

Helping students get the best from their practice placements

A Royal College of Nursing toolkit

CLINICAL PROFESSIONAL RESOURCE





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Publication

This is an RCN practice guidance. Practice guidance are evidence-based consensus documents, used to guide decisions about appropriate care of an individual, family or population in a specific context.

Description

The RCN recognises the importance and value of high quality practice-based learning environments for nursing and midwifery students. This toolkit will help students to think about how to get the most from practice placements, explore what they can bring to the placement and what to expect in terms of learning experiences, and recognise their own responsibilities alongside those of higher education institutions and practice-based learning providers.

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Evaluation

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Introduction

The Royal College of Nursing (RCN) recognises the importance and value of high quality practice-based learning environments for nursing and midwifery students.

This toolkit will help you to:

- think about how you can get the most from your practice placement
- explore what you bring to the placement and what you can expect in terms of your learning experiences
- recognise your own responsibilities alongside those of higher education institutions and practice-based learning providers.

Practice-based learning is the term used for all learning that is undertaken in the practice environment. It is the place where you, as a nursing or midwifery student, apply your knowledge to practice, learn key skills and achieve the required competencies for registration. The routes into a nursing or midwifery career can be variable. However no matter which route you are taking into this fulfilling career, learning in the contextual setting of clinical practice will enable you to confront many of the challenges and issues related to caring.

Practice is where lifelong learning is promoted and enhanced. This is where you as health care students gain exposure to person-centred care, master the skills to deliver safe and effective high quality care, and achieve the required professional competence for entry to the Nursing and Midwifery Council (NMC) register.

The importance of the role of the mentor and the quality of the mentorship offered in the practice environment, wherever that may be, cannot be over-emphasised. Practice-based learning in the clinical setting is essential in ensuring that the nurses and midwives of the future are fit for practice and purpose. The current NMC (2008) *Standards to Support Learning and Assessment in Practice* (SLAiP) outline the preparation and standards of practice and education of mentors and practice teachers. The NMC is currently undergoing a consultation of all their education standards and this includes the 2008 standards.

What is a practice placement?

For the purpose of this toolkit, a practice placement is where learning opportunities are available for you to undertake practice under the supervision of a range of practitioners in the team. It is the environment where you will meet and develop therapeutic relationships with a range of service users and their carers. Throughout this toolkit, service users and their supporting others will be referred to as service users and carers, acknowledging the range of terms used to describe both.

Practice placements during the pre-registration programme of study should be provided to facilitate the development of skills, competence and confidence and identify the community focus of care, the continuing nature of care, the need for acute and critical care and the multi-professional approach to care. A good practice placement has a direct bearing on your ability to work effectively and integrate theory to practice and is a place in which your competency will be assessed in a range of skills and behaviour.

Placements will be within a variety of settings and not just within NHS trusts (hospitals, community and primary care trusts). You may be placed in the independent, charity and voluntary sectors and integrated health and social care settings, schools and colleges and nursing and residential care homes. New models of care and service provision are developing at an unprecedented rate and as a student you may find yourself in many different settings. This is of enormous value and offers some very unique experiences. All placements are facilitated by the HEI and can be designed in different ways and supported by various models of practice based facilitation of learning.

You will be facilitated, depending on your programme, by a range of health care staff who are appropriately prepared, which can include support workers, associate and co-mentors, preceptors, mentors, sign-off mentors or practice teachers. These passionate and committed practitioners will support your development and assess your learning, enabling the achievement of required learning outcomes, skills and competencies.

For the purposes of this guide any reference to this range of staff will be referred to as mentor.

Aims of this toolkit

This toolkit is designed to enable you, as a student of nursing or midwifery, to:

- recognise and value quality placement experiences as vital for your effective education
- optimise the support of mentors, co and associate mentors, and others who will support your learning
- take personal responsibility for directing your own learning, making the best use of available resources
- recognise opportunities for achieving competencies for entry to the professional register
- act on the opportunity to provide honest, evaluative feedback of your practice experiences to aid the audit process for the practice placement that in turn will influence the quality of the practice placements at a local level.

It is important to emphasise that, as students, you have a central role in getting the most out of your practice placement, identifying best practice and providing feedback on the learning experience.

The importance of effective practice-based learning

To meet the current requirement of the NMC Standards for pre-registration nursing (2010) and midwifery (2009) all pre-registration degree programmes will be 50% practice and 50% theory. All students need to complete the minimum practice hours requirement in an appropriate practice placement. Practice-based learning will maximise learning opportunities and ensure that the statutory professional competencies for entry into the appropriate part of the professional register.

The Code (NMC, 2015) compels all registered nurses and midwives to share their skills, knowledge and experience for the benefit of people receiving care and your colleagues, to support students' and colleagues' learning to help them develop their professional competence and confidence. Educators can also use the Code to help students understand what it means to be a registered professional and how keeping to the Code helps to achieve that.

Effective practice placements promote learning and should help you to:

- meet the statutory and regulatory requirements
- achieve the required learning outcomes and competencies according to regulatory body requirements for pre-registration education (NMC, 2009, 2010)
- recognise cultural variance and develop cultural competence
- develop confidence in delivering person-centred care
- follow the service user's journey through health care so that a more comprehensive view of care can be experienced
- recognise the diversity of learning opportunities available within all health and social care environments, including independent, voluntary and new models of care provision
- work within a wide range of rapidly changing health and social services that recognise the continuing nature of care
- provide the full range of nursing care to all service users, including those within a multi-professional arena
- demonstrate an appreciation of the unpredictable and dynamic nature of the clinical setting as a learning environment within a multi-professional approach to care
- feel valued and safe within a culture that recognises the importance of adult learning
- maintain your supernumerary status when appropriate
- work alongside both registered and unregistered staff creating a good working relationship that benefits service users
- work alongside mentors who are appropriately prepared, creating a partnership with them
- identify appropriate learning opportunities to meet your learning needs, linking general learning objectives to specific experiences within the practice context
- use time effectively, creating opportunities to enable the application of theory to practice and vice versa
- apply knowledge gained in the use of experiential and enquiry or problem-based learning, within the practice context
- analyse and critique contemporary thinking within modern health care to evaluate the effectiveness of care provided, based on research evidence and continue to develop your competence in both
- both utilise and support your peers
- value service users and carers as experts for the continued opportunity for feedback on your practice and development.

The responsibilities of stakeholders

Practice placements are a vital component of the student experience. It is important they reflect both the nature of the provision of care to meet health care needs and the demands of professional registration.

The support required by you, as students, to gain the best from your learning experiences cannot be over emphasised. You have a right to expect input and support from key individuals to enable you to identify learning opportunities within the placement. With support, your placement enables the application of theory with constructive feedback and reflection on their clinical practice experiences.

The Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) states that an 'effective placement learning opportunity is one in which the aims and intended learning competencies are clearly defined and understood by all parties, and where the responsibilities of the higher education institution, placement provider and student are made explicit' (2012).

All major players have a responsibility for ensuring that, at the point of initial registration, nurses and midwives are fit:

- for purpose – can function competently in clinical practice
- for practice – can fulfil the needs of registration
- for award – have the breadth and depth of learning to be awarded a degree.

The NMC standards for pre-registration nursing (2010) and midwifery (2009) must be met and the competences achieved by the end of the programme. The standards aim to enable nurses and midwives to give and support high quality care in rapidly changing environments. The standards reflect how future services are likely to be delivered, acknowledge future public health priorities and address the challenges of long-term conditions, an ageing population, and providing more care outside hospitals using problem solving approaches and evidence in decision making, keeping up with technical advances and meet future expectations (NMC, 2010).

Key stakeholders in practice placements

- Students.
- Service users and carers within all sectors where health care is provided.
- The NHS, voluntary and independent sector and the social care sector.
- Higher education institutions (HEIs) – staff such as personal tutors, programme directors, cohort leaders and subject/module /academic leaders/link lecturers/practice learning facilitators.
- Service providers – these are part of the tripartite arrangements with HEIs/ universities and the commissioning body, who should work together to enable students to achieve their registration. They include the clinical team, mentors, lecturer/practitioners and practice educators/facilitators.
- The commissioning bodies for education in England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland.

The RCN acknowledges the support for practice-based learning is provided in different ways and different models across the UK. Wherever you are undertaking your education, training, learning and development it is important to identify those who will support you.

The student

Before placement

As a student, you have a responsibility to:

- read the HEI Charter and student handbooks. The principles contained within the handbooks identify the mutual obligations between HEIs and students and the HEI's responsibility to meet the requirements of the programme. Copies of these handbooks are given to all new entrants and revised annually. It is important to keep up-to-date with any changes through the National Union of Students (NUS)

- read and if necessary download the student handbooks related to your specific programme of study. The handbook will relate to the programme delivery and outcomes, including your practice placements
- read and keep safe the practice assessment documentation related to your specific programme of study, which will include the assessment of practice that must be achieved throughout the programme
- recognise the purpose of the practice placement experience and ensure you are clear about the expectations of the service provider
- ensure you understand the specific expectations of the placement, by contacting the placement and making enquiries with the placement office or link lecturer before you attend
- think about how you are going to meet your learning needs, using learning tools, assessment documentation and tools, learning contracts, and learning logs, diaries or action learning sets
- identify your specific learning needs and work towards the achievement of knowledge and the required outcomes and competencies
- familiarise yourself with the placement profile and the specific skills of each team member
- familiarise yourself with any resources that can support your education, learning and development. You may find resources specifically provided for your field of practice, such as the RCN's *The Needs of People with Learning Disabilities. What pre-registration students should know.*
- recognise cultural variances and develop cultural competence and inclusivity
- maintain confidentiality in line with NMC guidelines, which include engagement on social media platforms
- keep all practice assessment documentation that you complete safe (if using tablets or other digital means ensure these remain safe and confidential)
- maintain effective communication with service users, clients, personal tutors, mentors, and link personnel from both the placement and HEI
- know how you are going to meet your learning needs, using learning and assessment documentation and tools, learning contracts and logs, diaries or action learning sets
- revise the theory learnt on the programme or module and note its applicability to the practice placement
- be proactive in seeking out experiences for your level of practice and competence with the support of your mentor
- discuss your specific learning needs with your mentor and work towards the achievement of knowledge and the required outcomes and competencies
- develop an action plan for your learning
- demonstrate a willingness to work as part of the team in the delivery of safe service user care
- learn to express your needs and adopt a questioning, reflective approach to your learning within the multidisciplinary team

During placement

As a student you have a responsibility to:

- act professionally with regard to punctuality, attitude and image, and dress according to uniform policy
- complete the requirements of the UK Quality Code for Higher Education on mandatory training requirements (QAA, 2012)
- use your mentor for guidance and support to enable you to achieve your learning outcomes and satisfactorily complete your practice assessments
- seek help from appropriate clinical managers or link lecturer if the mentor relationship is not working, to enable the achievement of the learning outcomes

- recognise that safety is paramount in clinical practice and seek mentor supervision for procedures you have not undertaken before
- ensure that clinical skills required at each stage in the programme are attempted under the supervision of a skilled practitioner, with comments provided by both you and your mentor
- ensure you document all ongoing verbal and written feedback and achievement in the assessment records
- utilise learning opportunities outside the practice placements and, where possible, work with specialist practitioners
- identify the role of the multidisciplinary team and professionals within other contexts of the organisation or community, for example, in x-ray, pharmacy and outpatients departments and assess how they might support your learning
- give and receive constructive feedback
- reflect on your progress to increase self awareness, confidence and competence
- understand the process for raising concerns and your responsibilities for reporting them, for example, concerns with safeguarding or quality of care.
- ensure all practice placement documentation and assessments of practice submitted to the HEI are completed by the due date
- support the quality monitoring system for the practice placement with feedback, completing all the documents provided
- forward all evaluations to HEI personnel and service providers, on completion of your practice placement
- reflect with your personal tutor upon the practice experience and take action together where needed.

Higher education institutions

Higher education institutions (HEIs) have a responsibility to:

- monitor both the capacity and quality of all practice placements to meet statutory and professional body requirements
- ensure practice placements meet all standards for the specific programme validated by the HEI
- undertake joint annual audit of all practice placements (or cycle according to HEI)
- take action following the audit on the capacity and quality of the practice learning environment, based on feedback, which must include contributions from students, service providers, clinical staff and HEI personnel
- provide sufficient numbers of link lecturers and lecturer practitioners to support students and staff in placements
- ensure students can readily access support structures whilst in their practice placement, with contact numbers provided in student documentation
- maintain a live register of mentors to ensure there is the availability for the numbers of students allocated to the placement at any one time

After placement

As a student you have a responsibility to:

- evaluate your achievements, looking at what you enjoyed and benefited from during your practice placement
- evaluate the placement itself, providing constructive feedback on the learning environment
- prepare yourself for meetings with your personal tutor and for classroom discussion
- maintain regular contact with your personal tutor and keep them informed of any concerns or challenges you may have, either within the placement or of a personal nature, which has an impact on your experiences

- wherever possible, ensure that the placement opportunities identified reflect the student's level of experience in order to facilitate and build their confidence in practice
 - ensure mentors are kept informed when changes are made in the curriculum, programmes or modules
 - ensure the placement areas have documentation that reflects student requirements at each stage of the programme of study
 - provide effective communication networks between the HEI and the practice placement, with the use of placement co-ordinators and link lecturers
 - ensure link lecturers keep the practice placements informed of the different programmes undertaken, for example, a degree or PG Diploma – noting students may have varying requirements
 - monitor that staff are aware of recent research findings and the theory offered in the classroom is reflected, as much as possible, in the clinical experience (and vice versa)
 - have in place an effective system of jointly monitoring feedback from students about their practice placement experiences into the quality assurance cycle
 - have in place a system of notifying students when actions have been taken to improve practice placements, where concern was registered.
- on any personal, domestic, academic and practice placement matter throughout the student's programme. A variety of provision patterns exist throughout the UK
- make time for students at least once every term or semester, maintaining accurate records on their progress and the feedback they have been given
 - have knowledge of the student support services available and contact them when needed
 - monitor student progress and attainment of competencies of the programme
 - provide honest feedback. Should the need arise, your personal tutor can act as part of the tripartite relationship with mentors
 - inform the course leader when student problems persist, including those that relate to practice placement experiences
 - be responsible for writing exit references at the end of the programme. Personal tutors should monitor student achievement during the programme, including feedback from mentors and others in the practice placement area, and student self assessment.

Personal tutors

In addition to module unit lecturers, you may be assigned personal tutors. This varies between HEIs. Personal tutors have a responsibility to:

- take an active role in facilitating a student's learning as a matter of standard practice. For nursing and midwifery students, this role will be for the duration of the individual's programme
- maintain contact and effective relationships with students and provide an initial, active and sustained point of contact and reference

Service providers

Service providers have a responsibility to:

- recognise the student's supernumerary status. This means the student will be afforded the opportunity of learning in the practice placement
- maintain an up-to-date register of all mentors who hold the relevant mentor qualifications
- ensure the agreed number of mentors are available for the number of students allocated to the placement at any one time
- ensure the environment has a philosophy of person-centred care, and appropriate policies and guidelines for care
- ensure a meaningful mentoring relationship that enables a student's development and promotes increasing confidence in professional practice

- ensure that practice is evidence based, wherever possible, and underpinned by research
- provide students with an effective orientation and induction to the practice area, including policies on sickness, uniform, etc.
- allocate a named mentor prior to the placement commencing
- identify the student's learning needs at the start of the placement and jointly create an action plan to meet those needs
- ensure practice placement opportunities are clearly written and reflect current practice and available experiences
- arrange duty rotas to ensure students and mentors work together for at least three out of five shifts
- provide opportunities for students to experience the 24 hours, seven days a week pattern of care where appropriate
- encourage students to make decisions about nursing interventions and to participate in the delivery of nursing or midwifery care which reflects their level of experience
- provide students with appropriate learning opportunities
- give constructive feedback
- have a system of monitoring and evaluating feedback from students
- maintain close and effective links with the HEI.

Mentors

A mentor is an NMC registrant who has successfully completed an NMC approved mentor preparation programme which meets the current SLAiP (NMC, 2008). These standards outline the requirements for supporting the learning and assessment of students in the practice learning environment and leads to a recordable qualification on the NMC register. A mentor is “a mandatory requirement for pre-registration nursing and midwifery students” (NMC, 2008). Mentors are accountable to the NMC in their

monitoring of students to ensure they are achieving all practice assessments throughout their programme and they have the necessary knowledge, skills and competence at various stages in the programme, not just at the final phase. They are also responsible for informing HEI staff of any concerns regarding student performance or progress.

In addition to providing support and guidance to you in the practice area, mentors have the unique opportunity to role model the professional values and behaviours in order to instil professional integrity. The importance of this role modelling in supporting your professional socialisation and promoting positive values, attitudes and behaviours which is paramount.

Your mentor will enable you to make sense of their practice through:

- supporting the application of theory into practice
- observing practice and performance within your boundaries and providing constructive feedback
- providing opportunities for you to work with all members of the multidisciplinary team (MDT)
- facilitating reflection on practice, performance and experiences.

Good mentoring depends upon well-planned learning opportunities and the provision of support and coaching for students. However, mentors are also delivering care in busy and changing environments and we advise you to be aware of your expectations, make them realistic and understand they may change throughout your programme of study. For example, in your first year, you are likely to want your mentor to act as a guide and assessor but, by your third year, you will be aware of the potential for mentors and others to become role models – and you will look to those who you feel demonstrate good examples.

The SLAiP (NMC, 2008) state that the responsibilities of a mentor include:

- being educated and prepared to undertake the role

- sharing their knowledge of service user care and acting as a positive role model
- being familiar with the student's programme of study and practice assessment documentation
- identifying specific learning opportunities and ensure the learning experience is a planned process
- observing students practising skills under the appropriate level of supervision
- providing time for reflection, feedback, monitoring and documenting of a student's progress
- assessing competence and service user safety, in keeping with the assessment documentation
- giving students constructive feedback, with suggestions on how to make improvements to promote progress
- reporting any untoward incidents or concerns to management and the HEI
- liaising with lecturing and practice education staff as required
- maintaining own professional knowledge, including annual mentorship updates
- meeting revalidation requirements and maintaining own professional registration
- recording mentoring experiences and professional development within the role as evidence of professional development and for revalidation
- engaging in clinical supervision and reflection in relation to this role
- providing opportunities for students to work with other members of the MDT in practice.

Getting the best from your practice-based learning

With so many opportunities and challenges for students within health care today, it is important to start planning for your learning experiences before you attend the placement. From the outset of your placement, you should continue

planning with your mentor. This will enable the development of clinical skills and facilitate the integration of theory with practice.

Each practice experience will have a preparation phase, orientation, intermediate and final phase					
Preparation (prior to placement)	Orientation (to placement, assessing and planning the learning process)	Agree learning needs	Carry out plan, implement and manage	Intermediate (check progress, renegotiate plan)	Final phase (evaluate)
<p>Think about how to get the best from your placement.</p> <p>What Preparation does your college or university need to make?</p> <p>Think about what you already know.</p> <p>What should you learn, read and prepare before your placement?</p>	<p>Ask yourself and your mentor: What am I planning to learn?</p> <p>What learning opportunities are available to meet the competencies required?</p> <p>Now prepare your:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • learning agreement • learning log • diary. 	<p>Your learning should be based upon critical questions and reflection.</p> <p>Check your learning agreement includes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • formative assessment • feedback • a review of competencies • actions to take. 	<p>Ask: What principles from theory am I applying to the learning situation?</p> <p>What am I learning about myself?</p>	<p>Ask: What have I learnt? What do I still need to learn?</p>	<p>Your final assessment should include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • feedback • reflection • evaluation. <p>Ask:</p> <p>How well have I done?</p> <p>Have I achieved the competencies and practice outcomes for the placement?</p> <p>Did I understand the theory as it applied to practice?</p> <p>Does my learning agreement, log or activity sheet demonstrate planning?</p>

Points to remember

- Remember you are learning to be a professional nurse or midwife and should behave in a professional way towards the learning experience.
- You are there to learn how to assess, plan, implement and evaluate care.
- Review the learning outcomes and competencies expected at each stage of your specific programme of study.
- Identify the dress code for the placement.
- Liaise and link with other students. Find out what they liked best and their recommendations.
- Note the feedback you have from any previous placement and any areas for your improvement.
- Once you have identified where you need to improve, draw on your strengths.
- Identify learning needs with your mentor.
- Recognise your personal resources – your interests, previous experiences and current capabilities – and how you feel about practice.
- Be prepared to work as a team member, asking questions at the appropriate time.
- Be enthusiastic about the learning opportunities.
- Know when to ask for help.
- Know where to obtain appropriate help.
- Ask your mentors for clear feedback.

Here are some questions you could ask your mentor at the start of your placement

- Is there a placement profile?
- Is there an orientation booklet/induction for the area?

- Are there particular procedures specific to that area?
- What learning opportunities are available?
- When and how often will you work with me?
- Which other members of the team will supervise me?
- Who do I report to if I am sick? Or if I have an injury?
- When will we meet for the formative and final assessment of practice? Can we set dates?
- How will you feed any concerns back to me? Will it be directly or with the link lecturer present?
- Am I able to seek feedback from service users/clients?

Checklist for evaluating the practice placement

This checklist contains statements that address the provisions the HEI should make for your practice placement; what the service and your mentor should be providing and your responsibilities within the practice placement. Use it for each placement, photocopying the sheets and keeping them in your portfolio. It will help you identify:

- good learning experiences
- poor learning experiences, where no standards exist to support the learning environment and student learning outcomes
- inequity and inconsistency between practice placement environments
- where you were unable to achieve the competencies and learning outcomes at that stage of the programme
- where the quality of service user care was not good
- where the quality of service user care was good.

Checklist for evaluating the practice placement

Prior to placement

Higher education institution's (HEI) responsibilities	Yes	No	Comments and action taken
You had access to the allocation office or placement support unit			
You were supported and prepared for managing short or long placements, where they were located away from your home			
Travel arrangements were discussed			
Travel claim forms were available			
You were issued with appropriate uniforms and told where and how they could be laundered			
Occupational health checks were carried out as appropriate			
Practice placements were notified that you were attending and were expecting you			
You were provided with a list of the appropriate support staff, including their base and contact numbers			
You were issued with all the necessary paperwork for practice assessment, logs or learning agreements			
Statutory training was carried out before placement, for example, moving and handling			
<p>You were clear about your roles and responsibilities within the practice placement concerning:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • regulatory body guidance on issues related to undertaking any procedure or skill where you were not confident and competent • your responsibility to service users and other employees, with regards to the ethical and legal requirements of practice • issues related to confidentiality • legal issues of record keeping • the uniform code for the placement area • policy on sickness and absence • emergency policies and procedures. 			

Orientation

Placement provider's responsibilities	Yes	No	Comments and action taken
You were welcomed to the placement			
You were given a proper orientation and told what was expected of you			
You were given an induction pack, containing a staff profile for the clinical area. Additional information linked to the placement was contained in a student handbook including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • placement name, address, telephone number and contact • type of placement – service user or client group • learning opportunities available for those in their first and subsequent years • additional learning opportunities • learning outcomes expected • any special knowledge and information that would be helpful before the placement • resources available within the placement recommended reading. 			
You were properly introduced to the placement team with whom you will have contact			
You were allocated a mentor prior to the placement			
You had a meeting with your mentor during the first week			
Your mentor introduced you to co-mentors and those supporting you			
At this first meeting, your mentor agreed a timetable when you would meet and work together			
Times were agreed for both the formative and final interviews			
Your mentor established both their and your role and responsibilities at this meeting			
Your mentor was aware of the learning outcomes for your programme or module			
Your mentor was aware of the assessment criteria for your programme of study			
Your mentor helped you develop a learning agreement or learning log, if necessary			
Your mentor was aware of the relevant learning opportunities available within the practice setting to enable you to gain new skills and transfer previous learning			
Your mentor discussed expectations in terms of attitudes and standards required from you			
Once expectations were agreed, other team members were informed of your learning needs			

Placement provider's responsibilities	Yes	No	Comments and action taken
You knew who would support you in the team, when the mentor was not available			
You had the opportunity to work with your mentor for a minimum of 40% of your time on the placement			
When undertaking new skills for the first time, you were given supervision by a registered nurse or midwife			
You and your mentor negotiated achievable time frames to meet the outcomes agreed on the learning agreement or other tool, with opportunity for evaluation and reflection			
Your mentor gave you the opportunity for reflection on your practice			
Your mentor gave you constructive feedback on your progress at regular intervals			
You achieved the specific learning outcomes for the placement or module			
If standards were not being achieved, your mentor involved your link lecturer so that action could be taken			
The mentor who worked with you for the majority of your placement followed the process for assessment effectively, completing and signing your form on the final week			
Your mentor gave constructive feedback, with suggestions on how you could transfer skills to your next placement			

Orientation (cont'd)

Your responsibility as a student	Yes	No	Comments and action taken
You recognised that you had a crucial role in informing the mentors and placement staff when your assessment(s) were due			
You were clear about the agreed competencies and learning outcomes for placements			
You took active responsibility for directing the learning opportunities, using learning tools when appropriate			
You identified your previous learning experiences and discussed how this linked with your current clinical placement			
You used available opportunities to work and learn alongside the multi-professional team			
You ensured that each skill you accomplished was signed off by your mentor			
You and your mentor took the opportunity to discuss the theory to practice element of the skill and learning outcome. Neither of you viewed it simply as a checklist to be completed			
You were able to identify your strengths and weaknesses and used a reflective cycle to consider your placement experiences			
You informed your link lecturer staff of both the positive and negative aspects of your placement experiences			
You kept an accurate record of the skills and competencies you achieved, maintaining your records for inspection with your log or portfolio of personal and professional experiences			

Link lecturer's responsibilities	Yes	No	Comments and action taken
Their contact details were clearly displayed on a notice board in the resource or practice area			
Link lecturers were visible and supported mentors and other staff within the placement area			
If urgently needed, the link lecturer was contactable to discuss any areas of concern			
If concerns about the placement standards were raised, there was constructive communication between the service providers and the HEI			

Orientation (cont'd)

The learning environment	Yes	No	Comments and action taken
The practice placement had a favourable culture for learning			
You had the opportunity to experience 24 hour, seven days a week care at some stage in the placement programme			
You were encouraged to question practices you felt were unsafe or not research-based			
You were helped to feel part of the team			
Staff practised care in line with the philosophy of the environment			
There was evidence of multi-professional team working within the documentation of care			
There was effective interpersonal communication between team members			
Notice and topic boards were used to good effect, with relevant information to help students			
Learning resources were available for students to use - for example, current books and journals, research materials, information technology and online resources			

Clinical team responsibility for care delivery	Yes	No	Comments and action taken
The provision of care for the service users and their carers reflected a person and family centred care ethos and respect for privacy, dignity, religious and cultural beliefs and practices			
Standards of care delivered to the service users were: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • satisfactory • not satisfactory. 			
If not satisfactory, did you know how to deal with this?			
You were made aware of the organisation's whistleblowing policy and guidelines on complaints			
You knew how to record your concerns and who to send them to			
You were supported by your mentor when you expressed concerns about care			

On completion of the placement

Evaluating the quality of the learning experience	Yes	No	Comments and action taken
You were encouraged by the mentor and the team to evaluate the learning experience both formally and informally			
You completed the documentation			
You felt adequately prepared for the practice experience by the HEI			
The time allocated for the placement was satisfactory to achieve the required competencies and learning outcomes for your stage in the programme			
The mentor was approachable and enthusiastic about their role within the practice setting			
You knew how to change mentors if the relationship was not working			
The placement experience offered you a quality learning experience where safe and effective care was evident			
This was a satisfactory learning experience			
There was an opportunity to reflect on this practice placement and the learning experiences within the classroom			
You were able to meet with your personal tutor to discuss this practice placement			

If you have concerns about your placement

If you are concerned about any placement area, notify the service manager, your mentor and your personal tutor as soon as possible, either during the placement or immediately following it. Discuss your placement experiences with

your personal tutor and explain why you had an unsatisfactory experience. Agree on the actions that will be taken to inform the appropriate people, for example, the HEI and service link managers. It is important you follow the correct channels of communication already established.

Additional information

Sickness absence during a placement

You need to notify both your HEI and the placement of your situation, with details of the circumstances. Follow the procedures specified by their HEI as each HEI will have regulations to identify the amount of sickness absence allowed during your programme of study.

Access to occupational health services?

The majority of NHS trusts and HEIs have an occupational health service on site. The Health Services Advisory Committee of the Health and Safety Commission (HSC) says that this service should be an independent, confidential, specialist advisory service for managers, employees and nursing and midwifery students.

Managing stress in the practice placement

Stress, working patterns and shortages of staff may cause you to suffer ill health in your placement. In addition to physical health, the Health and Safety at Work Act (1974) includes mental wellbeing, including work-induced stress. Inform your mentor and personal tutor if you feel you are affected. They may suggest you seek help from an occupational health service, or local services such as link lecturer, personal tutor or student counsellor who should be able to direct you to confidential support.

Other RCN services include:

- The RCN Welfare Rights and Guidance Service provides practical advice to help with financial difficulties and short-term grants. They can be contacted on 0345 772 6100 or go to: www.rcn.org.uk/get-help/member-support-services/welfare-rights-and-guidance
- The RCN Counselling Service provides free, confidential short-term counselling on personal or work-related matters. To find out more, or to speak to a counsellor, phone 0345 772 6100 or go to: www.rcn.org.uk/get-help/member-support-services/counselling-service

Uniforms

All nursing students are required to wear uniforms at some point during their clinical placements but who pays for them varies across the country and each trust will have its own uniform policy. You may not need to wear your uniform in some placement settings.

Bear in mind there is no legal obligation for a uniform to be provided. The RCN guidance on uniforms and workwear (2013) sets out principles that are applicable to all four countries of the UK. Individual countries may have developed specific policy positions or guidance in relation to uniforms or work wear and you should always refer to your local organisational policies in the first instance.

The guidance outlines the legislation attached to uniforms including the need to ensure that policies enable good hand hygiene practices, for example, by keeping the hands, wrists and lower arms free from jewellery. It is important that any uniform is the right size and allows a free range of movement, enabling you to move without restraint, reducing the risk of injury. If this is not the case, seek advice from the local RCN safety representative within your clinical placement. If problems arise in relation to laundering uniforms – usually due to poor hospital facilities – it may be useful to speak to the infection control nurse.

Keeping safe

You are protected under the Manual Handling Operations Regulations [MHOR] (1992) and the Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations (1992) which states that an employer must comply with the risk assessment requirements set out and carry out a risk assessment on manual handling tasks. If you are an employee, you must make full use of any safe system of manual handling your employer puts in place. Do not put your health or back at risk if the equipment is unsafe or just not available. It is the duty of every employee whilst at work to take reasonable care for their health and safety and of those who may be affected by their acts or omissions at work. Inform the service user why you are unable to move items and tell the nurse in charge of the placement area. Check a risk assessment has been undertaken by the service user, taking into consideration their condition,

weight and height, with suggestions for the most appropriate equipment to use.

You may also contact the trust or placement moving and handling co-ordinator, who will investigate your concerns and register them. In the majority of NHS trusts there is an RCN safety representative who works with the employer to make the workplace safer and to ensure that the statutory obligations are met. Safety representatives have a right to inspect the workplace, investigate accidents and follow up complaints of unsafe conditions. Always keep a record of any concerns of this nature and make sure you report them, so that others are not placed at risk.

Bullying, harassment, violence or abuse

If you experience any incidents of bullying, harassment, violence or abuse, or witness them happening to a colleague, it is vital that you report it. You must speak out if you find yourself in this situation. Bullying and harassment often leads to sickness and absenteeism. If you are affected, first inform your link lecturer or placement co-ordinator, then seek advice from your RCN steward. The RCN is working with employers to raise the awareness of this issue. You may find it useful to look at the RCN website for additional information and links to support, go to: www.rcn.org.uk/get-help/bullying-harassment-and-stress

Witnessing bad practice

You may occasionally find yourself in a situation where you become concerned about poor or bad practice. If this happens to you, first inform your mentor and then the nurse in charge. Be aware of and follow local safeguarding policies and procedures. If you feel your concerns are not being adequately addressed, you should contact the link lecturer who will discuss the matter with the nurse in charge. The standard of patient care is a recognised aspect of the clinical governance agenda and is part of the audit process for the practice area. The placement must demonstrate respect for privacy, dignity and religious and cultural beliefs, delivering care to a safe standard. If the matter is not addressed to your satisfaction and you believe service users to be at

risk of physical, mental or emotional abuse, you should contact your local RCN steward. They will be able to help clarify the issues, advising you to record your concerns by writing down facts and dates.

Extra paid care work during my programme of study

While in theory there is nothing to prevent you from doing this, it is vital that you consider the needs of the course and your responsibilities to the placement. You must meet the requirements of your programme in terms of attendance.

Failing a practice assessment

If this occurs, it must be assumed you have been made aware of your development needs earlier in the placement, enabling you to demonstrate progress and learning. Prior to being failed, if you did not receive a mid-point interview or feedback about your need to develop, you are entitled to additional time to address your learning and practice skills. Try not to panic. Instead, seek support from your link or personal tutor, or your mentor and refer to your student handbook. If you feel you require further support or advice, contact the NUS or your local RCN office.

Elective placements

The application process for elective placements is dependent on local policy within the HEI and the requirements of the student's programme of study. Students tend to make initial contact with their chosen placement, followed by a formal approach from the appropriate staff member for the programme. As a student, clarify what you want to gain from the placement before it begins, identifying learning outcomes if they are not already in place. Discuss your thoughts with your personal tutor or the module or course leader.

Glossary of terms

Assessment

This is the opportunity to provide feedback, support and guidance, while encouraging the student to identify their learning needs.

Assessment (practical)

This encompasses a variety of methods for assessing practice development, in order to measure the individual's competence to practice. It involves a tripartite approach to learning, involving the student, the clinical assessor and personal tutor. They agree objectives for practice-based learning and review the student's progress towards attaining these aims.

Assessment (formative)

This is an attempt to understand more about the student, discovering the nature and quality of their learning, their strengths and weaknesses, and their individual style of learning.

Assessment (summative)

This determines the extent to which a student has achieved the outcomes and objectives for the programme, either as a whole or a substantial part. It contributes to a grade or award of attainment, related to the stated outcomes of the programme.

Associate or co-mentors

These are other registered nurses or midwives who have not yet undertaken an approved mentor preparation programme; or health care support worker who have been given some additional support and training. All of whom provide opportunities for learning and support for pre-registration students.

Audit

An educational audit involves monitoring, measuring and evaluating clinical placement areas, and related learning resources, ensuring they meet the required standard to support quality student learning.

Clinical placement facilitator or co-ordinator

This is one of the roles that will help to ensure good quality clinical placements. There are many variations in the both the titles and responsibilities of these roles and they could also be called a placement development, link lecturer.

Competency

The regulator (NMC) sets the standards for competence for entry to the NMC register. It defines competence as a holistic concept that includes the combination of skills, knowledge and attitudes, values and technical abilities that underpin safe and effective practice (NMC, 2011).

Learning agreement

This is a vehicle for ensuring that the planning of learning experiences is a mutual undertaking between a learner and their helper, mentor or teacher, and often their peers. As a result of this process, the learner develops a sense of ownership and commitment to their plan.

Lecturer practitioner

This person is a university-based lecturer with responsibility for educational provision in both the classroom and practice areas.

Link lecturer

The role of the link lecturer is to liaise with clinical staff. Their aim is to foster a partnership with the university and practice areas, offering educational advice and support to students and qualified nurses. They monitor placements, undertake the educational audit and inform the university of any changes or developments.

Mentor

A mentor is a nurse, midwife or health visitor who facilitates learning, supervises and assesses students in the practice setting (English National Board/Department of Health, 2001).

Personal tutor

This person is a university appointed lecturer, whose role is to provide a supportive relationship with students throughout their programme of study. They record the student's progress in theory and practice and provide written summaries, as required, throughout the programme, including the student's end of programme reference.

Practice educator

This is one of the roles identified in *Making a difference* (Department of Health, 1999), created to enable skills development in staff within clinical placement areas. Practice educators are teachers of nursing, midwifery or health visiting who make a significant contribution to education in the practice setting, co-ordinating student experiences and their assessment of learning (English National Board/Department of Health, 2001).

Practice placements

These are practice settings approved by the HEI or regulatory body to give students the opportunity to observe or gain practical experience in order to meet the practical competencies required for registration.

Supernumerary status

In relation to students, this means that they shall not, as part of their programme of preparation, be employed by any persons or body under a contract of service to provide nursing care. This means that students are additional to the workforce requirements and staffing establishment figures. However, they must make a contribution to the work of the practice area to enable them to learn how to care for service users.

Quality assurance

Quality assurance encompasses those activities within an organisation that help to identify good practice and prevent poor practice.

Undergraduate education

This is a three year programme of study leading to the award of a first degree.

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Useful websites

RCN Library Subject Guide on Mentorship
www.rcn.org.uk/library/subject-guides/mentorship

British Dyslexia Association
www.bdadyslexia.org.uk

NHS Education for Scotland (NES)
www.nes.scot.nhs.uk

Northern Ireland Practice and Education Council for Nursing and Midwifery (NIPEC)
www.nipec.n-i.nhs.uk

Dyslexia Action
www.dyslexiaaction.org.uk

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