

Frequently asked Questions and Answers for Midwives Supervising and Assessing Pre-registration Midwifery Students under the NMC (2020) Emergency Standards for Nursing and Midwifery Education During COVID-19

To support practice learning during the COVID-19 situation Northern Ireland has adopted the NMC [Emergency standards for nursing and midwifery education](#) as follows:

- Pre-registration midwifery students in the **final six months** of their programme (September 2017 intake and October 2018 intake):
 - ✓ will complete their programmes in clinical practice while ensuring all learning outcomes are met but may require protected time to learn (AEIs to liaise with Trusts)
 - ✓ will still be students and must have access to supervision and support during this period.
 - ✓ the hours in practice during this period will be counted toward the hours of their programme in order to meet the requirement for entry unto the NMC register, when the emergency situation ceases
 - ✓ will not be supernumerary
 - ✓ any student who is unable to commence their final clinical placements will have a position agreed with the relevant University (e.g. they may pause from the programme)
 - ✓ AEIs will provide pastoral support to students.
- Pre-registration midwifery students in either 2nd year (September 2018 intake) or in their **first six months** of the shortened midwifery program (October 2019 intake):
 - ✓ will spend no more than 80% of their hours in clinical placements and 20% of their hours in theoretical learning. Universities and Practice Partners will work together to make the relevant arrangements for their clinical placements
 - ✓ must have access to supervision and support during their hours in clinical practice
 - ✓ will not be supernumerary, but will require protected time to learn.
- Pre-registration midwifery students in 1st year (September 2019 intake):
 - ✓ will spend the remainder of their 1st year programme in theory/academic learning, which may be virtual or distance learning.

To support practice learning under the COVID-19 emergency arrangements the SLAiP has been stood down and Northern Ireland will align to Emergency Standard E5. As such the Standards for Student Supervision and Assessment (SSSA) NMC 2018 will be implemented across all pre-registration midwifery programmes.

BSc Midwifery Sciences September 2017 intake will complete their management/intranatal placement under the existing SLAiP

BSc Midwifery Studies shortened programme (October 2018) intake will *complete* their programme under the existing SLAiP

Q. What does this mean in practice?

A. The role of sign-off mentor will be replaced by roles of the practice supervisor and practice assessor. Each student will be allocated a practice assessor for each practice placement or series of practice placements and at least one practice supervisor (may be dual roles).

Q. What are the new roles in the Standards for Student Supervision and Assessment NMC 2018?

A. The roles are as follows:

- **Nominated person:** the ward sister or designated representative who is responsible for ensuring continuity of the student's practice learning experience.
- **Practice Assessor:** coordinates the students initial, midway and final review meetings and undertakes the students formative and summative assessments.
- **Practice Supervisor:** coordinates and supports student learning on a day to day basis and can sign competencies that the student has achieved.
- **Academic Assessor/Link lecturer:** works in partnership with the practice assessor to recommend the student for progression.

Q. What do these changes mean for me as a sign-off mentor?

A. There is no change in terms of helping midwifery students achieve their learning outcomes. These are unprecedented times and there may be concern from staff in preparing to undertake the roles in SSSA role and the timing of these changes. The NMC have recognised that there is a critical mass of very skilled staff who currently support students and who can, with confidence and the right support, move immediately into the roles of practice supervisor and practice assessor.

Q. Who can be a practice assessor?

A. All sign-off mentors can undertake the role of a practice assessor.

Q. What is the role of the practice assessor?

A. The role of the practice assessor is very similar to the role of the sign-off mentor - you will:

- ✓ set the learning objectives, for the practice learning experience with the student at their initial meeting and undertake the progress and final review meetings
- ✓ work alongside the students and periodically observe their practice and give them feedback
- ✓ receive feedback from practice supervisor/s on the students' performance
- ✓ work in partnership with the academic assessor/link lecturer to evaluate and recommend the student for progression to each part of their programme, in line with their programme standards (formative and summative assessments)
- ✓ manage any student underperformance issues and support the student and practice supervisor/s throughout.

Q. Who is the practice supervisor?

A. All midwives can undertake the role of a practice supervisor. Each student will be allocated at least one practice supervisor, by the nominated person but it is likely the student will work with several practice supervisors to achieve the optimum learning experience to meet their learning outcomes.

Q. What is the role of the practice supervisor?

A. The practice supervisor coordinates and supports student learning ensuring students' access opportunities to meet their learning objectives. Key aspects of the practice supervisor role include:

- ✓ serving as a role model
- ✓ supporting the student to safely achieve a range of proficiencies/skills
- ✓ ensuring student learning opportunities are facilitated
- ✓ providing feedback to the student to support learning
- ✓ providing feedback to the practice assessor regarding the students' progress and performance
- ✓ contributing to the student's assessments to inform decisions for progression
- ✓ signing student NMC essential skills clusters
- ✓ recording relevant observations of progress in the students' practice assessment document
- ✓ identifying, escalating and supporting the management of student underperformance issues.

Q. Can I be a practice supervisor and a practice assessor to the same student?

A. During the COVID-19 period the NMC has allowed that a registrant can be both a practice supervisor and a practice assessor for the same student, meaning sign-off mentors transitioning to these new roles of practice supervisor and practice assessor can undertake dual roles for the same student, significantly increasing capacity for student supervision and assessment.

Q. What are the key changes?

- ✓ Students can work alongside an allocated practice supervisor or several practice supervisors who will support student learning and can contribute to the students practice assessment document signing off skills and competencies as they are achieved.
- ✓ Practice assessors will seek and receive feedback from practice supervisor/s about the student's performance, attitudes and values - all contributing to the students assessment.
- ✓ students will *not* be required to spend 40% of their time with a sign off mentor.

Q. Are students in the final six months of their programmes going onto an NMC emergency register?

A. No.

Q. Are students being employed as midwifery care assistants?

A. No. They will retain their student status and continue learning as midwifery students. They should continue to be supported in practice. During this emergency period supernumerary status has been removed and programme structures are changing to allow students to opt in and spend more time in practice to help support the workforce whilst also meeting the requirements to successfully complete the programme.

Q. I am currently a sign-off mentor, does my title change to that of practice supervisor and practice assessor?

A. Yes. sign-off mentors will automatically transition to the roles of practice supervisor and practice assessor. Staff who are already sign-off mentors have the skill set to support students.

There is flexibility for staff in these new roles who are working within the COVID-19 response to undertake fuller role preparation at a more appropriate time when this emergency period has passed. At that time preparation of Future Nurse Future Midwife (FNFM) practice supervisor practice assessor roles for all staff will be taken forward as originally planned through the FNFM Project and FNFM local implementation groups.

Q. Can midwives who are not sign-off mentors support student midwives?

A. Yes. The NMC (2018) Code identifies that all midwives 'support students' and colleagues' learning to help them develop their professional competence and confidence.'

Q. Will students' Practice Assessment Document change?

A. The student portfolio/practice assessment document/on-going record of achievement remains in place with minimal changes which reflect the current emergency situation.

Q. Will the Practice Assessment Document be electronic?

A. No, however the Practice Assessment Document has been sectioned and reduced to a more manageable size.

Q. Will grading remain?

A. Yes

Q. I am due to have my annual update and triennial review within the next month can I continue to be a sign off mentor?

A. Yes. During the COVID-19 emergency all non-essential training has been stood down and this applies to annual updating and triennial reviews. You can continue to supervise and assess students without annual update and triennial review.

Q. If I consider that a student is unable to achieve all of the learning outcomes outlined in their Practice Assessment Document due to the changes within service delivery during this COVID-19 period – what should I do?

A. Identify any potential gaps as soon as possible, consider alternative means and opportunities locally that could be utilised to help achieve the learning outcomes. If further support is required, then contact your line manager, nominated person, Practice Education Team or university link lecturer.

Q. Is there any change as to how I raise and escalate a concern about a non-supernumerary paid student?

A. No. The university guidance for raising and escalating concerns about a student's performance is within the students Practice Assessment Document. Contact your local Practice Education Team if you require additional support.

Q. If I consider that a student is underperforming – what should I do?

A. All areas of concern of student underperformance must be documented in the student's Practice Assessment Document and addressed as close to the time as possible. If underperformance is identified the practice assessor should agree an action plan, identifying specific objectives with the student to support their development and involve the academic assessor/link lecturer where relevant. The practice assessor should liaise with the practice supervisor, who will support and provide feedback to the student to help them achieve their objectives. The date for review of the action plan should be set by the practice assessor with the student. The practice assessor should seek feedback from the practice supervisor/s on the student's performance to inform the review of the action plan and liaise with the academic assessor/link lecturer as appropriate e.g. if performance issues are not resolved through the action plan. Your local Practice Education Team can provide additional support if required.

Q. What can non supernumerary students do in practice?

A. The students' Practice Assessment Document details the essential skills, knowledge and learning outcomes required while regulatory and local policy determines those skills inappropriate for a student to undertake e.g. their role in administration of medicines remains the same. There is no expectation that students will be required to work outside of their skills or capabilities. Support and further guidance can be obtained by referring to the NIPEC [Deciding To Delegate Framework](#).

Q. What if students' circumstances change and they want to opt out of paid placement?

A. Students can opt out if they want, this is a legitimate choice as opting in to work in clinical practice is voluntary. If at any time students feel unable to continue to work you should inform your local Practice Education Team who will be aware of processes required to be followed. Encourage the students to contact their university academic assessor/link lecturer to discuss their programme options.

Q. If I am redeployed during this COVID-19 period what happens to the student/s I am responsible for supervising and assessing?

A. This situation, if it arises, requires discussion and will be a joint decision between the student, university, Practice Education Team and the ward sister/nominated person. The student may remain in the area under the supervision of another practice supervisor. Discuss the situation with your Practice Education Team and ask the student to contact their university academic assessor/link lecturer.

Q. What would happen to the student if I became symptomatic with Covid-19 and am required to self-isolate?

A. The student can remain in the placement. Discuss with your line manager and arrange for the student to be supervised by another member of the team in your absence until your return from leave.

Q. What do I do if the student becomes symptomatic of Covid-19?

A. If the student becomes ill while working, local policy and national guidance must be followed to ensure the student's wellbeing and the safety of others. The student should withdraw from work as per current guidance and refer the student to guidance available via coronavirus-placementguidance@qub.ac.uk. You should immediately inform your line manager and local Practice Education Team. Ask the student to inform their university link lecturer and to follow normal university processes for reporting sickness/absence.

Q. Have students had additional induction and preparation prior to coming into paid practice?

A. Personal Protective Equipment preparation is being provided by each Trust area once the student commences placement.

Q. How will I know if students will have completed this essential learning?

A. The Practice Education Teams have been liaising and organising this additional training within the practice area.

Q. Where will I get support?

A. Support systems remain unchanged, your Practice Education Teams and Link Lecturer/Nominated person. The role of Trust Practice Education Team is particularly important at this time to support the implementation of these new Emergency Standards across all settings. If you have any queries please do not hesitate to contact them.