



To whom it may concern,

We're writing to you as the local and national representative bodies for 374,000 students across Ireland, and specifically on behalf of students of Social Care Work programmes. We understand that all stakeholders are aware of the challenges that social care students and their educators face in attempting to source and complete placement, owing to the COVID-19 pandemic and its subsequent impact on the operation of many health and social care services across Ireland.

At present, social care students are required to complete 800 hours of practice placement across a minimum of two placements in order to meet the CORU criteria for Education & Training programmes. Whilst the way in which this is broken down varies across programmes, this generally results in students completing an average of 400 hours practice placement across Years 2 & 3 of the programme. Whilst every effort is being made by students and providers to source and complete placements in order to meet the CORU standards of proficiency and education criteria, this is proving increasingly difficult in the changing profile of the pandemic.

Whilst it is our understanding that education providers have autonomy in how they deliver these programmes, and meet the criteria and standards, we also believe that vastly different measures being applied across the entirety of social care programmes is not in the interests of students, their education institutions or the wider social care sector.

Furthermore, where students are unable to source placement, or unable to complete the necessary number of practice placement hours, this will result in them having to defer their progression to the next stage of the course and may result in delayed graduation for many students in current and future years. Students who are required to complete placement hours over summer will also face additional barriers given that SUSI and other grants are not paid during the summer months, and the majority of students rely on summertime employment to fund their studies. It is in all of our interests to ensure the progression of students into the health and social care profession where they are much sought after.

Many students continue to work part-time in the health and social care sector whilst undertaking their studies and it is our belief that consideration needs to be given to how this part-time work can be recognized in order to alleviate the pressure on practice placements in the sector. The valuable work that students undertake within the sector has a significant physical and mental toll, further exacerbated during the current pandemic. This stress is similarly being felt by students who are unable to source placement, and we have significant concerns that this may lead to increased rates of deferrals and drop-outs amongst social care students.

In light of this, we ask that discussions are convened urgently between CORU, all relevant education providers, the Departments of Health, and Further & Higher Education, and other key stakeholders such as Quality and Qualifications Ireland, as well as student representatives to discuss how students can best be supported to successfully complete their programmes of education, and meet the standards of proficiency, whilst recognizing the logistical challenges currently posed by the pandemic and the need to explore other ways of facilitating and assessing practice placement.

Potential solutions might include, but are not limited to:

- Permitting students working part-time in the health and social care sector to complete their placement hours in these part-time jobs.
- Permitting students to complete placement remotely where this is being facilitated by employers.
- Provision of financial support to students required to undertake placement over the summer months who are unable to undertake other part-time work during this time.

The current extraordinary times we find ourselves in necessitate extraordinary measures being put in place. We believe that the challenges faced by the health & social care profession, and their educational partners are best tackled when they are tackled collaboratively and would welcome space being created to discuss how these challenges can be addressed, keeping in mind the needs of students on these programmes.

We look forward to your response,



Athlone IT Students' Union



Carlow College Students' Union



Comhaltas na Mac Léinn OÉ Gaillimh



Dundalk IT Students' Union



GMT Students' Union



IT Carlow Students' Union



IT Sligo Students' Union



Limerick IT Students' Union

MTU Cork Students' Union



MTU Kerry Students' Union



Letterkenny IT Students' Union



TU Dublin Students' Union



WIT Students' Union

*Sent to:*

*CORU – Education Department, Minister Simon Harris - Minister for Further & Higher Education, Research Innovation and Science, Minister Stephen Donnelly – Minister for Health, Minister Heather Humphreys - Minister for Social Protection, THEA, IUA, TU Dublin, QQI.*