



UNISON Health

What support do nurses and midwives qualifying in the age of Covid-19 need?

Insights from UNISON members 2021

What support do newly qualifying nurses and midwives need?

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Unprecedented demands have been placed on student nurses and midwives during the Covid-19 pandemic. Many students plunged 'into the numbers' to support the NHS during the crisis and others for many valid reasons opted to only study theory.

Health service leaders promised no student would be disadvantaged and offered them their full support. Many of these students are now newly qualified nurses or midwives, or are about to register and join the NHS, and are grappling with the huge workloads and challenges facing the health service.

Discussions with UNISON student nurses, practicing nurses and educators, along with additional survey work shows growing concerns that students have missed out on key learning experiences. Constructive, meaningful support in the workplace is now needed for those newly qualifying to fulfil their full potential. Healthcare leaders must ensure they stand by the students who came to the rescue of the NHS when they were asked.

Joy O' Gorman

UNISON Student Nurse Lead

Trudie Martin

UNISON Nursing and Midwifery Committee Chair

Key findings

We discussed this issue with elected UNISON representatives, student leaders, UNISON organisers and those supporting students in practice and educational settings. More than 130 final year students, newly qualified nurses and midwives subsequently completed our survey

Missed learning

70% said they have missed out on key experiences due to the pandemic

“the pandemic meant training opportunities were non-existent” – newly qualified nurse

Pressure to qualify and lack of preparation

56% of final year students agreed ‘I am not as well prepared for qualification as I should be’

“we have had to cram in learning – last minute panic from university to cover all our requirements for graduating” – final year student nurse

Inadequate support in first roles

‘Work pressures make me consider leaving my job’ – 60% of newly qualifieds agree

“I have never felt so lost, scared, stressed and underprepared than since I started as an NQN. I consider quitting daily.”

Risks for students and services

‘I am regularly anxious and stressed by my job’ – 62% agree

“without adequate support there is absolutely a risk ...we can’t provide enough support for the newly qualified nurses” – Nurse practice supervisor

What support do nurses and midwives want in their first roles?

- ▶ Guaranteed, regular paid protected time for learning, development and wellbeing support – 89% agree this would be useful or essential
- ▶ A guaranteed period of supernumerary time to adjust – 89% agree this would be useful or essential

- ▶ Regular, protected study days – 84% agree this would be useful or essential

- ▶ A structure programme of preceptorship in the first year – 76% agree this would be useful or essential

The student nurses and midwives who have been completing their studies during the pandemic have shown great resilience to continue learning through such a difficult time. Many have been caring for families and relatives whilst taking part in emergency placements and completing academic work.

Health leaders and the NHS now owes it to them to ensure they are given the right support to achieve their full potential in their first roles. The NHS remains under great pressure but without flexible, protected time for support we risk losing out on the full skills and knowledge newly qualified nurses and midwives can bring.

What is UNISON calling for?

Structured programmes of preceptorship throughout the first year of registration to include:

- ▶ A guaranteed period of supernumerary time of at least one month to adjust to the first clinical role
- ▶ Guaranteed, paid protected time away from clinical areas of a minimum of one day a month for learning, development and wellbeing in that first year
- ▶ Quality, protected time with clinical leaders for career support and development

These calls are supported by the UNISON Student Nurse & Midwife Network and the UNISON Nursing and Midwifery Committee

www.unison.org.uk/at-work/health-care/representing-you/nursing/

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