

NextGen: HN educator guide

HNC Healthcare Practice: nursing care

Qualification code: GHQ6 47

Valid from: August 2026

This guide provides information about the Higher National Certificate (HNC) to ensure consistent and transparent assessment year on year. It is for lecturers and assessors, and contains all the mandatory information you need to deliver and assess the HNC.

You must read it alongside the grading pack.

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Purpose of the qualification

The Higher National Certificate (HNC) Healthcare Practice: nursing care broadens access and facilitates improved entry into all branches of undergraduate nursing degree programmes. This initiative responds to the decline in recruitment figures observed between 2016 and 2022, as reported by UCAS (2024), and addresses concerns about the future healthcare workforce. Given an ageing population, rising disease burden, increasingly complex health requirements, and growing expectations among individuals, it is vital to have a healthcare workforce equipped with the requisite knowledge, skills, and abilities to meet these evolving demands (Scottish Government, 2025).

With the Government's opt-out progression model for this qualification, we expect an increase in HNC learners progressing directly to the second year of degree programmes. This aligns with the Scottish Government's policy objective of boosting nursing numbers.

The development of this qualification has involved extensive consultation with stakeholders, including:

- the Chief Nursing Officer's Directorate
- the Council of Deans
- Higher Education Institutions
- Further Education Colleges
- NHS Education for Scotland

The qualification is fit for purpose, delivering the essential knowledge and skills learners need to advance in their chosen career. Beyond providing a recognised pathway for advanced standing, the qualification also serves as a recognised qualification for senior healthcare support workers at Band 3.

Reflecting the principles of the HNC NextGen developments, this qualification features fewer units, a holistic approach to assessment, and a grading system that acknowledges overall learner effort. This ensures a fairer and more accurate representation of individual achievement across the qualification.

At its core, the qualification is underpinned by the ethos that learners develop a thorough understanding of the values and principles of healthcare, and learn how to integrate these with the skills and knowledge required to deliver effective, person-centred care.

Nursing is evolving, with practitioners taking on broader responsibilities and working within multidisciplinary teams across health and social care. Nurses now manage care, promote wellbeing, and help address health inequalities, reflecting their growing influence in society (Scottish Government, 2017). The HNC Healthcare Practice: nursing care reflects these ongoing changes, placing greater focus on personal outcomes to improve person-centred care. It also highlights an increased understanding of the factors contributing to mental health issues and the range of support available, alongside a growing expectation for digital competencies.

Additionally, there is an emphasis on developing self-awareness through meta-skills, which are essential for the future workforce. As acknowledged in the report from the Nursing and Midwifery Taskforce, the focus here is not on raising the profile of the nursing profession, but rather on ensuring that the nursing workforce is well-prepared and capable of responding to the needs of individuals as we approach 2030 (Scottish Government, 2025).

References

- Scottish Government, (2017) *Nursing 2030 Vision: Promoting confident, competent and collaborative nursing for Scotland's future*, Edinburgh: Scottish Government.
- Scottish Government, (2025) *Delivering together for a stronger Nursing and Midwifery Workforce*, Edinburgh: Scottish Government.
- UCAS, (2024) *2024 cycle applicant figures*.

Structure

Higher National Certificates (HNCs) are at SCQF level 7 and are made up of 120 SCQF credit points (15 Qualifications Scotland credits). HNCs must incorporate at least 80 credit points (10 Qualifications Scotland credits) at SCQF level 7.

HNCs contain 15 credits to increase opportunities for learners returning to education. Refer to the 'Meta-skills' section of this guide for more information.

HNC Healthcare Practice: nursing care consists of 120 SCQF credit points at SCQF level 7.

Framework

HNC Healthcare Practice: nursing care has 6 mandatory units. Learners must complete all the mandatory units.

Mandatory units

Unit code	Unit title	Qualifications Scotland credits	SCQF credit points	SCQF level
JRG7 47	Professional Practice in Healthcare Settings	4	32	7
JL25 47	Understanding Personal and Professional Development	1	8	7
JGN2 47	Mental Health: A Comprehensive Overview	2	16	7
JEF5 47	Placement Proficiencies and Skills	3	24	7
JDCT 47	The Human Body in Health and Illness	2	16	7

Unit code	Unit title	Qualifications Scotland credits	SCQF credit points	SCQF level
JSIN 47	Healthcare Careers: Preparation and Progression	3	24	7

Aims of the qualification

General aims

1. Develop transferable abilities, such as core skills.
2. Enhance independent learning, academic writing, and research capabilities.
3. Engage in reflective practice to strengthen individual performance.
4. Promote critical and evaluative reasoning.
5. Support career advancement and academic progression across diverse environments.
6. Deliver care that is compassionate and inclusive.
7. Adhere to safe and effective professional practices.
8. Develop meta-skills that complement technical and professional knowledge and skills.
9. Develop Learning for Sustainability skills, knowledge, understanding and values.

Specific aims

1. Develop understanding of the principles and values underpinning healthcare practice, with a particular emphasis on person-centred and holistic care.
2. Develop the theoretical knowledge and practical skills required to deliver safe, effective, and compassionate nursing care across a range of healthcare settings.
3. Develop critical and evaluative thinking skills to support evidence-based practice and continuous improvement in care delivery.
4. Promote effective communication and interpersonal skills, as necessary for building therapeutic relationships with patients, families, and multidisciplinary teams.
5. Apply ethical reasoning and demonstrate professional integrity in all aspects of healthcare practice.
6. Recognise and respond appropriately to the diverse needs of individuals, ensuring inclusive and culturally sensitive care.
7. Develop reflective practice, to assess own performance and identify areas for professional growth.

8. Prepare to engage in safe and effective clinical decision-making, demonstrating sound judgement in challenging and unpredictable situations.
9. Facilitate the development of meta-skills to complement competence and support high-quality nursing care delivery.
10. Promote an understanding of the importance of lifelong learning and professional development for career progression in the healthcare sector.

Who is this qualification for?

This qualification is suitable for college-based learners, as well as employees in the healthcare practice sector, with different modes of entry, full or part-time.

Entry to this qualification is at your centre's discretion. However, we recommend that learners have one or more of the following:

- Previous study in a related subject at SCQF level 6 or above
- SCQF level 6 in literacy through Higher English or an equivalent qualification
- Previous experience of working in care is desirable but not essential

In addition, for progression to HEI undergraduate nursing degrees, learners need:

- SCQF level 5 in numeracy or equivalent
- for non-native speakers, a Higher ESOL at A or B or International English Language Testing System (IELTS) at 6.5 for writing and 7 for reading, listening and speaking

Recognising prior learning

Qualifications Scotland recognises that learners gain knowledge and skills through formal, non-formal and informal learning contexts. Formal learning is learning certificated by a recognised awarding or professional body. Non-formal learning includes learning such as employers' in-house training courses. Informal learning is learning based on experience from a variety of environments that is not formally assessed.

It is unlikely that a learner would have the appropriate prior learning and experience to meet all the requirements of a full HNC.

You can find more information and guidance about the [recognition of prior learning on Qualifications Scotland's website](#).

Articulation and progression

Learners who complete this qualification could go on to:

- further study or other qualifications in nursing or related areas
- employment and/or training
- senior healthcare support worker roles
- undergraduate nursing degrees at Scottish universities

Individuals who achieve this qualification and successfully complete 600 hours of placement are eligible to enter directly into the second year of an undergraduate nursing degree programme at a Scottish university.

Professional recognition

There is no professional qualification attached to this qualification. However, HNC Healthcare Practice provides a range of underpinning knowledge and skills relevant to the following qualifications awarded by Qualifications Scotland or other awarding bodies:

- a range of Scottish Vocational Qualifications (SVQs) in Care
- a range of Professional Development Awards (PDAs) in Care

Credit transfer arrangements

Centres can make decisions about transferring credit. They can transfer credit if the subject-related content of the units is broadly equivalent. Centres should consider the currency of a learner's achievement before transferring credit.

Recommended Core Skills entry profile

Learners should have the following Core Skills at the stated SCQF levels before starting this qualification. This information can help identify learners who may need additional support.

Core Skill	Recommended SCQF entry profile
Communication	SCQF level 6
Numeracy	SCQF level 5
Information and Communication Technology (ICT)	SCQF level 5
Problem Solving	SCQF level 5
Working with Others	SCQF level 5

How the qualification meets employer and higher education institution needs

This qualification is designed in collaboration with employers, higher education institutions (HEIs), practitioners and professional bodies to meet the sector need.

The following tables show how the qualification can benefit employers and HEIs by equipping learners with the necessary skill set:

- Table 1 shows how units map to the general aims of the qualification.
- Table 2 shows how the units map to National Occupational Standards (NOS).
- Table 3 shows the assessment strategy for the qualification.

Table 1: mapping general qualification aims to units

Key: aim is directly relevant to unit (X), aim is optional in this unit (O), aim is not applicable to this unit (N/A)

Unit code	Unit title	Aim 1	Aim 2	Aim 3	Aim 4	Aim 5	Aim 6	Aim 7	Aim 8	Aim 9
JRG7 47	Professional Practice in Healthcare Settings	X	X	N/A	X	X	X	X	X	X
JGN2 47	Mental Health: A Comprehensive Overview	X	X	X	N/A	X	X	X	X	X
JDCT 47	The Human Body in Health and Illness	N/A	X	X	N/A	X	N/A	X	X	X
JSIN 47	Healthcare Careers: Preparation and Progression	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
JL25 47	Understanding Personal and Professional Development	N/A	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
JEF5 47	Placement Proficiencies and Skills	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X

Table 2: mapping National Occupational Standards (NOS) to units

Unit code	Unit title	NOS codes
JEF5 47	Placement Proficiencies and Skills	SCHCHS3, SFHCHS4, SFHCHS5, SFHCHS6, SFHCHS9, SFHCHS10, SFHCHS11, SFHCHS12, SFHCHS14, SFHCHS17, SFHCHS19, SFHCHS36, SFHCHS130, SFHCHS131, SFHCHS146, SFHCHS147, SFHCHS185, SFHCHS239, SFHGEN2, SFHGEN4, SFHGEN5, SFHGEN6, SFHGEN7, SFHGEN8, SFHGEN14, SFHGEN15, SFHGEN16, SFHGEN23, SFHGEN39, SFHGEN57, SFHGEN62, SFHGEN80, SFHGEN81, SFHGEN96, SFHGEN97, SFHGEN98, SFHIPC N4, SFHIPC9, SFHGEN12, SCDHSC0035, SGHGEN23, SDCHSC0021, SCDHSC0226, SCDHSC0241, SCDHSC02434, SCDHSC0224, SCDHSC3111, SCDHSC3100, SCDHSC0213, SCDHSC0219, SCDHSC0035, SCDHSC0033, SFHIPC7, PCS6, SFHCHS69, SFHIPC3, SFHGEN63, SCDHSC002, SCDHSC0023, SCDHSC0032
JSIN 47	Healthcare Careers: Preparation and Progression	SFHGEN80, SCDHSC0033, SCDHSC0035, SCDHSC3100, SCDHSC3111, SCDHSC0234, SCDHSC0226, SCDHSC0241, SFHGEN98, SFHGEN23, SFHGEN12, SFHCHS69, SFHGEN63, SCDHSC0032

Table 3: assessment strategy for the qualification

Unit code	Unit title	Assessment method
JRG7 47	Professional Practice in Healthcare Settings	• Integrated project (outcomes 1, 2, 4, 5, 6, 7) • Reflective account (outcome 3)
JGN2 47	Mental Health: A Comprehensive Overview	• Investigative report (outcomes 1, 2, 3) • Presentation (outcome 4)
JL25 47	Understanding Personal and Professional Development	• Reflective account (outcome 1) • Academic competency assessed across the course (outcome 2) • Folio (outcome 3)
JDCT 47	The Human Body in Health and Illness	• Multiple-choice assessment (outcomes 1, 2) • Report, presentation or SWAY (outcomes 3, 4)

Unit code	Unit title	Assessment method
JSIN 47	Healthcare Careers: Preparation and Progression	• Readiness for placement activities (outcome 1) • Investigative report (outcome 2) • Statement of support for progression to employment or further study (outcome 3) • Curriculum Vitae (outcome 3) • Carry out practice interview (outcome 3) • Completed placement visit and/or liaison form (outcome 3) • Placement document showing achievement of: ○ agreed placement hours (outcome 4) ○ all relevant platform proficiencies (outcome 4) ○ evaluation of service user or supervisor, and/or assessor feedback from practice placement (outcome 4)
JEF5 47	Placement Proficiencies and Skills	• Placement achievement document (outcomes 1, 2) • Case study and practical assessment demonstrating core clinical skills in the management of a deteriorating patient (outcome 3) • Multiple-choice assessment (outcome 4)

Meta-skills

Every NextGen: HN Qualification gives learners the opportunity to develop meta-skills.

Meta-skills are transferable behaviours and abilities that help people to adapt and succeed in life, study and work. There are three categories of meta-skills: self-management, social intelligence and innovation. Each of these is made up of four meta-skills and a number of sub-skills.

- Self-management — focusing, integrity, adapting, initiative
- Social intelligence — communicating, feeling, collaborating, leading
- Innovation — curiosity, creativity, sense-making, critical thinking

From early in the qualification, we want learners to identify and understand the meta-skills they can develop, and to appreciate the personal and professional value of these skills. We want to support learners to continue to articulate, use and build on them long after they have achieved their qualification. In this way, we help learners to develop broad skills profiles, enabling them to thrive in a changing world.

Every NextGen: HN unit signposts opportunities for learners to develop meta-skills, and there is an assessed outcome in one of the mandatory units. When you make your whole-qualification grade decisions, you consider learners' commitment to engaging with meta-skills development.

You do not assess learners on their competence or progress in individual meta-skills. Instead, you assess them on evidence that they have engaged with a personal process of development. Meta-skills development is founded on a clear process of self-assessment, goal setting, action planning and reflective practice.

You can find meta-skills teaching, learning and assessment resources on [our meta-skills web page](#).

Meta-skills in HNC Healthcare Practice: nursing care

HNC Healthcare Practice: nursing care develops meta-skills alongside nursing knowledge, supporting personal and professional growth. Learners build these skills through activities reflecting real clinical situations, such as simulations and reflective accounts. Using frameworks such as Skills Development Scotland's Skills 4.0 model, you help learners develop meta-skills essential for adapting to changes in healthcare. You should encourage learners to apply meta-skills as practical tools for real-world challenges, using shared terminology and understanding relevant to healthcare. The curriculum integrates self-assessment, goal setting, and reflective practice, making meta-skills development central to coursework, clinical placements, and teamwork. Tutors and clinical mentors support this process with feedback and guidance. Reflection and group discussion help learners recognise their strengths and areas for growth, while teaching remains responsive to individual needs. Embedding meta-skills in all aspects of the qualification helps to prepare learners for the evolving demands of nursing practice and lifelong learning.

HNC Healthcare Practice: nursing care puts a strong emphasis on developing meta-skills alongside subject-specific knowledge. This approach provides learners with a comprehensive framework for personal growth, fully aligned with the expectations and professional standards of nursing. Throughout the course, you should encourage learners to build their meta-skills as they engage with both the theoretical and practical aspects of nursing. Teaching methods that mirror authentic clinical situations help to develop these skills, which you assess holistically through activities such as simulated patient care and reflective writing.

The focus on meta-skills and wider 21st-century abilities in HNC Healthcare Practice prepares aspiring senior healthcare support workers and nurses to adapt to the ever-changing demands of the healthcare sector. Although meta-skills frameworks may vary, the fundamental principle remains: to foster skills that are personally meaningful and contextually relevant, using reflective practice and practical application in healthcare settings. According to Skills Development Scotland's Skills 4.0 model, there are 12 essential meta-skills that enable individuals to navigate evolving roles influenced by technological changes and global health trends.

Nurturing these meta-skills equips learners to thrive in today's fast-paced healthcare settings.

When introducing meta-skills to learners, present them as practical strategies for addressing real-life challenges encountered in care. At SCQF level 7, you should use the terminology of the Skills 4.0 model and help learners develop a shared understanding of meta-skills most relevant to healthcare. This ensures that skills development is valuable for personal growth as well as for coursework, clinical placements, and future employment.

Integrating meta-skills into the nursing curriculum encourages learners to plan, act, and reflect on their progress. Skills such as self-awareness, setting goals, and monitoring development become part of clinical skill-building, patient assessment, and teamwork in multidisciplinary healthcare teams.

The development of meta-skills is a dynamic, ongoing process rather than a straightforward path. Learners should be actively involved from the outset, participating in self-assessment, collaborative goal setting, and continual review. Reflective practice sits at the heart of this, enabling learners to evaluate their experiences, adapt their methods, and set new goals for improvement.

Traditional teaching approaches in nursing education — like patient simulations, case studies, and clinical placements — naturally encourage the development of meta-skills. By mapping these opportunities in the qualification, learners can identify and demonstrate growth in areas such as focus, teamwork, and critical thinking. For instance, in HNC Healthcare Practice nursing care, certain units place strong emphasis on reflection as a fundamental element of learning. The Understanding Personal and Professional Development unit specifically introduces learners to the essential concepts of reflective practice, encouraging its application across the entire qualification.

Meta-skills are key to successfully completing assignments and excelling in clinical practice. Encourage learners to be deliberate about how they plan to develop and apply skills such as maintaining concentration during complex procedures (focusing) or working collaboratively in healthcare teams during placements. Support from tutors, clinical assessors, and supervisors is essential in helping learners to identify,

nurture, and reflect on their meta-skills, in line with course outcomes and professional standards. These mentors often act as coaches, providing valuable feedback and guidance throughout both classroom and placement-based learning.

Introducing reflective practice to learners can enhance their personal development and ability to set meaningful goals. Regular formative reflection — through peer discussions, mentor feedback, and group debriefs — helps build the self-awareness crucial for effective nursing.

While we encourage learners to focus on the meta-skills most relevant to their personal and clinical contexts, the learning environment should also support individual growth. Each learner brings unique strengths and areas for development. The aim is not to meet a set benchmark, but to show ongoing progress in developing meta-skills. Using self-assessment tools to explore personal learning styles and strengths can help learners decide which meta-skills to prioritise as they prepare for professional practice. Case studies and scenario-based activities illustrate how these skills are applied in healthcare, while group reflection sessions offer opportunities for shared learning from each other's experiences.

As a facilitator, highlight moments where meta-skills have positively influenced clinical practice, and encourage reflective discussion about placement experiences. Recognise achievements and provide guidance for future development based on past performance. As learners advance, introduce healthcare topics that require problem recognition and problem-solving, both of which rely on a blend of meta-skills.

Deliver practical nursing knowledge and skills in a logical sequence but consistently include meta-skills in project planning and clinical tasks. This ongoing emphasis on reflective practice supports self-awareness and a commitment to continuous learning — both of which are vital for the modern nurse.

Learning for Sustainability

Context

The United Nations (UN) 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, adopted by the UK in 2015, has shaped the development of Scottish, national and international sustainability policy. It sets out the [UN Sustainable Development Goals](#) (SDGs), which are central to the Scottish Government's [National Performance Framework](#). Learning for Sustainability (LfS) is a commitment to embedding the SDGs in Scottish education.

LfS embraces global citizenship, sustainable development, social justice, human rights, climate change, biodiversity loss, equality and inclusion. Learners develop their capacity to deal with the unpredictable social, economic and environmental challenges facing our rapidly changing world.

LfS combines:

- education for sustainable development (ESD)
- global citizenship
- outdoor learning

ESD is the internationally used term for sustainability education. Although LfS has a broader remit, the terms are largely interchangeable. Colleges and universities tend to use ESD, while schools usually use LfS. Both focus on a broad range of social, economic and environmental themes and approaches across all levels of education. Qualifications Scotland uses LfS as an umbrella term.

Learning for Sustainability in NextGen: HN Qualifications

Sustainability is a core component in this qualification.

Learners who complete this qualification should have:

- a general understanding of social, economic and environmental sustainability
- a general understanding of the SDGs
- a deeper understanding of subject-specific sustainability
- the confidence to apply the skills, knowledge, understanding and values they develop in the next stage of their life

Sustainability is embedded as an outcome in the Professional Practice in Healthcare Settings unit.

Learners who complete this outcome can:

- assess their own knowledge and understanding of sustainability and the SDGs
- review unit content against the SDGs to identify a sustainability-related issue
- apply knowledge and understanding of sustainability and the SDGs to propose improvements

You can cover any of the SDGs that are relevant to the subject area, however the following sustainability goals relate well to this qualification:

- SDG 3 — reduce inequalities within and among countries and good health and well-being. Reducing inequalities includes:
 - empowering and promoting the social, economic and political inclusion of all
 - providing equal opportunity
 - reducing inequalities of outcome, including by eliminating discriminatory laws, policies and practices
 - wage and social protection policies to achieve equality
 - safe migration and mobility of people
- SDG 10 — ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages. This includes:

- reducing maternal mortality rates
- ending preventable deaths of newborns and children under 5 years of age
- reducing premature mortality from non-communicable diseases, through prevention and treatment
- promoting mental health and wellbeing
- strengthening the prevention and treatment of substance abuse, including narcotic drug abuse and harmful use of alcohol
- ensuring universal access to sexual and reproductive health-care services, including for family planning, information and education, and integrating reproductive health into national strategies and programmes
- universal health coverage, including financial risk protection, ensuring access to quality essential health-care services and access to safe, effective, quality and affordable essential medicines and vaccines for all
- strengthening the capacity of all countries, in particular developing countries, for early warning, risk reduction and management of national and global health risks

Find out more about Qualifications Scotland's approach on the [NextGen: HN Learning for Sustainability web page](#). There is an LfS reflective template available in the resources section. You may find it helpful as a starting point for considering how the SDGs are, or could be, embedded in a qualification, unit or assessment.

Grading

Please see the grading pack for this qualification for more information on making grade judgements.

Grading in NextGen: HN Qualifications produces a valid and reliable record of a learner's level of achievement across the breadth of the qualification content.

As well as grading the whole qualification, you assess individual units on a pass or fail basis. Each unit has evidence requirements that learners must achieve before you can consider them for whole-qualification grading.

Whole-qualification grade outcomes

Learners who pass NextGen: HN Qualifications receive one of the following grade outcomes for the qualification as a whole:

- Achieved with Distinction
- Achieved with Merit
- Achieved

To determine a learner's whole-qualification grade, you use the grading matrix provided in the grading pack to assess and judge their performance across the key aspects of the HNC. You must align your judgements with the following whole-qualification grade descriptors.

Whole-qualification grade descriptors

Achieved with Distinction

The learner has achieved an excellent standard across the course content, going significantly beyond meeting the qualification requirements. They showed a comprehensive knowledge and understanding of course concepts and principles, and consistently used them to apply skills to complete high-quality work. They engaged significantly with the process of developing their meta-skills in the context of their HN Qualification.

Achieved with Merit

The learner has achieved a very good standard across the course content, going beyond meeting the qualification requirements. They showed a very good knowledge and understanding of course concepts and principles, and consistently used them to apply skills to complete work of a standard above that expected for an Achieved grade. They actively engaged with the process of developing their meta-skills in the context of their HN Qualification.

Achieved

The learner has achieved a good standard across the course content, credibly meeting the qualification requirements. They showed a good knowledge and understanding of course concepts and principles, and used them to apply skills to complete work of the required standard. They engaged with the process of developing their meta-skills in the context of their HN Qualification.

Achievement in individual units is determined on a pass or fail basis, with each unit having specific evidence requirements that learners must fulfil before being considered for overall qualification grading. Judgements regarding the quality of assessment evidence are made using a grading matrix aligned with the qualification's key criteria.

To successfully achieve the qualification, learners must pass all criteria outlined in the grading model. For the grade of Achieved with Merit, learners must attain Merit level or higher in at least 7 out of 10 assessment criteria, while the remaining 3 must be at a minimum of Achieved level. For Achieved with Distinction, they must meet 7 criteria at Distinction level, with the remaining 3 at either Achieved or Merit level.

The grading model is designed to:

- promote a comprehensive evaluation of the learner's performance throughout the qualification, rather than focusing solely on individual units
- emphasise a learner's strengths in the values, knowledge, and skills essential for social services
- encourage and motivate learners during the academic year
- distinguish candidates' levels of achievement for employers and progression to higher education
- maintain consistency of grading standards across different centres

Quality assurance

At three key points during the qualification, marking teams must complete a grading template for each learner, covering all work completed so far. It is important for marking teams to clearly summarise the rationale behind the grade awarded for each criterion, referencing the specific evidence supporting their decision. This information enables the external quality assurer to confirm the accuracy of assessors' grading judgements.

Grading and meta-skills

Meta-skills play a central role in HNC Healthcare Practice, with learners developing these skills throughout their studies. However, individual meta-skills are neither directly assessed nor assigned grades. For instance, the qualification does not evaluate the quality of a learner's emotional insight or creativity, nor does it measure progress in any single meta-skill. Instead, the qualification focuses on the learner's overall journey in planning, developing, and reflecting on their meta-skills, which

forms part of the holistic judgement. Learners should present evidence demonstrating how they have engaged in these processes. The grading matrix features criteria related to meta-skills, which should be used to guide this overall assessment. For additional guidance, refer to [Meta-skills — Assessment and grading information for centres](#).

Approaches to delivery and assessment

You can deliver the qualification through several formats, including:

- full-time study
- day release
- other part-time options
- blended learning

You can also combine these delivery methods, tailoring your approach to the specific requirements of each unit and learners' employment circumstances. When designing the delivery schedule, centres must address the unique needs and circumstances of all learners, particularly those who are currently employed. Wherever feasible, teaching should build on learners' existing knowledge and understanding.

To carry out the Placement Proficiencies and Skills, and Healthcare Careers: Preparation and Progression units, centres or course providers must confirm that learners are either already employed in a relevant care setting, or that they are able to secure a placement in an appropriate environment. Furthermore, centres must ensure that they have suitably qualified and vocationally experienced staff and appropriate resources and equipment for the delivery and assessment of the qualification.

The qualification's structure offers units focused both on developing theoretical knowledge and on applying that knowledge in practical settings. Centres must arrange suitable placements to enable learners to complete the practice-based units successfully.

There is no requirement to use the E-Pad for evaluating clinical skills and professional conduct in this qualification. Centres can create their own paper-based assessment materials, provided these are agreed on with their higher education institution partners. We recommend that centres collaborate with placement providers to devise clear guidance on both delivery and assessment. Any local arrangements for placements should, wherever possible, tap into relevant educational support networks. When using NHS placements, centres should work

closely with designated practice educator facilitators (PEFs), as such partnerships enhance and reinforce the support provided by placement supervisors, assessors, and further education institutions.

The agreed number of placement hours required for articulation to year 2 is 600 hours. If learners do not wish to follow this articulation route, then they need only complete the minimum number of 288 clinical hours.

The approach to delivery and assessment in this qualification is varied to give learners and centres the opportunity to deliver a variety of teaching, learning and assessment approaches. Your centre could use the following suggested delivery methods:

- lectures
- tutorials
- study packs
- problem-based scenarios
- group work
- presentations
- online materials, including TURAS
- IT-based teaching materials
- projects
- clinical skills simulation
- virtual learning environments and digital approaches to learning and assessment

Although you can teach certain units through open or online learning, you must not deliver the whole qualification solely by these means. This is primarily because practical units require assessment of occupational competence, and values-based components require direct delivery and evaluation. You must embed assessment of teamwork and communication skills across this qualification, as these competencies cannot be evaluated effectively through solely online teaching and learning methods.

During the qualification, you should give learners clear guidance regarding the presentation of information, as outlined in Understanding Personal and Professional Development. You should consistently use standard referencing conventions, such as the Harvard referencing system, to enable learners to confidently incorporate

wider evidence into their research and academic work. This also underpins evidence-based practice in healthcare professions and helps ensure compliance with copyright regulations, thereby preventing plagiarism. Centres must secure adequate work placements in partnership with organisations such as local NHS Boards, so that learners can complete relevant units and you can assess them. This is essential to ensure those aiming to progress to employment at Career Framework level 3 or 4 acquire appropriate workplace experience through their placement.

Sequencing or integrating units

Given the demands associated with both placement and acquiring pre-placement skills, we acknowledge that scheduling this programme may pose challenges. Centres should establish their own delivery and assessment schedules. We recommend that you introduce learners to self-reflection and the significance of reflective practice at an early stage, through the Understanding Personal and Professional Development unit. This may include a preliminary exploration of meta-skills, an initial meta-skills assessment, and the development of a skills improvement plan. Alongside reflection, early exposure to professional standards and ethics further enhances learners' comprehension of nursing practice.

Before learners commence their placements, you must deliver aspects of the Healthcare Careers: Preparation and Progression unit, so that they have the necessary foundational skills and knowledge.

There are opportunities to integrate teaching across units. For instance, you can connect the exploration of health inequalities in Mental Health: A Comprehensive Overview to the inequalities outcome in Professional Practice in Healthcare Settings. This integration also extends to teaching on UN sustainability goals. You can align meta-skills reflections and the creation of action plans with the reflective practice elements in the Understanding Personal and Professional Development unit, as well as the final reflective outcome in Healthcare Careers: Preparation and Progression.

Additional guidance on integrated or holistic assessment

Holistic or integrated assessment focuses on assessing a number of outcomes in a unit together, or in some cases, assessing the unit as a whole, rather than by outcome. When assessing a unit of competence holistically, the assessment activities integrate a number of aspects of the competence. Holistic or integrated assessment can reduce the time spent on assessment and can promote greater equity in the assessment process.

When developing or revising a NextGen: HN Qualification, Qualifications Scotland works with a development team to devise an appropriate assessment strategy that accommodates holistic or integrated assessment. However, the practice of integrating units for the purposes of learning and teaching is a centre-led activity.

Units are designed to facilitate holistic or integrated assessment approaches that prevent large, unwieldy assessments.

Sometimes more than one piece of evidence is needed for a unit. For example, if a unit covers carrying out basic observations, a learner would need to understand the processes involved, accurately carry out the tasks, correctly communicate with the patient, accurately document their findings and report any adverse findings to a senior practitioner.

Evidence requirements must do what they say: specify requirements for evidence of learner competence in the unit. The evidence must be of sufficient quality for an assessor or verifier to judge that the learner has achieved the unit.

Possible assessment integration examples

Unit and outcome or outcomes	Integrates with
Professional Practice in Healthcare Settings outcome 2	Healthcare Careers: Preparation and Progression outcome 2
Professional Practice in Healthcare Settings outcome 3	- Understanding Personal and Professional Development outcome 3 - Healthcare Careers: Preparation and Progression outcome 4
Professional Practice in Healthcare Settings outcomes 5, 6 and 7	Mental Health: A Comprehensive Overview outcome 2
Placement Proficiencies and Skills outcomes 1, 2 and 3	- Understanding Personal and Professional Development outcome 1 - Healthcare Careers: Preparation and Progression - Professional Practice in Healthcare Settings outcome 3
Understanding Personal and Professional Development	Assessed across all assessments in the qualification

Remediation and re-assessment in NextGen: HN Qualifications

Remediation

Remediation allows an assessor to clarify learners' responses, either by requiring a written amendment or by oral questioning, where there is a minor shortfall or omission in evidence requirements. In either case, the assessor must formally note such instances, in writing or as a recording, and make them available to the internal and external verifier.

Remediation is not permitted for closed-book assessments.

The size and structure of the larger NextGen: HN units should mean that the assessor or lecturer is close enough to ongoing assessment activity in project-based units to identify the requirement for remediation as it occurs.

Re-assessment

We must give learners who fail the unit a re-assessment opportunity or, in exceptional circumstances, two re-assessment opportunities. Where we have introduced larger units to the framework, we expect instances of re-assessment to be minimal, due to the approach to assessment and remediation. Where re-assessment is required in a project-based unit, a substantially different project must be used.

Resource requirements

Each unit in HNC Healthcare Practice: nursing care includes links to relevant resources. Additionally, we encourage you to use the resources available on the NHS NES website, where appropriate. If the assessments provided by NES align with the evidence requirements of the HNC units, they may be suitable for use as unit or outcome assessments.

There are appropriate resources in specific learning zones on [TURAS](#) that are relevant to this qualification, for example:

- infection prevention and control
- mental health and wellbeing
- person-centred care
- an introduction to values-based health and care
- trauma-informed practice: an introduction
- an introduction to equality, diversity and human rights
- public health

We recommend that you explore these resources and select appropriate ones for learners to access.

Learners and delivery staff should have easy access to digital devices. Learners must carry out guided research as part of their studies, which means they need access to web resources, libraries and workplace or placement resources.

Information for centres

Equality and inclusion

The units in this HNC are designed to be as fair and as accessible as possible with no unnecessary barriers to learning or assessment.

You should consider the needs of individual learners when planning learning experiences, selecting assessment methods or considering alternative evidence.

Guidance on assessment arrangements for disabled learners and those with additional support needs is available on the [assessment arrangements web page](#).

Internal and external verification

You must make sure all assessment methods you use in this qualification are internally verified according to your centre's policies and Qualifications Scotland's guidelines.

Qualifications Scotland carries out external verification to ensure that internal assessment meets the national guidelines for this qualification.

More information on internal and external verification is available in Qualifications Scotland's [Guide to Assessment](#) and in [NextGen: HN Quality Assurance — Guidance for Centres](#).

Glossary

Qualifications Scotland credits: 1 Qualifications Scotland credit equals 8 SCQF credit points.

Qualifications Scotland credit value indicates the contribution the unit makes to an Qualifications Scotland qualification. A Qualifications Scotland credit value of 1 represents approximately 40 hours of learning, teaching and assessment.

SCQF: the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF) is Scotland's national framework for describing qualifications. We use SCQF terminology in this guide to refer to credits and levels. [For more information on the SCQF, visit the SCQF website.](#)

SCQF credit points indicate the amount of learning required to complete a qualification. NextGen HNCs and HNDs are worth 120 SCQF credit points.

SCQF levels indicate how hard the qualification is to achieve. The SCQF covers 12 levels of learning. NextGen HNCs are at SCQF level 7 and NextGen HNDs are at SCQF level 8.

Information for learners

HNC Healthcare Practice: nursing care

This information explains:

- what the qualification is about
- what you should know or be able to do before you start
- what you need to do during the qualification
- opportunities for further learning and employment

Qualification information

HNC Healthcare Practice: nursing care is an SCQF level 7 qualification that includes 6 mandatory units, worth a total of 120 SCQF credit points. The units are:

- Professional Practice in Healthcare Settings
- Placement Proficiencies and Skills
- Understanding Personal and Professional Development
- Mental Health: A Comprehensive Overview
- Healthcare Careers: Preparation and Progression
- The Human Body in Health and Illness

Entry is at your centre's discretion. You should, however, have effective communication and interpersonal skills. You can demonstrate these with:

- relevant qualifications at SCQF level 6
- experience of working in the health or social care sectors

If progression to an undergraduate nursing degree is your aim, you should also have achieved:

- SCQF level 5 in numeracy or equivalent
- if you are a non-native English speaker, a Higher ESOL at A or B or International English Language Testing System (IELTS) at 6.5 for writing and 7 for reading, listening and speaking

HNC Healthcare Practice: nursing care develops meta-skills alongside nursing knowledge, supporting personal and professional growth. You build these skills through activities reflecting real clinical situations, such as simulations and reflective accounts.

Your progress throughout the qualification is evaluated using a variety of assessment methods, which may include:

- demonstrating competence during placements
- compiling portfolios
- completing practical tasks
- participating in classroom assessments
- preparing investigative reports
- analysing case studies
- delivering group presentations

You are assessed on a unit-by-unit basis and through a comprehensive review of your performance across the entire qualification. The teaching team conduct a final holistic assessment, using a grading matrix to measure your achievements against specific criteria. Based on this, you receive one of the following classifications:

- Achieved with Distinction
- Achieved with Merit
- Achieved

HNC Healthcare Practice: nursing care focuses on helping more people progress to year 2 of nursing degrees in Scotland, so there are more nurses and better support in the profession.

By completing this qualification, you develop the knowledge and skills you need to go straight into year 1 or 2 of a university nursing degree, or work as a senior healthcare support worker in the NHS. If you're already working in healthcare, this pathway helps you take your career to the next level and expand your skills. We encourage you to reflect on your own practice and learn independently, while also building specialist knowledge and important transferrable skills.

The main goal of the qualification is to help you become a confident and skilled member of the healthcare workforce, which means better care for patients. You learn how to put professional healthcare practice into action, giving you a solid base for further study or moving into a new job in health.

The HNC Healthcare Practice gives you clear options for what to do next. Most Scottish colleges have agreements with local universities, so if you successfully complete the qualification and your 600 placement hours, you're guaranteed a place in year 2 of a nursing degree at a Scottish university. If you prefer, you could start in year 1 of a degree, or move straight into work as a senior healthcare support worker in the NHS. This qualification opens doors to further study and a rewarding career in healthcare.

Administrative information

Published: June 2026 (version 1.0)

History of changes

Version	Description of change	Date

Please check [our website](#) to ensure you are using the most up-to-date version of this unit.

If a unit is revised:

- no new centres can be approved to offer the previous version of the unit
- centres should only enter learners for the previous version of the unit if they can complete it before its finish date

For more information on NextGen: HN Qualifications please visit the [NextGen: HN web page](#).

Thank you to everyone who helped us develop this qualification. Your expertise, time and thoughtful input was invaluable.

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