

## Placement shortages FAQs

These FAQs are for students in the School of Health and Life Sciences whose programmes have an integral practice placement, and where the COVID-19 pandemic has potentially impacted placement availability.

### 1. What programmes are affected by placement shortages?

Currently, programme teams in the following areas have identified a potential risk for some students, of reduced placement availability: Dietetics, pre-registration Nursing programmes, Occupational Therapy, Orthoptics, Optometry (final years), Paramedicine, pre-registration Physiotherapy, and Social Work.

Across other programmes that require placements (Applied Biomedical Science, Food Bioscience, Podiatry, Radiography and Doctoral Psychology) the availability is adequate, and we will keep students up to date if there are any changes to this.

### 2. How have we responded to placement shortages?

We have been monitoring the risk of placement shortages closely since March 2020, and, where necessary we have been working with placement providers to maintain the placements offered during changes to service, prevent reductions in the numbers of students being offered placements and been working to identify where alternatives to practice placements can be offered that meet the needs of the programme learning outcomes. Where appropriate we have made changes to programme flow (the order in which modules are taken) to minimise the chance of there being placement shortages or late changes to placement availability.

Across the country, Universities, Health Boards, placement providers, and Scottish Government have all agreed to prioritise the placement learning of final year students. This is because they have less time on the programme to make up any deficits. GCU is therefore prioritising the provision of placement opportunities to final year students.

### 3. What is the situation now in respect of placements in 2021?

There is information coming in from our practice and service partners on a regular basis, and hence this picture may change over the coming weeks. We undertake to update you as and when new information becomes available.

Thanks to the efforts of service providers and staff in the School, we currently (as of the 7<sup>th</sup> December) have sufficient offers of placements for Applied Biomedical Science, Food Bioscience, Podiatry, Radiography (Diagnostic and Therapeutic) and the suite of Doctoral Psychology programmes (Counselling, Sports&Exercise, and Health). In these areas we are working hard with service providers to ensure that we maintain these placements for our students.

As it stands at present, however (as of the 7<sup>th</sup> December) we anticipate that there may be shortages in placements for some types of courses for some years of students in the following programmes: Dietetics, pre-registration Nursing programmes, Occupational

Therapy, Orthoptics, Optometry (final year only), Paramedicine, pre-registration Physiotherapy, and Social Work.

Not all years will be impacted in the same way: some years will not be impacted at all, and some groups of students will have reduced availability of specific types of settings where these have been particularly affected by the pandemic.

#### 4. How will placement shortages affect me?

Each student is allocated an appropriate placement based upon the types of practise experience they need to prepare them to be a fully-rounded health or social work professional. Your placement is therefore based, first and foremost, on the ability of the service setting and the supervisor to provide you with the experience you need to develop and demonstrate the skills required for your discipline.

If you need a placement in a 'shortage' setting then there is a risk that you won't get your placement at the originally scheduled placement time, and we might have to delay your placement to later in the year (a delayed placement).

We are working to provide appropriate alternatives to 'in person' placements where possible, such as increased use of practice simulation, virtual reality placements, case-based approaches, or 'attend anywhere' placements (an alternative placement).

If we need to offer students a delayed placement, or an alternative placement, we will, where we can, ask you for your preferences. This is because some students might prefer a delayed, or an 'attend anywhere' (alternative) placement due to their personal circumstances.

#### 5. In placements with a shortage, how will they be shared across students?

Where we have a placement shortage, despite the efforts of the practice setting and GCU, (that is, a higher number of students require a particular practice experience at a particular time than there are placements offered by service), we will allocate placements fairly by:

1. Firstly, place students who either
  1. have a placement related reasonable adjustment in place (as documented on their reasonable adjustment page (RAP) ,or
  2. whose carers' plan notes that they care for a person with a disability.
2. We will then select the remainder of the placement students for the particular setting at the original placement time by using a fair and transparent method of random selection (from a list of names of those students who need that particular placement at that time). This is to ensure that everyone gets the same chance of getting allocated to that placement at the earliest opportunity.
3. We will then use a 'best-fit' model to match students with the most appropriate placement according to distance to travel etc (based upon address, and caring responsibilities, etc). This approach is to get the best-fit for you as a student and hence put you in the best place for your placement experience.
4. Any student not selected for placement at the originally scheduled time, at step 2 (above), will be offered a delayed placement.

#### 6. Might this affect the duration of my programme?

There is a risk for some students that the shortage of placements might delay the completion of your programme. We at GCU and our service providers are working hard to increase the number of placements available for final year students, to minimise any risk of delay to your programme, but with the rapidly changing situation we cannot guarantee that all students will avoid a delayed placement or that it might impact upon the duration of their programme. Where we can, we will swop elements of the programme around to ensure that your University-based modules and the practice-based modules will continue to run to minimise any delay to your completion.

**Your programme leader will keep you up to date with the planning for your programme, including whether there is a risk of delayed placements.**

#### 7. Who will pay for any additional student living costs if my programme is delayed?

We recognise that the living costs incurred by students during any delay to their placement could be considerable and mechanisms for mitigation of those costs are being explored with key stakeholders and funding bodies.

We have asked SAAS to consider the impact of programme delay on their bursaries, and they have yet to reply.

Please keep in touch with GCU Student Support if you are worried about money due to programme delay, as you may be eligible to apply for hardship funds.

<https://www.gcu.ac.uk/student/finance/fundingyourcourse/discretionaryfund/>

#### 8. Can more simulated training replace seeing patients / visiting clients?

In many cases we already have simulation teaching and assessment of students before they enter practice and at various points in their programme. We are currently exploring the ways in which additional simulation, virtual practice and other forms of practice might be useful to still allow students to develop their skills, competence and confidence, and meet the learning outcomes of the programme. However, there is a limit to the level to which simulation can replace direct practice experience, including consideration of the viewpoint of the regulator.

#### 9. When will I know whether I will have a placement or not?

Your programme team will keep in contact with you and let you know as soon as we have information on your placement allocation. This includes letting students know if there is a risk that there is a shortage of a particular placement, and hence a chance will be offered a delayed placement.

10. When will I know if I'm able to graduate on time?

We are prioritising students who are closest to graduation so that we can minimise any chance of your being delayed in graduation due to placement shortages. The School will also arrange any necessary additional examination boards to consider the transcripts of students with a delayed placement, and hence we are doing everything we can to minimise the number of students affected by placement shortages and keep any delay to the absolute minimum.

11. Other alternatives to placements have been mentioned but will they still count and give me the practical experience I will need?

Many aspects of care delivery are changing due to this pandemic, and we may retain some aspects of the changes we have seen, such as increased use of telehealth / remote consultations. The skills that professionals / registrants will need in the future will therefore be changed by this move to greater use of technology and increased use of a blend of in-person and remote working.

Our priority is to ensure that you have the learning experience necessary to allow you to demonstrate the competencies of a health / social work professional in your discipline, and the alternative placements may allow us to devote more time to addressing the needs of the future professional – such as greater experience in the challenges surrounding information technology skills, confidentiality, data security and professional boundaries / work-life balance, when modes of working are so different.

You can be confident that where we make any alternatives to placements, we work with the University Quality team, external examiners and professional bodies / regulators, to make sure that your programme remains fit for purpose.

12. Is there a chance that I won't be able to go on placement at all?

We are confident that you will get the practice learning that you need, via placements, and / or alternative placements, but there is a risk that for some students this might be later in the programme than originally scheduled.

13. If priority is being given to final year students, and I can't go on placement because of that, how am I expected to make up the hours while at the same time continue with my normal studies?

If there is any interruption to placements that means that you need to 'catch up' with placements at a later date, then we will look at the whole of your academic year to ensure that you aren't being asked to do too many modules and practice hours at the same time.

14. Who can give me more information about my practice placement?

Your programme leader is the key person for queries about your programme, including the placement element. Your programme placement teams are doing their utmost to arrange the placements that you need and to keep you up to date where there are any changes. Your programme pages on GCULearn will have up to date information about YOUR programme.

15. If my study period runs over because of a delay in getting onto practice placement, will I need to pay additional fees?

No. Where your period of study is extended because of a delay in practice placement, then you will not be liable for additional fees.

16. I receive a student bursary from SAAS - if my period of study is extended due to a delay in my practice placement, then will I receive the bursary for longer?

The University does not manage the SAAS bursaries. Universities have asked SAAS to confirm whether students will have an extended or increased bursary if their programmes are extended due to placement shortages, but we do not have an answer yet to this query, although we expect one very soon. We will continue to keep you updated as and when we get any more information. In the meantime, please do look at the students support pages on the GCU website if you are facing financial difficulty: <https://www.gcu.ac.uk/student/finance/fundingyourcourse/discretionaryfund/>