

# Nursing associates: Frequently asked questions (FAQs) for employers



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### What is a nursing associate?

The nursing associate is a bridging role between health and care assistants and graduate registered nurses.

Nursing associates are new members of the care team, who are trained to foundation degree level. They work with people of all ages and in a variety of settings in health and social care.

### Why has the role been introduced?

The role was introduced in response to the Shape of Caring Review (HEE, 2015), to help build the capacity of the nursing workforce and the delivery of high-quality care. It will be a vital part of the wider health and care team and aims to:

- support the career progression of health and care assistants
- enable nurses to focus on more complex clinical work
- increase the supply of nurses by providing a progression route into graduate-level nursing.

### Why should I employ a (trainee) nursing associate?

Employers that have invested in the nursing associate role as part of wider workforce planning and skill mix transformation, have appreciated numerous benefits, including:

1. improved **service delivery and patient care**
2. improved **staff retention** through career progression
3. the ability to **'grow your own' nursing workforce**
4. investing in a **tried and tested training programme**, accredited by the Nursing and Midwifery Council (NMC).

To find out more, please view:

- [Why employ a nursing associate](#) (pdf)
- [Why employ a nursing associate?](#) (PowerPoint)

### What do nursing associates do?

The NMC has developed and published [standards of proficiency for nursing associates](#). These standards provide a clear picture of what nursing associates know and can do when they join the register.

The HEE Nursing Associate Implementation Group developed guidance to support employers in developing job descriptions for qualified nursing associates. [This guidance](#) provides prompt questions to help employers consider responsibilities and expectations of the post specific to the organisation and deployment setting. The guidance also includes a template person specification for the role, which aligns to the [NMC standards of proficiency for nursing associates](#).

### Are nursing associates registered?

Yes, the NMC is the regulator for the nursing associate role in England and began accepting individuals onto the nursing associate part of the register from January 2019. The title 'nursing associate' is protected in law in England. Only those qualified and registered as nursing associates can use this title.

This means that nursing associates are individually accountable for their own professional conduct and practice. They will need to meet the [NMC standards of proficiency](#) to register and continue to meet the standards and the [code of practice](#) as a condition of their registration.

### How could I deploy qualified nursing associates?

Nursing associates can be deployed across a range of health and social care settings. They play an active role as members of interdisciplinary teams, collaborating and communicating effectively with nurses, a range of other health and care professionals and lay carers.

To use the workforce efficiently and effectively it is important to identify the skills needed to deliver the care required and deploy the right staff to deliver that care.

Effective workforce planning can help employers:

- strengthen their organisation's understanding of current and future demand for services
- understand how the nursing associate role can support with meeting this demand
- define how the role will fit within the multidisciplinary team
- support a business case to present to the board.

Find out more about [workforce planning and deployment of nursing associates](#).

### Can nursing associates administer medicines?

As part of their training nursing associates will be educated to understand medicine management and, within the confines of local employer policies, administer prescribed medicines safely and appropriately.

Alongside the forthcoming Nursing and Midwifery Council's (NMC) regulatory standards for the role, HEE has published guidance to provide clarity to all NHS organisations about how nursing associates can be deployed to administer medicines safely and effectively.

Read [Advisory Guidance - Administration of Medicines by Nursing Associates](#) (pdf)



### Can nursing associates undertake screening for cervical cancer?

Registered nursing associates working in primary care are eligible to train to undertake the role of cervical sample taker as per national guidance.

[View the full Public Health England \(PHE\) briefing.](#)

### What's the difference between a registered nurse and a nursing associate?

The [Nursing and Midwifery Council \(NMC\)](#) has summarised its standards of proficiency for both the registered nurse and nursing associate role as shown in the table below.

Nursing associate	Registered nurse
6 platforms	7 platforms
Be an accountable professional	Be an accountable professional
Promoting health and preventing ill health	Promoting health and preventing ill health
Provide and <b>monitor</b> care	Provide and <b>evaluate</b> care
Working in teams	<b>Leading and managing nursing care</b> and working in teams
Improving safety and quality of care	Improving safety and quality of care
<b>Contributing</b> to integrated care	<b>Coordinating</b> care
	<b>Assessing needs and planning care</b>

### How can I persuade my board?

You may need to present a business case to your board to secure the required investment to develop this role in your organisation. Visit the [NHS Employers website](#) for a list of prompts and an example business case.

### How do people qualify as a nursing associate?

The nursing associate role is regulated by the Nursing and Midwifery Council (NMC). To become a registered nursing associate, individuals must pass a foundation degree awarded by an NMC-approved provider, typically taken over two years. The programme prepares trainees to work with people of all ages and in a variety of settings in health and social care. Trainee nursing associates can either earn while they learn as part of an apprenticeship programme or follow a self-funded route.

Find out more about [training a nursing associate](#).

### What does the course entail?

The foundation degree training programme is usually taken over two years. During this time, the trainees must complete at least 2,300 programme hours, which are divided equally between academic and work-based learning.

To meet the requirements of the training programme, trainee nursing associates must work in a range of settings and situations to gain as much experience as possible across the four fields of nursing: children, adults, mental health and learning disabilities. This is achieved by the trainees completing placements outside their primary place of employment.

The full requirements for training and education are set out and regulated by the [NMC in its standards for pre-registration nursing associate programmes](#).

Currently, most nursing associate training foundation degree programmes are being delivered through the apprenticeship route. However, a growing number of universities are now offering direct entry programmes, for which trainees fund their own study.

### What are the entry requirements?

As a minimum, trainee nursing associates will need GCSEs grade 9 to 4 (A to C) in Maths and English, or Functional Skills Level 2 in Maths and English. They will also need to demonstrate:

- their ability to study to level 5 foundation degree level
- the values and behaviours of the NHS Constitution
- a commitment to completing the programme.

Note that universities may have additional requirements. Aspiring trainees without the relevant Maths and English requirements will be asked to sit a numeracy and literacy assessment as part of the recruitment process. Most education providers will request that trainees then achieve a level 2 literacy and numeracy qualification prior to starting the programme.

Functional skills training and examination is free to any learner who does not hold Maths and/or English GCSE at C or above (or equivalent). If you have employees who need further support with functional skills, you can direct them to [your local further education college](#).

Applicants from non-English speaking countries will also need to have successfully completed a recognised English language test.

For more, please view the [Functional skills toolkit](#) produced by HEE London.

Please direct any potential trainee nursing associates to the [nursing associate site](#) for more information on the role.

### What progression opportunities are available to nursing associates?

Like registered nurses and other healthcare professionals, nursing associates may expand their scope of practice through further education and experience after they have qualified and joined the nursing associate part of the NMC register.

Nursing associates can also go on to become registered nurses [by completing a shortened nursing degree or nursing degree apprenticeship](#).

### How do I set up an apprenticeship programme?

You will need to:

- adhere to the nursing associate apprenticeship standard, which reflects the agreed NMC standards for nursing associates. You can download the [nursing associate standard and end-point assessment on the HASO website](#)
- identify apprenticeship levy funding for the programme
- procure a training provider – see the [HEE Apprenticeship Procurement Toolkit](#)
- secure placements for your trainees
- recruit to the programme.

### What is the direct entry route?

A growing number of universities are offering direct entry programmes, for which trainees will need to fund their own study. You can find a [list of all approved programmes on the NMC website](#) or visit [UCAS to search for self-funded courses](#) open to application.

### How can I fund my trainee nursing associate programme?

Employers can use the apprenticeship levy to fund a nursing associate apprenticeship programme. The levy is paid by all employers who have an annual pay bill of £3 million or more. The rate is set at 0.5 per cent of the total pay bill and is paid to HMRC through the PAYE process. Those with a pay bill of less than £3 million don't pay the levy and use different arrangements to pay for apprenticeship training. Read [Nursing associates and the apprenticeship levy: A quick guide](#).

Find out more about the apprenticeship levy is, and how to use it within the NHS on the [NHS Employers website](#).

### How do I procure a higher education provider for the apprenticeship programme?

With the introduction of the apprenticeship levy in 2017 and the potential financial value of contracts for training provision, a formal procurement process is advisable to ensure compliance with NHS Procurement Rules.

HEE has produced a toolkit to provide guidance for healthcare employers, with support to navigate the procurement process and an overview of the various options available nationally.

Read the [HEE Apprenticeship Procurement Toolkit](#).

### How do I recruit (trainee) nursing associates?

The nursing associate role provides a natural progression route for health and care assistants. Therefore, many employers developing an apprenticeship programme recruit both internally and externally through platforms such as NHS Jobs.

To help you explain and promote the role to potential recruits, please direct them to the [nursing associate website](#).



### How do I support newly qualified nursing associates?

Newly qualified nursing associates may need time to adjust to the increased responsibility and accountability associated with being registered. You can support them to do this by:

- promoting the role throughout your organisation
- creating a formal job description and scope of practice
- supported medicines administration procedures
- offering preceptorship programmes.

### What is a preceptorship and why should I offer one to newly qualified nursing associates?

A preceptorship is a period of support and guidance for new registrants. The wave 2 evaluation of the HEE nursing associate programme found that preceptorship programmes can have several benefits for recently qualified nursing associates, including:

- an adjustment period to help them cope with increased responsibility and accountability
- opportunities to build further awareness of the role
- additional supernumerary time, including extra support and training to ensure they are meeting professional standards
- extra time to ensure they have good working knowledge of their roles and can reflect on how they can best integrate within their team or setting
- an additional opportunity to develop peer support networks.

For more read:

- [Best practice guidance on preceptorship for nursing associates, HEE, 2018](#)
- [Introduction of nursing associates – year 2 evaluation report, Traverse, October 2019.](#)



## How do I engage other staff in the role?

For more on how to engage nurses and other health and care professionals in the new role, please visit NHS Employers: [How do you involve staff in understanding the need for and placement of trainee nursing associates?](#)

## Do nursing associates need to revalidate?

Yes. Nursing associates will need to renew their registration every three years through the same revalidation process as that applied to nurses and midwives. Employers can support nursing associates to meet the revalidation requirements.

## Where can I find out more?

Please visit:

- The [HEE website for information on nursing associates for employers](#)
- The [Nursing associate website](#) for information for potential trainee nursing associates
- [The NHS Employers guide to nursing associates](#)
- [Nursing and Midwifery Council \(NMC\) resources](#)
- Information on nursing associates in social care on the [Skills for Care website](#)

If you have a question we haven't answered here, please email the national nursing team at [tนาenquiries.national@hee.nhs.uk](mailto:tnaenquiries.national@hee.nhs.uk)