

Deployment of Student Nurses and Midwives in Extended Paid Placements- Covid-19: Lessons Learned

Executive summary

In March 2020, student nurses and midwives (excluding year 1) were given the opportunity to 'opt in' to a revised programme structure of extended paid placements to support the workforce during the Covid-19 pandemic. Students who chose to 'opt in' registered with the NES Covid-19 Accelerated Recruitment Portal (CARP) but allocations of placements remained the responsibility of universities in line with NMC emergency standards to ensure they achieved programme outcomes.

This was a complex process and required close collaboration between NES, Scottish Government, universities and placement providers. This paper provides an overview of the lessons learned from NES facilitated debrief sessions.

The key Lessons were:

1. The overall experience for students was positive but there was confusion around role clarity (student v HCSW).

Participants felt bank staff should have been prioritised for employment before students and students remain on normal placement (non-paid) until the balance for demand and supply was confirmed. However, when deployed, and where possible, it would have been helpful to keep students in current/ previous placement. The role profile required greater clarity on the difference between a student on paid placement and supernumerary. Universities required more time to plan support mechanisms for students before commencing paid placements to ensure programme completion.

2. The rapid pace of decision making with multiple changes led to confusion.

Participants recommended a standard operating procedure outlining the required information for students and a national communication plan and protocol for communicating with them, and others, to streamline key messages and facts so they are more readily accessible and understandable. In addition, one centralised communication hub where all key decisions, documents and announcements are published would have aided communication.

3. Excellent examples of collaboration were acknowledged but multiple channels of communication resulted in organisations not receiving information at the same time.

Regular meetings between key organisations is helpful for questions, answers and escalation of issues as they arise. A list of key contacts for each organisation

involved with student deployment to share within organisations, as well as externally, would have been beneficial.

4. There were challenges in using the Covid-19 Accelerated Recruitment Portal (CARP) for student nurses and midwives.

Early agreement of a unique identifier would have prevented problems down the line and a communication plan to ensure students knew exactly what information was required for employment processes would have prevented some confusion for all involved in employment processes. It was also suggested that rationalising the numbers of systems in use to reduce the risk of data breaches. If students are to be redeployed again then it would be useful to explore other platforms such as JobTrain and a National Placement Centre. Some participants felt devolved responsibility at regional level (universities/ placement providers) to include all aspects of recruitment would be more effective. Adequate resourcing for additional workforce would be required to support large scale rapid recruitment.

5. The large numbers of student entering the workforce presented significant pressure on individual and organisational processes such as HR, OH and Payroll.

There was agreement that deployment of students in a more phased approach would have been helpful. There was confusion around contract duration and agreement on a standardised approach to contract duration across Boards including hours of work and opportunity for over-time would be beneficial. Greater clarity around roles and responsibilities for organisations and individuals involved as well as processes around risk assessment and 'fast track' occupational health screening.

6. Commence future planning now to minimise the number of rapid decisions if there is a further crisis and link to the centralised communication hub.

Background

The Nursing, Midwifery and Allied Health Professional (NMAHP) Directorate of NHS Education for Scotland (NES) played a leadership role in the deployment of student nurses and midwives in extended paid placements to support the service response to the COVID-19 pandemic. To manage this, and in addition to close working with colleagues in NES and Scottish Government, NMAHP set up two key strategic groups, one with representatives of Council of Deans Health Scotland and another made up of NHS and Non-NHS clinical education leads. Initially these groups met three times per week. Other established operational groups also met more frequently to address regional/ local issues and develop guidance and protocols as required. In addition, Digital Directorate led the development of

the Covid-19 accelerated recruitment portal and held daily meetings to discuss associated HR and payroll issues with stakeholders (including NHS Board HR, Payroll, NSS, Scottish Government, SSSC, Care Inspectorate).

In the Joint statement on expanding the nursing workforce in the COVID-19 outbreak ¹ in March 2020, student nurses and midwives were identified as a group who could '*deliver the care that is needed in a way that is safe and effective for all concerned to meet demand*' in such unprecedented times. Universities and placement providers responded swiftly to the impact of the pressures associated with COVID-19 on service provision to ensure the continuation of pre-registration programmes, where possible, in line with the [NMC emergency standards](#), Joint Statements¹ and the CNO Scotland request to offer students (excluding year 1) the opportunity to 'opt in' to a revised programme structure of extended paid placements. Students who chose to 'opt in' were asked to register with the NES Covid-19 Accelerated Recruitment Portal (CARP) however allocations of placements remained the responsibility of universities to ensure they were deployed in areas that had been audited as suitable placements in line with NMC standards and where they could continue to be supervised and assessed to ensure achievement of programme outcomes. Initially all students were to be employed by NES however ultimately only those students allocated to Private and Independent providers were and the remainder became employees of the NHS Board placement provider.

Students in the final six months of the programme were invited to 'opt in' to an extended paid placement (Band 4 AfC) until 30th September² (similar to normal timelines for graduation and NMC registration) where they maintained student status and continued to receive appropriate supervision and assessment within an appropriate delegation framework. For all students who 'opted in,' the hours worked² contributed to overall programme requirements (2,300 Practice hours).

Students not in first year or not in the final six months of pre-registration programme were given the opportunity to 'opt in' to extended paid placements (Band 3 AfC) until 31st August 2020², where they were no longer supernumerary but maintained student status and continued to be supervised and assessed. Those who were unable to 'opt in' to extended paid placements were asked to liaise with their universities to consider options available to them which included continuation of academic studies or interruption to study (in line with existing regulatory processes).

¹ <https://www.nmc.org.uk/news/coronavirus/statements/>

² Some students terminated their contracts earlier than this date

First year students had all placements 'paused' but continued with the theoretical component of the programme, some bringing forward year 2 theory modules³.

Placement Capacity

Learning environments or placement are prepared in line with NMC Standards and allocated to meet the learning needs of students to enable them to meet learning outcomes to progress through programmes. There are normally 3,361 active learning environments prepared and used for pre-registration nursing and midwifery placements within Scotland, this includes; 340 non-NHS placements: 248 care homes, 12 GP practices, 16 Hospices, 6 Independent or private hospitals, 11 charity placements and 47 nursery or school environments. However, the impact of COVID-19 precautions had a significant impact on the reduction of placement capacity for child, mental health and learning disabilities fields of nursing students and access to Third Sector, nursery and school environment placements due to closure and reconfiguration of the service at that time. Community placements were also considerably reduced due to factors associated with access to people's homes and car sharing. In addition, placements were cancelled at short notice and in some instances, students turned away when they arrived resulting in change of allocation.

Outcome of Deployment of Students

Table 1 provides the detail of pre-registration student nurses and midwives numbers who opted in to paid placements on the week commencing 6th July.

In summary, approximately 4,848 nursing and midwifery students opted in for extended paid placements, through CARP. However, approximately 1,250 students were eligible but unable to opt in for extended paid placements; only 35 of which were midwifery. Approximately 3,889 students in year one were not eligible to opt in.

³ Any hours accrued as a HCSW on the Bank or voluntary work cannot be counted towards programme hours.

Table 1: Student deployment in extended paid placements per board on week commencing 6th July 2020 (from QMPLE)

NHS Board area	Total number of students	Year 2 (+ some year 3 Honours)			Final Year Students		
		NHS	NonNHS	Midwifery	NHS	NonNHS	Midwifery
Ayrshire and Arran	296	120	21	13	120	11	11
Borders	71	35	1	4	24	3	4
Dumfries and Galloway	112	42	0	3	63	1	3
Fife	196	62	3	6	113	3	9
Forth Valley	403	188	31	11	146	17	10
Golden jubilee Foundation	44	17	N/A	N/A	27	N/A	N/A
Greater Glasgow and Clyde	1341	526	71	43	637	22	42
Grampian	514	189	5	27	255	8	30
Highland	146	42	6	5	92	1	0
Lanarkshire	442	182	17	10	212	7	14
Lothian	839	342	29	32	393	8	35
Orkney	11	3	0	2	5	0	1
State Hospital	13	1	N/A	N/A	12	N/A	N/A
Shetland	14	5	N/A	1	6	N/A	2
Tayside	379	95	29	11	227	8	9
Western Isles	27	9	1	1	15	2	0
Total Numbers	4848	1858	214	169	2347	91	170

Please note: These figures fluctuated on a weekly basis.

A number of students were placed out of normal Board areas

Lessons Learned

The deployment of student nurses and midwives was a complex process and required close collaboration between NES, Scottish Government, universities and placement providers. The direction from Scottish Government late March was to get students into extended paid placements by the beginning of April. Therefore, decisions were made rapidly and systems to plan and support this activity were developed at the same time as the mass movement of students in placement areas. Because of this and to plan for a potential second wave it was agreed that NES would facilitate debrief sessions which aimed to:

- a. identify if we had to do this again what would we do differently;
- b. ensure the right people are involved in the process should it happen again;
- c. provide Scottish Government with guidance on how to manage repeating the process if it were necessary; and
- d. make the process more effective.

There were two parts to the debrief:

1. A Questback survey based on 'Collaborate Social Change Model' with questions centred around collaboration, leadership and structure:

- What did you observe?
- How might this be done differently if the process were repeated?

There were 37 responses from 11 Territorial Boards and 8 Higher Education Institutions. The main themes that were common to all stakeholder groups were communication; shared goal; local ownership; and the requirement for clear and understood roles, responsibilities and processes.

2. Virtual workshops, two workshops held in each region:

- Workshop 1 for universities, NHS Board Education Leads, NES
- Workshop 2 for NHS Board Practice Education Leads, Board HR, Board Payroll, NES

Findings from the questback survey were presented at the workshops and then participants were split into smaller groups and asked to follow a three-step approach:

Step 1: Share own reflections and insights;

Step 2: Identify what aspects you would want to do differently if the same had to happen again;

Step 3: Share practical solutions on the aspects you want to do differently.

Table 2 presents a summary of the discussions that took place at the workshops.

Table 2: Findings from Debrief Sessions

The role of student nurses and midwives in extended paid placements

Summary	Even better next time
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The overall experience for student nurses transferring out of programme into employment was positive, particularly for final year students preparing to join the workforce Some students experienced being Healthcare Support Workers and lost their identity as students 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Prioritise bank staff, then returning staff to go into required posts before student nurses If students required, consider their time as non-paid placements Provide more time for Universities to plan how to support students to complete their programmes prior to commencing paid placements Balance supply and demand for paid placements; too many workers in the system and not enough demand, understand local need and challenges prior to any deployment Keep students in previous/current placement areas if they must be employed Deploy student nurses in a phased approach Carry out risk and benefits analysis for deploying students

Communications to student nurses and midwives transferring out of programme into extended paid placements

Summary	Even better next time
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Decision making at a rapid pace with multiple changes caused confusion for the student nurse cohort 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Set out standardised job descriptions/role profile for student nurses, making the clear the different role of a paid student nurse to a student on placement Agree standardised contract duration with all Boards including (or excluding) flexible/overtime arrangements Develop standard operating procedure outlining information required from student nurses Establish national protocol for communicating with student nurses Agree national communication plan for all student nurses ensuring data to be submitted by them on the most appropriate platform is uniform and in a single data system Send information out to student nurses at optimal time which allows time for them to act

Communications to stakeholder organisations managing student nurses and midwives transfer from programme to extended paid placements

Summary	Even better next time
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Whilst there were excellent examples of collaboration both within organisations as well as across them, there were multiple communication channels resulting in not all organisations receiving the same information at the same time 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Establish a centralised communication hub where all key decisions, documents and announcements are published Establish list of key contacts for each organisation involved in student nurse deployment Implement quality assurance process to ensure accurate information is shared through centralised hub Streamline communications to key messages and facts Undertake future planning now with key stakeholders for a similar scenario to minimise the number of rapid decision-making points, link into centralised communication hub Maintain regular meetings between key organisations to support Q&A and the escalation of issues as they arise

Management of student nurses and midwives transferring into extended paid placements

Summary	Even better next time
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The accelerated recruitment portal provided challenges pertinent to data collection Some boards questioned whether CARP was the right platform to use for student nurses There was an unclear path for understanding where student nurses were placed. There was limited reliability to quickly identify when placements/posts 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Agree which unique identifier is used by student nurses when registering details Rationalise the number of systems used to reduce risks i.e. GDPR Explore other platforms for registering student nurses moving into paid employment e.g. Jobtrain Establish a national placement centre as the holder of data related to student nurse placements/posts, co-designing this with HEI's, Boards and NES Devolve responsibility to regions to manage the process, bringing together SEND and Council of Deans to create these groups Document roles and responsibilities for each organisation involved in student nurse transition to paid employment and develop into standard operating procedure NHS Boards have responsibility as employer for student nurses overseeing all aspects of recruitment i.e pre-employment checks, payroll

<p>were changed i.e. due to ward closures, students no longer required</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Protocol and fast track Occupational Health screening/judgements/risk assessments • Adopt the principle of placing people locally first i.e. some students went home which was far from their university campus • Develop clear and standard approach for induction
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Management of student nurses and midwives extended paid placements

Summary	Even better next time
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The number of student nurses entering the workforce resulted in extreme pressure on individual and organisational processes i.e. HR and payroll • Student nurses shared significant feedback they were supported by Boards • Duplication of datasets resulted in payment errors and contract start date errors 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Acknowledge and resource additional workforce required to support large scale recruitment of student nurses • Establish one shared dataset

In addition and as a recommendation of the Scottish Government commissioned '*Provision of Nursing, Midwifery and Allied Health Professions (NMAHP) placements in the 2020-21 Academic Session*' Report (NES, 2020) a rapid action placement oversight group (RAPOG) was convened in September to have oversight of NMAHP student placement challenges and possible solutions taking place across Scotland in the new academic session 2020/21. The primary purpose of the group is to provide oversight in taking forward the recommendations from the report and the lessons learned in this document; take a strategic view on responding to further action required throughout the academic year; co-ordinate discussions taking place across Scotland on placement issues relating to NMAHP courses and advise Scottish Government on mitigating actions that can be taken to support NMAHP placement capacity management in the event of a potential second wave of COVID-19.

Conclusion

Overall the rapid deployment of approximately 4,848 nursing and midwifery students into paid extended placements was successful but it was a very complex process due to the pace of decision making and development of CARP at the same time as the mass movement of students which coincided with the redesign, closure and reluctance in some placements to take students. The lessons learned will inform future planning for any future surges of Covid-19.

Nursing, Midwifery & Allied Health Directorate, NHS Education for Scotland

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