

Visit the [sparqs' COVID-19 hub](#) for more information and support

## COVID-19 course rep briefing on transitions

As we approach the end of the academic year, there is growing concern among students as to what is going to happen if certain elements of their course cannot be completed. Students who need to undertake a placement, those who have only completed the theory, but not the practical elements of their course, and those who are required to demonstrate skills and knowledge gained through in-person assessments, are just some of the cohorts who have voiced apprehension around what will happen if these cannot take place.

Colleges and universities are working hard to plan for a number of scenarios and eventualities, and plans are in place for a phased return to campus for those students who need it most, as government restrictions permit. However, we know that this will not alleviate all worries and that there may still be students who are unable to return to in-person settings before the end of the academic year.

### Questions course reps should be asking students:

- What challenges do you foresee progressing from one year of your course to the next?
- Do you feel prepared to transition into further study (whether that is at college or university) or into the workplace?
- What additional support (both academic and non-academic support) do you think would help you successfully transition?
- Have you started to identify any gaps in your knowledge or skills as a result of missing particular content?
- Have you received any communication around how identified gaps in your skills or knowledge might be filled?
- Are you aware of any alternative assessment methods you might be offered to ensure completion of your course?
- If you have been unable to undertake a placement, has any alternative provision been provided, and have you been supported through this change?
- Have further course opportunities and pathways been made clear to you?

A number of conversations have already taken place at a national level with student officers and sector agencies, and some potential suggestions that have been raised include:

- A summer extension to complete practical assessments.
- Part-certification with enhanced links to businesses and employers to support practical skills development in the workplace that can then be later accredited/verified.
- Extra support and/or funding to re-sit the year.
- Flexible assessment and multiple assessment options.
- Part-accreditation for those who want it.
- Use of alternative placement ideas, such as completing a project for a live client digitally.
- Using technology to film/monitor professional competency which can be viewed by an assessor.
- Better communication and clarity from all awarding bodies and sector agencies as to the options available to students.



It is really important that you work with students and staff to create space in staff-student committees or course rep meetings over the coming weeks to discuss these possible solutions, evaluating the impact and effect they could have, and what the benefits and challenges of them might be to students, as well thinking about the realistic expectations of what is possible for colleges and universities to achieve.

### **Other things students might ask/have concerns around:**

- Will I have to defer or re-sit?
- Will I still receive funding if I take longer to complete my course?
- Will I lose my place at college/university?
- Will I still be able to articulate to university?
- I am worried I will not have the skills/knowledge needed to be 'industry ready'
- How will I demonstrate skills/knowledge if I can't complete my assessments?
- I don't feel confident in my abilities; will I be at a disadvantage?

There will be many concerns from students and they will probably have lots more questions and worries than just the small selection above. However, it is important to remember that there will be a lot of issues that arise that are not the responsibility of a course rep to solve, and you cannot know the answers to all of these questions.

Instead, you can signpost students with specific issues to the staff who are best placed to resolve these issues. Therefore, it would be useful to check with your students' association the different staff or departments to direct students to, or if there is a webpage or FAQ section that has already been established to deal with these types of questions and concerns.

A key part of your role and how you can best represent your peers, will be to collate some of the key themes and issues that you are hearing about, and engage with staff, relevant committees and the students' association to relay these issues, so that work can happen at both a local and national level to tackle the main challenges.

There may also be certain groups of students who will be inadvertently adversely affected by the current challenges. Ensuring that there is opportunity for those voices to be heard and their concerns raised will be very important. Those students might include articulating students who are due to enter into year 2 or year 3 of university, students who have caring or parental responsibilities, apprentices, or medical and healthcare students. Working in partnership with fellow course reps, student officers and staff to facilitate discussion amongst these groups will help institutions and the sector better understand the additional issues they might face.

### **Further information**

You can find more information and questions around student achievement and progression in sparqs' [Suggested questions for course reps COVID-19 edition](#).

You can also find a suite of resources that can support you in your role as a course rep during the current time in our [COVID-19 information hub](#) on the sparqs' website.