

CoDH briefing: Proposals for the development of a new 'nursing associate' role

Introduction

On 28 January 2016 Health Education England (HEE) launched a consultation on the development of a new health and social care role, provisionally given the name 'nursing associate'. The consultation [Building capacity to care and capability to treat – a new team member for health and social care](#) sets out some of the issues that will need to be examined and resolved in order to make this new role a reality for the health and social care sector.

This briefing paper introduces HEE's consultation document and explores some of the most important issues in relation to the proposals, particularly those that impact directly on the university sector and on the education and training of nurses and midwives.

Throughout this document and our draft response we have adopted the term nursing associate. However we do not necessarily endorse the term and welcome members' views on what the new role should be called.

Proposals for the development of a new 'nursing associate' role (Eng)

Purpose: This briefing provides an overview of proposals to introduce a new 'nursing associate' role as outlined in the Health Education England (HEE) consultation *Building capacity to care and capability to treat – a new team member for health and social care*.

Publication Date:
28 January 2016

Respond by: The HEE consultation on the proposals is open until 11 March 2016. Contributions to the Council's response should be sent to [Fleur Nielsen](#) by 4 March

Relevance for CoDH members: The Council is a critical stakeholder in the development of this new role. The nursing associate proposals apply to England only. However, the proposals may indirectly have implications for Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland

CoDH contact for more information:
[Fleur Nielsen](#)

Background

The Shape of Caring review of the education and training of registered nurses and care assistants recommended in its *Raising the Bar* report of March 2015 that a newly defined care role should be developed to “act as a bridge between the unregulated care assistant workforce and the registered nursing workforce”. The stated aim of this proposal is both to help the NHS respond to pressing demographic and workforce challenges and to improve the career structure for those care assistants that wish to develop their skills. HEE is explicit that in addition to recognising higher level skills the proposed role:

“will provide a new route in to pre-registration nurse education for those that wish to achieve registration and will contribute to the ever important widening participation agenda”. [Paragraph 3.3]

The intention is to allow for the recognition of prior learning if nursing associates wish to become Registered Nurses. This is seen as being one step on a newly defined career progression pathway running from health care assistant to consultant nurse. It is therefore linked both to the wider Shape of Caring recommendations and to a lesser extent to the Nursing and Midwifery Council’s ongoing review into pre-registration education standards.

The consultation document says:

“In line with government policy the proposed academic and vocational pathway for the development of this new role is through the Higher Apprenticeship framework that utilises a Foundation Degree or equivalent Level 5 qualification with its structure”. [Paragraph 5.5]

The consultation suggests that the apprenticeship delivery model provides the work based learning “that will be key to ensuring both the academic and practical components of learning for the proposed Nursing Associate role”.

It is important to understand the link between the nursing associate agenda and the Government’s targets for apprenticeships. The Government is concurrently consulting on plans to deliver three million apprenticeships by 2020. It is proposed that all public bodies with 250 or more employees in England will have a target of a minimum 2.3% apprenticeship starts each year based on the headcount of employees. As large employers, all NHS Trusts will be included in this initiative. The nursing associate programme will be one way Trusts can deliver against their apprenticeship targets.

Scope of the consultation and the Council of Deans of Health's response

The nursing associate proposals apply to England only. However, one significant underlying issue with the consultation is that the proposals may indirectly have implications for Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland, specifically through the question of regulation.

While support workers are found working to allied health professionals and midwives, the nursing associate role is

“designed to function in a uni-professional capacity – with a clear, core focus of supporting services in the delivery of expert nursing care” [paragraph 4.7].

We may wish to question the logic of a uni-professional focus in the context of the multiplicity of existing roles and the agenda for integration across health and social care.

The consultation document says that nursing associates will need to be adaptable to work in varied care settings and use academic and practical education to cover a range of topics. Very little detail is given and the consultation invites comments on the knowledge the role will require.

For such a significant and complex policy change, HEE's consultation is surprisingly brief. Over 16 pages it briefly introduces a number of areas for consideration, most of which relate to practice and regulation rather than explicitly to education and training. It poses eight questions/topics for respondents to address:

1. What are the most important issues that need to be addressed in deciding whether to establish a new care role working between a Care Assistant with a Care Certificate and a Registered Nurse?
2. What contribution to patient care do you think such a role would have across different care settings?
3. Do you have any comments on the proposed principles of practice?
4. Do you have any comments on the aspects of the service the proposed role would cover?
5. Do you have any comments on the proposed list of knowledge this role requires?
6. What do you think the title of this role should be?
7. Please comment on what regulation or oversight is required for this role and which body should be responsible
8. The consultation would welcome any further views.

The deadline for responses to the consultation is 11 March 2016. Over the course of the consultation the Council will discuss and shape a full response to these proposals, focusing in particular on the implications for higher education institutions (HEIs). There are several important matters not raised in the consultation which must be resolved by HEE and partners before the new role can come into being. The Council is a critical stakeholder in the development of this new role.

When we respond to this consultation our response will be guided by principles previously discussed by our members in relation to this sort of new support role:

- New roles should not be a pretext for compromising on safe staffing and patient safety;
- People who use services need clarity over who is caring for them;
- Developments must recognise the wide range of roles that already exist within the 'support worker' family and build upon the education already provided by HEIs (and others);
- Support workers' contribution to care – at all levels - should be valued in its own right not just as a 'stepping stone' into registered professions;
- The matter of regulation must be resolved satisfactorily, with careful consideration given to the potential implications for the whole of the UK.

A first draft of our consultation response has been developed

We welcome comments from our members on the consultation and on our draft response. These should be sent by 4 March to Fleur Nielsen, Head of Policy, fleur.nielsen@cod-health.ac.uk.