

## The Practice Assessment Process for Nursing Students

N.B. Mentors should have an awareness of the Standards for pre-registration nursing education (NMC, 2010)

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## **Approval and monitoring of the practice learning environment**

Approval of a practice learning environment is undertaken through the educational audit process. When a potential practice learning environment is identified an academic member of staff from the University will meet with the placement provider to discuss the opportunities available for students within the setting and the potential for staff to act as mentors. If it is felt that an area would be suitable, an educational audit of the area will be undertaken through an online self-assessment process. The academic will review all evidence in support of the self-assessment at this point. It is usual to have actions identified following an initial set up of a placement area, as there will not be any evidence of student feedback which requires constant monitoring.

All potential mentors will be identified and provided with a mentor update, which provides information about the assessment process and the curriculum. Mentors will then be annotated to the live mentor register and can be allocated students.

After the initial audit the area completes a self-evaluation annually and a 10% sample of placements are visited by academic staff to review the evidence in support of the self-evaluation. The NMC require an educational audit to be completed biennially.

At the end of each placement experience, students are required to complete an evaluation of the quality of the learning experience. Evaluations are a good way of identifying whether or not the learning opportunities available to students are appropriate and whether students are adequately supported.

There will be occasions when individual students have not enjoyed their experience in a particular placement area. However, quality is generally assessed through the collation of a number of evaluations rather than individual evaluations.

It is important that placement areas act upon the feedback from student evaluations to improve the quality of the learning experience and that this is recorded in the form of an action plan, which is available as an online action plan. Evaluations form an important part of the educational audit process, which is an NMC requirement.

Individuals within each area are identified with specific responsibility for accessing the online educational audit, student evaluation feedback and allocation reports. If you are unsure who these individuals are within your area please ask your manager or a one of the university/practice support staff.

## Hub and Spoke Model of Practice Learning

Each period of practice learning (each year) will consist of an identified 'hub' placement and 'pathway' (spoke) placements. A nurse mentor who has completed specific preparation in assessing students, which meets the NMC requirements, is responsible for ongoing supervision and assessment in practice settings and in simulation (the hub mentor). A hub mentor can have up to three students at any one time. Other registered professionals (pathway mentors/supervisors) who have been suitably prepared can supervise and contribute towards the assessment of nursing students (NMC, 2010).

Mentor(s) on the hub placement are responsible for completing the interview/assessment schedules: initial interview, progress review and final interview. Following the Progress Review the hub placement mentor will decide whether or not an action plan is required to support the achievement of remaining outcomes. Concerns identified prior to the Progress Review should be actioned as soon as they occur by the mentor/supervisor in whatever practice learning setting the student is in, it is not necessary to wait for the Progress Review. Support should be sought from the university/practice support staff when concerns are raised and action planning is required.

In some placement areas a student may be allocated a second mentor who has also met the SLAiP requirements to be a live mentor. This mentor can sign the student documentation in the absence of the first mentor. An associate mentor may also be identified. An associate mentor is a registered nurse who has not met the SLAiP requirements. Associate mentors can contribute towards the assessment of the individual essential skills clusters but cannot complete the overall assessment at the progress review and final interview stages. This must be undertaken by a mentor who has met the SLAiP requirements and is currently live on the mentor register.

In year one the hub placement mentor can be any relevant registered professional who has received appropriate training, in year two the hub placement mentor must be a registered nurse and in year three the sign-off mentor must be a registered nurse in the same field of nursing as the student.

Students must be supervised by their mentor in the practice setting for at least 40% of the time for a valid assessment to be completed. The sign-off mentor must also have the equivalent of one extra hour of protected time per week per student, which can be used to familiarise themselves with the requirements of the practice assessment document, provide feedback on progress to students, review the student's progress with meeting the requirements of an action plan.

At the final interview point, at the end of each year, the hub placement mentor is responsible for deciding whether or not the student has achieved all of the practice requirements for progression to the next level (year). The hub placement mentor in year three will be the sign-off mentor with responsibility for confirming that the student has met all of the practice assessment requirements for entry to the NMC register.

The student will attend pathway (spoke) placements during the weeks between the hub placement dates. These pathway placements will usually be between one and four weeks and are designed to give the student breadth of experience. The mentor/supervisor during these pathway placements can assess competence on individual aspects of the Essential Skills Clusters. The assessment level required is specified in the practice assessment document and is different for each year. Any supervisor on a pathway placement who is not a registered nurse mentor should have received guidance regarding the completion of the assessment document and should seek support from the university/practice support staff when any queries arise.

The student must maintain consistency in their level of performance. If they have previously been assessed as competent in one or more of the Essential Skills Clusters by a pathway supervisor, this decision can be changed by the hub placement mentor at a later date if the mentor has sufficient evidence to support this decision. The university/practice support staff should be contacted when this occurs.

## Continuous Assessment

The assessment of practice is a continuous process and should not just happen during formal interviews. To increase the reliability of the assessment of the student's practical ability, a wide range of evidence should be reviewed:

- A team approach should be used to review the student's progress and the views of all members of the inter-professional team that the student has had contact with should be taken into consideration. However, mentors must be mindful of maintaining student confidentiality.
- The views of service users and their families must be taken into consideration where possible.
- Self-assessment is also an important part of the learning and assessment process and students must ensure that they reflect on their own progress and achievement throughout each placement experience.

Sample practice assessment documents with guidance regarding completion can be accessed from this [link](#). Within all documents the sections within tables that need to be completed by the mentor/supervisor are indicated by a triple border.

## Levels of Performance, Supervision and Practice

The *levels of performance, supervision and practice* change for each year indicating a student's development from greater direct supervision required in year 1 to more indirect supervision in year 3. These levels have been produced to give the mentor/supervisor a better understanding of the requirements for students in different stages of the programme. Access to these documents can be obtained from this [page](#)

It is essential that students are assessed against the required level. It is also essential that mentors recognise the requirement for greater direct supervision in year 1, when the student's skills and knowledge are in the early stages of development. Whilst students are required to participate in all aspects of care, they should not simply be allocated to work with health care assistants/care support workers with no or little supervision or direction from the mentor/supervisor. It is important during these early stages of the programme that students receive tuition and supervision from registered nurses so that the skills acquired are of a good standard.

In general:

- By the end of year one students should be able to recognise the needs of a patient/service-user, coordinate and deliver care of a good standard, demonstrating a good knowledge base.
- By the end of year two, students should be able to coordinate and deliver care to a small group of patients/service-users.
- By the end of year three, students should be able coordinate and deliver care to a group of patients/service-users within a service.

At all of these stages, the student must be adequately supervised, must feedback to the mentor/supervisor throughout the shift and be given constructive feedback from the mentor/supervisor throughout a shift regarding their performance.

## Ongoing achievement record

The NMC Standards to Support Learning and Assessment in Practice (NMC, 2008a) requires that:

*'An ongoing achievement record including comments from mentors must be passed from one placement to the next to enable judgements to be made about the student's progress'*

The achievement record:

- is integral to the assessment process
- should not duplicate assessment
- is a summary of strengths and areas for development
- must be presented to the mentor at the commencement of every placement and every practice interview, including the progression points at the end of years one and two and the sign-off point at the end of year 3.

The Ongoing Achievement Record (OAR) should be reviewed at the start of the placement to identify any specific learning needs that the student may have and should be completed by the designated mentor at the end of each placement. Feedback within the OAR, therefore, needs to be constructive so that the next mentor/sign-off mentor can identify the student's individual strengths and weaknesses.

The sign-off mentor is responsible and accountable for making the final assessment of the student's overall proficiency and fitness to practise, and will confirm that the student has successfully completed all practice requirements. The Ongoing Achievement Record (OAR) should help to inform this decision and, therefore, needs to contain adequate detail from previous mentors regarding the student's performance. All actions must be taken with the full knowledge of the student. Mentors should not keep their own separate student progress records, everything should be contained within the PAD and OAR (NMC, 2008a).

## Declaration of Good Health and Good Character

Once the student has achieved all of the requirements of the programme, for both theory and practice, the head of the programme within the University is required to sign a declaration of good health and good character for the NMC before the student is entered on to the NMC register.

**Test your knowledge and understanding of this section by answering the following questions:**

1. When undertaking a student assessment the mentor should
  - a. not take into account any previous feedback from placements
  - b. look at previous feedback from placements but not allow this to cloud the assessment during this placement
  - c. only ask the student to indicate how well they have performed on previous placements
  - d. use the ongoing achievement record and the current practice assessment document to review performance to date and identify any themes
2. What is the minimum amount of time that mentors should spend supervising students either directly or indirectly?
  - a. 100% of the time
  - b. 75% of the time
  - c. 50% of the time
  - d. 40% of the time
3. Under the NMC requirements to support learning in practice what is the maximum number of students a mentor can support at any one time?
  - a. 1
  - b. 2
  - c. 3
  - d. 4
4. As a registered nurse do you have to undertake any additional training requirements to become a mentor?
  - a. Yes
  - b. No
5. A hub placement mentor in year two can be:
  - a. Any registered professional with appropriate training
  - b. Any registered healthcare professional with appropriate training
  - c. A registered nurse from any field of nursing
  - d. A registered nurse from the same field of nursing as the student
6. Who can complete the progress review and final assessment in a student's practice assessment document?
  - a. Any registered professional
  - b. Any registered nurse
  - c. An associate mentor
  - d. A mentor who is live on the mentor register



7. What level of supervision should be provided by mentors over the three years of the programme?
- a. Close direct supervision in year one, decreasing to more indirect supervision in year three
  - b. Close direct supervision throughout the three years
  - c. Indirect supervision in year one, leading to close direct supervision in year three
  - d. Indirect supervision throughout the three years

Answer sheets can be found on the Mentor update pages.