# Using this document

This document can be used by any organisation wishing to implement student flexible working.

Formatting and wording may be amended to suit organisational processes and logos may be added, however:

* The principles of student flexible working must not be changed
* NHSE London region must be credited and their logo must remain

Dear Student,

We understand that attending placements can be challenging for many reasons. To support you to complete your placement, XXXXXUniversity and XXXXXTrustare offering flexible working to students while they are in clinical practice.

The information below provides you with all of the information that you need to know about flexible working arrangements. Please note, there may be some differences in how this is carried out depending on the Trust/placement provider you are placed with, but the main principles are the same.

**We recognise that student nurses are not employed by their placement areas, so technically their time on placement is not “work”. We use the term “student flexible working” to describe formalised arrangements to support flexibility in placement hours, as it is a terminology that most people are familiar with, and to highlight the similarity to NHS Trust flexible working policies for staff.**

**Students on apprenticeship programmes should be aware that any flexible working they have in place in their place of employment is separate from any student flexible working described in these guidelines.**

We hope that by formalising flexible working processes, we can support you to balance your personal commitments with your placements. Please read the information below carefully, and speak to your XXXXX if you have any questions.

*A note on working hours:*

We recognise that some students may request flexible working for financial reasons, and may take on other paid work outside of their nursing studies. If this is the case, students must adhere to the UK Worktime Regulations.

These limit the working week (placement hours and paid work combined) to 48 hours averaged over a 17 week period, at least 11 hours of rest between 12 hour shifts, and a continuous rest period of at least 24 hours (typically a day off) in a block of 7 days.  More information is available here: <https://www.gov.uk/maximum-weekly-working-hours>

This means a student can work a maximum of 12 consecutive days, but it must start and end with a full day off and cannot exceed 48 working hours per week.

Students should consider the impact of their paid working hours on their physical and mental health and wellbeing, and the effect this will have on safety and patient care.

**Principles of Flexible Working for Students:**

* You can apply for flexible working for any reason, and the reason for your request is not typically used to decide whether or not your flexible working request can be accommodated
* If you have Occupational Health requirements or Reasonable Adjustments in place, you may still apply for Flexible Working, and this will not affect your other arrangements, however flexible working should not be requested instead of seeking OH support through reasonable adjustments
* Flexible working requests might not always be agreed. It will depend upon the clinical area and if they are able to support the request, and must take your safety, your learning and patient safety into account
* Flexible working requests will only be agreed if they do not impact your ability to complete the shifts/shift patterns required to complete your course
* Flexible working requests must be agreed by your university and the Trust
* You should be informed of the outcome of your request in a timely manner
* Student flexible working should be comparable to staff flexible working policies and processes, although we know that there are some differences.

XXXXXXXXXX **NHS TRUST – Student Flexible Working Guidance**

**When to apply**

You can apply for flexible working at (point in the year). All submissions must be received before (DATE), and it is your responsibility to make sure that you meet deadlines and follow the processes outlined.

**How to apply**

To apply for flexible working, you must complete the Student Flexible Working Application Form. The form is available from XXXXX.

All sections of the form MUST be completed for you to be successful in your application. There is additional guidance on what to include in your application at the end of the form.

Once the form is completed it must be submitted to XXXXX. You must make sure that your course/director/placements lead/link lecturer/programme lead/personal tutor knows about your application.

**What flexible working options are available?**

(TRUSTS TO FILL IN)

**How decisions are made**

Flexible working requests will be accommodated wherever possible, as long as it can be safely accommodated and does not impact learning, The reason for the request is not usually considered in the decision-making process. Students will be informed of the outcome of their request within (X) weeks of their application.

Where there have been more requests than can be safely accommodated, the Trust will use the following criteria to decide who will be offered flexible working arrangements:

* (Date of receipt of application/other criteria)

**How are students informed of the outcome?**

The Trust will email students using their university student email account to inform them of the outcome of the decision.

We hope that this will support to successfully complete your placements and achieve a better work-life balance.

Wishing you all the best in your studies,

XXXXXXXXX University, XXXXXXX Trust.

**Principles of Student Flexible working**

**Flexible working- Definition**

The NHS defines flexible working as “an arrangement which supports an individual to have greater choice in when, where and how they work.” This may include changes to their working pattern, hours and role, and/or the location in which their work takes place. Having a flexible working arrangement can help individuals to have better notification of, and predictability in, their work schedules and so may facilitate greater variation in their work. Good flexible working arrangements should balance the needs of the individual with three key organisational factors; patient/service user and staff experience, service delivery and work-life balance of colleagues (NHS 2022).

**Flexible working for students**

We understand that student nurses can have many demands on their time, including caring responsibilities, religious obligations and financial pressures. Flexible working may help some students to manage these demands, while still meeting the practice requirements of their nurse education.

In the same way that the NHS recognises that flexible working must balance the needs of the organisation, and ultimately the needs of patients, with the work preferences of its staff, student flexible working must also balance NMC requirements with regard to the number and type of shifts worked and the requirements of the programme of study. Students should bear in mind the requirement for full commitment to the course, and to the clinical areas that they are working in, and also the ability of the practice environment to safely accommodate any flexible working requests.

While Trusts and HEIs will be as creative and flexible as they can to meet flexible working requests, it will not always be possible to grant students their ideal working pattern. There may however be the opportunity to compromise to better meet the needs of both the student and the organisation.

The student flexible working policy for each Trust will be aligned with staff flexible working policies in order to better prepare students for working life as a qualified nurse, although there may be some necessary differences in student policies and processes.

Students should consider that once a flexible working arrangement has been agreed and is in place, this should be adhered to for the agree time period.

**Occupational health needs/reasonable adjustments**

Students who require reasonable adjustments under the Equality Act (2010) or for acknowledged health reasons should have these accommodations made through the usual Occupational Health processes agreed with the HEI and Trust. Flexible working processes work alongside these processes, and student with additional needs may still apply for flexible working arrangements, however it should be noted that these are not the same as Occupational Health-related needs and reasonable adjustments.

**What flexible working arrangements are available?**

Flexible working arrangements can vary from Trust to Trust, however students *may* be able to request any of the following:

* Set shift patterns (Trusts will advise students with regard to which shift patterns are available in particular practice areas)
* No nights (as long as this does not prevent students from meeting NMC requirements for nightshifts worked before the end of their studies)
* No weekends (as long as this does not prevent students from meeting NMC requirements for weekends worked before the end of their studies)

Trusts will be able to provide specific details regarding the options that students can request.

**How are HEIs involved in student flexible working decisions?**

This may vary from Trust to Trust, however students must speak to the appropriate person from their University to ensure that they are in agreement that any flexible working request will not affect the student’s ability to meet course requirements. For instance, it would not be appropriate for students to request no weekends or nights in their final placement if they had not worked sufficient weekend or night shifts in their previous placements to meet NMC requirements.

Arrangements between HEIs and Trusts regarding decision making processes may vary; for instance there may be an email discussion, or panel meeting depending on the nature of the request.

**When can applications be made?**

This may vary from Trust to Trust, but students will be given timely advice and guidance on when they may submit flexible working requests by their Trusts. Deadlines must be met in order for a flexible working request to be considered.

**How are students informed of the outcome?**

Students would normally be informed of decisions regarding their flexible working applications by email, and in the time frame stated by their Trust and HEI.

**How are decisions made?**

Trusts will approach all applications for flexible working creatively and positively, and will accommodate requests wherever possible, however some flexible working requests may not be possible to accommodate. Where this is the case, the Trust will have a clear criterion which they will share with students to ensure a fair and transparent decision-making process. This could be based on when applications were received, or a scoring system for applications which Trusts and HEIs will make available to students prior to their flexible working applications.

**When might flexible working not be possible?**

Some clinical areas may not be able to fulfil flexible working requests. This could be because:

* too many students have applied for the same shift pattern
* the clinical area or service cannot accommodate the request while providing appropriate supervision for students
* The flexible working request would mean the student missing handovers or other information vital for patient safety
* The service runs from 9am – 5pm, and students would not be able to fulfil their placement hours if the request is accommodated

There may be other reasons of staff or patient safety that could also affect a particular clinical areas ability to accommodate student flexible working requests.