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# Neonatal nurse education in Scotland

Specialised neonatal care has developed to a point where today, approximately 12% of all live births are admitted to a neonatal unit (NNU). The success of neonatal intensive/special care provision is shown in the low rates of mortality and morbidity seen in these infants<sup>1</sup>. These achievements have been attributed to advances in medical knowledge and technology, specialist nursing knowledge and care, place of delivery and skill mix/nurse-patient ratio<sup>2</sup>. Many factors are influencing change in neonatal nursing education at the post-registration level. These include: the increased complexity in patient care and rapid expansion of knowledge underpinning practice, proposals for the reorganisation of service provision<sup>3</sup>, training/career opportunities including modernising medical and nursing careers and the European Working Time Directive<sup>4-6</sup> and national staffing standards<sup>7</sup>. Ensuring that the current and future workforce is appropriately skilled and experienced to continue to provide high quality patient care is essential to NHS policy<sup>8</sup>. Thus there is the need for an education structure that enables nurses to “work in different care settings, to take on different roles and responsibilities, develop a varied mix of skills...”.<sup>5</sup>

In 2009, Edinburgh Napier University’s School of Nursing, Midwifery and Social Care in collaboration with NHS Lothian was awarded the tender from NHS Education for Scotland to develop and implement post-registration neonatal nurse education modules and programmes designed to meet current and future workforce needs. With the tender award came recognition of the University and NHS Lothian as the preferred provider of neonatal nurse education for Scotland.

Adaptations were made to the existing provision, and BSc/BSc Honours Neonatal Nursing programmes were developed along with a MSc Neonatal Practice suite of three programmes. Depending on their existing qualifications and career and academic aspirations, students make choices as to what modules/programmes to engage with. The following outlines the choices that are now available.

## 1. CPD in Special Care

To meet the workforce training needs of staff, who previously would not have been eligible to participate in accredited neonatal nurse education and who work only in a special care and/or transitional care unit or who manage infants requiring special care on the postnatal ward, a Special Care Neonatal Nursing module is offered

at Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF) level 8.

## 2. BSc/BSc Honours Neonatal Nursing

The original ‘foundations in neonatal care’ modules were created around a workforce that was primarily ‘Diploma’ status at point of registration and a service necessity for a ‘short course’. While this approach was appropriate in the past it does not support anticipated service requirements or a career pathway. More nurses and midwives are qualifying with a degree and this, taken in consideration with the expectation that nursing is to be an all graduate profession<sup>9,10</sup>, meant the ‘foundation’ modules needed to be reconsidered. Therefore the ‘foundations’ modules were revamped to be delivered and assessed at SCQF level 10<sup>11</sup>. On the basis of student evaluation and feedback from neonatal managers, the duration of the modules was lengthened.

There are now two modules at SCQF level 10 for students who are registered nurses/midwives and are working in NNUs, but have no neonatal nursing qualification:

- Special Care Neonatal Nursing
- High Dependency/Neonatal Intensive Care Neonatal Nursing

Achievement of both modules confers “Qualified in Specialty” (QIS) status and recognition as a qualified neonatal nurse.

Students entering with a Diploma in Higher Education in Nursing or Midwifery may add the credit for these modules to existing academic achievements to exit with a BSc Neonatal Nursing.

Existing graduates may exit with a Graduate Certificate or else undertake a ‘Neonatal Project’ and exit with a BSc Honours Neonatal Nursing.

For students working with the Scottish Neonatal Transport Service, a module in ‘Neonatal Resuscitation, Stabilisation and Transport’ may be undertaken as Continuing Professional Development or as part of the BSc/BSc Honours Neonatal Nursing programmes.

## 3. MSc Neonatal Practice suite of programmes

The design and delivery of this suite of programmes have been informed following significant consultation with managers, lead professionals for neonatal nursing and midwifery, advanced neonatal nurse practitioners, the Scottish Neonatal Nurses Group, and consultant neonatologists. In addition a presentation of the

proposal was made to Heads of Midwifery (Scotland), the Local Supervising Authority Midwifery Officer, representatives of the Royal College of Midwives and the current external examiner of the University neonatal programme. The suite is built around a proposed career framework that articulates with both academic requirements and service modernisation<sup>3,12-14</sup>.

Graduate QIS neonatal nurses may enrol on one of the three programmes in the suite; Neonatal Practice, Advanced Neonatal Practice or Neonatal Practice with Education. All modules in the suite are offered at SCQF level 11 and the following two modules are mandatory for all three programmes:

- Theory and Practice of Neonatal Care part 1
- Contemporary Issues in Neonatal Practice

Completion of these two modules confers a Post Graduate Certificate Neonatal Practice and expert neonatal nurse status.

If further study is planned, route and module choices are made depending on individual requirements:

- Students who plan to exit with a Post Graduate Diploma Neonatal Practice and intend to practice as a clinical specialist will undertake option modules offered by the school relating to quality improvement and change management, or leadership and contemporary issues or research.
- Students who plan to exit with a Post Graduate Diploma Advanced Neonatal Practice and practice as an Advanced Neonatal Nurse Practitioner will undertake modules in the 'Theory and Practice of Neonatal Care part 2 and Supplementary and Independent Prescribing'.
- Students who plan to exit with a Post Graduate Diploma Neonatal Practice with Education and record this teaching qualification with the Nursing and Midwifery Council will undertake three modules in teaching and learning.

Having successfully completed the modules required in any of the three routes, the student may choose to undertake a Dissertation module to be eligible for an award of MSc Neonatal Practice, MSc Advanced Neonatal Practice, or MSc Neonatal Practice with Education.

These are exciting educational developments, not least because the SCQF level 11 neonatal-specific modules have online theoretical components, fitting with the School's ethos and the requirements of the neonatal units. The development of learning materials for all modules has been undertaken using a team approach. This allows for a collaborative approach between academics and clinicians to development where each person's skills, knowledge and attributes can enhance the quality of the materials.

The first intake to the new programmes was in September 2010 with 17 students from across

Scotland registering for the Special Care Neonatal Nursing module at SCQF level 10 and three students for the SCQF level 8 version of the module. There were 14 students who registered for the MSc Neonatal Practice suite, with the majority choosing the Advanced Neonatal Practice programme.

Module evaluation by students will be encouraged and a first year review of all programmes will be undertaken. All neonatal nursing education must be dynamic allowing for necessary ongoing updating and changes to be made as required.

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