

From the Chief Nursing Officer
Professor Charlotte McArdle



**Open letter to all Nursing and Midwifery
Students in Northern Ireland**

Department of Health
C5.14
Castle Buildings
Stormont Estate
Belfast BT4 3SQ

Date: 27 January 2021

Dear Students,

As you may be aware, the Nursing and Midwifery Council (NMC) has recently announced the reintroduction of emergency education standards that can be flexibly applied as required across the four UK countries. These emergency standards enable final year nursing students to opt-in to support the response to the Covid-19 pandemic, via paid clinical placements. The emergency standards have also made changes to the requirements for first year nursing and midwifery students, enabling them to focus on academic and online learning rather than participating in clinical placements while the system is under pressure due to the pandemic.

In Northern Ireland, the progress of the Covid-19 pandemic although presenting significant challenges to our Healthcare service is not currently at the same stage as in England, where some regions have decided to adopt the emergency standards, this however is not replicated within Scotland and Wales. Following careful consideration and discussion with relevant stakeholders, I do not believe it is appropriate to disrupt your programmes through withdrawing clinical placements for any year group, or authorising deployment of final year students into paid clinical placements at this time. Our key priority in Northern Ireland continues to be ensuring the timely graduation of final year students with students retaining their supernumerary status and their position in the clinical area as learners. This position

is under constant review, but it is important that as many students as possible complete all aspects of their nursing and midwifery programmes.

I will be recommending that the AEI's use their discretion in relation to student supervision and assessment, which allows this role to be undertaken by the same person during this time, given that it is likely to increase flexibility in relation to supporting and maintaining clinical placements for students to maintain the integrity of the nursing and midwifery programmes.

I am aware, and it is greatly appreciated that many of you are providing additional support to the Health Service via the Bank system which is over and above your academic / clinical requirements, and we want to facilitate those of you who are able to continue to contribute this valuable support during this time, whilst also protecting your programme requirements and ensuring you are still able to be supervised, supported, and placed where there are appropriate learning opportunities.

In recognition of the contribution as students during the pandemic, I am pleased the Minister of Health has announced a one off payment for students (non-salaried) undertaking pre-registration programmes from 1st October 2020 until 31st March 2021. As the Chief Nursing Officer for Northern Ireland, I want to sincerely thank you all, whatever role you have been able to undertake since the beginning of the pandemic, for your commitment to your future profession, and for your continued efforts in the weeks and months ahead. The exceptional hard work, dedication, skills and commitment of every one of you has contributed to our health service during these unprecedented times.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Charlotte McArdle". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

PROFESSOR CHARLOTTE MCARDLE

Chief Nursing Officer