

COVID-19 Guidance for Higher Education Institutions

In response to COVID-19, the CSP has drawn together advice for Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) that will help teams manage the impact of the measures imposed by the government in response to the pandemic. Our intention is to create clear guidance that complements that issued by Health and Care Professions Council ([HCPC](#)) but that also seeks to address issues specific to professional body expectations of accredited programmes.

Additionally, we have produced several [FAQs](#) which will be updated as the situation continues to evolve. Although we're trying to pre-empt as many of the implications that we possibly can, we cannot provide advice for all eventualities as the situation is changing so rapidly.

The advice and guidance we give below should work for most programmes. However, given the differences in delivery that exists across programmes, each team will need to consider the implications for themselves locally for whatever plans they choose to implement. In some instances, this will mean thinking through plans for individual student circumstances.

On 13th March, we emailed all HEIs with initial guidance and with it, an offer of support. We will continue to communicate and offer bespoke advice directly with teams via email– Specifically, we will help teams think through and implement their contingency plans which will need to cover university teaching and placements.

We will also be continuously adding new advice, as and when changes happen, to this page of the website. Programme teams are advised to check here for updates, or alternatively speak directly with the *Workforce & Education team* at learning&development@csp.org.uk.

We recognise that these are exceptional circumstances and that this guidance is temporary, covering this period only. We will keep this guidance under continuous review during the Covid 19 pandemic.

The issues that we are all grappling with are complex and often inter-linked. The guidance has therefore needed to be necessarily detailed.

However, the key issues discussed within the guidance can be summarised as follows:

1. Teams will need to be pragmatic and think creatively
2. CSP actively supports the move to online learning where possible
3. The temporary HCPC register will need careful thought as students are likely to still be required to have completed sufficient placements and meet HCPC Standards of Proficiency
4. CSP supports teams to take a flexible approach to programme management delivery during post COVID 19 pandemic to ensure students have met SOPs and adequate practice based learning, ensuring that students are not disadvantaged long-term by the need to manage the current pandemic.
5. Placements – CSP supports an outcomes based approach. Teams will need to be pragmatic but they must ensure appropriate measures are in place should students not be able to complete their normal placement profile.
6. CSP supports teams to take a flexible approach to programme management delivery post-COVID 19 pandemic also. We would particularly encourage teams to work regionally with regards to placements.

Key guidance

Creative thinking

Our key advice is for teams to use their professional judgment on what will work locally to balance student welfare and patient safety, while making sure final year students are able to graduate as close to their normal exit point as possible.

[HCPC guidance](#) makes a similar point. Like them, we are not requiring teams to formally request changes to their programme. We are however, offering teams the opportunity to discuss their plans either with the Workforce and Education team here at the CSP or with their CSP education rep should they wish to problem solve.

And as mentioned, we will also be running webinars that will provide a virtual space for programme teams to come together and problem solve with colleagues across the four countries. These will focus on moving to online learning and making adaptations to curriculum design and delivery in these unprecedented times.

University teaching – moving to online delivery

Almost all programmes utilise online teaching already and there are many ways to deliver learning online both synchronously and asynchronously. We know that some universities are further ahead than others with delivering teaching material online. Teams who are further ahead will be able to switch to online delivery without too much additional workload for the staff, but for others, we will be facilitating networks to share good practice and support our members to move learning online.

Webinars will also provide an opportunity for educators to discuss online delivery issues and share good practice. We have three planned webinars taking place on the following dates:

- Thursday 26th March 2pm – 3pm
- Tuesday 31st March 9am – 10am
- Friday 3rd April 1pm – 2pm

[Places can be booked on EventBrite here](#). The webinars will be identical in format and content to allow all HEIs to attend one. Please nominate one person per HEI to attend who can circulate notes afterwards. If demand is high, we will look to run these again.

In addition to the webinars, there are discussions happening within the international community that teams might want to tap into including [WCPT Network for Physical Therapist Educators](#).

Proposals for temporary register to include final year students

The HCPC are responsible for determining an individual's eligibility to go on the register. With them, we have been working with the Council of Deans for Health (CODH) and national AHP leads on proposals to create a temporary register for final year students who have completed clinical placements and have met the required Standards of Proficiencies. This guidance will be published imminently.

Once it is published, as teams, you will need to consider implications of students joining the temporary register carefully and this may ultimately depend on your programme structure in the final year. We will follow up with additional guidance once the details are announced.

You will also consider the implications for students completing their full academic profile ahead of, or alongside, students joining the register. Students themselves will need to consider these implications in terms of insurance etc. A further FAQ is likely to be provided that directly addresses this.

If students are permitted to join the register after successfully completing final year placements for example, then the full academic award might be being awarded at a later point. As teams you will therefore need to carefully consider this, undertake detailed mapping and ensure that you have in place the mechanisms for students to complete all academic components of your programme in order to assure yourselves, your students, employers etc. that your students are eligible to be awarded the full award. You will need to look carefully at your academic regs and consider how your Boards may need to be structured/timed to manage this.

Again, teams will need to strike a balance to ensure that those who are graduating ultimately meet the Standards of Proficiency and the full programme aims.

We appreciate that you will be restructuring your programmes and focusing on students' readiness for practice in this current environment. we recommend that you introduce your students to the latest [COVID-19: infection prevention and control](#) national advice. This should be used alongside local procedures.

Placement hours - final year students only

This point relates only to final year students who are close to graduating. Please see advice below for other year groups.

In order for third year students to be eligible to join the register as soon as possible, the CSP recommends that programme teams adopt an outcomes-based approach to the expectation that a minimum of 1000 hours of practice is achieved.

It is important to note that this is a temporary measure that will only be in place to help manage this extraordinary situation – clinicians, students, managers and HEIs themselves are clear that retaining an expectation set at 1000 hours is the ideal scenario.

However, it is also important to recognise that placements are likely to be withdrawn by Trusts and services due to clinicians and managers deciding to reduce pressure. This is placing universities in an impossible situation if there is no flexibility around this normal requirement.

For programmes where students have almost completed their placement profile

Most teams have a contingency built into their hours, operating at around 1050 hours. Because this buffer exists, it would be reasonable for these programmes to allow students to graduate if they fall short by two to three weeks (a week normally equating to 37.5 hours) without the need for much adjustment to your programmes.

In these circumstances, we encourage teams to take a pragmatic approach and consider including hours accrued from clinical activity that might not normally be included. This could include earlier volunteering, earlier observational placements and other activities (including simulation). Please do use these experiences only if they give you confidence in your students' abilities and if it could legitimately help you make a case for your students being assessed and deemed to have met the Standards of Proficiency, be safe and employment-ready.

Teams will need to exercise sound professional judgement that is in the best interest of the students, and the service users that will be treated by your graduates. Those who graduate from your programmes should not be disadvantaged in the long-term by decisions that are made in response to the short-term needs.

For programmes where students haven't yet been able to go out on a final placement who will fall significantly short of the 1000 hours.

We recognise that the decision whether students are competent will be harder to make if they have a significant number of hours yet to complete.

Your programme is designed as a whole and you will need to determine whether students have met the learning objectives for all modules as well as the programme learning outcomes. This is unlikely to be an issue for university-taught modules if you are switching to online delivery and assessment, however, we do foresee that there are implications for final placements.

As each HEI operates with autonomy and sets its own regulations, it is your own institution's regulations which will need to be considered carefully.

You should ensure that you have identified and put in place contingencies, including alternative assessments, so that you can assure yourselves, your students, their employers and ultimately service users that students have met the HCPC Standards of Proficiency.

You may be able to apply across cohorts, but in most circumstances, you will need to consider this on an individual student basis. As teams, you are best placed to do so as only you are aware of your students' profiles.

You will need to consider the following:

- Whether your students have had other placements at level 6 and whether that feedback given by practice educators indicates whether students are operating as close to a newly qualified physiotherapist as possible by this stage in their programmes
- Placement profiles including range and breadth of placements
- How capable you have judged students to be through university practice and assessments including OSCEs, clinical vivas etc. It will be important to consider any areas where you feel they might not have had the opportunity thus far to demonstrate these skills in a practice-setting.
- How much opportunity you will have to deliver and support students between now and normal graduation point to refresh, consolidate, and assure yourselves of their ability in areas where they can't demonstrate that they have met the learning outcomes. If you have mechanisms, likely to be virtual in the short-term, to support and assess students further in cases where you may have concerns, we encourage you to put these in place.

However, even with these measures, there will still be some students who are unable to graduate at the normal point of graduation. **Teams should feel empowered to make the difficult decision that a student is not ready to graduate and put in place action plans to support them to graduate as soon as in possible.**

Placements for students not in their final year

The issue for students who are earlier in their studies will be less acute. We know that teams are already considering the order of programme delivery, including frontloading most of the university teaching with students picking up placements at later points.

This action has the potential to place a burden later down the line on placement providers. It will therefore be important, more than ever, for teams to work with neighbouring institutions to find placement solutions collectively.

We actively encourage you to draw your placements from all sectors and settings. There will be an urgent need for physiotherapists not just throughout the COVID-19 pandemic but afterwards. Look for opportunities to place students wherever a physiotherapist could work, including making greater use of 'role-emerging' style placements. Our practice-based learning activity to date, illustrating innovation and creativity in placement provision and supervision, is designed to support educators and programme leads in this aim.

And finally, we are aware that some students in second year have concerns about placements being withdrawn. We have produced some FAQs aimed directly at the students and we will continue to support you as you support them. Additionally, we are producing a set of videos aimed directly at explaining the situation – and that you as teams are having to make difficult decisions.