

## **Position statement in response to the College of Paramedic Advice and Guidance to Student Paramedics – Covid-19**

South Western Ambulance Service NHS Foundation Trust (SWASfT) is a placement provider for 6 partner universities, supporting over 600 Paramedic and Allied Health Professional (AHP) students to develop into registered clinicians. As a result of COVID 19 response measures, and risks associated with Personal Protective Equipment, it became increasingly challenging to provide a quality safe practice placement. In conjunction with the universities a reluctant decision was taken to withdraw students from placement.

Practice Placement underpins the foundations of all AHP programs, without this the ability for a student to complete their studies and graduate is significantly affected, as is the national commitment for all Higher Education Institute's (HEI's) and placement providers to increase the number of AHP's within the NHS. SWASfT, in close liaison with our Partner Universities, responded quickly to addressing the inability to provide placement through innovative models of recruitment. This in turn supported the overwhelming need to increase available front line personnel. These decisions were running both in parallel, and ahead of national pace and decisions.

On the 19<sup>th</sup> March 2020 the Health Care Professions Council (HcPC) opened a temporary COVID-19 register. This was an unprecedented move to meet the demands of unprecedented times, enabling third year students, who had completed all their placements, to register and begin work under their protected title. <https://www.hcpc-uk.org/covid-19/temporary-register/>

On the 6<sup>th</sup> April 2020 the College of Paramedics (CoP) published advice and guidance to student Paramedics relating to the disruption of student studies and placements as a result of the national response to COVID 19. [https://collegeofparamedics.co.uk/COP/News/Covid-19/advice\\_and\\_guidance\\_to\\_student\\_paramedics.aspx](https://collegeofparamedics.co.uk/COP/News/Covid-19/advice_and_guidance_to_student_paramedics.aspx) Guided by the joint statement issued on the 3<sup>rd</sup> April 2020 by the UK AHP community <https://councilofdeans.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/Joint-statement-on-how-we-will-support-and-enable-the-student-allied-health-professional-workforce-to-respond-to-the-Covid-19-V3.pdf> the college has shown the support and high regard they place on our students, and their ability, to not only support the national COVID 19 response, but also for them to complete their studies to full registration.

It is to be noted that information being issued is guidance; however it allows a framework for both students and placement providers, switching to being employers of students, to review and consider ensuring they can be operationalised to meet the varying needs of the AHP workforce demands. SWASfT has been in close liaison with the CoP, neighbouring Ambulance trusts, Health Education England (HEE) and partner HEI's ahead of the publication; as a result the actions we have taken are aligned to the principles set out within the guidance issued by the CoP, HcPC, and the UK AHP Community.

SWASfT has proactively recruited 25 Temporary Newly Qualified Paramedics (NQP's) from Plymouth University. They will receive induction, preceptorship and enter into the Consolidation of Learning as per all NQP's recruited . This is in alignment with the recommendations of the HcPC, set out within their guidance for bringing students into practice.

SWASfT is committed to ensuring temporary registrants are not only regarded and supported as per all employees, but that they remain students until they gain entry onto the permanent register, and the support this also brings from their University and the practice placement teams. Key for this group is to ensure smooth transition from temporary to full registration.

SWASfT is wholly supportive of the approach that learning, whilst working, within a role aligned to their studies is a valuable and essential avenue to progress, particularly during this time where placements have been withdrawn. Therefore students in year 2 and 3, who are not eligible for temporary registration but who are wishing to support the COVID 19 response, have been recruited into bank Emergency Care Assistant (ECA) roles, and supported to continue to carry out the skills and competencies permitted of a student paramedic. This again is in alignment to the guidance of the CoP, HEE and the AHP community.

Students working within a bank ECA role are receiving an induction and, depending on their C1 status, allocation to both Emergency Response and non-Emergency Response Driving courses. This is a great opportunity for students in preparing them for their future registered role within SWASfT. We are also extending support to those who do not hold C1 on their license by taking the unprecedented decision to allow them to enter into the workforce in a non-driving capacity, whilst we support them through the C1 processes, and then onto an appropriate driving course.

With regards to the study/work split within the CoL guidance for students to be available for 40% of their time to complete their studies, all partner universities are closed and are beginning to make available the outstanding modules on line with the angle and acceptance this will be completed around shifts. The opportunity to work within a bank ECA role will allow students the flexibility to continue with their studies to enter into their next year, or to graduate this year. It is the expectation of SWASfT that students will take responsibility for balancing their ability to work and to complete their studies. However the practice placement team, in close liaison with the universities, will ensure that appropriate support is put in place and opportunities for skill acquisition and sign off maximised wherever possible.

Students within their first year, or those in year 2 and 3 not wishing to work clinically, are also able to support the COVID 19 response in non-clinical roles, and many have taken up this opportunity. However, it is vital that this group of students continue to focus on their academic studies, and as a placement provider we work pro-actively to return them to supernumerary placement as soon as practicably possible.

SWASfT is so proud of the students who have taken the decision to work in the various roles available to them during a time never so challenging. Equally SWASfT is proud and respectful to those students who have decided that working and learning is not appropriate for their needs. SWASfT is committed to their students, and we will ensure that we continue to support all, and welcome those who have temporary employed status with us.