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## Sign-off mentor criteria

### Summary

- This circular sets out advice regarding additional options to enable prospective sign-off mentors to achieve sign-off status.
- This circular should be read in conjunction with the *Standards to support learning and assessment in practice* (NMC 2008).
- This advice is effective from the date of this circular.
- This circular does not replace any previous circular.

### Background

- The NMC set the standards of education, training and conduct that nurses and midwives need to deliver high quality healthcare consistently throughout their careers.
- *NMC Standards to support learning and assessment in practice* were introduced in 2006 and became mandatory from September 2007. The second edition was produced in 2008.
- These require that decisions about whether a student has achieved the required standards of proficiency for safe and effective practice for entry to the register must be made by a sign-off mentor. Sign-off mentors are also a requirement for post registration specialist practice programmes, and specialist community public health nursing programmes, and supervisor of midwives programmes.
- From September 2007 nurses or midwives designated to sign off proficiency must meet the criteria listed at section 2.1.3 of the standards.
- All midwifery mentors must meet the additional criteria to be a sign-off mentor.

- There are differences in where sign off is required for nursing and midwifery students. This must be at the end of a programme for nursing, and at progression points as well as at the end of a programme for midwifery.
- Programme and placement providers of both nursing and midwifery programmes have reported difficulties in meeting the NMC criteria for sign-off mentor, specifically the requirement that:

‘... a nurse or midwife designated to sign off proficiency for a particular student at the end of a programme must have been supervised on at least three occasions for signing off proficiency by an existing sign-off mentor or practice teacher.’ (*NMC Standards to support learning and assessment in practice*, section 2.1.3).

### **Additional options for achieving sign-off mentor criteria**

The NMC Professional Practice and Registration Committee have agreed that:

- the requirement for a prospective sign-off mentor to be supervised in signing off students on at least three occasions before they can be designated a sign-off mentor remains unchanged. However:
  - first and second such supervisions may now be effected using a range of methods. These include activities which would test the skills required to sign off students safely, including: simulation, role play, objective structured clinical examination (OSCE) and interactive use of electronic resources. These will be determined locally by programme providers (approved education institutions and their partners) and will be considered by the NMC at programme approval and monitored during annual monitoring visits
  - the final supervision for signing off proficiency must be with an actual student undertaking an NMC approved programme. The alternative methods, such as those referred to in paragraph 3.2, above, are not permitted for this final supervision
  - advice for programme providers on arrangements for first and second supervisions, giving further details of the permitted alternative methods for testing the skills required to sign off students safely will be issued.

## Advice

The purpose of supervised sign off is to enable the prospective sign-off mentor to experience and demonstrate the skills required to safely sign-off a student on an NMC approved programme with the support of an existing sign-off mentor.

The first and second supervised sign off can be achieved as part of or following an NMC mentor preparation programme.

Supervised sign off can take place in a variety of settings including the workplace, an assessed simulated environment, such as a skills laboratory, or a classroom. A range of methods may be used as long as these test the skills required to sign off students safely, for example, a three way discussion or role play, or the interactive use of electronic resources such as computer assisted learning packages, or video conferencing.

This is not intended to be an exhaustive list. Programme providers (approved education institutions and their partners) are encouraged to identify their own appropriate means, and account for how they confirm that sign-off mentors meet NMC standards. The local arrangements for supervising prospective sign-off mentors will be considered as part of NMC programme approval and monitoring.

**The final supervision for signing off proficiency must be with an actual student undertaking an NMC approved programme.**

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This circular has been issued by

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