



14-Dec 2020

Response to Department of Health from School of Nursing and Midwifery, University College Cork, (UCC) and the local Joint Working Group¹

Timelines:

- The COVID-19 pandemic reached Ireland on 29th February 2020, and within as short timeframe, cases had been confirmed in all counties. On the 12th March 2020, the first lockdown was announced. This time-period was characterised by a lot of unknowns and huge uncertainty within the health services with both the health services and society evolving in their response to Covid19.
- In recognition of this uncertainty for clinical placement's pre-April 10th 2020, supernumerary² students were given the option of going on placement or deferring their placements. Going on placement pre-April 10th was voluntary and by student's choice.
- Chief Clinical Officer- Dr Colm Henry's communication to University Presidents and Heads of School meant that all supernumerary clinical placements ceased on the 10th April 2020.
- All university organised BSc programme related clinical experiences for supernumerary students were stopped from April 10th to July 14th 2020.
- Clinical placements for supernumerary students resumed on the 14th July 2020 for supernumerary students in compliance with all the risk mitigating guidance relating to infection prevention and control provided for in Dr Colm Henry's communications.

Clinical experiences between April 10th – July 14th 2020 fell into two categories

1. Paid internship as part of the rostered workforce complement where two fourth year students replaced one staff nurse/midwife
2. On contracts as salaried health care assistants (where they were not operating as student nurses/midwives).

Are the HEIs satisfied that the placements are safe? UCC is satisfied that placements are quality learning environments. The rationale for this response is:

- Link Lecturers from the university are assigned to each placement area.
- Clinical learning environment audits are conducted every 4 years, such audits can be revisited if a concern is raised, a targeted action plan can be put in place and a placement site can be made unavailable until such a time that the site meets NMBI audit requirements;

¹ The local joint working group in UCC's context is called the Steering Group.

² Supernumerary status means that students cannot be counted as part of the workforce when they are learning on placement in a clinical setting. The supernumerary student is surplus to the rostered complement of nurses or midwives.

- Joint collaborative health service provider (HSP) & School of Nursing and Midwifery (SoNM) committees provide the governance structures overseeing the undergraduate programmes: Allocations Committee; Clinical Practice Committee and Steering Group or (Local Joint Working Group) Committee meetings (9 meetings in total) over the academic year. The purpose of these joint meetings is to provide a collaborative forum for clinical matters/issues/concerns to be addressed and escalated as deemed necessary. There are student representatives on these committees. There are very good collaborative working relationships between the School and the local health service providers, thus if issues are identified they are addressed in a timely and appropriate manner.
- Outside of scheduled meeting times, clear policies, guidelines and communication pathways are made available to students so that concerns raised are addressed in a timely manner with a particular focus on closing the feedback loop. The committees have representation from the key health services used for clinical placements within the programme and the three committees have student representatives as members.
- Clinical placement evaluations are conducted with students on an annual basis in collaboration with HSPs.
- Student experience committee meets three times a year with over 40 student representatives – issues raised in this committee are escalated as required.
- In response to COVID-19, the SoNM, UCC have also developed an online preceptorship programme to support supervision for students on clinical placement.

Are the HEIs satisfied that the placements are in line with NMBI requirements? Yes. All clinical sites are subject to NMBI Quality Clinical Learning Environment Audit Criteria. In addition, the regulatory body NMBI conduct site visits to ensure that Standards and Requirements are being adhered to. On an annual basis, the HEIs are obliged to submit a detailed Annual Nursing and Midwifery Programme Reports to NMBI. However, we would acknowledge that the availability of placement sites has changed during Covid-19 thus impacting on the variety of placement experiences available to students.

Are the recommended levels of support and supervision being maintained? Every effort is made to ensure that appropriate and safe levels of support and supervision are provided for students on clinical placement. The main point of support for students are their preceptor/associate preceptor. Other key supports include the clinical nurse/midwife managers (CNM/CMM), clinical placement coordinators (CPC), practice development coordinators, allocation liaison officer (ALOs) Link Lecturers, Practice Module Leads, and Programme Leads. In most clinical areas' students have an identified CPC – which is critical in terms of supporting students whilst on placement, however we acknowledge that there are ongoing challenges in ensuring that the NMBI recommended ratio of CPC/ALO to students in some areas. Within the Covid-19 context we are aware of some challenges to staffing in some areas and this presented challenges in continuity of preceptorship in some instances. However, from our experience CPCs and CNMs/CMMs make every effort to ensure appropriate supervision and support is provided.

If there have been complaints, what have the HEIs done? Clear joint HSP and SoNM policies and guidelines exist that determine the appropriate course of action to be taken, depending on the nature of the issue raised. We continue to have a close collaborative relationship with all our HSPs so

that issues identified can be addressed in as timely a manner as is possible. Issues will always be raised by students through the various fora; the key point from UCCs' perspective is to respond to the issues raised and address the concerns highlighted. During Covid-19 we were constantly in communication with and available to students.

We are aware of some issues being raised by students in relation to clinical placement coordinator (CPC) cover at one site and this issue was raised through the governance structures at the affiliated health service provider and the level of CPC cover was subsequently increased. Subsequent feedback by students on that placement area have been very positive.

What have the HEIs done to connect with the students? Many different mechanisms exist for linking with students. These include:

- Practice placement preparation sessions organised prior to scheduled clinical placements.
- Post clinical placement evaluation sessions organised to take feedback.
- Students consistently encouraged to discuss concerns with their Preceptor; Clinical Practice Co-ordinator; Allocation Liaison Officer; Link Lecturer; Practice Module Lead; Programme Lead; Year Co-ordinator; Undergraduate Clinical Practice Director; BSc Programme Director; School of Nursing and Midwifery Student Experience Committee (Student Representatives); Student Representatives on both the School of Nursing and Midwifery's Clinical Practice Committee and Steering Group.
- The School continues to communicate with students on a regular basis seeking feedback/enquiring about their wellbeing and informing them of available SoNM and College supports and resources. A support infogram (outlining key supports) was created and is communicated regularly to students.
- Health service providers have also consistently highlighted the importance of supporting students at various fora within the health services e.g. CNM/CMM meetings and clinical fora.
- The student union also highlights support to students in their communications.

Completed by:

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(on behalf of the Steering Group)³

³ This response was agreed by a subsample of the Steering group who met on MS teams 14th December 2020 including representation from the health services, NMPDU, UCC and a student representative.