This statement

Children, young people, families and the public can expect that nurses, doctors and other professionals who are responsible for children and young people's health care will be appropriately qualified and experienced. Professional codes, government policy, and guidance from the Platt Report through to the Kennedy and Carlile reports, all require that staff involved in the care of children and young people should have specific training to meet the special needs of this group.

This statement, *Preparing nurses to care for children and young people*, presents a summary of the views of the Royal College of Nursing (RCN) Children and Young People Field of Practice on how the nursing profession should meet this requirement for specific training.

Also in preparation by the RCN Children and Young People Field of Practice is a statement containing the supporting evidence and rationale for the recommendations set out in this summary. This second document will include more detail of RCN members’ views on future educational provision and how the RCN is ensuring that there are strong links between education, nursing roles, integrated career and competency frameworks, and improved workforce planning.

The aim of these documents is to inform policy and decision making at all levels; to contribute an informed view of how nursing educational programmes will best ensure that children and young people receive integrated, effective and evidence-based nursing services in the future.

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1 The RCN Children and Young People Field of Practice encompasses specialty forums and groups of RCN members, and exists to:

✦ be a focus for RCN members interested in the nursing of children and young people, providing them with networks and opportunities for support, advice and professional development

✦ be a voice for children’s nursing within the RCN and for nursing within the world of child health

✦ develop the art and science of children’s nursing and children’s nursing specialties.
In preparing the documents we, the members of the RCN Field of Practice, have assumed that future child health services will be organised around the needs of children, young people and their families and that these services will be provided by integrated, multi-agency teams of professionals and support workers. The RCN’s Nursing education: a statement of principles (RCN, 2002), which include the principle that the initial preparation of nurses should be at degree level, are fully supported by the Field of Practice and are not re-stated here.

The requirement for specific education

All nurses who provide care to children and young people\(^2\) should have a specific qualification in the nursing care of children and young people. At present, such nurses may be registered children’s nurses or hold a certificate or diploma in health visiting or school nursing.

Many nurses currently providing care to children and young people, however, do not have a specific qualification. This is particularly so in primary care, where nurses see many children and young people.

This requirement for specific education raises significant issues both for workforce planning and educational provision. These issues must be tackled alongside the development of new models and standards for children’s and young people’s health services in the four UK countries. Until the long term goal of an appropriately qualified nursing workforce is achieved, short term measures must be taken urgently to ensure the safety and protection of children and young people and to meet clinical governance requirements.

There should be few exceptions to the requirement for specific education – but where these exist

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\(^2\) The term ‘children and young people’ in this document refers to infants (neonates), children and young people up to the age of 18, or the point at which the individual’s transition to adult health care is completed.
Preparing nurses to care for children and young people (for example in remote or rural areas), nurses should have specific education in remote area or family nursing and systems in place for consulting outside their areas of expertise.

**Short term measures**

**Education for all nurses**

Every registered nurse must have initial education and appropriate updating in child protection.

All nurses should also have initial education in:

✦ recognising illness and mental health problems in children and young people
✦ basic paediatric life support and first aid
✦ children’s rights
✦ communicating with children and young people.

During initial training, nurses in other fields of practice should acquire sufficient understanding of the scope of their registration to know that they should not undertake the nursing care of children and young people without support and supervision from an appropriately qualified nurse.

**Working with children and young people without specific training**

Any nurse who is presently caring for children and young people, but in doing so is working outside their registration status, should be supervised by an appropriately qualified nurse. In settings such as primary care where this is not feasible, systems should be in place for such a nurse to access advice and intervention when necessary, and to undertake specific training in the needs of the children and young people.

At a minimum, and until there are sufficient practitioners with a specific qualification, a nurse undertaking any nursing of children and young people without a specific qualification

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will require additional training and supervision to ensure competence in:

✦ upholding the rights of children and families within the health system
✦ acting within specific child legislation and adhering to relevant professional and local guidelines
✦ communicating with children and young people to understand their needs, involving them and their parents/carers in decision-making and assisting children to care for themselves
✦ assessing infants/children/young people
✦ recognising actual and potential health problems and deterioration
✦ basic paediatric life support
✦ recognising signs and situations which indicate neglect or abuse
✦ taking appropriate action as a result of assessments

(recognising limits of competence)
✦ recording assessments and care, and communicating with the child health team, including parents or carers.

Specific preparation

Initial education

Current educational programmes will not be adequate in the future to prepare nurses for effective and efficient delivery of health care to infants, children and young people in all settings.

Educational programmes leading to an initial qualification in the nursing care of children and young people need to prepare the nurse to be competent to a basic level in:

✦ public health nursing of infants, children and young people: screening, monitoring, prevention, promotion and community child health

4 Defining competence at registration and thereafter is the subject of an RCN project (an integrated competency and career framework for nurses caring for children and young people).
‘illness’ nursing of infants, children and young people (in all settings)

learning disability nursing of children and young people at a level which enables them to care for the disabled child who also has clinical care needs (with support from qualified learning disability nurses when needed)

mental health nursing of children and young people to tier 2 of the Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) model (with support from qualified mental health nurses when needed).

This first qualification in the nursing care of children and young people is the basis for care delivered in the home, school, primary care settings, hospital and remotely, using relevant technology. It is also the basis for specialist and further education to prepare specialist and expert practitioners to meet the diverse and changing needs of children and young people.

Preferred model for initial education

So that nurses can meet future children’s and young people’s health needs – and the challenges of new roles and service models – programmes will need to prepare adaptable practitioners who can lead teams as well as work in them, manage information and knowledge effectively, and who are committed to life long learning.

We believe that the model of education that will most effectively prepare such nurses has the following elements:

- a foundation shared with other professionals involved in care and support of children, young people and their families (including social services)
- general nursing of children and young people
- public health, ‘illness’, mental health, learning disability nursing of children and young people
- core professional nursing values and competencies as a continuing thread (see figure 1 on page 6).
Figure 1: Preferred educational model of a clinical practice career pathway for nurses caring for children and young people

Summary

Pre-registration
1. Common foundation with other professionals working with children and young people (CYP)
2. General nursing of children and young people, foundation branches (including core nursing professional content with other nursing students)
3. CYP nursing for public health, ‘illness’, mental health, learning disability

Outcome
1st level degree and qualification as a child health nurse – prepared to care at a basic level for children and young people in any setting, with additional knowledge and skills in a specific CYP branch.

Post-registration
4. In service and other provision to meet requirements for PREP and for updating on child protection, life support
5. Specialist and further CYP programmes supporting integrated career frameworks and skill mix requirements.

Outcomes
certificate, diploma, clinical Masters and Doctorate awards.

Specialist and further CYP programmes
Clinical Masters, Doctorate
(alongside integrated career framework)

Inservice, updating and other provision

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CYP public health</th>
<th>CYP ‘illness’</th>
<th>CYP mental health</th>
<th>CYP learning disability</th>
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General children’s and young people’s nursing
✓ Core professional nursing
✓ Foundation CYP mental health, public health, learning disability and ‘illness’ nursing

Common Foundation CYP - all professionals pursuing career with CYP
Preparation of nurses to care for children and young people

Clinical placements

Clinical placements for students at all levels must provide a good learning environment and promote the application of theory to practice across the range of settings in which children and young people receive care.

Whilst they are on placement, nursing students must be appropriately supported; children’s and young people’s health settings can be particularly stressful for students, particularly those who are young and new to nursing. Special skills are also needed in a field where parents provide much of the nursing care. Paediatric clinical skills facilitators, employed purely to support students in the practice environment, will help retain students and support them in making the most of the opportunities for learning.

Dedicated paediatric skills laboratories are proving useful in giving students extra skills practice in a realistic but safe environment.

Education strategy

A children’s and young people’s nursing education strategy needs to be seen as part of any wider strategy for the whole nursing profession. But it must nevertheless be defined first in terms of children’s and young people’s needs, and then in terms of cost effectiveness and service requirements.

The model for education set out on page 6 is the most likely to support the effective delivery of children’s and young people’s health services in the future.

We believe that the majority of entrants should be given direct entry to this field – this is the most cost-effective route in terms of attracting suitable recruits.
effective use of teaching and other resources, and actual costs of preparation.\(^5\)

There needs to be a more flexible approach to accrediting prior experience and enabling students with other nursing qualifications to enter this field. Irrespective of the route of preparation, nurses qualified to care for children and young people should have the same status and career opportunities as those qualified in other branches of the profession, such as midwives and nurses who care for adult patients.

**Ongoing learning**

After they qualify, and when they move to a new area of practice, all nurses need a period of supervised practice. They must meet the requirements from PREP and undertake mandatory updating, which in this field should include both paediatric life support and child protection.

As part of an integrated career and competency framework, the majority of nurses could expect opportunities to advance their skills in general nursing of children and young people and in professional areas such as leadership and research, as well as in specialist and advanced practice.

**Specialist and further education**

Because only small numbers of nurses have as yet received specific training, there is an urgent need for a UK-wide workforce development plan. This should determine the demand for specialist nurses and nurse practitioners to inform a strategic plan to identify and fund a small number of national centres for their education.

Neonatal and paediatric nurse practitioner roles, complementing both nursing and medical roles, are one of the cornerstones of future children’s and young people’s health service provision. We expect that there will be a significant increase in these posts in both primary and secondary care - although we recognise that there is only a small pool of experienced children’s nurses to draw from.

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5 Based on Hansard in 2001, costs for direct entry preparation were £39,000 per nurse compared with £82,200 for post-registration preparation.
To prepare paediatric and neonatal nurse practitioners, Masters level programmes specific to this client group need to be developed – at present some nurses have to adapt adult programmes, which is far from satisfactory.

Specific clinical Masters programmes are also required for those nurses who pursue a clinical career pathway in this field (see figure 1 on page 6). As with specialist provision, such programmes in this relatively small field of nursing require flexible, family-friendly programmes using innovative learning and teaching methods, including distance learning and better use of information technology.

As part of the development of a ‘faculty’ concept at the RCN, we are exploring the Field of Practice’s role in specifying and monitoring educational standards for specialist programmes, and in accrediting nurses who have undertaken such programmes. Between the Nursing and Midwifery Council (NMC), the Commission for Health Improvement (CHI) and the Quality Assurance Agency (QAA), it is unclear how the quality of specialist and advanced education in specialty areas will be assured in the longer term, but it is essential that specialist clinical and education experts are involved at all stages.

**Nurse educators**

Supporting students who are learning about nursing children, young people and families requires particular knowledge and skills. Besides the specific content of programmes, learning often takes place in the presence of parents/carers who frequently provide nursing care.

Nurse educators should have the appropriate background and experience. This includes a:

✦ qualification in the care of children and young people

✦ minimum of two years in a role where they had responsibility for teaching and assessing students and 24-hour responsibility for the care of children and young people

✦ teaching qualification and degree (Masters level in future).
As in the health service, higher education institutes must ensure specific representation for nurses working in children’s education, at the level of executive decision-making.

The NMC will continue to define the criteria against which the standards for initial nursing programmes can be judged - and to inform this process it must draw on expertise in nursing children and young people.

**Conclusion**

In January 2003, the RCN and the Royal College of Paediatrics and Child Health called for an urgent increase in the numbers of pre-registration training places for children’s nurses and for a review of the type of clinical placements to support increased numbers of students. The necessity for reactive, crisis lobbying of this kind needs to be replaced by coherent, properly funded national plans in each UK country, to ensure that there are sufficient numbers of appropriately qualified nurses to care for children and young people in the future. In addition, a UK-wide approach to post-registration education is required, supported by workforce planning and appropriate commissioning and funding models.

The RCN Children and Young People Field of Practice will closely monitor and support all educational developments in this field and would like to hear from RCN members or others who have views, experiences or ideas to share on the issues presented in this summary document. Please contact Fiona Smith, the RCN Adviser in children’s nursing on 020 7647 3753, email fiona.smith@rcn.org.uk

**Reference**
