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Health Education and Improvement Wales

**Briefing paper for
Practice Partners,
Education Leads, Practice
Education Facilitators
(and equivalent roles)
during the Coronavirus
(Covid-19) period**

March 2020

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Briefing paper for Practice Partners, Education Leads, Practice Education Facilitators (and equivalent roles) concerning support of nursing and midwifery students in clinical practice during the Coronavirus (COVID-19) period.

Date: 30.03.20.

1.0 SITUATION

This paper sets out further guidance to Health Boards and consideration of the imminent pressures facing health and care services in relation to the COVID-19 outbreak. The paper also takes account of announcements from professional regulators and a joint statement by the four country Chief Nursing Officers endorsed by Welsh Government concerning healthcare students and measures to increase the NHS workforce.

2.0 BACKGROUND

In response to the COVID-19 national public health emergency, UK regulators (NMC; HCPC) have published statements on expanding the healthcare workforce.

2.1 Nursing and Midwifery Council (NMC) statements

Joint nursing and midwifery leaders' statements on expanding the health and care workforce in the COVID-19 pandemic includes four parts:

<https://www.nmc.org.uk/globalassets/sitedocuments/other-publications/joint-statement-on-expanding-the-midwifery-workforce-in-the-covid-19-outbreak.pdf>

1. The UK Government has passed legislation to enable the NMC to establish a COVID-19 temporary emergency register. The first focus will be to invite those nurses and midwives who have left the register within the last three years to opt in should they wish to do so.
2. The joint statement also encourages those nurses and midwives who are currently on the register but not working in clinical care to consider coming into clinical practice during this time.
3. The NMC have changed the nature of the programme for undergraduate nursing and midwifery students so that they can opt to undertake their final six months of their programme as a clinical placement.
4. The COVID-19 emergency temporary register has established a specific part for nursing students in the final six months of their programme. The NMC will only consider asking student nurses whether they would like to join the COVID-19 emergency temporary register if they believe that this is necessary. This does not apply to midwifery students.

*** Actions 3 and 4 of the NMC statement have significant implications for nursing and midwifery students which this paper addresses in a Welsh context.**

2.2 Further key NMC publications

NMC 25.03.20. - *Emergency standards for nursing and midwifery education*
<https://www.nmc.org.uk/globalassets/sitedocuments/education-standards/emergency-standards-for-nursing-and-midwifery-education.pdf>

NMC: 25.03.20. - *Update in relation to nursing and midwifery students in all fields, who are not in the final six months of their programme:* <https://www.nmc.org.uk/news/news-and-updates/joint-statement-update-for-students-not-in-final-six-months-covid/>

This statement has been agreed by a number of national organisations including the four nation Chief Nursing Officers, Council of Deans for Health and Welsh Government.

2.3 Impact of COVID-19 on students in different years of the programme

Students will remain as students during the COVID-19 period and aligned to their Approved Education Institution (AEI). NMC Standards for Supervision and Assessment (NMC 2018) will apply when students are in clinical practice. Students' deployment in practice for a paid placement will be with the agreement of their Approved Education Institution and count towards practice hours.

All students must receive theoretical learning concerning infection prevention and control measures in relation to COVID-19. This will be delivered by AEIs. For those students opting to work in practice, students must have an effective safety induction into new areas where they are being deployed, ensuring they are familiar with emergency procedures, reporting procedures and any equipment they may be asked to use including appropriate fit testing and use of Personal Protective Equipment (PPE).

2.3.1 **First year nursing and midwifery students in all fields will not undertake practice placements during the COVID-19 emergency period.**

These students will nevertheless continue with their nursing and midwifery programme. Their clinical placements will be paused, and for the duration of the COVID-19 emergency period students will pursue a programme of academic learning organised by their AEI using distance/ online learning approaches.

All students will continue to receive their usual bursary payments until the end of their programme.

Due to the pause on clinical placements, these students will not be able to complete the usual level of practice hours in their first year. The NMC will work closely with AEIs to assess how students can be supported to reach the required number of practice hours beyond the COVID-19 period and across their remaining programme time.

In addition, first year nursing and midwifery students may volunteer or undertake paid work in a clinical setting in their spare time while they maintain their academic study. However, volunteering or paid work will not be counted towards the practice hours and experience required to complete their pre-registration course.

2.3.2 **Nursing and midwifery students (in all fields) in their second year or first 6 months of the third year (and postgraduate pre-registration students not in the last 6 months of their programme) can opt into a revised programme structure.**

Given the significant pressures on the system and the need to ensure that front line services are fully supported, the NMC recognise it is not possible to continue to provide the current programme for students in these years of study.

These students will be invited to opt-in to an arrangement where they may spend no more than 80% of time in clinical practice and 20% in academic study during the COVID-19 emergency period.

This amounts to a pattern of 30 hours in practice and one day academic study each week. The purpose of the period of academic study is to build in designated structured and regular contact with their relevant AEI personnel.

Time in practice for these students will be remunerated and will also count towards practice hours as it will be part of the student's programme.

In addition to continuation of the usual bursary payments, it is expected that second year students and those in the first 6 months of their third year will be remunerated as Agenda for Change Band 3.

2.3.3 **Supervision and assessment**

The NMC understands that it will not be possible for nursing and midwifery students (in all fields) in their second year or first 6 months of the third year to be supernumerary on clinical placement in this emergency situation but will expect students to be supervised and work within an appropriate delegation framework.

An appropriate delegation framework will require institutions to adopt NMC *Standards for Student Supervision and Assessment* (NMC 2018 - SSSA) for these students. The SSSA standards allow for greater flexibility, by allowing any registered health or social care professional to supervise students.

A nominated practice assessor (experienced as a mentor or sign-off mentor) who is a registered nurse (or for midwifery students a registered midwife) must be the individual to ultimately confirm student achievement of competence and practice learning outcomes.

In exceptional circumstances, the same person may fulfil the role of practice supervisor and practice assessor.

The exact nature of the role to be undertaken and the level of supervision will be agreed between the student and the organisation in which they will be working, **within the limits of students' level of competence**. In most cases there will be an effort to place students in an organisation where they have worked previously.

2.3.4 **For pre-registration nurses and midwives in the final 6 months of their programme the NMC have outlined a change of nature of the programme.**

These students will be asked to opt-in to an arrangement whereby they undertake their final six months of their programme as a clinical placement.

An appropriate delegated framework will require institutions to adopt NMC *Standards for Student Supervision and Assessment* (NMC 2018 - SSSA) for these students.

The SSSA standards allow for greater flexibility, by allowing any registered health or social care professional to supervise students.

A nominated practice assessor (experienced as a mentor or sign-off mentor) who is a registered nurse (or for midwifery students a registered midwife) must be the individual to ultimately confirm student achievement of competence and practice learning outcomes.

In exceptional circumstances, the same person may fulfil the role of practice supervisor and practice assessor.

The exact nature of the role to be undertaken and the level of supervision will be agreed between each student and the organisation in which they will be working, **within the limits of students' level of competence**. In the majority of cases there will be an effort to place students in an organisation where they have worked previously.

In addition to continuation of the usual bursary payments, it is expected that those students who opt to undertake their final six months as a clinical placement will be remunerated on Agenda for Change Band 4.

2.3.5 **Under new legislation, the NMC have emergency powers to enable nursing students in the final six months of their pre-registration programme to join a COVID-19 emergency temporary register.**

The policy

The Nursing and Midwifery Council have also established a COVID-19 emergency temporary register. This went live on the 25.03.20. In the first instance, the COVID-19 emergency temporary register is only open to nursing and midwifery professionals who left the register within the last three years.

The NMC will only consider asking student nurses whether they would like to join the COVID-19 emergency temporary register if they believe that this is necessary to further benefit health services and the people who use them. Further details about this will be made available to students on the NMC website at <https://www.nmc.org.uk/news/coronavirus/temporary-registration/>

On the 25.03.20. the NMC published a COVID-19 emergency temporary registration policy: <https://www.nmc.org.uk/globalassets/sitedocuments/registration/covid-19-temporary-emergency-registration-policy.pdf>

Should the NMC open the emergency temporary registration to students in their final 6 months of the programme, the COVID-19 registration policy outlines several provisos.

The NMC consider final six-month nursing students can reasonably be considered fit and proper by reason of their participation in approved education programmes, particularly as those students are subject to fitness to practice procedures in line with NMC health and character guidance.

Also, that students in their final six months can be considered suitably experienced to be registered during this emergency period provided their temporary registration is subject to proposed 'conditions of practice.'

Note: The NMC are not proposing to invite midwifery students to join the temporary register at this time. This is because the newly registered midwife is required to practice with a high level of clinical autonomy, which it was felt could not be expected of students who had not completed their full programme.

Conditions of practice

If the COVID-19 emergency temporary register is opened to nursing students, the NMC have proposed conditions of practice. Any nursing student placed on the emergency register would be subject to the following conditions on their temporary registration.

This would include:

- *Working at all times with, but not always directly observed by an NMC registered nurse, midwife, or other registered health care professional, who is not on a temporary register.*
- *Not carrying out any activity in which they have not been assessed as competent and appropriately signed off during their training unless supervised by NMC registered nurses, midwives, and other registered health care professionals who are not on a temporary register (or unless a lifesaving intervention is required to avoid sudden and unexpected death).*

The NMC will ask AEIs to exclude any student who is in a local fitness to practise process, who has any outstanding failed assessments, or for whom the university would not sign a health and good character statement.

Nursing students who choose to join the temporary register instead of completing their pre-registration programmes in an extended clinical placement will not be automatically admitted onto the full register at the end of the emergency period.

In each case, the AEI would need to work with the student who opted to join the temporary register to see if their practice hours could be counted towards their programme.

The AEI will also need to ensure that there is an appropriate assessment to ensure all the learning outcomes and requirements for full registration have been met. If not, then the student would need to return to their programme to complete their studies.¹

Supervision and assessment

An appropriate delegation framework will require institutions to adopt NMC *Standards for Student Supervision and Assessment* (NMC 2018 - SSSA) for these students. The SSSA standards allow for greater flexibility, by allowing any registered health or social care professional to supervise students.

A nominated practice assessor (experienced as a mentor or sign-off mentor) who is a registered nurse (or for midwifery students a registered midwife) must be the individual to ultimately confirm student achievement of competence and practice learning outcomes.

Student registrants will be allocated to work in a variety of settings to meet service needs and the influence of the university over placements is likely to be reduced.

While in clinical practice students will be paid in line with the terms and conditions of the organisation in which they are working and national guidelines (e.g. Agenda for Change). As set out above, specific roles will be agreed with individuals with the first 6-8 weeks expected to be at Band 4 moving to Band 5 on joining the temporary register.

2.3.6 Student opt-in status

Not all students will opt to undertake practice placements as the opt-in is voluntary. Students who do not wish to undertake the revised programme structure will not be disadvantaged. They will be supported by their AEI to consider options available.

2.3.7 Students identified as being in vulnerable categories

Given the increased risks associated with COVID-19, students would not be expected to opt-in to arrangements for working in practice should they be at increased risk of severe illness relating to their own health and/or with caring responsibilities. In these situations, the AEI will discuss alternative options.

2.3.8 Student support whilst working in practice

All students will continue to be supported by identified AEI and practice staff throughout the COVID-19 period. Practice Education Facilitators (PEFs) and university staff will also provide a direct and bespoke support network for students whilst working in practice.

¹ Students in these circumstances would continue to receive their usual bursary payments.

3.0 ASSESSMENT

See also Appendix 1: Summary of emergency COVID-19 arrangements and impact on current student cohorts.

3.1 Implications for student support

There are several implications for the supervision and assessment of healthcare students including:

3.1.1 *Support of healthcare students' emotional well-being during unprecedented circumstances in healthcare services.*

There is the potential for significant increased programme attrition in terms of completion of programmes and retention of future registrants. It is vital that beyond the COVID-19 emergency period Wales can ensure a sustainable workforce.

3.1.2 *Support of students' understanding of a potential extension to their studies, assisting them to record their practice experiences, motivate their ongoing learning and encourage them to continue to develop their skills and experience.*

This will be important in relation to the potential to credit service experience, knowledge and skill development against the programme requirements within the flexibilities afforded by professional regulators.

This work will also be vital to continue to enable students to progress their nursing and midwifery studies after the emergency period is over.

3.1.3 *Support of nursing and midwifery students who opt to undertake their final six months of their programme as a clinical placement or who consider entry to the COVID-19 temporary register as and when established by the NMC.*

3.1.2 *Support of practice staff's understanding of NMC emergency standards which allow that in exceptional circumstances the same person may fulfil the role of practice supervisor and practice assessor.*

3.1.4 *Support for newly registered nurses.*

It is recognised that usual preceptorship arrangements for students transitioning to registrant status may not be as readily available for these cohorts during the COVID-19 period and they will require additional bespoke support to mitigate any risks involved in their retention in service.

4.0 RECOMMENDATIONS FOR PRACTICE EDUCATION FACILITATOR ROLES

Following the joint CNO statement Practice Education Facilitators (or equivalent roles including Educational Liaison Nurses, Open University Practice Tutors and identified Approved Education Institution staff) are seen as having a key role in supporting healthcare students who are working in practice and those entering the period of registration.² These roles will:

4.1 ***Establish and maintain a dedicated and creative support network for healthcare students working in practice during the period of the COVID-19 period.***

HEIW will oversee this network across Wales and work with relevant AEI personnel and PEFs (and equivalent roles) to develop detailed local plans, gather data, and report and respond to any identified risks concerning the immediate or continuing viability of student placements during the emergency period. The AEI will continue to exception report to NMC if required.

4.2 ***Maintain robust communication systems with healthcare students in practice.***

This will include a range of methods (direct face-to-face support in the clinical area, or through methods such as Skype, video or telephone calls).

4.3 ***Liaise with service colleagues utilising AEI/PEF established link areas***

This involves identification of all second and third-year students working within clinical practice environments during the COVID-19 period.

This includes establishing viable means of communication in order to respond to students' pastoral needs during placements with due consideration of students' continuation in practice at any point there are indications this is becoming unsustainable.

4.3 ***Support service colleagues' understanding of NMC emergency standards***

This includes students working within an appropriate delegation framework and how this relates to NMC Standards for supervision and assessment (NMC 2018).

4.4 ***Support students' understanding of supernumerary status being removed during the COVID-19 emergency.***

PEFs will liaise with students and service colleagues to monitor all students are supervised and supported appropriately and that they are working within an appropriate delegated framework.

4.5 ***Liaise with relevant AEI staff and service colleagues as and when there is consideration of a student being considered for the COVID-19 temporary register within the final six months of their programme.***

This would include discussion with AEI staff and service colleagues concerning conditions of practice for any student going onto the COVID-19 temporary register (does not apply for midwifery students).

² Chief Nursing Office for Wales will establish a point of contact (telephone helpline, website) for all health and social care employers in all four nations across the UK that can provide appropriate information for potential registrants and final year students.

Appendix 1. Summary of COVID-19 emergency arrangements and impact on current student cohorts

Cohort	Months into course	Altered placement pattern	From	Student support arrangements in practice
M17	3 years - New registrants	These students are at the point of registration and entering a preceptorship period as new registrants.	April 2020	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The new registrant works within the delegated framework in their area of employment. - Additional bespoke preceptorship support from AEI staff and PEF (and equivalent) roles.
S17 (3 rd year) ³	2 years 7 months	<p>Arrangement 1: Students can opt-in to an arrangement whereby they undertake their final six months of their programme as a clinical placement. In addition to continuation of the usual bursary payments, students who opt to undertake their final six months as a clinical placement will be paid as a Band 4.</p>	April 2020	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Students are supervised and work within an appropriate delegation framework (NMC Standards for supervision and assessment (NMC 2018). - The requirement for supernumerary status will be removed for these students (however NMC emergency standards would require them to be supervised and supported appropriately during the emergency period). - Students can potentially finish their training on placement subject to learning outcomes being met.
		<p>Arrangement 2: Under new legislation, the NMC has emergency powers to enable nursing students in the final six months of their pre-registration programme to be asked to join a temporary register. Specific roles will be agreed with individuals with the first 6-8 weeks expected to be at Band 4 moving to Band 5 on joining the temporary register.</p>	TBC ⁴	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Student nurses opting to join this register would be subject to specific conditions of practice, to ensure that they, and the public are appropriately protected. These include appropriate supervision and working within the boundaries of their competence. - Education institutions and practice partners will need to work with individual student nurses to determine whether it will be possible for them to meet all requirements to be fully registered at what would be the end of their programme. If students do not meet all their learning outcomes during this time, they would need to extend their programme to complete their studies

³ Those students having already commenced their final placement can choose to opt-in to the revised programme structure.

⁴ The NMC will only consider asking nursing students whether they would like to join the COVID-19 emergency temporary register should they believe that this becomes necessary.

Cohort	Months into course	Altered placement pattern	From	Student support arrangements in practice	
M18 (3 rd year)	2 years	Students can opt-in to an arrangement where they may spend no more than 80% of time in clinical practice and 20% in academic study. In addition to continuation of the usual bursary payments, students in the first part of the third year will be paid as a Band 3.	April 2020	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Students are supervised and work within an appropriate delegation framework (NMC Standards for supervision and assessment (NMC 2018)). - The requirement for supernumerary status will be removed for these students (however NMC emergency standards would require them to be supervised and supported appropriately during the emergency period). 	
S18 (2 nd year)	18 months	Students can opt-in to an arrangement where they may spend no more than 80% of time in clinical practice and 20% in academic study.	April 2020		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Additional bespoke support from AEI staff and PEF (and equivalent) roles.
M19 (entering 2 nd year)	12 months	Students can opt-in to an arrangement where they may spend no more than 80% of time in clinical practice and 20% in academic study.	April 2020		
S19 (1 st year)	7 months	First year nursing and midwifery students in all fields will not undertake practice placements. May volunteer or undertake paid work in a clinical setting in their spare time, while they maintain their academic study.	April 2020	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Clinical placements will be paused, and for the duration of the COVID-19 emergency period they will pursue a programme of academic learning organised by their AEI using distance/ online learning approaches. 	
M20 (1 st year)	Programmes commencing	First year nursing and midwifery students in all fields will not undertake practice placements. May volunteer or undertake paid work in a clinical setting in their spare time, while they maintain their academic study.	April 2020	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Clinical placements will be paused, and for the duration of the COVID-19 emergency period they will pursue a programme of academic learning organised by their AEI using distance/ online learning approaches. 	