



Bord Altranais agus
Cnáimhseachais na hÉireann
Nursing and Midwifery
Board of Ireland

Policy for Programme Approval and Monitoring Processes

Second Edition

Approved by the NMBI Board: April 2025

This document is a revision of the First Edition, which came into effect following Nursing and Midwifery Board of Ireland approval in January 2022. The Second Edition received Nursing and Midwifery Board of Ireland approval in April 2025.

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Introduction

About NMBI

Protecting patients, individuals, service users and other members of the public is at the heart of what we do at the Nursing and Midwifery Board of Ireland (NMBI). We are committed to fulfilling this objective by supporting registered nurses and midwives in their provision of the highest standards of care.

Among our core functions we:

- maintain the Register of Nurses and Midwives and a Candidate Register for nursing and midwifery students
- set the standards for the education and training of nurses and midwives
- approve programmes of education necessary for registration and monitor these programmes on an ongoing basis
- support registrants by providing appropriate guidance on professional conduct and ethics for both registered nurses and midwives, and
- investigate and consider complaints against registered nurses and midwives.

NMBI has a statutory responsibility to protect the public and protect the integrity of the professions under the Nurses and Midwives Act 2011, as amended.

NMBI sets the standards and requirements for registration in all divisions of the Register and specialist nursing and midwifery qualifications. We set the criteria for the approval of an education body seeking to deliver an education programme and we monitor adherence to these criteria to ensure ongoing compliance.

This document outlines the processes involved in the approval and monitoring of nursing and midwifery education programmes. It details the roles of NMBI, education bodies and their practice partners. This document relates to the approval and monitoring of all pre-first-time registration programmes, post-registration programmes leading to registration, and specialist nursing and midwifery education programmes. These processes are informed by our primary legislation, statutory instruments, our statement of strategy, and our funding model.

This document is divided into five sections:

1	Overview of NMBI's programme approval and monitoring processes
2	Programme approval process
3	Site inspections
4	Programme monitoring process
5	Ministerial communication

Further information is available on our [website](#).

1. Overview of NMBI's Programme Approval and Monitoring Processes

1.1 Legislative Basis

Section 85 of the Nurses and Midwives Act, 2011 (the Act), provides for:

- The setting and publishing of standards for nursing and midwifery education and training for first time registration and post-registration specialist nursing and midwifery qualifications
- Approval of programmes of pre first time registration, post-registration leading to registration and specialist nursing and midwifery education and training
- Monitoring adherence to the standards of nursing and midwifery education and training for first time registration and post-registration specialist nursing and midwifery qualifications
- Inspection of approved bodies to ensure ongoing compliance with criteria set out in the Rules (S.I. 218 of 2018 Nurses and Midwives (Education and Training) Rules 2018, S.I. 501 of 2020 Nurses and Midwives (Education and Training) Amendment Rules 2020):
 - Compliance with relevant standards and requirements
 - Minimum governance requirements relating to the delivery of programmes
 - An indicative curriculum that is responsive to current healthcare needs
 - Have regards to the National Framework of Qualifications.
- Inspection of places where training takes place, and
- Publishing details of all inspections.

1.2 Standards and Requirements

The approval and monitoring of nursing and midwifery education programmes is based on the standards and requirements developed for each of the programmes. The standards and requirements provide guidance for education bodies and their practice partners in relation to the development, approval, delivery, assessment and monitoring of education programmes. They are developed and updated in consultation with registrants, education bodies and a wide range of stakeholders including public representative groups. Approved programmes are required to meet all the relevant standards and requirements.

1.3 Programme Approval

An education body who is applying for approval of a new programme leading to first time registration, a post registration programme leading to registration, or a specialist nursing or midwifery education programme is required to:

- satisfy the Board that it complies with the relevant standards and requirements
- set out minimum governance requirements relating to the delivery of the programme
- incorporate an indicative curriculum that is responsive to current healthcare needs, and
- have regard to the National Framework of Qualifications.

Applications for approval of a new programme can be made by an existing approved education body or by an education body not previously approved by the Board. There are distinct processes for previously approved education bodies and for education bodies applying for approval for the first time.

At the end of the approval process the Board can, where appropriate:

- approve education programmes and bodies which may deliver such programmes
- approve subject to conditions attached to the approval of the programmes and bodies which may deliver such programmes
- refuse to approve an education body to deliver such programmes.

Once a programme has been approved by the Board, the programme moves to the monitoring phase.

This process is clearly outlined in [Section 2](#).

1.4 Programme Monitoring

Programme monitoring begins once a programme has been approved by the Board. The purpose of monitoring is to ensure ongoing compliance with the standards and requirements. There are three elements involved in the monitoring of programmes:

- Site Inspections
- Annual Reports
- Material Changes.

1.4.1 Site inspections

The Board will inspect education bodies approved to deliver education programmes at intervals, not exceeding five years, to ensure ongoing compliance with the relevant standards and requirements. The site inspection involves the completion of a self-assessment audit by the education body, a visit by a site inspection team to the education body, and a review of all programmes leading to registration in any division of the Register and specialist programmes not leading to registration.

The site inspection also includes a visit by a site inspection team to a sample of practice partners associated with the education programmes. The inspection team must comprise of people with relevant knowledge and experience. Site inspections can be in-person, virtual or a combination of both.

The site inspection team, having carried out the inspection, will prepare a written report setting out its findings and recommendations for the Education, Training and Standards Committee (ETS).

- The ETS Committee can recommend to the Board to continue to approve an education programme. The decision to continue to approve a programme will be made by the Board.
- Where the ETS Committee recommends continued approval subject to specified conditions, continued approval may be granted pending the resolution of specified conditions within a documented timeframe.
- Where the ETS Committee recommends withdrawal of approval of an education programme, this will be escalated to the Board for a decision.

Site inspection reports are published by the Board's on the NMBI website.

Further information on the site inspection process is included in [Section 3.1](#).

1.4.2 Annual reports

All education bodies, in association with their practice partners, are required to submit a report to NMBI by the date communicated on our website confirming the continued compliance of their programme(s) with the standards and requirements, including an update on any conditions that the Board may have imposed.

A template for the Annual Report will be provided to the education body each year by the Education, Policy and Standards Department. Annual Reports are not published, however, compliance with conditions imposed at initial approval, or as an outcome of a site inspection, will be published on the NMBI website as an update to the previously published site inspection report.

Further details on the Annual Report process is available in [Section 4.1](#).

1.4.3 Material changes

An education body approved to deliver an education programme is required to notify the Board of any proposed material change to the programme and to receive approval for the change in advance of implementing the change. A material change is any significant change to an approved programme that would have implications for the continued approval of that programme. It is the responsibility of the education body to define how the material change will continue to meet the relevant standards and requirements.

Further information on material changes is available in [Section 4.2](#).

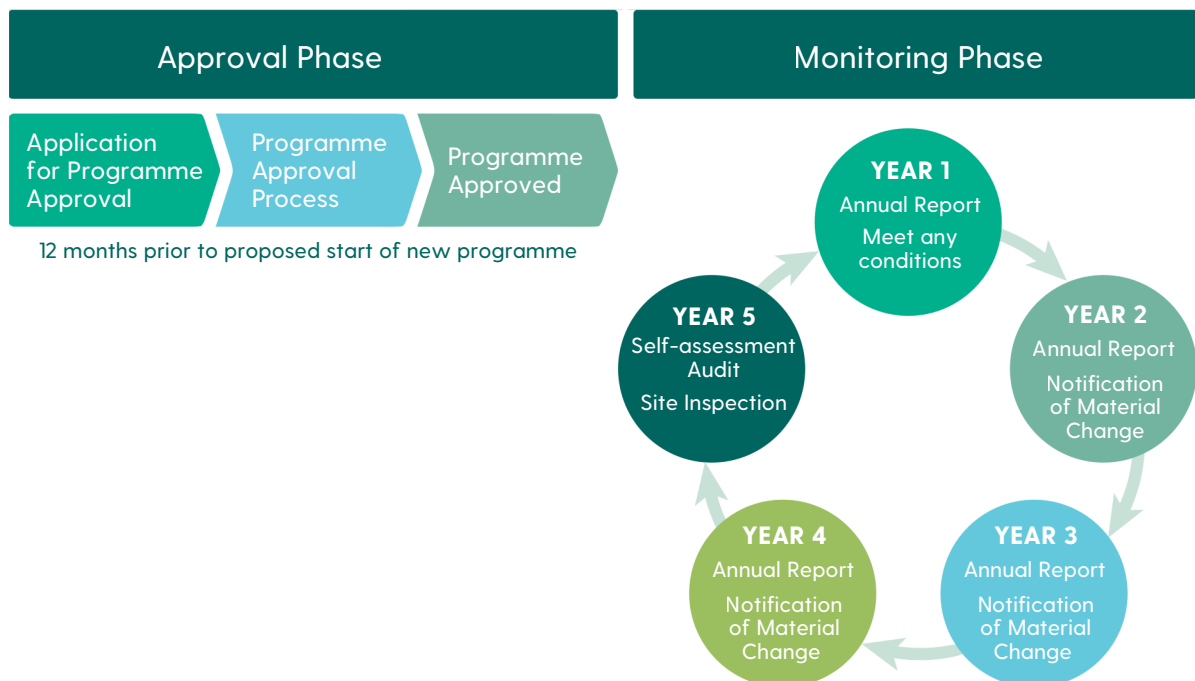


Figure 1: Overview of NMBI programme approval and monitoring process

2. Programme Approval Process

This section outlines the **initial** approval process of a new education body to deliver an education programme and the process for approval of a new programme from a previously approved education body.

2.1 Process for Initial Approval

The process for an education body seeking initial approval from the Board to deliver an education programme includes the following stages:

2.1.1 Application

The education body will write to NMBI seeking approval to deliver an education programme for the first time. They will outline their intent to develop a new pre-registration nursing and midwifery programme.

2.1.2 Meeting with NMBI personnel

A preliminary meeting will be set up with the Director of Education, Policy and Standards and (if appropriate) the Director of Professional Standards – Midwifery, to discuss the approval process.

2.1.3 Self-assessment audit

The education body will complete a self-assessment audit (template provided by NMBI) in line with the relevant standards and requirements for each of the proposed programmes. The completed self-assessment audit must be submitted to NMBI, along with supporting documentation at least 12 months prior to the proposed commencement date of the programme. In certain circumstances, changes to this timeline may be permitted with approval from the Education, Policy and Standards Department. Any deviations must be reviewed and authorised by the Director of Education, Policy and Standards.

2.1.4 Review of application

The application will undergo a desk-based review to assess compliance with the programme approval criteria. At any stage during this process, NMBI may request additional information from the education body to support the application. Once the review is complete, the application will be submitted to the ETS Committee for consideration and approval to proceed to the site inspection stage.

2.1.5 Site inspection

The Education, Policy and Standards Department will conduct a site inspection of the education body and a representative sample of its practice partners. The inspection team will include individuals with appropriate knowledge and expertise. The purpose of the inspection is to assess compliance with the relevant standards and requirements. The inspection schedule will be agreed by NMBI and the education body. Following the inspection, a draft report will be prepared. Further details on the site inspection process can be found in [Section 3](#).

2.1.6 After the site inspection

A draft site inspection report will be issued to the education body within six weeks of the inspection's completion. The education body will have three weeks to review the report and submit comments on any factual inaccuracies. An updated report will then be provided to the ETS Committee. Based on this report, the ETS Committee will make a recommendation to the Board.

2.1.7 Decision by the Board

Having considered the application and the recommendation of the ETS, the Board may decide to:

- grant approval of the proposed programme
- grant approval of the proposed programme subject to specified conditions
- refuse the proposed programme based on specified reasons
- refuse the education body as a provider of programmes based on specified reasons
- grant approval of the education body as a provider of programmes
- grant approval of the education body as a provider of programmes subject to specified conditions.

2.1.8 Approval with conditions

Any conditions attached to the approval of a programme must be fulfilled by the deadline set by the Board. A report outlining how the conditions have been met will be submitted to the ETS Committee for review and a recommendation will be made to the Board. The Board reserves the right to amend or remove any conditions attached to the programme.

In specific circumstances, an education body may request an extension to the programme's approval period. Such requests must be submitted in writing and will be reviewed by the Director of Education, Policy and Standards and noted by the ETS Committee.

A written request to extend the deadline for meeting conditions set by the Board may be submitted to the Director of Education, Policy and Standards. Approval of such an extension is at the discretion of the Director.

2.1.9 Refusals

If the Board is unable to grant approval or decides to refuse approval to an education body, it will issue a formal notification outlining the reasons for its decision. The education body has the right to respond to the Board regarding the issues raised. This response must be submitted within a reasonable timeframe specified by the Board, which will be no less than one month from the date of notification. The Board will review the response, including any proposed resolutions and make a final decision. The education body will be notified of the outcome, which will take effect from the date of notification.

2.1.10 Appeals

An education body may appeal the Board's decision to the High Court under Section 86 of the Act. This appeal must be lodged no later than 21 days after the education body receives formal notice of the Board's decision. A copy of the relevant section of the Act will be included with the notification.

2.1.11 Publication

A decision by the Board to approve an education body as a provider of education and named programmes under Section 85(2)(a) of the Act, including approvals granted with conditions, will be published on the NMBI website.

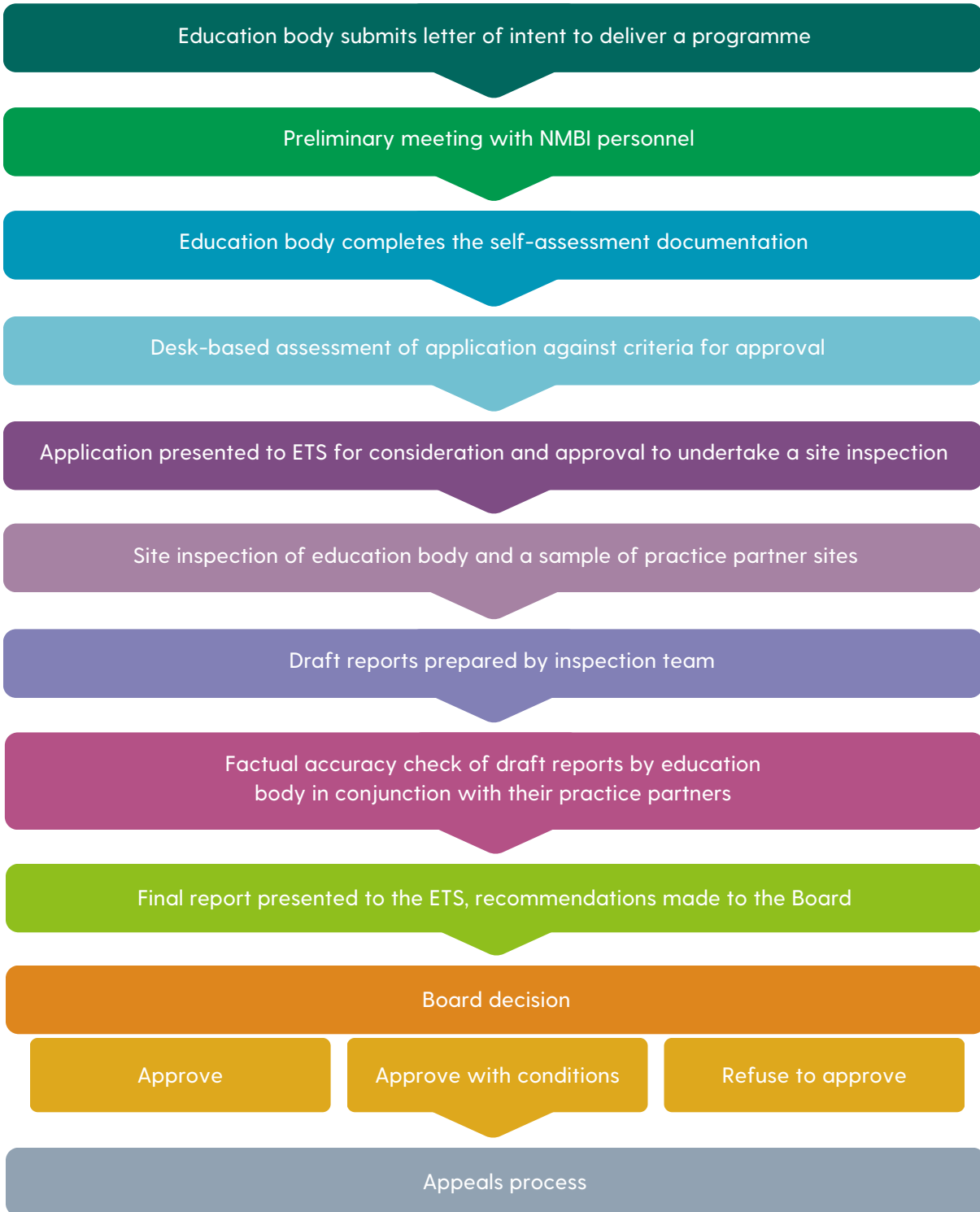


Figure 2: Flowchart for initial approval of an education body to deliver programmes

2.2 Application for Approval of a New Programme in an Approved Education Body

Education bodies that already hold approval to deliver education programmes may apply for approval of a new pre-registration programme, a post-registration programme leading to registration, or a specialist education programme through a desk-based review process. New pre-registration programmes will require a site inspection for first time approval. The site inspection will incorporate an inspection of the provider and their proposed practice sites.

As part of this process, the education body must:

- complete a self-assessment audit using the template provided by NMBI, in accordance with the relevant standards and requirements
- compile all necessary supporting documentation, and
- submit the full application, including the completed audit and all supporting materials to NMBI **at least eight weeks** in advance of the relevant ETS Committee meeting.

Following the desk-based review of the submitted documentation, a report will be prepared for consideration by the ETS Committee. The ETS Committee will then make a recommendation to the Board to:

- approve the programme
- approve the programme subject to specified conditions, or
- Refuse to approve the programme.

2.2.1 Refusals

If the Board refuses to grant approval for a proposed education programme, it will notify the education body accordingly. This notification will include a statement informing the education body of its right to respond to the matters raised. The education body must submit its observations within a timeframe specified by the Board, which will be no less than one month from the date of notification.

The Board will review the response and any proposed resolutions before making a final decision. The education body will be notified of this decision, which will take effect from the date of notification.

Where a programme is refused approval, a number of recommendations may be suggested to improve the overall application. Education bodies have the opportunity to resubmit the programme once these recommendations have been actioned.

2.2.2 Appeals

An education body may appeal the Board's decision to the High Court under Section 86 of the Act. This appeal must be filed no later than 21 days after receiving notice of the Board's decision. A copy of the relevant section of the Act will be included with the notice of the Board's decision.

2.2.3 Publication

A decision by the Board to approve an education programme(s) under section 85(2)(a) of the Act, including approval with conditions, will be published on the NMBI website.

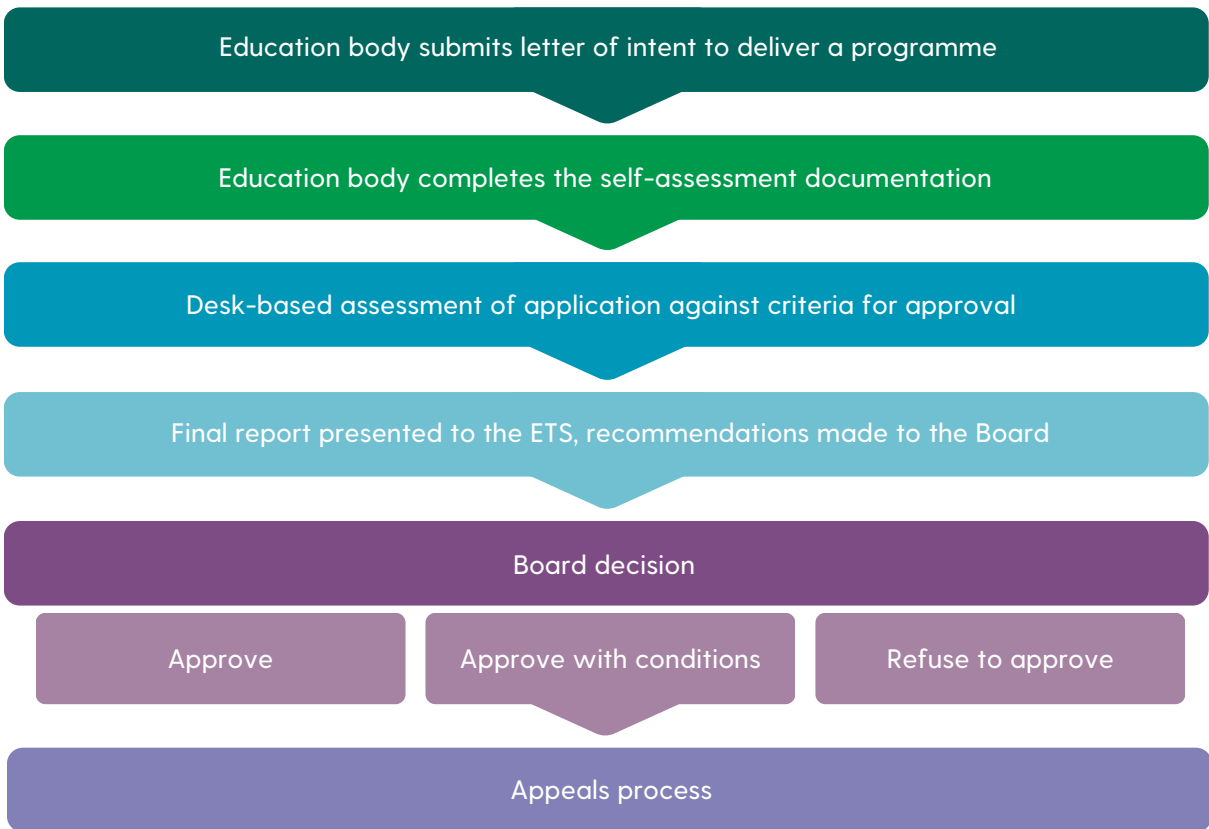


Figure 2: Flowchart for approval of a new programme in a previously approved education body

3. Site Inspections

Each education body will be inspected at least once within a five-year cycle to ensure ongoing compliance with the relevant standards and requirements. During the site inspection, the Board will review all programmes leading to registration in any or all divisions of the Register, specialist nursing and midwifery programmes, and a sample of practice partners associated with individual programmes.

Site inspections will also occur when an education body applies for first-time approval to deliver a nursing or midwifery education programme.

The Board reserves the right to schedule an inspection outside of the five-year cycle under certain circumstances. For example, if there are significant material changes to the programme(s) that warrant an additional site inspection, or if conditions imposed by the Board require a follow-up inspection.

3.1 Notice of Site Inspection

The education body will be notified in writing one year in advance of the proposed inspection. NMBI will coordinate with the education body to agree on dates for the site inspection. Six months prior to the inspection, a meeting will be organised between NMBI and a nominated site inspection lead from the education body to discuss document requirements and scheduling arrangements.

NMBI will request details of all practice partners, including relevant contact information, to determine the inspection schedule. The education body must submit the self-assessment audit and supporting documentation by the specified date. This submission should also highlight any changes or updates to the programme(s).

It is the responsibility of the education body to provide details of all programmes they wish to continue offering. Only programmes that are submitted for site inspection will be considered for reapproval.

3.2 Selection of Practice Partner Sites for Inspection

During the normal course of the programme, the assessment of practice partners' suitability is delegated to the education body. NMBI provides an audit tool to determine suitability in relation to the programme standards and requirements. As part of the education body site inspection, NMBI will conduct practice partner site inspections to audit compliance with the standards and requirements of the practical components of the programme. The sample selected will be determined on a risk basis using several metrics, including:

- | | |
|--|--|
| • A risk-based approach to selection | • Date of previous inspection |
| • Prioritisation of new programmes | • Outcome of previous inspection |
| • High volume sites | • Sites aligning with evolving health policy |
| • High profile sites | • New sites that support student learning |
| • Sites with changes in ownership or structure | |

3.3 Site Inspection Team

The Director of Education, Policy and Standards will appoint a site inspection team from the site inspection panel, dependent on availability, to review the self-assessment audit documentation, conduct the site inspection and prepare a written report. The site inspection team will consist of individuals with relevant knowledge and experience.

Approximately, 3 months prior to site inspection a Request for Availability will be issued to the Site Inspection Panel. The request will ask potential inspectors to provide their availability for the upcoming inspection(s). There is a two week timeframe for reply. Once the final availability list has been collated, the Education, Policy and Standards team will propose the site inspection team to the Director of Education, Policy and Standards for approval. The team will comprise representatives from academic and practice backgrounds. The site inspection team will be notified of their selection and further arrangements will be made for access to documentation.

The site inspection team will meet with the Education, Policy and Standards team to discuss the documentation and logistics. The education body will be notified of any issues that require clarification or additional documentation prior to the inspection.

3.3.1 Site Inspection Panel

Every three years, the Education, Policy and Standards Department renew the existing site inspection panel. An expression of interest is circulated among academic and practice stakeholders. Interested professionals are invited to apply for the panel.

All applications are reviewed and candidates who meet the criteria for the panel are placed with the Director of Education granting the final approval for appointment to the panel.

In the preparation for inspection, a request for availability is issued to the panel at least three months in advance of the inspection. Available inspectors will then be considered for selection to the site inspection team.

3.4 Site Inspection Timetable

For the education body, the site inspection timetable will be finalised 14 days in advance. The education body will be informed of the format and purpose of each meeting, as well as any requirements for staff presentations.

If any serious concerns regarding the education body arise during the site inspection, these will be brought to the attention of the Head of School/Department or other relevant personnel.

Practice placement sites will be notified at least six weeks prior to the inspection. The timetable and agenda for the inspection will be agreed in advance. The agenda will include a brief overview from the practice site outlining the nursing and/or midwifery services available. The self-assessment audit completed by the practice site will be reviewed by the site inspection team in advance. Evidence supporting the self-assessment will be requested during the inspection. It is the responsibility of the practice sites to provide the requested evidence to support the self-assessment audit. It is preferable that students are rostered on during the site inspection process.

If a significant issue arises during the site inspection that requires escalation, the CEO of NMBI will be notified. Depending on the severity, the site inspection team lead, in conjunction with the Director of Education, Policy and Standards, will highlight the issues at the earliest possible opportunity with the Head of School/Department. Further escalation to the Education Body Executive Team, Regional Director of Nursing/Midwifery or the Board may occur if necessary.

3.5 Post Site Inspection

The site inspection team will convene to discuss the findings from the site inspection, identify areas of good practice (commendations), and make recommendations regarding the continued approval of each programme. The team will prepare a draft written report which will include commentary on both the education body and their practice partners. A copy of the draft report will be sent to the education body for verification of factual accuracy. It is the responsibility of the education body to liaise with their practice partners regarding the content of the report.

3.6 Outcome of Site Inspection

The draft report will be presented to the ETS Committee. The committee can recommend to the Board to continue approving the education body and its programmes. Recommendations to continue approval of the education body and/or programmes, subject to specified conditions, or to withdraw approval of the education body and/or programmes, will be escalated to the Board for a final decision.

3.7 Publication

The 2011 Act requires NMBI to publish details of all inspections on its website. The final Board-approved site inspection report for the education body will be published on the NMBI website. The report will include a table outlining the relevant requirements, the findings related to each requirement, any conditions attached to the continued approval of the education body and any commendations of good practice observed during the site inspection.

The report template will include a description of NMBI approval or monitoring processes, with a particular focus on the role of site inspections and the type of documentation involved in the site inspection.

When conditions are attached to the practical element of the programme, it is the joint responsibility of the education body and practice partner to address these conditions through the Local Joint Working Group. Education bodies are required to provide updates on conditions within the specified timeframe in the site inspection report and additionally within the annual report for any outstanding conditions.

A further report addressing the education body's response to conditions will be published on the website as an addendum to the original site inspection report.



Figure 4: Flowchart for a site inspection to an education body

4. Programme Monitoring Process

This section outlines the processes for monitoring adherence to the standards and requirements set out in Section 85 of the Nurses and Midwives Act 2011, as amended. The Board ensures compliance through site inspections of the education body and their associated practice partners, as well as through the education body's annual reports. Additionally, the education body must notify the Board of any proposed material changes to the programme.

4.1 Education Body Annual Reports

Education bodies are required to submit an annual report to the Board, jointly prepared with their practice partners. This report must demonstrate ongoing compliance of all approved programmes with the relevant standards and requirements, as well as any conditions previously imposed by the Board.

Each year, NMBI provides a standardised template in advance of the submission deadline. This template enables the education body to report comprehensively on all pre-registration, post-registration and specialist programmes. It includes a core set of data that must be submitted annually. NMBI may amend the template each year to address specific themes or to collect additional information on a particular topic of interest.

The annual report template includes the following elements:

- A report on conditions attached to the initial programme approval
- A report on conditions arising from ongoing monitoring (for example, site inspections)
- A declaration from the education body's management confirming that all programmes continue to meet the required standards and requirements
- Information or data related to a specific theme or topic identified by NMBI for that reporting year.

Annual reports must be submitted on or before the date specified on the NMBI website each year, or as otherwise communicated by the Board. Due to exceptional circumstances, an education body may request an extension to this deadline, provided the request is submitted in writing and includes a valid justification. These requests will be reviewed on a case by case basis.

All annual reports are reviewed by the Education, Policy and Standards Department. A summary of the findings - including declarations of continued compliance and adherence to previously imposed conditions - is presented to the ETS Committee and the Board.

In the year a site inspection takes place, the education body may not be required to submit an annual report and instead complete a six month monitoring report. NMBI will confirm this on a case-by-case basis.

Annual reports are not published. However, information relating to compliance with previously imposed conditions may be published as an addendum to the original site inspection report on the NMBI website, where those conditions were initially outlined.

4.2 Notification of Proposed Material Change

Education bodies are required to notify the Board of any proposed material changes to an approved education programme. A material change refers to any modification that affects the core elements of the programme as originally approved. These changes are substantial enough to impact on the programme's alignment with the standards.

When submitting a proposed change, the education body must provide a clear explanation and map of how the change will continue to align with the standards and regulatory requirements.

Examples of material changes include, but are not limited to:

- Changes to curriculum, revisions to core content and removal or addition of core modules within the programme
- Changes to the programme's structure or mode of delivery
- Modifications to the admissions process

All proposed material changes must be approved by the Education, Policy and Standards Department. Where necessary, proposals may be escalated to the ETS Committee for a decision.

Approval must be obtained prior to implementing any material changes to the programme.

4.3 Notification of Proposed Minor Amendments

A minor amendment to an approved education programme refers to a small-scale change that does not significantly alter the overall aims, structure, learning outcomes or quality of the approved programme. These changes are made to improve clarity, update content or respond to feedback.

Examples of minor amendments include, but are not limited to:

- Updating reading lists
- Slight adjustments to module content
- Minor assessment changes.

All proposed minor amendments must be approved by the Education, Policy and Standards Department. Where necessary, proposals may be escalated to the ETS Committee for noting.

5. Ministerial Communications

In accordance with legislative obligations, NMBI will notify the Minister for Health and the Minister for Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science of the outcome of any site inspection and/or application for programme approval. This notification will be issued in writing annually and will be communicated through the Education, Policy and Standards Department.

The Board reserves the right to communicate directly with the Minister(s) in exceptional circumstances. This may occur where there are significant concerns regarding an education body and/or its programme(s). The Director of Education, Policy and Standards will advise the CEO and the Board that direct and immediate communication is warranted. In such cases, the communication will be issued through the Chief Executive Office.

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