



Removal of Learners from Clinical Placements in Relation to Serious Concerns

Executive summary

NHS England is responsible for ensuring that there are high quality learning environments for all healthcare learners (this statutory responsibility was transferred from the former Health Education England (HEE) on 1st April 2023).

This guidance is designed to ensure that NHS England-funded or directly commissioned healthcare education and training is undertaken in line with the *NHS Education Contract*.

NHS England will work in collaboration with placement providers, education providers, healthcare and professional regulators, and other system partners, to ensure that work-based healthcare training placements meet NHS England's quality standards and expectations as set out in our *Education Quality Framework*, an integral part of the *NHS Education Contract*.

This guidance refers exclusively to training programmes in England directly managed by NHS England, which include Doctors in Postgraduate Training, Dentists in Postgraduate Training, Healthcare Scientists and Foundation Pharmacists (the term 'learner' is the generic term used to refer to all these groups throughout this guidance).

NHS England recognises that there will be times where its expectations of the quality of education and training are not met, and where all reasonable actions have been taken to resolve concerns that have been raised regarding a healthcare learning environment, but which continue to remain unresolved. This guidance specifically details the principles that will be adhered to when removing learners from practice placements in relation to serious quality concerns. Removing learners is normally an act of last resort.

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1. Introduction, purpose, and scope

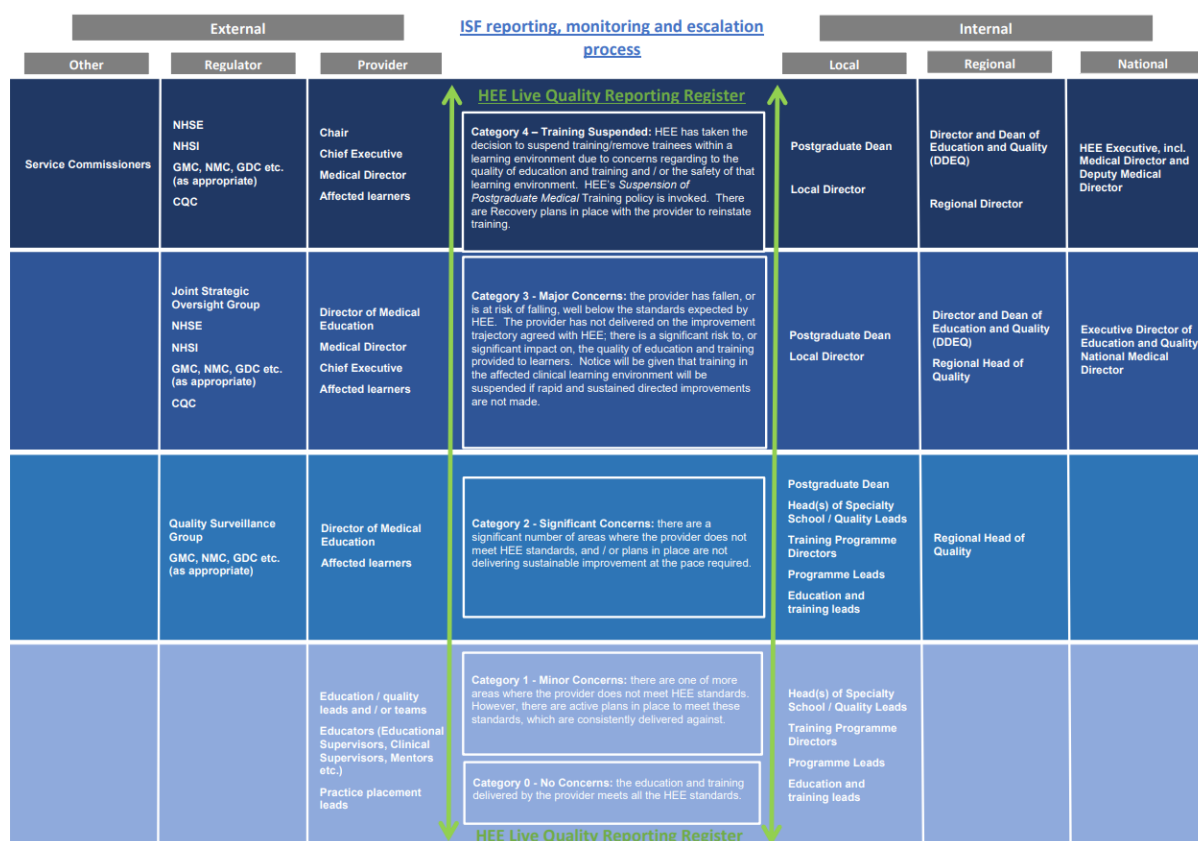
- 1.1. This guidance is owned by the Director of NHS England's Workforce, Training and Education (WT&E) Directorate. It applies to directly managed healthcare training programmes in England only. Currently, this includes:
 - Doctors in Postgraduate Training
 - Dentists in Postgraduate Training
 - Directly managed pre-registration Healthcare Scientists (HSST, STP and ETP)
 - Foundation Pharmacists
- 1.2. NHS England's WT&E's strategic goal is to assure and deliver, with partners, quality education and training that is rigorous, highly sought after and future focussed.
- 1.3. The guidance aims to keep patients and service users safe, ensure learners' welfare and safety and provide a mechanism to enable transparent and prompt action when major quality concerns about education and training, and patient safety where relevant, are identified.
- 1.4. This guidance outlines the principles that should be considered in relation to the removal of one or more learners by NHS England from one or more specific settings within a placement provider¹ or from a placement provider as a whole. It reflects action that may be taken when evidence from (in particular, but not exclusively) NHS England's quality management activities has identified that there are major quality concerns within a clinical learning environment regarding education and training and/or patient safety.
- 1.5. This guidance does not apply to the following:
 - unfilled placements in programmes following recruitment;
 - moving individual learners due to reasons other than the quality of the clinical learning environment (there may be many reasons for this but examples might include a breakdown of relationships, or needing experience elsewhere to meet specific educational requirements);
 - planned reduction in training capacity to fulfil workforce plans, changes in funding or national training priorities and/or planned 'decommissioning' (which may apply quality criteria);
 - the decision of a placement provider to reduce its training capacity.
- 1.6. The guidance should be read and used in conjunction with the NHS England's *Education Quality Strategy, Education Quality Framework, Intensive Support*

¹ An organisation within which a learner undertakes a practice placement and which delivers the practical, clinical element of an education and training programme. Placement providers hosting those undertaking postgraduate or pre-registration training for those this guidance applies to are usually NHS Trusts, NHS Foundation Trusts, GP surgeries, Dental practices and Pharmacies, but can also include any other organisation that forms part of the NHS or which delivers placement learning funded by the NHS which, for the purposes of the NHS contract, includes the independent and voluntary sectors (but only placements which are funded and/or managed by NHS England). They may also include the Local Authority sector (for example, for Public Health training).

Framework (ISF), and any other relevant documents outlining professional regulator quality expectations and standards.

- 1.7. NHS England's *Education Quality Framework* sets out our standards and expectations for the quality of clinical learning environments, which clinical placement providers are required to meet through the *NHS Education Contract*. The ISF enables categorisation of quality concerns with regards to the *Education Quality Framework* and describes a graded approach to escalation, reporting and, crucially, providing appropriate support (in collaboration and consultation with other stakeholders) (See Figure 1). In doing so, it provides a framework for deciding when support and remedial measures have been exhausted and removal of learners should be considered as an option.
- 1.8. The decision to remove learners is not taken lightly and is normally an act of last resort following the identification of major concerns about the quality of training, the capacity to train, patient care and/or the welfare of learners. When assessing whether to remove learners, NHS England takes into consideration (but is not constrained by) the potential impact on service delivery and patients, the impact on learner progression, the impact on other learners within the setting not covered by this guidance (liaising with professional regulators and other system partners where appropriate), and that removing learners is not often a solution. Assessment of the impact should be made in discussion with the provider(s) to establish and understand the potential level of risk.
- 1.9. The aim is for removal to be temporary while concerns are addressed (see 5.5). However, it may be decided that removal should be permanent (or it is considered unlikely that learners could return in the short or medium term), and that decommissioning of placements (funded training posts) is a necessary action. This guidance applies to the removal of learners only rather than decommissioning of placements. Decommissioning will involve a separate and formal contractual process (including a notice period) but does not preclude the removal of learners while this process is underway.

FIGURE 1. The Intensive Support Framework



2. The Regulators and NHS England

2.1 As this guidance applies to directly managed healthcare training programmes, the following regulators may be directly affected:

- Doctors in Postgraduate Training – General Medical Council (GMC)
- Dentists in Postgraduate Training – General Dental Council (GDC)
- Healthcare Scientists – Health and Care Professions Council (HCPC)
- Foundation Pharmacists – General Pharmaceutical Council (GPhC)

2.2 These regulators have a range of responsibilities, which include the approval of education and training programmes, approval of training sites, setting professional standards, setting standards for education, and approval of practitioners for professional registration with the regulatory body.

2.3 As a commissioner of education and training, legally enshrined in the *NHS Education Contract*, NHS England will inform the relevant regulator when the decision has been made to remove learners from a healthcare setting.

2.4 NHS England will also seek to inform and work with all regulators and HEIs, including those where learners are undertaking programmes not directly managed by NHS England, at the earliest possible opportunity.

3. Removal of learners

- 3.1 The decisions to remove learners will typically be made in relation to one or more concerns that have been known about for some time and which, despite intervention and attempts to improve quality, have deteriorated to the extent where the education and training of learners is at significant risk (i.e., such that they cannot meet their curriculum requirements) and/or learners are in an unsafe placement environment. However, there may be rare occasions where an identified concern is of such significance that learners need to be removed immediately and at short notice.
- 3.2 The decision to remove learners rests with the local Postgraduate Dean and will be taken in consultation with the Regional Dean and local Primary Care Dean, Dental Dean, Pharmacy Dean, and Healthcare Science Lead (as appropriate), and the relevant Regional Director.

4. Escalation and communication

- 4.1 The local Postgraduate Dean is responsible for ensuring that key stakeholders within the placement provider organisation(s) (including the learners themselves) are aware of concerns and any decision to remove learners. Once the decision to remove learners has been discussed and agreed within NHS England, formal, written notification will be sent to the placement provider(s).
- 4.2 Where it has been determined that learners should be removed from a setting or placement provider, NHS England's WT&E Director will be informed, to:
 - outline the rationale underpinning the decision
 - describe the actions agreed because of that decision
 - highlight any potential or emerging high impact concerns regarding patient or learner safety (including the safety of any remaining learners placed within that setting).
- 4.3 NHS England's respective regional and national communications and media teams will be informed in advance of the decision to remove learners as there may be local and/or national media interest.
- 4.4 Any Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) hosting learners affected by the decision will be informed and consulted prior to removal (involvement of the HEIs at an early stage of management of quality concerns is expected).
- 4.5 The local Postgraduate Dean will ensure that relevant professional leads for any other healthcare learners who may be affected are informed as well as any relevant Royal Colleges, Colleges, or Faculty (and professional leads within any other stakeholder organisations, e.g., the Defence Deanery).
- 4.6 The Postgraduate Dean will be responsible for informing health and care regulators (such as the Care Quality Commission) of the decision to remove learners.
- 4.7 The Postgraduate Dean should notify other Postgraduate Deans in any other regions hosting learners who are on placement out of region and affected by the decision.

- 4.8 The decision to remove learners while quality concerns are addressed sometimes involves small placement providers where there may only be one or two learners at any one time, and where the impact on service and any other learners is likely to be minimal, and where wider patient safety concerns may not be an issue. Examples, of these providers would include GP practices, pharmacies, and some community teams (mental health, community nursing, community midwifery etc.). In these circumstances, the Postgraduate Dean may exercise discretion in deciding which of the escalation steps outlined in 4.2, 4.3, 4.5 and 4.6 above are necessary and proportionate.

5. Supporting learners and service

- 5.1 Support must be offered to the learners that have been removed. In addition, the impact of any new learning locations must be considered (such as travel time; a new location should not burden the learner).
- 5.2 If the consideration of removal of learners is being triggered by an individual or individuals raising concerns, it is vital that they are subject to the relevant protections of the Public Interest Disclosure Act 1998, with NHS England acting as a prescribed body under this Act. Steps should be taken in line with NHS England's obligations under the Act to support them and where possible protect their identity.
- 5.3 Individual learners must not be exposed to the media.
- 5.4 The placement provider(s) must provide assurance to the Postgraduate Dean that the quality of the learning environment for all other learners remaining in the setting will be maintained once removal has taken place.
- 5.5 Once the learners are removed, all reasonable support will to be provided by NHS England and wider system partners to improve the quality of the learning environment, with a focus on rapid but sustainable improvement allowing for the return of learners as quickly as possible.

6. Associated documents

*NHS England's *Education Quality Strategy*

*NHS England's *Education Quality Framework*

*NHS England's *Intensive Support Framework*

NHS Education Contract

*The latest version of these documents can be found at: <https://www.hee.nhs.uk/our-work/quality>