



# **Guidance Notes for Practice Assessors in General Practice - for pre-registration nursing students**

**(Version 1)**

# Guidance Notes for Assessors in General Practice (for pre-registration nursing students)

## Do we need a Practice assessor in my practice area?

All students on an NMC approved programme must be assigned a nominated practice assessor for a practice placement or a series of practice placements. Therefore, either the student's practice assessor will be based in your practice, or if the student is only with you for a short period (as a spoke placement) there is a possibility that the practice assessor is located within their main placement (hub). For example, this could be another practice within your PCN, a community team or nursing home nearby.

The student and the supervisors must be aware who the practice assessor is and provide feedback to them.

## The practice assessor's role in general practice

Practice assessors work with the student, practice supervisors, academic assessors, other members of the team and patients. They conduct assessments to confirm student achievement of proficiencies and programme outcomes for practice learning.

Practice assessors make and record objective, evidence based assessments on conduct, proficiency and achievement, drawing on student records, direct observations, student self-reflection, feedback from practice supervisors and other resources.

The practice assessor works in partnership with the nominated academic assessor to evaluate and recommend the student for progression for each part of the programme, in line with programme standards and local and national policies. The practice assessor should also have an understanding of the students learning and achievement in theory.

Practice assessors cannot simultaneously be the practice supervisor for the same student. Therefore, if you work in small practices, where there is only one nurse, it is likely that (if training has been undertaken,) the nurse will be the practice assessor and the other registered members of staff, e.g. physiotherapists, paramedics and GPs act as the practice supervisors.

## Scope of Practice - What can students do?

Assessors are often concerned about which tasks the students are authorised to carry out. To help support assessors, supervisors and students with this, we have worked with local Universities and produced a separate guide called:

Practice Guidelines for Students in General Practice

This useful guide shows how the supervisors and assessors can ensure learning experiences and levels of supervision and assessment are inclusive and tailored to the student's stage of learning, proficiencies and programme outcomes.

## Who are practice assessors and how are they prepared?

The practice assessor must maintain current knowledge and expertise relevant for the proficiencies and programme outcomes they are assessing.

They must also undertake preparation or evidence prior learning and experience that enables them to demonstrate achievement of the following minimum outcomes:

- **Interpersonal communication skills, relevant to student learning and assessment**
- **Conducting objective, evidence based assessments of students**
- **Provide constructive feedback to facilitate professional development in others and**
- **Knowledge of the assessment process and their role within it.**

Practice assessors must continue to proactively develop their professional practice and knowledge in order to fulfil their role and have an understanding of the proficiencies and the programme outcomes that the student they assess is aiming to achieve (see section below).

If a registered nurse has completed their mentorship qualification, they may feel confident in the above areas. If they do not, it is recommended that they undertake the supervisor training programme, either provided by your local University or *“The Inspire Project – Becoming a supervisor course”*.

If a nurse has not previously completed a mentorship qualification, it is advised that they undergo the supervisor and assessor training provided by your local university.

## Understanding Proficiencies

Practice supervisors should have an understanding of the proficiencies and programme outcomes they are supporting students to achieve. The skills students nurses should achieve on completion of their programme are set out in annex a and b of the “Future Nurse: Standards of proficiency for registered nurses” (NMC, 2018).

These are reflected in their Practice Assessment Document (PAD). Most students in the east of England will now be using the same Midlands Yorkshire and East (MYE) PAD. To help you understand the documentation, it is recommended you read the “Guide to using the Practice Assessment Document” (MYEPAD).

## How long do practice assessors have to spend with the student?

There is no prescribed time that the practice assessor has to spend with the student but there must be sufficient opportunity for the practice assessor to gather and coordinate feedback from practice supervisors, any other relevant people, in order to be assured about their decisions for assessment and progression. They must also ensure that there are sufficient opportunities for the practice assessor to periodically observe the student in order to inform decisions for assessment and progression.

## Equality and Diversity

The University, with its practice learning partners, is responsible for ensuring that the equality and diversity needs of students and practice supervisors and assessors are taken into account. If needed, reasonable adjustments should be made.

## Reasonable adjustments

Please see the Inspire Project reasonable adjustment guidance.

## Keeping the public safe

All practice assessors are responsible for upholding public protection when assessing students. This means that the assessment does not compromise public protection. It can be done by:

- Ensuring that the assessments they carry out are evidenced based, objective and fair.
- Serving as a role model for safe and effective practice in line with the NMC code of conduct.
- Raising concerns about any impact to public protection from student learning. This can mean risks to the public from the student, but also any risks to people arising from the environment in which the student is placed, including if the practice supervisor has been asked to practice beyond their competence.
- Taking action to ensure any concerns raised with them are dealt with in a timely and appropriate manner
- As registered professionals, all practice assessors also have a responsibility to abide by the duty of candour

## Managing a student not meeting the progress expected

The practice assessor should be aware of any concerns regarding student performance, including any concerns that have been raised in the academic environment or under previous practice assessors.

Once they are aware of concerns around student performance, they should have a role in improving the student's performance. This can be done by putting in place action plans or by working directly with the practice supervisors, the academic assessors and the student themselves.

If it becomes apparent that the student will not improve, or has not met the required actions in a plan, the practice assessor should take appropriate action, such as recommending the student be failed on a placement, or recommending they do not progress. This should be done through discussion with the nominated academic assessor and the placement co-ordinator.

## Allowing time

The NMC state that assessors must have supported time and resources to enable them to fulfil their roles in addition to their other professional responsibilities. Practices will receive a tariff payment to cover the backfill costs of assessor's time.

## The Practice Learning Environment

Consider the factors in the table below:

Good Learning Environment	Damaging Learning Environment
Consistent	Students not expected or welcomed
Available resources	Inadequate time with supervisors or too many students
Flexible	Short staffed and student used as a pair of hands
Enthusiastic, compassionate and approachable staff	Assessor or supervisor not interested in student
Given responsibility and clear opportunities to learn	Clash of personalities
Students respected and feel part of the team	Critical rather than constructive feedback

**What are the Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats in your learning environment? How can you improve your learning environment?**

## Providing Feedback

Feedback supports the development of the learner. It should be timely and expected, clear and specific, honest, open and objective, balanced and motivating. Where possible, record feedback either in the daily learning logs or the Practice assessment documents. Pendleton's rules are a common framework used in healthcare to support the feedback process:

1. *Ask the student what went well*
2. Tell them what went well (compliment)
3. *Ask the student what could be improved*
4. Tell them what could be improved
5. *Ask the student what their action plan is*
6. Approve / modify action plan

**(Pendleton, 1984)**

## Notes on the assessment process

Practice Assessors make an evaluation of student competence over a period of time against certain criteria in the practice assessment document (not against peer performance):

### Areas of competence

Skills and Knowledge

Attitude

Behaviours

Team Working

Professional Values

Practice assessors use a variety of methods to assess students in practice:

### Methods of assessment

Observation

Question and Answer

Direct supervision

Feedback

Discussion

Presentation

Joint reflection

Practice assessors ensure that all assessments provide supporting information and / or evidence, these may or may not then be included in the practice assessment document. Evidence could include:

### Supporting Evidence

Notes taken during observation

Student reflections during assessment

Feedback from self and others

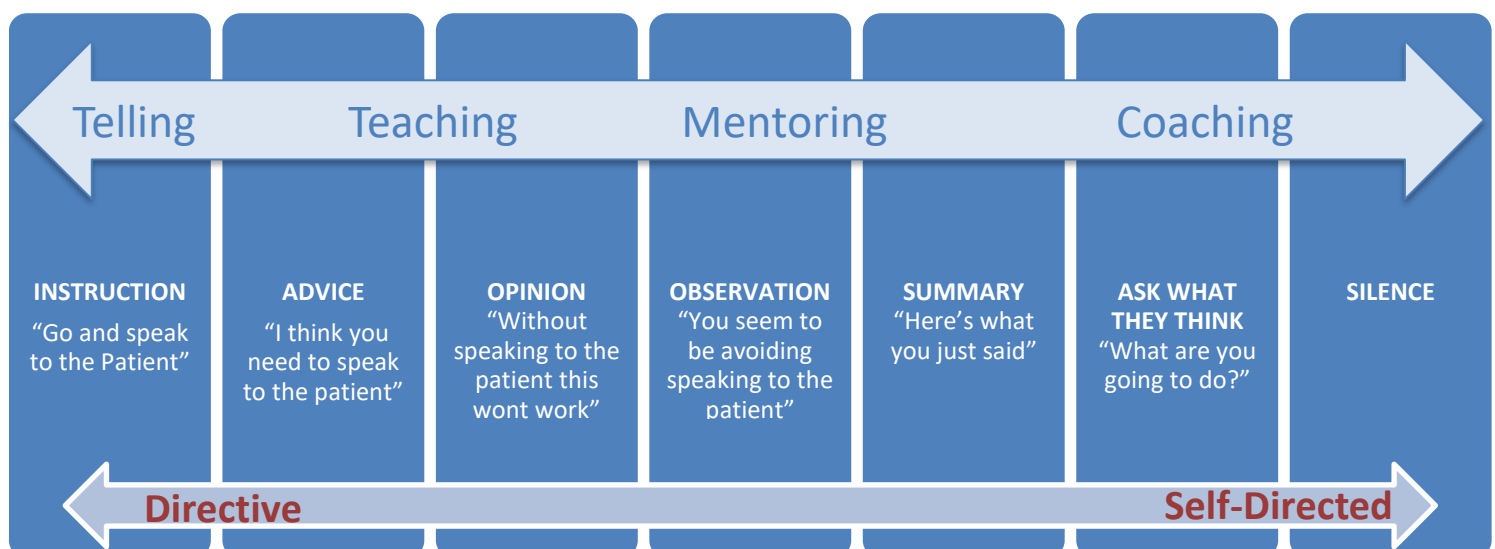
Outcomes from virtual experience tests

Many factors may affect assessment; practice assessors should consider these when forming assessment decisions:

Factors affecting assessments
Bias towards student
Insufficient opportunities to observe and assess certain skills
Student's own readiness, preparation and/or nerves
Pre-conceived ideas based on other students' performance
Uncertainty of documentation and completion requirements
Workload pressures
Inadequate feedback

## Communication skills relevant to students' assessment and learning

Having an awareness of the different approaches to development and different types of conversations, allows us to develop flexible communication skills. Different situations suit different conversational approaches. For example, in urgent situations, or where the student has no knowledge of the topic, you would use a more directive approach. If you want to challenge the student and enable them take responsibility for their learning you would ask more questions and utilise a more self-directed approach.



## Coaching nursing students

The key advantages to coaching are:

- Coaching promotes greater student autonomy
- Coaching encourages students to take responsibility
- Coaching promotes an ethos of lifelong learning
- Coaching promotes questioning, enquiring and promotion of student centred learning, which is much more effective than historical “tell and teach” approaches.

## Using the GROW model of coaching

GROW (Goal, Reality, Options and Will do) is a great ways to manage a single shift or a whole placement with a student. It can take the pressure off you as an assessor as it encourages students to take ownership of their own development and learning. Coaching involves the use of skilful questioning and a belief that the student has the resources to find solutions for themselves.

## Helpful Questions

**GOAL** (at the beginning of a shift or at the initial interview at the beginning of the placement)

- What do you want to focus on for this shift / placement?
- What do you want to achieve?
- Why is this important to you right now?
- What will make you feel like this time has been well spent?
- What is your goal for today?

These questions should help the student identify a goal for the shift / goals for the placement. Goals should be SMART (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic and Timely)

## REALITY

- What is happening now?
- Describe the current situation...
- What have you tried so far?
- What skills, knowledge, experience, attributes do you already have?
- What do you think you may want to do differently?
- What is currently working well?

## OPTIONS

- What options are there?
- What else could you do OR What else could you try?
- If anything was possible, what would you do?
- How have you managed a similar situation before?
- What if...?
- I have a suggestion, would you like to hear it?



## Will Do

- What are you actually going to do now? (Specific)
- How will you measure your progress? (Measurable)
- How are you going to achieve it? (Achievable)
- What support do you need? (Realistic)
- When are you going to do it? (Timely)
- How will you overcome any challenges
- What do you need from me?
- What support do you need?
- How will you get this support?

## Other resources available from The Inspire Project:

- Guidance notes for Supervisors in General Practice
- Guidance notes for Placement Coordinators in General Practice
- Practice Guidelines for Students in General Practice
- Reasonable Adjustment for students in General Practice
- General Practice - Practice Learning Environment policy

## Also recommended

[Guide to using the Practice Assessment Document \(MYEPAD\)](#)