

Option for planned placements - England only

Context

1. The Nursing and Midwifery Council (NMC), Health and Care Professions Council (HCPC), Health Education England (HEE), the Council of Deans of Health, employers and unions worked together in March to agree special arrangements allowing students to spend more time in practice, in remunerated placements, to support health and social care services during the Covid-19 pandemic. These arrangements are designed to be facilitative rather than directive so that universities are able to make changes to their programmes to enable students to contribute to supporting services while continuing with their education and placement hours.
2. Emergency arrangements were developed to help the NHS cope with the projected peak demand of the pandemic. Across all nations in the UK, detailed assessments were made of the likely impact of Covid-19 on demand for health and social care services. It was agreed that there was a clear need to expand capacity and provide healthcare with additional healthcare professionals. It was also recognised that, in the majority of cases, offering students a full normal placement experience with normal supervision and assessment would be very challenging owing to pressures on service and service reconfiguration.
3. Planning for the pandemic predicted serious social, healthcare and educational disruption was likely, with regions and sectors potentially facing challenges at different points and with different degrees of severity.
4. Joint statements and policy guidance documents were developed for the four nations that set out a framework for university healthcare faculties to work with local systems to support the pandemic. It was recognised that local areas would choose from the various available options according to local need.

Using planned placement arrangements

5. In some areas and during some periods it may prove unnecessary to use the full emergency arrangements. Where universities and practice partners can ensure that regulators' standards can be met and where it is acceptable to all parties, students *may* still undertake planned placements in line with their normal course structure. All placements in this period will be remunerated under a paid contract of employment (see point 8). Decisions should be made with regard to local service demand, supervision capacity and student wellbeing.
6. The NMC and HCPC are happy for students to undertake planned placements where these placements meet normal regulatory criteria for supervision.

7. Though planned placements may sometimes still be possible, the NHS is operating with emergency provisions. Disruption to normal placement arrangements is still highly likely and students on placement in any environment are at higher risk of contracting Covid-19.
8. **HEE and the Council of Deans of Health have agreed that healthcare students on placements of any length during the Covid-19 pandemic should be working under a remunerated contract of employment, like those on emergency placement arrangements.** First year students will generally be excluded from this arrangement. The contract should confer death in service cover through the opportunity to be in the NHS pension scheme while remuneration recognises the ongoing exceptional circumstances which may impact on the placement experience.
9. Remuneration for students on placement is paid through the placement provider but funded centrally by the NHS. National financial support enables remunerated students to be taken on in addition to existing staffing establishments. A letter to finance directors has been produced to accompany this statement. If students have valid DBS checks these need not be repeated.
10. The placement contract does not affect responsibility for the placement. Arrangements between universities and placement providers may change a little during this time to recognise that the learner is both a student and remunerated. However, universities maintain overall responsibility for all placements undertaken by their students, in keeping with regulatory requirements. This includes responsibility for agreeing the placement with the placement provider.
11. Whether or not emergency provisions are used to place students, some learners will be unable to take part in patient-facing roles during the pandemic as a result of health issues. This is understood by all parties and every effort will be made to help these students progress through their courses in a timely way.
12. **Student progression should be a high priority for all placement providers and universities. As many placement opportunities as possible will be needed to help make up for placement hours that have already been lost to Covid-19.** Placement opportunities should be offered in the first instance to final year students first and then to other students who have passed their first year. This will help minimise disruption to the workforce pipeline. We would expect most first year students to continue with academic elements of their course. Every effort should be made by all parties to ensure third years students are able to complete their course and graduate in a timely manner.
13. The arrangements outlined above for the contracting and remuneration of planned placements are time limited as they are a specific response to the level four pandemic. These arrangements will be reviewed in June 2020 with a view to ending these arrangements at the end of the 2020 Summer term.