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**The role of the support workforce in pre-registration student education**

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**A team based approach**

A team based approach to pre-registration student education is a model where all members of staff in a placement environment formally contribute to a student’s education. Team based approaches provide students with a rich and varied placement experience.

The majority of teams in clinical practice will have at their core, skilled and experienced support workers. While many team members who are support workers might be asked to ‘take the student for the afternoon’, in a true team based model, support workers are involved in sharing their knowledge, skills and experiences with students more formally. When support workers are involved in pre-registration student education they can contribute to an outstanding placement experience.

The information below will help you to:

* define how support workers can contribute to pre-registration students’ practice based education
* outline the value of involving support workers in pre-registration students’ practice based education
* implement this approach safely and appropriately in practice

**Health and Care Professions Council (HCPC) position**

As part of its [standards of education and training](https://www.hcpc-uk.org/standards/standards-relevant-to-education-and-training/) the HCPC stipulates that students on placement must have a ‘practice educator’. This is an individual/s who is responsible for a learner’s education during their practice based learning. The HCPC also stipulates that it expects a practice educator to be a HCPC registered professional or other statutory regulated professional.

However, the HCPC recognises that a variety of staff in a placement environment can contribute to practice based learning. It does not set standards and limits on models of learning or involvement of other staff but does expect that the qualifications and experiences of staff are appropriate to the specific aspects of practice based learning they are involved in, and that they are able to effectively support learning.

Support workers are **non-registered** members of a clinical team and are not regulated by the HCPC or other statutory regulator. They cannot therefore undertake the formal role of ‘practice educator’. They can though, with the right experience, training, education and competence to support learners in practice, contribute to practice based learning within the scope of their role.

**What can support workers bring to pre-registration student education?**

Support workers have a wealth of skills and knowledge. These include:

* technical competence in the tasks and activities they undertake in their roles
* communication skills
* cultural competence
* experience in person centred care approaches
* knowledge of local systems and processes
* an abundance of noticing, coaching and caring talents
* years of clinical and life experience

In addition, it is critical that pre-registration students understand the scope of practice, role, value and impact of the support workforce. This is to ensure that once registered they are able to work respectfully in practice teams and know how to delegate safely.

**Scope of practice of support workers**

It is in the scope of practice of all support workers at all levels to induct less experienced staff to their roles and responsibilities and train others in the tasks and activities they undertake in their role. We provide further detail on support worker scope of practice [here](https://www.csp.org.uk/professional-clinical/professional-guidance/scope-practice/understanding-it/scope-practice-support).

At all times a support worker will work under the delegation of a higher level practitioner or registered professional. Working with students is considered a delegated activity and the higher level practitioner or registered professional is accountable for their decision to delegate this to a support worker.

The extent to which a support worker may be delegated education, training and supervisory activities with students will be dependent on local job descriptions, local delegation policies, the level of competence of a support worker in their role, and their competence to support pre-registration students in practice.

**What does this look like in practice?**

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| As an entry level support worker, you can:  (indicative NHS Band 2) | As an intermediate & higher level support worker, you can:  (indicative NHS Band 3,4 and higher) |
| Induct students to your work area  Educate students about your role and responsibilities  Train students in the tasks and activities you undertake as part of your role  Support students pastorally as part of a compassionate and supportive team culture | Induct students to your clinical area  Educate students about your role and responsibilities  Train students to undertake the tasks and activities that are common to your role  Work alongside a student, enabling them to take the lead in a task or activity that is common to your role and in which the student has been trained  Feedback to a student on their performance; supporting them to reflect; identify further learning needs and ways in which these might be met  Contribute to team discussions regarding a student’s performance and placement assessment  Support students pastorally as part of a compassionate and supportive team culture  **N.B.** Countersigning students’ records is permissible if local policies allow and if the support worker is deemed to be a competent practice educator (i.e. they have received training and development in practice education)  The registered professional/s who is the named practice educator is accountable for delegating this aspect of student supervision to a support worker and remains responsible for service users’ care. |

In addition it should be expected that support workers welcome students in their teams and treat them inclusively, upholding professional and local organisation values.

**Developing support workers to contribute**

Educating, training and supporting students on placement is a skill and requires specific competencies, including but not limited to:

* teaching methods and approaches
* coaching techniques including advanced communication skills and how to provide feedback
* recognising when a student might be struggling
* supporting an underperforming student
* supporting an excelling student

Support workers cannot be expected to contribute to pre-registration student education without investment in their own learning and development. This is to ensure they can undertake this aspect of their role confidently and successfully. Investing in support workers’ learning in this way is necessary to empower them to contribute fully. It is also a requirement from the HCPC that anyone contributing to pre-registration practice education is competent to do so.

Support should be given for staff to identify strengths and gaps in their current knowledge and skills in education, training and supervision. Many support workers have had other careers and varied life experiences and may already be competent in certain areas.

There are various ways to support staff to develop competence. This might include a local training and development programme, either ‘in-house’ or through an organisation’s learning and development team. You could consider using the resources on the Health Education England e-learning for health platform as part of a local training programme <https://portal.e-lfh.org.uk/> , you don’t have to work in the NHS or in England to register for an account. Working with your local Higher Education Institute (HEI) to enable support workers to attend elements of practice educator training, is another option.

Staff should also have access to education that enables them to sensitively and appropriately support students on placement who may need particular adjustments and those who come from diverse backgrounds.

**Top tips**

* talk to your support workers about their role and students learning and how they feel about it
* update support workers’ job descriptions, job plans and annual objectives to include involvement in practice based learning
* ensure support workers are fully competent and confident to contribute to practice based learning- do they know their scope and boundaries and what to do if issues arise?
* inform students joining your team on placement that support workers will be formally contributing to their placement education and how they are a valued part of the team
* create regular and timetabled periods for students to spend with support workers in order that support workers can:
* induct a student to their role
* teach and train students in the tasks and activities they undertake in their role
* build a relationship with students in order to contribute to their pastoral support
* Share their learning and insights from the work they do and its contribution to patients pathways, care and experience
* ensure students understand the scope of practice of support workers; their value in the MDT and their impact in services
* fully involve support workers in discussions regarding feedback on a student’s performance and placement assessment