

From the Chief Nursing Officer
Professor Charlotte McArdle



Department of
Health

An Roinn Sláinte

Mánnystrie O Poustie

www.health-ni.gov.uk

BY EMAIL:

D Fitzsimmons
S McIlpatrick
Trusts EDONs
M Devlin, GP Federations

Department of Health
C5.14
Castle Buildings
Stormont Estate
Belfast BT4 3SQ
Tel: 028 9052 0562
Email:
Charlotte.McArdle@health-
ni.gov.uk

Date: 4 May 2020

Dear Colleagues,

RE: COVID-19: Post registration Education of Nurses and Midwives

Following my letter to you on 3 April highlighting arrangements for pre-registration education through the NMC Emergency Standards for Nursing and Midwifery Education, it is now timely to focus on the current situation for post-registration education programmes.

I want to begin by again expressing my thanks and appreciation to all nurses and midwives throughout Northern Ireland for the dedication and professionalism they have demonstrated during this extremely challenging time. As Chief Nursing Officer, I am proud of how the nursing and midwifery professions have met the COVID-19 emergency response; demonstrating positivity and courage across the wide range of practice and service areas.

I understand that in responding to the current emergency there has been a need to reconfigure services in order to provide the safest care possible and that whilst every effort has been made to take a regional approach to this, there will be some variations across Trusts due to the need to redeploy a number of staff. This has undoubtedly impacted on the ability of nurses and midwives to continue to undertake the range of education programmes commissioned through ECG with the Universities.

The NMC, as have universities, made considerable efforts to ensure that programmes can be completed as flexibly as possible through their **Emergency Standards for Education** which were published on 25 March 2020. These standards are intended to provide flexibility during the COVID-19 situation, to allow learning in practice to continue.

Following agreement and discussion with the DoH, AEIs, Practice Partners and the NMC, the NMC Emergency Standards were agreed, for implementation in Northern Ireland from 3 April

2020. I wrote to you then with regard to pre-registration programmes and now want to highlight that these will now also apply to post-registration education programmes.

Full details from the NMC and regarding what is in place in Northern Ireland are available through the following links:-

<https://www.nmc.org.uk/news/coronavirus/>

Emergency Standards for Nursing and Midwifery Education

<https://nipec.hscni.net/work-and-projects/stds-of-ed-amq-nurs-mids/future-nurse-future-midwife/fnfm-covid-19/>

FNFM Products and Resources

Regarding the delivery of post-registration programmes delivered by Ulster and Queen's universities, these continue to be available and I want to thank both universities and their staff for the considerable efforts they have made to ensure programmes remain accessible.

The universities are encouraging as many students as possible to continue their academic work, and have reconfigured assessments and continue to offer a range of flexibilities to students to support them on programmes, e.g. through online education provision and a range of blended learning approaches. Academic staff will continue to be available to support and guide students and have been liaising with HSCTs.

Communications remain open between the universities, students and practice partners and this will continue to be necessary as the situation continues to change and evolve.

Regarding practice learning, opportunities are also being explored to enable completion of education, where at all possible, to ensure that no student will be disadvantaged and to support students to progress through the programme.

Whilst the future months remain uncertain regarding the need to continue to reconfigure services, it is likely this will continue to impact on staffing across all organisations. It is important however that we remain mindful of the need to complete a range of post-registration programmes and assess how we commission the next cohorts of students from September 2020. It is crucial that every effort is made to finish programmes, in particular those that have been commissioned to ensure we have the right number of staff across service areas, otherwise this will impact in the near future on the capacity and capability of the workforce to respond to patient and client needs across the life course (for example district nursing, health visiting, school nursing).

I have every confidence that you will endeavour at every reasonable opportunity to review and focus on ongoing post-registration education in order to support your staff to complete ongoing programmes. Meanwhile the Education Commissioning Group will remain the mechanism through which we will continue to plan for 2020-21.

Yours sincerely,



Professor Charlotte McArdle
Chief Nursing Officer

Cc: H Finlay
M F McManus
D Spence
D Nixon
A McLernon
F Cannon
C Lee
ECG members