

Position statement: Supernumerary status

The primary role of the student undertaking a practice experience is that of a learner and they are required to be supernumerary. Supernumerary status of students means that students are additional to the workforce requirement and staffing figures. However, definition of supernumerary status may vary, for example, for nursing students both the RCN and the NMC give guidance, although from slightly different perspectives and with different levels of authority.

“All students undertaking pre-registration nursing and midwifery programmes have supernumerary status while on placements. This means that they are additional to the workforce requirement and staffing figures” (RCN 2007)

The NMC give a slightly different perspective:

“Programme providers must ensure that students are supernumerary during all practice learning. Supernumerary means that the student will not, as part of their programme of preparation, be contracted by any person or body to provide nursing care”. (NMC 2010)

For Allied Health Professional the guidance from HCPC is as follows:

Although the term supernumerary is not specifically used within HCPC guidance due to the nature of AHP placements, however the HCPC standards for education and training specify:

“There must be an adequate number of appropriately qualified and experienced staff at the practice placement setting” (HCPC 2009 5.2) and “the practice placement settings must provide a safe and supportive environment” (HCPC 2009 5.3). This ensures that learning, teaching and supervision are designed to encourage “safe and effective practice, independent learning and professional conduct” (HCPC 2009 5.4).

By implication, AHP students are therefore extra to the established workforce in a specific placement location.

In the Faculty of health Sciences, we advocate the following principle:

“Students undertaking practice experiences as part of their programme of study are extra to the established numbers in the practice areas. They will be allocated a negotiated workload that is within their scope of practice that meets their required learning needs”

This means that the experience they gain during practice experiences should be determined by their educational needs. This does not mean that students are purely observers. To develop the required skills and achieve the identified learning outcomes, students must participate in clinical activities under direct or indirect supervision of a Mentor or Practice Educator. Students should discuss with their practice educator or mentor the best ways of achieving their learning outcomes, and ensure that their practice assessment and skills documentation reflects the competence is demonstrated.

We recognise that practice experiences vary and that staffing levels may also alter across the sectors, units and even within one unit/ward, team or department. Students are required to experience the 7 day a week, 24 hours per day nature of modern health care and as such should experience a variety of working patterns. Students should not interpret supernumerary status as being able to alter allocated working patterns or to have their personal requests constantly honoured.

Ultimately, supernumerary status means that the service would continue to be delivered without the student’s presence. One example of this would be where a learning opportunity involves leaving the placement area to observe and learn from another experience or place of delivery of care e.g. theatre, outpatients, or another service they are free to do so.

References

Health Professions Council (2009) **Standards for Education and Training**. London: HCPC

Nursing and Midwifery Council (2010) **Standards for Pre-registration Nursing Education**. London: NMC

Royal College of Nursing (2007) **Guidance for Mentors of Nursing Students and Midwives**. London: RCN

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