

Cervical Sample Taker Initial Training

Prospectus 2025

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NEPSEC North of England Pathology and Screening Education Centre

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INTRODUCTION

This document is designed with the aim of providing potential applicants, their employers and nominated Mentors with a full overview of the education pathway, detailing the theoretical study, practical training and assessment requirements and how the programme of learning is delivered, administered and managed. It is important to read the information carefully before committing to or committing somebody to undertaking the programme of learning or the mentor support role.

The NHS Cervical Screening Programme (NHSCSP) requires that all cervical sample takers have undertaken appropriate training in the cervical screening programme and sample taking technique.

North of England Pathology Screening & Education Centre currently offers the initial training course in cervical sample taking and has recognised accreditation from the Royal College of Nursing for the theoretical elements.

The course is not intended to be used for three yearly update training for experienced sample takers – that training is provided separately or available elsewhere.

The training is in two parts - a theoretical course plus an up to 9 month period of mentored practical training.

There are two methods of delivery, as the face-to-face learning package has also been converted into a blended learning package, which includes distance learning with some self-directed study, some MS-Teams events and a face-to-face practical session in smaller groups to allow for appropriate access to the training manikin. The method of delivery offered for any one cohort may change due to unforeseen circumstances.

The course is run a number of times each year in the areas indicated on the front page. It is also offered as a module on the BSc/PG Certificate in Practice Nursing course with De Montfort University and Keele University

After theoretical study, practical on-the-job training will take place in the trainee's place of work and must be supervised by an appropriate nominated mentor. As part of this trainees must also visit a cytology laboratory (or undertake an approved virtual tour) and a colposcopy clinic local to their practice during their training. **All training must be completed within a nine-month period.**

Learners should be prepared to dedicate a **minimum** of 50 hours to the practical side of this programme of learning. It is possible to complete the whole programme of learning in as little as 3 months, but this requires extensive in-practice support and access to sufficient and appropriate patient footfall, whilst still allowing dedicated time for the return of sampling results for appropriate and full progress review at each of the stages.

Training Providers have the facility to authorise short extension periods lasting no more than 3 months for extenuating circumstances only. A fully completed and employer supported Extension Request Form is required and can be available from the supporting NEPSEC Administrator upon request

TRAINING AUDIENCE

This training course is intended to be used for training registered nurses, midwives, paramedics and qualified doctors because it assumes prior knowledge and experience of professional standards and delivery of patient care. It is anticipated that the majority of trainees will be practice nurses whose employers require them to commence cytology sample taking in the NHS cervical screening programme. Suitably accredited Physician Associates and RCN registered Nursing Associates may also undertake this programme.

When a Nursing Associate has registered with the Nursing and Midwifery Council (NMC), a registered professional listed under the legislation (registered nurse or GP) will need to supervise their practice. The individual who provides this supervision must become their nominated Mentor and be present at the workplace to support the learner at all times even when the Nursing Associate is carrying out the procedure as part of their indirect/unsupervised sampling.

The trainee's employer and/or Practice Manager must consider whether a proposed learner is employed for a sufficient number of hours to allow them to complete the minimum requirements of this programme of learning within the given timeframe. It is suggested that trainees work in practice for a minimum of 15 hours per week, must anticipate continued stable employment for at least 9 months following theoretical training and have access to the required number of patients to successfully complete the practical elements of the training. They must have regular protected access to their named mentor during this time.

This is a comprehensive RCN accredited course that requires full commitment to the nine-month training period. **Please do not underestimate the time and commitment required to successfully complete the course.**

At all times during this course the work produced by the student must be of an academic standard. Record keeping must be clear, well organised and submissions free from any personal identifiable data.

COURSE STRUCTURE

The course will consist of:

- Directed pre-course reading (approximately 3 hours)
- Theoretical training delivered by distance learning and video-link sessions and/or in a classroom setting (approximately 12-14 hours) (see course programme for format).
- Observation of mentor taking at least two samples.
- Five samples taken from patients attending for screening, directly supervised by a mentor, with reflective practice recorded in clinical training record book.
- Review of supervised sample results, and completion of a documented Initial Assessment **before** commencing unsupervised sampling practice
- 20 unsupervised samples, taken without direct supervision but with your named mentor or qualified support colleague available in the building with reflections recorded in personal training record book. (N.B. for Nursing Associates this **MUST** be your named mentor)

- Completion of an audit confirming the adequacy and acceptance of your 20 unsupervised samples, with completion of a reflective account of sample taking to include any rejected or inadequate samples
- Reflective accounts of Laboratory and Colposcopy Service tours/visits
- Assessment of clinical competence by an external assessor (observation of the trainee conducting at least three samples) after the completion of 20 unsupervised 'acceptable' samples.
- Supervised samples can be undertaken at any stage of the learning pathway, up to the limit of 15. This may be useful for trainees awaiting their final clinical assessment.
- Completion and submission of course work to the Training Provider, including reflective practice on **all** elements of the learning pathway.
- The number of samples available for trainees to take is limited at each stage of their training. The absolute maximum number of samples a trainee may take in total is 45 (see table on page 10). **Exceeding the limits at any stage of training will result in failure of the course.**

THEORETICAL TRAINING CONTENT

The theoretical training course content will contain the following as a minimum:

- Anatomy & physiology of female reproductive system
- Overview of the NHS Cervical Screening Programme
 - Aims of the NHSCSP
 - History of the screening programme
 - Current statistics/success of the programme
 - Important elements in the success of the programme
 - Uptake, coverage and cancer prevention rates
 - Recommended screening intervals
 - Unscheduled screening tests
- The background to cervical screening
 - Epidemiology and HPV
 - Risk factors
 - Principles of cervical screening
 - Effectiveness and limitations of cervical screening
 - Future developments of cervical screening
- Organisation of the NHSCSP
 - NHSCSP activities
 - Screening protocols
 - Sample Taker responsibilities
 - Commissioning
 - Call/Recall
 - General Practice
 - Other clinicians who provide cervical screening services
 - The role of the laboratory – including visit and reflection
 - The role of colposcopy – including visit and reflection
 - The role of the Hospitals Based Programme Coordinator
 - The role of Quality Assurance
 - National co-ordination and the role of the SITs and local cervical screening committees

- Equality of Access to cervical screening
 - Invitation information
 - Informed choice
 - Checking for understanding
 - Patients from minority ethnic groups
 - Female Genital Mutilation
 - Patients with learning disabilities
 - Patients with physical disabilities
 - Female to male transgender
 - Patients who are not registered with a GP
 - Ceasing or withdrawal criteria
- Understanding the test results
 - Cytology results
 - HPV testing
- Legal & Professional issues
 - Professional responsibility and accountability
 - Confidentiality
 - Obtaining informed consent
 - Medico-legal considerations
 - Preparing a room
 - Equipment for taking LBC samples
 - Checking identity
 - Taking clinical history
 - Taking screening history
 - Preparing & completing the request form
 - Choosing the appropriate speculum
 - Appearance of the cervix
 - TZ Sampling
 - Taking the sample
 - Infection control
 - Ending the consultation
 - Sending the sample
 - Auditing test results
- Local practice & issues
- Allocation and use of sample taker numbers

TRAINING RECORDS

Each trainee should keep a record of their practical training in a Personal Training Record Book (commonly known as Log Book or Portfolio), which will be provided to them at the commencement of the theoretical course. Trainees must record the topics covered by theoretical training in their personal training record and must document their practical training. A Practical Record Sheet must be completed for **every** sample taken (including Final Clinical Assessment samples) – it will be necessary for trainees to take some copies of the blank/template record sheets provided.

Trainees should also document and reflect on their visit to colposcopy clinic and also their laboratory tour (virtual or physical). Guidance on these visits will be available to trainees in their course packs. Trainees are strongly advised to undertake those visits soon after the theoretical training days and they **MUST** take their personal training record book with them to allow an appropriate person to sign the appropriate sections.

PRACTICAL TRAINING

Before enrolling, a trainee must identify a suitable mentor for their sessions of practical observation and training. This individual will usually be an experienced sample taker working at the trainee's practice or clinic, who is able to provide day to day support to the trainee sample taker as they commence sample taking, and after they have attended theoretical sample taker training. In some circumstances the mentor may need to be someone external and this should be discussed with the North of England Pathology & Screening Education Centre in the first instance.

In accordance with national guidance it is recommended that trainees are given **30 minute appointment slots** throughout their training period.

Mentors are there to provide support for trainees and new sample takers by allowing them to observe their practice, advising them on their own clinical practice and observing their counselling, documentation and sample taking technique to ensure that they are competent. Mentors will also undertake an Initial Assessment with the trainee as outlined in the NHSCSP Guidance for the Training of Cervical Sample Takers.

Mentors take on this role as part of their professional responsibility to share education and skills, however they are expected to join the Training Providers list of approved mentors and receive appropriate Mentor Briefing related to this programme of learning. This session lasts approximately 3 hours and is delivered by MS-Teams video-link. The cost of it is included in the trainee's course fee.

Should there be a necessity to change mentor for any reason during the 9 months training, this must be discussed directly with the North of England Pathology & Screening Education Centre and the course facilitator before it occurs. **Trainees must stop taking samples** to allow the time for this.

Mentors should have effective teaching and communication skills and ideally hold a relevant mentoring and/or teaching qualification. Before supporting a trainee it must be determined that they:

- Are a practicing cervical sample taker
- Have had a minimum of 12 months continuous experience following completion of initial cervical sample taker training
- Have undertaken a minimum of 50 adequate samples following completion of initial cervical sample taker training
- Have undertaken cervical screening update training at least every three years
- **Have undertaken a NEPSEC Mentor Briefing within the last two years**

Additionally, the Mentor must be able to show continuing competence in taking samples for cervical screening with particular reference to:

- Equipment and sample preparation
- Sampling technique
- Audit of sampling results
- Have read:
 - The relevant and most current training course prospectus.
 - NHSCSP Guidance for the training of cervical sample takers.

N.B. Nursing Associates are not permitted to act as a Mentor or Professional Support Colleague

EXTERNAL ASSESSMENT

The final practical assessment will be arranged by an external assessor appointed by the North of England Pathology & Screening Education Centre or the appropriate University where this course forms a module on a university certificated course.

Assessors are experienced sample takers who are deployed by the training centre/University to visit a trainee in their place of work (or in exceptional circumstances have them visit the assessor's place of work), to observe their practice and provide a response on their competence. By signing the application form you are agreeing that the proposed trainee can undertake all of the practical elements of the course in their place of work, including the final clinical assessment.

Assessors undertake purely an observational role and will never take over or intervene directly with a patient registered to the trainees practice or unit.

An assessor must observe the trainee taking at least three samples, although at least five appointments should be made for the assessment session, to allow for non-attendance. Patients attending the assessment session must be told that the assessment is taking place and must give consent to the presence of the assessor.

If less than three patients attend on the day, the Assessor is not permitted to make a decision about the nurse's competency. Therefore, a return visit will be necessary. There will be an additional cost to the practice/workplace for this.(see page 12)

The nominated mentor should ideally be available after the external assessment for final discussion with the assessor and trainee, although this may not always be possible. For Nursing Associates, the nominated mentor MUST be available on the premises during the whole assessment.

TRAINING VENUES & DATES

Theoretical training practical/simulated learning will usually be delivered in suitable premises in locations considered reasonably accessible to sample takers:

Yorkshire & The Humber	NEPSEC training facilities at Wakefield Office Village
University cohorts	within the university buildings or at Primary Care Training Hub approved premises
Midlands	Primary Care Training Hub approved premises or suitably risk assessed premises spread throughout the region
Norfolk & Waveney	suitably risk assessed premises spread throughout the region
Kent & Medway	suitably risk assessed premises spread throughout the region
Surrey & Sussex	suitably risk assessed premises spread throughout the region
West Midlands	suitably risk assessed premises spread throughout the region
North West	suitably risk assessed premises spread throughout the region
Tees	suitably risk assessed premises spread throughout the region

It is impossible to identify locations convenient to everyone, but it is hoped to keep travel to a minimum. Trainees or their employers are responsible for the cost of travel to the venue, parking and any overnight accommodation costs. Unfortunately, the North of England Pathology & Screening Education Centre cannot help with arrangements for overnight accommodation.

Training dates have not been included in this prospectus as they are subject to demand and availability of trainers and venue. For a list of planned dates, please contact the North of England Pathology & Screening Education Centre (Wakefield: 0113 246 6330).

TRAINERS

Training will be delivered by our specialist trainers. They are all appropriately qualified and experienced members of the NEPSEC Team. They will be supported by external contributors who have specialist knowledge of different topics relevant to cervical screening.

The trainers have administrative support from the North of England Pathology & Screening Education Centre Administration team.

Trainees will be advised of their dedicated administrators contact details and are advised to keep regular contact with the administrators in order for progress records to be maintained.

FEEDBACK

Trainees will be asked to complete an exit questionnaire at the end of the theoretical training and are encouraged to provide feedback on these forms. Trainees are welcome to raise any issues directly with the trainer at any point in the training pathway. Should a trainee wish to make a formal complaint, they should do so in writing to the Directors of the Training Centre.

SAMPLE TAKER PINs

To ensure all cervical samples taken as part of the NHS Cervical Screening Programme in [all areas](#) are taken by suitably trained individuals, it is essential that each sample taker has a unique Sample Taker ID PIN. This number denotes that the sample taker has undergone initial training in ThinPrep® LBC technology and is registered on the central database of sample takers held at the following locations:

South East Coast:	Regional CSTD support service, Berkshire & Surrey Pathology Service
East Midlands:	Regional CSTD support service, Derby Royal Hospital
North West:	Regional CSTD support service, Manchester Royal Infirmary
North East, Yorkshire & Humber:	Regional CSTD support service, Queen Elizabeth Hospital, Gateshead
West Midlands:	Regional CSTD support service, The Royal Wolverhampton NHS Trust

East of England: Regional CSTD support service, Norfolk & Norwich University Hospitals NHS Trust

London: Regional CSTD support service, CSL at University College London Hospitals Trust

Trainees **MUST** be allocated a Sample Taker PIN prior to observing or taking any samples. This *may* be suffixed with a 'T' or may have some other trainee identifiable mechanism. That PIN is unique to the individual and must not be shared. **No sample taker should use another person's Sample Taker PIN.** The trainee must insert their PIN on the request form of all samples sent to the cytology laboratory in the training period.

Samples will be rejected by the cytology laboratory if the sample is not received in accordance with National Specimen Acceptance Guidance. This includes if documentation is not completed with the inclusion of the trainee's valid sample taker PIN.

When a trainee has completed theoretical and practical training and has successfully passed all elements of the programme of learning, they will be notified of their pass by the training provider. Where the 'T' is used they will be told that it can be removed from their Sample Taker PIN or they will be issued with a permanent PIN.

On successful completion of all theoretical and practical training, the North of England Pathology & Screening Education Centre will issue trainees with a Certificate of Completion, which should be kept in their personal file.

INITIAL ASSESSMENT

Prior to commencing any unsupervised samples, it is compulsory under national guidance to successfully complete the Initial Assessment. This is facilitated by the nominated mentor. Instructions for the mentor on how to conduct and record the Initial Assessment are shared at the NEPSEC Mentor's Briefings. It is also important to discuss the supervised sample results at this time.

KNOWLEDGE FRAMEWORK QUESTIONS

Students will be expected to answer a suite of 20 questions in the Personal Training Record Book, which is designed to ensure that they have the necessary theoretical knowledge and understanding of the cervical screening programme to support their clinical skills.

In order to accommodate all, including those who experience learning difficulties, neurodivergence or dyslexia, this is a fully open-book exercise for which the learners have the whole 9 month period to undertake the test. They can seek whatever support they need to understand the questions, such as their Mentor explaining things in a more practical sense or any text to speech software that they are used to using. Employers are encouraged to make considerations and reasonable adjustments with the learner to enable the completion of this element of the course. However, using artificial intelligence to answer the questions is not permitted.

Each question is worth 5 marks, the pass mark for this element is 65% and it is assessed by the Training Team and validated by the Training Provider. There is no opportunity for resubmission, so students are advised to *read the question carefully* and answer accordingly.

Referencing is required, but please ensure reputable and credible references are used if quoting on-line resources.

CLINICAL AUDIT

Students will need to provide evidence of their cervical sampling results which have been verified by their mentor to fulfil the audit requirements within this programme of learning. The full report details (including cytology result for HPV Positive samples) excluding patient identifiers must be entered into the logbook table and on the Practical Record Sheets before the coursework is submitted.

Practice/Line Managers are requested to arrange for the trainee to be allowed 30 minutes per patient when taking cervical samples. This will give the student sufficient time to think carefully about their actions and reflections during their practical learning experience and complete the extra record keeping required for their portfolio of evidence.

In order to ensure excessive sample taking is not undertaken before qualification, the following limits have been placed on numbers of samples which may be taken at each stage of the training process following theoretical training and must not be exceeded:

Table 1: Number of samples permitted by stage of training

Training phase	Notes	Minimum	Maximum
Observation	Observation of mentor taking samples	2	n/a
Supervised	<i>Samples taken under direct supervision of mentor</i>	5	15
Unsupervised	<i>Samples taken under indirect supervision of mentor (often referred to as “unsupervised”)</i> <i>There should be a pause in sampling after 10 samples to allow for an appropriate mid-point review</i> <i>*Additional samples beyond the minimum 20 must ONLY be taken IF a sample has been reported as INADEQUATE* <u>or</u> has been REJECTED.</i> <u>The training centre should be contacted before taking any more than 20 samples.</u> <u>Failure to comply with this requirement will lead to you failing the course</u>	20	25* (see notes)
STOP! Calculate your sampling audit with the results you have before requesting an assessment visit			
Assessment	Book 5 appointments in case of DNAs (min. 3 required for assessment)	Required 3	5
Absolute maximum in training period			45

INCOMPLETE OR FAILED TRAINING

Reasons the course may be failed include but are not limited to:

- failure to attend or undertake a virtual or face-to-face training session.
- failure to achieve 65% in the knowledge skills framework test.
- failure to successfully complete the “Initial Assessment” before proceeding to unsupervised sampling.
- failure to achieve the minimum 20 required accepted and adequate unsupervised samples in the sampling audit.
- breaching the trainee sampling allowance at any stage.
- coursework reflection which does not demonstrate sufficient understanding.
- failure of final clinical assessment.
- failure to submit coursework within the agreed deadline.
- leaving the course without notification and so failing to complete within the given timeframe.
- failure to follow the requirements of the learning pathway and National Health Service Cervical Screening Programme (NHSCSP) Guidance.
- actions leading to the issuing of a Screening Incident Assessment Form (SIAF) where the actions of the trainee have prompted the investigation.

If a trainee cannot attend a scheduled theoretical training session due to unforeseen circumstances, they must contact the NEPSEC training centre to arrange an alternative date. Trainees may be offered up to 2 alternative dates within a 6-month period to complete the outstanding sessions.

If a trainee is aware they have not understood the training content sufficiently at a theoretical training session, they must raise their concerns with the trainer at an opportune time. If they become aware of training issues after the theoretical training sessions, they should discuss the matter with their mentor in the first instance. If the mentor is unable to help, the trainer and/or the training provider will be very glad to provide assistance and support. It is far better to resolve issues early on than continue with difficulty.

If a trainee leaves employment and wishes to cease training completely during the practical training period, they are asked to notify North of England Pathology & Screening Education Centre and the course facilitator. They will receive a withdrawal letter and be required to cease taking samples.

If a trainee changes employment or sampling location and thereby also needs to have a different Mentor to support the remainder of their learning journey, they must temporarily cease sampling and notify North of England Pathology & Screening Education Centre and complete a Change of Mentorship Request Form. Once the processes behind such a request have been completed, they will receive notification which allows them to recommence sampling again.

Practical training is recorded in the personal training record book, which constitutes the coursework, and which must be submitted within nine calendar months of the practical/simulated learning sessions, or the trainee will automatically fail, unless a formal extension has been approved by NEPSEC prior to this date.

Any mitigating circumstances must be submitted in writing and will be considered on an individual basis, but NEPSEC and/or the course facilitator will make the final decision.

If an External Assessor is not satisfied that the trainee is able to conduct a cervical screening consultation satisfactorily and/or has significant concerns about their sample taking technique, they will inform the

trainee to cease sampling. The assessor will convey their concerns to the trainer and the training provider who will contact the trainee directly with regard to their training outcome.

If the coursework submitted to the trainer does not demonstrate sufficient understanding of the cervical screening programme and evidence of a learning curve, the trainee will fail the course and must enrol again if they wish to be a cervical sample taker. Whilst trainee have the right to appeal an outcome decision, re-submission after receiving a formal marked outcome is not permitted.

At any point in supervision, the mentor may raise concerns about the trainee with the training provider, which could ultimately lead to failure of training.

The primary aim of the course is to train sample takers to provide high quality sample taking, backed up by a good understanding of the NHS Cervical Screening Programme. In all circumstances, the decision on pass or fail rests with the training provider and is not open to dispute, although the trainer will provide feedback and clarification of problem areas to the trainee, throughout the course as necessary.

In all instances, pass or fail results will also be advised to the trainee's employer, the regional CSTD Co-ordinator at the cytology laboratory to which their samples are submitted and any other appropriate stakeholder such as University or Training Hub where appropriate.

ENROLMENT and FEES

Course fees are currently set at £575 per person, which includes the following;

- Theoretical study sessions
- Theoretical training packs
- Trainer support
- 1 Final Clinical Assessment
- Personal Training Record Book Marking Fees
- Certification

It also includes the briefing session for the nominated mentors.

On occasion a trainee may require further intervention training or additional assessment visits by members of the training or assessing teams. **Intervention training is chargeable at £30 per hour and additional assessment visits are chargeable at £125 per visit.** The training centre will arrange for an invoice to be sent directly to the employing organisation as appropriate.

Potential trainees must read the terms & conditions below and enrol directly with the North of England Pathology & Screening Education Centre, even if an initial expression of interest was handled by a third party, such as University or Training Hub.

A Sample Taker Initial Training application pack must be completed in full before a place on the course can be confirmed. This includes both the application form, Mentor's Acceptance of Responsibilities form and Mentors evidence of appropriate and up to date cervical sample taking training.

A delegate pack containing course paperwork, supporting information and a personal training record book will be provided.

If there are insufficient trainees to run a course, all applicants will be notified and a place on the next available course will be offered.

TERMS & CONDITIONS OF ENROLMENT

1. Trainees must be a registered nurse, midwife, paramedic, registered doctor, NMC registered Nursing Associate or Physician Associate registered on the PAMVR. They must anticipate stable employment in a place of work where regular cytology sample taking is undertaken for at least nine months following theoretical training.
2. Each trainee/workplace must identify a mentor with whom they have regular contact. The mentor must comply with the criteria in this document (pg. 6). The mentor's ST PIN must be provided on the trainee's application form, along with the completion of an Acceptance of Responsibilities Form. Should a change in mentor be necessary during the 9-month training period, this should be discussed directly with the North of England Pathology & Screening Education Centre and the course facilitator before it occurs.
3. Each trainee and their employer must consent to the presence of an external assessor for at least half a day in the trainee's place of work and must allow the assessor access to cervical sample taking clinical consultations for observation purposes. It is advisable to book at least five patients for the half day in case of non-attendance. Patients attending the assessment session must be told that the assessment is taking place and must give consent to the presence of the assessor. Care must be taken to give the assessor sufficient notice of expected completion of 20 unsupervised samples – assessments can rarely be arranged at very short notice.
4. Each trainee should keep a record of their training in a personal training record book.
5. Each trainee must make their own arrangements to visit a colposcopy clinic and undertake a laboratory tour during the training period. It is advisable to do this as early as possible following theoretical training.
6. Each trainee must use their allocated ST PIN while in training and must not share that number. Where in use the 'T' may only be removed on successful completion of training. The trainee sample taker PIN may only be used for a limited number of samples – it is vital that further samples are not taken until the trainee has been notified by North of England Pathology & Screening Education Centre that they have passed the course.
7. The trainee agrees to abide by the course requirements and those in all relevant national guidance documents.
8. The decision on training outcome rests with the trainer and training provider. Trainees may appeal a formal outcome decision themselves in writing within 14 days of receiving a failure notification. Appeals will be reviewed by a senior member of the management team and the outcome of the review is not open to dispute. In undertaking this course you agree to be judged against the criteria in National Guidance and in North of England Pathology & Screening Education Centre documentation.
9. Practical training must be completed and reflected in coursework which must be received by the North of England Pathology & Screening Education Centre within nine calendar months of the practical/simulated learning sessions, or the trainee will be deemed to have failed.