

## **Guiding principles for working hours for students undertaking practice placements on healthcare programmes in the Faculty of Health Sciences (Including: Nursing, Trainee Nursing Associates, ODP, Midwifery, Paramedics)**

The following guidance has been produced for students, university staff and placement partners to ensure that there is a consistent approach to managing the working hours of students on healthcare programmes. The guidance has been produced in collaboration by members of the University of Hull practice forum using the Principles of The European Working Time Directive [EWTD] (1998) and with reference to the Royal College of Nursing (2012) document 'A Shift in the Right Direction'.

Please note: There are some slight differences between students on different programmes. The guidance should be presumed to be the same, unless otherwise stated.

Students on healthcare programmes are subject to a number of attendance regulations. These are underpinned by the University of Hull programme regulations and statutory requirements linked to Professional Statutory Regulatory Body (PSRB) standards (NMC and HCPC). Students should be aware that all absences from theory and practice are reported to potential employers in academic references. Many students work additional hours above placement hours in employment this can be exhausting and potentially detrimental to their studies; students undertaking any employment are reminded that attendance at placement supersedes any paid work commitments or shifts.

**Definition of a 'practice' week:** a practice week consists of 37.5 hours, usually made up of five 7.5 hour shifts or the local equivalent in 'long day' shifts. For midwifery students, the practice week may be 30 hours if there is a reading day included.

**Definition of a Placement Supervisor:** this refers to all trainers/supervisors/coordinators/mentors/educators/assessors who are appropriately qualified/suitably prepared to support learners. In the practice placement, learners are provided with a named member of staff who will oversee their learning on placement and is usually responsible for the assessment of the learner's practice. The title of this person varies according to each profession and as such we have used a generic term of placement supervisor.

## **General Principles for Student Working Hours in Practice**

The health and safety of students and the patients they are caring for is paramount when considering shift patterns and hours of work in clinical practice placements. The current European Working Time Directive does not allow employees to average more than 48 hours work per week and states that there should be an 11 hour break between the end of one shift and the beginning of the next. Although students are not bound by the EU Directive, students should only work a weekly hours total of 37.5 hours (defined as a practice week) and no more than 48 hours in any one week. Students should have an 11 hour break between shifts.

Students should comply with the requirements of the professional body that approves their programme. Students are required to participate in 24 hour, 7 days a week care of patients/clients during the course of their programme. This means students will undertake a range of shifts from the outset of their programme and will be expected to work a range of shift patterns, including early, late, night shifts and weekends (where the working patterns of the placement area facilitate this). Some practice placements work predominantly 12.5 hour shifts, and while students are encouraged to attend for the full duration of such shifts, they are not obliged to. Some practice placements have little flexibility in shift patterns particularly if they are a Monday - Friday 9 - 5 service; and GP practice placements restrict students to working a maximum of 10 hours per day.

Students should seek to confirm their placement shift patterns at least two weeks in advance of the placement start date and should document these within the formal record of 'off-duty' in line with the local processes of the practice placement.

- The shifts that students work will be identified by the practice placement and will be influenced by: the normal shift patterns worked in the placement they are allocated to, the working pattern of their placement supervisor and the numbers of students requiring supervision.
- There may be an opportunity in some practice areas for a student to negotiate to work long shifts (to a maximum of 14 hours). Students should not expect to normally work this type of shift, as it may not be appropriate and should only be used when students are required to make up hours. Long shifts can only be worked with the agreement of the placement supervisor. For paramedic trainees, any shift changes must be made through the YAS placement team.
- Students would not normally be expected to work more than 2 consecutive long shifts together. Paramedic trainees may be required to work four 12 hour shifts in a week.

- Students should normally work a minimum of 37.5 hours per week in practice. Working 48 hours per week, should only be in exceptional circumstances rather than the norm. The placement hours will be averaged out over the placement block to enable the student to reach the amount of placement hours required.
- Attendance in clinical practice is recorded by the student in their practice assessment documentation and verified by their Placement Supervisor or other appropriate person. The hours worked (**excluding breaks**) must be recorded in the student's attendance record. For paramedic trainees meal breaks are **not** deducted from their hours worked record. Nursing students must use the provided paper form or use the off-line mobile app template to record hours and have them signed by their supervisor when they work a shift away from the allocated placement. Completion of attendance records in practice should be contemporaneous - it is not good practice to retrospectively complete attendance logs at the end of a placement experience.
- All sickness, compassionate leave and absences must be recorded on the student's attendance record in their practice assessment document.
- Students must inform the placement supervisor by telephone (or by the placement's agreed absence reporting route) of any absence from clinical practice and must also report any absence to the University Student Hub. The student hub should be notified using SID (online Student Information Desk) or alternatively via telephone on 01482 463342.

### **Students' shift hours and breaks in clinical practice**

In order to provide clarity on breaks the University of Hull in agreement with practice partners advises the following:

During an 8 hour shift, a rest period of at least 30 minutes should be taken. Again, the time allocated for this break should not be claimed for in the hours worked. So, if a student works 8 hours, with a 30 minute break, they will record 7.5 hours worked in their attendance record. In addition, a concessionary 15 minutes break during the shift may be taken which can be included in the hours worked.

During a shift exceeding 8 hours an adequate rest period of at least 60 minutes (may be split into two 30 minute breaks) should normally be taken. These breaks should not be claimed for in the hours documented in their attendance record. So, if a student works 12.5 hours, with a one hour rest period, they will record 11.5 hours worked in their attendance record. In addition, a concessionary 15 minutes break during the shift may be taken which can be included in the hours worked. NB: in exceptional

cases, shorter breaks may be taken based on client need. However this should not become routine practice, nor should students routinely use this to shorten their working shift.

Flexibility about when breaks are taken must be negotiated with the placement supervisor in the placement area. In certain circumstances (e.g. attending a woman in labour, being involved in an emergency) timing of breaks may be delayed. However, it is important that students recognise the effects of fatigue on performance and concentration and are aware of the effect that human factors can have on care delivery to avoid any potential risks to patients (Nursing and Midwifery Council, 2018; Royal College of Nursing, 2018a; Royal College of Nursing, 2018b).

### **Night Shifts**

- Students are expected to experience care delivery over the 24 hour period.
- Students are not permitted to attend full days at the University prior to or immediately after a night shift. Therefore students must ensure they change their off-duty should they need to attend University.
- Students may experience night duty from the first placement onwards if appropriate/available.
- Not all placements can offer night duty and therefore students must be certain that they have gained appropriate experience, in the delivery of care over the 24 hour period, prior to the completion of their course.
- Student nurses would not normally be expected to work more than 2 consecutive night shifts together.
- Midwifery students will follow the rostered hours of their sign-off mentor and undertake night duty in all years of the programme.

### **Bank Holidays**

Students have no extra time off placement for bank holidays. They are expected to work 37.5 hours during weeks that include bank holidays. Students may negotiate to take the bank holiday as one of their days off in that week.

## **Annual Leave**

Annual leave is built into the student's healthcare programme and can only be taken in the weeks specified as annual leave in the programme timetable. Students need to be aware that absence from the programme outside of the identified annual leave weeks may result in not meeting PSRB requirements for practice attendance.

## **Adverse Weather**

During incidents of adverse weather it is unlikely that a placement will be closed and students should make safe and reasonable efforts to attend allocated shifts. In advance of travel we advise that students check the Trust or organisation's website for information and the local radio news. We take the view that students should adopt the same professional approach in this situation as we would any member of staff. As such, it is expected that a student makes their own assessment of their safety and that no one else can make this decision on their behalf.

If a student decides it is unsafe or impossible to travel to placement they must telephone the placement to let them know as soon as possible and they are expected to also report this to the Student Hub. The student hub should be notified using SID (online Student Information Desk) or alternatively via telephone on 01482 463342. Students will be recorded as absent for those shifts as the University are required to maintain accurate sickness/absence records for each student. If a placement supervisor advises a student to leave a placement early due to deteriorating weather conditions then the student will be credited with the full shift.

To avoid the requirement for authorised absence the following options can be considered:

- In the first instance a change to scheduled days off or shift pattern should always be requested.
- To ensure students meet the practice requirement for that placement students may wish to negotiate to work an alternative shift when the weather improves.

## **References**

The Working Time Regulations 1998. Available at <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/uksi/1998/1833/contents/made> [accessed 20/09/2018].

Royal College of Nursing (2012) *A shift in the right direction: RCN guidance on the occupational health and safety of shift work in the nursing workforce*. London: Royal College of Nursing.

NMC (2018) *The code. Professional standards of practice and behaviour for nurses, midwives and nursing associates*. London: Nursing and Midwifery Council.

Royal College of Nursing (2018a) *Rest, Rehydrate, Refuel*. London: Royal College of Nursing.

Royal College of Nursing (2018b) Stress and Fatigue. Available at <https://www.rcn.org.uk/clinical-topics/patient-safety-and-human-factors/professional-resources/stress-and-fatigue>  
[Accessed 20/08/2018].