



Royal College
of Nursing

Advanced Level Nursing Practice

Section 2: Advanced level nursing practice competencies

RCN Standards for advanced level nursing practice,
advanced nurse practitioners, RCN accreditation and
RCN credentialing

CLINICAL PROFESSIONAL RESOURCE

nurse
treatment advanced
innovation authority
assessment making
counselling clinical
experienced
responsibility
prescribing
diagnosis
referral
highly professional
leadership
holistic
educated
ANP
practice
skills
accountability



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Introduction

This document signposts readers to relevant domains and competencies for advanced level nursing practice in the UK. The RCN endorses the consensus evident in the national standards on advanced level nursing practice published by the Department of Health (England), the Scottish Government, the Department of Health and Social Services Northern Ireland and the Welsh Assembly Government.

The RCN has undertaken a considerable amount of work on advanced level nursing practice, originally mapping the RCN's competencies for advanced nurse practitioners against the NHS Knowledge and Skills Framework in the early 2000s. The RCN competencies were devised and researched collaboratively with the Nursing and Midwifery Council (NMC), higher education institutions (HEIs), professional organisations and service providers. They defined the characteristics of advanced practice and standardised clinical outcomes.

This early pioneering work provided a solid foundation for furthering developments across the UK. The RCN has been able to support advanced level nursing practice developments undertaken in the four UK countries. The Department of Health (DH, 2010) for England; Health Education England (2017); the Welsh Assembly Government (2014); the Scottish Government (2010), currently under further review; and the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety in Northern Ireland (2014), have all now published country-specific documents on advanced nursing practice, the web links for which are in the references section.

An RCN advisory group in 2016 defined advanced practice as:

“Advanced practice is a level of practice, rather than a type of practice. Advanced Nurse Practitioners are educated at Masters Level in clinical practice and have been assessed as competent in practice using their expert clinical knowledge and skills. They have the freedom and authority to act, making autonomous decisions in the assessment, diagnosis and treatment of patients.”

In line with UK, European and international literature the RCN defines advanced level nursing practice as a level of practice rather than a role or job title. Advanced level nursing practice has four pillars of practice, which the advanced practitioner must have as part of their core role and function. These four pillars are:

- Clinical/direct care
- Leadership and collaborative practice
- Improving quality and developing practice
- Developing self and others.

Section 2 on advanced nursing practice forms part of a larger RCN resource. Further detail, including the standards can be found at www.rcn.org.uk/ANP

Country-specific competencies

England

The 2010 England Department of Health position statement on advanced level nursing describes the level of practice expected of nurses working at advanced level who provide direct care. It aims to provide a benchmark for all stakeholders to define the scope, level of practice and competencies of nurses working at this level. It acknowledges the international and national work that has been completed on advanced practice. It argues that at that time there was still inconsistency and confusion about how the term advanced practice was being used.

Health Education England has most recently (2017) developed a single, multi-professional, nationally agreed definition and education and competence framework for advanced clinical practitioners, which will provide a clear career pathway into and within the role. This has been mapped to the multi professional all Wales framework in recognition of work already achieved (NHS Wales, 2014) and recognises other regional frameworks that have been developed.

Northern Ireland

The Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety in Northern Ireland, in partnership with the Northern Ireland Practice and Education Council for Nursing and Midwifery (NIPEC) and the Health and Social Care Trust have published the Advanced Nursing Practice Framework (2014). The framework provides a definition, identifies core competencies and learning outcomes and highlights the supervision and governance required for the advanced practice role in Northern Ireland.

Scotland

The Scottish Government, CNO Directorate, published Advanced Nursing Practice Roles Guidance for NHS Boards in 2010. The document developed by NHS Education for Scotland (NES) provided a framework for advanced nursing practice within NHS Scotland and was undertaken under the auspices of the UK-wide Modernising Nursing Careers initiative (DH, 2006). It builds upon earlier Scottish work, in particular the Framework for Developing

Nursing Roles (SEHD, 2005). The toolkit articulates a nationally-agreed definition of advanced practice as it stood in 2008 along with competence frameworks, job outlines and education outcomes competencies.

More recently RCN Scotland has produced the report Nurse Innovators – Clinical Decision-making in Action (2015). This document further emphasises the RCN definition of an advanced nurse practitioner as any nurse who is working at an advanced level of nursing practice, citing the lack of a single definition or terminology that collectively describes this level of practice leads to variety and lack of consistency of roles. The document provides an opportunity to showcase ANPs in action by giving practice examples of advanced practice.

Wales

The National Leadership and Innovation Agency for Healthcare published a Framework for Advanced Nursing, Midwifery and Allied Health Professional Practice in Wales (2014) in response to the lack of clarity regarding what an advanced practitioner actually is. This is the only multidisciplinary framework in the UK and is aimed at a more consistent approach to managing current and future advanced practice across Wales. The document provides some key messages that are explored in the framework. These relate to defining the ANP as a level of practice rather than a specific role, but acknowledging this is applicable across all areas of practice, including clinical, education, management and leadership roles and outlining how and to what standard ANPs should have developed their skills and theoretical knowledge.

In all the above frameworks there is a national agreement that the following competencies are expected in an advanced level nurse practitioner.

Competencies

Clinical/direct care

Nurses working at an advanced level:

- 1.1 practise autonomously, are accountable and responsible for decisions, actions and omissions and are self-directed
- 1.2 assess individuals, families and populations holistically using a range of different person-centred approaches, assessment methods, some of which may not be usually exercised by nurses such as physical examination, ordering and interpreting diagnostic tests or advanced health needs assessment
- 1.3 have a health promotion and prevention orientation, and comprehensively assess patients for risk factors and early signs of illness
- 1.4 draw on a diverse range of knowledge in their clinical reasoning and decision making to determine evidence-based therapeutic interventions (which will include prescribing medication and actively monitoring the effectiveness of therapeutic interventions)
- 1.5 plan and manage complete episodes of care, working in partnership with others, and delegating and referring as appropriate to optimise health outcomes and resource use, as well as providing direct support to patients and clients
- 1.6 use their professional judgement in managing complex and unpredictable care events and capture the learning from these experiences to improve patient care and service delivery
- 1.7 use existing and emerging technology and draw upon an appropriate range of multi-agency and inter-professional resources in their practice
- 1.8 utilising the professional code of conduct appropriately define the boundaries of their practice.

Leadership and collaborative practice

Nurses working at an advanced level:

- 2.1 identify and implement systems to promote their contribution and demonstrate the impact of advanced level nursing to the health care team and the wider health and social care sector
- 2.2 provide leadership and consultancy services in their own and other professions on therapeutic interventions, practice and service development
- 2.3 acting as a role model, are resilient and determined and demonstrate leadership in contexts that are unfamiliar, unpredictable, complex and unpredictable
- 2.4 engage stakeholders and use high-level negotiating and influencing skills to develop and improve practice advocating for developments that enhance and improve care
- 2.5 work across professional, organisational and system boundaries and proactively develop and sustain new partnerships and networks to influence and improve health, outcomes and health care delivery systems
- 2.6 develop practices and roles that are appropriate to patient and service need through understanding the implications of and applying epidemiological, demographic, social, legal, ethical, political and professional trends and developments
- 2.7 identify the need for change, assessing risk and mitigating for it, proactively generate practice innovations and lead new practice and service redesign solutions to better meet the needs of patients and the service.

Improving quality and developing practice

Nurses working at an advanced level:

- 3.1 are proactively involved in developing strategies and undertaking activities that monitor and improve the quality of health care and the effectiveness of their own and others' practice utilising clear governance strategies
- 3.2 strive constantly to improve practice and health outcomes so that they are consistent with or better than national and international standards through initiating, facilitating, disseminating and leading change at individual, team, organisational and system levels
- 3.3 continually evaluate and audit the practice of self and others at individual and systems levels, selecting and applying valid and reliable approaches and methods which are appropriate to needs and context, and acting on the findings
- 3.4 continually assess and monitor risk in their own and others' practice and challenge others about wider risk factors
- 3.5 critically appraise and synthesise the outcomes of relevant research, evaluations and audits, disseminating and applying the information when seeking to improve practice
- 3.6 plan and seize opportunities to generate and apply new knowledge to their own and others' practice in structured ways which are capable of evaluation
- 3.7 alert appropriate individuals and organisations to gaps in evidence and/or practice knowledge and, as either a principal investigator or in collaboration with others, support and conduct research that is likely to enhance practice
- 3.8 use financial acumen in patient/client, team, organisational and system level decision-making and demonstrate appropriate strategies to enhance quality, productivity and value.

Developing self and others

Nurses working at an advanced level:

- 4.1 actively seek and participate in peer review of their own practice
- 4.2 enable patients/clients to learn by designing and co-ordinating the implementation of plans appropriate to their preferred approach to learning, motivation and developmental stage
- 4.3 develop robust governance systems by contributing to the development and implementation of evidence-based protocols, documentation processes, standards, policies and clinical guidelines through interpreting and synthesising information from a variety of sources and promoting their use in practice
- 4.4 work in collaboration with others who may mentor, supervise, coach or assess, plan and deliver interventions to meet the learning and development needs of their own and other professions
- 4.5 advocate and contribute to the development of an organisational culture that supports continuous learning and development, evidence-based practice and succession planning
- 4.6 have high-level communication skills and contribute to the wider development of those working in their area of practice by publicising and disseminating their work through presentations at conferences and articles in the professional press.

Specialist competencies and domains

Some specialist competencies may be additionally developed when practicing in a specific area/specialism. For example, these could be paediatrics, mental health, learning disability, general practice to complement the generic competencies.

The RCN recognises there are significant ongoing developments across the UK and acknowledges the development of regional frameworks for advanced clinical practice.

Higher Education Institutions throughout the UK, wishing to gain RCN accreditation for their educational preparation programmes, should demonstrate how their programme will prepare applicants to achieve the relevant country/regional-specific competencies and outcomes, as well as how their programme demonstrates achievement of the 15 RCN QA standards discussed in [Section 3](#). They will therefore be asked to map their programme against the relevant competencies to show where each is taught and assessed.

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You can download further ANP information from www.rcn.org.uk/ANP

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