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Supporting Information:  
**Protected learning  
time in practice for  
nursing associate  
programmes**

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# Programme standard

The wording of the standard in the *Standards for pre-registration nursing associate programmes* is:

Approved education institutions (AEIs) together with practice learning partners must ensure that nursing associate students have protected learning time<sup>1</sup> in line with one of these two options:

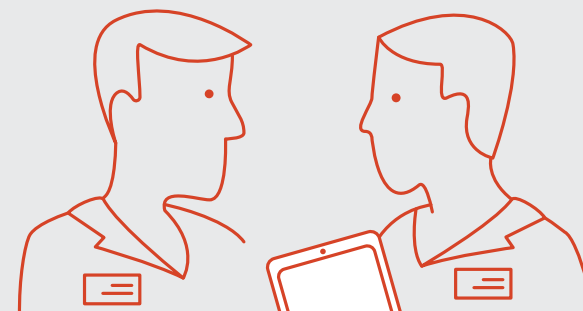
- **Option A:** nursing associate students are supernumerary when they are learning in practice
- **Option B:** nursing associate students who are on work-placed learning routes:
  - are released for at least 20 percent of the programme for academic study<sup>2</sup>
  - are released for at least 20 percent of the programme time, which is assured protected learning time in external practice placements, enabling them to develop the breadth of experience required for a generic role, and
  - protected learning time must be assured for the remainder of the required programme hours.

<sup>1</sup>Protected learning time is designated time in which students are supported to learn. All students are appropriately supervised until they have demonstrated proficiency in aspects of care. Supernumerary status is one approach to protected learning time.

<sup>2</sup>The 20 percent specified here is not the total sum of theoretical learning students will need to undertake – please see standard 2.7 which requires equal weighting of theory and practice in the curriculum

## Notes

- The NMC does not require nursing associate students to be supernumerary while learning in practice, but the student must have protected learning time. The decision about how this is provided is for AEIs and their practice placement partners.
- All students must be supervised when they are learning in practice. The level of supervision will depend on level of risk associated with particular tasks or interventions, and the competence and confidence of the student.
- Nursing associate pre-registration programmes must include at least 2,300 programme hours, typically over two years. These hours must be protected for learning, whether in an academic, health, or care setting. These programme hours must include an equal balance of theory and practice learning.
- An external practice placement is a placement a student undertakes outside of their primary employed role. As an example, this could include a student employed in an acute ward of a hospital and undertaking an external practice placement in the maternity ward of the same hospital or a placement outside the hospital (for example, in general practice).



# Supporting information - protected learning time

This document sets out additional information about protected learning for AEs and their practice learning partners. It contains:

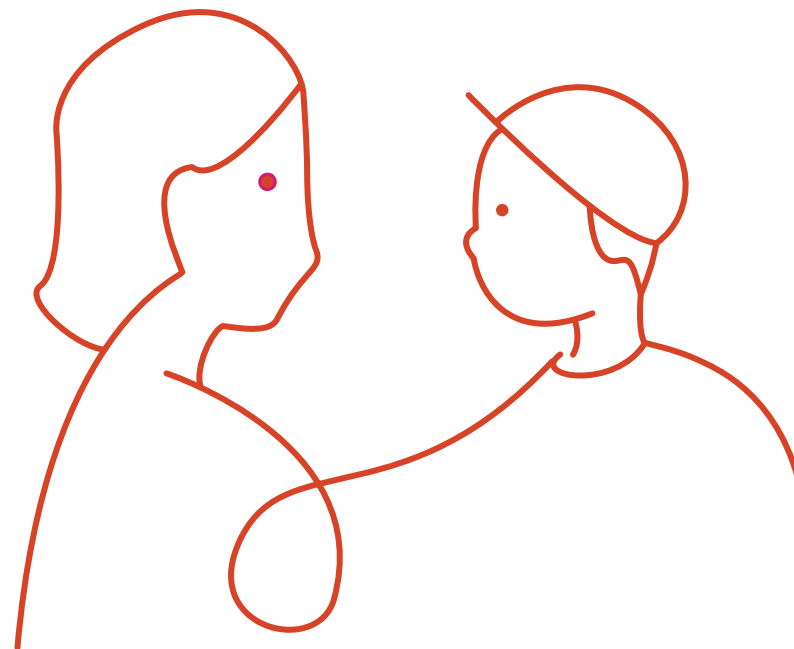
1. An example of the standard in practice
2. A definition of protected learning time
3. Examples of protected learning time
4. Governance arrangements and protected learning time
5. NMC approvals, monitoring and evaluation



# Example of the standard in practice

In this example, a student spends one day learning at an AEI per week, one day a week at an external placement and the remaining three days in the place where they are employed. The AEI and its practice placement partners need to determine how much protected learning time is provided throughout the week. They also need to set out how this can be met, to assure the NMC how protected learning time is achieved at programme approval.

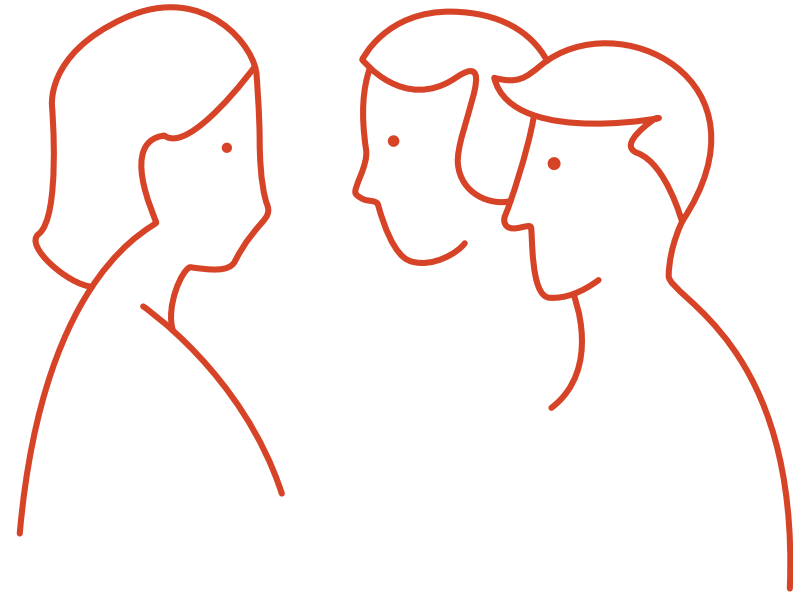
The amount of protected learning time would contribute towards the student achieving the minimum requirement of 2,300 programme hours for a nursing associate programme.



# Definition of protected learning time

Protected learning time is defined as time in a health or care setting during which students are learning and are supported to learn.

Students must be supervised during protected learning time. The level of supervision required is a matter of professional judgment and will depend on the competence and confidence of the student, and the risks associated with the intervention being delivered.

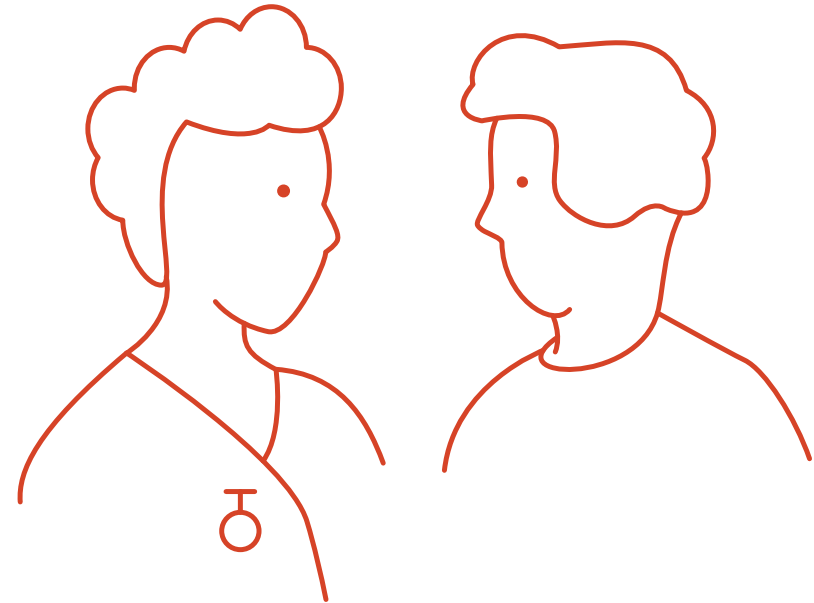


# Examples of protected learning time

When applying for programme approval the AEI, together with its practice placement partners, will need to demonstrate how they will make sure students benefit from the required amount and quality of protected learning time.

## Examples of how protected learning time might be provided includes:

- providing and facilitating opportunities for students to practise skills
- sharing knowledge with the student and effectively demonstrating how to put that knowledge into practice safely
- observing students
- giving constructive feedback on student performance
- empowering students to take advantage of available resources, learning and CPD opportunities
- delegating learning opportunities to other practice supervisors and anyone else who may suitably enable learning
- enabling students to follow a patient pathway across settings
- supporting students to reflect on learning
- supernumerary time.



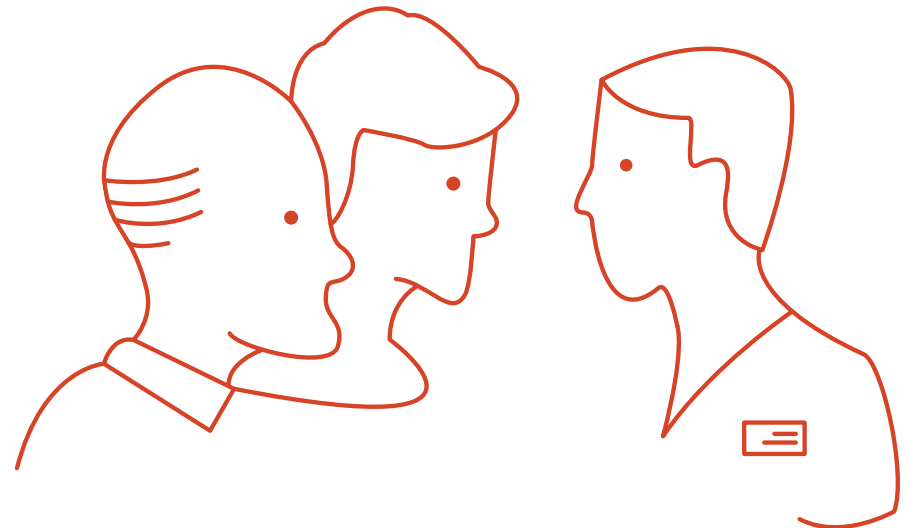
# Governance arrangements and protected learning time

## Programme governance will need to make sure that:

- apprentices' employers have set out a realistic commitment to protected learning time
- apprentices' employers understand how they and AEIs are required to provide protected learning time and are able to differentiate protected learning time from standard practice
- placement settings have sufficient and appropriate staff to meet the requirement that students are supervised during protected learning time
- apprentices' employers and AEIs are clear about the proficiencies to be achieved in protected learning time
- AEIs' oversight is sufficient to ensure any problems with protected learning time would be picked up and addressed
- apprentices know how to raise any concerns about the volume or quality of protected learning time
- there is a way of logging protected learning time so the student and AEI can evidence the required overall programme hours.

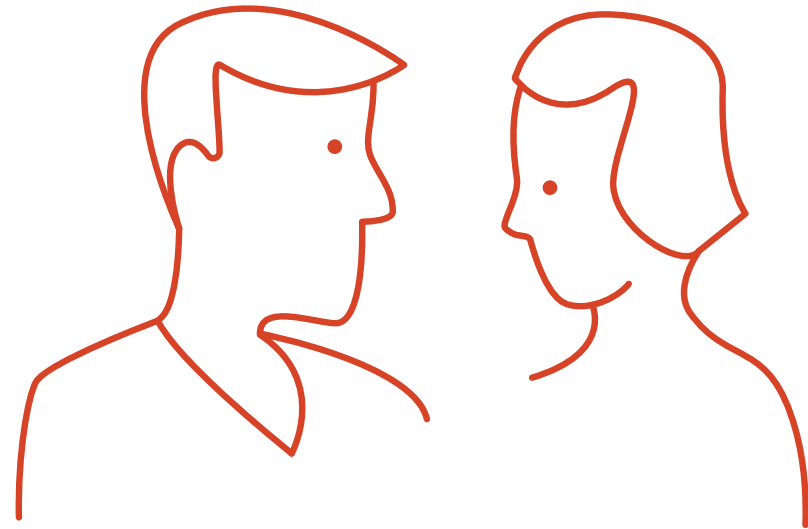
## AEIs and their practice placement partners may want to consider:

- a signed agreement between the AEI and practice placements partners clearly setting out the commitment to provide protected learning time in practice, and explaining how this will be achieved
- a learning agreement signed by the practice supervisor and the student which sets out the learning commitment required, including the requirement to release the student for learning opportunities.



# NMC approvals, monitoring and evaluation

- [Option B](#) will require us to pay particular attention to the quality and sufficiency of protected learning time during approval and monitoring.
- We are likely to seek evidence that employers understand their obligation regarding protected learning time. They should be able to differentiate protected learning time from standard practice appropriately – for the students, their colleagues and for patients and service users.
- We will want to know how any issues are raised and resolved.





# The role of the Nursing and Midwifery Council

## What we do

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We regulate nurses, midwives and nursing associates in the UK. We exist to protect the public. We set standards of education, training, conduct and performance so that nurses, midwives and nursing associates can deliver high quality care throughout their careers.

We make sure nurses, midwives and nursing associates keep their skills and knowledge up to date and uphold our professional standards. We have clear and transparent processes to investigate nurses, midwives and nursing associates who fall short of our standards.

We maintain a register of nurses, midwives and nursing associates allowed to practise in the UK.

