



Committed to promoting the development of children's nursing through evidence based information about practice and education

## **Association of British Paediatric Nurses**

### **Background Paper on Children's Nurse Education**

#### **Introduction**

Children's nursing across the UK is a story of evolving care, professionalism, and specialisation since the first formal paediatric nursing programme was set up in 1899 at the London Hospital. It reflects broader changes in medical care, social attitudes towards children<sup>1</sup>, and the development of nursing as a profession.

#### **History**

The first hospital for sick children in the UK was the Hospital for Sick Children, Great Ormond Street, founded in 1852 in London. Alongside this recognition of the specific needs of children Florence Nightingale led a reform of nursing during the 19th century.

The first registered children's nurse was Evelyn Margaret Hughes, who trained at the Birmingham Children's Hospital in England from 1909 to 1912, she registered with the General Nursing Council (GNC) on the supplementary register on the October 28, 1921

By 1923, the General Nursing Council (GNC) began to recognise the need for specialised training for children's nurses. A separate children's nursing qualification was introduced as part of the general nursing curriculum. However, many nurses working in children's hospitals received on-the-job training rather than formal education.

Following the "The Welfare of Children in Hospital" (Platt Report) published in 1959, a series of reforms began to shape children's nursing into a more distinct field during the 1970's. This included the Briggs Report (1972), which led to more structured training and education for nurses, with children's nursing recognised as a distinct area of study.

In 1989 Project 2000 was launched and led the way to nurse training and education to become a degree-based profession with nurse education moving into the university sector.

---

<sup>1</sup> The term child/children is used to describe infants (including neonates), children and young people up to the age of 25 years

Children's nursing education is now integrated into university nursing degree programmes<sup>2</sup>.

The Nursing and Midwifery Council (NMC) oversee standards for education and professional conduct, ensuring that children's nurses are equipped with both the clinical skills and the theoretical knowledge needed to meet the complex needs of infants, children and young people.

### **Nursing and Midwifery Council Role**

The Nursing and Midwifery Council (NMC) sets specific standards and requirements for those seeking registration as a children's nurse to ensure that those nurses are competent, safe, and prepared to provide high-quality care for infants, children and young people.

The key requirements for children's nurse registration are:

Completion of an NMC-approved degree programme in children's nursing. Programmes typically last for three years and must cover the NMC standards of proficiency for nurses, ensuring students develop the skills and knowledge needed for safe and effective practice.

The NMC sets out proficiency standards that all registered nurses must meet. For children's nurses, these standards ensure they are equipped to care for children from birth through adolescence and young adulthood. Key areas include:

- Person-centred care for children and their families.
- Skills in clinical decision-making, observation, and intervention for children.
- Knowledge of developmental stages and the physical, emotional, and mental health needs of children.
- The ability to promote health and prevent illness in children.
- Skills in medicines management tailored to children's specific needs.
- An understanding of the legal, ethical, and professional responsibilities involved in safeguarding children.
- The ability to work collaboratively with families, carers, and other healthcare professionals.

Children's nursing students must complete at least 2,300 practice hours in supervised clinical placements, to gain practical experience working with infants, children and young people in various settings under the supervision of registered nurses.

---

<sup>2</sup> Some universities provide a 4-year Masters level education programme for children's nursing to acquire children's nursing registration and others provide a 4 year children's nursing and children and young people's mental health programme

Ongoing Professional Development: Children's nurses must maintain their registration by meeting NMC revalidation requirements every three years. This includes:

- Completing 35 hours of continuing professional development of which 20 hours must be participatory learning
- 450 practice hours
- Reflecting on how their learning and experiences have improved their practice.
- Gaining feedback from colleagues or patients.
- Providing a health and character declaration and evidence of professional indemnity insurance.

### **Current situation**

Around 59 universities in the UK offer courses in children's nursing in 2024.

There are about 52,000 registered children's nurses in the UK.

### **Sources**

Nursing and Midwifery Council

[A Brief History of the Association of British Paediatric Nurses \(the "Blue Book"\)](#)

November 2024

Copyright ©2024 Association of British Paediatric Nurses. All rights reserved.