



## **JOINT STATEMENT for pre-registration nursing and midwifery students during COVID-19 in England**

### **A thank you to students**

Since the start of the Covid-19 pandemic in 2020, student nurses, student midwives and student allied health professionals (AHPs) have played an essential part in supporting the health and social care workforce. They have contributed to safe and effective care in their communities alongside continuing their studies.

Students who were unable to do this equally showed courage and professionalism during the pandemic. Many are now completing their hours of practice and programmes to graduate and join their chosen profession.

As a nation, we are exceptionally proud of what they have achieved, and we want to say thank you to you all. This statement applies to nursing and midwifery students and is supported by a letter that will go out to all student nurses and midwives. Student allied health professionals will receive information from their regional teams.

### **A thank you to academic and clinical staff supporting students in placement**

The last few months have put unprecedented pressure on not just health and social care but on universities, the higher education sector and placement providers. We have seen collaboration across these sectors that has resulted in the quick and successful implementation of the Nursing & Midwifery Council's (NMC) emergency education standards, supporting students into practice and the continuity of education and training.

This has been an exceptionally busy time for academic and placement staff and we therefore thank all of you for your hard work supporting students during these unprecedented times.

Despite none of us knowing how the pandemic will progress over the next few months, it is evident that it will continue to affect our society for an extended period. We must be prepared to manage this and will continue to work collaboratively across health and education sectors with regulators, professional bodies and trade unions, to support

students. In partnership, we will face the next wave with the same effort, commitment, and cooperation as last time.

### **Next steps:**

We recognise that this is a fast-moving and dynamic environment and will keep doing what we can to support health and care and students under national and regional review as the next wave develops.

This time we have more effective treatments, a more knowledgeable population, new Test and Trace capability being built, together with a greater understanding of the spread and what worked last time. However, we also face the winter with pressures including flu, more nuanced population restrictions which are potentially more difficult to follow, new students with less developed skills and knowledge at this point, tired and stressed staff on the frontline, and an increasing need to focus on other areas of care as well.

Our priority is the continuing education of student nurses and midwives and support of their learning in this challenging time. We continue to work collaboratively to provide clarity and reassurance and are working with partners to support students from all year groups to undertake supernumerary placements with good supervision in the coming months. This will be a time when students will be building their learning as part of teams managing complex care in people's homes, hospitals and community facilities.

The support that students need has changed. Students have transitioned to a new year of study. The continuity of studies and any built-up delays are an important factor to be considered in the next phase. Some students may still have hours to complete and assessments to undertake. Students' wellbeing and the implications of the blended learning approach are also an essential consideration.

We understand that there are several issues that students have raised with education, health and regulator partners, professional bodies and trade unions about their studies in subsequent waves of the pandemic. We agreed principles with the NMC in July, and building on these, we commit to the following:

**We will take all possible steps to protect the safety of students** – All students will have a thorough, individualised risk assessment before undertaking any placement. Students will have access to the same testing and vaccinations as NHS staff.

**We will focus on supporting current students through their programmes** – students want to be able to complete their courses and start their career as a registered professional, and we must support them to do that. Regardless of what happens with Covid-19, the nursing and midwifery students of today are critical to our future health and social care workforce. We will continue to support and explore flexible options for clinical practice environments and ensure all options are explored with students before suspensions or deferrals are considered

**We will normalise student education as far as possible** – the pandemic is not over and there is a good chance that life for all of us will be changed. While there are many practical matters that need to be addressed, we must achieve a more stable

learning environment for students which is as near to normal arrangements as possible. Clinical placements for nursing and midwifery students will remain supernumerary as this is the most effective way to ensure students have the time and support necessary to learn.

**We will assess the specific support that individual students need** – students will have different educational and support needs as a result of the pandemic, especially those who have been shielded or missed out on important learning opportunities. We must ensure that all options are explored so that every student is enabled to complete their studies, and provided with the practical, theoretical, financial, pastoral and emotional support they need.

**We will monitor placement hours and resolve issues to ensure students' progress**– it is recognised that there are challenges in relation to placements in health and social care with numbers of students requiring practice hours, including first year students who have yet to have clinical experience. We have invested and worked with partners to maximise additional placements this year and next to accommodate these additional hours requirements.

**We will gain further feedback on students' experience by repeating the Covid-19 pandemic student survey**– it was recognised that student experiences during the first wave were varied. We must continue to understand their placement experience during the pandemic and commit to work with education and system partners to make rapid adjustment to improve their education and training experiences.

## **Rotas**

We expect that students should receive their placement notification rota well in advance of placement and typically 4 weeks prior to placement. We also recognise that HEIs and placement providers are undertaking a complex task this year ensuring placements during the pandemic.

While we have increased placement capacity, some placements may be excluded for a variety of reasons and such information must be communicated to students as soon as possible. HEIs will continue to monitor this, routinely sharing any concerns with HEE and NHS England to support placement providers in resolving any issues.

Trade unions and professional bodies will continue to raise concerns on behalf of their students where placement rotas might be an issue.

## **Wellbeing**

Given the challenging times we are faced with, it has never been more important to look after our health and wellbeing. We recognise that the needs of healthcare students must be prioritised so that students can train effectively to pursue professions which care for others. We know that HEIs and placement providers are

working together to ensure that student nurses and midwives have the support they need, but there are also other routes of support which are available.

As part of the NHS family, healthcare students can also access help and support in the same way the NHS workforce can while looking after others. This information is available at <https://people.nhs.uk/>. There is additional information in the letter that will be sent to all students, directing to resources available.

### **Essential worker role**

The Department for Health and Social Care and the Department for Education have confirmed that for the purposes of essential travel to clinical placements and in the event of any future need for accessing keyworker places, healthcare students on placement can self-declare as essential workers.

As set out above, students on clinical placement within a Trust will also be classed as 'essential' for the purposes of testing and have clear and accessible testing routes available when symptomatic, according to where in the NHS their placement is. In addition, healthcare students undertaking clinical placements will be included in testing decisions undertaken by the host Trust on the asymptomatic testing of NHS staff.

Further details on this can be found here:

<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/coronavirus-covid-19-getting-tested#list-of-essential-workers-and-those-prioritised-for-testing-england-only>

### **Life assurance**

The NHS & Social Care Coronavirus Life Assurance Scheme provides additional financial protection for frontline staff who are employed to deliver care for people and work in environments that carry an increased risk of contracting Coronavirus.

Whilst the scheme is designed to cover employed staff, the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care recognises the importance of the role students on placement play in supporting frontline health and social care services and so can exercise his discretion and consider cases from individuals who meet the appropriate eligibility criteria.

The Secretary of State for Health and Social Care will review each case individually to decide whether to exercise this discretion and if the other eligibility criteria are met. As with claims for employed NHS staff, there is no blanket guarantee that a claim will be accepted however the availability of the scheme provides reassurance.

## **Vaccinations**

The annual flu vaccination programme has now commenced and it's an important part of protecting ourselves and others from the risks of flu. We recognise that some students will fall into the eligibility criteria and have a vaccination through their GP. For others, it is important that they are protected and in turn protect patients from the risk of flu. We know that HEIs will work with local placement providers to ensure that students on placement are able to have a flu vaccination in the way substantive staff are.

We will contact you again when information on the Covid-19 vaccinations becomes available.

## **Personal Protective Equipment (PPE)**

Like all other NHS staff, the level of PPE required by students on placement will vary according to the role and setting. Placement providers will ensure that students have access to appropriate PPE and the relevant training throughout their placement.

Any concerns with a PPE product should be reported through the Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency (MHRA) yellow card scheme for medical devices, and for other types of PPE where the issues are not resolved locally they should be reported to the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) through their Concerns and Advice Team.

MHRA yellow card scheme: <https://coronavirus-yellowcard.mhra.gov.uk/>.

HSE Concerns and Advice Team: <https://www.hse.gov.uk/contact/concerns.htm>.

## **Student fees**

This is a difficult and uncertain time for students, but the Department for Education is working with the sector to make sure all reasonable efforts are being made to enable students to continue their studies. We have seen some fantastic and innovative examples of high-quality online learning being delivered by providers across the country. The Government expects universities and other higher education providers to continue delivering a high-quality academic experience and help students to achieve qualifications that they and employers value.

Universities and other higher education providers are autonomous and responsible for setting their own fees. In deciding to keep charging full fees, providers will of course want to ensure that they can continue to deliver courses which are fit for purpose and help students progress their qualifications.

It is an Office for Students registration condition that providers must deliver well designed courses that provide a high-quality academic experience for all students and enable a student's achievement to be reliably assessed. If providers are unable to facilitate good online or in-person tuition, they should seek to avoid charging students for any additional terms they may need to undergo as a consequence –

avoiding effectively charging them twice. Whether or not an individual student is entitled to a refund of fees will depend on the specific contractual arrangements between the provider and student.

If students have concerns, there is a process in place. They should first raise their concerns with their university. If their concerns remain unresolved, students at providers in England or Wales can ask the Office of the Independent Adjudicator for Higher Education to consider their complaint.

### **Students requiring extensions to their studies**

We know that as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic some students have experienced unavoidable delays to their studies. We are committed to ensuring that students receive the financial support they need in order to graduate and any student who is concerned should discuss this with their HEI who can advise on the process for applying for additional funding through the NHS Business Service Authority where appropriate. Further detail of the support available can be accessed:

For the NHS Learning Support Fund at <https://www.nhsbsa.nhs.uk/nhs-learning-support-fund/learning-support-fund-coronavirus-covid-19>.

For the NHS Student Bursary at <https://www.nhsbsa.nhs.uk/nhs-bursary-students/nhs-bursary-students-coronavirus-covid-19>.