**FAQ’s**

**What is a mentor and what are the responsibilities?**

A Nursing and Midwifery Council (NMC) mentor is a registrant who, following successful completion of an NMC approved mentor preparation programme – or comparable preparation that has been accredited – has achieved the knowledge, skills and competence required to meet defined NMC outcomes.

A mentor is a mandatory requirement for pre-registration nursing and midwifery students.

Mentors who are assessing competence must have met specific NMC outcomes or be supervised by a mentor who has met these outcomes. Those who sign off proficiency must have met the additional criteria to be a sign-off mentor.

As a Mentor, you are responsible and accountable for:

• Organising and co-ordinating student learning activities in practice.

• Supervising students in learning situations and providing them with timely constructive feedback on their achievements.

• Setting and monitoring achievement of realistic learning objectives.

• Assessing total performance – including skills, attitudes and behaviours.

• Providing evidence as required by programme providers of student achievement or lack of achievement.

• Liaising with others (e.g. mentors, sign off-mentors, practice facilitators, practice teachers, personal tutors, programme leaders) to provide feedback, identify any concerns about the student’s performance and agree action as appropriate.

• Providing evidence for, or acting as a sign-off mentors with regard to making decisions about achievement of proficiency at the end of the programme (NMC 2008).

**Why are mentors so important?**

The public have the right to expect that registered nurses are safe and competent in their practice. As a practical assessor, it is your role to ensure that each student nurse that you mentor and qualifies meets these criteria. Mentoring is enshrined in the NMC Code of Conduct (NMC 2008) - you must facilitate students and others to develop their competence - and is fundamental to patient safety (NMC 2010). You are asked to use your professional judgement to ensure that those who enter the register are wholly suitable to do so and as such help to regulate the nursing profession.

**What are the criteria to be a mentor?**

Nurses and midwives who intend to take on the role of mentor must fulfil the following criteria:

• Be registered in the same part or sub-part of the register as the student they are to assess and for the nurses’ part of the register, be in the same field of practice (adult, mental health, learning disabilities or children’s). Please also see NMC Standards for Pre Registration Nurse Education (2010).

• Have developed their own knowledge, skills and competence beyond registration i.e. been registered for at least one year.

• Have successfully completed an NMC approved mentor preparation programme (or a comparable programme).

• Have the ability to select, support and assess a range of learning opportunities in their area of practice.

• Be able to support learning in an interprofessional environment – selecting and supporting a range of learning opportunities for students from other professions.

• Have the ability to contribute to the assessment of other professionals under the supervision of an experienced assessor from that profession.

• Be able to make judgements about competence/proficiency of NMC students on the same part of the register, and in the same field of practice, and be accountable for such decisions.

• Be able to support other nurses and midwives in meeting Continuing Professional Development (CPD) needs in accordance with the Code: Standards for conduct, performance and ethics for nurses and midwives (NMC 2008).

• To remain a mentor-

* Attend an annual update
* You must have mentored 2 students in 3 years
* Demonstrated enhanced practice through 8 domains (see NMC Standards to Support Learning and Assessment in Practice 2008)
* Triennial Review –appraisal, evidence required

**What is a sign-off mentor?**

A sign-off mentor is a nurse or midwife who, having met the additional criteria can make judgements about whether a student has achieved the required standards of proficiency for safe and effective practice for entry to the NMC register. They are required for students on their 2nd placement Yr3.

The role of the sign-off mentor is to:

•Meet for 1 additional hour per week – this is only for the sign off part of the placement at the end placement 2 Yr3.

• Keep record of meetings (document within the student’s document and for your own personal records to assist with triennial review).

• Review the students On-going Assessment Record.

• Provide feedback on the progress of your student.

• Be accountable for your decision.

• Verify student has maintained competence.

• Complete sign-off documentation.

**What are the criteria to become a sign-off mentor?**

Placement providers must ensure that a nurse or midwife designated to sign-off proficiency for a particular student at the end of a programme is:

• Identified on the local register as a sign-off mentor or practice teacher.

• Registered on the same part of the register.

• Working in the same field of practice as that in which the student intends to qualify.

• Have an accredited mentor qualification.

And additionally to be a sign-off mentor they must have:

• Clinical currency and capability in the field in which the student is being assessed.

• A working knowledge of current programme requirements, practice assessment strategies and relevant changes in education and practice for the student they are assessing.

• An understanding of the NMC registration requirements and the contribution they make to the achievement of these requirements.

• An in-depth understanding of their accountability to the NMC for the decision they must make to pass or fail a student when assessing proficiency requirements at the end of a programme.

• Mentors who undertake post-registration mentor training AFTER September 2007 must have been supervised on at least three occasions for signing off proficiency by an existing sign-off mentor.

• A working knowledge of current programme requirements, practice assessment strategies and relevant changes in education and practice for the student they are assessing.

• The achievement of these requirements (NMC, 2008).

**What are the NMC requirements to support learning in practice?**

The NMC requires mentors to support learning in practice for several reasons:

• Provide support and guidance to the student when learning new skills or applying new knowledge.

• Act as a resource to the student to facilitate learning and professional growth.

• Directly manage the student’s learning in practice to ensure public protection.

• Directly observe the student’s practice, or use indirect observation where appropriate, in order to ensure that NMC defined outcomes and competencies are met.

There is further guidance within the NMC document Standards to Support Learning in Practice regarding requirements that enable effective mentorship to be realised –p 31.

**Who are the Practice Placement Managers (PPM) or Clinical Placement Facilitator (CPF) and what is their role?**

There is at least one PPM working in each Trust. A PPM is a Senior Nurse or Healthcare Professional with management responsibility who works for the Trust to support mentors and students in clinical practice. They have a responsibility for placement quality and capacity. The PPMs are the link with the universities who provide the diploma/degree courses and provide a link with the Strategic Health Authority or now known LETB/LETC. The PPMs all work differently depending on the size of their organisation, number of placement areas and the number of students allocated to placement.

**What hours should my student work?**

The rule of thumb should be that the student works the same shifts as their mentor whenever possible and they should be given their off-duty rather than be allowed to ‘choose’ what they would like to work – this will give the student access to all possible learning activity with their mentor. Wherever possible, give students their rota in as much advance as you can so that they can make sure that they have all the necessary arrangements in place to ensure that they have 100% attendance. Please always make sure that all student off-duty is documented with the ward staff off-duty or within the work diaries of healthcare professionals – this not only provides a clear record of attendance it is also a good way to demonstrate that your students are supernumerary. Documented off-duty will also provide managers with accurate information in the case of an emergency (such as a fire) and will give a clear audit trail where any investigation may be required.

Students are SUPERNUMERARY when on placement but this does not mean that their role is purely observational. Students should participate in all aspects of patient care under supervision but must not be counted in the workforce numbers. Students must experience the 24 hour cycle of care including early, late and night shifts – this should also include weekends. Long days can be worked at the discretion of the ward manager and/or the mentor if the student wishes to work them (no more than 12hrs).If you have any doubts or concerns, please contact your Practice Team.

Students may have individual concerns about meeting shift patterns and this must always be negotiated with the mentor and/or the ward manager. Should a student request specific shifts, days or hours or state that the university has given them permission to do such shifts, please contact your Practice Team who can confirm if this is indeed the case. All students are on a full-time programme and are expected to work full-time hours (37.5hrs a week) for the whole of their placement experience. It is not acceptable that students request to work less than this.

The NMC require student nurses to undertake NO LESS than 2300 hours in clinical practice (in 3 yrs) and these hours are carefully calculated by the universities when devising the programmes.

Some areas may work long days and many varieties of shifts. It is important to remember that student must work the full 37 ½ hours whatever those shifts consist of.

The NMC state that students must spend a minimum of 15 hours per week with their mentor (NMC, 2008) and it is important to remember that if there are any issues around shifts or off duty you should contact your Practice Team who will be able to advise the correct course of action.

Study time- In the Diploma course they are allowed up to 7.5hrs a week of practice related study (could relate to speciality they are working in or their practice documentation).

In the new BNURS degree course they have been allocated evidence weeks to complete their allocated practice work in their PAD document and any other work deemed appropriate by their mentor.

**Can I give my student additional study time whilst on placement?**

Students must work in practice at all times when on placement. The students can leave the placement for learning opportunities, but this must always be negotiated and agreed as appropriate with the mentor BEFOREHAND.

Should you have any concerns about a students’ progress you should ensure that they spend as much time as possible working with you in the placement area in order that you can closely support and supervise them.

Tutorials – students may need to visit lecturers in order to discuss assignment or exam issues. Tutorials must be in the students own time and should only be granted in placement time at the discretion of the mentor and/or ward manager.

Please contact your Practice Team if you are unsure about any of these issues.

**Who should I inform if my student is off sick?**

The vast majority of students are very conscientious and keen to make the most of their placement opportunities, but if you do find that students are not turning up or going off sick without having informed the placement area, then please call your Practice Team as soon as possible.

Students must report their sickness from placement to their university as soon as they know that they will miss a shift (Placement Learning Unit (PLU)- details in their practice documentation).

As well as contacting the university the student should contact the placement area and speak to the person in charge. They must follow the Trust’s policy on sickness and absence at all times. If you have any doubts or concerns, then a call to the university (PLU) to report sickness or absence will always be welcomed.

It is not acceptable for the student to call after the shift has started and definitely not acceptable not to phone at all. If the student does not turn up for duty, they must be marked as absent on the off duty and the in the students’ document. A call should be made to the Practice Team to let them know about this so they can follow it up.

Reporting fit – once recovered, the student should inform both placement and the university that they are fit to work. Students who are off sick for 7 days or more are required to submit sick notes to the university.

Making up of time- They must make it up in their allocated retrieval of hrs period at the end of the yr in yr1 and yr2 and in yr3 they must make it up as they go along (they can work upto 50hrs a week) or in their holidays (as there is no allocated retrieval of hrs period in yr3) or if they have a lot to make up they must come up with a plan with their Personal Tutor and Practice Team and may have to make it up at the end of their course (which may delay them getting their PIN number).

**Are students allowed special leave or carers leave?**

This should only be granted by the university. This ensures that the university and the personal tutors are aware of any issues whilst the students are on placement and enables the student to have the full support of the faculty staff on return to the university. Please inform your Practice Team so they can also support the student in practice. Seconded students must have their leave granted by their line managers and the placement area and PPM should be informed as soon as possible.

**If a bank holiday falls within placement are the students to work it?**

If a bank holiday falls within placement time, the students must work it if allocated to do so. It is not given as holiday. Their annual leave entitlement has already been calculated within their programme and their practice hours worked out accordingly.

If your area does not work on a bank holiday, please give your student some learning activity to complete whilst they are off. If in doubt please contact your Practice Team.

**How much time can my student have off from placement?**

ALL students are expected to be on placement for 100% of their allocation. If your student has not attended 100% then they can indeed fail the placement. As their mentor you must decide if you have worked with your student for sufficient time for them to be signed off (NMC states should work 40% of placement time with mentor).

**What should I do if my student has another job?**

Some students do have genuine hardship difficulties and need to work additional hours to supplement their bursary or grant in order that they can complete the course. Any additional work MUST NOT impact on the students’ placement and special dispensation should not be granted for the whole of placement to accommodate specific regular requests.

For example if your student states that they work every Saturday (or any other day) – you cannot give them every Saturday off if you are working some of those days. Not only are you reducing the learning time for your student but you must be seen to treat ALL students equally. Many other clinical areas may not be able to grant such a request for a variety of reasons and this could be seen as inequitable practice. Equally you could well be condoning a breach of the European Working Time Directive – the student is already employed on a full time course and there may also be a danger that you are facilitating the student in working back to back shifts without realising so please exercise caution.

If there are any doubts or the placement area cannot accommodate student requests then please contact your Practice Team.

**What do you do if you think your student is struggling or failing in practice?**

If you have any concerns about a students’ progress, please contact your Practice Team as soon as possible - you do not have to wait until the intermediate interview/progress review to do this, it can be done immediately.

It is also essential that the student is made aware as soon as possible that they are not achieving the required standard and that you record your concerns within the students’ practical assessment document.

An action plan may be required and your Practice Team can work with both the mentor and the student in developing the plan to provide the student with every opportunity to achieve in the remaining time in placement.

It is vital that you remember that 50% of the course is practice based and as a mentor, you are accountable for your decision when passing a student as ‘competent in practice’. It is not acceptable to pass the student assuming that a future placement will ‘give them more of a chance’. Passing students in the hope that they will improve later in the course has consequences for patients, clients, students and future mentors (Duffy, 2004).

If you make a decision that a student is under achieving, failing or not performing at the required standard/level of their training then please makes sure that you have the Practice Team involved.

**If a student is unsuccessful in practice, what happens after they leave placement?**

Practical competence is considered to be as equally important as academic ability in assessing students on pre-registration courses and the university ensures that students have passed their placements before progressing through their course. They will get another chance to retrieve placement and if they don’t they will not be able to progress to the next yr. If this happens the University will decide what options they student has open to them.

**Do you have concerns about a student’s conduct whilst on placement?**

Should you have any concerns about the conduct of a student whilst on placement i.e. poor attendance/punctuality/refusing to work shifts, poor attitude please contact the Practice Team.

The University treat issues around poor student conduct issues very seriously and have strict processes to follow regarding fitness to practice. If you have any concerns regarding conduct, please raise them with the Practice Team and they will help you make a decision as to the course of action.

**Does the university have uniform guidelines for students?**

The universities have strict uniform guidelines of which all the students are expected to adhere to. Students must follow the Dress Code policy of the Trust they are working in at all times. Where placements do not require the students to wear a uniform, the student should be advised of the local guidelines in respect to the dress code. Students should at all times have their university ID badge with them and displayed so that it is visible to both staff and patients/clients. If you are concerned that your student may not be adhering to the uniform policy or local dress code, please approach them first and advise them of your concern. If the student then fails to dress appropriately you may seek advice from the Practice Team.

**What are my main responsibilities when completing the student’s documentation?**

The documentation of a student’s clinical experience is crucial. The aim of the assessment process is to demonstrate fitness to practice. The documents for the university are all very similar in structure and all contain learning outcomes and activities, Essential Skills, or proficiency statements for each particular placement.

It is the responsibility of the student to complete the document with the support of their mentor. They MUST also have it with them on every shift – you may not wish to look at it on every shift, but other clinical staff may wish to sign individual skills they have witnessed or elements of clinical practice.

Only YOU as the mentor can sign the interviews and judge them to have passed or not, other clinical staff can sign off skills if they observe the student in practice.

There are three key times when you MUST meet with your student, review their document and record your meeting within the document :

The Initial Interview

The midway Interview (intermediate or progress review depending on course they are)

The Final Interview

Although the student is responsible for completing the main parts of the document, as a mentor, you are responsible for verifying its content and applying judgement to ensure that it is completed correctly.

As the mentor it is vital that you complete and sign the relevant parts of the document where requested. When the student has completed their placement they are required to return the document to their university to demonstrate their achievement in practice.

Remember that anything you write in the students’ document should be considered as important as when you write in the patients notes. Please do not sign a document that has been written in pencil, do not use ticks and make sure that you sign and print your name. Please see the guidelines at the start of the document for more information.

**How do I know what my student has been studying in university prior to placement?**

If you are unsure which module or part of the course the student is undertaking you can refer to the placement handbook. Alternatively ask the Practice Team.

**What are mentors accountable for?**

To assess students - using different assessment strategies, for making judgements on the competence of students – safety, socialise students to the team, support students to identify learning needs, supervision of students – direct/indirect and when on annual leave or day off (may need an associate mentor), to give ongoing constructive feedback , complete documentation in a timely manner i.e. interview scheduling and action planning as necessary, making sure all student nursing entries are countersigned by a RN, refer/defer or not allowing the student to progress(depending on the course they are on) if they do not meet the criteria and work in partnership with PPM & Practice Team.

**How do I know how my student performed on previous placements?**

All students will have an Ongoing Assessment Record (OAR). This will contain a summary of their placement experiences throughout their course. You need to see this record to help you to identify any learning needs and to gain a perspective on their current level of experience and performance. You will also need to complete parts of this.

If you are a sign-off mentor assessing a student in their Sign Off placement , it is expected that you review the OAR as a formality during your weekly meetings. This will assist you in making your final judgement about the students’ suitability and to verify that the student has maintained competence to enter the professional register. You will also need to complete parts of this.

**How can I help my student to plan their learning?**

Make sure they have completed their Practice Development Plan (for the BNURS course) and make sure it has appropriate and timely and sign it off when appropriate.

**How many interviews do I have to do with my student?**

The students are required to have a formal interview with their mentor three times during placement:

• The Initial Interview – this should be done on the first day of placement but as a minimum before the end of the first week. This is your opportunity to welcome your student, introduce them to members of the team and introduce the student to the placement routine and ensure that they have access to or are introduced to the local placement policies and procedures and they should be informed of action to take in case of an emergency. You should discuss the learning opportunities available as well as any developmental needs that the student discloses. Also, please advise your student who will support them when you are not on duty.

• The Interim Interview (called the intermediate or progress review depending on the course) – this should be half way through the placement and gives the mentor and the student the opportunity to discuss progress. When the student presents their document to you for their interim interview, please make sure that they have completed their self-assessment so that you can gauge how they think they are progressing. If they present a completely blank document to you, send them away to complete the necessary sections.

If you have any concerns at all about students’ progress YOU DO NOT NEED TO WAIT UNTIL MIDWAY - YOU CAN DO THIS INTERVIEW SOONER. Please do however contact your Practice Team who will help you to formulate an action plan which will identify to the student the areas they need to work on and improve in order to be able to reach the required level of competence.

• The Final Interview/assessment – the final interview should be completed during the final week. All interviews should be completed in the presence of the student so please do not take the document home! The student should only be signed as up to the required standard if you are happy that you or a colleague has directly observed a students’ performance in practice and that the student is able to answer questions about their practice.

Please make sure that you sign all parts of the document, especially the final interview page where you can make constructive comments about your students’ performance. This is the sheet that will go in to the Ongoing Assessment record and will be seen by other mentors, especially the final sign-off mentor on their final Sign Off placement.

The interviews give you the opportunity to review the performance of your student. You can make the process a lot less time consuming by reviewing the document throughout the placement (signing off Essential Skills as you go along) and giving feedback on progress as part of your daily contact with the students. Students do realise how difficult it is for mentors to have the time to review their documents, but equally can feel very despondent if the mentor dismisses the importance of it or fails to read/complete it correctly. Many students state that ‘the mentor has informed them that they do not know how to complete the document’. If you are unsure please do not hesitate to contact your Practice Team and they will happily guide you through the process.

**Do students have to achieve all of the skills in their document?**

Students have skills (among other work) that they have to achieve within their practice documents. As a mentor it is important that you familiarise yourself with the skills within the students practice document to help them to achieve them. Please advise the student at their initial interview which skills are available in the placement area. If you feel the skills listed are not available in your area, please ask your Practice Team for advice. Remember the skills can be signed off by simulation, discussion and other methods and not just observation.

**When should an action plan take place and what for?**

This should take place as soon as possible so as to give the student as long as possible to improve matters. An action plan is formulated when there is any issue relating to the student’s performance.

**Who can action plan?**

The mentor action plans the student with a Practice Team member (where possible this should be the Academic Practice Team member) being to advise and support both the student and mentor.

**How do you action plan?**

Using SMART action planning- Specific, Measurable,Achievable,Realistic, Time limited. This must be done in partnership with a member of Practice Team . Refer to skill(s) in Practice Document or issue (Professional Conduct) under discussion with student, document on action Plan, set objectives to achieve outcome, agree evidence required & agree resources needed, set a date/targets, review weekly/regularly for monitoring of progress and document, date formal assessment/final interview and ensure and document student knows they may be referred.

**In what situation could a student fail their placement?**

Failure to achieve skills required for placement, failure to maintain previously achieved skills, failure to abide by Trust, organisation or University policy & procedures, failure to act in an appropriate manner, any student causing harm to a patient should be removed from practice and Practice Team should be informed at the earliest opportunity and they will inform they appropriate personnel. They will be referred to a Suitability Panel if it relates fitness to practice.

**Do students evaluate their experience in practice?**

Yes - All students are given the opportunity to evaluate their placement .

Students should also be reminded that should they have any concerns and wish to highlight poor practice whilst on placement they should speak to their Practice Team and they will follow the local Trust Whistle Blowing Policy, and report their concerns in a timely manner as highlighted in the appropriate policies and procedures.

**How can I contact the Practice Team?**

Details are on the website and should also be on all placement areas. If you can not get hold of one of them you try the other people within the team whether they are academic or Trust based.

**Are the students visited by their university tutors whilst they are on placement?**

There are academic Tutors on your Practice Team who have hrs dedicated to supporting students and mentors in practice. Personal Tutors may at times also visit their students in practice e.g. for the progress review interview. If you wish to discuss a particular issue or concern with a tutor, please check the students’ practice document front page as well as your Practice Team details as this should contain the relevant contact information of the tutor.

**How do the placement areas know the students are coming?**

The students are allocated to placements by the Practice Team (PPM/CPF and Academic Practice Team members) and they are then inputted onto evision by the PLU. The placement area will either receive allocation reports or the placement area will be able to access the system themselves to view which students and how many are coming (this will vary dependent on Trust).

**If a student approaches me and informs me that they have a disability, what should I do?**

Permanent staff and students at all levels may be working with a recognised disability. If a student informs you that they have a disability, and that they have informed their university, they will probably have an action plan or at least a plan of what they require as additional support whist they are in clinical practice. This will be different to what support they have been offered in theory at the University. In practice it will be very much about what is deemed reasonable for the service. If in doubt, please ask your students permission to contact the Practice Team to liaise with the relevant university staff to forge a plan of action.

**What should I do if my student informs me that they are pregnant?**

Inform the manager of the placement area, encourage the student to inform their personal tutor and make sure that you follow local policy. This will usually entail the completion of a risk assessment. A risk assessment is also required to be completed by their Personal Tutor. If you are unsure about their fitness to work contact the Practice Team for further advice and support.

**I haven't had a mentor for a few yrs can i still be a mentor?**

If you had an accredited mentorship qualification then you will just need to have a mentor update and then you will be able to mentor again. If you don’t then you will have to prove that you can meet the 8 domains as set out by the NMC Standards to Support Learning and Assessment in Practice. If you are unsure contact your PPM/CPF or other Practice Team member for advice.

**I am struggling to work with my student because i am part time. What can I do?**

The NMC state that the student must have worked at least 40% of their placement with their mentor. If your part time this maybe difficult. Allocation of an Associate Mentor (2nd mentor) may help with this as you will be able to share the student.

**Can i be involved in the interview process for student nurse training?**

Yes, speak to the Practice Team who can put you in touch with the University representative that organises the interview panels.

The university (in partnership with Trust representatives) does prepare the students for clinical practice. They provide sessions to explain to them how to complete their practice document, what to expect in practice and address any concerns they may have before they come out to placement. They are also many support and training sessions and systems in place for when they are out on placement.

If there is anything that you are not sure about, if you would like to discuss any specific issues, have any questions or just need some advice or support, please do not hesitate to contact your Practice Team.

If your student is struggling please make contact with your Practice Team as soon as possible – the earlier the better, your Practice Team will be happy to advise you.

**REFERENCES/USEFUL INFORMATION**

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SLAIP (2008)- <http://www.nmc-uk.org/Documents/Standards/nmcStandardsToSupportLearningAndAssessmentInPractice.pdf>

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Standards for Pre-Registration Nursing Education (2010)- <http://standards.nmc-uk.org/PublishedDocuments/Standards%20for%20pre-registration%20nursing%20education%2016082010.pdf>

Duffy (failing to fail)- <http://www.nmc-uk.org/Documents/Archived%20Publications/1Research%20papers/Kathleen_Duffy_Failing_Students2003.pdf>

RCN toolkit for mentors- <http://www.rcn.org.uk/__data/assets/pdf_file/0008/78677/002797.pdf>