

Standards for the preparation and practice of supervisors of midwives

**NURSING &
MIDWIFERY
COUNCIL**

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preparation and
practice of
supervisors
of midwives**

Protecting the public through professional standards

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Standards for the preparation and practice of supervisors of midwives

Introduction

The Nursing and Midwifery Council (NMC) is the UK regulator for two professions, nursing and midwifery. The primary purpose of the NMC is protection of the public. It does this through maintaining a register of all nurses, midwives and specialist community public health nurses eligible to practise within the UK and by setting standards for their education, training and conduct. Currently the number of registrants exceeds 682,000. The Nursing and Midwifery Order 2001 (The Order)¹, sets out the NMC's role and responsibilities.

Statutory supervision of midwives

Statutory supervision of midwives has operated in the UK for over 100 years. It has developed to become a means by which midwives are supported in, and with, their practice. As a modern regulatory practice, statutory supervision of midwives supports protection of the public by:

- ▶ promoting best practice and excellence in care
- ▶ preventing poor practice and
- ▶ intervening in unacceptable practice.

Effective use of the supervisory framework leads to improvements in the standard of midwifery care and better outcomes for women².

Statutory supervision of midwives is a valuable resource for midwives, their employers and the profession because it enables midwives to provide safe and effective care. Supervisors also have a role in advising and supporting women who use midwifery services.

Supervision is a valuable component of midwifery practice and its success reflects the ability of those who are supervisors of midwives. It is therefore important to get the right person into the role. Good quality preparation of supervisors and on-going assessment of their performance is essential to effective supervision of midwives.

One of the first pieces of work undertaken by the statutory Midwifery Committee of the NMC was to produce UK-wide local supervising authority standards. These were included in the Nursing and Midwifery Council (Midwives) Rules 2004 (the Midwives Rules)³ and came into effect on 1 August 2004. These standards, for both the preparation and practice of supervisors of midwives, complement the Midwives rules and standards. Guidance is also provided on the interpretation of those standards. The standards replace all previous requirements issued by the four National Boards for nurses, midwives and health visitors for England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland.

Who are these standards for?

This publication contains the NMC's standards for the preparation of supervisors of midwives and for their continuing practice. They will be of interest to:

¹ SI 2002/253

² UKCC Position statement Annex 1 to Registrar's letter 22/2001

³ SI 2004/1764

- ▶ midwives who want to understand more about the supervisory responsibility and what they can expect of their supervisor of midwives
- ▶ supervisors of midwives and prospective supervisors of midwives who need to know how the role is structured
- ▶ employers who have responsibilities for supervisors of midwives
- ▶ educationalists who are offering programmes of preparation for supervisors of midwives
- ▶ members of the public who want to understand how supervision of midwives contributes to excellence in care.

Background

The Order requires that the Council:

'... establish and keep under review the standards of conduct, performance and ethics expected of registrants and prospective registrants and give them such guidance on these matters as it sees fit' [Article 21(1)(a)].

The Order also requires *'... midwives to attend courses of instruction in accordance with the rules ...'* [Article 42(1)(c)] and *'... in respect of additional qualifications which may be recorded on the register the Council may establish standards of education and training ...'* [Article 19(6)]. This applies to the educational programmes that prepare midwives to take on the supervisor of midwives role as referred to in Rule 11(5).

Standards of competence

The standards of competence (see page 10) underpin the principles of statutory supervision of midwives, within the context of midwifery practice. Students undertaking the preparation programme will be required to demonstrate achievement of the competencies through assessment. Following completion of the programme, the competencies provide benchmark standards against which the continued competence of a supervisor of midwives can be assessed.

Statutory supervision of midwives is a UK-wide requirement, but it is recognised that the role is undertaken in regionally specific contexts. It is essential for the local supervising authority to provide supervisors of midwives with detailed information relevant to their area to enable them to carry out their role effectively.

Section 1 – Standards for admission to approved preparation programmes and to the recordable qualification for supervisors of midwives

This section provides the standards and guidance for admission to NMC approved education programmes, leading to a recordable qualification and subsequent appointment as a supervisor of midwives. These standards are in accordance with Article 43(2) of the Order, which requires Council from time to time to prescribe:

'... the qualifications of persons who may be appointed by the local supervising authority (LSA) to exercise supervision over midwives in its area, and no one shall be so appointed who is not so qualified.'

Standard 1.1 Eligibility to undertake the preparation programme

A midwife who wishes to be considered for a place on a preparation programme must:

- (a)⁴ be a practising midwife; and
- (b)⁵ have three years' experience as a practising midwife of which at least one shall have been in the two-year period immediately preceding the appointment.

The midwife must also obtain confirmation of nomination to undertake the preparation programme from the local supervising authority midwifery officer (LSAMO) of the relevant LSA, together with agreement from the programme leader.

Guidance

As the programme is intended for midwives who seek appointment as a supervisor, they must undergo the relevant LSA's selection process. The selection process will be fair, equitable and transparent.

Midwives can self nominate or be nominated by those who wish to support their application. This would include other midwives, supervisors, midwifery managers, midwifery educationalists and heads of midwifery. Nominations must be from more than one midwife. Midwives will provide a statement in support of their application and include the names of those midwives who support their nomination.

The LSA will hold a selection panel to include user representation, a contact/lead supervisor, the unit's head of midwifery, the preparation programme leader and the LSAMO. The panel will ratify those nominations for midwives to undertake the programme. Where needed, the LSAMO will have the casting vote.

It is important that the midwife seeking to become a supervisor has sufficient practice experience to enable her to support and advise on midwifery matters. In cases where the midwife works part-time, the LSAMO can use discretion as to the quality and quantity of the midwife's experience to enable her to be eligible to undertake the programme.

Standard 1.2 Recording the qualification of supervisor of midwives

The lead midwife for education (LME) will be responsible for informing the NMC and the LSAMO that a midwife has successfully completed the NMC approved programme of preparation.

Guidance

The LME will electronically upload to the NMC the information about midwives who have successfully completed the approved NMC preparation programme. An application pack will be sent to the successful midwife who should complete the form and return it with the fee, to the NMC. The midwife's register entry will then be amended to include the qualification.

It is not necessary to submit a declaration of good health and character, as the midwife is not entering a part of the register, just adding to their original entry.

⁴ Rule 11(2a) SI 2004/1764

⁵ Rule 11(2b) SI 2004/1764

Section 2 – Standards for initial and subsequent appointment as a supervisor of midwives

This section provides the standards and guidance relating to the appointment of supervisors of midwives whether it is the first or subsequent appointment. Information relating to changes in appointments must be notified to the NMC by the LSA so that the NMC can maintain an accurate register of appointed supervisors.

Standard 2.1 Initial appointment as a supervisor of midwives

Having successfully completed a preparation programme, the midwife is eligible to be appointed as a supervisor of midwives by an LSA. A midwife can only use the title 'supervisor of midwives' after appointment to the role of supervisor.

Midwives who are not appointed as supervisors of midwives within three years of having successfully completed a preparation programme must undertake an update before being considered for an appointment.

Midwives who are not appointed as supervisors of midwives within five years of successfully completing a preparation programme will be required to repeat the preparation programme.

Guidance

A shelf life of five years for the preparation programme has been stipulated to ensure that supervisors of midwives have up to date knowledge and skills. If an appointment has not been made within this time, midwives must repeat the programme if they still wish to take up a supervisor appointment. Where the period of time is more than three years but less than five, midwives must undertake an update before being considered for an appointment.

The update must be of sufficient length and content to enable the midwife's ability to achieve the NMC's supervisor of midwives competencies to be assessed. An LSAMO and a preparation programme leader will determine jointly how to meet the midwife's learning needs.

Standard 2.2 Subsequent appointment as a supervisor of midwives

A midwife can be considered for re-appointment provided she:

- ▶ has been appointed as a supervisor within the three years preceding re-appointment
- ▶ undergoes the LSA's selection process to be re-appointed, if required (see guidance). As with any other application, midwives will nominate those whom they wish to support as supervisors of midwives
- ▶ has a satisfactory reference from her previous LSAMO, if required (see guidance).

Guidance

A supervisor is appointed to a particular LSA and not to individual maternity units. This is relevant when considering a supervisor's request to be re-appointed.

A supervisor, who wants to be re-appointed as a supervisor in the same unit as they practised in previously, will not be required to undertake a selection process. Neither will those who move to another unit within the same LSA although they will need a period of orientation. This is because they already hold an appointment in the LSA.

For a midwife who has been a supervisor elsewhere but is new to the LSA, the selection process will be the same as for those applying for a place on a preparation programme. This is to ensure the midwife is familiar with the area, the midwifery practice and is known to the midwives. In their statement in support of nomination, midwives should declare why they stood down from their previous appointment. The reference will be provided by the LSAMO following discussion with the supervisor's own supervisor or a contact/lead supervisor.

Ideally, the 'supervisor' will have been in a post for a period of time before applying to be appointed to enable midwives to get to know her. Six months would be a reasonable time for this purpose.

The same time periods that apply to initial non-appointment of a supervisor at Standard 2.1 will apply to any subsequent appointment.

Guidance

An LSAMO and a preparation programme leader will discuss with the midwife how her learning needs will be met. The programme must be of sufficient length and content to enable assessment of the midwife's ability to achieve the NMC's supervisor of midwives competencies.

Standard 2.3 Transitional provision for appointed supervisors of midwives

The NMC register entry of those midwives who hold appointments as supervisors of midwives on 1 September 2007 can, with the support of their LSAMO, be marked as holding the qualification of supervisor of midwives and their appointment with the LSA.

Guidance

This provision is for those midwives who have previously undertaken a preparation programme and who hold an appointment as a supervisor on 1 September 2007 to have their register entry amended.

Midwives who hold the qualification but are not appointed at 1 September 2007 will have the time limit of three years from completion of the preparation programme or since when they were last in appointment, to undertake an update. If the time is five years or more then a repeat of the preparation programme is required.

Standard 2.4 Informing the NMC

The LSA will inform the NMC electronically of any changes to their list of appointed supervisors of midwives such as new appointments, resignations or removals. The NMC register will be updated on receipt of the changes.

Section 3 – Standards for the structure and nature of the preparation of supervisor of midwives education programme

This section provides the standards for the preparation programme, in accordance with Rule 5.

Standard 3.1 The education provider

NMC approved educational institutions will deliver the preparation programme. It will be approved and monitored annually through the NMC quality assurance processes.

Programme planning teams must include representation from key stakeholders, including service users.

Guidance

Key stakeholders would include representatives from the LSA, education, practice-based supervisors of midwives (experienced and new), and users of the maternity services. This will ensure the programme meets the needs of the local area and the units in which the supervisor of midwives will be undertaking the role. The programme should be arranged so that teaching and learning of core principles, and those specific to supervision of midwives-in-action in a regional context, are integrated throughout the programme. Opportunities for inter-professional shared learning and working should be offered, particularly in relation to the application of leadership theories and skills.

The programme must include a variety of teaching and learning strategies to help students learn the theoretical concepts related to statutory supervision of midwives and to become proficient in the application of these concepts in supervisory practice.

Programmes may be delivered in a variety of ways, such as theory, block release or full-time study. However the student must have the opportunity for discussion and debate of supervisory principles through face-to-face contact with teachers and supervisors. Programmes should not be delivered only by distance learning or electronic-learning methods.

A variety of members of the teaching team, and those involved in the statutory framework for supervision of midwives, will contribute to the student's learning. However, it is the supervisor mentor and programme leader who will confirm that the student has achieved the programme proficiencies through practice-based and theoretical assessments.

Standard 3.2 Academic standard of the programme

A minimum standard of first degree (or equivalent) is required.

Standard 3.3 Length of the programme

The education programme is provided over a minimum consecutive period of 26 weeks.

Guidance

The length of the programme relates to the time taken to complete the learning and teaching components and not the time taken for the student's work to go through the HEI's examination confirmation processes.

Education providers will determine how many hours are required for a student to achieve the competencies for the programme. It is recommended that the programme comprise as a minimum, twelve days of structured learning in practice (see 3.6 for further guidance).

Standard 3.4 Interruption in the preparation programme

If a student interrupts their studies whilst on the preparation programme, they must complete the programme in no more than three years from the identified start of the programme. Programme providers must ensure that the student's acquired knowledge and skills remain valid to enable them to achieve the competencies set by the NMC.

Guidance

For the purpose of this standard, 'interruption' means any absence from a programme other than annual leave, statutory and public holidays.

Standard 3.5 Student support

The designated leader for the preparation programme must hold an NMC recorded teaching qualification in their entry on the midwives' part of the register and should ideally be an appointed supervisor of midwives.

If the programme leader is not a supervisor of midwives, a member of the programme's development and teaching team must be a supervisor of midwives.

All student supervisors of midwives are required to have an allocated supervisor mentor who meets the NMC mentor standard.⁶

Guidance

Students on the preparation programme should be supported in both academic and practice-based learning environments by midwife teachers and supervisor mentors who have the knowledge, skills and expertise to provide appropriate support to student supervisors of midwives. Working collaboratively, they are able to identify learning opportunities and offer guidance and support to students.

Standard 3.6 Balance between practice-based learning and theory

The education programme should be divided equally between practice-based learning and theory and equal credit will be given to the theory and practice assessments.

⁶ Nursing and Midwifery Council (2006) Standards to support learning and assessment in practice

Guidance

It is important that the practice-based learning component provides student supervisors with opportunities to observe supervision-in-action. The role of the supervisor mentor is to enable the student to access supervisory experiences, therefore regular contact between the student and mentor should be planned. To achieve the proficiencies in practice, students must have exposure to supervisory activities in practice, e.g. observation of supervisory interviews, supervisor's meetings, audits, investigations and meetings where supervisory input is given such as policymaking, clinical governance and NMC fitness to practise hearings.

Section 4 – Standards for continuing in the role as a supervisor of midwives

Standard 4.1 Continued support following new appointment as a supervisor of midwives

The supervisor of midwives will be provided with a period of preceptorship for a minimum of three months (full time or equivalent).

Guidance

The principle of this standard is that a newly appointed supervisor, whether to the role, the unit or LSA, will require some time to adjust. In many cases, it will be the supervisory team who will provide advice and support and will continue to do so after the three-month period. The level and type of support needed will vary from supervisor to supervisor, however some form of support should be offered.

Standard 4.2 Continuing professional development

Supervisors who continue in the role are required to undertake a minimum of six hours relevant learning in each year of appointment. This is in addition to the 35 hours required to renew professional registration.

Section 5 – Competencies for a supervisor of midwives

1 Statutory supervision of midwives: theory, roles and responsibilities

The supervisor of midwives will:

Understand the role of the supervisor of midwives in protecting the public

Have a working knowledge of the statutory framework for supervision and the role of the NMC

Be aware of and disseminate guidance or information relevant to midwifery practice, including NMC circulars

Demonstrate continuing professional development as a supervisor

Enable midwives to develop and maintain competencies for their midwifery practice by:

- a) demonstrating responsibilities and duties of the supervisor of midwives, to include:
 - ▶ meeting with supervisees at least annually and maintaining agreed records
 - ▶ ensuring midwives know their responsibilities regarding NMC registration, ITP notification and the requirement to comply with the NMC Midwives rules and standards and Code of conduct
 - ▶ acting as a role model for midwives
 - ▶ being a resource for midwives to implement and support change
 - ▶ encouraging midwives to learn by critical analysis and evaluation of their practice
- b) Demonstrating a working knowledge of the legal and professional requirements related to record keeping for midwifery practice
- c) Undertaking audits of midwifery records and where necessary, initiate appropriate action

2 Statutory supervision in action

The supervisor of midwives will:

Promote childbirth as a normal, physiological event

Understand statutory supervision within the governance agenda

Demonstrate the ability to source literature, research and professional evidence to underpin strategy and service development

Assist with the development of evidence-based guidelines, policies and standards for maternity service provision

Demonstrate the ability to undertake assessments of practice areas to identify potential/actual risks and mitigate where possible

Encourage midwives to utilise an evidence-based approach towards their care delivery

Support midwives working with complex ethical, legal and professional issues

Attend supervisory meetings to share information and explore relevant issues

Contribute to the development and monitoring of standards and guidelines relating to supervision

Understand the supervisor's role in the investigatory process by demonstrating ability to:

- ▶ undertake an investigation of any serious untoward incident concerning midwifery practice or of an individual midwife's alleged impairment to practise
- ▶ prepare a supervisory report of the investigation's outcomes and recommendations and inform the LSAMO
- ▶ in cases where supervised practice is recommended, set agreed learning objectives for the midwife, with a midwifery educationalist, and monitor progress
- ▶ support a midwife involved in the investigatory progress

3 Statutory supervision of midwives: working in partnership with women

The supervisor of midwives will:

Create opportunities for women to:

- ▶ engage actively with maternity services and
- ▶ influence their development

Advocate for the right of all women to make informed choices and to contribute to decision making related to their care

Promote the business of midwifery and the role of the midwife and supervisor of midwives by engaging with women

Demonstrate how supervisors of midwives can contribute to ensuring maternity services are responsive to the needs of women

Support midwives who are supporting women in making care choices

Provide additional advice to women who are experiencing difficulty in achieving their care choices

4 Statutory supervision of midwives: leadership

The supervisor of midwives will:

Display a non-discriminatory, honest, open and fair approach

Assess and apply current theory and approaches to leadership

Provide visible leadership in the workplace

Demonstrate an ability to engage effectively with a wide variety of individuals, groups, agencies and organisations

Understand the broader strategic and political factors influencing maternity service provision

Encourage and enable supervisor colleagues, midwives and members of other multidisciplinary teams

Be self aware

Support midwives to maximise their potential in practice

Promote multidisciplinary team working that fosters mutual respect, regard and value for the perspectives and contributions of others

Be able to handle conflict and achieve a consensus ensuring no party feels disadvantaged

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information.10.06

23 Portland Place, London W1B 1PZ

Telephone 020 7637 7181 Fax 020 7436 2924 www.nmc-uk.org

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