
The role of the standards of proficiency for midwives

A resource for directors and heads of midwifery

Original publication July 2024



Contents

Introduction	3
Standards of proficiency	4
Revalidation	5
Maternity concerns	6
Annexe 1	7
Annexe 2	19



Introduction

This supporting information has been developed for you as a Director/Head of Midwifery to use within your Trust or Health board. Together with your executive, you can use it to consider on how far the standards of proficiency have been embedded in your service. It will support you to:

- ensure every midwife in your service have adopted the standards of proficiency in their practice
- use the Standards of proficiency as a gap analysis to identify your midwives' continuing professional needs
- consider the role of the Standards of proficiency to address the recommendations raised in recent maternity safety reports.

In 2017 we started the process to develop these standards of proficiency which included extensive consultation and input from our stakeholders across the UK. We held a public consultation in spring 2019 and were pleased to have more than 1,600 responses, including over a 1,000 from the public. We listened closely to the feedback we received and incorporated positive changes to the standards as a result.

Published in November 2019, the standards were updated to reflect the changes taking place in society and health care, and what they mean for current and future midwifery practice. It's important to understand the Standards of proficiency for midwives because they:

- reflect what the public, women and families can expect midwives to know and be able to do in order to provide the best and safest care possible
- represent the knowledge, skills and attributes that all midwives must demonstrate at the point of registration
- identify continuing professional developments needs during the revalidation preparation process
- provide a benchmark for midwives educated outside the UK wishing to join the register
- provide a benchmark for those who plan to return to practice after a period out of practice.

Standards of proficiency

The standards of proficiency have six domains

- 1 Being an accountable, autonomous, professional midwife.
- 2 Safe and effective midwifery care: promoting and providing continuity of care and carer.
- 3 Universal care for all women and newborn infants.
- 4 Additional care for women and newborn infants with complications.
- 5 Promoting excellence: the midwife as colleague, scholar and leader.
- 6 The midwife as skilled practitioner.

These standards are part of the suite of Standards for education and training which also includes:

[Part 1: Standards framework for nursing and midwifery education.](#)

[Part 2: Standards for student supervision and assessment.](#)

[Part 3: Standards for pre-registration midwifery programmes.](#)

Reading all documents together provides a complete picture of:

- what midwives need to know and be able to do, by the time they register with us
- what approved education institutions (AEIs) and their practice learning partners must provide when delivering education and training courses.

Revalidation

Revalidation is a way we can make sure that the people on our register continue to have the skills and knowledge required to provide kind, safe and effective care.

When a midwife revalidates, the standards can be used to:

- consider what knowledge and skills they need to practise safely
- reflect on their practice and identify any further learning
- help plan their CPD.

In addition, our [Practising as a midwife in the UK](#) document provides information for midwives, women and families, and anyone else with an interest in midwifery. While it is not a regulatory standard, it describes our approach to the regulation of midwives and should be read in conjunction with the Code and other standards and guidance.

It contains sections relating to each of our statutory functions:

- the education and training of midwives
- registration and revalidation
- standards and guidance.



Maternity concerns

Recent reports into some maternity services have made it clear that women and families receiving care were not listened to or treated with compassion and there was a clear breakdown in effective teamwork.

Our evidence-based Standards of proficiency for midwives (based on the Framework for Quality Maternal and Newborn Care (QMNC) from the Lancet Series on Midwifery), support midwifery professionals to provide safe, effective and kind care to women, babies and families. This includes acting with compassion, working as part of a multi-disciplinary team and speaking up when things go wrong.

These standards must be implemented across education and practice. Maternity services must be properly resourced to support the implementation of these standards including the provision of professional development for staff. Those responsible for commissioning and managing maternity services need to take this seriously.

The standards are there to support midwives to deliver the safest, person-centred care for women and babies. This includes knowing when things are going wrong and making sure the right actions are taken in response. To ensure these standards are fully implemented in education and practice, maternity services across the country must be properly resourced, with sustained investment in continuing professional development.

Key question:

How do we know that every midwife has adopted the Standards of proficiency for midwives (2019) in their scope of practice?

We have mapped the actions from the Ockenden report and the East Kent report to our Standards of proficiency for midwives (annexe 1). We found that the standards align with the actions and recommendations. The standards can be used to undertake a gap analysis of your maternity service, and support development as well as determine your professional development needs of midwives and the maternity team (annexe 2).

Annexe 1

Mapping of NMC Standards of proficiency for midwives to: 'Reading the Signals': the report of the independent investigation led by Dr Bill Kirkup on maternal and neonatal services in East Kent (2022).

and

Ockenden Report - Final. Findings, conclusions and essential actions from the independent review of maternity services at the Shrewsbury and Telford Hospital NHS Trust (2022).

Please note: The different styles of report presentation has meant that a slightly different approach was required to map the Standards of proficiency for midwives.'

Recommendation 2 – East Kent

Those responsible for undergraduate, postgraduate and continuing clinical education be commissioned to report on how compassionate care can best be embedded into practice and sustained through lifelong learning.

Standards of proficiency for midwives

1.8	demonstrate an understanding of and the ability to challenge discriminatory behaviours
1.9	provide and promote non-discriminatory, respectful, compassionate, and kind care and take account of any need for adjustments
1.11	use effective authentic and meaningful communication skills and strategies with women, newborn infants, partners and with colleagues
1.12	develop and maintain trusting, respectful, kind and compassionate person-centred relationships with women, their partners and families, and with colleagues
6.1.4	make appropriate use of respectful, caring and kind, open and closed questioning
6.1.6	respond to women's questions and concerns with kindness and compassion
6.1.7	avoid discriminatory behaviour and identify signs of unconscious bias in self and others
6.1.15	maintain effective communication techniques with interdisciplinary and multiagency teams and colleagues in challenging and emergency situations
6.2.1	build and maintain trusting, kind and respectful professional relationships
6.2.2	convey respect, compassion and sensitivity when supporting women, their partners and families who are emotionally vulnerable and/or distressed

Recommendation 3 – East Kent

Relevant bodies, including the Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists, the Royal College of Midwives and the Royal College of Paediatrics and Child Health, be charged with reporting on how teamworking in maternity and neonatal care can be improved, with particular reference to establishing common purpose, objectives and training from the outset.

Standards of proficiency for midwives

5.5	understand the relationship between safe staffing levels, effective team working, appropriate skill mix, and the safety and quality of care
5.8	demonstrate understanding of why interdisciplinary team working and learning matters, and the importance of participating in a range of interdisciplinary learning opportunities
5.9	contribute to team reflection activities to promote improvements in practice and service
5.13.1	individual and team reflection problem solving and planning
5.13.2	effective and timely communication with colleagues and senior staff
5.14	demonstrate how to recognise signs of vulnerability in themselves or their colleagues and the actions required to minimise risks to health or well-being of self and others
5.15	demonstrate awareness of the need to manage the personal and emotional challenges of work and workload, uncertainty and change; and incorporate compassionate self-care into their personal and professional life
5.19	safely and effectively lead and manage midwifery care, demonstrating appropriate prioritising, delegation, and assignment of care responsibilities to others involved in providing care
5.20	demonstrate positive leadership and role modelling, including the ability to guide, support, motivate and interact with other members of the interdisciplinary team

Recommendation 3 – East Kent

Relevant bodies, including the Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists, the Royal College of Midwives and the Royal College of Paediatrics and Child Health, be charged with reporting on how teamworking in maternity and neonatal care can be improved, with particular reference to establishing common purpose, objectives and training from the outset.

6.1.13	communicate effectively with interdisciplinary and multiagency teams and colleagues in all settings to support the woman's needs, views, preferences and decisions
6.1.15	maintain effective communication techniques and interdisciplinary and multiagency teams and colleagues in challenging and emergency situations
6.2.1	build and maintain trusting, kind and respectful professional relationships
6.2.8	communicate complex information regarding a woman's care needs in a clear, concise manner to interdisciplinary and multiagency colleagues and teams
6.2.9	consult with, seek help from, and refer to other health and social care professionals both in routine and emergency situations
6.2.10	demonstrate skills of effective challenge, de-escalation and remaining calm, considering and taking account of the views and decisions made by others
6.83	work with interdisciplinary and multiagency colleagues, advocacy groups and stakeholders to promote quality improvement
6.84	work with interdisciplinary and multiagency colleagues to implement change management
6.85	when managing, supervising, supporting, teaching and delegating care responsibilities to other members of the midwifery and interdisciplinary team and students
6.89	demonstrate engagement in ongoing midwifery and interdisciplinary professional development

Recommendation 1 – Ockenden

Enhanced safety

Safety in maternity units across England must be strengthened by increasing partnerships between trusts and within local networks.

Neighbouring trusts must work collaboratively to ensure that local investigations into Serious Incidents (SIs) have regional and Local Maternity System (LMS) oversight.

Key themes in Standards of proficiency for midwives

- The physical, psychological, social, cultural, and spiritual safety of women and newborn infants.
- Enabling and advocating for the views, preferences, and decisions of women, partners and families.
- Interdisciplinary and multiagency working.
- Ensuring that women, partners and families have all the information needed to fully inform their decisions.
- Anticipating, preventing, and responding to complications and additional care needs.

References

Domain 2	Safe and effective midwifery care: promoting and proving continuity of care and carer
Domain 6	Assess, plan, provide, and evaluate care in partnership with women, referring to and collaborating with other health and social care professionals as needed
6.19	Assess, plan and provide care that promotes and protects physical, psychological, social, cultural and spiritual safety for all women and newborn infants... recognising the diversity of individual circumstances

Recommendation 2 – Ockenden

Listening to women and families

Maternity services must ensure that women and their families are listened to with their voices heard.

Key themes in Standards of proficiency for midwives

- Communication and relationship building, working in partnership with women.
- Enabling and advocating for the views, preferences, and decisions of women, partners and families.
- Ensuring that women, partners and families have all the information needed to fully inform their decisions.
- The importance of physical, psychological, social, cultural, and spiritual factors.

The role of the midwife is to provide skilled, knowledgeable, respectful, and compassionate care for all women, newborn infants and their families. Midwives work across the continuum from pre-pregnancy, pregnancy, labour and birth, postpartum, and the early weeks of newborn infants' life.

They work in partnership with women, enabling their views, preferences, and decisions, and helping to strengthen their capabilities. (The Future Midwife: the role and scope of the midwife in the 21st century page 4).

Care tailored to women's circumstances and needs (The Framework for Quality Maternal and Newborn health from The Lancet Series on Midwifery page 10).

References

Domain 1	Respecting human rights, they work in partnership with women, enabling their views, preferences, and decisions, and helping to strengthen their capabilities. They promote safe and effective care, drawing on the best available evidence at all times. They communicate effectively and with kindness and compassion.
1.13	Demonstrate the ability to always work in partnership with women, basing care on individual women's needs, views, preferences, and decisions, and working to strengthen women's own capabilities to care for themselves and their newborn infant.
6.80	Work in partnership with the woman, her partner and family as appropriate, and in collaboration with the interdisciplinary and/or multiagency team, to plan and implement compassionate, respectful, empathetic, dignified midwifery care for women and/or partners and families.

Recommendation 3 – Ockenden

Staff training and working together

Staff who work together must train together.

Key themes in Standards of proficiency for midwives

- Interdisciplinary and multiagency working.
- Ensuring that women, partners and families have all the information needed to fully inform their decisions.
- Taking personal responsibility for ongoing learning and development.

References

3.3	Provide students with learning opportunities to enable them to achieve the proficiencies related to interdisciplinary and multiagency team working (from Pre-registration Programme standards)
Domain 5	<p>Midwives make a critically important contribution to the quality and safety of maternity care, avoiding harm and promoting positive outcomes and experiences. They play a leading role in enabling effective team working, and promoting continuous improvement.</p> <p>Midwives recognise their own strengths, as well as the strengths of others. They take responsibility for engaging in continuing professional development and know how they can support and supervise others, including students and colleagues.</p>
4.9	Demonstrate the ability to work in collaboration with the interdisciplinary and multiagency teams while continuing to provide midwifery care needed by women and newborn infants
5.3	Demonstrate knowledge and understanding of how to work with women, partners, families, advocacy groups, and colleagues to develop effective improvement strategies for quality and safety, sharing feedback and learning from positive and adverse outcomes and experiences
5.4	Understand and apply the principles of human factors, environmental factors, and strength based approaches when working with colleagues

Recommendation 3 – Ockenden (cont'd)

Staff training and working together

Staff who work together must train together.

5.5	Understand the relationship between safe staffing levels, effective team working, appropriate skill mix, and the safety and quality of care
5.6	Recognise risks to public protection and quality of care and know how to escalate concerns in line with local/national escalation guidance and policies
5.7	Demonstrate the ability to act safely in situations where there is an absence of good quality evidence
5.8	Demonstrate understanding of why interdisciplinary team working and learning matters, and the importance of participating in a range of interdisciplinary learning opportunities
5.9	Contribute to team reflection activities to promote improvements in practice and service
5.20	Demonstrate positive leadership and role modelling, including the ability to guide, support, motivate, and interact with other members of the interdisciplinary team
6.1.13	Communicate effectively with interdisciplinary and multiagency teams and colleagues in all settings to support the woman's needs, views, preferences, and decisions
6.1.14	Maintain effective and kind communication techniques with women, partners and families in challenging and emergency situations
6.44	Demonstrate the ability to consult, collaborate with, and refer to, interdisciplinary and multiagency colleagues as appropriate

Recommendation 4 – Ockenden

Managing complex pregnancy

There must be robust pathways in place for managing women with complex pregnancies. Through the development of links with the tertiary level Maternal Medicine Centre there must be agreement reached on the criteria for those cases to be discussed and/or referred to a maternal medicine specialist centre.

Key themes in Standards of proficiency for midwives

- Anticipating, preventing, and responding to complications and additional care needs.
- Understanding and working to mitigate health and social inequalities.
- Interdisciplinary and multiagency working.
- Communication and relationship building, working in partnership with women.
- Ensuring that women, partners and families have all the information needed to fully inform their decisions.
- Evidence-based care and the importance of staying up-to-date with current knowledge.
- Providing continuity of care and carer.

References

2.5	Demonstrate the ability to provide continuity of midwifery carer across the whole continuum of care and in diverse settings for women and newborn infants with and without complications and additional care needs
4.1	Demonstrate knowledge and understanding that the complications and additional care needs of women, newborn infants, partners and families may relate to physical, psychological, social, cultural, and spiritual factors
4.3	Demonstrate knowledge and understanding of pre-existing, current and emerging complications and additional care needs that affect the woman, including their potential impact on the woman's health and well-being; and the ability to recognise and provide any care, support or referral that may be required as a result of any such complications or needs
4.8	Use evidence-based, best practice approaches for the firstline management of complications and additional care needs of the woman, fetus and/or newborn infant; including support, referral, interdisciplinary and multiagency team working, escalation and follow-up, as needed

Recommendation 5 – Ockenden

Risk assessment throughout pregnancy

Staff must ensure that women undergo a risk assessment at each contact throughout the pregnancy pathway.

Key themes in Standards of proficiency for midwives

- Anticipating, preventing, and responding to complications and additional care needs.
- Enabling and advocating for the views, preferences, and decisions of women, partners and families.
- Working across the whole continuum of care and in all settings, and understanding the woman's and newborn infant's whole maternity journey.
- Providing continuity of care and carer.
- Ensuring that women, partners and families have all the information needed to fully inform their decisions.

References

1.24	Understand the importance of effective record keeping, and maintain consistent, complete, clear, accurate, secure, and timely records to ensure an account of all care given is available for review by the woman and by all professionals involved in care
3.25	Use evidence-based, best practice approaches and work in partnership with the woman to provide care for the woman and the newborn infant across the continuum that optimises normal processes, manages common symptoms and problems, and anticipates and prevents complications, drawing on the findings of assessment, screening and care planning
6.17	Demonstrate the ability to involve women in assessment, planning and evaluating their care
6.69	Recognise, assess, plan, and respond to pre-existing and emerging complications and additional care needs for women and newborn infants, collaborating with, consulting and referring to the interdisciplinary and multiagency team as appropriate
6.83.4	Contribute to audit and risk management

Recommendation 6 – Ockenden

Monitor fetal wellbeing

All maternity services must appoint a dedicated Lead Midwife and Lead Obstetrician both with demonstrated expertise to focus on and champion best practice in fetal monitoring.

Key themes in Standards of proficiency for midwives

- Evidence-based care and the importance of staying up-to-date with current knowledge.
- Anticipating, preventing, and responding to complications and additional care needs.
- Interdisciplinary and multiagency working.
- Taking personal responsibility for ongoing learning and development.

References

3.23	In partnership with the woman, use evidence-based, best practice approaches to plan and carry out ongoing integrated assessment, individualised care planning and evaluation for both the woman and the newborn infant, based on sound knowledge and understanding of normal processes and recognition of deviations from these
6.32	Undertake auscultation of the fetal heart, using Pinard stethoscope and technical devices as appropriate including cardiotocograph (CTG), accurately interpreting and recording all findings including fetal heart patterns
6.57 and 6.57.1-7	Accurately assess, interpret and record the health and wellbeing of the woman and the fetus during labour for: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• the woman’s behaviour, appearance, and emotional needs• the need for mobility and position changes• effectiveness of contractions and progress in labour• fetal well-being and the need to respond to problems• the need to expedite birth when necessary• the need for an episiotomy• recognising the position of the umbilical cord during birth and the need to respond to problems

Recommendation 7 - Ockenden

Informed consent

All Trusts must ensure women have ready access to accurate information to enable their informed choice of intended place of birth and mode of birth, including maternal choice for caesarean delivery.

Key themes in Standards of proficiency for midwives

- Ensuring that women, partners and families have all the information needed to fully inform their decisions.
- Communication and relationship building, working in partnership with women.
- Enabling and advocating for the human rights of women and children.
- Enabling and advocating for the views, preferences, and decisions of women, partners and families.

Practitioners who combine clinical knowledge and skills with interpersonal and cultural competence (The Framework for Quality Maternal and Newborn Health from The Lancet Series on Midwifery - pg 7)

References

1.1	Understand and act in accordance with The Code: Professional standards of practice and behaviour for nurses, midwives and nursing associates, and fulfil all registration requirements
1.20	Understand the importance of, and demonstrate the ability to seek, informed consent from women, both for herself and her newborn infant
1.21	Understand and respect the woman's right to decline consent, and demonstrate the ability to provide appropriate care and support in these circumstances
Domain 6	They combine clinical knowledge, understanding, skills, and interpersonal and cultural competence, to provide quality care that is tailored to individual circumstances
6.22	Provide evidence-based information on all aspects of health and well-being of the woman and newborn infant to enable informed decision-making by the woman, and partner and family as appropriate
6.53	Use evidence-based information to enable women, their partners and families to make individualised care choices and decisions

Annexe 2

Mapping tool for your service contribution to the education of student midwives

	Score
A What is the level of understanding in your maternity service of the Quality Maternal and Newborn Care Framework (QMNC) (the Lancet series in midwifery) and the importance of the midwife providing universal care to all women and co-ordinating care for women with additional needs?	
B What level of opportunity is there for student midwives in your maternity service to provide continuity of care for all women and newborn infants?	
C What level of opportunity is there for student midwives in your setting to care for diverse populations across a range of settings?	
D What level of opportunity is there for student midwives in your practice setting to become proficient in the full systematic physical examination of the newborn infant?	

Score legend

- 1** Midwives have no understanding and do not practise at this level/student midwives have no opportunity to meet this proficiency in this practice placement setting.
- 2** Midwives have little understanding and do not practise at this level/student midwives have little opportunity to meet this proficiency in this practice placement setting.
- 3** Midwives have some understanding and do sometimes practise in this way/student midwives occasionally have some opportunities to meet this proficiency in this practice placement setting.
- 4** Midwives have a good understanding and mostly practise in this way/student midwives have regular opportunities to meet this proficiency in this practice placement setting.
- 5** Midwives have excellent understanding and can practise this way/student midwives have frequent opportunities to meet this proficiency in this practice placement.

Now that you have your score this will facilitate further discussion with your Trust or Health Board Executive.

What we do

Our vision is safe, effective and kind nursing and midwifery practice that improves everyone's health and wellbeing. As the independent regulator of more than 826,000 nurses and midwives in the UK and nursing associates in England, we have an important role to play in making this vision a reality.

We're here to protect the public by upholding high professional nursing and midwifery standards, which the public has a right to expect. That's why we're improving the way we regulate, enhancing our support for colleagues, professionals and the public, and working with our partners to influence the future of health and social care.

Our core role is to **regulate**. We set and promote high education and professional standards for nurses and midwives across the UK, and nursing associates in England and quality assure their education programmes. We maintain the integrity of the register of those eligible to practise. And we investigate concerns about professionals – something that affects very few people on our register every year.

To regulate well, we **support** nursing and midwifery professionals and the public. We create resources and guidance that are useful throughout professionals' careers, helping them to deliver our standards in practice and address challenges they face. We work collaboratively so everyone feels engaged and empowered to shape our work.

We work with our partners to address common concerns, share our data, insight and learning, to **influence** and inform decision-making and help drive improvement in health and social care for people and communities.

23 Portland Place,
London W1B 1PZ
+44 20 7637 7181

www.nmc.org.uk

 @nmcnews  @nmcuk


**Nursing &
Midwifery
Council**