

Novel Coronavirus: Allied Health Workforce Planning

1. Statement

The purpose of this guidance note is to inform affected Queensland health services, directors of allied health services, allied health professional leads and operational managers on allied health surge workforce approaches involving students and allied health student placements.

2. Novel coronavirus

The novel coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic will result in increased demand for health services, particularly in settings such as critical care, respiratory and cardiac care. It is anticipated that the allied health workforce will be impacted by COVID-19, resulting in staff shortages which may, in turn, impact clinical service delivery and usual student clinical placement capacity and practices.

Maintaining an efficient and effective allied health workforce will require a flexible approach. The use of allied health students has been considered as an option to supplement the allied health workforce.

3. Guiding principles

Under supervision allied health students can and do make an important contribution to patient care. Decisions on the use of an allied health student workforce in response to the increasing demands from the COVID-19 pandemic should consider the following principles:

Safety – Safety of both students and patients is paramount.

Role clarity – Whether on a placement or employed as a casual or temporary employee, the role of the student should be clearly defined and documented. This should include activities/duties that the student is permitted to undertake and, where applicable, activities that are out of scope.

Competent – Students must not exceed their level of competence.

Supervision – Whether on a placement or employed as a casual or temporary employee, students must be supervised at all times. The nature of the supervision and how it is operationalised will depend on the activities and the experience of the student.

4. Allied health student placements and employment opportunities

4.1 Allied health student placements for education and training under the Student Deed Framework

Pre-entry clinical placements for allied health students are offered within Queensland Health across a range of settings including acute hospital and ambulatory/ outpatient services, primary care and community health, subacute services, mental health services and emerging areas of practice.

Queensland Health recognises that student placements form an essential part of the education of allied health students and that the student workforce makes a significant contribution to service delivery capacity.

The [Student Deed](#) provides the overarching framework under which students undertake placements within the Queensland public health sector. The Deed stipulates that placements are to be undertaken:

- a) at public sector health facilities that are owned by or substantially operated for the benefit of, the State of Queensland;
- b) in conjunction with and under the supervision of health professionals who are employed by, or officially authorised to represent the Department for purposes related to the placement; and
- c) to help students satisfy practical training requirements related to their course or module of study in which they are enrolled with the education provider.

Any placements undertaken as a consequence of the Deed are to be carried out and completed in accordance with the terms of the Deed. This includes having a current and valid student placement program placement schedule. The schedule must list relevant placement details including the hospital and health service, model for supervision, student information, service fee and payment details, and timetable.

Queensland Health remains supportive of the continuation of clinical placements where health services are able to accommodate those placements. However, it is recognised that as a result of the potential impact of COVID-19, hospital and health services may determine that they are unable to accommodate students in certain areas, for a period of time and/or provide the necessary supervision. These changes should be communicated via the usual placement Deed mechanisms. Where a student is on a placement covered by the Deed, students must undertake activities that are consistent with placement learning objectives.

4.2 Allied health student “work experience” placements for service capacity

The participation of students in work experience programs and placements within Queensland Health is at the discretion of the Director-General (or delegate). All work experience placements must comply with [HR Policy B3 \(QH-POL-262\) Work Experience Programs and Placements](#).

The use of work experience placements for allied health students as a surge workforce strategy should be carefully considered in light of restrictions on patient contact and access to patient records. HR Policy B3 requires managers who are responsible for student placements to comply with number of conditions including:

- a) There is to be no unsupervised individual patient contact.
- b) There is no personal access allowed to patients or staff personnel records.
- c) Students do not receive any payment or reward.
- d) Students are never to be used as a precondition for paid employment nor as a substitute for paid work. Students are not to replace paid Queensland Health employees.

It should be noted that students are not covered by any insurance applicable to Queensland Health employees. It is the responsibility of their school or training provider or themselves to provide any insurance necessary.

Given these restrictions, students on work experience placements that are supporting service capacity would be better suited to assisting with non-clinical tasks.

4.3 Casual and temporary employment of students

Casual and/or temporary employment of allied health students has been identified as a critical strategy to support allied health surge workforce strategies in response to COVID-19.

The current Queensland Health industrial frameworks provide for casual or temporary employment in the operational stream (for employment as an allied health assistant) or health practitioner stream level 1 (for employment as a “student cadet or student trainee” of the relevant discipline).

Allied health students who are employed by Queensland Health in either the operational or the health practitioner (level 1) stream are covered by relevant Queensland Health indemnity and insurances.

Short term casual employment within Queensland Health is defined as “an employee, other than a part-time employee, who is engaged as such and paid an hourly basis.” The casual employee’s employment history may be informal and irregular, and with no continuing relationship between the employer and employee. Provisions for casual employment are outlined in [HR Policy B26](#).

Temporary base grade appointments within Queensland Health may be established for periods less than 12 months on the basis of operational convenience, in accordance with the provisions of Public Service Commission (PSC) Directive 15/13 – Recruitment and Selection (extended to Queensland Health via the Public Service Regulation 2018). Provisions for temporary employment are outlined in HR Policy B25.

The work that is undertaken by a casual or temporary employee within Queensland Health facilities must be consistent with the role description against which they are employed.

4.3.1 Employing students as allied health assistants (operational stream)

An allied health student employed as an allied health assistant can only undertake tasks, under the direction and supervision of allied health professionals, consistent with the allied health assistant delegated role. For example, an allied health assistant may undertake screening tasks under delegation but is not responsible for patient assessment.

4.3.2 Employing students as a student cadet or trainee (health practitioner level 1)

An allied health student employed as a health practitioner level 1 (HP1) may undertake tasks, under the direction and supervision of an allied health professional, consistent with their level of knowledge and skill in their given discipline. For example, a student who has already successfully completed a clinical placement in a clinical area could undertake tasks, under supervision, consistent with the tasks they performed on placement (including supervised assessments).

5. Allied health workforce planning for COVID -19

The Allied Health Professions' Office of Queensland (AHPOQ) is available to assist directors of allied health services and discipline leads with statewide advice and support for workforce planning during the COVID-19 service response.

Contact person

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