- Access to an online library, containing a world-class collection of high-quality academic and professional resources.

8. ASSESSMENT

8.1 Theory assessment

Your apprentices' theory work will be assessed by the OU through a combination of tutor-marked assignments (TMAs), interactive computer-marked assignments (iCMAs) and End-of-module assessments (EMAs).

8.2 Practice-based assessment

In practice, the Nursing Associate Higher Apprenticeship Practice Assessment Document (PAD) records your apprentices' achievement of the [NMC \(2018\) Standards of proficiency for nursing associates](#) both within their primary practice base and in external practice placement areas. The practice assessor in the practice setting will sign off apprentices' achievements.

Regular meetings will take place between the apprentice, their practice assessor and their OU practice tutor, who also fulfils the role of academic assessor.

8.3 End-Point Assessment (EPA)

When your apprentices' training is complete, a final independent assessment takes place, called an end-point assessment (EPA). This assessment is the opportunity for your apprentices to demonstrate that they are genuinely competent in their occupation at the end of their training.

For apprentices joining the programme from October 2020 onwards (subject to final confirmation), this assessment will be integrated in the final stages of the programme. For Nursing Associate apprentices who joined the programme prior to October 2020, the EPA will take place within three months of completing their final OU module.

Details of what the Nursing Associate Higher Apprenticeship end-point assessment will entail is set out in the [nursing associate assessment plan on the Institute for Apprenticeships & Technical Education website](#). This will include an assessment of apprentices' skills, knowledge, values and behaviours.

The OU will contract with the EPA organisation on behalf of your organisation.