



Mr Brian Carroll, Staff Officer,
South Dublin County Council
County Hall, Tallaght,
Dublin 24,

11 March 2021

Dear Mr. Carroll,

I refer to your recent correspondence on behalf of Social Care students, concerning the issue of placement hours as part of their course during the Covid-19 pandemic.

I am aware that issues have arisen in relation to placement hours both for students of Social Care programmes and for placements more generally as the restrictions to combat the spread of Covid-19 have tightened. My Department is monitoring developments in this regard very closely.

From the onset of the Covid-19 pandemic, significant work has been undertaken by a stakeholder group chaired by Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI), and including the representative bodies of education providers and students to address issues relating to the maintenance of the quality and standards of:

- Teaching and Learning
- Assessment
- Qualifications

This group has focused on the implementation of alternative arrangements and methods of delivery, where appropriate and necessary, to meet both these standards and, where applicable, the educational accreditation criteria established by Professional Recognition Bodies (PRBs).

In the case of Social Care, the awards standards in place for these qualifications reflect the accreditation criteria and placement requirements that have been set out by CORU, Ireland's multi-profession Health and Social Care Regulator and consequently the relevant PRB for this profession.



Since March 2020, QQI has facilitated engagement between members of the stakeholders group and CORU which have taken place in parallel to direct engagements between CORU and individual education providers. The goal of these engagements has been to ensure that, where possible, necessary alternative arrangements are in place to maintain the standards of education and training in this area and that these issues are actively managed. These efforts are to ensure that students can progress in their programmes from one academic year into the next, or, where relevant, graduate with the necessary professional competencies that have been set out by CORU.

While I would like to take this opportunity to acknowledge the efforts that have been made by CORU, QQI and our educational institutions to identify and implement flexible solutions for students up to this point, I am conscious that further efforts are now necessary.

The current timing and the likely duration of Covid restrictions has created even greater disruption and uncertainty in this space than anticipated and has substantially impacted on the expected level of available social care placements. It is in this context that I have asked QQI, supported by my Department, to facilitate intensified engagements between CORU, education providers and relevant stakeholders on this issue. The focus of these engagements will be to identify solutions that can be swiftly implemented for the student cohort who are most impacted in the near term while also identifying flexible approaches that can be readily adopted within the system in the medium to longer term as the response to the pandemic evolves and changes. These engagements will facilitate a dialogue among stakeholders in developing these solutions and, most importantly, will ensure transparency and clarity for those students studying social care.

Students should continue to engage directly with their institution for further information on the arrangements being implemented for their particular year and course.

I trust this is of assistance to you.

Yours sincerely,

Simon Harris T.D.,

Minister for Further and Higher Education,

Research, Innovation and Science

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