Dear Colleagues,

**COVID-19 ENHANCING WORKFORCE CAPACITY**

1. This guidance sets out the Scottish Government’s policy position on the employment of healthcare students, in the current emergency circumstances. In accordance with these principles, Boards are permitted to recruit nursing, midwifery, AHP and undergraduate medical and dental students on less than full time (LTFT), fixed-term contracts through staff banks.

**Situation**

2. The increased transmissibility of the new Covid-19 variants, and the impact of winter and the festive period continues to compound existing pressures in acute healthcare across NHS Scotland.

3. Additional staffing capacity has already been made available to Boards through the Covid-19 Health and Social Care Accelerated Recruitment Portal and the GMC and NMC emergency registers.

4. As of 17 December 2020, details of applicants who remained on the Accelerated Recruitment Portal have successfully been passed to Territorial Health Boards. We have indicated previously that we expect Boards to make use of all suitable candidates made available through this resource.

**Further Measures to Enhance Workforce Capacity**

5. Given the on-going workforce pressures and capacity challenges, further deployment of healthcare students in appropriate support roles has been identified as another beneficial step to support Boards’ workforce capacity.

6. The Scottish Government is therefore making available to Health Boards the option of deploying students on LTFT, fixed term contracts.

7. It is however our expectation that Boards should fully utilise their bank resources and, as necessary, agency staffing as well as unallocated candidates from the Accelerated...
8. Boards are also encouraged to use agency staffing at their own discretion, where it is available during this emergency period.

**Employment of Students to Enhance Capacity**

9. The Scottish Government does not believe it is appropriate to disrupt healthcare students’ programmes through authorising full-time student deployment at this time. The timely graduation of this year’s cohort is essential for the maintenance of the health and social care workforce, across the regulated professions.

10. A communication will be issued to healthcare students via universities and colleges – including nursing, midwifery, AHP, HCS students and undergraduate medics and dentists – proactively inviting them to register with their local staff bank, if they have not already done so. The communication will highlight that the any fixed term contract opportunities referred to in this guidance will be made available through the banks, as well as potentially future offers of fixed term employment.

11. The communication to students will clarify that these opportunities are underpinned by governing principles concerning student wellbeing and safety, outlined below. Further, the communication will signpost to Scottish Government guidance on deployed students’ key worker status, also outlined below.

12. Boards should make offers through the staff bank to students for fixed term contracts for 3 or 6 months. Students should be deployed for a maximum of 15 hours per week, with contracts offered at bands 2, 3 and 4 – commensurate with prior work experience. All roles offered will be predicated on an extant job description, which has been evaluated and will be paid at the relevant AFC banding for the specific job role.

13. Students should be deployed in accordance with board needs, but in a regular setting. It is anticipated they can provide a measure of additionality at evenings and weekends, working during the week also where they do not have academic study or additional placement responsibilities. The employment should not directly interfere with ongoing programmes of study.

14. The Scottish Government expects Boards to consider this option proactively in respect of service demand and capacity, thinking about needs over the next 6 months. Boards should factor in the dilution of skills mix attendant the deployment of students in frontline healthcare settings, in line with guidance issued by the UK Chief Nursing Officers’. Consideration
should also be given to the use of deployment to facilitate staff respite and recuperation over this period – including providing additional cover to facilitate staff taking appropriate breaks on-shift.

**Actions**

15. In anticipation of recruiting students on less than full-time contracts, we are now asking Health Boards to consider offering all bank staff, who wish to do so, fixed term contracts (FTC).

16. In addition to this, consideration should be given to offering all students on staff banks a FTC for up to a maximum of 15 hours per week.

17. A communication will be issued to all students studying appropriate disciplines, via universities and colleges, for those not already on staff banks to encourage them to join their local staff bank.

**Governing Principles**

18. Students may be employed for deployment in acute, mental health and community settings (i.e. a care home) providing they are appropriately line managed and supervised.

19. Where students are being employed on a fixed term basis and deployed into frontline settings, they should be fully apprised of the nature of the assignment and its duration, their principal duties and shift-patterns, who they will report to whilst on assignment and who their local line-manager will be.

20. Health boards are to use students’ pre-existing Disclosure Scotland and Occupational health checks (obtained in relation to continuing study on an approved pre-registration course) in satisfaction of NHS Scotland pre-employment criminal records and occupational health checking.

21. As employees, any issues relating to the employment will be governed by the suite of Once for Scotland NHS Workforce Policies, and any relevant health board policies where no national employment policy currently exists.

22. Students employed on less than full time contracts should not undertake duties outwith the role profile to which they have been recruited, and should not be expected to undertake duties they are not competent to undertake.

23. All Health and Safety requirements and obligations (for both employer and employee) apply as do the provisions of employers liability. Students undertaking less than full time employment will also be professionally indemnified in the
same way as all other NHS Scotland Employees. The provisions of the Coronavirus (Scotland) Act 2020 apply in relation to the extension of discretionary professional indemnity by Scottish Ministers, where no other indemnity provisions apply.

24. Any student undertaking a temporary contract or engaging in work through the staff bank will be covered by the NHS Scotland and Social Care Coronavirus Life Assurance Scheme 2020. Further information is available here:


25. Healthcare students must be assured that they will have access to appropriate PPE suitable for the duties they are being asked to undertake. They are expected to comply with health and safety law and understand the Infection Prevention and Control Processes in operation where they work.

26. The employing health board retains its rights, in accordance with their own service provision responsibilities, to suspend or terminate the employment in line with NHS Scotland policy and the governing principles of UK employment law. This should be done sensitively, and where possible, by mutual discussion, to minimise service impacts.

27. Additionally, where student employees are being placed in a community setting they remain an employee of the employing health board. Nevertheless, whilst working alongside community service providers, such other providers have the following responsibilities:

- An obligation to promote the health, safety and welfare of any student placed with them on temporary deployment.
- Further, they have an absolute responsibility to ensure that their own staff and service users treat any health board staff member placed with them on temporary deployment with dignity and respect.
- Any incident that gives rise to concerns relating to discrimination, bullying, harassment, or abuse, or which compromises the health, safety and wellbeing of the health service employee, howsoever arising, must be appropriately investigated, documented and recorded.
- Any disciplinary, conduct, health and wellbeing or welfare issue concerning a health board employee on deployment in a community setting shall be governed by Once for Scotland and/or health board policies, without exception.
- The employing health board retains an absolute right to terminate any such community deployment, at any time.
Travel and transport for students on placement

28. Students on placement are classed as key workers and can travel between local authority areas and tiers for work (i.e. practice learning experience) purposes. The current guidelines on exceptions for travel from home (Mainland Scotland and certain islands) confirms that students may also:

- travel for childcare or parental support services
- travel to provide care, assistance, support to or respite for a vulnerable person.

29. Students should adhere to the same guidance as other frontline healthcare workers who may commute from other local authorities to their workplace. Students should continue to follow the guidance on travelling safely, which can be found on the Scottish Government website at:


Covid-19 Vaccinations for Students

30. Students working either on the bank or on a fixed-term contract, and students on placement, are classed as frontline staff and therefore included within Priority Group 2 of the JCVI Priority List. Students should therefore be invited to make an appointment to receive their vaccination in line with local booking processes for staff.

Yours sincerely

Sean Neill
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