

# Advanced Level Nursing Practice: Introduction

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

CLINICAL PROFESSIONAL RESOURCE

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



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# Contents

<b>Introduction</b>	<b>4</b>
Background and context	4
<b>Advanced Practice Pillars</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>The Royal College of Nursing and Advanced Level Nursing Practice</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>References</b>	<b>7</b>

# Introduction

## Background and context

With an ever increasing demand for health care and financially constrained budgets it has never been more important to have the right staff who are educated and competent, delivering the best care possible at the right time for patients. Leadership and innovation are the key to developing and delivering the right services and care and improving health and wellbeing outcomes for people. Registered nurses are increasingly extending and expanding their scope of practice beyond initial registration in all health care settings developing their skills, competence and confidence.

These updated RCN competencies recognise the changing landscape of advanced level practice in nursing and other allied health professions and uses the term advanced level nursing practice to acknowledge this. It is relevant to any nurse working at this level of practice. The educational level required for this level of practice is discussed in [section 3](#).

The RCN recognises that advanced practice is a level of practice, rather than a type of practice. Advanced Nurse Practitioners are educated at Masters Level in clinical practice and have been assessed as competent in practice using their expert clinical knowledge and skills. They have the freedom and authority to act, making autonomous decisions in the assessment, diagnosis and treatment of patients. Registered nurses working at an advanced level work in various health care settings, in primary, secondary and tertiary care, such as general practice, accident and emergency departments, minor injury units, medical assessment units, out of hours services and within specialties such as paediatrics, neonatal care, cancer care, ophthalmology and orthopaedics; in any setting where patients would benefit from nurses with advanced level skills and knowledge. With the integration of health and social care across the UK advanced level nurses are working beyond the NHS in the care home, independent, third and voluntary sectors too.

The RCN recognises a number of different roles developing at an advanced level of practice, ranging from an advanced nurse practitioner, an advanced clinical nurse specialist, advanced clinical practitioner and a nurse consultant leading specialist services.

Registered nurses working at this advanced level:

- are accountable practitioners, working at the boundaries of their profession
- are innovative and highly skilled at assessing and managing risk
- have the freedom and authority to act autonomously and independently
- accept the responsibility for decisions made and actions taken
- are very experienced and highly educated experts
- are holistic practitioners, able to address nursing as well as medical needs
- have the ability to 'see' the whole person, fuse biomedical science with the art of caring, providing health promotion advice, counselling, assessment, diagnosis, referral, treatment and discharge
- are increasingly seen as the right solution to addressing workforce challenges, meeting the needs of an increasingly ageing population and managing an ever developing chronic disease profile.

By 2020 there will be a million more people over 65 years of age, 7,000 people over 100 years old and two-out-of-three babies born today will live until they are 100 (CNO Summit, 2017). Nurses, as one of the most trusted professions with a long and distinguished heritage have a significant role to play in meeting the diverse needs of the public. A registered nurse working at this will have had a higher level of education and training at master's degree and have significant roles within each of the four pillars of:

- advanced clinical practice
- leadership
- facilitation of education and learning
- evidence research and development.

In 2007, NHS Education for Scotland (NES) developed these four advanced practice pillars and defined the characteristics of each. NHS Wales demonstrated this in the table below (NHS Wales, 2010).

# Advanced Practice Pillars

## 1. Management and Leadership

- Identifying need for change, leading innovation and managing change, including service development
- Developing case for change
- Negotiation and influencing skills
- Networking
- Team development

## 2. Education (either within clinical practice or education sector)

- Principles of teaching and learning
- Supporting others to develop knowledge and skills
- Promotion of learning/creation of learning environment
- Service user/carer teaching and information giving
- Developing service user/carer education materials
- Teaching, mentorship and coaching

## 3. Research

- Ability to access research/use information systems
- Critical appraisal/evaluation skills
- Involvement in research
- Involvement in audit and service evaluation
- Ability to implement research findings into practice – including use of and development of policies/protocols and guidelines
- Conference presentations
- Publications

## 4. Advanced Clinical Practice

- Decision making/clinical judgment and problem solving
- Critical thinking and analytical skills incorporating critical reflection
- Managing complexity
- Clinical governance
- Equality and diversity
- Ethical decision-making
- Assessment, diagnosis, referral, discharge
- Developing higher levels of autonomy
- Assessing and managing risk
- Non-medical prescribing in line with legislation
- Developing confidence
- Developing therapeutic interventions to improve service user outcomes
- Higher level communication skills
- Service user/public involvement
- Promoting and influencing others to incorporate values-based care into practice
- Development of advanced psycho-motor skills

This introduction to advanced nursing practice forms part of a larger RCN resource. Further detail, including the standards can be found at [www.rcn.org.uk/ANP](http://www.rcn.org.uk/ANP)



# The Royal College of Nursing and Advanced Level Nursing Practice

“Advanced practice is a level of practice, rather than a type of practice. Advanced Nurse Practitioners are educated at Masters Level in clinical practice and have been assessed as competent in practice using their expert clinical knowledge and skills. They have the freedom and authority to act, making autonomous decisions in the assessment, diagnosis and treatment of patients.” (Royal College of Nursing Advisory Group, 2018)

The RCN’s competencies for advanced nurse practitioners were first mapped in the early 2000s against, and informed by, the NHS Knowledge and Skills Framework (DH, 2004). The competences were devised and researched collaboratively with higher education institutions (HEIs), professional organisations and service providers. They have standardised clinical outcomes and are a tool that HEIs can use to map and validate their curriculum outcomes as well as audit fitness to practice at this level. They also inform the RCN accreditation of Advanced Level Nursing Practice programmes being run by a number of HEIs.

Whilst the RCN acknowledges that advanced level nursing practice is encompassed within, and regulated by, the NMC Code (2015), this is not sufficient in isolation and other checks and controls must be in place. Thus, in addition to the Code (NMC, 2015), the RCN sees employer-led governance as another of the key components of the wider governance framework and guidance that should monitor advanced level nursing practice, and thereby assure improved patient safety. Robust governance by employers makes transparent their responsibility for patient safety, and provides an additional layer of monitoring of appropriate competency, education and tangible evidence-based practice. Effective governance enables the employer to assure the public that they are deploying nurses to advanced roles in such a way that they can verify their fitness to practice as purposeful, planned, underpinned by appropriate education that is both measurable and safe.

RCN Accreditation accredits ALNP programmes in HEIs against 15 quality assurance standards, focusing specifically on the quality and standards of provision of education and practice learning for students enrolled on these programmes.

The four UK countries have published their country-specific documents on advanced nursing practice and much of this work was informed by the original work developed by the RCN. The RCN supports advanced level nursing practice developments throughout the UK as well as any undertaken by the NMC.

The RCN has produced this guidance to be of use to:

- employers and potential employers of advanced level nurses
- those nurses wanting to develop their careers supporting development from existing practice to working at an advanced level
- policy makers working to develop solutions to health care needs, whilst ensuring high quality nursing care
- higher education institutions offering or developing advanced level nursing practice programmes or other advanced clinical practice programmes for wide range of allied health professionals, including nurses
- researchers of advanced level nursing practice
- patients/service users, to inform their choices about what level of nurse they wish to provide their care.

It is anticipated that this guidance:

- can be used as a benchmark to enhance patient safety and the delivery of high-quality care and responsive services by supporting local governance, assisting in good employment practices and encouraging consistency in the development of roles and posts
- will provide consistency in the development and delivery of education and training in advanced practice skills and theoretical knowledge of advanced level nurses holding the title of advanced nurse practitioner
- will support nurse managers to develop models of flexible and affordable services through advanced level nursing practice roles whilst ensuring safe, high quality patient care.

# References

Department of Health (2004) *Knowledge and Skills Framework (NHS KSF)*, London: Crown Copyright.

NHS Wales (2010) *Framework for Advanced Nursing, Midwifery and Allied Health Professional Practice in Wales*, Llanharan: NLIAH

Nursing and Midwifery Council (2015) *The Code: professional standards of practice and behaviour for nurses and midwives*, London: NMC.

You can download further advanced level nursing practice information from [www.rcn.org.uk/ANP](http://www.rcn.org.uk/ANP)

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