

Returning undergraduate pre-registration nursing and midwifery students to their normal programme:
supporting information and frequently asked questions for students.

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Background

The Nursing and Midwifery Council (NMC) working in partnership with the Chief Nursing Officers (CNO), Council of Deans of Health (CoD), Royal Colleges and Trade Union representatives [published joint statements on expanding the workforce](#) during the Covid-19 outbreak. In addition, the NMC ratified [Emergency standards](#) that provided flexibility for Approved Education Institutions (AEI's) and practice areas to support nursing and midwifery students on their current programmes of study. To compliment the NMC's publications, the Department of Health (DoH) in Northern Ireland (NI) produced [support guidance](#) enabling nursing and midwifery students to contribute to the workforce demands in a paid capacity during the pandemic and continue with their pre-registration undergraduate education programmes. Implementation of the guidance would not have been possible without the partnership working and efforts of both the AEI's and practice areas.

Given the significant pressures on the system and the need to ensure that services were fully supported it was recognised that a revised programme structure would be required during the Covid-19 outbreak. Students, with the exception of those in their first year, had the opportunity to opt in to a revised programme structure with the hours they required to complete in clinical practice being remunerated. First year students had their clinical placements paused and for the duration of the emergency they continued their academic work. Second and final year nursing and midwifery students were offered the opportunity to undertake a paid role, with the hours worked counting towards the AEI's required clinical placement. These placements have been remunerated at Band 3 Agenda for Change (AfC) for year two and early year three students and Band 4 AfC for students in the final six months of their programme. The uptake of paid clinical placements has been significant with over 680 students in the final six months of their programme and over 700 second and early third year students choosing to opt into the paid arrangement. The contribution of all nursing and midwifery students to support the workforce during the Covid-19 outbreak has been recognised and acknowledged by the Minister of Health, Chief Nursing Officer and other nursing and midwifery leaders throughout NI.

The NMC issued a [further statement](#) on June 25th 2020 on principles for nursing and midwifery students during the next phase of the Covid-19 pandemic and ending of the emergency standards. In recognition of country specific arrangements for students, the NMC has requested that each United Kingdom (UK) country publish information on arrangements and timings of returning students to their normal studies.

Overview

This document sets out timelines for nursing and midwifery students, highlighting when remuneration at Bands 3 or 4 AfC will cease and when supernumerary placements will be restored.

What are the next steps for nursing and midwifery students?

The DoH is cognisant of the disruption to clinical placements caused by the Covid-19 pandemic and has been committed from the outset of the pandemic to ensuring that students complete their training and are able to qualify as registered nurses or midwives. The focus is now on considering the transition back to normalised, supernumerary placements, enabling students to progress with their education programmes. Supernumerary placements for nursing and midwifery students are essential for developing skills and ensuring a mix of academic, theoretical and safe practical learning.

This document outlines a set of more general **Frequently Asked Questions** providing further clarity to support students during this time on pages 6-7.

A table outlined in **Annex A** provides additional information for individual cohorts of nursing and midwifery students and how their placements will return to supernumerary status.

Arrangements for Students in Year 1

For students in year 1 of their programme, clinical placements can be resumed. These placements will be arranged between AEI's and local HSC Trusts in order to ensure all NMC requirements are met and students can progress to second year.

Arrangements for Students in Year 2 and Early Year 3

In line with AEI calendars, following a paid placement block all year two nursing and midwifery students should complete placement by 31st August 2020. Thereafter, these students will revert to supernumerary status and placements will not be paid.

Second year students from the Open University who received an uplift in their salary band will be returned to their original band on 31st August 2020.

Early year three nursing students (February 2018 cohort) should complete their placements by 12th July 2020 in accordance with the requirements of their AEI calendar. These students, will have availed of a paid placement and following a period of leave will return to their final placement. The final placement for this cohort will revert to supernumerary status.

Arrangements for Students in the final six months

For students in the final six months of their undergraduate programme all paid placements will cease by 30th September 2020. There will be no new paid clinical placements commencing after 31st July 2020. However, a paid clinical placement commencing on or before 31st July 2020 but continuing after 30th September will be fully paid until the end of the placement.

For those students nearing the end of their programme, once they have successfully completed both their practice hours and academic components, they will then be

ready to join the NMC register, take up roles and be paid as registered nurses and midwives.

Additionally, the Department of Health will issue written communication to Health and Social Care Trusts stipulating that nursing and midwifery students nearing the end of their programme are supported to transition to permanent posts, moving from Band 4 to Band 5 AfC registrants.

Where necessary any student at the end of their final year who still has clinical hours to complete will be paid until 31st August 2020 to facilitate this. In a very small number of cases, a student may be facilitated to progress beyond this point in paid clinical placement if there is a specific reason to ensure completion of hours. This will be by arrangement with their AEI and HSC Trust. Students must have started clinical placement prior to 31st July 2020 to be eligible for this arrangement.

Frequently Asked Questions

I am a final year student in the last six months having commenced my programme in September 2017, what does this mean for me?

You can continue on your paid clinical placement and these clinical hours will count towards the practice hours required to complete your programme. As a final year student your paid placement should have ceased by 31st August 2020. In a very small number of cases, a student may be facilitated to progress beyond this point in paid clinical placement if there is a specific reason to ensure completion of hours. This will be by arrangement with their AEI and HSC Trust. Students must have started clinical placement prior to 31st July to be eligible for this paid arrangement.

I am an early year three student and commenced my programme in February 2018, what does this mean for me?

As per your AEI calendar you are currently on a paid clinical placement and these clinical hours will count towards the practice hours required to complete your programme. Following your paid placement and a period of leave you will return to your AEI to complete your final placement. Your final clinical placement will be supernumerary and not remunerated.

I am a second year student and commenced my programme in September 2018, what does this mean for me?

You can continue on your paid clinical placement and these clinical hours will count towards the practice hours required to complete your programme. As a second year student your paid clinical placement will have ceased by 31st August 2020. Your future clinical placements will be supernumerary and not remunerated.

I am a second year student and commenced my programme in February 2019, what does this mean for me?

As per your AEI calendar you can commence a paid clinical placement and these clinical hours will count towards the practice hours required to complete your programme. As a second year student we expect that your paid clinical placement will have ceased before the 31st August 2020. Your future clinical placements will be supernumerary and not remunerated.

I commenced my midwifery programme in October 2019, what does this mean for me?

As a salaried student on the shortened midwifery programme you can continue on your clinical placement and these clinical hours will count towards the practice hours required to complete your programme. Your clinical placement will have ceased by 31st August 2020. Your future clinical placements will be supernumerary.

I have annual leave accrued, what should I do?

Your entitlement to paid annual leave will be set out in your contract. Your line manager will be able to help you understand how much leave you are entitled to and facilitate you to book that time off.

I have been off sick during my paid placement, how will that impact on my placement hours?

If you have an HSC contract that means you have entitlement to AfC terms and conditions which will include paid sick leave. If you have any questions about this, please talk to your employer. Any hours away from your clinical placement including sick leave will not count towards your practice placement hours.

I have completed my programme but am still waiting for my NMC registration to be processed. What can I do?

Students on paid clinical placements who have completed their programme, and have been offered a Band 5 AfC position but are awaiting registration with the NMC may wish to continue in paid employment at Band 4 AfC until registration is confirmed.

I am in my final placement, can I finish my programme early?

To join the NMC register you need to have successfully completed all the clinical placement and academic elements of your programme. Your AEI will work with you to facilitate you to complete your programme and join the NMC register when all elements have been successfully achieved.

I have not been out on clinical placement as I have been shielding, how can I complete my programme?

Each individual circumstance will be different. If you contact your AEI they will outline what academic and clinical placement requirements you need in in order to successfully complete your programme and progress to NMC registration.

I have questions about my contract. Who should I speak to?

Most of these questions can be quickly resolved with your line manager. Employers are speaking to those students who are on paid placements as temporary contracts are ended. Students should speak to their employers and their AEI about the best way to manage this given their own personal circumstances.

I still have some questions, who should I contact?

The first point of contact for questions about your programme or clinical placements will be your AEI. If you have questions about your contract and work arrangements, please talk with your line manager or supervisor in the HSC Trust. Most questions and concerns can be addressed quickly this way.

Glossary

Agenda for Change	National system for pay and terms and conditions for all HSC staff, with the exception of doctors, dentists and most senior managers.
Approved Education Institutions	Bodies approved by the NMC to offer educational programmes for nurses, midwives and nursing associates (England only).
Council of Deans of Health	Represents the UK's university faculties providing education and research for nurses, midwives and allied health professionals.
HSC	Health and Social Care
Nursing and Midwifery Council (NMC)	The professional regulator of nurses and midwives in the UK, and nursing associates in England. Ensures these professionals have the knowledge and skills to deliver consistent, quality care that keeps people safe.
Supernumerary	Students must be considered 'supernumerary', meaning that they are not counted as part of the staffing required for safe and effective care in the setting. This ensures that students can be supported to learn and practice skills safely.

Annex A: Table outlining paid placement arrangements for Northern Ireland

	Paid clinical placement options now	After July 31st	After September	How will my AEI be involved
Nursing and Midwifery students in the final 6 months of their undergraduate pre-registration programme	Can continue on paid clinical placement or if commencing clinical placement this must start on or before 31 st July 2020.	<p>If the student has successfully completed clinical hours and AEI requirements they can register as a Registered Nurse / Registered Midwife with the NMC.</p> <p>If student has started a paid placement to complete clinical hours they can continue being paid until the end of the placement.</p> <p>New placements starting after 31st July will be supernumerary and will not be paid.</p>	<p>The majority of students will be able to register with NMC as a Registered Nurse / Registered Midwife.</p> <p>Any student whose paid clinical placement started prior to or on the 31st July 2020 who might still be on clinical placement in September will continue to be paid until they complete their placement.</p>	Your AEI will contact you about your clinical placement start date, duration and any remaining hours or assessments to complete. They will agree a plan with you to facilitate you to complete your programme.
	Paid clinical placement options now	After July 31st	After September	How will my AEI be involved
Early third year students (February 2018 Cohort)	<p>You can continue on or opt into a paid placement up until 31st July 2020.</p> <p>Placement counted as clinical practice hours</p>	You will not be able to opt into a paid placement after 31 st July 2020.	<p>Future placements will be supernumerary.</p> <p>Aim to join the NMC register in early 2021</p>	Your AEI will contact you about your placement start date, length and any remaining hours or assessments to complete.

	Paid clinical placement options now	After July 31st	After September	How will my AEI be involved
Second year students (Sept 2018 Cohort)	You can continue on or opt into a paid placement up until 31 st July 2020. Placement counted as clinical practice hours.	Paid placements will not continue after 31 st August 2020.	Future placements will be supernumerary. Aim to join the NMC register in September 2021.	Your AEI will contact you about your placement start date, length and any remaining hours or assessments to complete.
	Paid clinical placement options now	After July 31st	After September	How will my AEI be involved
Second year students (February 2019 Cohort)	You can continue on or opt into a paid placement up until 31 st July 2020. Placement counted as clinical practice hours.	Paid placements will not continue after 31 st August 2020	Future placements will be supernumerary. Aim to join the NMC register in early 2022.	Your AEI will contact you about your placement start date, length and any remaining hours or assessments to complete.
	Paid clinical placement options now	After July 31st	After September	How will my AEI be involved
October 2019 Midwifery Cohort (Shortened programme)	As a salaried student your clinical placements will continue. Placement counted as clinical practice hours.	As a salaried student your clinical placements will continue after 31 st August 2020	Future placements will be supernumerary	Your AEI will contact you about your placement start date, length and any remaining hours or assessments to complete.
	Paid clinical	After July 31st	After September	How will my

	placement options now			AEI be involved
All Year 1 students (September 2019 and February 2020 Cohorts)	Paid placement is not an option	Future placements will be supernumerary.	Future placements will be supernumerary.	Your AEI will contact you about your placement start date, length and any remaining hours or assessments to complete.