

COVID-19 Guidance for Higher Education Institutions (Updated Oct 2020)

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 are trying to pre-empt as many of the implications that we possibly can, we cannot provide advice for all eventualities as the situation is still changing.

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.

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 and through the weekly newsletter. 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 continue to be pragmatic and think creatively
2. CSP supports the move to online learning where possible using robust and engaging teaching and learning strategies and inclusive assessment.
3. CSP supports teams to continue to take a flexible approach to programme management delivery during 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.
4. 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.
5. CSP supports teams to take a flexible approach to programme management delivery as we come out of the COVID 19 pandemic also. We would particularly encourage teams to work regionally with regards to placements, considering innovative models including multiples supervision models, non-patient facing placements and role –emerging 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.

We continue to run webinars that 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.

Webinars also provide an opportunity for educators to discuss online delivery issues, teaching of practical skills, programme amendments and to share good practice.

[Places can be booked on EventBrite here.](#)

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](#).

HCPC temporary register

The HCPC are responsible for determining an individual's eligibility to go on the register. The HCPC created a temporary register for final year students who had completed sufficient clinical placements and had met the required Standards of Proficiencies. The closing date for the temporary register has been extended from 30th September to 30th November 2020 to support those students who still need to complete their academic studies. If students were 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 before the closure of the register. You will need to look carefully at your academic regulations and consider how your Boards may need to be structured/timed to manage this. There are no plans outlined by HCPC at present to reopen or extend the temporary register further and the addition of new temporary registrants is not expected.

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 – all students

In order for students to progress through their programmes, 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 maybe 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 will fall significantly, short of the 1000 hours.

We recognise that the decision whether students are competent will to 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 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:

- For final year students, have they had 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 cannot 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.**

We actively encourage you to draw your placements from all sectors and settings. Before COVID we promoted the use of a range of placements including those in non-patient facing roles. There is an urgent need for physiotherapists not just throughout the COVID-19 pandemic but afterwards and we need to increase quality placement capacity to support this demand during and beyond COVID-19. Look for opportunities to place students wherever a physiotherapist could work, including making greater use of 'role-emerging' style placements and multiple supervision models. The CSP [practice-based learning website](#) illustrates innovation and creativity in placement provision and supervision and is designed to support educators and programme leads in this aim. If you have examples of innovative placements that you would like to add to the website as a case study please email learning&development@csp.org.uk.