Birth and Beyond Practitioner: a new qualification

NCT has launched a new course in partnership with the University of Worcester. Clea Harmer, NCT’s education manager, explains what the course does and why we need it.

In September 2012, NCT launched a new qualification: a Certificate in Higher Education (Cert HE) called Birth and Beyond Practitioner, offered in conjunction with the University of Worcester. The course has been developed in response to the Department of Health’s launch, in October 2011, of the Preparation for Birth and Beyond Programme and Resource Pack. This new antenatal education programme was developed by a group of experts, and based on the best available evidence about what kind of information and support new parents need.

NCT is committed to providing the best support possible to parents-to-be, so we wanted our practitioners to be able to teach these new courses. At the same time, after a 15-year partnership with the University of Bedfordshire, we made the decision to partner with the University of Worcester to develop the NCT College. Worcester is developing a reputation as a centre of excellence for midwifery and early years training, and shares NCT’s commitment to evidence-based practice and widening access.

In Autumn 2011, there was also a change in funding. The government’s white paper ‘Putting Students at the Heart of Higher Education’ removed the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) funding that had previously supported NCT students. We reviewed our courses to make sure that students had access to excellent vocational training that could be completed in a shorter timeframe and represented good value for money. It gave us an opportunity to develop training that had something to offer current practitioners as well as new students.

The launch of NCT’s 2010-2020 strategy also helped to shape the thinking behind the new qualification. NCT aims to reach 20 million parents by 2020 and our vision is a world where parents are valued and supported to build a strong society, believing that a child’s early years significantly impact upon the future they help to shape. NCT College has a key part to play in realising the vision, enabling us to offer training that is flexible and fit for purpose for both practitioners and students.

A new kind of training

Tutors from NCT’s three specialisms (antenatal teachers, breastfeeding counsellors and postnatal leaders) formed a core development team and decided that, rather than creating three separate programmes, they would pool their expertise to create a single programme. The team identified the key strengths and skills that are held in common by the three specialisms, with the aim of creating core training at level 4, and to use level 5 to teach the specialist elements.

The structure of the Cert HE

The core development team decided that the course should teach two key skills:

• Facilitating learning in groups. This would include an understanding of how groups work, as well as listening skills and an appreciation of how adults learn.

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Applications to study with NCT in 2013 are now open.
Visit www.nct.org.uk/nct-college

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As with all NCT courses the approach is parent-centred and research-based.

Induction

In September this year, 68 new students and 15 tutors attended an induction weekend at the University of Worcester. Half of the students, who ranged in age from 20 to late 50s, were full-time, half part-time. Just under a third already had a higher education qualification.

The weekend introduced students to the resources available, the use of the university online system to submit work electronically, the Blackboard learning platform and the Pebblepad electronic portfolio system. It also gave them a chance to consider how adults learn and how to use research. Students experienced the kind of physical skills work and interactive facilitation that they will be using as practitioners.

This is the first time an NCT programme has started with all new students attending the same event, and the students clearly appreciated the opportunity to meet each other. It clearly also gave them a chance to get a feel for the course as they started. ‘It helps to understand my place in NCT and how I can grow and develop,’ one said. Another student summed the experience up by saying ‘It was inspirational to listen to the passion, pride and care with which the women who
spoke regarded the work of NCT and their own roles within it. I am excited to be able to become a small part of this."

**What next?**
In September 2013 the new Level 5 and Level 6 modules will be launched. These will be open both to the new Birth and Beyond practitioners and our current practitioners.

At Level 5, students can train in any of the three specialisms, and current practitioners can train in other specialisms if they want. We hope that the wide range of Level 5 modules will allow practitioners to build a personal skill and knowledge base that reflects both their interests and the needs of parents in their area. The ability to opt for individual modules will give practitioners the time and space to do this at a pace that works for them.

Level 6 modules are open to anyone with the diploma who wishes to top it up to an honours degree. The only pre-requisite is that they need to have completed the research module at Level 5. So that current practitioners can start in September 2013 if they want, the research module will be run in-house from January to July 2013.

**References**
2. Department for Business Innovation and Skills

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## Course overview

**Level 4 Modules**

1. **Facilitating Learning in Groups** – 30 credits
2. **New Family: Changes and Challenges Part 1** – 30 credits
3. **The Developing Baby** – 30 credits
4. **Introduction to Reflective Practice** – 15 credits
5. **Giving Birth** – 15 credits

**Level 5 Modules**

1. **PNL Specialist Practitioner**
   - Facilitating Postnatal Groups – 30 credits
   - New Family: Changes and Challenges Part 2 – 30 credits

2. **BFC Specialist Practitioner**
   - Counselling Skills for NCT Practitioners – 15 credits
   - Applying Counselling Skills for NCT Breastfeeding Counsellors – 15 credits
   - Developing and using Breastfeeding Knowledge and skills – 15 credits
   - Understanding Women’s Experience of Breastfeeding – 15 credits

3. **ANT Specialist Practitioner**
   - Challenges and Choices around Labour and Birth – 30 credits
   - Undisturbed Birth – 30 credits

**Level 6 modules**

1. **Reflecting on Assessment Practice** – 30 credits
2. **Adult Learning** – 30 credits
3. **Curriculum Design, Development and Management** – 30 credits
4. **Independent Study (NCT specialism)** – 30 credits

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**What are credits?**

Credits are an indication of how much learning a student has had to do to obtain a qualification. A certificate of higher education typically requires 120 credits.

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**Resources for students, practitioners, midwives and health care professionals:**

- Teaching aids
- Key learning sheets
- Information sheets
- Birthling aids
- Birth room equipment

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