

Your first placement

Effective preparation for your placement/s will give you confidence before you start.

See our tips on what will be expected of you, and how to get the most out of your placement.

Student nurse walking in corridor

How to prepare

You will be given information about your placement by your course staff and possibly by NHS trust representatives visiting your university.

You may also have an induction day run by the trust to familiarise you with the placement setting.

If no visit is planned you may need to contact your placement mentor/clinical educator to arrange the shifts you will be working. You'll feel much more confident when you start if you are familiar with the surroundings and some of the people you'll be working with.

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"Be as flexible as you can with your shifts, so you work the same shifts as your mentor and are able to work alongside them wherever possible, to maximise the opportunities you have to learn."

Heather Bower, lead midwife for education, University of Greenwich

Familiarise yourself with assessment documents and set yourself clear learning objectives for your placement. Discuss these with your placement mentor before starting. This is the best time to make any specific requests for learning opportunities as your mentor will be busier once the placement starts.

Make sure you read relevant journals and magazines, and be aware of key health topics in the media.

"Get an overview of the trust you will be working for by looking at its website. You'll be more likely to demonstrate a genuine interest in the hospital if you have some idea of the range of departments and services it offers."

Danielle Nixon, practice development midwife, St Thomas' Hospital

What will be expected?

Students on health courses often worry about what will be expected of them on placement so here are some tips:

- have a 'give-it-a-go' attitude to new skills but remember the aim of the first placement is to develop your basic skills, such as making conversation with patients, observations, assisting with personal hygiene and bed changing
- show a willingness to get to know and work with the whole team including assistants and support workers and understand the workings of a ward or healthcare unit

"There will be formal expectations in terms of clear learning objectives that you will need to meet but also other expectations of your interpersonal skills that are not so clear cut. For example, contributing to the team effectively can mean engaging with all members of staff, showing enthusiasm and recognising when you can help out, such as making tea."

Neil Rossi, physiotherapy clinical educator

- you'll be expected to have a professional approach to confidentiality and to keep your emotions in check on the ward (it's OK to show how you feel in the staff room)
- know your limitations and don't be afraid to speak up if you see anything that could put a patient in danger, using the trust's official process if necessary. Remember the professional code for your healthcare area and that patient safety ^[1] should always be your first priority
- if you are asked to perform a task you should always be supervised by a skilled practitioner

"You have a responsibility to speak up if you feel out of your depth. This part of the professional code is to ensure patient/client safety. Although this shouldn't happen, in a situation for example where a hospital is short staffed, you may be asked to do something you don't feel ready to do."

Heather Bower, lead midwife for education, University of Greenwich

• Getting the most from your placement

The following tips will help you make the most of your first (and future) placements:

- always ask for help if you need it. Ask questions if you don't understand what is being asked of you. Your mentor should be your first point of contact for questions but if they are not around try to speak to other members of the healthcare team, or to second or third year placement students
- be as proactive as possible and open to anything you might learn. Students who do well are those who are curious and hungry for experience. Remember you have more time to observe and learn new procedures as a student so make the most of this!
- read up on what you are seeing so you can match theory with practice

"Strike a balance between achieving your learning outcomes and not trying to run before you can walk. Ask for opportunities to practice the basic skills as much as you can."

Danielle Nixon, practice development midwife, St Thomas' Hospital

- keep an open dialogue with your mentor and speak up if you are finding things difficult
- keep a diary and use the reflective techniques you have been taught to record [2] what happened, how you felt, what you have learnt from it and how you would do things differently in the future. Keep a daily record of where you have demonstrated certain skills such as resolving problems or using your initiative. Remember, it may be hard to do this in retrospect and you will need this level of detailed evidence for job applications, so keep your record up to date
- ask yourself what you enjoyed most about the placement and, if you didn't enjoy it, was it the setting, nature of the specialty, or the people you worked with?
- if you feel you're not getting the support you need on your placement, tell your university
- see your placements as a careers opportunity; remember you may want to work at your placement trust in the future! Make a good impression and build good relationships. Keep in contact with key people from your placement. Remember, networking is important when you are looking for your first job and you may want to use your mentor as a referee

"Treat your placement as an opportunity to have the time to ask questions, try things in a safe environment and learn from top clinicians. Once you are qualified, you will never again receive this much tuition, so make the most of it."

Neil Rossi, physiotherapy clinical educator

• Real-life stories

Read our real-life stories from students about their first placement:

- midwifery student Emilie Edwards [3]
- physiotherapy student Yannica Chang [4]
- nursing student Kevin Boyle [5]

Source URL:<https://www.healthcareers.nhs.uk/career-planning/study-and-training/considering-or-university/support-university/your-first-placement>

Links

[1] <https://www.healthcareers.nhs.uk/about/working-health/nhs-constitution> [2] <https://www.healthcareers.nhs.uk/career-planning/developing-your-career/learning-and-development/your-portfolio> [3] <https://www.healthcareers.nhs.uk/career-planning/study-and-training/considering-or-university/support-university/your-first-placement/real-life-story-emilie-edwards> [4] <https://www.healthcareers.nhs.uk/i-am/considering-or-university/support-university/your-first-placement/real-life-story-yannicca-chang> [5] <https://www.healthcareers.nhs.uk/career-planning/study-and-training/considering-or-university/support-university/your-first-placement/real-life-story-kevin-boyle>