



Department of
Health

An Roinn Sláinte

Mánnystrie O Poustie

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Support guidance for nursing and midwifery students, in the final six months of their programme during Covid-19 outbreak

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Purpose of this guidance

The Covid-19 pandemic means we are in unprecedented times with significant pressures being placed upon our health and social care services. This guidance document provides information to nursing and midwifery students on what this means for them during this time.

The guidance focuses on how students can support the Health and Social Care (HSC) system during this time of emergency and, as this is a fast-changing and emerging situation, advice may be subject to further development. However, these principles should be used in conjunction with advice and guidance from both students' Approved Education Institutions (AEIs) and the Nursing and Midwifery Council (NMC).

The resources contained in this guide should answer questions you may have about what this may mean for you and to support your decision-making during this emergency situation.

Overview

We have heard from many of you asking how you can support services during this Covid-19 emergency. In response we have worked collaboratively with the NMC, Royal Colleges, Council of Deans of Health, Government departments of the four nations and staff side representatives to consider how best to support you to use the skills and expertise you have in the safest possible way, as reflected in the Joint statements on expanding the nursing and midwifery workforce in the Covid-19 outbreak. A key element will be partnership working between AEs, students and HSC Trusts. The NMC have approved [Emergency standards for nursing and midwifery education](#). These standards provide AEs with flexibility to enable students, particularly in the last six months of their undergraduate pre-registration nursing and midwifery programmes, to complete their training within clinical placements, while ensuring all learning outcomes are met.

It is important that we recognise the different experience, knowledge and skills of students depending on the stage of their journey through the programme.

This guide provides a summary of the position and options for students in the last 6 months of their undergraduate pre-registration programme.

This document also outlines a set of more general ***frequently asked questions*** providing further clarity to support students during this time on page 15.

Midwifery students in the final six months of their undergraduate pre-registration programme

Overview

Given the significant pressures on the HSC system, and the need to ensure that front line services are fully supported, it is not possible to continue to provide the current programme structure for students in the final six months of their programme.

You will be invited to opt in to a revised programme structure as set out below. This recognises the valuable contribution students are making and can offer to health and care delivery in these challenging times.

This is a completely voluntary arrangement and if you, for whatever reason, do not wish to opt in to this arrangement, you will be supported by your AEI to consider an alternative option (**Annex A**).

Revised programme delivery

In the emergency period, the NMC has provided flexibility for the nature of the programme for undergraduate pre-registration midwifery students so that they can opt to undertake the final six months of their programme in clinical placement to help the maternity service. It will not be possible for students on clinical placement to be supernumerary in this emergency situation, but it is expected that students will be supervised and work within the guidelines of: [‘Deciding to delegate: a decision support framework for nursing and midwifery’](#). Protected learning time as outlined in the [NMC Emergency standards for nursing and midwifery education](#) will be facilitated in partnership with the AEI and HSC Trust.

Choosing to opt in

If you opt in, this arrangement will continue for the final six months of your programme and your student status will remain unchanged. You will remain a student and be supervised in practice until all NMC registration requirements have been met or the state of emergency ends. You will continue to receive appropriate support, supervision and pastoral care from your AEI in partnership with HSC Trusts until the end of your programme.

The AEI and HSC Trusts will work together to agree a plan for achieving competencies and to facilitate flexibility in relation to clinical placement allocations where possible. However, in light of the emergency situation this may not always be possible.

The integrated method of teaching midwifery means that students will have achieved different proficiencies at different times in their education; this clinical placement is an opportunity for you to complete the requirements of the EU directive that need to be achieved before being eligible to apply for registration as a midwife in the UK. As you are still clearly a midwifery student, you will continue to learn and work in an area where you are needed. This will help in achieving the proficiencies you still require, whilst under supervision. You will be progressing your learning to be fully accountable as the lead professional for the care and support of women and newborn infants and partners and families.

The health and wellbeing of the midwifery students as well as the safety of the service is key. You are helping us in our time of greatest need. This arrangement will enable you to graduate without a time lag, entering the workforce as a registered midwife, having achieved the required proficiencies and programme outcomes.

It has been decided that midwifery students in the final six months of their undergraduate pre-registration midwifery programme will not have an option to join a temporary register and therefore can continue in this final clinical placement.

Academic Elements

AEIs will continue to provide support to you and the time in clinical placement can be used to support achievement of required practice hours.

However, given the significant change in time spent in clinical placement consideration will need to be given to how you can be supported to meet the academic programme requirements. The AEI will work closely with the NMC and Council of Deans of Health to assess what this means for student midwives in the final six months of their studies and how you can be supported to achieve the programme requirements across the remaining period of your studies.

Financial arrangements

Whilst on clinical placement, students who commenced their undergraduate pre-registration programme in September 2017 and who are in their final 6 months of study, will be paid in line with Agenda for Change (AfC) terms and conditions.

You will be remunerated at AfC Band 4. Your current bursary will continue to be paid during the period.

A student who commenced the shortened midwifery programme in October 2018 will continue to receive their Band 5 salary.

Choosing not to opt in

This arrangement is completely voluntary and if you for whatever reason do not wish to opt in to this arrangement, your AEI will discuss alternative options (**Annex A**). This may mean that your clinical placement will be paused until the emergency is over and you will remain on the programme, academic only. In this instance, for September 2017 midwifery students, their student bursary will continue and for October 2018 midwifery students their salary will continue.

Next steps

Your AEI will be in contact to invite you to opt in to this arrangement, and will seek to answer any questions and address concerns through existing pastoral support routes.

Nursing students in the final six months of their undergraduate pre-registration programme

Overview

For nursing students in the final six months of their undergraduate pre-registration studies it is not possible to continue to provide the programme in the way it is currently structured. Given the significant pressures on the HSC system and the need to ensure that front line services are fully supported it will not be possible for students on clinical placement to be supernumerary in this emergency situation. It is expected that students will be supervised and work within the guidelines of: [‘Deciding to delegate: a decision support framework for nursing and midwifery’](#). However, protected learning time for nursing students as outlined in the [NMC Emergency standard for nursing and midwifery education](#) will be facilitated in partnership between the AEI’s and placement areas.

Revised programme delivery

You will be invited to opt in to a revised programme structure as set out below. This recognises the valuable contribution students are making and can offer to health and care delivery in these challenging times. This is completely voluntary and if you, for whatever reason, do not wish to opt in to this arrangement, you will be supported by your AEI to consider the options available (**Annex B**). These options may include pausing the current clinical placement element to your programme, but even if you choose to do this then the standard bursary will remain in place.

Choosing to opt in

If you opt in you will complete your programme hours in clinical placement. When you commence a clinical placement you will receive appropriate support, supervision and pastoral care from your AEI in partnership with HSC Trusts. This placement will give you the opportunity in collaboration with your AEI and practice area to work towards achieving your outstanding proficiencies and programme outcomes.

Financial arrangements

Whilst on clinical placement, you will be paid in line with Agenda for Change (AfC) terms and conditions. You will be remunerated at AfC Band 4. Your current bursary will continue to be paid during the period.

Decisions for opening a temporary register for nursing students in the final six months of their NMC approved programme

At this time the NMC have not opened the temporary register to nursing students in the final six months of programme. The NMC are keeping this under close review in discussion with Health Departments across the UK to determine whether and, if so, when the temporary register should be opened to this group.

If and when the temporary student register opens your AEI will support you in understanding the choices and options available to you at this time.

If you opt to join the temporary register for nursing students and provided you meet the NMC criteria, it has been decided that, following a minimum of 8 weeks in your clinical placement, you can opt to join the Covid-19 temporary register. While on this register you will be regarded as a Registered Nurse with conditions on your practice, but will be considered a vital support to the registrants already working in practice. You should work to the standards of practice and behaviour set out in the [NMC Code](#) and within the requirements of '[deciding to delegate: a decision framework for nursing and midwifery](#)'.

If the decision is taken to open the temporary register to nursing students, and you opt in to this arrangement, then you would step off your programme and be employed. Your AEI would not be involved in supporting you during this period. At the end of the emergency period you may need to return to your studies to complete any remaining learning outcomes, and have your competencies assessed to enable you to join the full NMC register.

When the emergency period ends you may return to being a nursing student and your AEI will discuss any aspects necessary to complete your programme.

Financial arrangements when on the Covid-19 temporary register

If the Covid-19 temporary register is opened, and you opt to join it, you will be remunerated at AfC Band 5 by your employer. All AfC terms and conditions will apply and these can be viewed by clicking [here](#). At this point your student bursary support would cease.

Continuing in clinical placement as a student if you do not opt to join the Covid-19 temporary register

If the Covid-19 temporary register is opened, and you choose not to join it, you can continue in your clinical placement remunerated at AfC Band 4 for the period of the emergency response.

Next steps

Your AEI will be in contact to invite you to discuss these arrangements, and will be available to answer any questions or concerns through existing pastoral support routes.

If the NMC decides to open the student nursing temporary register then they will write separately to students asking if you would like to opt in to this arrangement.

Student health and wellbeing during the Covid-19 outbreak

Looking after yourself and others

Over and above the precautions regarding contacting coronavirus, it will be crucial over the coming weeks and months that you look after yourselves, reflecting on physical and mental health.

Your AEI will continue to provide pastoral and professional support to you and when you move into clinical practice you will work with other registered nurses and midwives who can provide additional support. You should maintain your academic links with your AEI through the link lecturer / practice tutor route in the first instance.

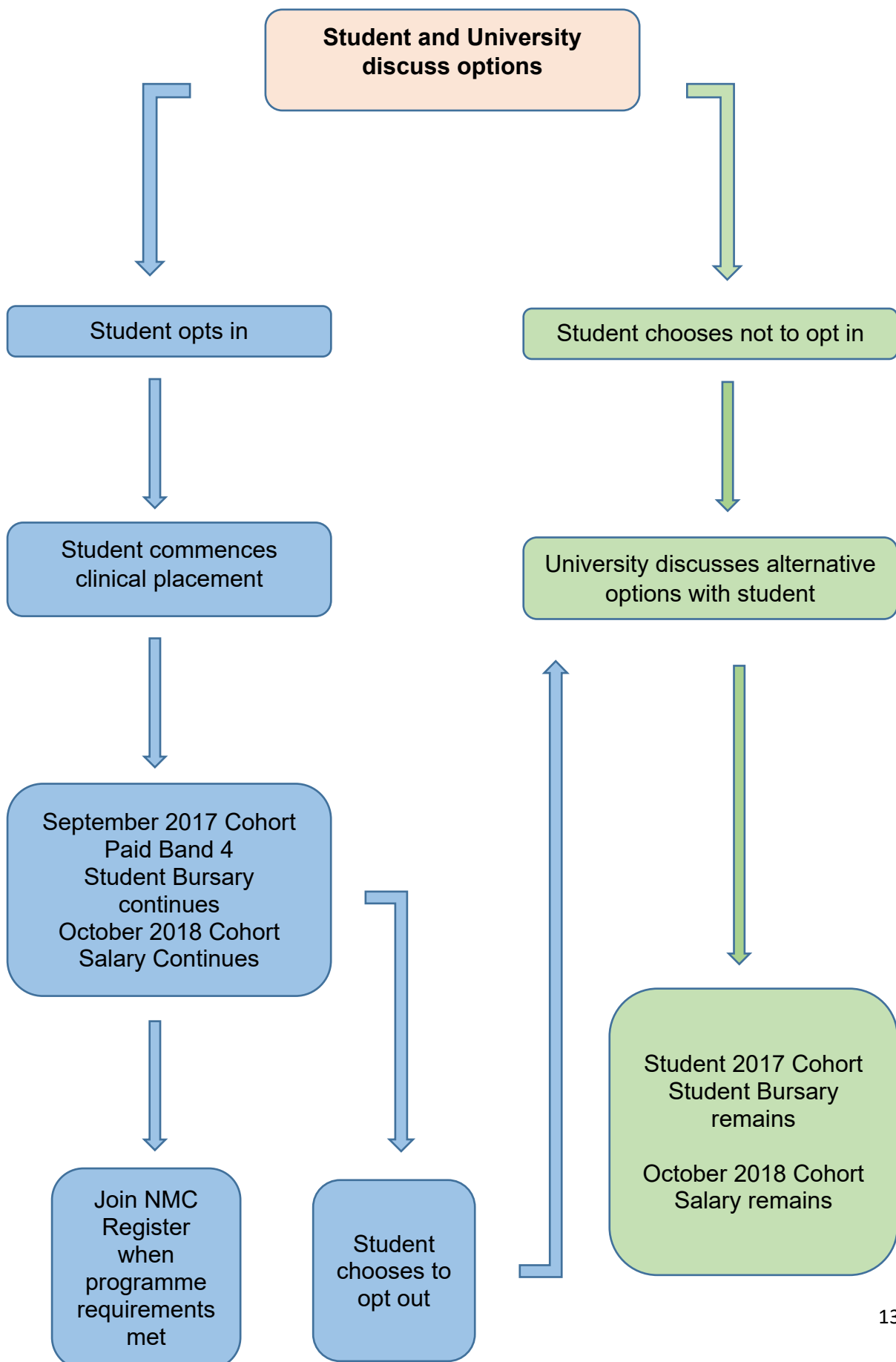
Wellbeing and support

It is vital that you maintain your health and wellbeing thus, clinical placement areas in partnership with your AEI will ensure that you receive the support you require. Please ensure you have regular breaks to reduce the onset of fatigue, dehydration and other associated risks. It is important you know how to access local support including occupational health, trade unions and psychological support. Your placement area together with your AEI will be a valuable resource and willing to offer advice. These individuals can signpost you to the relevant HSC Trust and AEI resources should you feel anxious, distressed or just need a 'listening ear'. These are challenging times and while your contribution is valued it is of the utmost importance that you care for your physical and mental health.

Should you for any reason feel unwell with symptoms of Covid-19 then it is important to follow the most up-to-date guidance by clicking [here](#). You should also keep in regular communication with the relevant AEI who can provide additional support.

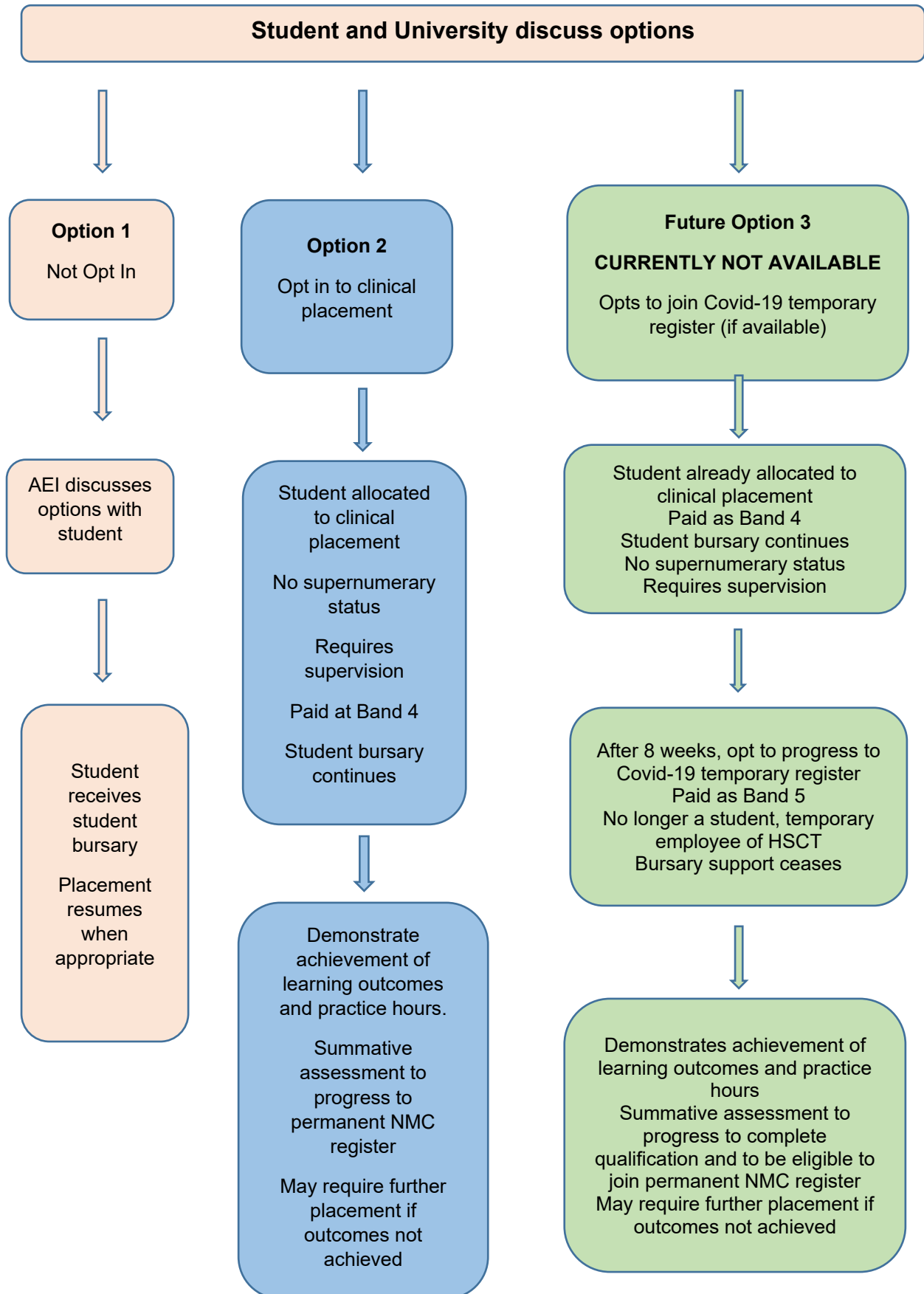
Annex A – Process Flowchart

Midwifery students in the final six months of their undergraduate programme



Annex B – Process Flowchart

Nursing Students in the final six months of their undergraduate study



Further information

Your AEI together with the NMC and Royal Colleges and trade unions will be making information available to guide and support you on their websites. Click on the links below to access more information.

[Council of Deans of Health](#)

[Department of Health](#)

[Open University Nursing Students](#)

[NHS111](#)

[Public Health Agency](#)

[Queen's University Belfast – Nursing and Midwifery Students](#)

[Royal College of Nursing](#)

[Royal College of Midwives](#)

[The Nursing and Midwifery Council](#)

[Ulster University Nursing Students](#)

[Unison](#)

[Unite](#)

Frequently asked questions

Terms and conditions during the Covid-19 emergency

If I choose not to opt in to any of the arrangements, what happens to my bursary?

If you choose not to opt in to any part of the arrangement you will need to discuss this with your AEI, however, in the emergency Covid-19 phase your student bursary will still be provided.

Will my student status remain if I opt in to the arrangement of being paid Band 3 or Band 4 even though I will be considered an HSC employee?

Yes, you will remain a student and be supervised at work within the Deciding to delegate: a decision framework for nursing and midwifery.

What will my terms and conditions be if I choose to opt in to the Band 4 arrangement?

As an employee within the HSC, Agenda for Change terms and conditions will apply.

Will I get a salary in April?

We recognise that financial considerations will be a major concern. Our colleagues across the HSC are all working under extreme circumstances, and it may not be possible to immediately get you onto the payroll system. We will do our best, however, a contingency plan has been put in place to uplift bursary payments to the equivalent of net salary, plus bursary, for April and May, should this be required.

How will indemnity work?

As an employee within the HSC, indemnity will be provided by your employing body.

Will I have a contract and when will I receive this?

Yes – Trusts have been instructed to ensure all students get a contract of employment at the earliest possible opportunity.

How many hours can I work?

This can be agreed with your employer but must also be agreed with your AEI. If you wish to work less than full-time hours, you should inform your AEI at the earliest possible opportunity to ensure that the correct payments are made to you. Any over-payments made in the initial months will be recouped.

Will I join the HSC Pension Scheme?

As an employee you will be automatically enrolled in the HSC Pension Scheme. This will enable you to make an early start on investing in your long term future and will

also provide the added reassurance of death in service benefits. You may choose at any time to opt out of the Scheme and, if you do so within the first 30 days of joining, will be refunded any contributions deducted and be treated as if you have never joined.

What will my annual leave / maternity leave entitlement be?

You will be an employee and have the terms and conditions as set out under Agenda for Change.

What pre-employment checks will I require?

No pre-employment checks are necessary at this time.

What if I require an extended period of absence?

You will need to discuss this on an individual basis with both your employer and the AEI.

Deployment

Where will I be placed?

Your clinical placement will be agreed between your AEI and HSCT. However, if you are on the Covid-19 temporary register your AEI will not be involved in your deployment.

There might be rare occasions where you may be asked to consider moving to a different area to cover local needs but this will be in accordance with your identified knowledge, skills and competencies and will be discussed with you beforehand.

Do the changes to my clinical placement in the revised programme options apply to midwifery and all four fields of nursing?

Yes – this applies to all student nurses and midwives.

I have children – do I qualify as a key worker?

Students undertaking clinical healthcare courses are contributing to the national Covid-19 response and are regarded as key workers.

If you require any evidence to support discussions with your school or childcare provider this can be obtained from your AEI.

What if I decide I can no longer continue in clinical placement?

As set out in this guide opting in is completely voluntary. If at any time you do not wish to continue in clinical placement, you should speak to your employer and AEI link who can support you.

What is the Covid-19 temporary register for nursing students?

The NMC have established a Covid-19 emergency temporary register. This went live on the 25.03.20. <https://www.nmc.org.uk/news/press-releases/nmc-covid-19-emergency-registergoes-live/>

In the first instance, the Covid-19 emergency temporary register is only open to nursing and midwifery professionals who left the register within the last three years.

At present the NMC have not yet offered the Covid-19 temporary register for nursing students in the final six months of their undergraduate programme.

Should it be made available the NMC recognise there may be nursing students in their final six months who are suitably experienced to be registered on the Covid-19 temporary register during this emergency period, however their temporary registration is subject to proposed 'conditions of practice.'

As with the permanent register, your registration will be listed on the NMC website.

Being on the student part of temporary registration has conditions of practice. What does this mean?

The NMC conditions of practice and proposed conditions of practice for nursing students going onto the Covid-19 temporary register state that:

You must ensure that you are supervised any time you are working. Your supervision must consist of:

- Working at all times with, but not always directly observed by, a NMC registered nurse, midwife, or other registered health care professional, who is not on a temporary register.
- You must not carry out any activity in which you have not been assessed as competent and appropriately signed off during your training unless you are supervised by NMC registered nurses, midwives, and other registered health care professionals who are not on a temporary register (unless a lifesaving intervention is required to avoid sudden and unexpected death).
- These conditions of practice would be published on the temporary register for any nursing student registrant.
- The NMC will also inform students who were opting onto the register that they would be subject to those conditions.

In the event that nursing students are invited to join the temporary register, the NMC will ask AEIs to exclude any student who is in a local fitness to practise process, who

has any outstanding failed assessments, or for whom the AEI would not sign a health and good character statement.

Nursing students who choose to join the temporary register instead of completing their undergraduate programmes in a clinical placement will not be automatically admitted onto the full register at the end of the emergency period.

In each case, the AEI would need to work with the nursing student who opted to join the temporary register to ensure all proficiencies are achieved.

Will I have to pay to join the NMC Covid-19 temporary register?

No – there will be no fee to join the temporary register.

If I opt to join the NMC temporary register, am I still a student?

No, your status will change from student to Registered Nurse on Covid-19 temporary register with conditions on your practice. You will work as a paid employee (Band 5 AfC) as part of the Health and Social Care team.

If you are temporarily registered with the NMC up-to-date information can be accessed [here](#) about the NMC Code and other professional standards.

Glossary

Agenda for Change	National system for pay and terms & 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.
Covid-19 temporary register	This is a new part of the NMC register, established by emergency legislation, to which nurses whose registration recently lapsed may be admitted. Nursing students in their final 6 months of study may also be considered for the temporary register with specific conditions of practice, should this become an option.
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.
OU	Open University
QUB	Queen's University Belfast
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.
Supervision	Supervision of student nurses and midwives in practice learning environments by registered nurses to ensure that students can meet the relevant learning outcomes whilst ensuring public protection.
UU	Ulster University