NOVA SCOTIA NURSING AND MIDWIFERY REGULATOR

Education Program Approval

CATEGORY

Standards and Guidance and Education Program Approval

Policy

OVERVIEW

Under the authority *of the Regulated Health Professions Act (RHPA),* the Nova Scotia Nursing and Midwifery Regulatory (NSNMR) is mandated to regulate the nursing profession in the public interest. A key component of this public protection mandate is ensuring that individuals entering the profession have the knowledge, skills, and judgment to practice safely, ethically, and competently.

Entry and re-entry level nursing education programs in Nova Scotia must receive approval from NSNMR for their graduates to be eligible to write the applicable licensing exam and for registration. The Board holds final authority to grant approval status. The Standards and Guidance and Education Program Approval Team support the Board through structured evaluation and recommendations.

This policy establishes the framework, principles, standards and indicators used to evaluate programs requirements, and decision-making criteria governing the approval of entry-level nursing education programs.

POLICY STATEMENT

- Program approval decisions are based on standardized, evidence-informed evaluation processes aligned with NSNMR's public protection mandate.
- Approval is granted to the institution conferring the degree, diploma, or certificate.
- Programs must demonstrate compliance with the approved Education Standards for Nova Scotia Nursing Programs and the mandatory indicators under these standards to receive or maintain approval status.
- Approval status is determined through preliminary reviews (initial), comprehensive reviews (at least every seven years) and/or through annual monitoring reviews using a standardized scoring methodology.
- Preliminary approval is granted to a new program who at minimum meets all the requirements of the curriculum mapping submission.
- Programs receiving preliminary approval must undergo a comprehensive review in the academic year following the first class of graduates. Graduates from programs with this status are considered graduates of an approved nursing program and are eligible for registration in Nova Scotia.
- Approval is granted when programs achieve a minimum overall cut score of 75%, and a score of "met" on all mandatory indicators. Graduates from a program with this status are considered graduates of an approved nursing program and are eligible for registration in Nova Scotia.
- Conditional approval is granted when schools do not meet the cut score of 75% OR do not meet the mandatory indicators. Graduates from a program with this status are considered graduates of an approved

nursing program and are eligible for registration in Nova Scotia,

- Programs receiving Conditional approval must implement corrective action within prescribed timelines.
- Programs are not approved if the program fails to meet the cut score of 75% OR does not meet the mandatory indicators over a consecutive number of years (see the Guidelines for specific number of years based on the programs approval status) and does not demonstrate improvement in meeting the requirements. Graduates from a program with this status are not eligible for registration in Nova Scotia.
- Programs must notify NSNMR of substantive program changes.
- Discontinued programs must provide written notification to NSNMR.
- Approval decisions are made public.
- All program review materials remain confidential except for publicly posted approval status.
- All individuals involved in approval activities must declare conflicts of interest and recuse themselves where appropriate. Programs may raise perceived conflicts before deliberations begin.
- NSNMR will recover direct costs associated with program approval that is outside the normal operating budget, for example if a site visit is warranted.

Key Principles

The program approval process is:

Regulatory-focused – Centered on public protection.
Transparent – Standards and decisions are publicly available.
Evidence-informed – Based on best practice and evidence.
Objective – Grounded in standardized criteria.
Sustainable – Maintainable by system partners.

Policy Elements

DEFINITIONS

- **Approved Program**– This term designates an education program has met the prescribed standards set out in the NSNMR program approval process. Program approval is a mandatory process based on the entry-to-practice competencies for a class or category of a nurse.
- **Conditional Approval** – Approval granted subject to required corrective action within a defined timeframe.
- **Preliminary Approval**- is given to a new program who at minimum meets all the requirements of the curriculum mapping submission.
- **Comprehensive Review** – One component of the program approval framework used to approve entry-level nursing education programs. For the comprehensive review, all program approval indicators are reviewed every seven years, unless annual review results are unsatisfactory.
- **Annual Monitoring Review** – One component of the program approval framework used to approve entry-level nursing education programs. A subset of the program approval indicators (the outcome indicators) are examined yearly for each program and the program's approval score is calculated. Programs are approved annually based on the annual monitoring review results or the comprehensive review as required.
- **Indicator** – For the purposes of program approval, an indicator is an objective measure used to assess

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whether an entry-level nursing education program has achieved the program approval standards. An indicator is specific, measurable, attainable, realistic and time- limited.

- **Mandatory Indicators** – An indicator that must be fully met to receive an approved status for education program approval.
- **Substantive Change** – A significant modification to program delivery, curriculum, governance, admission requirements, or related indicators that may trigger review.

GUIDELINES

1. All entry and re-entry level nursing programs must be assessed against Board-approved standards in the areas of:
   - Structure (25%)
     - Governance
     - Client and student safety
     - Qualified faculty
   - Curriculum (40%)
     - Entry-level competency integration (mandatory)
     - Clinical learning opportunities
     - Integrated practicum communication processes
   - Outcomes (35%)
     - Registration exam first-time pass rates (3-year rolling average)
     - Graduate readiness survey
     - Preceptor readiness survey

   Indicator scoring:
   - Met = 2
   - Partially Met = 1
   - Not Met = 0

   Indicator score = Evidence score × Indicator weight

2. Approval Status Categories
   Programs receive one of four statuses:
   1. Preliminary Approval
   2. Approved
   3. Conditional Approval
   4. Not Approved

   Graduates from programs with Preliminary, Approved, or Conditional status are eligible for registration. Graduates from Not Approved programs are not eligible.

3. Programs must notify NSNMR in writing of substantive change such as:
   - Significant changes made to the curriculum including how the curriculum addresses the competencies
   - Changes to the admission requirements or exemption criteria for students entering the entry-level program

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- Changes to the delivery site of the program such as offering a program at a new site
- New or changes to collaborative partners or other organizational governance changes that impact the delivery of the program
- Significant changes in policies or procedures related to any of the program approval indicators.

4. Frequency of Review
    - Comprehensive Review: at least every 7 years for programs who received approved status
    - Annual Monitoring: Outcome indicators annually
    - Conditional Monitoring: at minimum yearly or based on action plan requirements for programs that are approved with conditions

5. Approval Terms and Conditions

    If a program receives Conditional Approval:

    As a result of failure to meet mandatory indicators:
    - 1 year to correct
        - Schools to develop action plan with NSNMR template
    - If unmet after 1 year → consultation with applicable Government partner
    - 1 additional year → if still unmet → Not Approved

    As a result of failure to meet cut score of 75%:
    - Up to 3 years to improve with annual progress report submitted on work towards meeting the cut score
        - Schools to develop action plan with NSNMR template
    - If no improvement → consultation with applicable Government partner
    - 1 additional year → if still unmet → Not Approved

6. Communication of Decisions
    - Written report and scorecard provided to schools
    - Status published on NSNMR website
    - Schools advised to post approval status publicly
    - Applicable Government partner notified prior to Board decisions involving not approved statuses

ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

SGEPA Team
- Conducts program evaluations.
- Reviews evidence submissions.
- Makes recommendations to the Board
- Determines whether substantive changes trigger review.
- Communicates decisions to schools

CEO & Registrar
- Provides oversight.
- Participates in dispute resolution if required.

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- Communicates with applicable Government partner.

Schools

- Submit notification of preliminary program approval request as applicable at least 12 months prior to anticipated start of the program
- Submit required documentation.
- Notify NSNMR of substantive changes or discontinuation.
- Develop and implement action plans if required.
- Post approval status on their website when advised.

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Version Control Approval and Classification

CURRENT VERSION OF DOCUMENT

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Next Review Date		**Date Rescinded**	

VERSION HISTORY

Version No.	Date	Changed by	Changes Made

RELATED LEGISLATION & STRATEGIC PLAN OBJECTIVE

Legislation [*Act*, Regs, By-Laws]	Section	Strategic Plan
Regulated Health Professions Act (RHPA)	6(2)(a)(i)	Future Facing Regulation

CLASSIFICATION

This document is determined to be	Public
	[insert classification from table below]

Classification	Description
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