Graduate preparation for nursing registration - FAQ

Information for student nurses

This information is aimed at student nurses who are already on a diploma or degree pre registration programme. The aim is to provide information on changes that are taking place around nurse education and how this may impact on existing students.

1. What is the current situation for pre-registration nursing?
The majority of student nurses are currently studying at diploma level with 20 per cent of student nurses studying at degree level.
At the moment both degree and diploma routes lead to registration with the Nursing and Midwifery Council (NMC). However this is going to change.

2. Why is all-graduate preparation for nursing registration being introduced?
The Next Stage Review (Darzi, 2009) underlined the importance a high quality workforce has in the provision of high quality care. Graduate preparation for nursing is considered to be the way forward to achieve this as it:
- ensures nurses can manage patients with increasingly complex care needs
- ensures a level of educational preparation equal to that of other healthcare professions in the UK, and registered nurses in other countries
- makes nursing an attractive option for school leavers looking to study at degree level
- supports job satisfaction and professional development for nurses through more rewarding jobs, greater autonomy and better career opportunities.

The majority of participants who contributed to the NMC online consultation agreed that graduate preparation should be the minimum standard for new pre-registration nursing courses.

3. When will the new course start?
Nationally, the first of the new pre-registration graduate preparation courses will start in autumn 2011 with the majority of courses to begin in autumn 2012.
In the south east coast region the University of Brighton plans to start the new degree course in autumn 2011 with University of Greenwich, Canterbury Christchurch University, and University of Surrey starting in autumn 2012.
The first new graduates will qualify in 2014.
4. What will happen to the current diploma courses?  
They will be phased out over time and by 2012 the majority of pre-registration nursing courses will be offered at degree level only.  
Existing courses for current diploma students will continue until these students have completed their course.

5. How will the new curriculum be different?  
The new curriculum will be set so that nurses completing the course will be better able to:

- work in increasingly independent and autonomous ways
- exercise higher levels of professional judgement
- work confidently in multidisciplinary teams across service boundaries.

It is guided by three principles that will:

- provide for greater opportunities of shared learning with other professions and branches
- create specific competencies for community and public health

As with current courses, the structure will be 50% theoretical and 50% clinically based training as now, and also aims to give students the educational foundations to develop as lifelong learners, and future career progression/development

Courses leading to nurse registration must be approved by the NMC, which sets the educational standards.  
New standards are currently being developed by the NMC and will be consulted on this winter prior to implementation in September 2010.  
You can contribute to the consultation via the NMC website [www.nmc-uk.org]

6. Will new students be able to register as a nurse if they do not achieve degree level?

No, students will have to have the minimum of a bachelors degree in order to register with the NMC.  
However, student nurses who leave the course before completion may qualify for a different academic award such as a Certificate in Healthcare Studies but this will not enable them to work as a registered nurse.

This minimum requirement applies only to students starting the new graduate programme. Those who are already on a diploma course and who successfully complete the programme will be able to register with the NMC.
7. What about bursary/funding arrangements?
Currently pre-registration nurses doing a diploma have a non-means tested bursary while undergraduate nursing students have a means tested bursary.

The Department of Health is now conducting a national review of student support that is due to report in March 2010. **The outcome of the review will not change bursary arrangements for current students**

8. Does this mean my qualification is now of less value?
No. Employers will continue to want registered nurses who can work as safe, compassionate and competent practitioners. Whilst the change over to degree only preparation is taking place soon, it will be many years before the new graduate nurse makes up the majority of the nursing workforce.

Once you have qualified, you will continue to have opportunities to develop your skills and knowledge through a 4-6 month programme of preceptorship to help you to consolidate your learning, and gain confidence as a registered nurse.

9. How do I get a degree if I want to top up my diploma qualification?
Many nurses have decided to study for a degree or masters once they have qualified. Sometimes it is helpful to wait and see which area of nursing interests you so you can chose the relevant programme. Generally it is a good idea to focus on consolidating your learning first before starting another course, and most universities will expect you to have some experience at Band 5 level first. You will need to discuss study leave and funding with your line manager and advice is also available from universities on course options.

10. What if I don't want a degree but want to develop my skills and knowledge?
There are lots of opportunities to develop your practice. Most Trusts will offer you an induction programme to help you orientate to your new post and to give you some insight into the organisation.

As a newly qualified nurse you should also be offered a period of preceptorship that will give you extra support as you take on the role of a registered nurse. This is usually supported by a teaching programme.

**NHS Trusts will expect you to undertake mandatory and statutory training. This varies depending on your work situation but examples would be fire safety, basic life support and risk management. Most Trusts provide in house training and development opportunities. These are teaching sessions or study days that provide a basic awareness on topics such as safe management of medicines.**
Whilst you may not be thinking of doing a full degree or masters programme, you can consider studying individual modules that are provided by universities. An example would be preparation to be a mentor.

10. **What about registered nurses who do not have academic qualifications?**
The NMC has no intention of requiring nurses already on the register to gain a degree as it recognises they have valuable clinical experience. This judgement also applies to Return to Practice nurses and qualified nurses from the EU and overseas who wish to register with the NMC.

However, there are career benefits for staff to hold a degree.