Scottish Dietetic Practice Placement Allocation and Administration Policy

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1. INTRODUCTION

Since October 2004 the three Universities within Scotland training student dietitians (Queen Margaret University (QMU), The Robert Gordon University (RGU), Glasgow Caledonian University (GCU)) work in partnership to facilitate dietetic practice placements and manage the allocation of student dietitians to practice placements throughout Scotland.

This document aims to set out the process by which practice placements are allocated to all students and make clear the current policy and process on how placement decisions are made. It describes the policies and processes to which all relevant parties (i.e. Universities, NHS Education Scotland, NHS Boards, Course Tutors/Placement Tutors, Dietetic Managers and the Scottish Placement Administrator) in the placement process agree to abide by and outlines the obligations and terms and conditions to which the student signs up to when making an application for placements within the allocation process outlined.

All placements will be allocated as defined in this document and at no point should students contact practice placement providers directly to negotiate or modify their own training, as such actions will not influence allocations made. Those students that do so will be referred back to their University.

Please note this document is not exhaustive and is subject to change. Should any substantive change occur all relevant parties will be notified.

2. PRACTICE PLACEMENTS

The BDA Curriculum Guidance (2013) endorses an integrated skills based approach to the delivery of University and practice based learning in dietetics. It stipulates that students will normally be expected to undertake not less than a 1000 hours of practical learning and experience. At present in Scotland this is met by the incorporation of 3 practice placement blocks. An initial four week (A) placement; split two weeks on campus and two weeks in practice, and two further placements of 12 weeks each (B & C). These placements are interspersed with periods of consolidation and teaching within each of the Universities. Students are required to meet specified programme regulations and placement learning outcomes prior to progressing to each stage of their programme and placements.

Placement A, the first of three placements, takes place early in the academic programme and aims to introduce the student to the work of a dietitian by observing working practices and undertaking practical exercises. Students must meet the associated learning outcomes of Placement A prior to progressing to Placement B.

Following reflection on practice and further learning within the academic environment the students undertake a B Placement (12 weeks in practice), the second of three placements. Placement B aims to enable the student to apply theoretical knowledge and develop the range of skills needed to work as a dietitian with specified clients/care groups and in a range of work settings. Students must meet all of the associated learning outcomes of Placement B prior to progressing to Placement C.

Placement C, the final of the three placements (12 weeks in practice) aims to enable the student to become competent in translating theory into practice and demonstrate the range of skills needed to work as a newly qualified dietitian. Students must also meet all of the associated learning outcomes of this placement.

Further information regarding placement aims and programme structures can be obtained via the Scottish Dietetic Cluster Website http://www.rgu.ac.uk/scdp or from the relevant University.
In order to maximise placement supply within Scotland and in a bid to manage demand throughout the year, practice placements are grouped in cohorts. The usual A, B and C practice placement cohorts accessed by Universities and Programmes for the Scottish cluster are as follows:

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<th>Jan</th>
<th>Summer (May-Sept)</th>
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<td>A</td>
<td>GCU (PG)</td>
<td>GCU (UG)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>QMU (PG)</td>
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<td>B</td>
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<td>QMU (UG)</td>
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<td>RGU (UG)</td>
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<td>C</td>
<td>Jan/Feb</td>
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<td>QMU (UG)</td>
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<td>RGU (UG)</td>
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3. SCOTTISH PRACTICE PLACEMENT ALLOCATION

The process involves Scottish placement allocations only.

Each year all students from each of the three Universities in Scotland (QMU, RGU, GCU) will complete the relevant Placement Application Forms (A, B, C) provided by their University. These forms will be completed at the beginning of the academic year for the forthcoming placement cycle. Students will be required to complete a separate form for each of the placements that they are required to undertake during the defined period of allocation and this will be done under the guidance of their Programme Tutors/Placement Tutors.

Students who may qualify for an individual matching of a placement will complete an additional ‘Individual Matching of Placement’ form provided by their University. Individual matching status will only be awarded to those students who satisfy the criteria and provide appropriate supporting evidence. NB This status does not guarantee a placement.

Application forms are signed by students indicating that all the information is correct and that they agree to abide by the terms and conditions of the allocation process as set out in this document.

4. OPERATIONAL PROCESS

Planning for the placement cycles commences in May/June each year and continues into the summer period prior to the start of the relevant academic year. Approved Practice Providers in Scotland are asked to complete the following:

A ‘Practice Placement Supply’ form detailing the type and number of practice placements they can supply for the next placement cycle including when these are available in relation to cohort times. This is returned to the Scottish placement administrator for collation and circulated to the relevant Stakeholders.

Universities are asked to complete and return to the Scottish placement administrator a Practice Placement Demand form detailing practice placement demand for each of their assigned cohort times. This information is again collated by the Scottish placement administrator and circulated to the relevant stakeholders.

The Universities liaise with practice placement providers to negotiate that wherever possible practice placements are offered at appropriate times and locations to best meet the Scottish cluster demand.

Practice placement providers are also asked to report any significant changes to the organisation of their placements and to complete a practice placement profile providing information on the placement itself, which is held on the Scottish Cluster website: Scottish Cluster Dietetic Placement website: http://www.rgu.ac.uk/scdp
The Placement profiles can be used by students after they have been allocated a practice placement to allow them to be briefed on the training offered by Practice Providers and any specific requirements (e.g. criminal disclosure, dress/uniforms requirements).

The following information is made available by the Scottish placement administrator to programme tutors at the start of the academic year:-

Scottish practice placement supply details for appropriate placement type and cohort(s)
Scottish practice placement demand
Student application forms for allocation of practice placements A, B or C
Individual matching of placement application forms

Programme/Placement Tutors then support students to complete their practice placement application forms at the appropriate times.

4.1 Applications for the individual matching of placements

It is acknowledged that some students may have particular needs which in some instances can only be supported by the student undertaking their practice placement(s) in a specific location. Students are requested to complete an individual matching of practice placement application form and to provide evidence to support their application. Students can only make a case for this based on the criteria given below:

- student with young/school age children or with other family responsibilities e.g. sole carer of an older relative;
- student with health problems that requires individual matching of placement due to those specific health grounds.

Students should discuss their potential qualification for individual matching with their tutor who is required to countersign the application as correct. Students are required to provide a supporting statement outlining their specific needs and provide relevant supporting evidence. Examples of suitable evidence are given on the form itself. It should be noted that individual matching is not always granted and in addition an approved application for individual matching allocation does not guarantee a placement. Applications which fail to provide supporting evidence, for example the evidence is missing or it cannot be verified will result in the application being declined. Evidence which is subsequently proven to be false and has resulted in a placement allocation will result in that practice placement being withdrawn and the student will be placed at the bottom of any existing waiting list to be allocated a placement only after all other students (including those from other Universities and Programmes) have been allocated placements. Any student may also be referred to their University Fitness to Practice/Non-academic Misconduct procedures.

Students are required to keep Programme/Placement Tutors informed of any changes in circumstance either qualifying or disqualifying them.

NB: Note that an individually matched placement allocation is normally based on the principle of a placement allocation approximately no more than 70 miles from permanent home or University address dependent on individual circumstances and on placement availability.

Once all completed application forms are returned to the Scottish Placements Administrator the provisional allocation of students to Practice Placements begins. Applications are sorted into the required practice placements and their cohort start dates. Universities are provided with access to an equal share of each available cohort type/time and students are allocated to placements as follows:

- For the purposes of the Scottish placement allocation system all practice placements in Scotland are considered to be local to all of the three Universities within Scotland
- Each University in line with their demand/cohort requirements is initially allocated a random selection of placements from those placements available
• Students are then allocated to placements as per their own Universities processes.
• Each Scottish University within the cluster will receive an equal share of the Scottish Placements available in each of the cohort times. Where a University has been allocated a lesser share of placements due to an unequal number of practice placements being available in the cohort timing then the rotation of subsequent practice placement allocations will commence with the University with the lesser share.
• Practice placement allocations will then follow in strict rotation between the Universities.

Where an excess of Practice Placement supply exists beyond a Universities demand for that cohort, this will be offered in the first instance to the other Universities. If surplus to cohort demand and where surplus placements cannot be moved to another cohort time to address a possible deficit these placements will be used to facilitate the progression of any students out of cohort due to extenuating circumstances and for students who have not met the required placement learning outcomes and who require a period of extended training.

Following the confirmation of placement allocations, the Scottish placement administrator completes and sends to the appropriate practice placement provider the application forms for those students who have been allocated to the practice placement provider for the forthcoming placement cycle.

Students who are unallocated after the initial allocations will be informed and placed on a waiting list for allocation as and when additional placements become available, following the above guidance. (See Section 7: Unallocated Students for further information)

In order to avoid the unnecessary declining of a placement allocation, students should not make travel/holiday plans until they have been allocated a placement and a start date has been agreed with individual Practice Providers. NB There are implications for future progression should a placement be declined -See Section 5.2: Declining a Practice Placement

All Practice placement allocations are provisional and dependent on the student reaching the standard required as set by the University Examinations Boards. Details of practice placement allocations and unallocated students are notified to course tutors and practice placement providers and published to students according to local timetables. Once allocations have been confirmed, practice placement providers normally contact students to discuss individual arrangements for placements normally two months before the expected start date. However if students have not heard from the practice placement providers six weeks prior to the expected start date they themselves should contact the practice placement provider. Contact details can be found on the Scottish Dietetic Placement Website

NB Students, Programme Tutors and Practice Providers are not permitted to exchange allocated placements, unless in exceptional circumstances and only with the agreement of all three Universities.

University Programme/Placement tutors are responsible for continuing to notify the Scottish Placements Administrator regarding student’s progress throughout the programme. All practice placements allocated to the University via the Scottish allocation process will remain with that University to be allocated to another student utilising that cohort timing from that University unless surplus to that University’s requirements for that cohort timing. For example, if as a result of examination failure, student deferment or withdrawal from the course a student cannot proceed to a practice placement allocated by the Scottish Cluster then that placement will be allocated to another student within that University unless it is surplus to the University’s requirements. In that instance it will be offered in strict rotation to the next student on the waiting list requiring a placement from one of the other Universities (see section 4.2: Extended practice placement for further information

Should any additional placements become available after the initial allocations have been made then those placements will be allocated to students on the waiting list following the above guidance. This only applies to students who have not yet been placed and not those requiring extended placements. NB Should students have any concerns about their practice placement allocation(s) they should be addressed to their Course/Placement tutor. The Scottish placement administrator will not enter into direct correspondence with any third parties.
4.2 Extended practice placement weeks

Students who do not successfully complete their practice placement(s) will be required to undertake a period of extended training. This will be determined by criteria set by the BDA Curriculum Framework (2013) detailed below and any additional regulations as set by the individual University programme. Individual Universities are responsible for maintaining the necessary student records to ensure compliance with the agreed criteria and any programme specific regulations.

Students are not normally allowed to extend more than 500 hours in total (or 50% of the total hours) of practical training ie the overall maximum hours of AB&C placements combined will be 1500 hours. Any designated period of practice placement (eg A, B or C) may normally only be extended once. Students absent from placement through sickness will normally be expected to make up an agreed number of hours subject to discussion between the University and named Practice Placement Provider. This will take account of current performance and potential effects on future progression- see section 4.4 attendance and absence on placement for further information.

4.2.1 Extended Practice Placement weeks (no extenuating circumstances)

In the best interests of the student, extended practice placement weeks should normally be completed with the original allocated practice placement provider. The number of weeks will be agreed and organised in liaison with the Programme Tutor of the relevant University and communicated to the Scottish placement administrator. To facilitate this the extended weeks do not have to run concurrently with the original placement weeks. Where other students are due to commence their practice placement with a placement provider offering extended weeks and the placement provider cannot accommodate all students at the same time, students undertaking a placement for the first time will be given priority. The student requiring extended weeks may therefore be delayed until the placement provider is able to accommodate the extended weeks.

If it is not possible for the extended placement weeks to be undertaken with the original allocated practice placement provider the following process will apply:

Once the number of extended placement weeks has been agreed, the student will be placed on a centrally held waiting list for the allocation of extended weeks as and when they become available. Surplus/held placement weeks ordinarily released back to Practice Providers will normally be utilised (in part or in full) for this purpose, but cannot be allocated to students requiring extended weeks until four weeks before the expected start date of the placement). In these circumstances, the individual University is responsible for completing the extended weeks training form which should be submitted to the Placement Administrator. Students will not be placed on the waiting list, nor allocated any further of placement weeks until the Placement Administrator has received the extended training form.

4.2.2 Extended Practice Placement weeks (with extenuating circumstances)

Where a student requires extended practice placement weeks as a result of extenuating circumstances the above processes will apply. However such students will be given priority on the waiting list above those without extenuating circumstances.

NB In situations where there may be a shortage of placements, students who have not undertaken an initial placement are normally prioritised before students who require extended placement weeks (with or without extenuating circumstances).

4.3 Exam Failure

Students who have been allocated a placement and subsequently fail any of their required pre placement examinations (reference needs to be made to individual University regulations) will lose their allocated placement and be suspended from the allocation process until all the relevant examinations have been retrieved. Students who subsequently retrieve the required examinations will then be reinstated into the allocation system to await the allocation of a placement at the next available cohort.
time accessed by their University and their Programme (UG/PG) after all other students progressing normally. **NB** This also applies to students requiring individual matching of a placement.

### 4.4 Attendance and absence on placement

Where absences due to sickness do occur these will normally be dealt with as follows:

**A placement (refers to both campus and practice weeks):**

**Loss of up to 2 placement days:**
- No action needs to be taken if the Practice Provider and University consider that there is no detrimental effect on the student’s progress, ie they have met all of the learning outcomes for that placement. If this is not the case the lost time must be made up.

**Loss of more than 2 placement days**
- Students should normally make up any additional days beyond the 2 day threshold (ie they should normally complete a minimum of 18 days). No action needs to be taken beyond this if the Practice Provider and University consider there is no detrimental effect on the student’s progress i.e they have met all of the learning outcomes. If this is not the case then the rest of the lost time should be made up.

**B & C placements:**

**Loss of up to 5 placement days**
- No action needs to be taken if the Practice Provider considers that there is no detrimental effect on the student’s progress, i.e. they have demonstrated competence in all of the learning outcomes for that placement. If this is not the case the lost time must be made up.

**Loss of more than 5 placement days**
- The student must complete a minimum of 11 weeks; any lost time must be made up to 11 weeks. No action needs to be taken beyond this if the Practice Provider considers that there is no detrimental effect on student’s progress, i.e., they have demonstrated competence in all the learning outcomes. If this is not the case the rest of the lost time should be made up.

If the student requires a prolonged period of absence from their placement, the period of training required will be determined in consultation with the Practice Provider and University Tutor.

### 5. ADDITIONAL OPERATIONAL POLICY

#### 5.1 Health

The Health and Care Professions Council (HCPC) requires that students should undertake practice placement(s) in the knowledge that they are fit to practise (HPC Guidance on conduct and ethics for students, sections 4, 5, 6, 7) if a student is aware of any circumstances which may prevent the completion of their placement or require the placement to be postponed then they should discuss this with their tutor in the first instance.

Students who withdraw or defer from practice placement(s) on a temporary basis on health grounds or as a result of changes in personal circumstance will need to discuss matters with their Programme/Placement tutor prior to being allocated and undertaking a further placement. Medical certification must be provided to support any such withdrawal where appropriate. A discussion will take place between the Programme/Placement tutor, previous trainer and external examiner where necessary. Recommendations will be made on an individual basis regarding when students should be reinstated into the allocation process and the length of training required. If the withdrawal was on health grounds then further medical certification declaring fitness to complete the placement will be required before a further placement will be allocated. The Scottish placement administrator will then seek to allocate a suitable placement (which will be dependent on current availability). Students with health problems who postpone commencing their placement would normally be allocated a placement at the
next available cohort time. When the next available cohort time is not the usual University cohort time, such students will be allocated placements after all other students/University programmes who would normally access this cohort time (eg only surplus/held placements can be used for this purpose).

5.2 Declining a Practice Placement

Students who decline an allocated practice placement(s) will be placed at the bottom of any existing waiting list for an alternative placement. A further offer will only be made once all other students above them on the waiting list (including those unallocated from other Universities) accessing that cohort time have been allocated placements. Students are strongly recommended to discuss all such decisions with their course tutor.

NB the above does not apply to unallocated students who qualify for an individual matching of a placement.

Students who decline an allocated placement due to a change in their circumstances which then qualifies them for an individual matching of a placement will be offered an alternative placement subject to availability. The necessary evidence must be provided and submitted to the Practice Placement Administrator to support such a change.

5.3 Informing Programme/Placement Tutors of changes in personal circumstances

Students are responsible for informing their Course/Placement tutor of any issues which may affect practice placement allocation. This may include: changes in personal circumstance which may qualify or disqualify them for individual matching of a practice placement or affect the completion of a practice placement in the time allocated; a personal decision to defer undertaking a practice placement or withdrawal from the course.

Students who withdraw during their practice placement will need to discuss the issues involved with their course tutor in the first instance. The decision as to whether a subsequent practice placement is offered will depend on discussions between the trainer, the course tutor, the external examiner and the student. Should any further placement be required, this will be administered by the placement administrator subject to availability. NB It is the individual Universities responsibility to inform the Scottish placement administrator of any such changes immediately.

5.4 Alterations to Practice Placement Allocations

The Scottish placement administrator may be required to make a change to allocated practice placements due to the practice placement no longer being available. Students will only be reallocated by the Placements Administrator if there is an alternative practice placement available. Every effort is made to identify practice placements for students whose initial practice placements have been withdrawn. Although this is subject to availability these students will be prioritised over other students on the waiting list. Students will be notified of any changes to practice placement allocation by their course tutor.

Withdrawal of a practice placement at short notice is sometimes unavoidable. Staffing situations within dietetic departments can change quickly as a result of key staff leaving and the Health Board being unable to recruit to a vacancy for several months. It is difficult to state a minimum period of notice for withdrawal of practice placements although Practice Providers are requested to give at least a 4 week minimum notice period to the Scottish Placement Administrator. It should be noted that, in line with NES PPA agreements, the withdrawal of practice placements should only occur in line with the NES cancellation policy.

Released placements are not available to other students who have already been allocated a practice placement.

Students are expected to undertake their practice placement(s) at their allocated Practice Placement. Practice placements will only be altered should individual circumstances change and the student
qualifies or disqualifies for individual matching of a practice placement. In this situation the Scottish placement administrator will seek to reallocate the student accordingly in liaison with the University. However, it should be noted that in some instances, due to the availability of placements, the latter may result in a delay to progression.

6. PRACTICE PLACEMENT APPROVAL

All practice placements within Scotland must be approved by the agreed Universities and cluster approval and monitoring mechanisms. This is administered on a Scottish wide basis by the Universities. All NHS Boards involved in training are aware of this and subscribe to the approval, monitoring and practice placement allocation processes.

NB In accordance with University approval & monitoring processes students can only undertake placements with approved practice placement providers.

7. UNALLOCATED STUDENTS

Whilst the Universities use their best endeavours to place students within their normal allocated cohort there may be from time to time a shortfall of practice placements in Scotland and therefore this cannot be guaranteed and some students therefore may not be allocated practice placements at the time they require them. Students in this situation are described as “unallocated” and placed on a priority waiting list for a placement as and when additional placements become available. Although it is recognised by all Stakeholders that this may delay progression the Universities continue to work with NHS Education Scotland, NHS Scotland and individual Health Boards to identify practice placements for all students concerned and will make every effort to place the student as soon as possible to minimise disruptions to student progression this cannot be guaranteed. The Programme/placement tutor will keep the student informed regarding the situation.

Students should discuss any concerns regarding practice placements with their Programme/Placement tutor.

8. FINANCE ON PLACEMENT

Practice Placement expenses eg travel and accommodation are not met by either Health Boards or Universities. However students funded by SAAS may be able to claim expenses incurred as a consequence of Practice Placements. Further information is available directly from SAAS and students are advised to contact SAAS to clarify what funding is available to them.

Students with concerns about additional costs in relation to practice placement(s) should in the first instance discuss this with their Programme/placement tutor who may be able to advise on alternative student funding sources.

9. ACCOMMODATION ON PLACEMENT

Health Boards are under no obligation to provide accommodation for students. If accommodation cannot be offered by the Health Board and students are unfamiliar with the area students are advised to contact Practice Placement Providers directly who may be able to advise students on the area and local accommodation. Accommodation costs are not met by Universities or Placement Providers.