Chapter 4: APN Educators: Competencies and Curriculum Development

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Introduction

The position of APN educator involves combining expertise in nursing science with effective pedagogical skills, with a deep understanding of the role and functions of APN in the global context. A specific competency framework for APN educators was collaboratively developed. The additional elements for academic nurse educators to work at post-degree level include proficiency in master's-level curriculum development, comprehension of advanced clinical practice, and the capacity to translate international and national healthcare and nursing research into solutions to local health challenges. In addition, APN educators need to show innovation skills, research capacity, and leadership to continually contribute to the development of nursing education.

Keywords: advanced practice nursing, educators, competencies, curriculum development

Advanced Practice Nursing educators' competencies and curriculum of the Baltic/ Nordic program

Even though the World Health Organization (WHO) published in 2016 the Nurse Educator Core Competences, including eight core competence domain statements (WHO, 2016), and the National League for Nursing (NLN) developed Novice Nurse Educator Competencies in 2020, there is no global consensus on the qualifications or competencies required for nurse educators (Salminen et al., 2026). According to WHO (2016), the core competency domains are formulated as a minimum standard for nurse educators, with 37 sub-competency statements. The competence domains are: (1) theories and principles of adult learning; (2) curriculum and implementation; (3) nursing practice; (4) research and evidence; (5) communication, collaboration, and partnership; (6) ethical/legal principles and professionalism; (7) monitoring and evaluation; and (8) management, leadership, and advocacy. The NLN (2020) Novice Nurse Educator Competencies also contain eight core competencies: (1) facilitate learning; (2) facilitate learner development and socialization; (3) use assessment and evaluation strategies; (4) participate in curriculum design and evaluation of program outcomes; (5) function as a change agent and leader; (6) pursue continuous quality improvement in the role of the nurse educator role; (7) engage in scholarship; (8)

function within the educational environment. Lippe et al. (2025) found that these educator competency frameworks are almost fully aligned and can also be used when creating master's-level nursing programmes.

The specific competencies needed by APN educators have not been investigated nor defined, but they doubtlessly include both a solid theoretical knowledge foundation in nursing science and the practical teaching skills to apply theoretical information, like other nurse educators (WHO, 2016). Competency in curriculum development is also required, as is the capacity to analyse global health knowledge, nursing standards and guidelines, and national and local needs as foundations for the curriculum. Even though mastery of these competencies should be a basic requirement for APN educators, there are more features to consider. APN educators are required to demonstrate innovation and research skills and to be leaders and champions of continuous improvement in the nursing education field. In addition to these, APN educators must be able to teach, guide, and mentor APN students at an advanced level for them to truly attain the competencies targeted by the curriculum. (WHO, 2016; Fitzgerald et al., 2020; The Essentials: Core Competencies for Professional Nursing Education 2021; Ye et al., 2022.)

In terms of health science teachers' and nurse educators' self-assessment of their competencies, multiple studies have found that they rate their level as high (Mikkonen et al., 2018; Elonen et al., 2023; Vauhkonen et al., 2024). In the study by Vauhkonen et al. (2024), for example, nurse educators from different European nations rated their total competency level as excellent, with evidence-based practice ranked highest. Furthermore, they evaluated their pedagogical competency as high and believed that they act according to ethical principles and can integrate theoretical knowledge into teaching practice. Despite good results, the educators thought their cultural competence needed to be strengthened. Similarly, in the review by Mikkonen et al. (2018), health science teachers evaluated themselves as highly competent in almost all areas of teaching competence. However, according to the review, it seems that nursing students evaluated their teachers' competence significantly less positively than the teachers themselves did (Mikkonen et al., 2018). Although APN teachers were not the target group of either investigation per se, the results can be applied to them as well. To strengthen APN educators' abilities, knowledge, and attitudes, it is critical to obtain frequent feedback from students and colleagues in pursuit of excellence.

Nurse educators who teach future APNs are the driving force behind the development of qualified and capable APNs. Qualified educators are thus required to prepare nurses for challenging advanced clinical positions. Currently, the need for advanced-level nurses is growing in health care systems and new countries and faculties are starting these programmes globally to meet this requirement. For this reason, the APN-EDU network co-created an APN educator competence framework and education programme for nurse educators in 2020-2021.

The outlined descriptions and definitions of competencies and learning outcomes for APN educators were based on the WHO's descriptions of nursing educator

competencies (WHO, 2016). First, the WHO Nurse educator competences were reflected by mapping them against APN competences (see chapter 3) and the Tuning guidelines for the design of teacher education programs (González Ferreras & Yarosh, 2018). A consensus of APN educator competences was formulated by the network members who were nurse educators mostly with doctoral-level education and already involved in APN or Master's-level nursing programmes at their universities.

The three core competence areas of APN educators are: (1) APN Curriculum; (2) APN Clinical Nursing Practice; and (3) APN Education Development and Evaluation. In order to create the learning outcomes and content, each of the 37 sub-competencies was analysed to determine what should be added or taken into account when educating APNs. What an APN educator should specifically be competent in serves as the basis for formulating the learning outcomes and content. Evidence-based practice and health promotion are embedded in the curriculum.

Furthermore, the APN-EDU network has constructed a comprehensive curriculum for APN educators. This curriculum aims to enhance APN educators' capacity to build, implement, and evaluate master's degree programmes tailored to advanced nursing care. By aligning with international standards and involving local stakeholders, the curriculum aims to develop educators capable of shaping the future of APN education. The intensive course for APN educators from the Nordic and Baltic countries (excluding Latvia) was implemented in 2023 (Grommi et al., 2026). Table 1 presents an overview of the APN educator competencies, learning outcomes, and proposed course content.

Table 1. APN educator competences, learning outcomes, and proposed content for the intensive course. (Grommi et al., 2026).

Core Competency Areas	Learning Outcomes	Content
APN Curriculum	The APN educator: 1) identifies and analyses current trends in Advanced Practice Nursing (e.g., e-health, variation of job descriptions, APN education); 2) identifies different attributes related to clinical decision making (CDM) and implements different strategies in the teaching process; 3) composes/constructs systematic evidence-based tools to evaluate APN competency development during education.	1) current trends in APN at local, national, and international levels; 2) contemporary theories of clinical decision making, clinical judgement, and consultation, 3) CDM teaching strategies; 4) different evidence-based competence assessment tools.
APN Clinical Nursing Practice	The APN educator 1) possesses profound understanding of professional ethics and the scope of practice of APN in an international context; 2) has mastered the contents and teaching methods related to health assessment and diagnosis, and health promotion; 3) comprehends the organisation of autonomous APN practice and independent appointment, including planning, delivering, and assessment of care in different health care settings; 4) applies contemporary theories and methodologies to increase students' understanding of clinical decision making, consultation, and advanced counselling.	1) professional ethics (marketing, pharmaceutical companies), collegiality, advocacy, accountability, boundaries, legal issues, ICN scope of practice; 2) health assessment and diagnosis (health promotion at an advanced level); 3) frameworks/methods of advanced counselling, suggested in-depth counselling content.
APN Education Development and Evaluation	The APN educator: 1) possesses profound knowledge of tools, methods, and indicators used to evaluate Advanced Practice Nursing; 2) initiates and engages in discussions on the development of APN in international and national contexts; 3) leads collaboration among interdisciplinary groups at the local level in order to develop the scope of practice of APN:	1) teaching methods and frameworks based on evidence-based practices; 2) tools, methods, and indicators used in the evaluation of APN; 3) argumentation theories, reasoning, and critical thinking in APN, advanced teamwork and collaboration; different platforms for effective discussion in society and interdisciplinary groups.

Advanced Practice Nursing Programme Curriculum Design

Developing a competence-based curriculum at the master's level for APN nursing education is critical to ensuring that graduates have the skills and knowledge to provide high-quality care (Lippe et al., 2025). As such, designing curricula for APN programmes involves reviewing the best evidence from international research on APN master's-level education, analysing professional nursing standards and guidelines (Lippe et al., 2025), and involving local stakeholders to guarantee alignment with evolving healthcare needs. (Arends, 2024.) In addition, European programmes must correspond to the master's level of the European Qualifications Framework, indicating the high level of knowledge and skills acquired by graduates (Description of the eight EQF levels, n.d.). Specifically, nurse educators should understand the role that international and national professional standards and guidelines have in curriculum development. It is imperative to define the appropriate competencies for future APNs considering the global guidelines to ensure that the programme is at an international level. The ICN, for example, published its Guidelines on Advanced Practice Nursing in 2020, in which the scope of practice, competency descriptions, and professional standards for APN and APN education are described (Guidelines on Advanced Practice Nursing, 2020).

In addition to the above-mentioned elements, curriculum development also specifically considered the competencies of Nurse Practitioners as specified by the International Council of Nurses (Guidelines on Advanced Practice Nursing, 2020, p. 19). These are the following:

- Demonstrates safe and accountable Nurse Practitioner practice incorporating strategies to maintain currency and competence;
- Conducts comprehensive assessments and applies diagnostic reasoning to identify health needs/problems and diagnoses;
- Develops, plans, implements, and evaluates therapeutic interventions when managing episodes of care;
- Consistently involves the health service user to enable their full partnership in decision-making and active participation in care;
- Works collaboratively to optimise health outcomes for health consumers/population groups;
- Initiates and participates in activities that support safe care, community partnership, and population-level improvements.

Furthermore, the core competencies, areas of autonomy, and extended roles included in Nordic and Baltic countries' (excluding Latvia) APN programmes were evaluated by APN-EDU network participants (Sulosaari et al., 2023), and the results were taken into consideration when building the curriculum for APN educators. Table 2 presents the recommended core competencies included in the six different countries' APN programmes (Sulosaari et al., 2023).

Table 2. Comparison of APN competencies, areas of autonomy, and extended roles in Nordic and Baltic APN programmes (Sulosaari et al., 2023)

APN Core Competencies (Gobbi & Kaunonen, 2018; Guidelines on…, 2020)	**Areas of autonomy and extended roles**	**Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Lithuania, Norway, Iceland**
Quality management and safety	1) quality improvement 2) clinical audit and/or other quality assessment method	All All
Leadership	3) leadership to facilitate and manage change 4) change management models and theories	All All
Education	5) teaching others 6) mentorship, supervision, coaching 7) self-development, scholarship	All All All
Research	8) research and development of evidence-based practice	All
Advocacy	9) advocation of health and social services 10) development of health care policies 11) role of the APN	All All All
Communication and collaboration	12) inter- and multidisciplinary within and outside the health sector	All
Direct holistic evidence-based care	13) comprehensive health assessment 14) complex care (case) management, care coordination	All All
Case management	15) chronic disease management 16) care monitoring and evaluation	All All
Health promotion	17) improvement of the physical, functional, and psychological well-being of patients with acute or chronic conditions	All
Ethical decision making	18) improvement of health promotion practices 19) rehabilitative care 20) specialty-specific procedures 21) education, guidance of patients and families 22) admission and discharge planning (health care settings and other services)	All All All All All
Clinical diagnostic, therapeutic treatment	23) ordering diagnostic tests 24) making medical diagnoses 25) prescribing (therapeutic) treatments 26) prescribing medication	All Only in Lithuania and in ambulance programmes in Estonia. All, excluding Estonia, where this is included only in theoretical studies and to a limited, nationally regulated extent. Varies by country

More detailed information on the prerequisites, differences, and similarities in APN education in various countries can be found in a study of Advanced Practice Nursing in Europe (De Raeve et al., 2024), which presents results from studies in 35 European countries and discusses the current state of the field in Canada, the United States, and Australia. The study shows significant variation in how European nations define APN and regulate academic and practice levels. (De Raeve et al., 2024.)

Prescribing competences as part of the Advanced Practice Nursing curriculum

Prescribing medicines within one's own competence area is a central part of a Nurse Practitioner's scope of practice and full practice potential (Guidelines on Advanced Practice Nursing, 2020, p. 18). Prescriptive authority is always governed by country-specific regulation. Nurse Practitioners commonly have prescriptive rights, while Clinical Nurse Specialists may or may not have some rights to prescribe within their speciality (International Council of Nurses, 2020, p. 24).

Conclusion

The deficit of academic nurse educators and the demand for efficient and effective nurse education set further requirements for harmonization of APN educators' competences and increase the request for courses for APN educators. Furthermore, in 2026, NLN published The Scope of Practice for Academic Nurse Educators, where four differentiated roles and competencies are defined for academic nurse educator, academic clinical nurse educator, academic novice nurse educator, and academic practical/vocational nurse educator (Christensen & Simmons, 2026). Salminen et al. (2026) have constructed recommendations to improve nurse educator education.

In conclusion, staying informed about current global trends and research in healthcare and maintaining regular collaboration with local clinical partners and other stakeholders enables APN educators to design curricula that reflect contemporary practice needs in advanced nursing. Also, APN educators require continuous professional development to further develop their competencies. Such ongoing engagement ensures that advanced practice nursing programmes remain relevant, evidence-based, and consistent with professional and regulatory standards, ultimately helping graduates succeed in their future careers.

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