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Referring to the NMC

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The name of the organisation, when included within text, must always be written as the 'Nursing and Midwifery Council'.

We don't use the ampersand (&) in text, only in our logo

Use pronouns like 'we' or 'us' to refer to the NMC or our departments - it helps us to avoid appearing cold and distant.

Don't use 'us' or 'we' when you're referring to decisions made by our Council.

Note, we 'protect' the public, rather than 'safeguard' it.

People on the register

We refer to people on the register as 'nurses, midwives and nursing associates' not 'registrants'.

Don't use 'practitioners' or 'members'. Use 'those on our register' or 'anyone on our register' for more variety when writing.

Don't refer to nurses, midwives and nursing associates as 'she' or 'her' or 'he' or 'him' - use 'they' instead.

Style specifics

Last Updated: 16/11/2020

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Capital letters

Avoid capital letters where they're not needed, and don't use them if you're in doubt. Email addresses are all in lower case.

We do capitalise 'the Code' (but not 'the') and 'our Council'. This is to give these two fundamentally important things appropriate emphasis.

Job titles

Job titles take initial capitals ('Director of Professional Regulation'), but job roles do not (such as 'the directors met...', 'the nurses spoke to their manager').

Andrea Sutcliffe's title is always 'Chief Executive and Registrar' never just 'Chief Executive' or 'CEO'. However, you can refer to the role of 'Registrar' independently when talking about fitness to practise and registrations processes.

Titles of forms, events, projects or processes

These are usually written in lower case. For example, refer to the 'revalidation project', our 'fit for purpose review', and 'annual performance reviews' and so on.

However, if the title is a unique phrase or could create confusion it should be capitalised. An example of where it would be better to capitalise for clarity would be the 'Rising Together mentoring scheme'.

Titles of legislation

Acts of Parliament and other pieces of legislation take initial capitals for each word but not italics, and should always include the year. So, for example: "The NMC was established under the Nursing and Midwifery Order 2001. The order sets out our powers..."

Titles of publications

Use an initial capital letter followed by all lower case. Use a colon before subtitles, then a second initial capital. For example, Raising concerns: Guidance for nurses and midwives (NMC, 2010). Write the author and year of publication in brackets. If the first word in a publication is 'A' or 'The', then capitalise the second word as well.

Avoid using NMC in the title of a document. For example this is our House style guide, not the NMC house style

guide. For subsequent references to the publication, you can use a shortened version of the title, without capital letters or italics, for example "this guide should be referred to when writing any publication".

Organisations

Organisation names usually have initial capitals, for example the 'Nursing and Midwifery Council' or the 'Department of Health and Social Care'. Political parties, for example the 'Labour Party', use initial capitals, and always use an initial capital for 'Parliament'.

When referring specifically to 'the Government' (for example, when the Government decides its policy'), use a capital 'G'. However, when referring to government in general (for example, 'national and local government'), or as an adjective (for example, 'many government departments'), use a lower case 'g'.

Acronyms and abbreviations

Avoid acronyms and abbreviations if they just add to the jargon.

If an acronym will be useful to avoid repeating a frequently written phrase, write the name in full the first time, followed by the acronym. For example, 'Royal College of Nursing (RCN)'. However, do not define an acronym in this way in a heading. Write 'Royal College of Nursing' in the heading, then 'Royal College of Nursing (RCN)' the first time you use it in the text below the heading.

If you won't be using the name again in the document, there's no need to include the acronym too. For example, if you're writing a short paragraph and will only mention Department of Health and Social Care once, don't write Department of Health and Social Care (DHSC) -- simply write Department of Health and Social Care.

If you say the acronym as a word, spell it as one, with an initial capital, such as 'Trim', 'Pin' and so on.

Don't use a full-stop after abbreviations (Dr, Mrs, Mr) or after times, weights and measurements.

Don't use ampersands when writing text, except in NMC logo.

Preferred spellings

- Registrable not registerable.
- Adviser not advisor.
- Email not e-mail.
- Fetus or fetal, rather than foetus or foetal.
- Directors group not Directors' group.
- Benefiting and benefited not benefitting or benefitted
- Use -ise ending to words, not -ize. For example, 'organisation', not 'organization'.
- 'Paediatrics' and 'paediatrician', not 'pediatrics'.
- Use 'judgement'; and 'acknowledgment'.
- 'Percent' should be written in full when used in body text, however '%' can be used in graphs, charts and tables.
- An attachment to a paper is an 'annexe', not an 'annex' or 'appendix'.

Words and phrases to avoid or take care with

- The word 'patient' should only be used in specific circumstances. Generally it's better to use phrases like 'members of the public' or 'people who use services'. This is particularly important when talking about midwifery, as there are far fewer 'patients' in that setting.
- Service users - while it's fine to say 'people who use services' it's not fine to say 'service users'. It takes away from the fact they're people first.
- 'Putting people at the heart' - no-one wants to be 'put' anywhere. They want to be at the centre like it's a natural thing. So it's fine to say, 'People are at the heart of everything we do' but not, 'We put people at the heart of everything we do'.
- When talking about settings where nurses work, we should always refer to 'social care' too. For example, refer to 'Health and social care professionals' not just 'Healthcare professionals'.
- FtP - this was an acronym for the former Fitness to Practise directorate. When writing about the process, or

a person's fitness to practise, it's better to write this in full using initial lower case letters ('fitness to practise'). This is more important when writing for an external reader. Internally, FtP is fine to use.

- When we talk about the professional groups we regulate we should always reference nursing associates in England.
- We use gender neutral terms. Always use 'they' or 'their', not 'he/she' or 'his/her'.
- The words 'rules', 'standards', 'guidance' and 'advice' all have specific meanings in our legislation, and should only be used in line with these specific meanings.
- We use the word 'must' when referring to requirements in our rules and standards, and the word 'should' when referring to guidance we produce.
- 'Vulnerable people' or 'vulnerable' – this is a loaded term that can bring up notions of weakness, victimhood, dependency and exclusion. We only use it with great care and not as a synonym for people with disabilities. Use more accurate and meaningful phrases instead that describe the specific vulnerability in its particular situation and setting.
- The word 'supervision' can mean clinical supervision, statutory supervision or something more general.
- 'Committed suicide' - this outdated phrase comes from a time when suicide was considered a crime that a person had committed. Instead, say, 'Took their own life'.
- Avoid ambiguous phrases like 'reaching out'.
- e.g. or eg - You should use 'for example' instead.
- i.e. or ie - You should use 'that is' instead.
- etc - You should use 'items such as' before your list, or 'and so on' at the end of your list instead.
- 'practice' is the noun, and 'practise' is the verb.
- 'while' not 'whilst'

Contractions

It's fine to use contractions and they can make it easier for people to understand. Just don't overdo it. Here are some that are fine to use and others that are best avoided because they're harder to read.

Aren't
Can't; Couldn't
Could've; Couldn't've; Should've; Shouldn't've; Would've; Wouldn't've
Didn't; Doesn't; Don't
Hadn't; Hasn't; Haven't
Had've
I'd; She'd; He'd; They'd; Who'd
It'd
I'm; I've; She's; He's; They're; They've; Who'd
I'll; She'll; He'll; They'll; It'll; Who'll
Let's
That's; That'll

That'd
There's
There'd; There'll; There're
Wasn't; Weren't
What's
What'll
You'll; You'd; You're; You've

Numbers

Write out numbers one to nine, and use numerals from 10 upwards. Avoid starting a sentence with a number – rephrase the sentence instead. For example, '18,370 professionals joined our register last year' might become, 'A total of 18,370 professionals joined our register last year.'

Use a comma only when writing numbers of five digits or more (1000 but 10,000).

Write London phone numbers with the correct dialling code of 020, never 0207. So, our number is 020 7637 7181. Mobiles are five numbers, followed by six, so 07766 114703.

Times and dates

Dates should be written in the format 21 July 2020. Write times in the 24 hours format, with a colon separator, for example 09:30 or 17:00.

Time and date ranges should be written 21–22 January 2020, or 13:30–16:00, using an en dash with no spaces. To write an en dash, press 'Ctrl' and the 'minus' on the number pad on your keyboard. Note the difference between a hyphen (-) and an en dash (–).

URLs

Hyperlink website URLs in text when possible. For example: '[Visit the NMC website](https://www.nmc.org.uk)' not 'Visit the NMC website at <https://www.nmc.org.uk>'.

Punctuation

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Hyphenation

Use hyphens only where needed.

Use where the meaning would be ambiguous, for example, re-creation/recreation, re-sign/resign. Also, use where two or more words form an adjective or adverb, for example, 'ill-prepared report', 'long-term solution', 'decision-making body'. Therefore, you would write "I met John face to face", and "John and I had a face-to-face meeting."

Don't use a hyphen with adverbs ending in --ly, for example, 'wholly owned' should not be hyphenated. In tables, use an en dash (–) instead of a hyphen (-) when denoting the number 0 or blank text.

The following should appear as single words: caseload, cooperate, coordinate, healthcare, helpline, reapply, roadshow, timeframe, whistleblowing, wellbeing, workstream.

These should appear as two words: case law, high quality, lay person, record keeping.

Additionally, we use: post-registration, pre-registration, striking-off, decision-making, practice-related and risk-based.

Slashes

Don't put spaces on either side of a slash, for example, 'either/or' not 'either / or'.

Quotation marks

Use double "quotation marks" only when quoting someone and 'single quotation marks' for points which you wish to emphasise in a special way within the text. However, use italics if this is more appropriate for the type of emphasis you want to make. Also, use single quotation marks for quotes within quotes.

Ellipses

There's no space between ellipses...when used in a sentence. An ellipsis should only be three dots.

Brackets

Use round brackets () throughout. Only use square brackets [] only within round brackets. (If the whole sentence is within brackets, the full stop should appear within the brackets.)

If only part of the sentence is in brackets, the full stop should appear outside of the brackets (like in this sentence).

Fonts and format

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Typeface

Use Arial at 12 point in documents. Never use all capitals, never use underline and only use italics for publication titles in body text.

To emphasise text within a document or letter, use italics, but sparingly. If italics isn't appropriate for the context, use single quotation marks.

Text and number alignment

The text of all documents, including text in tables, should be left aligned. Text shouldn't be justified.

Text in tables is 12 point and left aligned. However, you should right align numbers in tables along with the headings over these columns.

Sentence and paragraph spacing

Sentences should be separated by a single space, never a double space. Paragraphs should be separated by a single line space.

Page breaks

When a piece of writing goes over a page, paragraphs can become broken up and headings can come adrift from the paragraphs they describe. It is usually better to move the whole paragraph onto a new page when this happens.

Paragraphs

Ideally paragraphs should be no more than 100–150 words. Use sub-headings to break up long sections of text, if appropriate.

Lists/bullet points

In formal papers sub-points should be numbered, rather than using bullet points. Bullet point lists can be used in informal papers. There are two types of lists we should try to use.

- One in which each point in the list is a complete sentence or paragraph. These lists are usually introduced by a complete sentence. This introductory sentence should end with a full stop (like this list). Each point should start with a capital letter and end with a full stop.
- The other type of list used is to note information that doesn't form a complete sentence. In this case, start the list with an initial lower case letter. You don't need to use semi-colons or 'and' at the end of each because the bullet point itself separates each point. Only the final bullet point should have a full stop at the end, to note the end of the sentence.

Headings

We use the styles list in Word to choose the type of headings we need. These can be found in the 'Home' tab.

For the title of the document (at the very beginning) we use the 'Title' style.

Then for headings we use the 'Heading 1' style, for subheadings we use the 'Heading 2' style, and for subheadings under that we use 'Heading 3' then 'Heading 4' style.

Numbering paragraphs

Avoid use of numbered paragraphs. Sometimes they're necessary in lengthy documents, but in most cases, bullet points will be fine.

In formal documents and minutes, only number the paragraphs, not the headings.

Once you've started using numbered paragraphs, you should keep doing so for all sub-paragraphs (for example 13.1, 13.2), not switch to bullets. Use the 'Numbers' option in the styles list in Word to create numbered paragraphs. (If 'Numbers' isn't an option in the main styles list, click the small expand symbol under 'Change Styles' in the 'Home' tab, then choose 'Numbers'.)

Annexes should be numbered separately from the main text. If the document is long, use a contents page.

Footnotes

Avoid footnotes wherever possible. There are times in lengthy documents where they may be easier for the reader to access the info. If they must be used, keep them as short as possible.

Use Arial at 10 point (remember we use Arial 12 point for our regular typeface).

Footnote numbers within text should be placed after the full-stop if referencing the whole sentence, and after specific words or quotes if these are being referenced (but after any punctuation). If you're using endnotes instead of footnotes, change the 'i' to numbers using the 'Numbers' option.

Document information, headers and footers

Documents should have information about their author and the date they were created in the footer. The format is the author's name and Trim reference (if applicable) on the left, the date in the centre, and the page numbers on the right hand side.

References

We use the Harvard style for quotation and referencing in formal documents that require proper reference lists. See Trim: 595692.

Annexes

An annexe must be created as a separate document from the one that refers to it. You should include the Trim reference for the annexe the first time you mention it in the main document. Please follow the template.

Letters and emails

For letters, the font is left aligned at 12 point throughout, including headings. Don't use commas at the end of address lines, salutations (for example 'Dear Mr Smith') or sign off (for example 'Yours sincerely').

For emails, the default font (Calibri, 11pt) is fine, including for headings, which can be bold. Always left align. Use the standard Outlook settings for bullets and numbering. Consider your audience – signing off with 'Kind regards' or 'Yours sincerely' may be the most appropriate.