

Nursing Career Frameworks - Why does Burn Nursing Care Need one?

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Introduction

In 2023, one of my first jobs in the role was to undertake a review of the nursing workforce across the 12 different services in the Northern Burn Care Network. This was a labour-intensive job but made easier as a previous review had been carried out in 2018, so I was able to use that data to collect and analyse against. The review was based on the 2023 National Burn Care Standards. The review identified several concerning areas, in the adult services there was an increased reliance on bands 2-4, with a decrease in band 5's. Bands 6&7 were largely the same or slightly increased and the single nurse consultant at 8b had not been replaced and there were no bands 8 in any of the adult services. Overall, the number of fixed posts had decreased and the vacancies had reduced.

Maternity leave had more than doubled, and sickness rates were above the national average. There were considerable numbers of staff over the age of 50 years with one service having almost 60% of there staff able to retire in the next 5 years.

In paediatric services, there was again an increase in band 2's but a decrease in bands 3-4. Band 5-6's had increased but band 7's had decreased. There was one band 8a in post. There was only one service with a fixed tern post and although double the adult rate, vacancies were down on 2018.

Again, in paediatrics, maternity leave was up but not as much as adult services. Sickness rates were above average in 2 services, but below average in the other services. The number of staff over the age of 50 was considerably lower than the adult services.

This led to a number of recommendations, a Career Framework for all the nursing workforce was one of these recommendations (NBCN 2024).

Nursing career frameworks are essential tools designed to support nurses in their professional journeys. They offer structured pathways for career progression, aligning with recognised standards and capabilities required in various nursing specialisations. They are designed to support professional growth, skill development and career progression. They define levels of practice, required knowledge, skills and behaviours and provide guidance for self assessment, training and meeting continuing professional (CPD) requirements (Skills for Health 2021).

A number of career frameworks for different disciplines and specialities exist; occupational therapy, mental health nursing, primary care, wound care, oncology etc
It was felt that given the nature of burns that a structured career framework across both trained and untrained staff would help to support this quite small but unique nursing workforce.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study was to develop a career framework for burns nurses from Bands 2-8. This would help to support in the recruitment and retention of staff across the Northern Burn Care Network (NBCN).

Methods

A review of existing career frameworks was undertaken by a working group made up of lead nurses in the NBCN. The group decided that the National Wound Care Workforce Framework (Skills for Health 2023) was most aligned to their needs and used that as a framework to undertake this piece of work. This was based on the Primary Care and General Practice Nursing Career and Core Capabilities Framework (Skills for Health 2021).

The Burns Career Framework covers nurses in bands 2-8. For untrained staff it outlines what is required nationally to move up the bands and then more specifically the level descriptor which identifies the key skills and knowledge required to undertake the role. The Career Framework for Health advocates 9 levels of career framework (Skills for Health 2010) (Fig 1) but in reality, most of the career frameworks are based around 6 or 7 levels:

The National Wound Care Workforce Framework utilises 6 levels:

Support Work Level Practice
Associate Level/Assistant Practitioner
Level Practice
Foundation Level Practice
Enhanced Level Practice
Advanced Level Practice
Consultant Level Practice

The inclusion of nursing associate is key as this role is starting to take hold in the NBCN with many more services employing them than previously.

Given the nature of the burns nursing workforce that either come and don't stay or more likely come and stay for many years, it was felt that there was a need for an additional level that crossed the Band 5 and Band 6 divide. The cohort of staff who are happy to work in burns but will struggle to move up the traditional career ladder without taking on diverse roles. So, the Junior Enhanced Level was created to reflect the largest cohort of our nursing workforce.

The Burn Career Framework will be supported by the development of burn capabilities for all nursing staff. These are in final draft and will replace the burns competencies we have had in place in the NBCN since 2012. The capabilities will be available by Autumn 2026.

So, this framework now has 7 career levels: (See Figs 2 & 3).

Support Work Level Practice (Bands 2-3)
Associate Level/Assistant Practitioner Level Practice Bands 3-4)
Foundation Level Practice Band 5)
Junior Enhanced Level Practice Bands 5-6)
Enhanced Level Practice (Band 6 – 7)
Advanced Level Practice (Band 7-8a)
Consultant Level Practice Bands 8a-8d)

Discussion / Results

A career framework gives a clear career roadmap, with defined job levels, objectives, targets and supporting criteria, so staff can see with clarity each role and can determine where they ultimately would like to be in terms of a career in burns.

Fig 2 Burns Career Framework: Support Worker/Associate Level

The Burns Career Framework			
The Career Framework Level	Level Descriptor	Indicative Requirements to work at this level	Indicative Roles
Support Worker Level Practice (Bands 2-3)	People at this level require knowledge of facts, principles, processes, and general concepts in burn care. They may carry out a wider range of duties and will have some responsibility, with guidance and supervision available when needed. They provide high quality, compassionate healthcare, following standards, policies or protocols and always acting within the limits of their capability. They use knowledge and understanding to take decisions within their area(s) of responsibility. They are responsible for their work and for reviewing the effectiveness of actions	Care Certificate Clinical Healthcare Support Qualification or appropriate equivalent Needs a minimum period of clinical supervision of (2-6 Weeks) if new to burn care	Health Care Assistant/Health Care Support Worker/ Support Worker
Associate Level /Assistant Practitioner Level Practice (Band 4)	People at this level require factual and theoretical knowledge in broad contexts within burn care They work independently, and with others, under the leadership and direction of a Registered practitioner within defined parameters, to deliver care in line with an agreed plan/protocol. They will have a breadth of knowledge and a flexible, portable skill set to serve local health populations, taking account of the perspectives and pathways of individuals, their families and/or carers providing holistic and	Nursing and Midwifery Council (NMC) registration as a Nursing Associate Appropriate Foundation degree and requisite qualification Appropriate Practice Supervisor/Assessor Status	Nursing Associate/ Assistant Practitioner

Fig 3: Burns Career Framework: Consultant Level

(Band 7-8a)	They have a critical awareness of knowledge issues in burn care and at the interface between different fields. They are innovative and have a responsibility for developing and changing practice and/or services in a complex and unpredictable environment. They demonstrate expertise in their scope of practice. They manage clinical care at the highest level independently, from beginning to end, for example from when an individual presents through to the end of the episode, which may include admission, referral or discharge or care at home. They work as part of the wider health and social care team and across traditional professional boundaries. They work across the network and/or regionally – leading and influencing practice development and service improvements. They satisfy all the requirements of Health Education England's multi-professional Framework for advanced clinical practice	Practice Recognition through successful completion of A HEE Centre accredited MSc programme which could include: • MSc Advanced Clinical Practice Or A portfolio of evidence, validated by the HEE Centre	Advanced Clinical Practitioner
Consultant Level Practice (Band 8a-8d)	People at this level require highly specialised knowledge, some of which is at the forefront of knowledge in burns, which they use as the basis for original thinking and/or research. They are leaders with considerable responsibility, and the ability to research and analyse complex processes. They have responsibility for service improvement or development. They generate new knowledge about best treatment and care by actively seeking and implementing best evidence to improve health and care outcomes and experiences for patients and staff. Through ongoing clinical development and research, they apply expert knowledge and lead change strategically across whole systems in their everyday practice.	Further appropriate and relevant qualifications which could include, but not limited to: Professional Doctorate PhD (Research) Educational Doctorate	For Example: Burns Consultant Nurse

Openshaw (2025) suggests that career frameworks have started to matter more in the UK, due to:

- A rising dissatisfaction in careers
- Concerns about social mobility
- Expectations from different generations, including Gen Z
- Digital disruption.

A 2022 survey by IRIS software group demonstrated 47% of UK employees don't see a clear path to progression in their roles and 68% feel their career progression is blocked or delayed because of HR or managerial support.

The benefits of a career framework

- Staff will feel appreciated** - Having a career framework shows your staff that you are keen to invest in their future and growth.
- It will improve employee motivation** – Helping staff to establish realistic and time managed career goals will increase motivation.
- Productivity will increase** - Staff perform better when they have access to training and development opportunities
- It will strengthen manager/employee relations** – Mapping out a career framework requires transparency and honest discussions with staff. This channel of communication over a period of time will help to build better relations while strengthening workplace culture.

Conclusion

Career frameworks are fundamental when it comes to improving performance, retaining talent, and strengthening working relationships
The Burns Career Framework is now live, and a series of webinars are planned for 2026 to ensure that staff at all levels, especially untrained understand the Burns Career Framework and how they could use it to plan their careers.

It is also felt that the Burns Career Framework can be used to conduct formal or informal appraisal, alongside a training needs analysis, comparing current skills and knowledge with required skills and knowledge. It can also be used to support revalidation requirements with the NMC.

References

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