



Royal College  
of Midwives

## Position Statement

Advanced

# practice

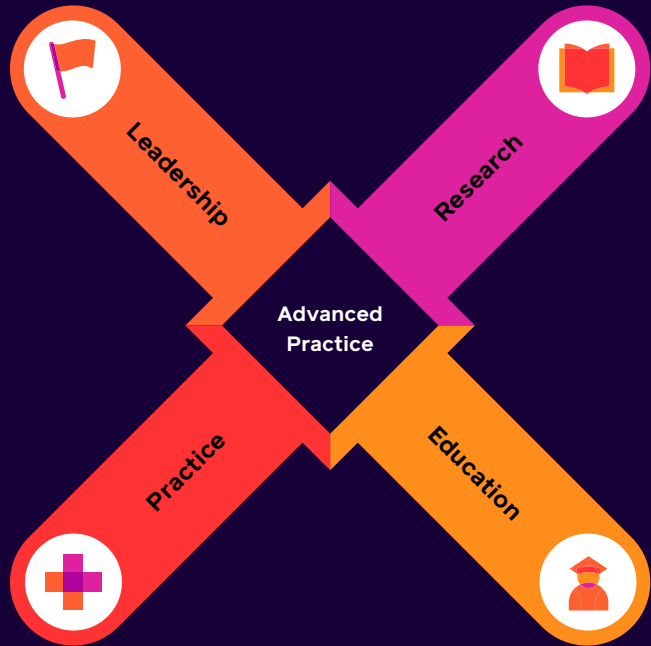
in midwifery



# The Royal College of Midwives position

The Royal College of Midwives (RCM) believes that advanced practice in midwifery expands knowledge, influence and impact across the four pillars of practice.

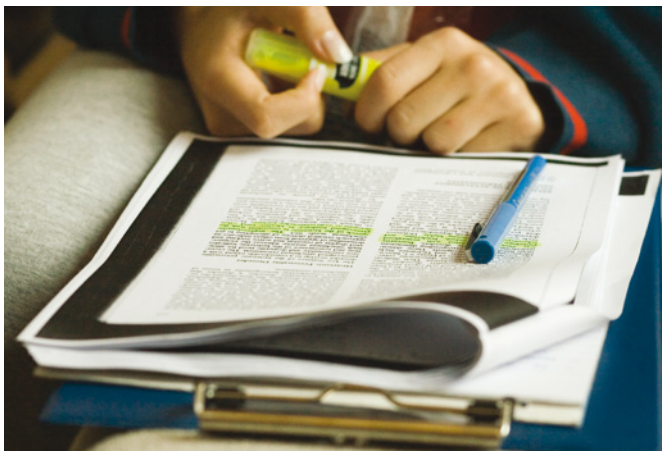
Midwives are autonomous and accountable as the lead professional for midwifery care at the point of Nursing and Midwifery Council (NMC) qualification and registration but they are not advanced practitioners. Advanced practice should build on the NMC Standards of proficiency for midwives<sup>1</sup> and form part of career journey opportunities.





The RCM defines advanced practice in midwifery as a level of practice underpinned by experience and expertise and enhanced by Masters level education.

It demonstrates influence and impact on midwifery practice across clinical practice, education, research and leadership. It is an opportunity for professional development and can support the midwife to accelerate into future career pathways. **It is not a replacement role for medical staff nor does it permit the undertaking of clinical skills that are not in the scope of midwifery practice.**



Advanced practice midwives can work alongside and complement others in roles such as midwives working in speciality, consultant midwives, lead midwives for education and professors. In addition, senior or expert roles and advanced practice should not be seen as mutually exclusive; midwives in these roles may or may not also be educated to advanced practice across four pillars of practice. Advanced practice pathways may support progression to other strategic or senior roles promoting succession planning and may be recognised working in clinical and non-clinical settings. Implementation may be different in each of the four UK countries depending on service need.

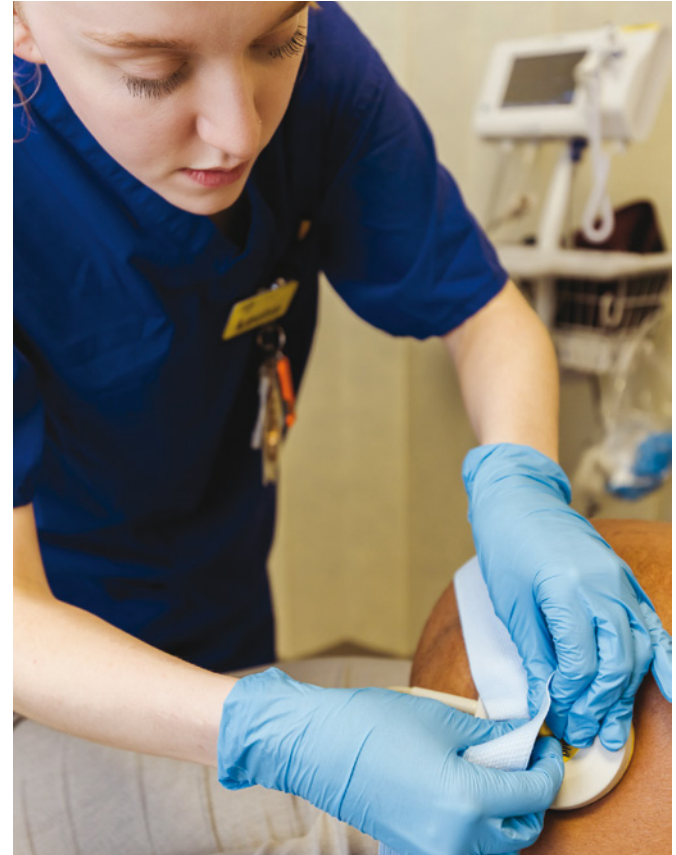
Advanced practice encourages experienced midwives to broaden their knowledge across the pillars of practice rather than a hierarchy of medical care. Midwifery careers do not need to be a linear journey of moving up a ladder; building a career portfolio can support personal advancement and widen career opportunities in practice, education, research and practice in a variety of settings. Furthermore it is an opportunity to enhance care provision and skill mix and ultimately the future of the profession.

**Advanced practice encourages experienced midwives to broaden their knowledge across the pillars of practice rather than a hierarchy of medical care**



## The RCM recommends:

- ▶ Protected time for education, development and reflection for midwives to continue their career journeys that can include mentorship and shadowing opportunities.
- ▶ Education routes and funding opportunities to be accessible through NHS education and local universities.
- ▶ Midwives are supported to build a career portfolio of practice that demonstrates their contribution and impact across the professional pillars.
- ▶ Universities with multi-professional advanced practice programmes should liaise with local Health Boards and Trusts to develop modules that meet national or local service need.
- ▶ Employers map role descriptors to advanced practice frameworks to ensure appropriate recognition.
- ▶ While it is important for a consensus on guiding principles for multi-professionals, advanced practice for midwifery must have its own recognised frameworks and proficiencies.



# Background and context



- ▶ In the UK, each country has its own policy on advanced practice. There are similarities in that advanced practice for nursing and midwifery is largely framed around four pillars covering clinical practice, leadership and management, education and research. Advancing practice frameworks are multi-professional in England,<sup>2</sup> Wales,<sup>3</sup> and Scotland.<sup>4</sup> The framework in Northern Ireland<sup>5</sup> is nurse specific and England is the only country that has a specific advanced clinical practice in midwifery capability framework.<sup>6</sup>
- ▶ There are two recent reports analysing advanced practice in midwifery. The University of East Anglia and Health Education England (HEE, now NHS England Workforce, Training and Education) report<sup>7</sup> recognises the differences between nursing and midwifery and that there is no one clear definition, although all the country polices have their own. The Nuffield Trust report,<sup>8</sup> commissioned by the NMC, found that there are few midwives with an advanced practice title. They found only seven specific midwifery roles and 27 titles in the NHS administrative data in England alone. Most midwives in these roles have achieved this recognised level of practice though a Masters education pathway.



▶ Consultant midwife and specialist midwife roles are more common and these are often compared to advanced practice. An RCM 2019 survey<sup>9</sup> found that the majority of consultant midwives were working across the four pillars in some capacity. The level of leadership was often related to midwife-led services, sometimes complex care and often a high degree of management. Most were involved in student and multidisciplinary education and, of those involved in research, it related to evidence-based policy and audit of services. Specialist roles provided aspects of service delivery, for example infant feeding, ultrasound scanning or care of specific complex needs. Masters level education was common and may have included prescribing. Few had a PhD.

▶ The analysis by University of East Anglia and HEE<sup>7</sup> found that those in advanced practice and specialist roles were clear that the consultant midwife role was different and more strategic, whereas advanced practice and specialist roles were viewed as more operational to clinical care. Many of those in specialist or advanced practice roles aspire to consultant midwife roles. The report recommends that an education and career pathway linked to multiprofessional advanced practice frameworks would enable midwives to plan career routes and describe it as a level of practice rather than role specific.

▶ In March 2024, the NMC<sup>10</sup> announced that additional regulation of advanced practice will be developed. Recommendations included the development of standards of proficiency for advanced level practice, an UK wide principles framework incorporating a shared position of definition of advanced practice and ensuring that advanced practice requirements are included in wider reviews of revalidation and the Code<sup>11</sup> in future.



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