Flexible Placements for Student Nurses and Midwives

A framework



**Foreword**

Flexible working for student nurses was first proposed by Charlii Siddu, in her joint roles as Practice Development Facilitator at a large acute hospital Trust in London and Senior Lecturer for Practice Learning at a London HEI. Charlii had witnessed the stress that the existing placements process caused for student nurses across her roles and worked to develop a better way to support them in her places of work. She then applied for funding as part of the REPAIR project and secured a grant to implement student flexible working across the London region.

This framework is one of the outcomes of this ongoing work to ensure that our student nurses, and now midwives, are supported to achieve their potential in practice placements.

Compassion, one of the “6 Cs” of nursing, is at the heart of this work. We hope that it will support colleagues to treat students in the holistic and person-centred way that we do the people and patients that we care for. We also hope that this expands into the wider workplace and helps to promote the NHS People Plan’s vision to promote flexible working and compassionate and inclusive cultures.

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Framework for Flexible Nursing and Midwifery Placements

(Student Flexible working)

# What is flexible placement provision?

Flexible placements accommodate the diverse needs of students while meeting educational and professional standards. They allow for variations in scheduling, location, and format to support students’ work-life balance, including cultural and religious needs and other personal circumstances, whilst maintaining a safe and effective workplace. Flexible placements ensure a valid learning experience and fair assessment, supporting students to graduate and facilitating a smooth transition to professional roles

Flexible placement opportunities should be widely available, supported by a simple process, and clearly communicated to all stakeholders. Providing flexible placement opportunities balances student needs with placement requirements, promotes safety and equity, and treats students with kindness and compassion.

# Why is flexible placement provision important

Providing flexible placements is essential to ensure a fair and valid learning experience for all students. It empowers students to take responsibility for their well-being and professional development, while meeting NMC standards and educational requirements, and fostering a supportive learning and working environment. This approach can reduce attrition rates and increase progression to professional registration.

Flexible placement provision promotes a culture of kindness and compassion, encouraging students to be viewed holistically and realistically, appreciating their circumstances both in and out of their role as a student nurse/midwife. This paves the way to creating compassionate and flexible workplace cultures.

# Who is the framework for

Flexible placements require partnership between all stakeholders: the higher education provider, including all those who have a role in ensuring and assuring student nurse/midwife education, students and the placement provider, including all those who have a role in providing safe and effective patient care. The framework is therefore intended to be accessible to a wide audience. It may be particularly useful for:

**Decision makers**: the framework has implications for policy, administrative systems and processes in both higher education and healthcare institutions.

**Educators:** the framework can help colleagues take a consistent approach to providing flexibility in placements.

**Students**: the framework may be used to help students identify their rights and responsibilities when requesting flexible placements.

**Placement providers:** the framework helps placement providers understand their roles and responsibilities towards student nurses/midwives, their own staff, and their capacity to deliver safe and effective care.

# How is the Framework structured

The framework acknowledges that the primary goal of delivering safe and effective evidence- based care by competent staff and students can be achieved alongside flexible placement

provision. This is possible when the needs and responsibilities of the three key stakeholders— higher education providers, students, and placement providers—are recognised. The core

principles underpinning the framework support students' transition to Newly Qualified Nurse/Midwife (NQN/M) status and aim to develop a robust future workforce.

***Mutual respect***

***Safe, effective, evidence-based care from component staff and students***

***Motivated, engaged and energised workforce***

***Work-life balance***

**Placement providers** have the responsibility to ensure a safe and effective learning environment for student nurses/midwives. They need to balance the educational needs of students with the operational requirements of their own staff. This includes providing valid learning

experiences, fair assessments, and supporting students’ transitions to professional roles.

Placement providers must also maintain clear communication, adhere to professional standards, and promote a culture of safety, equity, and compassion. They should be flexible to accommodate students’ diverse needs while ensuring the delivery of high-quality care.

**Higher education providers** must ensure that student nurses/midwives receive a comprehensive and valid learning experience that meets academic and professional standards, preparing them for

professional roles. They should promote and support flexible working options to ensure equity and fairness. This involves collaborating with placement providers to identify

opportunities that balance educational and personal needs with operational requirements. Additionally, they need to effectively communicate placement opportunities and manage expectations.

**Students** need a supportive and flexible learning environment that accommodates their diverse needs including cultural and religious considerations and personal circumstances to help them achieve a work-life balance. They are responsible for actively engaging in their learning, communicating effectively, and adhering to professional standards. Students must understand their rights and responsibilities and work collaboratively with placement providers and higher education institutions to ensure they meet the professional and academic requirements to successfully transition into a professional role.



# How can you use the framework

The framework is a guide to help readers ensure they are focusing on the whole student experience, adopting the appropriate degree of flexibility for their placement provision, and considering whether their policies or practices place unnecessary restrictions on student

choice. The framework can be viewed from the perspectives of each of the stakeholder groups and can be useful in communicating challenges and needs of each of the stakeholder. It’s designed to prompt all stakeholders to consider the wider implications of a flexible learning strategy and how this can be translated into policies and practices and communicated to all stakeholders.

# Higher Education Providers

**Ensuring Comprehensive Learning**: The framework helps ensure that student nurses/midwives receive a valid learning experience that meets academic and professional standards.

**Promoting Flexibility and Fairness**: It supports the promotion of flexible working options, ensuring equity and fairness by providing all students with the opportunity to graduate regardless of their circumstances

**Collaboration and Communication**: The framework facilitates collaboration with placement providers to balance educational and personal needs with operational

requirements, and ensures clear communication of flexible placement opportunities.

## Placement Providers

**Balancing Needs and Responsibilities**: The framework helps placement providers understand their roles and responsibilities towards student nurses/midwives and their own staff, ensuring safe and effective care.

**Supporting Student Transitions**: It aids in supporting students’ transitions to Newly Qualified Nurse/Midwife (NQN/M) status with a consistent approach.

**Maintaining Safety and Equity**: The framework ensures that placement providers maintain a safe learning environment and promote equity of opportunity.

## Students

**Receiving Flexible Learning Opportunities**: The framework ensures that students have access to flexible placements that accommodate their diverse needs, such as work-life balance and cultural considerations

**Understanding rights and responsibilities**: It helps students understand their rights and responsibilities, including the importance of effective communication, whilst meeting professional and academic standards.

**Supporting well-being and professional development**: The framework empowers students to take responsibility for their physical and mental health and supports their transition to professional roles.

***Motivated,***

 ***engaged,***

***energised work- force***

***Work- life balance***

***Mutual Respect***

***Safe, effective, evidence-based care***

***from competent staff and students***

Principles

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Valid Learning Experience and Assessment |  | Consistent and Transparent Communication |  | Capacity to Provide Placement |
| Work-Life Balance |  | Clarity in Policy and Purpose |  | Buy-In from Colleagues |
| Support and Well-Being |  | Realistic Workload and Planning |  | Realistic Compromise and Flexibility |
| Appropriate and Flexible Placements |  | Support for Change Management |  | Support from Higher Education Institutions |
| Clear and Accessible Information |  | Streamlined Processes |  | Expertise and Placement Knowledge |
| Respect and Professional Treatment |  | Collaboration and Capacity |  | Equitable Opportunities and FeedbackProcesses |
|  |
| Act Professionally |  | Listen and Communicate |  | Ensure Safety and Learning |
| Engage Proactively |  | Promote Flexibility |  | Act with Kindness and Fairness |
| Manage Personal Health and Well-Being: |  | Manage Transitions and Standards |  | Support and Communication |
| Understand and Apply Flexibility |  | Provide Accessible Information |  | Allocate Resources Wisely |
| Meet Academic & NMC Requirements |  | Support and Fairness |  | Drive Flexibility |
| Communicate Effectively |  | Balance and Manage Expectations |  | Ensure Sustainability |
| **Compliance and Standards** | **Placement and Hours Completion** | **Future workforce needs** |
| **Transition Support** | **Safety** | **Learning and Assessment** |
| Students  | Higher Education Institutions  | Healthcare Providers |

Responsibilities

Needs

## Flexible Working for Student Nurses and Midwives Framework

## Examples of using the framework

## Case study 1: Selina – an example of good practice

## Selina is a year one adult nursing student who has 3 young children. She and her partner are trying to manage childcare between them, but this is difficult because Selina’s partner is a shift-worker. Selina also works outside of her nursing course one day each week to make ends meet. She has been allocated to a general medical ward at a large Acute Trust for her placement. Selina is anxious about fitting her placement hours into her already complicated life.

## Needs:

## **Selina** needs to be able to go to her placement and work enough hours and have enough good learning experiences to pass. She needs to balance this with her responsibilities outside of the course, and be supported to do this. Selina needs to access information about how she can manage this, and what flexible placement arrangements are available to her. She needs to be guided through a process of professional negotiation so that a workable solution can be found. Selina needs to have her needs respected, and to be treated as the emerging professional she is so that a practical flexible working solution can be negotiated, bearing in mind that compromise may be required.

## **The HEI** needs to have a clear, simple process and policy in place (shared with he healthcare/placement provider)t so that they can provide Selina with the clear communication and guidelines required. HEI staff need to understand the process, and have this acknowledged by the institution as part of their expected workload. Staff should have access to the online resources about student flexible working provided by NHSE to ensure that the process is understood by all relevant staff. Senior management should know, understand and support the process while it embeds, and as the process becomes business-as-usual.

## **The Healthcare provider** that is providing Selina’s placement needs to have a process in place in partnership with the HEI to support equitable access to flexible working for student nurses. Staff need to access the information on student flexible working available on line, so that they understand and can support the process. The healthcare provider needs to be willing to be flexible and make compromise with Selina, based on their knowledge and expertise in the particular placement, and in student learning needs. The healthcare provider needs to have processes in place to ensure that the decision making process is fair and transparent, and that there is dialogue with Selina to ensure this is so.

## Responsibilities:

## **Selina** must initiate the process, and actively engage with it to ensure her needs are met. She must meet deadlines, communicate her needs and negotiate and compromise if necessary in a professional manner. Selina must understand the requirements of her course and the NMC requirements that must be adhered to, and ensure that she remains accountable to these.

## **The HEI** is responsible for ensuring that Selina’s needs are known and listened to, and that she and her colleagues know that flexible working is available through accessible information. They must also be clear about what may or may not be possible, managing expectations, so that Selina understands what is realistic and what is not. The HEI should be able to explain the process to Selina so that she is assured of a fair process. The HEI are responsible for checking with Selina that her requests do not compromise course or NMC standards.

## **The Healthcare Provider** is responsible for ensuring that the placement is a safe and effective learning environment, and has a responsibility to consider Selina’s request fairly and listen to her situation with kindness. They are responsible for ensuring that solutions do not compromise Selina’s or patients’ safety, and are realistic and achievable. They are responsible for communicating with Selina openly and clearly.

## Outcomes:

## Selina is able to work set shift patterns at her placement. This does mean that she and her partner will have to arrange childcare on some days, but they are able to plan this in advance, and most days that can manage this between them, which relieves the financial burden, and stress. This is beneficial for Selina’s wellbeing and work-life balance. This means that Selina is able to focus on learning in her placement. Selina feels supported and respected, and also respects the placement provider and their appreciation of her needs. Selina does not have to ask her practice assessors/supervisors for time off or to swap shifts, so they experience her as being committed and reliable. This benefits her learning relationships, and means she is able to successfully complete the placement. Selina feels motivated and supported, and the staff on her placement have a positive experience of supporting a student.

Case study 2: Emmanuel – Framework principles not being met

## Emmanuel is a year 2 nursing student. He is a single father of a 16 year old son, and has a flexible part time job to support them both. Emmanuel completed all of his part one placements in the same NHS Trust, and will be going to the same Trust for year 2. His practice assessors have always been accommodating, and for the most part Emmanuel has been able to fit in his work and placements, while being available to his son, although he has had to take annual leave from his job at times. Emmanuel has contacted his placement area to ask about flexible working, and has been told that he can just ask his PA when he comes in for his first shift. Emmanuel does this, but is told that his requests to not work on Thursdays or Sundays cannot be met every week, although the placement will do what they can. Emmanuel has to request several rota changes, including some that seem to be last minute, as he has been trying to change his paid work, and asking friends and family to confirm what days they are able to spend some time with his son in the evenings.

## Needs:

## **Emmanuel** needs to be able to go to his placement and work enough hours and have enough good learning experiences to pass. He needs to balance this with her responsibilities outside of the course, and be supported to do this. He needs timely access to information about how he can manage this, and what flexible placement arrangements are available to him. He needs to be guided through a process of professional negotiation so that a workable solution can be found. Emmanuel needs to have his needs respected, and to be treated as the emerging professional he is so that a practical flexible working solution can be negotiated, bearing in mind that compromise may be required. This needs to happen before the placement starts so that Emmanuel can plan. **These needs are not being met.**

## **The HEI** needs to have a clear, simple process and policy in place (shared with he healthcare/placement provider)t so that they can provide Emmanuel with the clear communication and guidelines required. HEI staff need to understand

## the process, and have this acknowledged by the institution as part of their expected workload. Staff should have access to the online resources about student flexible working provided by NHSE to ensure that the process is understood by all relevant staff. Senior management should know, understand and support the process while it embeds, and as the process becomes business-as-usual. **The HEI has not met these needs in this instance.** Emmanuel was not aware of a process, and had not received timely information about this.

## **The Healthcare provider** that is providing Emmanuel’s placement needs to have a process in place in partnership with the HEI to support equitable access to flexible working for student nurses. Staff need to access the information on student flexible working available on line, so that they understand and can support the process. The healthcare provider needs to be willing to be flexible and make compromise with Emmanuel, based on their knowledge and expertise in the particular placement, and in student learning needs. The healthcare provider needs to have processes in place to ensure that the decision making process is fair and transparent, and that there is dialogue with Emmanuel to ensure this is so. **These needs have not been met in this instance**. The placement area does not have an equitable process in place to support staff to make equitable flexible working arrangements available. Ad hoc requests being met where possible do not constitute a flexible working process.

## Responsibilities:

## **Emmanuel** has attempted to initiate conversation and be proactive to attempt to meet his needs, and appears willing to compromise and negotiate, however the lack of process means he cannot take this any further.

## **The HEI** is responsible for ensuring that Emmanuel’s needs are known and listened to, but does not appear to have any process for gathering such information or passing it on to Emmanuel’s placement provider. The HEI has not provided Emmanuel with information about how he can meet his needs on placement in a professionally negotiated way, and hence have **not met their responsibilities** under the Framework.

## **The Healthcare Provider** is responsible for ensuring that the placement is a safe and effective learning environment, and has a responsibility to consider Emmanuel’s request fairly and listen to his situation with kindness. They are responsible for ensuring that solutions do not compromise Emmanuel’s or patients’ safety, and are realistic and achievable. They are responsible for communicating with Emmanuel openly and clearly. Although the placement are willing to be flexible to some extent, they have not fully considered Emmanuels needs or explored solutions with him. They have not communicated with him in a timely fashion, which has meant that Emmanuel cannot plan. Emmanuel experiences increased stress and spends time on placements trying to negotiate shift changes, which impeded his learning. Therefore they have **not met their responsibilities** under the Framework.

## Outcomes:

## Emmanuel is not given information about flexible working, and the process to follow to organise this, and arrangements are not negotiated and confirmed in a timely fashion. He is not able to plan for the placement as he is not able to discuss his needs before the first day. Finding out that his request cannot be confirmed puts considerable extra pressure on Emmanuel, which means he finds the placement more stressful. He often spends time trying to find his PA to change shifts, which means he is missing out on learning. This also impacts his relationships with his PA and practice supervisors, who see him as being awkward. Emmanuel’s employer are also frustrated with him for making last minute leave requests and shift changes, which adds to his financial worries, as he is scared of losing his job. This impacts his academic work and his performance on placement negatively.