



Royal College  
of Nursing

# RCN Position Statement on Registered Nursing Associates (RNAs) Training in Cervical Screening

(England only)

POLICY AND POSITION STATEMENTS



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# RCN Statement

The RCN recognises that Registered Nursing Associates (RNAs) carry out cervical screening, in line with national standards. Service and education providers should be confident that appropriate and relevant training and supervision is in place. Extra training/pre-reading/pre-course work may be required to ensure RNAs are not disadvantaged during cervical screening training. They should be supported and supervised in their practice, in line with national standards.

## Background and Context

Registered Nursing Associates have been part of the NMC register since 2018 (England only). The role was introduced in response to the *Shape of Caring Review* (2015), to help build the capacity of the nursing workforce and the delivery of high quality care. A vital part of the wider health care team, the role of the RNA is intended to:

- support the career progression of health care assistants
- enable nurses to focus on more complex clinical work
- increase the supply of nurses by providing a progression route into graduate level nursing.

RNAs are part of the nursing team, who have gained a Foundation Degree, and are accountable for their practice. They are subject to the NMC Code (2018a) and once practising can undertake further training and education to achieve additional knowledge and skills, enhancing their competence (NMC 2018b). They must also undertake revalidation, in line with NMC requirements.

In September 2019, NHS Cervical Screening Programme, Health Education England and NHS England/ NHS Improvement Primary Care Nursing team confirmed that “*Registered NAs working in primary care are eligible to train to undertake the role of cervical sample taker*” (PHE 2019).

**Governance arrangements outlined by PHE:** Screening providers need to ensure the following governance arrangements are in place:

RNAs must meet the core clinical competencies in the Skills for Health competency framework set out in the NHS Clinical Screening Programme (NHS CSP) sample taker training guidance.

To undertake cervical screening, RNAs must have:

- completed a Nursing Associate qualification and be registered as a RNA with the Nursing and Midwifery Council (NMC)
- undertaken initial theory and practical training as required by the NHS CSP
- successfully completed the course and been assessed as competent
- undertaken updated training and maintained competency in line with the national cervical sample taker training guidance.

The RNA is not yet a named profession under the Treatment of Disease, Disorder or Injury (TDDI) legislation regulated by the Care Quality Commission (CQC). However, the CQC expects any provider to consider safety, quality, competency and TDDI legislation when deploying a RNA. See CQC briefing for providers.

(<https://www.cqc.org.uk/news/providers/briefing-providers-nursing-associates>)

In 2020, PHE published updated guidance on Cervical Screening: in cervical sample taker training, the content refers to ‘sample takers’ and does not distinguish between registered nurses, midwives, registered nursing associates or medical practitioners. The following UK registered health care professionals are eligible to train to undertake the role of cervical sample taker:

- registered nurses
- registered nursing associates
- midwives
- physician associates who are registered on the Physician Associate Managed Voluntary Register (PAMVR)
- registered health care professionals working in integrated sexual health (ISH) clinics
- General Medical Council (GMC) registered medical doctors.

## Supervision

When a RNA has registered with the NMC, a registered professional listed under the legislation (registered nurse or GP) will need to supervise the practice of that RNA. The supervisor must be present at the GP practice when the RNA is carrying out the procedure. The supervisor can undertake indirect supervision of the RNA when carrying out this procedure. This is a delegated activity and the RNA would be expected to work within the remits of their professional code.

## Education and Training

Cervical sample taking is one element of a complex screening pathway. A cervical screening test is a consultation and clinical examination. A cervical sample taker must have the required level of knowledge and understanding of the cervical screening programme, and clinical skill, to safeguard the individual.

The RCN recognises the importance of the role of the RNA in enhancing multi-disciplinary care, however any training programme needs to allow for differences in different registrants joining the programme e.g. prerequisites/previous clinical experience/pre reading/learning.

These may include having confidence that their primary or ongoing Continuing Professional Development (CPD) has enabled them to understand the complexities of cervical screening, recognising that it is not just taking a smear sample, but an opportunity to talk to the woman and understand her social construct. This should include individual wider determinants of physical and mental health and how this impacts on individual women, in addition to the complexity of recognising and reporting any

underlying vulnerabilities such as Female Genital Mutilation (FGM), Domestic Abuse (DA), and/or previous sexual assault. This would include understanding the issues that may impact on access to services for individual women (hard to reach and seldom seen) and the evidence about why women do not attend for screening appointments. All RNAs have a duty to understand the extent and limits of their competence, expertise and experience, and to report any deviation from normal to their designated supervisor.

PHE 2020 states in their education pathway that – “Training providers must make sure the trainee is eligible to undertake training”, which is outlined here (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/cervical-screening-cervical-sample-taker-training/training-for-cervical-sample-takers-education-pathway>)

*“Taking cervical samples is a delegated activity and the nursing associate works within the remits of their professional code. The screening provider must consider safety, quality, competency and the treatment of disease, disorder or injury (TDDI) legislation when deploying a nursing associate. When a nursing associate has registered with the Nursing and Midwifery Council (NMC), a registered professional listed under the legislation (registered nurse or GP) [who is trained as a cervical sample taker] will need to supervise their practice. The individual who provides this professional support must be present at the [general] practice in order to undertake indirect supervision of the nursing associate when carrying out the procedure.”*

The RCN supports the accreditation of training programmes, where there is clarity about who the training is directed at, e.g. Registered Nurses, Midwives and/or Registered Nursing Associates.

If RNAs are to access any training, the programme should explicitly include them as potential learners.

Training providers must seek external accreditation for their cervical screening initial training (as described in the relevant PHE guidance) and the requirement for accreditation also applies to update training, (with training provision taking place within the period of accreditation).

The RCN believes it is the responsibility of training organisations to ensure that an accredited programme meets the needs of all the learners who access it, which will then determine and manage the scope of practice, and recognition of competencies for those who successfully complete the programme of learning.



## Further reading

Health Education England (HEE) 2019 Registered nursing associates training in cervical sample taking <https://www.hee.nhs.uk/sites/default/files/documents/National%20message%20-%20Nursing%20Associates%20-%20Cytology.pdf>

HEE (2019) Nursing Associates: Their role in General Practice <https://work-learn-live-blmk.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/Nursing-Associates-FINAL.pdf>

NMC (2018a) The Code <https://www.nmc.org.uk/standards/code/>

NMC (2018b) <https://www.nmc.org.uk/about-us/our-role/who-we-regulate/nursing-associates/> and <https://www.nmc.org.uk/globalassets/sitedocuments/standards-of-proficiency/standards-for-pre-registration-nursing-associate-programmes/nursing-associates-programme-standards.pdf>

Public Health England (PHE) (2017) Cervical screening: education and training <https://www.e-lfh.org.uk/programmes/nhs-screening-programmes/>

PHE (2019) Registered nursing associates training in cervical sample taking <https://www.hee.nhs.uk/sites/default/files/documents/National%20message%20-%20Nursing%20Associates%20-%20Cytology.pdf>

PHE Screening (2020) Role of nurses in English cervical screening programme celebrated by WHO <https://phescreening.blog.gov.uk/2020/03/11/who-nurses-cervical-screening/>

PHE (2020) Updated guidance on the training of cervical sample takers <https://phescreening.blog.gov.uk/2020/03/05/updated-guidance-training-cervical-sample-takers/> and <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/cervical-screening-cervical-sample-taker-training/training-for-cervical-sample-takers-education-pathway>

Royal College of Nursing (2017) Accountability and delegation. A guide for the nursing team. [www.rcn.org.uk/professional-development/accountability-and-delegation](http://www.rcn.org.uk/professional-development/accountability-and-delegation)

RCN (2019) Sexual and reproductive health: education, training and career progression in nursing and midwifery <https://www.rcn.org.uk/professional-development/publications/pub-007502>

RCN (2019) Sexual health education directory <https://www.rcn.org.uk/clinical-topics/public-health/sexual-health/sexual-health-education-directory>

RCN (2019) The Role of Nursing Associates in Vaccination and Immunisation Position statement (April 2019) <https://www.rcn.org.uk/professional-development/publications/pub-007565>

RCN (2020) Genital Examination in Women <https://www.rcn.org.uk/professional-development/publications/rcn-genital-examination-in-women-pub007961>

RCN (2020) Human Papillomavirus (HPV), Cervical Screening and Cervical Cancer <https://www.rcn.org.uk/professional-development/publications/rcn-hpv-cervical-screening-cervical-cancer-pub007960>

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