The NMC published the new Standards to support learning and assessing in practice (NMC Standard 08.06) in August 2006. These standards are available to view/download on the Standards to support learning and assessment in practice sub section of the NMC website within the Education and Quality Assurance section. Since publishing the standards many registrants, employers and educationalists, have asked questions about their implementation; the following are some of the frequently asked questions with answers to help you to apply the standards. The answers should be read with reference to the relevant section of the published standards and the various NMC circulars which are referred to below.

Mentors
(NB many of the questions and answers in this section also apply to practice teachers)

Q. Can all mentors assess outcomes/ proficiencies?

A. Nursing and specialist community public health nurse registrants who have been prepared to be mentors through an NMC approved preparation programme (paragraph 3.2.1) can assess outcomes/ proficiencies up to the final placement of a pre-registration programme (paragraph 3.2.5). In the final placement a sign-off mentor who has met additional criteria (paragraph 2.1.6) must assess the student’s proficiency in practice (paragraph 3.2.6.) A mentor may assess in the final placement only if they are supervised by a sign-off mentor (paragraph 3.2.6). From September 2007 only a midwife who has achieved stage 2 of the developmental framework and has met the additional criteria for sign-off mentor can mentor and assess students commencing programmes from September 2007 (paragraph 2.1.3).

Q. Does the number of students each mentor may support only relate to students on NMC approved programmes?

A. Yes, the NMC can only set standards related to its own registrants or those in pre-registration education programmes. Advice can be found in paragraph 3.2.4.

Q. Why do mentors have to be involved in simulated learning?

A. The NMC is looking at setting standards for simulated learning in nursing education. Where this is used it is important that it reflects actual practice and mentors are best placed to ensure that this is so (paragraph 3.2.5).

Q. Does a mentor have to observe the student to assess performance?

A. The NMC requires that most assessments of competence should be undertaken through direct observation in practice (paragraph 3.2.5). The mentor who will confirm a competence has been achieved must either directly observe this or have evidence from another mentor (or appropriately prepared person from a different profession) that competence has been achieved through observed practice.

Q. How should mentors document evidence of their assessment decisions and student progress?

A. Mentors should maintain sufficient records to support and justify their decisions on whether a student is, or is not, competent/ proficient. These records should be sufficient to provide an audit trail to support such decisions. Where a critical decision on progress is to be made, the mentor should ensure that regular feedback is given to the student and that records are maintained documenting guidance given (paragraph 3.2.6).
Q. Where should such records be held and should mentors retain their own copy of any records?

A. Any records should be written in the student’s assessment of practice document and retained by the student to be shared with future mentors and the education provider. Mentors should not keep their own separate student progress records, everything should be contained within the assessment of practice document.

Q. How can a mentor/ sign-off mentor access documentary evidence of the student’s Previous performance?

The NMC requires that students keep an ongoing record of achievement which should summarise learning that has taken place and learning needs for the subsequent placement. This also enables the mentor to identify strengths, weaknesses and specific competencies needing to be achieved. The mentor should make students aware of their responsibility to share the information with the mentor on their next placement.

(Specific guidance relating to ensuring continuity of practice assessment through the ongoing achievement record will be issued shortly through an NMC circular).

Q. How do the essential skills clusters for nursing contribute to evidence for assessment?

A. The essential skills clusters for nursing are specific skills statements mapped to some of the outcomes of NMC proficiencies identified in the Standards of proficiency for pre-registration nursing education.

(See NMC Circular 07/2007 - Introduction of Essential Skills Clusters for Pre-registration Nursing programmes).

Q. If I have previously been prepared to be a mentor through a National Board approved programme or the equivalent; do I have to do another preparation programme?

A. No, the NMC does not expect existing mentors to retrain (page 7). However, the placement provider does have to ensure that registrants are appropriately prepared and have sufficient experience to be placed on the local mentor register. We do advise that existing mentors map their prior learning against the new outcomes for mentors and use continuing professional development to achieve any which have not met previously. Midwives would need also to map this against the additional requirements for sign-off mentors (paragraph 3.2.6). From September 2007, registrants wishing to become mentors will be required to undertake an NMC approved mentor preparation programme at an approved education institution. It is intended that if a registrant is on the local register of one placement provider, this should be transferable to another provider without the need to attend another programme.

Q. If I am an NVQ assessor can I assess NMC students?

A. Possibly, the principles of assessment are the same it is the context in which you use them that is different. You should map your prior learning to the new outcomes for mentors and then the placement provider will decide if they meet the requirements and that you can be placed on the local mentor register. If they decide that they do not then you should request accreditation of prior learning (APEL) against an NMC approved mentor preparation programme, following which you may be required to undertake a shortened preparation programme (page 7). If you are a midwife, you would also need to meet the additional requirements for sign-off mentors (paragraph 3.2.6).

Q. What is protected learning time in a mentor preparation programme?

A. The NMC supports that mentor preparation programmes should include learning in both academic and practice settings (paragraph 3.2.1). Five days of a ten-day preparation programme are protected and may include time in theory and practice. Where work-based learning is taking place in protected time it is important that the student mentor is not counted in the numbers for delivering care so that they can focus on their own learning needs.
Q. Why do outcomes/ standards of proficiency need to be confirmed by a mentor on the same part of the register and from the same field of practice as that which the student intends to enter (with due regard) at the end of a placement?

A. Confirming that a student has met the required standards of proficiency at the end of a placement means that the mentor is confirming that the student is fit for safe and effective practice in relation to those areas of proficiency. The registrant making these judgements therefore, has to understand what is required of a nurse or midwife and, for nursing, what is required to work in a particular specialty corresponding with the respective branch or field of practice. Only a registrant who has the knowledge, skills and competence to be on that part of the register and, for nursing, the appropriate mark designating their branch (field of practice), is able to confirm proficiency (paragraph 1.2).

Q. Does due regard apply to assessing outcomes within the common foundation programme for pre-registration nursing students?

A. This would apply where the placement is branch specific. If it is a general placement undertaken by students irrespective of their intended branch, then the mentor confirming that the required learning outcomes have been met can be registered in any branch of nursing as long as it is relevant to the field of practice in which the student is placed.

Q. Does due regard apply in formative placements (i.e. placements intended to extend the student’s breadth of knowledge but where outcomes/ proficiencies are not being assessed?)

A. No, due regard need not be applied in formative placements. However, where a person from a different profession supervises the placement, the student should have access to support from an appropriate nurse/midwife from the placement providing organisation or education institution to oversee the placement in order to ensure that the aims are being met.

**Sign-off mentors**

Q. From when does the requirement for a sign-off mentor apply?

A. For pre-registration nursing: The NMC requires that the standards apply to students commencing their programmes from September 2007 onwards (NMC Circular 20/2006 – Introduction of the Standards to support learning and assessment in practice). This means that those undertaking a 3 year programme will not have a final placement until 2010 which is when they will first need a sign-off mentor. If students undertake a shortened programme, then their final placement will be correspondingly earlier. However, there is no reason why the principles should not be applied to final placement students who commenced programmes prior to September 2007.

For pre-registration midwifery: From September 2007 only a midwife who has achieved stage 2 of the developmental framework and has met the additional criteria for sign-off mentor can mentor students commencing their programmes from September 2007.

For Specialist community public health nursing programmes: Students commencing specialist community public health nursing programmes from September 2007 will require a sign-off practice teacher who has met stage 3 of the developmental framework and has met the additional criteria to be annotated as a sign-off practice teacher. Student practice teachers will be required to consolidate their preparation programme with a period of preceptorship before being annotated as a sign-off practice teacher.

(See NMC circular 27/07 for further guidance relating to sign-off status and preceptorship for practice teacher students).

For Return to Nursing/ Overseas Nursing Programmes: From September 2007 only a mentor who has achieved stage 2 of the developmental framework and has met the additional criteria for sign-off mentor can mentor students commencing these programmes.
Q. Why does the sign-off of standards of proficiency at the end of an NMC approved programme need to be undertaken by a sign-off mentor with due regard who has met additional criteria?

A. Confirming that a student has met the required standards of proficiency at the end of a programme means that the sign-off mentor is confirming that all the practice requirements have been met and that the student is fit for safe and effective practice without supervision. The registrant making these judgements therefore, has to be able to draw together all the evidence from a student’s previous placements and make a judgement based on this together with evidence from the student’s performance within the final placement. This requires additional skills. The sign-off mentor equally requires an understanding of what is required of a registered midwife and, for nursing, what is required to work in a particular specialty corresponding with the respective branch or field of practice. Only a registrant who has the knowledge, skills and competence to be on that part of the register and, for nursing, the appropriate mark designating their branch (field of practice), is able to sign off proficiency at the end of a programme (paragraph 1.2).

Q. Are sign-off mentors only required in the final placement?

A. This differs for nursing and midwifery programmes:

For pre-registration nursing: Nurse mentors may assess competencies on the way through the programme (paragraph 3.2.6) but only a sign-off mentor may assess proficiency in practice in the final placement. The final placement is the long placement which normally occurs at the end of the programme or within the last six months of the programme.

For pre-registration midwifery. From September 2007 only a midwife who has achieved stage 2 of the developmental framework and has met the additional criteria for sign-off mentor can mentor students commencing their programmes in September 2007.

Q. Why do all midwifery mentors have to be sign-off mentors?

A. Midwives work autonomously and midwifery students are likely to have their final placement in a variety of different settings. The NMC Midwifery Committee decided that all midwifery mentors must be capable of taking the role of sign-off mentor (paragraph 2.1),

Q. What evidence do sign-off mentors need to support their decision to sign off a student as being proficient in practice?

A. They need to know that the student has met all of the NMC practice requirements and achieved all the proficiencies required for entry to the register in the Standards of proficiency for pre-registration nursing (or midwifery or specialist community public health nursing) education (paragraph 3.2.6). This evidence will come from their own observation of the student’s practice, the student’s ongoing achievement record and information from other mentors who have worked with the student during their final placement.

Q. What if the student’s final placement is not summatively assessed?

A. All programmes must have a period of practice within the final six months for the purpose of confirming to the Examination Board that all practice requirements have been met including the achievement of the required NMC proficiencies. It is common for the final Examination Board to meet during the final placement so that a decision may be taken on whether the student has successfully achieved the programme requirements. In such a case all students must have had equal opportunity to meet the competencies in the same timeframe. Programme providers must make sure that systems are in place to deal with any concerns that arise related to a student’s performance, good health and good character in that final placement.

Q. How do mentors achieve the criteria to be a sign-off mentor in preparation for new
students commencing in September 2007?

A. Placement providers are required to set up local registers of mentors and practice teachers ready for September 2007 (page 7) including those who may act as a sign-off mentor. When they first set up the register, they will decide who amongst existing mentors and practice teachers may be annotated as a sign-off mentor because they already make ‘safe’ judgements on a student’s ‘capability for safe and effective practice without supervision’. These sign-off mentors will currently be involved in assessing final placement students and confirming proficiency.

Q. How do placement providers identify sign-off mentors from 1 September 2007?

A. Once the local register is established, the placement provider will determine when a mentor has met the required additional criteria for sign-off mentors (paragraphs 2.1.3 and 3.2.6). (All midwives will be sign-off mentors). Where the placement provider is satisfied that the additional criteria have been met they will ‘annotate’ the local register accordingly to state that the registrant is a sign-off mentor.

Q. Can Specialist Community Public Health Nurses sign-off pre-registration students?

A Where a Registered SCPHN has maintained effective nursing registration and has the same ‘mark’ (branch/field of practice) on the register they may also act as a sign-off mentor for a nursing student providing that they have been annotated as such on the local register.

Interprofessional mentors

Q. Can a mentor from a different profession act as a mentor to students on NMC approved programmes?

A. No for midwifery

A. Yes for nursing - any appropriately prepared professional can act as a mentor. They can supervise a placement and confirm achievement of component skills for a student, but only where that specific skill is transferable. A mentor with due regard must confirm achievement of proficiency at the end of a placement and a sign-off mentor with due regard must sign-off overall proficiency at the end of a programme. (See circular 26/ 07 for further guidance on applying due regard to learning and assessment in practice).

NB. The one exception to the above principle is for students undertaking nurse prescribing programmes where there is a requirement for assessment by a designated medical practitioner.

Q. Can a nurse registrant from a different part of the register, or with a different mark on the register assess competence or proficiency?

A. Nurse registrant mentors on other parts of the register can supervise a placement and assess component skills where the skill is transferable across nursing branches/ fields of practice (paragraph 3.2.4). However, they cannot confirm that the student has met the required proficiency at the end of a placement or sign-off overall proficiency at the end of a programme unless they have maintained effective registration in the part of the register and branch/field of practice as that which the student is seeking to enter. (See above circular 26/ 07)

Practice Teachers

Q. Which NMC approved programmes require practice teachers?

A. All Students on Specialist Community Public Health Nursing Programmes will require practice
teachers from September 2007 (Where education providers cannot meet this requirement they may make an application to the NMC for deferment up until 2010).

For Specialist Practice Qualifications: where requirements for practice teachers exist by commissioners (e.g. for district nursing students) this should not be changed. In all other circumstances, the requirement for introducing practice teachers by 2008 is deferred pending a review of specialist practice.

For Advanced Nursing Practice programmes: the requirement for introducing practice teachers by 2008 and sign-off mentors by 2007 has been deferred and will be reviewed once the ANP sub part of the register opens.

(See NMC circular 08/2007- Revised arrangements for the introduction of the practice teacher standard).

Q. Can a person with a previous Community Practice Teacher (CPT) qualification automatically be recognised as a practice teacher?

A. Placement providers will set up and maintain local registers of mentors and practice teachers (page 7). They will decide if a registrant’s prior learning and experience is acceptable to record them as a mentor, sign-off mentor or practice teacher. (This might include previous CPT preparation) Registrants are encouraged to map their prior learning to the outcomes for mentors (stage 2) or practice teachers (stage 3) to assist placement providers in making a decision.

Q. What is the difference between a Practice Teacher and a Practice Educator?

A. Practice teachers will have met the outcomes of stage 3 of the new developmental framework (section 2.2). Previously the NMC set a standard for a Practice Educator (PE) that was an NMC recordable qualification equivalent to a Lecturer (requiring post-graduate preparation). Employers, however, developed practice education facilitator roles that were more suited to their needs and that did not equate to the NMC’s Practice Educator (PE) qualification. The NMC listened to employer needs and set an intermediate standard that was more adaptable to supporting learning and assessment in practice – both in acute and primary care that was between that of mentor and Practice Educator (PE).

Q. Can the Practice Teacher qualification be recorded on the NMC register?

A. No, this should be recorded on a local register set up and maintained by placement providers (page 7).

Q. Can someone be a Practice Teacher if they haven’t done an NMC approved preparation programme?

A. If a preparation programme has been taken that meets all or most of the requirements for practice teacher (section 2.2) then this can be mapped against the outcomes of stage 3. The placement provider who maintains the local register will need to determine if this prior learning is equivalent. If there are a small number of outstanding outcomes then these might be addressed through continuing professional development. (page 7), however if these are significant then local accreditation of prior learning (AP(E)L) processes should be used to determine how much of an approved preparation programme must be undertaken. From September 2007, any registrants wishing to become practice teachers must complete an NMC approved practice teacher preparation programme at an approved education institution.

Q. Can someone who is a mentor undertake further preparation to be a Practice Teacher?

A. The developmental framework has been designed to allow stepping on and stepping off points. The NMC expects that those who have met the mentor outcomes (stage 2) can, if they wish, be assessed for accreditation of prior learning (AP(E)L) in order to undertake a shortened practice
Q. How long does it take to complete a Practice Teacher preparation programme?

A. Normally a practice teacher preparation programme, requiring a minimum of 30 days protected learning (paragraph 3.3.1) would be completed within 6 months. The length may vary according to local needs i.e. some programme providers will want someone undertaking the practice teacher programme to be able to follow a student through both academic and practice learning experiences.

Q. Why are Practice Educators being replaced by Practice Teachers?

A. They are not. The Practice Teacher is a new intermediate award between that of mentor and teacher. The previous Practice Educator/Lecturer award is synonymous with that of Teacher in the new framework (section 2.0)

Teachers

Q. Can university teachers assess competence in practice?

A. Only if they practice nursing or midwifery by engaging in regular clinical experience, can meet the outcomes for a mentor (paragraph 2.1) and the requirements for triennial review (page 8)

Q. Can university teachers sign-off proficiency at the end of a programme?

A. Only if they are registered nurses and midwives, practice clinically, can meet the outcomes for a mentor (paragraph 2.1), meet the additional criteria for sign-off mentor (paragraph 2.1.3) and for triennial review (page 8)

Q. Can those who meet the HE Academy requirements record their teaching qualification on the NMC register?

A. Not necessarily - registrants would still have to demonstrate that they have met the equivalent of the outcomes of stage 4 of an NMC approved post-graduate preparation programme. The NMC process for recognising other teacher qualifications should be used for this purpose (paragraph 4.4).

Recognition of prior learning

Q. If a registrant has completed a post-graduate teaching course not approved by the NMC can they record their teaching qualification?

A. Possibly, they need to submit evidence to the NMC by mapping their prior learning against the outcomes of stage 4 and using the NMC process for recognising prior learning for teachers (paragraph 4.4).

Q. What evidence is required in order to use the recognition of prior learning route?

A. Registrants must apply to the NMC in order undertake the process for recognising prior learning for teachers. The process involves the applicant mapping their academic and experiential learning against the outcomes of stage 4 of the Standard. A template detailing the outcomes will be supplied to facilitate this process. The NMC will also require to see certified copies of relevant certificates and statements by two referees – one from an NMC registrant with a teaching qualification recorded on the register (who will confirm ability to teach in academic settings) and one from a registrant who can confirm ability to support learning in practice settings (paragraph 4.4). For further information and/or to request an application pack please contact the new registrations team - tel: 020 7333
Q. Does recognition of prior learning only apply to qualified teachers?

A. No, but placement providers rather than the NMC are responsible for assessing prior learning for mentors, sign-off mentors and practice teachers to enter them on a local register (page 7). The NMC will only consider prior learning for teachers who wish to record their qualification on the NMC register.

Q. How do placement providers recognise prior learning?

A. Registrants will be responsible for providing evidence to the placement provider that they have been previously prepared to be a mentor or a practice teacher and where relevant met the additional criteria for sign-off mentor (paragraph 3.2.6). The NMC advises that they map their prior and experiential learning against the outcomes for a mentor (stage 2) or for practice teacher (stage 3). The combination of formal and experiential learning should demonstrate that the registrant has met all or most of the outcomes.

Information for Placement Providers

Local registers

Q. What is the purpose of the local registers?

A. The purpose of local registers is to keep an up-to-date record of those NMC registrants who are currently available to act as mentors/ sign-off mentors and practice teachers for students on NMC approved programmes.

Q. Is there a specific format in which this information should be recorded?

A. No – it is for individual placement providers to determine an appropriate format for recording this information.

Q. Why do placement providers hold local registers and not universities?

A. The NMC are concerned that the local register (page 7) is an accurate reflection of staff actually available to support and assess students in practice; not merely a record of registrants who hold the qualifications. Placement providers are in a better position to appraise mentors and practice teachers and to add or remove names as staff join or leave employment.

Q. Can a university hold the register on behalf of placement providers?

A. This is a matter for local discussion between placement and education providers. If the placement providers wish to make use of an IT resource that the university previously had in place, then providing that they have remote access to this i.e. they can add and remove names from their own workplace; then the university could act as a host. However, the university must not be the responsible body that makes changes to the register – this must be ‘owned’ by the placement provider and updated regularly. The placement providers have to demonstrate to the NMC quality assurance agents (section 4) that the local register is an accurate and up-to-date reflection of staff available to act as mentors, sign-off mentors or practice teachers.

The exception to this is for providers of placements which are used infrequently for very small numbers of students (e.g. for Overseas Nursing Programmes where placements are undertaken in small nursing homes). In these circumstances, following agreement between the service provider and the Approved Education Institution, it is the responsibility of the AEI to develop and maintain the
local register in conjunction with placement providers. 
(See circular 28/07 - Guidance for small scale service providers in applying the NMC’s Standards to support learning and assessment in practice).

Q. How do placement providers decide who goes on to a local register and when does the local register become ‘live’?

A. Placement providers must have the local register set up for September 2007 when the standards become mandatory (page 7). In order to develop the initial ‘critical mass’ of registrants who will be entered onto registers as mentors, sign-off mentors and practice teachers, placement providers are required to identify existing staff who are currently practicing safely and effectively in these roles and who have undertaken an appropriate preparation programme (either previously approved by a National Board, or by a higher education institution or as deemed by the placement provider to be comparable) (page 7). Once the initial register is set up, those registrants who satisfactorily complete an NMC approved preparation programme for mentors or practice teachers can subsequently be added. New staff who provide evidence that they have recently been on a local register elsewhere may be entered without requiring additional preparation.

Q. What preparation will new entrants to mentor and practice teacher programmes be required to undertake?

A. New entrants to mentor and practice teacher programmes from 1 September 2007 must complete an NMC approved programme run by an Approved Education Institution before being entered onto a local register.

Q. How will these new mentors/practice teachers become sign-off mentors/practice teachers?

A. They would need to demonstrate that they fully meet the sign-off mentor criteria before being annotated as such on the local register (paragraph 2.1.3).

New mentors of pre-registration nursing students: this would normally mean a period of consolidation as a mentor followed by a period of supported learning to enable them to achieve the outstanding sign-off mentor criteria including being supervised on three occasions signing off proficiency at the end of a final placement by an existing sign-off mentor.

New midwifery mentors: all midwifery mentors must also be sign-off mentors and must achieve all the additional sign-off mentor criteria before being entered on the local register.

For new specialist community public health nursing practice teachers: practice teachers must be supervised signing off proficiency at the end of a supervised practice placement for at least one specialist community public health nurse student during their preparation programme. They are subsequently required to undertake a period of preceptorship as a practice teacher supported by an existing sign-off practice teacher before being annotated on the local register as a sign-off practice teacher. 
(See NMC circular 27/07 for further guidance relating to sign-off status and preceptorship for practice teacher students).

Q. How do placement providers decide on whether to remove a mentor or practice teacher from the local register?

A. Registrants are added to the register either in recognition of prior learning that has enabled them to meet the outcomes of stage 2 or stage 3 of the framework, or because they have successfully completed an NMC approved preparation programme. The NMC requires placement providers to undertake triennial review of mentors and practice teachers (page 8) taking account of minimum criteria to be met - this includes the requirement for annual updating (see page 8). If they become aware at any time, or during review, that a mentor/practice teacher is not meeting the outcomes for the role then they should consider whether they may remain on the local register. It is for the placement provider to have procedures in place for this to be managed.
Triennial review

Q. How does triennial review fit with annual appraisal?

A. NHS employers are required through Agenda for Change to undertake appraisal (there are other reasons as well but the KSF provides a structure not previously seen). Most independent sector employers have similar systems for reviewing the capability of their employees. Where such systems exist the NMC would expect that the review of mentors or practice teachers (page 8) becomes part of the normal appraisal process i.e. that consideration be given to the registrant’s responsibilities as a mentor or practice teacher as part of their overall review of performance. Some registrants work independently; in this case they would be responsible to (and appraised by) the placement provider who agrees to add their name to the local register and to use them as a mentor or practice teacher.

Q. Can a portfolio approach be used to demonstrate updated knowledge, skills and competence?

A. Yes, this would fit with the NMC’s requirements for continuing professional development and renewal of registration. However this would need to be discussed with employers to ensure that such an approach was acceptable to them.

Q. How do self-employed registrants meet the NMC requirements?

A. In this case it is the responsibility of the placement provider who agrees to add their name to the local register as a mentor or practice teacher to ensure that the NMC’s requirements have been fully met.

Q. How will triennial review be achieved in the independent sector?

A. The review would be undertaken by the placement provider who adds the name to their local register and assigns students to that person for supervision and assessment. Alternatively, for small scale providers where it has been agreed that the Approved Education Institution delivering the programme will maintain the local register, the AEI will also take responsibility for undertaking triennial review.

(See circular 28/07 - Guidance for small scale service providers in applying the NMC’s Standards to support learning and assessment in practice).

Q. In my organisation we have registrants who mentor nurses and midwives on developmental programmes which are not approved by the NMC. Does this count towards meeting the requirements for mentoring at least two students within the three year period prior to triennial review?

A. Normally, it would be expected that each registrant would mentor at least two students from NMC approved programmes during the three year period prior to triennial review (practice teachers to supervise at least one student) (page 8) in order to maintain up-to-date skills and therefore be eligible to remain on the local register. However, placement providers must make local decisions on whether mentoring experience with nurses or midwives on other programmes enables mentors to maintain their knowledge and skills and that they are able to continue to demonstrate effective mentoring practice.

Annual Updating

Q. Whose responsibility is annual updating of mentors and practice teachers?

A. The process of annual updating is a joint responsibility between the placement provider and the Approved Education Institution, although it is the responsibility of the placement provider and each
individual mentor/practice teacher to ensure that they undertake appropriate annual updating. For small scale providers where it has been agreed that the Approved Education Institutions delivering the programme will maintain the local register, the AEI will also take responsibility for ensuring that each mentor/practice teacher on the local register undertakes appropriate annual updating. **(See circular 28/07 - Guidance for small scale service providers in applying the NMC’s Standards to support learning and assessment in practice).**

Q. What form should annual updating take?

A. This should be locally determined. Discussions should take place between placement providers and local AEIs to ensure that a robust local process is developed and that the updates include current information regarding NMC approved programme requirements. Mentors/practice teachers should also have the opportunity to meet and explore assessment and supervision issues and validity and reliability of judgments made when assessing practice in challenging circumstances as part of this process.

**Information for Programme Providers**

**Approval of mentor/practice teacher/teacher preparation programmes**

Q. My institution has been running a mentor preparation programme for several years. Do we need to make any changes in order to be able to meet the new standards?

A. Possibly - you need to map the outcomes of the current programme against the criteria for mentor preparation programmes and the outcomes for stage 2 of the framework to ensure that it meets these criteria. Changes should be made where necessary to enable new students on the programme to achieve the outcomes. An approval event then needs to be held. The programme must have been approved before new NMC registrants start the programme from 1 September 2007.

Q. My institution has been running a lecturer/practice educator programme and it was re-approved last year. Do we need to make any changes for it to meet the teacher standard and/or will it need to be re-approved again?

Most lecturer/practice educator programmes which were developed according to the NMC Standards for the preparation of teachers of nurses, midwives and specialist community public health nurses (2004) should be able to continue with minor changes. Changes should be made where necessary to enable new students to the programme to achieve the outcomes for stage 4 of the framework and record their qualification on the NMC register as teacher. Such changes can be updated through the minor modification process by sending a copy of internal minutes to hslp/HIW, the NMC quality assurance suppliers. Students currently undertaking Lecturer/Practice Educator programmes approved under the previous NMC Standards may complete them and subsequently apply to record their qualification on the NMC register as Lecturer/Practice Educator.

Q. At my institution we already run a lecturer/practice educator programme and plan to modify this to become a teacher preparation programme including a module which can also be taken as a stand-alone practice teacher programme. What do we need to do to ensure that the correct approval process is undertaken?

A. You would need to hold a full approval event for the practice teacher programme. The necessary minor modifications to the lecturer/practice educator programme could also be presented at this event. **(See circular 17/2007 – Approval process and timetable to implement the Standards to support learning and assessment in practice for NMC approved programme providers)**

**Placements**

Q. There are some placement areas in our partner placement provider organisations where it is
difficult to place a pre-registration nursing student with a mentor from the same field of practice as that which they intend to enter. Does this mean that we would not be able to use these areas as placements for students as the requirement for due regard (underpinning principle A of the Standards) cannot be achieved?

A. Not necessarily. The standards require that those registrants who make judgements about whether the student has achieved the required standards of proficiency for safe and effective practice must be from the same field of practice as that which the student intends to enter. Mentors or practice teachers from a different part of the register may supervise and support student learning and assess appropriate component skills. However, in such circumstances, the overall confirmation of achievement of nursing proficiencies at the end of the placement should be made by a mentor with due regard in the context of the part of the register in which the student intends to enter.

Q. Is it appropriate for students to undertake placements with a person from a different profession in order to gain a wider breadth of experience? (e.g. a specialist community public health nurse student undertaking a placement with a social worker)

A. Yes, this would be entirely appropriate. Again, the social worker could undertake a day-to-day supervisory and supportive role and undertake assessment of component skills. However, if it were a summative placement where specialist community public health nursing (SCPHN) proficiencies were being assessed, then confirmation that these had been achieved at the end of the placement would need to be made by a practice teacher from the same SCPHN field as that which the student intended to enter.

Q. In our local area there are very few practice teachers available from school nurse and occupational health SCPHN fields. How can we ensure that the requirements for due regard and the practice teacher standard are fulfilled in relation to school nurse and occupational health nurse programme students?

Similar principles can be applied using the tripartite approach described in the two scenarios above. A student could be placed with a mentor from the SCPHN field that they were intending to enter who would provide day-to-day supervision and support. The placement would need to be overseen by a practice teacher who would support the student and mentor in the learning and assessment process. However, where a practice teacher is from a different SCHPN field to that which the student intends to enter, the final sign-off would need to occur jointly by both the practice teacher and the placement supervisor in order to ensure that the requirements for both due regard and practice teacher were both met. The introduction of the practice teacher standards can also be deferred until up to 2010 following application to the NMC.

(See NMC circular 26/07 for further guidance on applying due regard to learning and assessment in practice).

(See NMC circular 08/2007- Revised arrangements for the introduction of the practice teacher standard).

Q. Which programmes require mentors/ practice teachers to support the learning and assessment of students in practice?

A. Any programmes which lead to an entry on the NMC register.

Q. Does this include Overseas Nursing Programmes and Return to Nursing Programmes?

A. Yes. In addition, as both lead to entry/ re-entry onto the NMC register. In addition, as such programmes consist of a single placement, the sign-off mentor standard also applies.

Q. We run an Overseas Nursing Programme at my Education institution. The majority of student placements occur within small nursing homes across a wide geographical area. How should the requirements for maintaining the local register and annual updating/ triennial review be met?
A. In these circumstances, following agreement between the service provider(s), the Approved Education Institution should be responsible for developing and maintaining the local register and ensuring that arrangements for annual updating and triennial review are in place.

(See circular 28/07 - Guidance for small scale service providers in applying the NMC’s Standards to support learning and assessment in practice).