

**Benchmark statement:
Health care programmes**

Phase 1

Nursing

Subject benchmark statements: Health care programmes

Subject benchmark statements provide a means of describing the nature and characteristics of programmes of study and training in health care. They also represent general expectations about standards for the award of qualifications at a given level and articulate the attributes and capabilities that those possessing such qualifications should be able to demonstrate.

Subject benchmark statements are used for a variety of purposes. Primarily, they are an important external source of reference when new programmes are being designed and developed. They provide general guidance for articulating the learning outcomes associated with the programme but are not a specification of a detailed curriculum. Benchmark statements provide for variety and flexibility in the design of programmes and encourage innovation within an agreed overall conceptual framework.

Subject benchmark statements also provide support in the pursuit of internal quality assurance. They enable the learning outcomes specified for a particular programme to be reviewed and evaluated against agreed general expectations about standards.

Finally, subject benchmark statements are one of a number of external sources of information that are drawn upon for the purposes of academic review* and for making judgements about threshold standards being met. Reviewers do not use subject benchmark statements as a crude checklist for these purposes however. Rather, they are used in conjunction with the relevant programme specifications, the associated documentation of the relevant professional and statutory regulatory bodies, the institution's own self evaluation documentation, together with primary data in order to enable reviewers to come to a rounded judgement based on a broad range of evidence.

The benchmarking of standards in health care subjects is undertaken by groups of appropriate specialists drawn from higher education institutions, service providers and the professional and statutory regulatory bodies. The statements represent the first attempt to make explicit in published form the general academic characteristics and standards of awards in these subjects in the UK. In due course, the statements will be revised to reflect developments in the subjects and the experiences of institutions, academic review and others that are working with it.

* academic review in this context refers to the Agency's arrangements for external assurance of quality and standards. Further information regarding these may be found in the *Handbook for academic review*, which can be found on the Agency's web site.

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Foreword

This benchmark statement describes the nature and standards of programmes of study in nursing, that leads to awards made by higher education institutions in the United Kingdom (UK) in the subject.

It has been developed in collaboration with a number of other health care professions and these are listed below. Although initial work was undertaken in subject specific groups, the analysis of these early drafts identified a number of features which all the subject groups shared. It was, therefore, agreed by each of the specialist benchmarking groups that their respective statements could be cast using a common structure. As work progressed it became increasingly apparent that there was considerable overlap within the details of the subject-specific statements and a common health professions framework was emerging. This emerging framework is, accordingly, displayed in each of the subject statements in order to illustrate on the one hand, the shared context upon which the education and training of health care professionals rests and, on the other, the uniquely profession-specific context within which programmes are organised. It is important to emphasise that benchmark statements are not cast in tablets of stone and will need to be revisited in the light of experience and further developments in health care. Moreover, we are confident that the emerging framework has the potential to embrace other health related professions such as social work, dentistry, medicine and other therapies. It is anticipated that further work in a second phase of the project could lead to an overarching health professions framework.

The initial section of this statement sets out the health professions framework under three main headings:

- A Expectations of the health professional in providing patient/client services;
- B The application of practice in securing, maintaining or improving health and well-being;
- C The knowledge, understanding and skills that underpin the education and training of health care professionals.

The main section of this statement, in addition to describing the nature and extent of programmes leading to awards in nursing, describes the profession-specific expectations and requirements under the same three categories.

The key feature in this statement, as in the associated statements, is the explicit articulation of the academic and practitioner standards associated with the award in nursing. This duality reflects the significance of the academic award as the route to registration for professional practice and formal recognition by the professional and statutory regulatory bodies. The threshold standards set out the expectations of health professionals entering their first post immediately on qualification.

The section on standards accords with the relevant level descriptor for awards in the qualifications frameworks published by the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education.

The section on teaching, learning and assessment draws attention to the central role of practice in the design of learning opportunities for students and the importance of ensuring that professional competence developed through practice is adequately assessed and rewarded. It also notes how essential it is that the integration of theory and practice is a planned process within the overall arrangements made for teaching and learning.

The statement acknowledges the need to put the prospective client/patient at the centre of the student's learning experience and to promote within that experience the importance of team-working and cross-professional collaboration and communication. Implicit in the statement are the opportunities that exist for shared learning across professional boundaries, particularly in the latter stages of training when inter-professional matters can be addressed most productively. It is essential that the opportunities that exist for shared learning in practice are optimised, as well as best use being made of similar opportunities that prevail more obviously in classroom-based activities.

This statement and the associated statements will therefore allow higher education institutions, in partnership with service providers (where appropriate), to make informed curriculum choices about the construction of shared learning experiences. In this context shared learning is seen as one of a number of means of promoting improved collaborative practice and addressing a range of issues which span professional accountability and professional relationships.

Finally, the statement does not set a national curriculum for programmes leading to awards in nursing. It acknowledges that the requirements of the professional and statutory regulatory bodies need to be incorporated into the design of programmes. It seeks to encourage higher education institutions and service providers to work collaboratively in the design and delivery of their curricula. Its essential feature is the specification of threshold standards, incorporating academic and practitioner elements, against which higher education institutions are expected, as a minimum, to set their standards for the award.

¹ Dietetics, Health Visiting, Midwifery, Nursing, Occupational Therapy, Orthoptics, Physiotherapy, Podiatry (Chiropody), Prosthetics and Orthotics, Radiography, and Speech & Language Therapy.

An emerging health professions framework

The subject specific statements for nursing have been set within the emerging health professions framework outlined below. As indicated in the foreword, this framework developed as a result of the benchmarking work undertaken collaboratively by 11 different health professional groups. Further evolution of the framework is anticipated through a second phase of the project which will address its goodness of fit with a range of other health and social care professions benchmark statements.

A Expectations of the health professional in providing patient/client services

This section articulates the expectations of a registered professional within health and social care services. It describes what is regarded as a minimum range of expectations of a professional that will provide safe and competent practice for patients/clients in a variety of health and social care contexts.

A1 Professional autonomy and accountability

The award holder should be able to:

- maintain the standards and requirements of professional and statutory regulatory bodies;
- adhere to relevant codes of conduct;
- understand the legal and ethical responsibilities of professional practice;
- maintain the principles and practice of patient/client confidentiality;
- practise in accordance with current legislation applicable to health care professionals;
- exercise a professional duty of care to patients/clients/carers;
- recognise the obligation to maintain fitness for practice and the need for continuing professional development;
- contribute to the development and dissemination of evidence-based practice within professional contexts;
- uphold the principles and practice of clinical governance.

A2 Professional relationships

The award holder should be able to:

- participate effectively in inter-professional and multi-agency approaches to health and social care where appropriate;
- recognise professional scope of practice and make referrals where appropriate;
- work, where appropriate, with other health and social care professionals and support staff and patients/clients/carers to maximise health outcomes;
- maintain relationships with patients/clients/carers that are culturally sensitive and respect their rights and special needs.

A3 Personal and professional skills

The award holder should be able to:

- demonstrate the ability to deliver quality patient/client-centred care;
- practise in an anti-discriminatory, anti-oppressive manner;
- draw upon appropriate knowledge and skills in order to make professional judgements, recognising the limits of his/her practice;
- communicate effectively with patients/clients/carers and other relevant parties when providing care;
- assist other health care professionals, support staff and patients/clients/carers in maximising health outcomes;
- prioritise workload and manage time effectively;
- engage in self-directed learning that promotes professional development;
- practise with an appropriate degree of self-protection;
- contribute to the well-being and safety of all people in the work place.

A4 Profession and employer context

The award holder should be able to:

- show an understanding of his/her role within health and social care services;
- demonstrate an understanding of government policies for the provision of health and social care;
- take responsibility for his/her own professional development;
- recognise the value of research and other scholarly activity in relation to the development of the profession and of patient/client care.

B The application of practice in securing, maintaining or improving health and well-being

All health care professionals draw from the knowledge and understanding associated with their particular profession. This knowledge and understanding is acquired from theory and practice. It forms the basis for making professional decisions and judgements about the deployment in practice of a range of appropriate skills and behaviours, with the aim of meeting the health and social care needs both of individual clients/patients and of groups, communities and populations. These decisions and judgements are made in the context of considerable variation in the presentation, the setting and in the characteristics of the client/patient health and social care needs. They often take place against a backdrop of uncertainty and change in the structures and mechanisms of health and social care delivery.

Sound professional practice is essentially a process of problem solving. It is characterised by four major phases:

- the identification and analytical assessment of health and social care needs;
- the formulation of plans and strategies for meeting health and social care needs;
- the performance of appropriate, prioritised health promoting/health educating/caring/diagnostic/therapeutic activities;
- the critical evaluation of the impact of, or response to, these activities.

B1 Identification and assessment of health and social care needs

The award holder should be able to:

- gather relevant information from a wide range of sources including electronic data;
- adopt systematic approaches to analysing and evaluating the information collected;
- communicate effectively with the client/patient, (and his/her relatives/carers), group/community/population, about their health and social care needs;
- use a range of assessment techniques appropriate to the situation and make provisional identification of relevant determinants of health and physical, psychological, social and cultural needs/problems;
- recognise the place and contribution of his/her assessment within the total health care profile/package, through effective communication with other members of the health and social care team.

B2 Formulation of plans and strategies for meeting health and social care needs

The award holder should be able to:

- work with the client/patient, (and his/her relatives/carers), group/community/population, to consider the range of activities that are appropriate/feasible/acceptable, including the possibility of referral to other members of the health and social care team and agencies;
- plan care within the context of holistic health management and the contributions of others;
- use reasoning and problem solving skills to make judgements/decisions in prioritising actions;
- formulate specific management plans for meeting needs/problems, setting these within a timescale and taking account of finite resources;
- record professional judgements and decisions taken;
- synthesise theory and practice.

B3 Practice

The award holder should be able to:

- conduct appropriate activities skilfully and in accordance with best/evidence-based practice;
- contribute to the promotion of social inclusion;
- monitor and review the ongoing effectiveness of the planned activity;
- involve client/patient/members of group/community/population appropriately in ongoing effectiveness of plan;
- maintain records appropriately;
- educate others to enable them to influence the health behaviour of individuals and groups;
- motivate individuals or groups in order to improve awareness, learning and behaviour that contribute to healthy living;
- recognise opportunities to influence health and social policy and practices.

B4 Evaluation

The award holder should be able to:

- measure and evaluate critically the outcomes of professional activities;
- reflect on and review practice;
- participate in audit and other quality assurance procedures;
- contribute to risk management activities.

C Knowledge, understanding and skills that underpin the education and training of health care professionals

The education and training of health care professionals draws from a range of well-established scientific disciplines that provide the underpinning knowledge and understanding for sound practice. Each health care profession will draw from these disciplines differently and to varying extents to meet the requirements of their specialty. It is this contextualisation of knowledge, understanding and skills that is characteristic of the learning in specific health care programmes. Consequently, in this introductory section, the attributes and capabilities expected of the student are expressed at a generalised level.

C1 Knowledge and understanding

The award holder should be able to demonstrate:

- understanding of the key concepts of the disciplines that underpin the education and training of all health care professionals, and detailed knowledge of some of these. The latter would include a broad understanding of:
 - the structure and function of the human body, together with a knowledge of dysfunction and pathology;
 - health and social care philosophy and policy, and its translation into ethical and evidenced based practice;
 - the relevance of the social and psychological sciences to health and healthcare;
 - the role of health care practitioners in the promotion of health and health education;
 - the legislation and professional and statutory codes of conduct that affect health and social care practice.

C2 Skills***Information gathering***

The award holder should be able to demonstrate:

- an ability to gather and evaluate evidence and information from a wide range of sources;
- an ability to use methods of enquiry to collect and interpret data in order to provide information that would inform or benefit practice.

Problem solving

The award holder should be able to demonstrate:

- logical and systematic thinking;
- an ability to draw reasoned conclusions and sustainable judgements.

Communication

The award holder should be able to demonstrate:

- effective skills in communicating information, advice, instruction and professional opinion to colleagues, patients, clients, their relatives and carers; and, when necessary, to groups of colleagues or clients.

Numeracy

The award holder should be able to demonstrate:

- ability in understanding, manipulating, interpreting and presenting numerical data.

Information technology

The award holder should be able to demonstrate:

- an ability to engage with technology, particularly the effective and efficient use of information and communication technology.

Benchmark statement for nursing

Introduction

Nursing is an applied vocational and academic discipline that is often practised in a variety of complex situations across the health-illness continuum. There are a number of definitions of nursing but few, if any, that explicitly enable a benchmark nursing statement to be identified. The variety and diversity of nursing is articulated through the specialist branch structure that enables practitioners, upon successful completion of an approved programme, to register as either an adult, child, learning disability or mental health nurse.

Nursing focuses on promoting health and helping individuals, families and groups to meet their health care needs. Nursing work involves assisting people whose autonomy is impaired, who may present with a range of disabilities or health-related problems, to perform a range of activities, sometimes acting for, or on behalf of the patient. A defining feature of nursing is that it provides twenty-four hour care with a focus on meeting people's intimate needs.

Nurses work with patients, clients, families and communities in primary care, acute and critical care, rehabilitation and tertiary care settings. The knowledge base for nursing is broad-based encompassing natural, human and social sciences.

Nurses practise within a social, political and economic context. Through their *Code of Professional Conduct*, nurses embrace the concepts of inclusion, equal opportunities, individual rights and empowerment of patients and client groups. Professional and patient/client autonomy is a key feature of the nurse's role.

Given the complex nature of nursing and diversity of health care situations encountered, nurses must be skilled practitioners, knowledgeable in a range of subjects and able to appraise and adopt an enquiry-based approach to the delivery of care. Irrespective of the academic award, individuals undertaking programmes that lead to professional registration must demonstrate achievement of the nursing competencies required by the statutory regulatory body for entry to register.

The study of nursing encompasses the following principles:

- a commitment to provide high quality patient-centred care;
- a commitment to the development of new roles that support the interface between health and social care practice;
- the application of current knowledge and research to nursing practice across the health and illness continuum;
- a commitment to working in partnership with other professionals;
- an evolution towards role transferability in support of patient-centred care;
- the development of educational programmes that enable nurses to demonstrate fitness for practice and a commitment to lifelong learning.

Nature and extent of programmes in nursing

Nursing is a large and complex profession and academic discipline. Approximately 100 UK universities provide programmes to enable over 11,000 nurses to enter the professional register each year, and to continuously update and develop additional and specialist knowledge and skills.

Pre-registration nursing education consists of a common foundation programme and four branch programmes to prepare nurses to work in either adult nursing; children's nursing; learning disabilities nursing; or mental health nursing.

Common foundation programme

The common foundation programme is the core element that underpins each branch and is shared by all nursing students. It introduces students to the four branches but also focuses on a range of subjects within and applied to nursing that are common to all branches.

Nursing programmes involve integrated study of the knowledge, skills and values from a range of subject disciplines applied to the practice of nursing. These are outlined in this benchmark statement. Core areas within these subjects are common to all of nursing while other aspects within these disciplines are applied to specific branches. Regardless of the order that these subject areas appear in this benchmark statement, programmes within each of the four branches will place greater emphasis on certain subject areas.

Nursing competence requires the development of technical, cognitive and interpersonal skills and involves a variety of different ways of knowing and understanding. Technical skills are the most visible part of some branches of nursing while for other branches interpersonal skills are the primary focus. Interpersonal and interactive skills are needed to enable nurses to form appropriate professional relationships and for some branches the depth and breadth of interpersonal skills required is greater.

Through their educational preparation nurses become equipped to understand, contribute to, and work within the context of their profession and to analyse, adapt to, manage and eventually lead the processes of change.

Adult nursing

Central to adult nursing is a commitment to patient-centred care that recognises the need to assess physical, social, psychological and spiritual needs to maximise potential for health and well-being. This is underpinned by a philosophy which embraces partnership working with patients, carers and the multi-professional team. This approach enhances the development of values that promote independence, autonomy and reciprocity in adult health care.

Adult nurses need to understand the differing health care needs of adults within age groups that span adolescence, adulthood and older people. Care is provided for adults in a wide variety of primary, acute, continuing and rehabilitative care settings that include NHS trusts, the patient/client's own home, the workplace, the prison services and the independent and voluntary sector. Adult nurses acquire the knowledge, skills and attitudes to meet the needs of adults in all care areas, support them through programmes of care and treatment and maximise opportunities for health promotion.

A substantial part of adult nursing involves co-ordinating, integrating and managing care, making referrals to other members of the care team and ensuring that effective communication channels are in place to support continuity of care. In order to fulfil this role, adult nurses need to be confident to make decisions and where appropriate, challenge assumptions and practices.

Children's nursing

The developing needs of children from infancy to adolescence, in relation to physical and mental health and special needs, form the heart of children's nursing. Children's nursing is practised within a philosophy of child-focused and family-centred care in which, whenever possible, the child, parents and carers are equal partners. This partnership enhances self esteem, enables children to reach their full potential and encourages the development of autonomy in care and decision making.

Ill children present with complex multi-dimensional problems, some being life limiting or life threatening, and many which persist through childhood into adult life. These problems impact upon the child's development, choices and family life. This requires children's nurses to work collaboratively with other professionals in health and social care to promote health, minimise illness and protect vulnerable children.

Children's nurses practise within the child's own home, hospital, school, community and voluntary settings. The wide spectrum of health problems, care settings and opportunities for health promotion require nurses to demonstrate confidence and competence in child specific nursing. This involves the coordination of care and the use of refined interpersonal and communication skills with both children and adult carers, underpinned by knowledge of child development.

Children's nurses need to be politically aware, applying knowledge of health and social policy, law and ethics in order to champion the rights of children both as a group and as individuals receiving care.

Learning disabilities nursing

Programmes in the learning disabilities branch of nursing prepare nurses to work with people with a range of learning disabilities and with their families and significant others. Learning disability nurses' work is underpinned by the concepts of partnership, inclusion and advocacy. The role of the learning disability nurse, specifically, is to assist and support people to become and remain healthy, to improve their competence and quality of life, and to fulfil their potential. Learning disability nurses work with people with a spectrum of needs and abilities in a wide variety of settings, often working collaboratively with professionals from a range of health and social care agencies. This support may take place in the National Health Service (NHS), voluntary or independent sector, or in the patient/client's own home.

Mental health nursing

Programmes in mental health nursing prepare nurses to work in a branch of nursing whose precepts acknowledge that nursing is essentially a human activity which has as its core the relationship between the nurse and his/her client(s) and carers. This relationship is premised on knowledge, attitudes and skills that assist individuals with mental health problems to reach their maximum potential. The knowledge and practical skills required of the mental health nurse are those that facilitate the recognition and achievement of the interpersonal, emotional, behavioural, cognitive and spiritual needs of clients. Mental health nurses approach these in a structured way through a systematic process that embraces the concepts of client-centredness, self-reflection and self-awareness. This ensures that the nurse/client relationship is a dynamic one. The mental health nurse may be required to meet the health and/or nursing care needs of clients with acute, rehabilitative or continuing care needs or health promotion requirements within community, residential and hospital settings.

The statements in the rest of this document outline the knowledge, understanding and associated skills, and the application of these to nursing practice across all specialist nursing branches.

A The nurse as a registered health care practitioner; expectations held by the profession, employers and public

This section of the benchmark statement articulates the expectations of a registered nurse at the point of qualification. The core expectations that are common to all health care professionals can be found in section A of the health professions framework within this benchmark statement. Listed below are those attributes and capabilities that are specific to nursing.

Pre-registration nursing programmes should ensure that students are able to demonstrate the following attributes and capabilities to be an award-holder.

A1 Professional identity and accountability

The award holder should be able to:

- maintain the standards and practices required of a registered practitioner by the nursing statutory regulatory body;
- adhere to the professional code of conduct for nurses, midwives and health visitors;
- engage in clinical supervision and reflective practice;
- act autonomously whilst acknowledging the boundaries of professional competence;
- apply ethical and legal knowledge to practice ensuring the primacy of patients'/clients'/carers' interests.

A2 Professional relationships

The award holder should be able to:

- adopt partnership approaches with colleagues, patient/clients, families and carers;
- demonstrate the principles of effective team-working;
- work with professional and support staff and delegate care appropriately;
- generate and maintain effective interactions with relevant external agencies;

A3 Personal and professional skills

The award holder should be able to:

- maintain therapeutic relationships through the use of appropriate communication and interpersonal skills;
- recognise moral/ethical dilemmas and issues in patient care;
- recognise own learning needs and draw up personal action plans to meet these;
- apply the principles of health promotion and health education;
- articulate and justify decision-making processes associated with managing practice.

A4 Professional and employer context

The award holder should be able to:

- initiate appropriate actions in emergency situations in accordance with employers' guidelines, policies and protocols;
- recognise the need for changes in practice from best available evidence;
- contribute to, and maintain, a safe working environment;
- maintain accurate records.

B Principles and concepts: applications to nursing practice

Nursing draws upon nursing and health/social-related theories/models, frameworks and concepts as the basis for decision-making and judgements about the range of psychomotor, interpersonal and other skills that are appropriate to meet the needs of individual patients/clients in different healthcare settings. Each branch within nursing requires a different emphasis in terms of the knowledge and skills required for best practice in that branch.

This section articulates these principles and concepts. Those that are held in common with other health care professionals can be found in the Section B of the health professions framework of this benchmark statement.

B1 Identification and assessment of health care need

In addition, core to all nursing programmes, regardless of branch, the award holder should be able to:

- undertake a comprehensive systematic assessment using the tools/frameworks appropriate to the patient/client taking into account relevant physical, social, psychological and spiritual needs;
- discern relevant information from patients/clients/carers to determine and prioritise;
- apply relevant knowledge to the assessment of individuals, families and communities;
- assess the potential for health promotion with patients, clients and carers;
- assess priorities for clinical effectiveness including risk assessment.

B2 Formulation of plans and strategies for meeting health care needs

The award holder should be able to:

- use evidence-based options to facilitate patient choice and inform nursing interventions;
- plan care delivery to meet identified needs;
- demonstrate initiative in planning and organising care;
- formulate and document a plan of care in partnership with patient/client/ family/carers and other health care professionals.

B3 Nursing practice

The award holder should be able to:

- provide and document a rationale for nursing management of a patient/client that takes into account all the information gained from assessment;
- ensure that the primacy of the patient is upheld at all times;
- apply evidence-based knowledge to inform nursing care decisions;
- demonstrate standards of competence as laid down by the nursing statutory regulatory body;
- engage in appropriate therapeutic relationships using appropriate and sensitive communication and interpersonal skills;
- practise in a way that maintains human dignity, rights and responsibilities;
- create and use opportunities to promote health and well-being of patient/clients;
- demonstrate sound clinical judgements across a range of nursing situations;
- recognise potential need and instigate care to prevent or minimise the risk of complications;
- interpret and present information in a clear and concise manner;
- demonstrate a commitment to safe practice for self and others through delegation and supervision of others;
- understand and interpret numerical data appropriately;
- prioritise one's own work;
- communicate effectively to promote partnerships in the planning and delivery of care;
- apply a knowledge-base to support and teach others;
- use information technology applied to the needs of the patient/client or client group;
- contribute to the development of protocols to guide quality provision of care.

B4 Evaluation

The award holder should be able to:

- use reflection on/in practice to appraise and evaluate the effectiveness of nursing care;
- interpret and respond to significant changes in health, medical, psychological or social status;
- recognise situations in which quality of care might be compromised.

C Knowledge, understanding and associated skills that underpin the education and training of nurses

This section of the benchmark statement describes the subject knowledge, understanding and associated skills that are essential to underpin the informed, safe and effective nursing practice of a registered nurse at the point of qualification.

The core knowledge, understanding and associated skills that are common to all health care professionals can be found in section C of the health professions framework within this benchmark statement. Listed below is the knowledge, understanding and associated skills that are specific to nursing and are additional to those identified in the health professions framework.

Nursing departments will put together different pathways or programmes that specifically represent the appropriate balance of knowledge applied to the different branches, as well as the different academic levels of these pathways/programmes. Therefore, the order in which each specific subject is presented below is arbitrary and does not indicate a degree of importance for specific pathways or programmes.

Knowledge and understanding

The award holder should be able to demonstrate understanding of:

Nursing

- the nature of nursing;
- changing philosophical and historical perspectives in nursing and nursing theories appropriate to different client groups;
- the requirements of the statutory regulatory body associated with registration as a nurse;
- nursing, medical and health care language;
- nursing across the lifespan;
- professional nursing issues such as advocacy, accountability, informed consent, autonomy, partnerships, advocacy.

Natural and life sciences

- pharmacology;
- immunology;
- microbiology;
- epidemiology;
- nutrition;
- genetics;
- anatomy;
- physiology;
- pathophysiology.

Application of these to nursing practice with specific client groups.

Social, health and behavioural sciences

- policy and politics;
- psychosocial determinants of health;
- health economics;
- sociology and health;
- psychology and health;
- models of health and illness;
- loss, change and bereavement;
- anti-discriminatory practice including fairness, social inclusion, gender, sexuality, race and culture and health promotion.

Application of these to nursing practice.

Ethics, law and the humanities

- ethico-legal frameworks within nursing and relevant legislation;
- issues related to spirituality;
- caring and the primacy of patient/client interest.

Application of these to nursing practice.

Management of self and others' reflective practice;

- teaching and learning;
- leadership;
- prioritising care;
- principles of management within organisations;
- clinical governance and maintaining/monitoring standards.

Application of all of these to nursing care of clients and client groups.

C2 Associated skills

The statutory regulatory body for nursing has articulated the competency framework for nursing students in all branches relevant to expected achievements and upon completion of the relevant branch programme. Some of the core skills are common to health care professionals and can be found in section C of the health professions framework. The additional core skills specific for all branches of nursing are identified below. Each branch programme, however, will place greater emphasis on certain of these skills.

Communication and interpersonal skills

The award holder should be able to demonstrate:

- counselling skills applied to specific client/patient situations;
- an ability to identify and manage challenging behaviours;
- an ability to recognise anxiety, stress and depression, give emotional support and identify when specialist counselling intervention is needed.

Information gathering

The award holder should be able to:

- use contemporary physical, and/or psychosocial assessment tools to gather clinical and other data;
- use audit tools;
- seek out research-based evidence related to specific client groups.

Care delivery

The award holder should be able to demonstrate:

- safe moving and handling of patients within specific client groups;
- cardiopulmonary resuscitation and other emergency first aid interventions;
- observational skills (physical, emotional, social);
- relevant physical, psychological and social caring skills required of specific patients/clients or groups;
- pain management;
- risk management;
- delegate patients' care as appropriate.

Problem solving and data collection and interpretation

The award holder should be able to:

- assimilate and assess new concepts;
- think critically;
- analyse, interpret and assess the value of evidence to inform problem-solving.

Information technology

The award holder should be able to:

- use word processing, email, spreadsheets and databases;
- access health care research and literature databases;
- use the internet as an information source;
- use relevant electronic patient information systems.

Numeracy

The award holder should be able to:

- understand and carry out drug calculation and administration of drugs via appropriate routes;
- manage information relevant to the particular patient or client group;
- record patient data appropriate to the health care setting;
- report changes in patient information/data appropriately.

Teaching, learning and assessment

Decisions about the strategies and methods for teaching, learning and assessment are for institutions to determine, but should complement the learning outcomes associated with health profession programmes. It is not for benchmark statements to promulgate any one, or combination of, approaches over others.

However, this benchmark statement promotes an integrative approach to the application of theory and practice. It underlines the significance attached to the design of learning opportunities that facilitate the acquisition of professional capabilities and to assessment regimes that ensure these are being both delivered and rewarded to an appropriate standard.

In developing the curriculum the relationship between theory and practice will require the use of practice in simulated and health and social care settings. Standards for preparing supervisors and assessors of practice should be explicit and conform to the professional regulatory bodies recommendations.

Fundamental to the basis upon which pre-registration students are prepared for their professional career, is the provision of programmes of academic study and practice-based learning which lay the foundation for career-long professional development and lifelong learning to support best professional practice and the maintenance of professional standards.

The learning processes in nursing can be expressed in terms of four interrelated themes:

Cognitive and conceptual

Programmes should develop cognitive skills in students, eg the ability to reconstruct knowledge and apply it to individual situations. Such skills should be developed through a variety of teaching and learning methods in which students are encouraged to become actively and practically engaged with the process.

Clinical and technical

Nursing skills should be developed in both the university and the practice setting. These skills should be acquired through developmental learning experiences that are structured, supervised and assessed. Students should receive formative and summative judgements and feedback on their performance throughout the programme.

Nursing social and personal context

The programme should enable students to develop an awareness of the cultural diversity, values, beliefs and social factors that affect the context of nursing. This should be achieved from both theoretical and practice perspectives and by exposing students to clinical practice in a wide variety of settings.

Generic and enabling skills

Programmes should be designed to facilitate students' acquisition of effective communication skills, team working, problem solving, the use of IT, research methodology and critical reasoning. The generic nature of these skills should enable them to be achieved through inter-professional education where their acquisition should be through activity based experiences.

The assessment strategy

Methods should match the teaching and learning strategy, meet learning outcomes and encompass a wide variety of tools. Academic assessment should be designed to develop and test cognitive skills drawing on the context of practice and reflecting the learning and teaching methods employed. Methods should normally include case study presentations and analyses, practice-focused assignments, essays, project reports, clinical assessments and examinations of a written or practical nature. The assessment of competence to practise should be determined in partnership between nursing lecturers and placement staff. Professional registration is dependent upon meeting both statutory regulatory body assessment requirements and university requirements.

Academic and practitioner standards

The following standards are commensurate with the academic awards of the Diploma in Higher Education and the Honours Degree. They reflect the UKCC's competence requirements for pre-registration nursing programmes, UKCC Commission Report Fitness for Practice and the QAA national qualifications frameworks for higher education. The academic award standards for the Diploma in Higher Education together with the UKCC's competencies form the threshold standards for registration on the statutory body's Professional Register.

These standard statements are underpinned by the expectation of those who work as a professional in health care as identified in section A, the principles and concepts as applied to nursing as stated in section B and the subject knowledge and associated skills stated in section C. All of these apply to every branch within nursing.

Diploma

The following statements are commensurate with the Diploma in Higher Education academic award and are the threshold standard for entry to the professional register.

A: Working as a professional in health care: expectations

The award holder should be able to:

- manage oneself, one's practice, and that of others, in accordance with the *Code of Professional Conduct*, recognising own abilities and limitations;
- transfer knowledge and skills to a variety of clinical settings and unexpected situations;
- work in partnership with patients, clients and families and recognise when this approach to patient care may be inappropriate;
- provide support to patients, clients, carers, families and colleagues in changing and stressful situations;
- practise in accordance with the professional ethical and legal framework;
- demonstrate sound clinical judgement across a range of situations;
- contribute to public protection by creating and maintaining a safe environment of care;
- delegate care to others, as appropriate, ensuring effective supervision and monitoring;
- demonstrate understanding of the roles of others, by participating in multi-professional care.

Honours degree

The following statements are commensurate with the Honours Degree academic award and enhance the threshold standard for entry to the professional register.

A: Working as a professional in health care: expectations

The award holder should be able to:

- manage oneself, one's practice and that of others in accordance with the *Code of Professional Conduct*, and critically evaluate own abilities and limitations;
- select and apply knowledge and skills to complex and unexpected situations;
- implement strategies to promote and evaluate partnership working;
- anticipate potential stressful situations and participate in minimising risk;
- recognise the complexity of the professional ethical and legal framework and its impact on nursing care decision-making;
- demonstrate sound clinical judgement across a range of situations and critically evaluate the effectiveness of clinical judgement across a range of professional care contexts;
- participate in a range of quality assurance and risk management strategies to create and maintain a safe environment;
- provide appropriate levels of guidance, role-modelling and support to others in the delivery of health care;
- critically analyse roles within the multi-professional team and propose ways to strengthen patient-centred care.

B: Principles and concepts: application

The award holder should be able to:

- apply theories, concepts and principles of nursing to deliver patient centred care for individuals, families and communities;
- recognise potential risk and intervene to prevent, where possible, complications occurring;
- analyse and interpret relevant health education/promotion information and use this knowledge to promote the health and well-being of patients, clients and groups;
- use appropriate research and other evidence to underpin nursing decisions that can be justified, even when made on the basis of limited information;
- undertake and document a comprehensive, systematic and accurate nursing assessment of the physical, psychological, social and spiritual needs of patients, clients and communities;
- assess priorities in practice and deliver care competently to meet identified need;
- formulate and document a plan of nursing care in partnership with and the consent of patients, clients and where appropriate, their carers and families;
- demonstrate accountability for nursing care delivered, taking into account social, spiritual, cultural, legal, political and economic factors;
- accurately document and evaluate the outcomes of nursing and other interventions;
- demonstrate knowledge and understanding of effective multi-professional/multi-agency working practices and participate in team work that respects and uses the contributions of members of the health and social care team.

B: Principles and concepts: application

The award holder should be able to:

- demonstrate critical understanding of research-based knowledge and the application to practice;
- contribute to the development of protocols to guide the provision of quality care and minimise risk;
- capitalise on the potential for health improvement for patients, clients and groups through the development of health education/promotion strategies;
- articulate and justify decision-making and problem-solving processes associated with nursing practice;
- use relevant theoretical and research evidence to inform a comprehensive, systematic assessment of the physical, psychological, social and spiritual needs of patients, clients and communities;
- monitor and update priorities within a changing environment and communicate appropriately;
- critically evaluate research findings and suggest changes to planned care;
- demonstrate an ability to critically challenge the nursing care delivered taking into account the dynamic social, cultural, spiritual, legal, political and economic factors;
- critically evaluate outcomes of nursing and other interventions, adjusting care accordingly;
- contribute with skill and confidence to effective multi-professional/multi-agency working.

C: Subject knowledge, understanding and associated skills

The award holder should be able to:

- demonstrate knowledge and understanding of the subjects underpinning nursing (see section A) through application to a range of practice settings;
- discuss the political and social context within which the provision of health and social care takes place;
- understand and apply the values that underpin anti-discriminatory working practices;
- communicate effectively with patients, clients, carers and other health care professionals;
- demonstrate an understanding of research and other evidence and where appropriate, apply findings to practice;
- engage in, and disengage from, therapeutic relationships through the use of effective interpersonal skills;
- provide safe and sensitive care through the use of practical skills and knowledge of current best practice;
- interpret and use data with the aid of technology to enhance the management of care.

C: Subject knowledge, understanding and associated skills

The award holder should be able to:

- use knowledge and understanding of the subjects underpinning nursing (see section A) to provide creative solutions to health care situations;
- critically examine the impact of political and social contexts on the provision of health care;
- understand the differences in beliefs and cultural practices of individuals and groups and recognise and challenge discriminatory practice;
- confidently present information orally, in writing and, where appropriate through the use of technology, to provide coherent and logical arguments in the support of decision-making;
- critically evaluate research findings, suggest changes to practice and contribute to health care research to inform practice development;
- engage in, and disengage from therapeutic relationships through the creative use of theories and skills, demonstrating ethical discernment and clinical judgement;
- use practical skills and knowledge with confidence and creativity to enhance the quality of care;
- critically analyse and interpret data and appraise the value for care delivery and management.

Appendix 1

Nursing benchmark group membership

Ms Mary Boyle	National Board for Nursing, Midwifery and Health Visiting for Scotland
Mrs Audrey Cowie	National Board for Nursing, Midwifery and Health Visiting for Scotland
Mrs Anne Fagan (deceased)	Hospital of St John & St Elizabeth
Mrs Anne Hopkins	University of Wales Swansea
Ms Carol Kirby	The Queen's University of Belfast
Ms June Leishman	University of Abertay, Dundee
Mr Luke O'Byrne	East Berkshire NHS Trust
Mrs Diane Walker	Leeds Metropolitan University
Professor Mary Watkins (facilitator)	University of Plymouth

The benchmark group would also like to acknowledge the significant contribution made to this statement by:

Ms Diane Marks-Maran	Thames Valley University
Mrs Jane Marr	English National Board of Nursing, Midwifery and Health Visiting
Mrs Susan Montague	University of Hertfordshire

Appendix 2

Benchmark steering group membership

Mrs Margaret Andrews	North East Wales Institute of Higher Education
Mr David Ashcroft	Society of Chiropractors & Podiatrists
Mrs Linda Auty	Leeds Metropolitan University
Miss Lesley Barrowman	National Board for Nursing, Midwifery & Health Visiting for Northern Ireland
Mrs Valerie Beale	Somerset Health Authority
Ms Mary Boyle	National Board for Nursing, Midwifery & Health Visiting for Scotland
Mrs Ann Clarke	Bedford Hospital NHS Trust
Ms Helen Davis	Royal Hallamshire Hospital, Sheffield
Professor Anne de Looy	Queen Margaret University College, Edinburgh
Miss Faye Doris	University of Plymouth
Mr Martin Duckworth	College of St Mark & St John, Plymouth
Mr Brian Ellis	Queen Margaret University College, Edinburgh
Miss Anne Fagan (deceased)	Hospital of St John & St Elizabeth, London
Mrs Janice Gosby	UK Central Council for Nursing, Midwifery & Health Visiting
Ms Valerie Hall	University of Brighton
Mrs Julia Henderson	University of Hertfordshire
Ms Anne Hopkins	University of Wales Swansea
Mr Stephen Hutchins	University of Salford
Mr Tom Langlands	English National Board for Nursing, Midwifery and Health Visiting
Ms June Leishman	University of Abertay, Dundee
Professor Jeffrey Lucas	University of Bradford
Professor Dame Jill Macleod-Clark (co-chair)	University of Southampton
Ms Diane Marks-Maran	Thames Valley University
Mrs Susan Montague	University of Hertfordshire
Mrs Christine Mullen	South Manchester University Hospital NHS Trust
Mr Luke O'Byrne	East Berkshire NHS Trust
Mrs Audrey Paterson	Canterbury Christ Church University College
Ms Robyn Phillips	Welsh National Board for Nursing, Midwifery & Health Visiting
Professor Mike Pittilo (co-chair)	Kingston University & St George's Medical Hospital
Ms Lorna Povey	Wolverhampton Health Care NHS Trust
Mrs Jarina Rashid-Porter	Coventry Healthcare NHS Trust
Mr Gwilym Roberts	College of Occupational Therapists
Ms Jenny Routledge	University of East Anglia
Mr Ian Rutherford	University of Nottingham
Mrs Sandra Sexton	University of Strathclyde
Ms Gail Stephenson	University of Liverpool
Professor Averil Stewart	Queen Margaret University College, Edinburgh
Professor Mary Watkins	University of Plymouth