



# Healthcare Science student support guidance during COVID-19 outbreak

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## Purpose of this guidance

The COVID-19 pandemic means we are in unprecedented times with significant pressures being placed upon our health and care services.

This guidance document is aimed at providing information to Healthcare Science (HCS) Practitioner Training Programme (PTP) students in England on what this means for them during this time. The guidance is focused on how students on National School of Healthcare Science (NSHCS) PTP degrees can continue to study and support the health and care system during this time of emergency.

**This document concerns the following professions:**

- **Audiology**
- **Blood sciences**
- **Cardiac sciences**
- **Cellular sciences**
- **Genetics**
- **Infection sciences**
- **Neurophysiology**
- **Respiratory and Sleep Physiology**
- **Transfusion & Transplantation Science**

**Students training on Biomedical Science or other relevant science degrees are excluded from this guidance and should consult with their university about how they can contribute to the COVID-19 response.**

This is a fast-changing and emerging situation and advice may be subject to further development. Therefore, these principles should be used in conjunction with advice and guidance from both students' higher education institutions, regulators e.g. the Health and Care Professions Council (HCPC), professional bodies, and trade unions.

**We recommend students also refer to the [Nation School of Healthcare Science website](#) for further information.**

## Overview

We have heard from many of you asking how you can support services during this time and in response we have worked collaboratively with the regulators, Professional Bodies, Government departments, NHS Employers and trade unions to consider how best to support you to use the skills and expertise you have in the safest possible way.

It is important that we recognise the different experience and skills of scientific students depending on the point of their journey through their studies. This guide therefore provides:

- A summary of the position and options for students on PTP degrees accredited by the NSHCS:
  - the first year of their PTP
  - year 2 PTP who have not completed all their clinical placements
  - final year PTP students
- A set of more general frequently asked questions providing further information to support students during this time.

## Students in their first year of their PTP degree

### Overview

Students in year one will continue with their studies and remain on their programme. However, the nature of the programme will be adapted so that students will see their academic studies continue but their clinical placement time will normally be paused. The method of academic delivery may change, this will be the responsibility of the University to decide. As now, you may volunteer or undertake paid work within a healthcare setting while maintaining your academic study if you wish to do so. In line with current guidelines, volunteering or paid work will not normally be counted towards practice hours and experience.

### What this means for your education programme?

As set out above, you will continue to undertake your academic studies in line with the current programme via the distance/online learning approaches agreed with your university.

However, due to the pause on clinical placements you may not be able to complete the usual level of practice hours in your first year, but you should not be concerned about this. The NSHCS and Regulators will work closely with your university (or other education institution) to assess what this means for you and how you can be supported to reach the required number of practice hours across the remaining period of your course.

### Will this have a financial impact on students?

The Student Loans Company (SLC) have issued the following guidance which will continue to be updated: <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/slc-coronavirus-covid-19-update>.

SLC is continuing to support students, universities and colleges and they will be providing further updates, as necessary. You should not be required to pay for university accommodation after it has been closed or you have been advised to leave campus. SLC have confirmed that students will receive their scheduled or next instalment of their maintenance loan at the planned start of their summer term, regardless of whether their university or provider has made alternative arrangements for teaching.

### Can I still apply for student finance?

If you are studying now or you will be starting a full-time, undergraduate course after 1 August 2020, you can apply online for student finance as normal. Postgraduate pre-registration and part-time, undergraduate student finance applications for academic year 2020 to 2021 are scheduled to launch in June. If this changes, this will be communicated through social media channels.

### What action do students need to take?

You do not need to take any direct action at this stage. Your university will be in contact to explain how your academic studies will be delivered during this time and will be available to answer any questions or concerns through existing pastoral support routes.

## Year 2 PTP who have not completed all their clinical placements

### Overview

Given the significant pressures on the system and the need to ensure that front line services are fully supported it is not possible to continue to provide the current programme for students in this year of study.

You will be given the option to opt into a revised programme structure as set out below. This is voluntary and if you do not feel able to opt in to this you will be supported by your university to consider the options available to you including continuing with the academic elements of your study through distance learning/online approaches, postponement of placements or, an authorised break in your studies. Universities are working on the principle of supporting all students, so they are not disadvantaged in progressing with their education programme based on whether they decide to opt into the revised programme.

### Revised programme delivery

HCS students will be invited to opt into a revised programme structure that includes paid employment combined with continued academic study. The time set aside for academic study will build in continued academic progression and a period of structured contact with your university to ensure ongoing academic and pastoral support during the COVID-19 pandemic. This will ensure that second year students will not be at a disadvantage compared to previous cohorts.

The exact nature of the paid employment and the level of supervision will be agreed between you, your university, and the organisation in which you will be working. Where possible the role will be aligned with the specialism that you are studying and if possible, may be with your previously agreed placement provider. However, it is likely that the paid role may be with a different employer/provider. In such cases you could be asked to undertake work that falls outside of what would be expected of a professional registrant in your specialism. However, time on paid employment may contribute to accumulation of placement time and should enable you to complete work-based learning outcomes e.g. in Professional Practice, understanding the patient pathway, working constructively and effectively as a member of a multi-disciplinary team, maintaining professional relationships.

NHS Employers has indicated that job roles will be graded in accordance with the Agenda for Change banding structure. The specific job role to be undertaken will be for students, HEIs and employers to determine based on student's experience and chosen speciality, and the employer's need. To align with similar deployments, the Healthcare Scientist Assistant (or similar local variations of this role) may provide a good framework for taking this decision. These roles are usually remunerated at Agenda for Change Band 3.

It is recognised that you will need to be supported and supervised clinically during such deployment to develop your confidence and skills and education providers will advise students on how this will be managed.

### What does this mean for your education programme?

Your university will continue to provide support to you and will offer ways of maintaining contact when you are in clinical practice. Your time in paid employment may contribute to accumulation of placement time and should enable you to complete some work-based learning outcomes. Your education provider will advise you directly on this.

However, given the significant changes in providing work placements, consideration will need to be given to how students can be supported to meet all aspects of their course requirements. The NSHCS and Regulators will work closely with the universities to ensure students can be supported to achieve the course requirements across the remaining period of their studies to support completion of their degree and full professional registration.

Students that accept a paid role/placement must have a named clinical supervisor/educator in practice. This will usually be a supervisor from the same profession but if not, professional supervision should be provided via 'long arm supervision'. This is where a supervisor, who is located at a distance to the practice learning area, takes responsibility for supervising and supporting the student. Students should also have a named academic tutor. Students should also have arrangements in place, including a learning agreement, opportunities for learning and reflection and assessment processes, if clinical hours are to be accredited towards academic programmes. Protected time for academic study remains an important part of your progression. You should ensure that the employment contact you enter into allows you the time to continue with the academic study required at your stage of training.

### Will this have a financial impact on students?

While in clinical practice you will be paid in line with the terms and conditions of the organisation in which you are working and any national guidelines (e.g. Agenda for Change). As set out above, specific roles will be agreed with individuals, but it is expected that in most cases this will be on a fixed-term contract; confirmation on Agenda for Change Pay Bands will follow based on advice from the NHS Staff Council and NHS Employers.

The financial arrangements described above only apply to those students who are opting into this revised programme in response to the COVID 19 pandemic. If you are carrying out your clinical placement as usual and are not part of the revised programme, then the remuneration will not apply to you.

The Student Loans Company have issued the following guidance which will continue to be updated: <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/slc-coronavirus-covid-19-update>

SLC is continuing to support students, universities and colleges and they will be providing further relevant updates.

### Will I still get my next student finance payment?

SLC have confirmed that students will receive their scheduled or next instalment of their maintenance loan at the planned start of their summer term, regardless of whether their university or provider has made alternative arrangements for teaching.

### Can I still apply for student finance?

If you are studying at the moment you can apply online for student finance as normal. Postgraduate pre-registration and part-time, undergraduate student finance applications for academic year 2020 to 2021 are scheduled to launch in June. If this changes, you will find out through social media channels. More information is available here: <https://www.gov.uk/apply-online-for-student-finance>

### What action do students need to take?

Your university will be in touch with you to discuss the revised programme delivery model and what it means for you:

- If you decide to opt in to work in clinical practice, your university will work with you to identify your preferences, support you to arrange the deployment, discuss this in more detail and answer your questions.
- Should you be unable to work face to face with patients/service users your university will support you to consider other opportunities.
- If you decide you do not want to work in clinical practice, your university will discuss your alternative options with you including continuation of the academic elements of your programme.

# Final Year Students

## Overview

Given the significant pressures on the system and the need to ensure that front line services are fully supported, it is not possible to continue to provide the current programme for students.

## Students in their final year with outstanding placement hours

Final year students who have not completed all their placement hours can find ways to complete their degree without undertaking further placements. This should be done in partnership with your University, who can advise on the specifics around this.

## Students in their final year who have completed all their clinical placements

If you have completed all clinical placements, you may be able to graduate as normal.

## Will this have a financial impact on students?

SLC is continuing to support students, universities and colleges.

The Student Loans Company have issued the following guidance which will continue to be updated at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/slc-coronavirus-covid-19-update>

## Will I still get my next student finance payment?

SLC have confirmed that students will receive their scheduled or next instalment of their maintenance loan at the planned start of their summer term, regardless of whether their university or provider has made alternative arrangements for teaching.

## What action do students need to take?

Your university will be in touch with you with instruction on how to proceed.

## Student health and wellbeing during the emergency period

### Looking after yourself and others

Over and above the precautions protecting you from transmission of the coronavirus, it will be crucial over the coming weeks and months that you look both your physical and mental health.

Your university will continue to provide pastoral support to you and if you move into clinical practice you will have a line manager who will also provide support.

You can also access the NHS and the NSHCS Health and Wellbeing Framework here: <https://www.nhsemployers.org/retention-and-staff-experience/health-and-wellbeing> and <https://nshcs.hee.nhs.uk/coronavirus-covid-19-information/health-wellbeing-support/>

### Staff wellbeing and support – employers' duty of care

Employers have a moral and statutory duty of care to protect employee's health and safety and provide a safe environment to work in. NHS organisations need to be proactive in protecting employees and supporting them to feel safe and secure in their employment. It is critical employers support staff by listening to concerns, responding appropriately, and reinforcing the need to follow the latest PHE guidance.

Employers have the same duty of care to their staff during a pandemic as in other circumstances and will take steps to safeguard the health and safety of their staff. National, local, and professional guidance and principles on infection prevention and control should be applied and reflected in local plans.

NHS organisations must consult with their health and safety leads, public health colleagues and occupational health colleagues and staff unions to develop a local plan to support the workforce. Trade union safety representatives should also be involved and consulted in line with the statutory duty to consult them on matters relating to the health and safety of members they represent.

During your time in clinical practice you should:

- Have regular breaks to reduce the onset of fatigue and associated risks - additional arrangements may need to be considered by organisations where staff are working longer shifts and/or additional hours - this could involve the repurposing of offices into rest spaces.
- Know where to go to access local support e.g. Occupational Health contacts, employee assistance provider (EAP) information, psychological support - provisions for accessing counselling or other provision and trade union representatives.
- Be supported by a clinical supervisor / educator or line manager to transition into the workplace in this highly pressurised context.
- Have an effective safety induction into new areas where you are being deployed, ensuring they are familiar with emergency procedures, reporting procedures and any equipment they may be asked to use.
- Be and be able to raise concerns and seek reassurance/explore and agree solutions with your line manager where required.

## Frequently asked questions

We have compiled this list to address many of the questions that students may have in relation to their education and training during the COVID-19 pandemic. We recommend students also refer to the [NSHCS website](#) for further information.

### **What are the COVID-19 Temporary Registers?**

The Academy of Healthcare Science is also establishing a Temporary Register for students who have completed their studies but are unable to join their full accredited register. For more information about both Temporary Registers, please visit either the HCPC or AHCS websites.

### **How will protected titles be used and communicated with service users?**

COVID-19 temporary registrants will be able to use the protected title of the profession they are working in for the duration of their time on the COVID-19 temporary Register. It is important that you are open and honest with service users about your level of experience, qualifications, and your registration status where necessary. You should not suggest to a service user that you have an ability to practise outside of your COVID-19 temporary role.

It is likely employers will set in local policies guiding how COVID-19 temporary registrants will be deployed. This might include practising under a different title, which makes it clear to the public their COVID-19 temporary status. The NHS is coordinating the workforce response to the developing situation. Further information can be found at: <https://www.england.nhs.uk/coronavirus/primary-care/about-covid-19/>

### **I have concerns about data protection, who can I speak to?**

All possible steps to ensure that the personal information of final students is kept securely have been taken by the Regulators. The information on the COVID-19 temporary Registers that is publicly available is the minimum amount of information that is considered necessary for establishing this Register and protecting the public. If you have any concerns about this, please get in touch with the Data Protection Officer at the HCPC at [foi@hcpc-uk.org](mailto:foi@hcpc-uk.org). For the Academy for Healthcare Science, please contact [admin@ahcs.ac.uk](mailto:admin@ahcs.ac.uk).

## Deployment

### **What will I be expected to do? Year 2 who have not completed all their clinical placements)**

Students who enter into a revised programme will work in an appropriate professional role and will be matched to their professional group where this is possible. Whilst working on this revised programme it is important to remember that you are still a student and every effort will be made by universities to ensure that you are provided with learning opportunities that are relevant to the profession for which you are studying.

In order to support your NHS colleagues during COVID-19 you may also be asked to carry out duties that are not directly related to your programme of study; however, you will have the opportunity to develop a range of broad skills that are both valuable and transferable to all HCS roles e.g. communication, risk assessment, prioritisation etc.

You will receive support from both your employer and your university to ensure that plans are in place for you to receive adequate supervision/pastoral care during the placement and gain relevant experience that will enable you to continue your learning.

### **Will the hours that I work in practice count towards my clinical placement hours?**

This will be determined by your course provider, depending on the type of paid-placement you are undertaking. The aim is that, where possible, the hours that you work in practice will count, at least in part, as clinical placement time. There are several ways that this can be supported which will include having a named supervisor, having clear learning outcomes and carrying out a reflective assessment. Each university will negotiate with students to maximise the opportunity for work hours to count as clinical placement time where possible.

### **What about professional indemnity insurance?**

NHS staff will be covered by existing indemnity arrangements during a pandemic – the Clinical Negligence Scheme for Trusts (CNST) for those working in NHS trusts and the Clinical Negligence Scheme for General Practice (CNSGP) for staff working in general practice. This will apply even if they are working on a different site or seconded to a different employer. Temporary staff will also be covered, provided there is a clear contractual relationship with an employer. Volunteers should have a volunteer agreement. NHS Resolution does not believe that the risk of employers or employees being sued as a result of actions taken during a pandemic is any greater, as long as the healthcare professional can show they acted with an appropriate degree of reasonableness. NHS Resolution believes the courts would take a sensible view of what was reasonable in the context of an emergency such as a pandemic. Staff should not expect to be at greater risk of being sued following a pandemic, provided they have not behaved in a reckless way.

NHS Resolution has clearly set out its position on its website, making it clear that indemnity arrangements should not be a barrier to changed working arrangements during the pandemic: <https://resolution.nhs.uk/2020/03/19/covid-19-and-business-continuity/>

### **Will I need a DBS check and do I have to organise and pay for this?**

A DBS will not normally be required if it has already been completed through your university as part of your education programme and is still valid. Should a DBS check be required, this can be acquired the fast-tracked process run by the government. Students will not have to pay for this.

### **Where can I work?**

Where possible, you will be offered work at an organisation where you have undertaken a clinical placement before or previously worked. You may be asked if you would consider moving to a different area to cover local needs, or to work in a different organisation depending upon your circumstances. The paid role will be in accordance with your identified knowledge, skills and competencies and will be discussed with you beforehand. Any such decisions will also consider wider government advice on limiting travel.

### **What training and support will I receive before I am deployed?**

You will be provided with training and support from employers prior to commencing in your role. This will include induction as appropriate to your needs and to enable you to practice safely. This is likely to include:

- Statutory and mandatory training
- Local Induction
- Specific guidance associated with the unprecedented situation i.e. the management of coronavirus and use of Personal Protective Equipment (PPE).

### **I have children – do I qualify as a key worker?**

The Department of Health and Social Care has confirmed to the NHS Business Services Authority that students undertaking clinical healthcare courses are contributing to the national Covid-19 response and can confirm that these students are able to self-identify as key workers. If you require any evidence to support discussions with your school or childcare provider this can be obtained from your university or employer.

### **What if I decide I can no longer work?**

As set out in this guide, opting in to work in clinical practice is voluntary. If at any time you feel unable to continue to work, you should speak to your employer and university link who can support you.

Year 2 PTP students who have not completed their clinical placement hours and are unable to undertake an appropriate professional role will be supported by their university to complete learning outcomes by alternative learning and assessment methods. It has been agreed, on a temporary basis, due to coronavirus that there can be flexibility in accumulating clinical placement time without extending the original length of planned study.

## **Terms and conditions**

### **Will I get paid and how will this be agreed?**

Yes, you will be remunerated for any work you do in a way that reflects the responsibilities you undertake. This will be discussed with you at the point you commence work.

### **Will I have a contract?**

Yes, you will have a fixed-term contract of employment that reflects all the working hour protections, pay arrangements and annual leave entitlement of the organisation into which you are deployed. National terms and conditions for NHS staff can be found on the NHS Employers website - <https://www.nhsemployers.org/> How many hours can I work?

Your working hours and pattern will be agreed between you and the organisation in which you have decided to work. This agreement will consider working time regulations and expectations that enough rest time is provided. You may wish to consider working part time so that you can progress your academic studies simultaneously.

### **How long will I be needed for?**

You are likely to be needed for a short time period but at this stage, the exact length

is unpredictable. You are free to stop working at any point. Contracts are likely to be drawn up for six months with the possibility for extension.

### **Will I join the NHS Pension scheme?**

If you hold a contract of employment with an NHS employer and are on payroll, then you will be automatically enrolled into the NHS Pension Scheme upon starting your NHS employment.

Joining the NHS Pension Scheme allows you to get a head start on saving for retirement which you can continue throughout a future career in the NHS. Membership also provides valuable life assurance benefits whilst working for the NHS.

The pension scheme is contributory, which means that all members and their employers pay into the scheme each month. However, membership of the pension scheme is voluntary, and you can decide to opt-out at any time. If you opt-out within the first pay period after starting NHS employment, you will be treated as having never joined and your contributions are refunded. Your temporary employer will be able to help you with this.

Membership of the NHS Pension scheme allows individuals to access other benefits, such as Death in Service benefit.

### **Will I be paid my student loan even though I will be working rather than being on my course?**

Yes. You will be treated as being in attendance for the purpose of student finance.

### **Will the wages I receive while working as part of the COVID-19 response affect my student loan?**

No. In nearly all cases, earnings received by students during the academic year are disregarded for the purposes of calculating entitlement to maintenance loan. Where relevant, you will receive your payment for the next term as normal. For the majority of students this will be for the third term and payments will be made after Easter.

### **I am an independent student. Will the wages I receive while working as part of the COVID-19 response affect my student loan?**

No. In nearly all cases, earnings received by students during the academic year are disregarded for the purposes of calculating entitlement to maintenance loan. You will receive your payment for the next term as normal. For the majority of students this will be for the third term and payments will be made after Easter.

## Your health and wellbeing

### **What if I'm concerned about my health, I'm pregnant, immunosuppressed, have health problems or am a primary carer?**

Given the increased risks associated with COVID-19 in those with co-morbidity and in the elderly population, we would of course advise against taking up patient-facing clinical work if you belong to this group. There are a range of opportunities you may wish to consider in non-patient facing roles that may be more suited and these can be discussed in more detail as part of your bespoke offer. For more information on vulnerable groups please access [here](#).

### **What if I become ill when I am working or concerned that I may have coronavirus?**

If you become ill while working, local policy and national guidance must be followed to ensure your safety and the safety of others. You should immediately inform your line manager and withdraw from work. You will be entitled to the same sick pay as permanent employees in the organisation you are working in. If you have concerns regarding COVID-19 please follow national guidance which you can access via [NHS 111](#).

### **Where can I get more information?**

For further information, advice or support the following may be of interest:

- [National School of Healthcare Science](#)
- [NHS 111 coronavirus guidance](#)
- [Health and Care Professions Council](#)
- [Unison: your rights at work \(coronavirus\)](#)
- [Unite: Coronavirus COVID-19 advice](#)
- [National Care Forum – Coronavirus Resources](#)
- [Public Health England – Coronavirus Resources](#)
- [NHS Employers guidance](#)
- [SLC guidance on gov.uk](#)

You can find answers to more questions on HEE's website, at <https://www.hee.nhs.uk/coronavirus-covid-19/hee-covid-19-student-data-collections-support-paid-placement-deployment>

## Annex A - Glossary

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**Agenda for Change** - national system for pay and terms & conditions for all NHS staff, with the exception of doctors, dentists and most senior managers.

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**Academy of Healthcare Science** – represents for the UK Healthcare Science (HCS) workforce and works alongside the healthcare science professional bodies to strengthen the visibility of the contribution of the healthcare science workforce.

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**Employee assistance** – an employee benefit offered by employers and intended to help employees deal with personal problems that might adversely impact their work performance, health, and well-being.

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**IPEM** - is the professional organisation for physicists, clinical and biomedical engineers and technologists working in medicine and biology.

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**Health and Care Professions Council** – protect the public by regulating 15 health and care professions. It sets standards for professionals' education and training and practice; keep a register of professionals, known as 'registrants', who meet the standards; and take action if professionals on the Register do not meet the standards.

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**Preceptorship** – the period in which newly qualified practitioners are guided in their transition from a student and support to develop their practice further.

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**RCCP** - the Registration Council for Clinical Physiologists holds a voluntary register for practitioners in six disciplines of Clinical Physiology.

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**Statutory and mandatory training** – training for staff that is required by law or a compulsory requirement of the organisation to ensure safe and effective care.

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**Supervision** – supervision of HCSS in practice learning environments by other registered practitioners to ensure that students can meet the relevant learning outcomes whilst ensuring public protection

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**Temporary register** – a new part of the HCPC register, established by emergency legislation, to which HCSs whose registration recently lapsed and HCS students may be admitted.

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**Voluntary register** – available to healthcare students and trainees from the Academy for Healthcare Science (AHCS), Register of Clinical Technologists (RCT) and Registration Council for Clinical Physiologists (RCCP).

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## Annex B – Process flowcharts

Year 2 PTP who have not completed all their clinical placements

