

Scottish Government submission of 22 November 2023

PE2039/A: Fair pay to student nurses while on placement

Nursing and midwifery programmes are regulated by the Nursing and Midwifery Council (NMC) and delivered by higher education institutions. Each programme must adhere to the requirements stipulated by the NMC. As part of this, there is a requirement for every student to complete a minimum of 2300 hours of theoretical learning and 2300 hours of practice learning. Higher education institutions must ensure that this takes place prior to confirming to NMC that students are ready to enter the NMC register. This is a matter of protection of the public and adherence to regulatory requirements for the nursing profession UK-wide. It is therefore unfortunately not possible for student nurses to be employed as registrants before programme completion and entry to the NMC register.

The only exception to this was during the Covid-19 pandemic. The NMC introduced emergency standards which enabled second, third and final year students to be employed whilst undertaking placements. This unprecedented and unique step was taken to help support the NHS and ensure that final year students could graduate on time. It was only in place for a short period of time before Placements returned to supernumerary. This is a position on which the NMC continue to stand firm in order to ensure that students first and foremost continue to prioritise learning outcomes during placement.

The Scottish Government understands the financial challenges faced by all students, including nursing and midwifery students, and recognises that this has been exacerbated by the current cost of living crisis. However, it is important to note that eligible student nurses and midwives in Scotland receive the highest level of support across the United Kingdom. Our non-means tested, non-repayable bursary is £10,000 each year, and we provide free tuition for eligible pre-registration students in addition to funding for placement expenses, uniforms, and disclosure and health checks to support students to complete their programme.

If a student is under additional stress and/or they believe that they are not being given

supernumerary status, they should first discuss it with their practice supervisor, practice assessor and the unit manager. Students should also contact their personal tutor at their university, or the programme leader, and we would expect that this issue would be raised and followed up as part of the student feedback mechanism implemented as part of the Quality Management of Practice Learning Experience system, which is in place to help manage and quality assure student learning. Universities also have an escalation of concerns process, and students can use that process too.

Finally, registering with the Bank of healthcare workers at local NHS Boards can provide a variety of paid opportunities and we know that many nursing and midwifery students already work on the Bank. It does not provide a guarantee of work but allows NHS Boards to offer students employment as and/or when the need arises in their local area. Once a student is registered with the Bank some Boards may also offer students a part time fixed term healthcare support worker contract at a maximum of 15 hours per week. The opportunities which are available will vary between Boards, depending on their current and future requirements.

Nursing and midwifery students are the future of the profession, and the Scottish Government is committed to ensuring that students are supported to complete their studies.

Chief Nursing Officer Directorate