

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

14 January 2021

Dear Secretary of State

Emergency arrangements for enabling nursing students to move into extended clinical placements

Thank you for your letter of 13 January 2021 asking the Nursing and Midwifery Council (NMC) to reintroduce emergency standards for final year nursing students.

Since the initial use of emergency standards during the first wave of the pandemic, we have sought to normalise education for student nurses and midwives to ensure their learning experience is a positive one and to protect the future supply of professionals onto the NMC register. In September, we removed our emergency standards and replaced them with recovery standards which provided Approved Educational Institutions (AEIs) with flexibilities to help sustain student learning.

However, as you set out in your letter the country is now facing an emergency situation carrying an extremely high risk of insufficient nurses to meet the demands being placed on the health and care system.

In these circumstances, we have given your request careful consideration, and agreed to reinstate emergency standards to facilitate final year nursing students supporting the health and social care workforce. This letter explains the changes we have made, along with our assessment of wider actions that will be needed to support student learning and welfare over this time.

Emergency standards for final year nursing students

While these emergency standards remain in place, they will enable all final year nursing students to choose to undertake extended clinical placements for up to 100 per cent of their programme. After full discussion with Council, our Deputy Chair has also removed requirements for final year students covered by the emergency standards to be supernumerary. None of these changes will apply to midwifery students.

23 Portland Place, London W1B 1PZ
T 020 7637 7181
www.nmc.org.uk

We're the independent regulator for nurses and midwives in the UK, and nursing associates in England. Better and safer care for people is at the heart of what we do.

Registered charity in England and Wales (1091434) and in Scotland (SC038362)

While these changes have been requested by the NHS in England, the emergency standards are available to use in each of the four UK countries we regulate. We are however aware that the devolved nations may not wish to take make use of the standards at this point. They are not mandatory for any country, region, institution or student.

I welcome your commitments to minimising the impact of these measures on the training of our future nurses and ensuring that no student who takes up a front-line placement experiences longer-term adverse impacts. I also welcome your recognition of the need to protect student health and safety and take specific account of the additional risks Black, Asian and minority ethnic students may face.

Students are the future of the nursing profession, and the NMC remains committed to ensuring they are supported to complete their studies and join the registered workforce. I know that ensuring a sustained future supply of nurses is a personal priority for you, and this depends on current students being able to complete their training.

Measures to support student learning and welfare and patient safety

Introduction of these emergency measures is not without risk. The NMC sets standards of education and training to enable student nurses to meet the standards of proficiency necessary for safe and effective practice to join our register. Final year students will only be able to enter professional practice if they finish their studies and join our register. Our standards for education and training ensure that students themselves are safe in practice, and the supervision of students in clinical placement supports their learning but is also critical to the safety of the people receiving care from students.

Government, educators and education commissioners must therefore act with local employers to mitigate the risks of making changes to student education. These new standards should therefore be accompanied by wider measures to support students to continue and complete their learning and to protect students' health and safety. Our assessment of the key mitigating measures required is set out below:

- As you have acknowledged, final year students must be able to choose whether or not to move into clinical placement.
- The relevant body in each of the four UK's countries should produce guidance for students and approved education institutions (AEIs), for use by AEIs adopting these emergency standards.
- AEIs must retain control and oversight of students and of where they are placed. This is to ensure learning outcomes are met and students on extended placements are supported to complete their programmes.
- Students who are remunerated by employers must still be treated as students, with guidance setting out the professional accountability of the Directors of Nursing and registrants working with students. Employers will need to recognise the limits of the students' abilities, competence and confidence.
- Students must continue to be supported, supervised and assessed in line with our education and training standards.
- Universities will need to map their students' hours and learning outcomes to ensure students will have met the requirements to join the NMC register.

- Guidance will need to set out how students who need to continue studies beyond their expected completion date will be supported academically and financially.
- Partners from across the health and social care system must take full responsibility for protecting Black, Asian and minority ethnic students from any additional risks they may face during clinical placements, including ensuring appropriate PPE for all students and undertaking appropriate risk assessments.

NMC's role in ensuring students remain supported

Where the emergency provisions are applied, the NMC will request detailed information from universities to quantify the impacts of clinical placements on student qualification dates. We will also write to all AEs and their practice learning partners to set out their continued responsibilities to students, in particular to retaining oversight of students on clinical placement, continuing to support student learning, carrying out appropriate risk assessments for students and taking wider steps to support students. We will monitor compliance of this through our education quality assurance process.

Conclusion

The NMC remains mindful of the enormous pressures the current emergency situation is causing for the health and social care workforce as well as for people who use health and care services. As you note, we have already taken wider action over this emergency period. Our temporary register has been in place since March 2020, and I am glad you are seeking assurances that everything possible is being done to make best use of those returners. We continue to work with all four UK countries to promote the deployment of temporary registrants who have not yet been contacted.

We have recently invited those who left the permanent register between March and November 2020 to join our temporary register and are also currently inviting additional groups of overseas trained nurses to join. We remain committed to doing all we can to support health and social care services to respond to the pandemic, while ensuring we continue to fulfil our core regulatory role to protect the public.

With thanks for your continuing support for our work.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Andrea Sutcliffe', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Andrea Sutcliffe CBE
Chief Executive and Registrar