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New national nurse training centre brings major boost for University and North East health sector and wider economy

Up to 7,000 new nurses and midwives per year will complete the final stage of their training at Northumbria University after it was awarded a contract to become one of five national OSCE testing centres.

The University worked in partnership with [The Newcastle upon Tyne Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust](#) and [Newcastle City Council](#) to submit the bid for centre status, which will also boost the wider regional economy.

All new nurses in the UK – whether they have been recruited from overseas or if they have taken a significant break from their nursing career – must complete an Observed Structured Clinical Examination ([OSCE](#)) as part of their ‘Test of Competence’ before they can be registered to practice.

The test enables professionals to demonstrate to assessors that they have the skills and knowledge to care for people safely and effectively.

With rising demand to bring people with the right skills and knowledge onto the UK’s nursing register as quickly as possible, the [Nursing and Midwifery Council](#) has recognised the need to improve testing capacity and accessibility.

Until now, new and returning nurses had to travel to Northampton, Ulster or Oxford to take their OSCE but two additional new contracts – awarded to the University as well as Leeds Teaching Hospitals NHS Trust – [were today announced](#) by the Nursing and Midwifery Council.

Not only will having a national centre, which will be based at the University, be of benefit to local, regional and national trusts, it is expected to be worth millions to the University and wider regional economy.

Approximately 30 permanent jobs are expected to be created and there will be a connected uplift in tourism and accommodation bookings as thousands of nurses’ travel to the city from around the UK to take their test.

The University is now working closely with its partners in preparation of receiving its first OSCE candidates from February 2022. Details on how candidates can book their tests will be announced later this year.

Professor Debra Porteous, Head of the University’s Department of [Nursing, Midwifery and Health](#) said: “It is important that those nurses and midwives who trained outside of the country, or who are returning to practice after time away, are able to sit this test in a variety of locations across the UK.

“We are delighted to be chosen as the main university centre in the North of England,

helping to ensure that nurses and midwives with the right skills and

knowledge join the Nursing and Midwifery Council and can do so in a timely way.”

She added that the University’s success in this bid would not have been possible without working in partnership with Newcastle Hospitals and the City Council.

“It is a great achievement for the region to be able to contribute to the registration of nurses and midwives who have trained overseas and who play a vital role in the UK’s health and care workforce,” she said.

“Northumbria University and the North East region are renowned for their excellence in health and life sciences and our partnership with Newcastle Hospitals and the City Council made Northumbria’s bid to run this centre stand out from the crowd.

“We look forward to welcoming applicants to our newly-designed centre where they will be able to undertake the test of competence with experienced staff facilitating.”

Maurya Cushlow, Executive Chief Nurse at Newcastle Hospitals, added: “It’s exciting to be working with two organisations that are absolutely committed to driving the nursing agenda forwards – not just at a local level but also regionally, nationally and internationally.

“We have a strong reputation for recruiting – both here and overseas – as well as return to practice and the opportunity to have a national centre right here in the City will not only benefit local, regional and national organisations but help to address a growing need and have a positive impact on the local economy.”

Andrea Sutcliffe, Chief Executive and Registrar of the Nursing and Midwifery Council said: “I’m delighted that we’ve been able to significantly increase our OSCE test centre provision.

“This additional capacity will mean professionals with the right skills and knowledge will have more choice in where to take their test, enabling them to join our register quickly and safely.

“I look forward to working closely with our test centre partners as we get our new test centres up and running in the coming months.”

Newcastle City Council’s Cabinet member for Education and Skills, Cllr Paula Holland, said: “This is great news, and it further bolsters the city’s growing reputation for health and life sciences. Nationally we have a shortage and urgent need for more nurses and care staff so it’s great that Newcastle will be playing a part in getting more of them qualified and deployed as quickly as possible.”

The OSCE is part of the Test of Competence for nurses and is a face-to-face examination with actors playing patients. The actors simulate a variety of medical conditions or ailments to the nurse, who is assessed on how they care for and communicate with the patient to ensure they meet the required standards.

Northumbria University’s contract will run for an initial three-year period, with the option to be extended for a further two years.

Anyone wanting to find out more information about Northumbria University’s OSCE centre can do so at www.northumbria.ac.uk/osce

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