



Department of  
**Health**  
An Roinn Sláinte  
Máinnystrie O Poustie  
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# **Link Nurse Framework**

## **Supporting Nurses in HSC Trusts**

**July 2021**



## 1. Introduction

Following a Report in October 2018, reviewing the Link Nurse role primarily in Health and Social Care (HSC) Trusts, the Chief Nursing Officer, Department of Health commissioned NIPEC to develop a Link Nurse Framework. The purpose of the Framework is to support a standardised approach to the effective implementation of the Link Nurse role in practice. The Framework is relevant in all care settings where Nurses work and provide care for people, their families and communities.

The Link Nurse Framework is for use by:

- Line Managers to provide direction for managing an expression of interest to the Link Nurse role and to facilitate the necessary support and governance processes essential for the effective implementation of the role;
- Link Nurses and those interested in the role by identifying support and roles and responsibilities of key personnel related to the Link Nurse role;
- Specialist nurses and/or HSC Trust staff with designated nursing responsibility for the specialist area to enable an overview of the systems and processes that relate to the operationalisation of the Link Nurse role in practice areas; and
- Governance/Education Leads and/or Trust staff with designated nursing responsibility for the specialist area to ensure that the necessary processes and systems are in place for the Link Nurse role.

## 2. Link Nurse Role

The Link Nurse is a registrant with the Nursing and Midwifery Council (NMC) who has responsibility for a named area of practice in their team/department. The Link Nurse is responsible for supporting the team/department manager to achieve safe, effective, person-centred care within their team by:

- being the first point of contact for advice and signposting of staff to the referral process and to the specialist nurse team(s) where necessary;
- supporting staff to develop the competencies of members of the team in the area of specialist practice;
- supporting staff compliance with up to date evidence-based practice; and
- undertaking initiatives and participating in quality improvement, audit and research to support ongoing developments in practice.

### 3. Link Nurse Framework

The Link Nurse Framework comprises three elements to enable the effective implementation of the role:

1. **Essential skill set for Link Nurses;**
2. **Organisational processes for those interested in the role; and**
3. **Organisational processes to support Link Nurses.**

The Link Nurse Framework should be used in conjunction with relevant legislative and statutory requirements, including organisational policies, procedures, systems and processes.

#### 3.1 Essential Skill Set for Link Nurses

- A nursing registrant who has completed their preceptorship period following NMC registration.
- Those interested in undertaking a Link Nurse role should have a minimum of six months working experience in the relevant area of practice related to the Link Nurse role. This will ensure that there has been a period of consolidation of learning and adequate preparation for the Link Nurse role.
- The role and responsibilities of the Link Nurse role are aligned to the domains<sup>1</sup> in the Career Framework for Specialist Nursing<sup>2</sup> (see Table 1), although it is recognised that Link Nurses roles are not necessarily exclusive to the specialist nursing framework.

#### 3.2 Organisational Processes for those interested in the role

- Opportunities to undertake the Link Nurse role should be open to all registrants who are interested in and have the essential skill set for Link Nurses.
- In order to formalise the Link Nurse process, it is recommended that a Link Nurse role agreement is completed for each Link Nurse. This will enable the Line Manager, Specialist Nurse and Link Nurse to understand their individual roles and will provide a formal record to assist with auditing and evaluating the role (Appendix 1: Link Nurse role agreement template).
- Organisations should commit to providing support for the role using locally agreed solutions such as: ring-fencing time for the Link Nurse to

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<sup>1</sup> The domains in the Career Framework for Specialist Nursing (DoH 2018) are mapped against the four themes of: Nursing Midwifery Council (2018) *The Code: professional standards of practice and behaviour for nurses, midwives and nursing associates*. London: NMC

<sup>2</sup> Department of Health (2018) *Career Framework for Specialist Nursing Roles: Supporting Specialist Nursing in Health and Social Care*. Belfast: DoH.

fulfil their role; supporting continuous professional development (CPD)/study leave expenses.

### **3.3 Organisational processes to support Link Nurses**

- Line Managers will ensure that Link Nurses are facilitated to meet their identified learning and development needs for their role through processes such as appraisal and personal development planning.
- Supervision processes can be used to support Link Nurses who will avail of formal and informal learning activities relevant to their role. This can be evidenced and discussed in supervision with the aim of maximising and enhancing the development of competence in the relevant area of practice and within the role and achievement of revalidation requirements
- The Link Nurse will be facilitated by their line manager to undertake relevant CPD activities such as: attendance at Link Nurse meetings relevant to their area of practice; relevant courses and study days in line with revalidation requirements and in line with corporate, strategic and local clinical area priorities
- Line Managers will facilitate Link Nurses to use existing networks in the organisation e.g. action learning, peer/group supervision, to share and learn from experiences, challenges and solutions with a view to enhancing the Link Nurse role in the practice area.

## **4. Roles and Responsibilities for the Link Nurse, Line Managers and Specialist Nurses**

### **4.1 Role and responsibility of the Link Nurse**

- Enhance personal knowledge in the area of practice related to the Link Nurse role
- Work in partnership with the Specialist Nurse/s and other Link Nurses in the area of practice related to the Link Nurse role
- Disseminate information to colleagues in relation to the Link Nurse role
- Implement evidence-based practice and support a learning culture
- Work within personal and professional scope of practice
- Identify sub-optimal practice in relation to the Link Nurse area of practice and support improvements to address this.
- Facilitate audit and quality improvement activities relevant to the Link Nurse area of practice
- Provide feedback to the line manager about Link Nurse activities
- Maintain a record of learning, development and activity at ward/practice area in relation to Link Nurse activity and the role

#### **4.2 *Role and responsibility of the Line Manager***

- Provide clarity to the Link Nurse regarding their role and responsibilities as detailed within this framework
- Provide protected time within the needs of the service to enable the Link Nurse to fulfil the requirements of the role
- Facilitate access to learning and development appropriate to individual needs and the role requirements
- Manage any concerns regarding performance of the Link Nurse role using relevant organisational policies and procedures
- Maintain a register of Link Nurses at ward/local level and keep the Specialist Nurse informed of any changes that might affect service provision
- Maintain clear records of learning, development and activity related to the Link Nurse role.

#### **4.3 *Role and responsibility of the Specialist Nurse***

- Facilitate regular Link Nurse meetings and provide support and guidance to Link Nurses as required
- Communicate changes to policies and/or clinical guidelines to Link Nurses
- Act as a role model for Link Nurses
- Promote the Link Nurse role in their area of practice and encourage expressions of interest to the role
- Effectively communicate with Line Managers and Link Nurses to enable a seamless service.

**TABLE 1: Role and Responsibilities of Link Nurses**

<b>1. Clinical Practice</b>	
1.1	Act as a Link between the practice area and the Specialist Nurse to optimise patient care
1.2	Utilise the Link Nurse role to contribute to care in conjunction with nursing colleagues and the multi-disciplinary team
1.3	Work within personal and professional scope of practice
1.4	Support staff to develop competencies in the area of practice
1.5	Recognise situations when care may be suboptimal and act to address these

<b>2. Education and Learning</b>	
2.1	Maintain and enhance personal professional knowledge
2.2	Organise and coordinate learning resources and activities in practice
2.3	Utilise evidence-based resources to facilitate others' learning
2.4	Provide and receive feedback and act on this when required
2.5	Encourage and support learning within the nursing team
2.6	Engage with students and support their learning in the area of the Link Nurse specialism
2.7	Disseminate information to colleagues in relation to the Link Nurse role
2.8	Critically reflect on practice via revalidation, supervision and appraisal
2.9	Maintain a record of learning, development and activity at ward/practice area in relation to Link Nurse activity and the role

<b>3. Research and Evidence-Based Practice</b>	
3.1	Work in partnership with colleagues to implement the results of research and audit into practice
3.2	Be aware of the evidence-base related to the specialist area and work with nursing and multidisciplinary colleagues to implement this into practice
3.3	Support staff compliance with up-to-date evidence-based practice
3.4	Work in conjunction with the Specialist Nurse in the review and implementation of policies/protocols and guidelines if required
3.5	Facilitate audit and quality improvement activities relevant to the Link Nurse area of practice

<b>4. Management and Leadership</b>	
4.1	Be a role model for the Link Nurse role and the specialist service related to the role.
4.2	Develop the role in conjunction with the line manager, team and Specialist nurse
4.3	Work with other Link Nurses to develop the role and associated practice
4.4	Contribute to audit and quality improvement activities as required, including the maintenance of accurate records
4.5	Provide feedback to the line manager about Link Nurse activities

**Link Nurse Role Agreement Template**

Name of Link Nurse \_\_\_\_\_

Link Nurse role: \_\_\_\_\_

Location: \_\_\_\_\_

Name of Line Manager: \_\_\_\_\_

Date of commencement of Link Nurse role: \_\_\_\_\_

Specialist Nurse: \_\_\_\_\_

Review Date<sup>3</sup>: \_\_\_\_\_

Planned: expectations, learning & development & commitment	Review: Link Nurse comments	Review: Line Manager & Specialist Nurse comments
<p><b>Expectations for the Link Nurse role including intended impact on practice</b></p>		

<sup>3</sup> Review with Link Nurse, Line Manager and Specialist Nurse should be undertaken annually, as a minimum.

<b>Learning &amp; development required for the Link Nurse role including Link Nurse meetings/ networks/ forum, study days, courses</b>		
<b>Personal statement of commitment to undertake and facilitate the Link Nurse role</b>		

Link Nurse signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_/\_\_/\_\_

Line Manager signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_/\_\_/\_\_

Specialist Nurse signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_/\_\_/\_\_





For further Information, please contact

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