



Norman Franklin and Dr Jane Greaves in the newly-expanded test centre at Northumbria University.

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Major £2m expansion of nursing test centre will bring thousands more nurses to the frontline faster

A national nurse testing centre at Northumbria University has doubled in size to help to speed up the process of bringing more nurses to the NHS frontline.

In partnership with the [Nursing and Midwifery Council](#), Northumbria University [opened a Competence Test Centre](#) in March 2022 to provide the Objective Structured Clinical Examination, known as OSCE, for up to 7,000 candidates per year.

The Objective Structured Clinical Examination is the practical part of the Test of Competence that all nurses, midwives and nursing associates must take before they can be registered to practise.

All overseas-trained nurses and UK nurses returning after a career break are assessed on how well they care for and communicate with patients and must pass the exam before they are permitted to work.

By the end of 2022, Northumbria University was delivering 45 OSCE exams per day at its test centre, which is based at the Coach Lane Campus in Newcastle.

With the new centre running so successfully, and with an urgent need to recruit more than 100,000 nurses to the NHS, the Nursing and Midwifery Council asked the University if it could expand its current provision and offer more exams.

Northumbria began a major £2 million project to expand the centre to increase its capacity in January, which has led to the creation of more than 50 additional jobs.

An extensive renovation of existing teaching, office and social spaces has led to the University's Competence Test Centre doubling in size, from 15 to 30 testing bays.

The centre already employed more than 120 examiners, technicians, administrators and actors who play the role of patients in the exams. These numbers have now been significantly boosted to ensure the centre runs efficiently with its increased capacity and that exams meet the stringent national standards.

As each testing bay is now used to deliver three exams per day, Northumbria University will be able to offer up to 22,000 OSCE exams per year by the end of 2023, once all new staff are in post and fully trained.

Dr Jane Greaves and Norman Franklin in one of the OSCE testing bays

Head of the centre, Norman Franklin, said: “Although we only opened last March, by the end of last year we had grown so successfully that Northumbria University was already offering more OSCE exams than most of the other test centres in the UK.

“We all know that the NHS workforce is under increasing strain and so we are delighted to be able to play a part in alleviating this pressure by significantly expanding the number of test places we are able to offer.”

Jack Bland, Head of Testing Services at the Nursing and Midwifery Council (NMC), said: “Internationally educated nursing and midwifery professionals make a vital contribution to people’s health and wellbeing across the UK. This expansion will ensure even more professionals join our register quickly and safely, so they can provide the high-quality care everyone has the right to expect.

“A massive congratulations to all those involved in making this happen – what an incredible achievement.”

Dr Jane Greaves, Associate Professor and strategic lead for the centre, added: “This is a high stakes exam for the candidates who understandably find the test very stressful. At Northumbria we recognise this and have ensured that our candidate experience is as positive and supportive as possible.

“Our test centre and University aim is to ensure that our candidates have the best chance of success so that they can join the NHS workforce as safe and effective nurse professionals.”

Candidates sitting the OSCE examination mainly come from NHS Trusts or hospitals, care providers and international nursing recruitment agencies. Some candidates opt to sit the exam independently to prepare themselves to enter the workplace.

During the exam, the candidates demonstrate their skills, knowledge and ability to communicate with patients in simulations of real clinical work. The tests take place in a recreation of their working environment, using a combination of advanced simulation technology and actors presenting as patients. Candidates must pass the exam before they are permitted to work

as qualified nurses.

Northumbria's centre has already provided a welcome boost to the North East economy, with thousands of candidates travelling to Newcastle from all over the UK to sit their exams.

Northumbria University is one of the largest centres for healthcare professional education in the North of England, offering a range of specialist degree and CPD programmes across many areas of nursing, midwifery, operating department practice, physiotherapy and occupational therapy.

Anyone wanting to find out more about booking the OSCE exam at Northumbria University should visit the [University's NMC Competence Test Centre](#) website or call 0191 300 2441.

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