

INPLASY

The registered nurse degree apprentice experience of their programme: a scoping review protocol

INPLASY202590111

doi: 10.37766/inplasy2025.9.0111

Received: 27 September 2025

Published: 27 September 2025

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ADMINISTRATIVE INFORMATION

Support - NA.

Review Stage at time of this submission - Formal screening of search results against eligibility criteria.

Conflicts of interest - The author is an experienced practice educator experienced in supporting registered nurse degree apprentices (RNDA) in practice. If the assumption were to be taken that all learners needs and experiences are the same potential conflict of interest may occur. The potential conflict of interest is precluded by the recognition of the need to understand the RNDA experience in order to better appreciate the learner experience.

INPLASY registration number: INPLASY202590111

Amendments - This protocol was registered with the International Platform of Registered Systematic Review and Meta-Analysis Protocols (INPLASY) on 27 September 2025 and was last updated on 27 September 2025.

INTRODUCTION

Review question / Objective The registered nurse degree apprentice (RNDA) programme was promoted as an innovative change offering access to higher education and professional registration in accordance with the widening participation agenda of the United Kingdom. The research question has been developed using the PCC framework (population, concept and context) framework. As the introduction of the registered nurse degree apprenticeship is relatively recent, there are limitations to the empirical evidence exploring the learner experience. The purpose of the scoping review is to identify gaps in the current literature and to support an ongoing process of review to inform the area of study (Arksey and O'Malley

2005). The scoping review will consider the population of healthcare and nursing apprentices experiences of their registered Nurse degree apprentice programme. By completing a scoping review of the experience of healthcare and nursing apprentices, the intention is to appreciate the learner experience and identify potential areas for further exploration.

Background Willis' (2013) examination of pre-registration healthcare programmes identified factors that deterred prospective healthcare professionals from advancing in their chosen field. Willis advocated a spiral approach to education that encouraged widening participation through different educational opportunities including the development of apprenticeships. The Registered Nurse Degree Apprentice (RNDA) programme

came into effect in 2017; Bournemouth University established its programme in February 2021. In exploring opportunities to support retention and prevent attrition in pre-registration healthcare programmes, Lovegrove (2018) sought to appreciate the factors that contributed to a decision to continue or leave a programme. An apprentice programme differs from the established programme in that it is employer led, including both 'on the job' and 'off the job' learning (Department of Education 2025).

Whilst the greater number of students continue to follow the 'traditional' route of loan-based degree, the government views apprenticeship as a key strategy in developing the future healthcare workforce (NHS England 2023). The objective is that apprenticeships will increase by more than one hundred percent to 16% of all professional programmes by 2028. Since the COVID pandemic which witnessed an increase in applications to nursing programmes, there is a significant decrease in applications to study nursing by direct entry to university. In contrast applications for the apprentice route continue to increase. By completing a scoping review, current understanding of apprentice experience can be explored and evidence base critiqued.

Rationale The RNDA programme combines work, practice placement and theory in order to achieve professional registration and a degree in the chosen field of nursing (NMC 2018; Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education (IfATE) 2021).

The apprentice is both an employee and a learner, necessitating an understanding of how roles and responsibilities may differ in this different approach to professional education. There is a risk that assumptions can be made with regard to support, guidance and the learning opportunities that aid successful completion of the RNDA programme. Pressley and Garside (2023) recognise that a range of factors influence nurse retention; with an 11.9% vacancy rate in the UK nursing workforce, the need to reduce attrition in pre-registration education is essential for the NHS long-term workforce plan to be realised (NHS 2023; Buchan et al. 2020). Investigating what is currently understood of the apprentice experience has the potential to aid understanding of the pedagogies and employment practice that can enhance the RNDA experience.

METHODS

Strategy of data synthesis Based upon Cormack (2013) a data extraction tool will be used to standardise the review of the key characteristics each research article and will include study type

and aims, outcome and recommendations. A narrative comparison and synthesis of the findings will be developed to identify outcomes and considerations for further investigation.

Eligibility criteria Inclusion Criteria: The professions included social work, psychotherapy, nursing, radiography, anaesthesiology, police and STEM programmes. These were deemed appropriate as they require knowledge, skills and professional attributes reflective of nursing practice. In addition, foundation degrees were included as they are OFSTED regulated and, due to affiliation with an approved educational institute, are subject to the same quality assurance processes. An international studies will be included as healthcare apprenticeships are not limited to the UK.

Exclusion Criteria

Case studies and opinion pieces, whilst they could inform and contribute to the discussion, do not robustly inform the evidence base and thus pose a risk to subjectivity.

Limiters of 2017 to present day, full text, peer reviewed and English were applied.

Source of evidence screening and selection

The search was conducted using EBSCOhost, incorporating CINAHL, Cochrane Library, Directory of Open Access Journals, Embase, PsychINFO, MEDLINE with Full Text, SCOPUS, Web of Sciences and ETHoS (British library).

Evaluation of the literature will be undertaken using the GRADE-CERQUAL framework

To ensure the scoping review was not being replicated a search of PROSPero, JBI and InPlasy was conducted.

Terms used were registered nurs* AND experience OR perceptions OR attitudes OR views OR feelings OR qual* or perspective*; degree apprentice experience OR perceptions OR attitudes OR views OR feelings OR qual* or perspective*; Health* degree AND experience OR perceptions OR attitudes OR views OR feelings OR qual* or perspective*; apprentice OR higher apprentice* OR apprentice* training; degree apprentice* OR higher apprentice OR apprentice* training And experience OR perceptions OR attitudes OR views OR feelings OR qual* or perspective*.

Data management The search findings will be maintained in Endnote and duplicates removed.

To illustrate the initial results, a PRISMA diagram will be used illustrating the number of articles included and excluded. An adapted matrix (Kable et al 2012) will be used as a tool to evaluate the

individual research articles. A rationale for inclusion and exclusion will be provided.

Reporting results / Analysis of the evidence

Based upon Cormack (2013) a data extraction tool will be used to standardise the review of the key characteristics each research article and will include study type and aims, outcome and recommendations. A narrative comparison and synthesis of the findings will be developed to identify outcomes and considerations for further investigation.

Presentation of the results The results will be presented in a table, supported by a narrative discussion exploring key themes.

Language restriction English.

Country(ies) involved United Kingdom.

Other relevant information

As international papers are being included, there is the potential to appreciate the transcultural nature of learning.

Arksey, H., & O'Malley, L. 2005. Scoping studies: towards a methodological framework. *International Journal of Social Research Methodology*, 8(1), 19–32. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1364557032000119616>

Buchan, J., Ball, J., Shembavnekar, N. and Charlesworth, A., 2020. REAL Centre Workforce pressure points: Building the NHS nursing workforce in England. Available from: <https://www.health.org.uk/>

Department for Education, 2025. Apprenticeship funding rules August 2025 to July 2026 Version 2. Available from: <https://www.gov.uk>

Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education. Registered Nurse (2018) Occupational Standards. c2021. Available from: <http://www.instituteforapprenticeships.org>.

Kable A.K., Pich J. and Maslin-Prothero, S.E. 2012. A structured approach to documenting a search strategy for publication: a 12 step guideline for authors. *Nurse Education Today*. 32(8):878-86. doi: 10.1016/j.nedt.2012.02.022.

Lovegrove, M. REPAIR. Reducing Pre-registration Attrition and Improving Retention Report. C2018. Available From: <http://www.hee.nhs.uk>

NHS England. NHS Long Term Workforce Plan. 2023. Available from: <http://www.england.nhs.uk/ltwp/>.

Nursing and Midwifery Council (NMC). Part 3: Standards for pre-registration nursing

programmes. 2018. Available from: <http://www.nmc.org.uk>

Pressley C, and Garside J. 2023. Safeguarding the retention of nurses: A systematic review on determinants of nurse's intentions to stay. *Nursing Open*. 10(5):2842-2858. doi:10.1002/nop2.1588

Keywords Nurse apprentice; experience; Registered nurse education; Higher degree apprentice; perceptions.

Dissemination plans The intention is to disseminate findings at conference, educational events and publish in a peer reviewed journal.

Contributions of each author

Author 1 - Paula Shepherd - Author 1 drafted the scoping review.

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