PRACTICE PLACEMENT PARTNERSHIP AGREEMENTS FOR ALLIED HEALTH PROFESSIONS IN SCOTLAND

Frequently Asked Questions

August 2011

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1. What is a Practice Placement Agreement?

This is simply a document that formalises the current system regarding pre-registration AHP student placements. The Agreements have two parts (or Tiers). The first part is a Stakeholder Statement that outlines the importance and joint commitment of all in Scotland who are involved in AHP Student Placements. It has been signed by Board Chief Executives and Principles of Scottish HEIs.

The second part is the actual agreement which outlines the roles and responsibilities of the Board and partner HEIs in Scotland for AHP student placements. It is based on the Health Professions Council (HPC) Standards of Education and Training which all AHP courses must comply with. Each Board will have an Agreement with each HEI they work with in providing AHP student placement.
In addition to issues on roles and responsibilities, the Agreements clarify legal and risk aspects of placement provision and ask for Boards to provide a commitment to a certain number of placements per profession per year.

2. Why is a Practice Placement Agreement required?

The lack of governance around AHP Placements in Scotland was identified as being an issue and a risk to the AHP workforce as long ago as 2002\(^1\) and again in the AHP Practice Placements Project in 2006\(^2\). Internationally, there is an increasing recognition that to formalise these relationships is good practice\(^3\).

The Agreements are an open and transparent way to build on the good partnerships that already exist between Boards and HEIs in Scotland and largely formalise the systems and process that exist already. The Agreements are a way of ensuring on-going partnership working between HEIs and Health Boards.

Many Boards now require much tighter controls on individuals accessing clinical areas and patient care areas. This agreement enables Health Boards to put relevant systems and processes in place to address this need.

AHP Placement Agreements have been developed in partnership with NHS Scotland Health Boards and Scottish Higher Education institutions. The Agreements are supported by the Scottish Government Health Directorates, the Scottish Funding Council and acknowledged by the Health Professions Council.

3. What are the benefits of having a Placement Agreement?

The benefits are about making the role of the HEIs and placement providers explicit. For practice educators this is particularly in relation the role of higher education to support practice educator training, the sharing of information on placements, the management of risks (eg Disclosure, mandatory training) and enhancement of quality of the student and educator experience.

In addition it provides an overview of placement activity across the Health Board, a consistent approach to placement provision across professions, encourages better communication across professional groups and supports better partnership working between HEIs and Health Boards.

\(^1\) Building on Success - Future Directions for the Allied Health Professions in Scotland


\(^3\) Clinical Education and Practice Placements in the Allied Health Professions: An International Perspective Rodger et al, 2008
One of the explicit goals of the AHP Placement Agreements is to reduce both the number of cancelled placements and thus the number of last minute placement requests.

For higher education institutions, the placement agreements provide a way to agree the number of student placements that that institution has with the health board which will reduce last minute cancellations and late placement requests to other areas.

4. Will the placement agreements create more work for the professions?

Initially there will be some extra work required in setting up the best process and system for agreeing and signing-off the Agreements. As the Agreements are designed to describe the current way of doing things rather than establishing new processes, once they are in place there will be a yearly monitoring of placement activity and communication with HEI partners.

The day to day running of an individual student placement and the communication between the university and the placement provider will be largely unchanged.

5. What is the role of NHS Education for Scotland (NES) in this process?

NES is acting as a broker between the Scottish boards and the Scottish HEIs. NES has led on the development of the Agreements and will support the implementation and monitoring of the Agreements.

6. Is this agreement for ALL types of placement within the Health Board?

No. The agreement is only for students that are studying an educational programme that will enable them to apply for registration with the HPC as a health professional, commonly called pre-registration programmes. The Agreement is intended to cover all the AHP professions and is based on the HPC Standards of Education and Training.

7. Does this agreement apply to students from non-Scottish universities?

The initial focus is on Scottish HEIs but the intention is to discuss this approach with HEIs from England and Ireland in the future.

8. Is the Placement Agreement a contract/legally binding?

The agreement is a legal document, as it covers legal areas such as disclosure, discrimination and risk management but is not legally binding. The Agreements have been developed in partnership and so disputes will be managed via discussion and mediation.
The Agreements are not contracts and are not underpinned by financial arrangements.

9. **What is the difference between a “memorandum of understanding” and a “placement agreement”**

A memorandum of understanding is a document that sets out the principles and approaches between two (or more) organisations but does not necessarily cover legal issues. The content of the AHP Placement Agreements covers many legal issues which require a stronger commitment than just a memorandum of understanding. The Placement Agreements are similar to service level agreements or (SLAs) that are used between different parts of the NHS.

10. **What will change for practice education after signing up to the agreement?**

The Agreements will ensure a more consistent approach to the way that all pre-registration placements are delivered across the board for AHPs. The biggest difference is that boards will be asked to agree a certain number of weeks of placement to each HEI that they are partners with.

11. **What will change for individual Practice Educators/trainers/clinical educators?**

Very little. You may be asked a little earlier to consider how many students you are able or required to take in order to help contribute to your board’s commitment but this should be outlined in your job description and/or PDP.

The Agreements should ensure that you receive the appropriate training and updates for your role as a practice educator and that your students have all of the correct preparation completed before they commence on placement with you.

12. **How will the placement commitment be calculated?**

By and large this will be based on average historical commitment, ie boards will be asked to provide the same number of placements as they have been providing in recent years.

For some professions, such as dietetics, there is a nationally agreed allocation system for placements with one HEI acting as allocating institution on behalf of the others. This system uses a proportional method where each board offers a proportion of all the placements weeks needed relative to their share of the Scottish workforce. Where differences like this exist, it will be captured in a Schedule (Appendix) to the Agreement.

Placements of different length and type can be compared using the measure of a ‘placement week’.
13. What is a “placement week” and how is it calculated?

A placement week is one of the measures of a Boards’ placement commitment. The number of placements and total number of weeks required for these placements are other measures.

Placements of different length and type can be compared using the measure of a placement week.

The total placement weeks for one placement are calculated by:

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\text{Length of placement (in weeks) \times Days per week (or Whole Time Equivalent fraction)}
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So a 6 week, full time (1.0 WTE) placement is 6 placement weeks and a 12 week placement at 2 days a week (0.4 WTE) will be 4.8 placement weeks.

For timetabling purposes, total number of weeks required for a placement is as important as total placement weeks, as these ‘blocks’ need to be slotted into a calendar of activity for a practice area or HEI.

14. What are the requirements of the Professional Lead Role (or equivalent) in signing off AHP Placement Agreements?

Professional leads will ultimately be responsible for determining and delivering on the undertakings in the Agreements. This includes both placement commitment and quality enhancement activity. The AHP PEF will support the Professional Leads where required.

The nominated Board lead for the AHP Placement Agreement will sign off the agreement with the nominated lead from partner HEIs using information provided by the professional lead.

15. How do we implement this Agreement within each profession in NHS X?

AHP Directors across Scotland have been involved with the development of the Agreements and Board Chief Executives have been kept informed throughout. The implementation commenced with the signing of the Stakeholder Statement (August 2009).

Within each profession in NHS X the professional lead will need to discuss the content of the Agreements and any implications for practice education in their area. They will also need to commit to providing a certain number of student placement weeks (or placements) and have some system in place for negotiating this across all services.

Existing practice education networks will provide a method of supporting team leaders to meet their requirements in terms of placement provision.
16. What happens if we cannot meet our placement commitment? What happens if we need to cancel a placement?

As a first point of call you should attempt to meet your share of placement commitment from within your own service. If this is not possible, contact should be made to others in your profession as they may be able to assist with an extra placement this year in exchange for you taking a placement for them the following year.

If you have exhausted your options in your own board area, you will need to have a conversation with both the HEI you are working with as well as letting your professional lead know.

17. How often will the Placement Agreements be reviewed?

In the first instance, it is recommended that the Agreements be reviewed after 12 months. If both parties are happy with the way that the Agreement is operating this could be done virtually.