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# Development of the nursing science university field in France: National and international perspectives

## 1 | STATE OF COUNTRIES PRODUCING RESEARCH IN NURSING SCIENCES

A study by Yanbing et al., (2020) provides a global overview of nursing research based on a bibliometric analysis of research published between 2000–2019. This study identified 20 countries with the highest scientific output in nursing during this period. While the United States is unquestionably the most productive in this discipline, 11 European countries were also included in the top 20 countries: the UK, Sweden, Netherlands, Norway, Spain, Germany, Finland, Italy, Ireland, Belgium and Denmark. France, which has a population of more than 700,000 nurses, was not mentioned in this study.

This observation could be due to the very recent development in France of the “universitarization” process in the nursing discipline, term used for the process of integration of nursing training at the university. Since 2009, the training of nurses has been recognized by a bachelor's degree, with the implementation of an agreement between various nursing training institutes and universities specialized in health (Ministry of Health, 2009). In 2012, nurse anaesthetists were recognized at the master's level, according to a similar convention as the bachelor's degree (Ministry of Health, 2012). Subsequently, reforms for the field were put on hold until 2017. At this time, an interministerial mission was set up to promote the universitarization of paramedical and midwifery training (Ministry of Solidarity and Health & Ministry of Higher Education, Research and Innovation, 2018). Reforms began to accelerate in 2018, with the recognition of the advanced nursing practice and the organization of its training by accredited universities (Prime Minister, 2018). However, the key reform that may impact the development of the nursing discipline in France for the coming years was the creation of a nursing sciences section in the National Council of Universities (CNU; Presidency of the Republic, 2019).

## 2 | CREATION OF SECTION 92-NURSING SCIENCES OF THE CNU OF FRANCE

The CNU Nursing Section was established in December 2019 (Ministry of Higher Education, Research, & Innovation, 2019). It is composed of six members: three university professors and three assistant professors. This section, like all sections of the CNU, has

Editorial note: Editorials are opinion pieces. This piece has not been subject to peer review and the opinions expressed are those of the authors.

the mission of qualifying academics in nursing sciences, as assistant professors or university professors, at the national level. This qualification is mandatory for a national competitive examination when a French university proposes the recruitment of a candidate for a position as a nursing academic. The CNU section is in charge of evaluating the candidate's file to determine whether he or she meets the requirements as a nursing academic, based on his or her publications; involvement in disciplinary teaching, particularly in nursing and research methodology; participation in scientific societies or expertise related to the discipline; and potential administrative responsibilities (National Council of Universities, 2020). A doctorate (Ph.D.) is mandatory to apply as an assistant professor, and the *Habilitation à diriger des recherches* (HDR), the highest degree in higher education in France, is required to be qualified for a position as a university professor. The links of interest between a candidate's reviewers and the candidates for qualification are checked, and possible conflicts are managed by the president of the section.

In March 2020, the CNU Nursing Sciences Section qualified two university professors and 19 assistant professors. It is the task of French universities to open academic profiles in all university disciplines, based on quota set by the Ministry of Higher Education. Thus, they have the possibility to have candidates with specific profiles apply as assistant professors or university professors in the discipline of nursing. The number of qualified persons is often higher than the number of available positions, which augurs well for a very selective recruitment. As qualification is valid for five years, if a candidate does not succeed in being recruited to an academic position within this period, he or she must apply for a renewal of qualification.

Through its mission, the CNU Nursing Sciences Section makes explicit choices on what constitutes nursing research. It informs the scientific community of the major directions in the development of the discipline and research in France and encourages the creation and perpetuation of a corps of academics in nursing sciences.

## 3 | PERSPECTIVES

This reform, which allowed the creation of the CNU Nursing Sciences Section, recognizes and develops the careers of academics in the nursing sciences in France. This makes it possible to overcome the conditions of isolation in which some researchers find themselves, and finally move towards a professional community of researchers. This should be made possible as soon as French universities have

institutionalized the positions of assistant professor and university professor in nursing.

As soon as these academics have statutory positions at universities, they will be affiliated with research units identified by the Ministry of Higher Education. The aim is to bring the vision of nursing sciences within the framework of multidisciplinary research and to avoid isolating nursing research.

France's contribution to the development of nursing knowledge should therefore increase significantly over the next 10 years, based on national research, as well as through international collaborations with universities in Europe and around the world.

## AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

The article was coordinated by the first author. All authors contributed equally to this article.

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## CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

The authors report no conflict of interest in this work.

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