



Royal College
of Nursing

Helping students get the best from their practice placements

A Royal College of Nursing toolkit





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A practice placement is where a nursing or midwifery student applies their knowledge to practice, learns key skills and achieves the required competencies for registration.

This toolkit will help you to think about your placement so that you can get the best from it as well as help you look at what you bring to the placement and what you can expect in terms of your learning experience.

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1

Introduction and definitions

This Royal College of Nursing (RCN) toolkit is designed to enable you to get the best from your practice placement, recognising your own responsibilities alongside those of higher education institutions and placement providers.

A practice placement is where a nursing or midwifery student applies their knowledge to practice, learns key skills and achieves the required competencies for registration. Learning in the contextual setting of clinical practice enables you to confront many of the challenges and issues related to caring. Practice is where lifelong learning is promoted and enhanced.

This toolkit will help you to think about your placement, looking at what you bring to it and what you can expect in terms of your learning experience.

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 supervision. A practice placement has a direct bearing on your ability to work effectively and integrate theory to practice. A mentor will facilitate and assess your learning, enabling the achievement of required learning outcomes and competencies.

Definitions

There are many different titles used for nurses who support students in practice, for example, mentors, assessors, preceptors and practice educators. In order to ensure consistency, the term mentor, as identified by the English National Board (ENB, 2000), is used throughout this document.

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 important for your effective education
- ◆ influence the quality of the practice placements at a local level, with the use of feedback sheets, checklists and involvement in the audit process
- ◆ optimise the support of mentors
- ◆ take personal responsibility for directing your own learning, making the best use of available opportunities in the achievement of competencies for entry to the professional register.

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.

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The importance of effective practice placements

Effective practice placements promote learning and should help you to:

- ◆ meet the statutory and regulatory requirements and, where applicable, European Directives (UKCC, 1987)
- ◆ achieve the required learning outcomes and competencies according to regulatory body requirements for pre-registration education (UKCC, 1999)
- ◆ recognise the diversity of learning opportunities available within health and social care environments
- ◆ 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 patients
- ◆ 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
- ◆ 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
- ◆ reflect contemporary thinking within modern health care to evaluate the effectiveness of care provided, based on research evidence

- ◆ continue to develop your competence in both interpersonal and practical skills
- ◆ give an honest, evaluative feedback of your practice experiences to aid the audit process for the practice placement
- ◆ develop skills in information technology to access information within the placement area.

Practice placements during the pre-registration programme of study should be provided to enable you to 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.

Placement rotations will be within a variety of settings, for example, within NHS acute trusts (hospitals), NHS primary care trusts (community), and the independent and voluntary sectors.

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The responsibilities of stakeholders

Practice placements are a vital component of the student experience. It is important that 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. As students you have a right to expect input and support from key individuals to enable you to identify learning opportunities within the placement. With support, as students you are able to make sense of their practice through the application of theory, constructive feedback and reflection on their clinical practice experiences.

In its *Fitness for Practice* report (1999), the United Kingdom Central Council for Nursing, Midwifery and Health Visiting (UKCC) acknowledged that pre-registration programmes must meet a number of principal stakeholders' needs and expectations. The UKCC provided a clear, on-going set of outcomes for commissioning bodies, higher education institutions, trusts, mentors and students themselves. 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 diploma or a degree.

As pre-registration nursing students, you should achieve the competencies specified by the UKCC by the end of the first year of the common foundation programme and by the end of the branch programme.

The key stakeholders in practice placements

- ◆ Students.
- ◆ Patients/clients cared for within all sectors where health care is provided.
- ◆ The NHS and independent sector.

- ◆ Higher education institutions (HEIs) – staff such as personal tutors, programme directors, cohort leaders and subject/module /academic leaders/link lecturers.
- ◆ Service providers – these are part of the tripartite arrangements, with HEIs/universities and the commissioning body, which 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 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 the student handbooks related to your specific programme of study. The handbook will relate to your practice placements and 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 in that you are there to learn nursing or midwifery
- ◆ ensure you understand the specific expectations of the placement, by enquiring of the placement office or link lecturer before you attend
- ◆ contact the placement
- ◆ act professionally with regard to punctuality, attitude and image, and dress according to uniform policy
- ◆ maintain confidentiality
- ◆ maintain effective communication with patients, 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 tools, assessment, 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

During placement

As a student you have a responsibility to:

- ◆ be proactive in seeking out experiences for your level of practice and competence with the support of your mentor
- ◆ demonstrate a willingness to work as part of the team in the delivery of safe patient care
- ◆ learn to express your needs and adopt a questioning, reflective approach to your learning within the multi-disciplinary team
- ◆ 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
- ◆ 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
- ◆ utilise learning opportunities outside the practice placements and, where possible, work with specialist practitioners
- ◆ identify the role of professionals within other contexts of the organisation or community, for example, in X-ray, pharmacy and outpatients
- ◆ give and receive constructive feedback
- ◆ reflect on your progress to increase self-awareness, confidence and competence

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
- ◆ 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 problems you may have, either within the placement or of a personal nature, that impacts on your experiences
- ◆ ensure that all practice placement documentation and assessments of practice submitted to the HEI are completed on 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

HEIs have a responsibility to:

- ◆ monitor both the capacity and quality of all practice placements to meet statutory and professional body requirements
- ◆ ensure that practice placements meet all standards for the specific programme validated by the HEI
- ◆ undertake joint annual audit of all practice placements
- ◆ take action following 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 that students can readily access support structures whilst in their practice placement, with contact numbers provided in student handbooks
- ◆ 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
- ◆ 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 that 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 that link lecturers keep the practice placements informed of the different programmes undertaken - for example, a degree or diploma - noting that students may have varying requirements, depending on their entry level to the programme
- ◆ monitor that staff are aware of recent research findings and that the theory offered in the classroom is reflected, as far 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.

Personal tutors

As students, in addition to module unit lecturers, you will be assigned personal tutors who 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 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.

Service providers

Service providers have a responsibility to:

- ◆ recognise the student's supernumerary status. This means that 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 that the agreed number of mentors are available for the number of students allocated to the placement at any one time
- ◆ ensure that the environment has a philosophy of 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, wherever possible, 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 within the first week
- ◆ 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 that 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 HEL.

Mentors

Good mentoring depends upon well-planned learning opportunities and the provision of support and coaching for students. However, members tell us, the reality is that many students have 'hit and miss' experiences and consider themselves lucky if they get a good mentor. As a student, be aware of your expectations, make them realistic and understand that 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 some registered nurses to become role models - and you will look to those who you feel demonstrate good examples. The *Fitness for Practice* report (UKCC, 1999) called for students to have access to specialists in all fields who act as role models.

Mentors have a responsibility to:

- ◆ contribute to a supportive learning environment and quality learning outcomes for students
 - ◆ be approachable, supportive and aware of how students learn best
 - ◆ have knowledge and information of the student's programme of study and practice assessment tools
 - ◆ be willing to share their knowledge of patient care
 - ◆ identify specific learning opportunities that are available within the placement area
 - ◆ ensure that the learning experience is a planned process
 - ◆ ensure that time is identified for initial interviews with students in order to assess learning needs and develop a learning agreement or log
 - ◆ identify with students their core competencies and outcomes to be achieved
- ◆ make time to observe students undertaking new skills for the first time and practising newly learnt skills
 - ◆ encourage the application of enquiry-based learning and problem-solving to situations, as well as giving factual information
 - ◆ build into learning opportunities the chance to experience the skills and knowledge of other specialist practitioners
 - ◆ build into the daily routine adequate break times to enable students to enjoy the whole practice learning experience
 - ◆ offer encouragement to students and work in partnership with the multi-disciplinary team in order to provide holistic care
 - ◆ provide time for reflection, feedback and monitoring of students' progress
 - ◆ ensure that students have constructive feedback, with suggestions on how to make further improvements to promote progress
 - ◆ seek evaluative feedback from students at the end of their practice placement experience
 - ◆ be willing to take pride in sharing the student's journey on the path to becoming a registered nurse or midwife.

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Getting the best out of practice placements

With so many challenges and opportunities 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

Prior to placement	Week 1 orientation to placement, assessing and planning the learning process	Agree learning needs	Carry out plan, implement and manage	Check progress, renegotiate plan	Final week – 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:</p> <p>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:</p> <p>What principles from theory am I applying to the learning situation?</p> <p>What am I learning about myself?</p>	<p>Ask:</p> <p>What have I learnt?</p> <p>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.
- ◆ Review the specific outcomes for each placement before you attend.
- ◆ Check your attitudes and expectations of the placement.
- ◆ Identify the dress code for the placement.
- ◆ Find out from other students what they liked best and how they suggest you prepare for the experience.
- ◆ Note the feedback you have from any previous placement.
- ◆ Action any areas for your improvement.
- ◆ Once you have identified where you need to improve, draw on your strengths.
- ◆ Make a note of your attainments over the weeks and state what you want to achieve at each point in time.
- ◆ 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.

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

- ◆ What do you expect of me during the placement?
- ◆ Is there a placement profile?
- ◆ Is there an orientation booklet for the area?
- ◆ Are there particular procedures specific to that area?
- ◆ What are the formal and informal lines of communication and your role in the process?
- ◆ What learning opportunities are available?
- ◆ What resources are available to meet those opportunities?
- ◆ When and how often will you work with me?
- ◆ Will members of the team supervise my undertaking of new skills if you are not available?
- ◆ What skills and health/medical conditions should I review?
- ◆ What skills and procedures will you supervise during the placement?
- ◆ Who do I report to if I am sick? Or if I have an injury?
- ◆ What are the most important things for me to achieve from this placement?
- ◆ When will we meet for the formative and final assessment of practice? Can we set dates?
- ◆ What will I need to prepare before our interview?
- ◆ How will you feed any concerns back to me? Will it be directly or with the link lecturer present?

Points for consideration during the placement

- ◆ Identify the learning opportunities that are available, following discussion with your mentor.
- ◆ Identify your own specific learning needs in relation to each practice placement.
- ◆ Make a plan.
- ◆ Revise the theory learnt on the programme or module and note its applicability to the practice placement.
- ◆ Familiarise yourself with the placement profile and the specific skills of each team member.
- ◆ Identify members of the multi-disciplinary team and how they can contribute to the achievement of your learning needs.
- ◆ Recognise that safety is paramount in clinical practice and seek mentor supervision for procedures you have not undertaken before.
- ◆ Keep a record of your own progress and the development of your confidence and competencies.

Points for consideration when evaluating the placement

- ◆ As every placement will be different, so each evaluation is individual.
- ◆ Learn to evaluate all your practice placement experiences - the good and not so good.
- ◆ Welcome feedback and learn from it.
- ◆ Ask your mentor how you have done - did your nursing care meet professional standards and safety?
- ◆ Identify how you think you have done.
- ◆ Compare your perceptions.
- ◆ Look at setbacks as opportunities for growth.
- ◆ Look for positive situations as you progress through the programme.
- ◆ Listen and connect with others.
- ◆ Remember that learning is a process, not an event.
- ◆ Ask yourself: what have I learnt? What do I need to learn more about?
- ◆ Be honest.
- ◆ Plan for your next placement.

Checklist for evaluating the practice placement

This checklist (page 11) 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 existed 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 patient care was not good
- ◆ where the quality of patient care was excellent.

Do 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. As a student, it is important that you follow the correct channels of communication already established.

PRIOR TO PLACEMENT

Higher Education Institute (HEI) responsibilities	Yes	No	Comments and action taken
You had access to the allocation office or placement support unit			
You were offered accommodation for 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			
You were clear about your roles and responsibilities within the practice placement concerning: <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 patients 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 providers' 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:			
◆ placement name, address, telephone number and contact			
◆ type of placement – patient 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 within the first week			
You had a meeting with your mentor during the first week			
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			

ORIENTATION CONTINUED

Placement providers' responsibilities	Yes	No	Comments and action taken
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			
You knew who would support you in the team, if the mentor was not available			
You had the opportunity to work with your mentor for a minimum of three shifts each week			
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 for at least 30 minutes per week			
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 CONTINUED

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			

ORIENTATION CONTINUED

Link lecturer responsibilities	Yes	No	Comments and action taken
Their contact details and visiting times 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			

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 on-line resources			

ORIENTATION CONTINUED

Clinical team responsibility for care delivery	Yes	No	Comments and action taken
The provision of care for the patients and their carers reflected respect for privacy, dignity, religious and cultural beliefs and practices			
Standards of care delivered to the patients 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 system provided effective support to meet your learning needs			
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			

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Some frequently asked questions

What happens if I need to take time off for sickness during a placement?

You need to notify both your HEI and the placement of your situation, with details of the circumstances. Your HEI will have regulations to identify the amount of sickness absence allowed during your programme of study. If your absence is for more than three consecutive days, you must complete a self-certificate form. If you are absent for longer than eight days, you will need to obtain a certificate from your doctor and this must be submitted to your HEI without delay. If your sickness absence is longer than eight days, ensure you keep in touch with your HEI and follow their procedures.

What access do I have 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.

What help is there if I feel under 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 well-being, 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, which should be able to arrange for confidential support services, including counselling.

Other services offered by the RCN include:

- ◆ Nurseline. This provides an information and advice service, specialising in personal, health and financial problems. They can be contacted on: 020 7409 3463 between 9 am and 1 pm or 2 pm to 5 pm Monday to Friday. Email: Nurseline@rcn.org.uk
- ◆ 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 0845 7697 064 (hours as for Nurseline, as above). Email: counselling@rcn.org.uk

Who pays for 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. Since 1998, some HEIs will pay for three or four uniforms at the programme's outset, while some fund the student to buy two. The cost of a uniform is met within the purchasing contract for pre-registration courses and commissioned degree courses.

Every trust has its own policy on uniforms, with each having different versions – this means that it is difficult to be able to issue a standard uniform for all students. Bear in mind that there is no legal obligation for a uniform to be provided. The law applies only to protective safety equipment, for example, gloves and aprons.

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. The RCN publication *Taking a uniform approach – an RCN guide to selecting the right clothing for nurses* contains some helpful information. To obtain a copy call RCN Direct on: 0845 772 6100 and quote publication code 000 993.

What can I do if I am concerned about safety and manual handling equipment?

You are protected under the Manual Handling and Loads Act (1996) and the Health and Safety at Work Act (1974) which states: "It shall be the duty of every employer to ensure so far as reasonably practicable the health, safety and welfare of all employees." Do not put your health or back at risk if the equipment is unsafe or just not available. If you have a concern, you should not undertake any procedure where you risk your own safety or that of the patient. The 1974 Act also states: "It shall be the duty of every employee whilst at work to take reasonable care for the health and safety of himself and of other persons who may be affected by his acts or omissions at work."

Inform the patient why you cannot move them and tell the nurse in charge of the placement area. Check that a risk assessment has been undertaken on the patient, 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.

What can I do if I am a victim of bullying, harassment, violence or abuse - or I witness this happening to colleagues?

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 are working with employers to raise the awareness of this issue. You may find it useful to read the RCN publication, *Dealing with bullying and harassment at work: a guide for RCN members*. For a copy call RCN Direct on 0845 7726 100 and quote publication code 001 302.

What can I do if I witness 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. 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 patients 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.

Can I take on 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.

What will happen if I fail a practice assessment?

If this occurs, it must be assumed that 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 National Union of Students or your local RCN office.

How do I go about organising an elective placement either at home or overseas?

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.

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 new roles identified in *Making a difference* (Department of Health, 1999) that will help to ensure good quality clinical placements. There are many variations in these roles.

Competency

The regulatory body uses the term competency to 'describe the skills and ability to practice safely and effectively without the need for direct supervision' (*Fitness for Practice*, UKCC, 1999:35)

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 new 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.

Statutory body for nursing and midwifery

From 1 April 2002, the Nursing and Midwifery Council (NMC) became the body responsible for maintaining core regulatory activity for nursing and midwifery education and practice. It replaces the United Kingdom Central Council for Nursing, Midwifery and Health Visiting (UKCC).

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 patients.

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 or four-year programme of study leading to the award of a first degree.

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