



Ag Rialáil Gairmithe Sláinte
agus Cúraim Shóisialaigh
Regulating Health +
Social Care Professionals

Information for Education Providers

Impact of COVID-19 on Practice Placements

Updated June 2021

CORU is Ireland's multi-profession health and social care regulator. Its role is to protect the public by promoting high standards of professional conduct, education, training, and competence through statutory registration of health and social care professionals.

CORU is made up of the Health and Social Care Professionals Council and the Registration Boards, one for each profession named in our Act. Each Registration Board set Criteria and Standards for Education and Training programmes. These standards ensure that graduates possess the required knowledge and skills to practice safely in their chosen profession.

Unlike other health regulators in Ireland, CORU does not have any post-registration provisions, to limit scope of practice to compensate for training deficits or make up for shortfalls in pre-registration education and training. Therefore, it is critical to the protection of the public that Registration Boards' Criteria and Standards for Education and Training remain intact. They ensure that graduates completing an approved programme are safe to practice and can operate as an autonomous practitioner.

Context

CORU and its Registration Boards recognise that the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic has presented challenges for some Education Providers delivering CORU approved professional education and training programmes. CORU wishes to support the academic autonomy of Education Providers while also safeguarding the integrity of standards.

In 2020, CORU completed research to understand the specific practice placement challenges. The consultation process included the engagement with both Education Providers and Placement Providers. CORU's communication with Education Providers indicates that the biggest impact is on the sourcing of suitable practice placements and meeting the relevant Registration Board's minimum hour requirement. CORU is also aware that the COVID-19 pandemic is creating longer-term effects on practice placements. Practice placement-related decisions during the COVID-19 pandemic is creating a legacy for students in the early stages of the programmes or student entering programmes of study.

Purpose

Education Providers have autonomy on how they deliver their programmes of education and training. Since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, Education Providers have adapted and implemented changes to practice placements. CORU is supportive of these changes provided they meet the relevant Registration Board’s Criteria and Standards of Proficiency. This document provides information Education Providers may find helpful as they continue to deliver the practice placement component of the programme as set out in the Criteria and Standards of Education and Training for their profession.

Education Providers should read this document in conjunction with the relevant Registration Board’s:

- ▶ Criteria for Education and Training Programmes
- ▶ Standards of Proficiency

CORU designed this document and the associated Frequently Asked Questions section on the website for information purposes only. The approval or monitoring activity undertaken by CORU for education and training programmes remains unchanged. Therefore, the information in this document does not impact on a Registration Boards decision on whether evidence submitted is sufficient to meet the Criteria and Standards of Proficiency.

Considerations across the Stages of Practice Placement

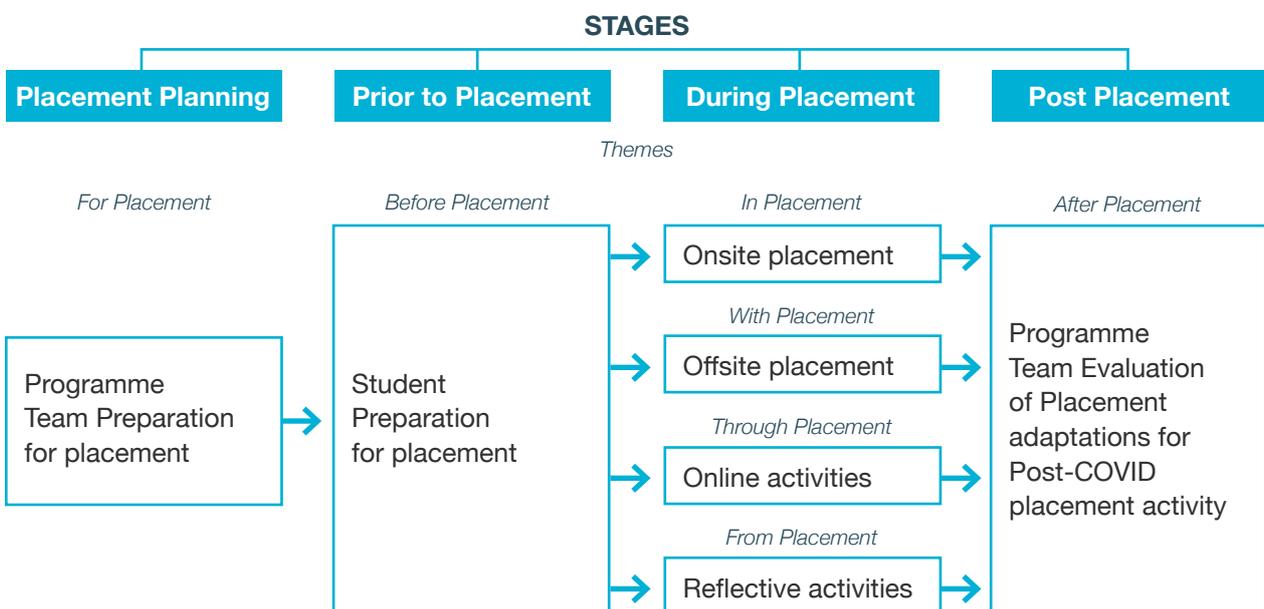
CORU recognises that the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic has an impact at all stages of the Practice Placement process. This section outlines considerations (and related themes) for:

- ▶ Placement planning (for placement)
 - ▶ Prior to placement (before placement)
 - ▶ During Practice placement
 - onsite placement activity (in placement)
 - offsite placement activity (with placement)
 - online activities (through placement)
 - reflective activities (from placement)
- ▶ Post placement (after placement)

This section also notes the stakeholders, activities along with key considerations for each of the stages of practice placement during and following the COVID-19 pandemic. The final section of this Considerations Document offers a summarised table of these stages for reference. An overview of the stages is also presented in the Figure 1 below.

Encouraging a partnership approach to practice placement, involving programme teams, placement providers and registrants is the ideal during these continued unprecedented times. Those on placement today are the registrants of tomorrow. Ensuring these students have a positive, effective experience is beneficial for the future of the profession.

Figure 1 Stages and Themes of Practice Placement during and following the COVID-19 pandemic.



Placement Planning

Theme: For Placement

Key elements

People involved:	Programme Team, Placement Providers
Activities:	Preparation and adaptations for Placement
Considerations:	Securing placements; Understanding Context and Assessing Risk; Communicating with Stakeholders; Maintaining Quality.

When identifying and sourcing suitable practice placements, Education Providers/ Schools/ Disciplines should consider:

- ▶ Using professional judgement to inform the implementation of changes, while ensuring the Board's requirements are met.
- ▶ Connecting with other agencies and mechanisms to source and select appropriate placement sites.
- ▶ Liaising with Professional Bodies to encourage as many of the practicing professionals engage in this activity.
- ▶ Engaging with existing Placement Providers to determine if additional hours can be met or if additional students can be accommodated.
- ▶ Considering and contacting previous placement sites on an existing database.
- ▶ Working closely with other Education Providers with a view to sharing information and contacts.

When planning student placements Education Providers/Schools/Disciplines should consider:

- ▶ Revising the curriculum design to ensure that all students will have the opportunity to complete placement requirements, whilst confirming the design continues to facilitate the integration of theory and practice.
- ▶ Assessing how practice placement is currently used to meet the Standards of Proficiency and the impact of changes to placement on the learning and assessment of proficiencies.
- ▶ Examining the completion of programme and graduation policies to determine if programmes can be extended to facilitate additional placements.
- ▶ Identifying the availability of placement sites, particularly over holiday periods.
- ▶ Reviewing whether the combined onsite, offsite, online, and reflective elements of placement are appropriate and suitable for their education programme including:
 - Will this placement reflect the demands and current practice of the profession?
 - Are students prepared to undertake a practice placement that may involve combined onsite, offsite, online, and reflective elements?
 - Can each proficiency be suitably taught and assessed through these activities?
- ▶ Reviewing if Placement Providers making payment to students while on placement will impact meeting the Criteria or students attaining the Standards of Proficiency.

When assessing the requirements of Practice Placement Educators, the Education Providers/Schools/Disciplines should consider:

- ▶ Engaging with Placement Provider management teams to identify suitable Practice Educators and Supervisors, who meet the relevant Board's requirements.
- ▶ Extending regular support and training already available to practice education teams to newly identified supervisors and teams.
- ▶ Ensuring that the criteria associated with the selection and training of Practice Education teams continue to be met.

When thinking about the needs of students during COVID-19 pandemic Education Providers/Schools/Disciplines should consider:

- ▶ Communicating the issues and concerns with students.
- ▶ Ensuring students understand the roles of the various stakeholders, Placement Providers, Education Provider Programme Team, Professional Bodies, Regulators and Employing agencies.
- ▶ Assigning a designated contact person within the Programme Team to address student concerns and answer queries.
- ▶ Adapting the health, wellbeing, and welfare support mechanisms in place for students, informed by the relevant issues that may be raised by students or Placement Providers.
- ▶ Promoting the mechanisms in place to raise individual and collective concerns about the programme or practice placement arising due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

It is acknowledged that direct service user engagement is the preference and essential for the development of some proficiencies. In these unprecedented times, practice placement requires modification to maintain health and safety linked to COVID restriction protocols.

Prior to Placement

Theme: Before Placement

Key elements

People involved:	Programme Team, Placement Providers, Students
Activities:	Adequate training and preparation for practice placement with adaptations as required
Considerations:	COVID-19, health and safety and PPE-related training; Training on new IT software, systems, or programmes

When preparing for practice placement, Education Providers/Schools/Disciplines may consider student activities and involvement such as:

- ▶ Reviewing and confirming that **all the resources (e.g., hardware, software, online access)** required are available at the start of placement.
- ▶ Participating in an **induction programme or training in the technology, online, and remote working resources** required for placement, to maximise their learning through these new methods.
- ▶ Undertaking **COVID-19 control measures**, including PPE (personal protective equipment), handwashing, online infection prevention and control training required in practice placement sites.
- ▶ Providing evidence of **training and risk assessment prior to the start** of the placement.
- ▶ Completing **additional training to prepare for placement** as may be required in the Placement Providers.

During Placement

Theme: In/With/Through/From Placement

Key elements

People involved: Programme Team, Placement Providers, Students

Activities: Onsite, Offsite, Online and Reflective placement activities

Considerations: CORU Standards of Proficiency are met

During practice placement, Education Providers/Schools/Disciplines may consider including onsite placement activities such as:

- ▶ Undertaking **observations shadowing**.
- ▶ Organising **telehealth activities**, including telephone and online assessments.
- ▶ Conducting **meetings or consultations with clients/service users**.
- ▶ Participating in **consultations and discussions** with practice educators/team under supervision.
- ▶ Partaking in **scheduled placement activity that is risk-assessed** and involves social distancing/health and safety standards in place.
- ▶ Accessing **resources and training available in the placement setting**.
- ▶ Seeking **guidance and implement advice under supervision** of a practice educator.
- ▶ Organising and participating in **one-to-one engagement with service users under supervision of practice educator**.
- ▶ Participating in **relevant risk assessed placement activities** (e.g., home visits).

During practice placement, Education Providers/Schools/Disciplines may consider including offsite placement activities such as:

- ▶ Assessing **case studies**, including those that require elements of professional judgement (e.g., risk management, negotiation skills).
- ▶ Completing **case planning of assigned caseload clients/service users with supervision** from Practice Educators.
- ▶ Shadowing **virtual clinics/telehealth interventions** (e.g., by conference calls via telephone, online meeting platform).
- ▶ Conducting **one-to-one virtual clinics/telehealth interventions** under supervision of a Practice Educator (e.g., conference calls via telephone, online meeting platform).
- ▶ Undertaking observation, shadowing and/or simulation activities.
- ▶ Reviewing **virtual case studies or caseloads** (with support via Microsoft Connect or another screen sharing facility).
- ▶ Recording and drafting **reports related to cases/caseload**.
- ▶ Completing **offsite direct practice adhering to all relevant COVID-19 protocols** and under the supervision of a Practice Educator.

- ▶ Composing **email correspondence or site notes** related to on-site/telehealth/virtual clinic to summarise discussions and actions.
- ▶ Devising a **one-page infographic** summarising key principles identified to communicate to clients/patients/service users to be reviewed by Practice Educators.
- ▶ Arranging and participating in **online meetings** involving practice educators and key staff to demonstrate learning from telehealth or virtual clinics.
- ▶ **Co-creating remote projects jointly between Programme Team and Practice Sites/ Practice Educators** involving regular meetings on the projects with Practice Educators and key/assigned Programme Team staff.

During practice placement, Education Providers/Schools/Disciplines may consider including online activities such as:

- ▶ Assessing **case studies and/or caseload assignments**.
- ▶ Participating in **HSEland training (e.g., GDPR/Children First)** or specific COVID-19 related training online required by the placement site.
- ▶ Preparing and completing **online live streamed content**.
- ▶ Organise and deliver **virtual presentations for a student-led virtual conference** for feedback on projects from Practice Educators/staff in placement.
- ▶ Arrange **regular practice education team meetings** to offer ongoing support for both students and staff on site.
- ▶ Complete **virtual projects** assigned by and/or supervised by a Practice Educator.
- ▶ Access relevant **conferences, information sessions, webinars and podcasts** as recommended or assigned by Practice Educators or within the placement site.
- ▶ Arrange and participate in **virtual supervision meetings with Practice Educators**.
- ▶ **Report to Practice Educators** on actions undertaken/not undertaken following supervision sessions.
- ▶ Participate in **virtual team meetings** within the placement site.
- ▶ Research **evidence-based interventions**.

During practice placement, Education Providers/Schools/Disciplines may consider including reflective activities such as:

- ▶ **Preparing for placement activities and/or training** with a post-activity reflection element.
- ▶ Keeping a **reflective/reflexive journal**.
- ▶ Applying **reflective practice models** to analyse practice/practice-based activities.
- ▶ Giving **feedback on observations**.
- ▶ Offering **reflections on ethics**, ethical practices, or ethical issues.
- ▶ Undertaking **reflective notes, record keeping or process recording** activities.
- ▶ Analysing a **log or journal entries drawing on professional codes or ethics**.
- ▶ Organising **regular meetings with Practice Educators** for practice-based reflective discussions.

Post Placement

Theme: After Placement

Key elements

People involved:	Programme Team, Placement Providers, Regulator – the relevant registration Board
Activities:	Review and guidelines in place; sharing good practice
Considerations:	External examiner and quality assurance requirements; CORU reporting

When reflecting and evaluating after practice placement, Education Providers/ Schools/ Disciplines should consider:

- ▶ Learning from the adaptations to arrangements related to practice placements during and following the COVID-19 pandemic.
- ▶ Recognising the innovative and creative approaches undertaken during practice placements since March 2020.
- ▶ Acknowledging the goodwill and efforts by Programme Teams, Placement Providers, Practice Educators and Students during these extenuating circumstances.
- ▶ Identifying ways to improve systems and arrangements if emergency circumstances arise again.
- ▶ Drawing on the new and/or adapted approaches to practice placement that may be integrated into curriculum and practice placement activity over the long term.
- ▶ Demonstrating how the adaptations to elements of practice placement supported students to meet the Standards of Proficiency.

Summary

Education Providers for Health and Social Care programmes are autonomous and academically independent. These Education Providers are entitled to regulate their own academic affairs and administrative processes, including in relation to practice placement arrangements.

CORU is aware that the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic has presented challenges for some Education Providers to deliver CORU approved education programmes, or programmes which have been submitted to CORU for approval. Since the start of the pandemic, CORU has been in regular contact with all Education Providers to advise them that they have flexibility and the responsibility in interpreting on how to ensure their students meet the Standards of Proficiency relevant to their profession. Many Education Providers have adapted practice placements activities as required to ensure these Standards of Proficiency can continue to be met by students while on placement.

As a member of an Education Provider Programme Team, if you require further clarity on elements of practice placement meeting the Criteria and Standards of Proficiency for a specific profession, please contact the Education Unit at education@coru.ie and one of our team will be in contact.

CORU intends on reviewing this document as the pandemic situation evolves to ensure it continues to offer timely information to Education Providers.

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ)

To complement this Considerations Document, CORU compiled a list of Frequently Asked Questions to respond to any additional queries related to practice placements. The FAQ list is available on the CORU webpage.

Figure 2 *Summary of the Stages of Practice Placement for Health and Social Care Professions During and Following the COVID-19 Pandemic.*

Stage	Theme	People involved	Key Activities	Considerations
Placement planning	<i>For Placement</i>	Programme Team, Placement Providers	Preparation and adaptations for Placement	Securing placements Understanding Context and Assessing Risk Maintaining Quality
Prior to placement	<i>Before Placement</i>	Programme Team, Placement Providers, Students	Adequate training and preparation for practice placement with adaptations as required	COVID, health and safety and PPE-related training Training on new IT software, systems, or programmes
During Practice Placement	<i>In Placement</i>	Programme Team, Placement Providers, Students	Onsite placement activity	CORU Standards of Proficiency are met
	<i>With Placement</i>		Offsite placement activity	
	<i>Through Placement</i>		Online activities	
	<i>From Placement</i>		Reflective activities	
Post placement	<i>After Placement</i>	Programme Team, Placement Providers, Regulator- the relevant registration Board	Review and guidelines in place; sharing good practice	HEI External examining requirements; CORU reporting



Ag Rialáil Gairmithe Sláinte
agus Cúraim Shóisialaigh

Regulating Health +
Social Care Professionals

CORU, Infinity Building, George's Court, George's Lane, Smithfield, Dublin 7, D07 E98Y.

T: 01 293 3160 F: 01 293 3170 E: info@coru.ie

www.coru.ie