



Department of Health & Social Care

*From the Rt Hon Matt Hancock MP
Secretary of State for Health and Social Care*

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Andrea Sutcliffe CBE
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13 January 2021

Dear Andrea,

Nursing students in England

As you are aware, Sir Simon Stevens, has asked for my agreement to introduce emergency measures similar to those implemented in the first wave of the pandemic, and to ask nursing students to take paid clinical placements on the NHS frontline in England. Sir Simon's request to me is in direct response to the four UK Chief Medical Officers' statement that the United Kingdom should be placed on level five alert. This means that there is a material risk of the NHS in several areas being overwhelmed over the next 21 days unless action is taken.

For this reason, we have introduced a national lockdown which is designed to reduce infection rates across the country but alongside that, we also have a duty to ensure that our NHS can provide the best possible care to patients.

As a nation, we are already indebted to nursing students for the extraordinary contribution they made to that collective effort last year and once again, together with the NHS, I am asking them to join their colleagues in the fight against the pandemic. We need the support of the Nursing and Midwifery Council to take this necessary step and I once again ask you and your Council to put in place NMC emergency standards as quickly as possible to enable those nursing students who wish to make an even more vital contribution to tackling the pandemic to opt into paid clinical placements.

However, unlike in Wave 1, NHS England and Improvement has asked that the emergency standards are put in place to enable all current third year students to enter paid placements in the NHS on a full-time basis, and that years one and two remain in their education programmes in clinical placements and undertaking academic learning, as planned.

In reaching this decision, both Simon and I are very conscious of the impact that this will have on the training of our future nurses, and there will be a need to review this decision in 12 weeks. I can assure you that my Department, the Chief Nursing Officer for England, and Health Education England are already working closely with Universities to minimise that impact and to put in place measures to ensure the future graduation of the nursing students as soon as possible once the current emergency subsides. We will work with Universities, Student Bodies and the Department for Education to ensure that no student who steps up into a front-line placement is adversely impacted in the longer term. I have specifically asked my officials to consider what risk assessments are required regarding the protection for all students, in particular those students from Black and Minority Ethnic backgrounds.

I have also asked Health Education England to work with all concerned to ensure that as students take up paid placements, they have the right support and supervision to ensure that their health and their wellbeing is a priority.

I am grateful to your Council for its recent decision to allow the temporary emergency registration of overseas nurses who are already in the country, allowing them to make use of their full set of skills. This is an important part of a wide-ranging set of measures to maximise at speed the number of staff available to respond the unprecedented pressures the service is experiencing as a result of the new variant of the virus.

In addition, the NMC has provided invaluable assistance to the service by placing many retired nurses on the temporary register, and many are now providing vital support, whether on the wards or in the national effort to ensure the rapid roll out of the vaccine. To ensure that this resource is maximised I have asked Simon and the NHS Chief People Officer for assurance that the NHS has taken every possible step to make best use of those returners who stepped forward to help during the first wave. However even with an increased contribution from this group, I am satisfied that the urgent deployment of nursing students is necessary to respond to the extraordinary pressures that the service is now facing.

I would therefore be grateful if your Council could agree the measures needed to enable students to join their colleagues as soon as possible.

Yours ever,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Matt". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.

MATT HANCOCK