Dear SQA,

We would like to thank you for the valuable feedback that you have provided to the questions we raised in our recent email. We want to emphasise that it is not about BACP imposing decisions on our courses but about seeking your collaboration and creativity to finding both temporary and longer-term solutions to these very difficult issues. So thank you for taking the time to give such clear and honest feedback which will help us work together to find solutions. We really felt the level of worry, concern for your students and the sheer mountain of difficulties and uncertainties that you and your students are currently facing for the foreseeable future.

We would also like to thank you for any concerns you may have raised about placing limits on online teaching and placements at the present time. It appears that the wording in the email may have caused some confusion as the suggestion of limits was aimed at the whole of the course, not at this coming academic year. We apologise for any misunderstanding that may have arisen and would like to reiterate that the purpose of the email was to gain your feedback on what might be possible in order to inform our thinking, not to impose such limits at this point in time. We will be as flexible as possible while current restrictions are in place.

There was broad agreement in the feedback that in principle, students should experience a greater proportion of classroom-based teaching and ‘in-room’ (previously referred to as face-to-face) placement hours. However, due to the complexities of the situation and the many varied contexts that courses, students and placements are in there was a consensus that putting specific limits in place at this particular point in time would not be helpful while the progression of the virus is still so unpredictable. We agree.

We would like to reassure you that our position on ‘only returning when it is safe to do so’ remains unchanged. While the virus is still in circulation the health and safety of staff, students and clients’ must take priority and we understand that is likely to mean that many will be unable to return to ‘in-classroom’ teaching and ‘in-room’ (face-to-face) placements for some time. We are still committed to being flexible about ‘live’ online and blended teaching for the time being and we certainly don’t want to bring in any limits that would disadvantage current students who have been most hit by the impact of the pandemic.

These recent months have shown us all that it is entirely possible to deliver a synchronous, relational and meaningful online learning experience and it’s your hard work and dedication that has enabled that transition. We wish to support courses in continuing to work in this way where returning to the classroom is not possible for health and safety reasons.

At the start of the pandemic, we highlighted the following principles to apply during the coronavirus pandemic:

* to be as flexible as possible while maintaining a standard
* to encourage centres to continue with online live teaching where possible
* due to extenuating circumstances, we’re allowing telephone/online working (using video/audio platforms) with clients providing that students have received some training and meet a minimum level of competence. These changes need to be agreed with the centre
* Students still need 100 hours to complete the course but we encourage centres to be flexible and exercise extension policies where appropriate.
* Moving existing clients to online/telephone – the course is responsible for ensuring students have sufficient training and supervision to support them during this transition with clients - [FAQs](https://www.bacp.co.uk/news/news-from-bacp/coronavirus/coronavirus-and-training/) on our website may help.
* Further training of more formal nature is required for taking on new clients, the assessor should be fully trained to assess client suitability, risk etc.

The feedback that we have received also highlights the very real possibility that some students may reach the end of their training without any practice experience of working in the same room as their clients. When considering course completion, courses are asked to consider how they will ensure students are competent in working ‘in-the-room’ with clients. There was agreement in the feedback that some ‘in-the-room’ placement hours would be needed to ensure competence however, significant concerns were also expressed about when, or even if this would be possible for some students before they complete their course. We ask that you consider utilising the course extension policy to give students the best chance of gaining the hours they need to demonstrate competence in both working remotely and in-the-room with clients. At this point in time, BACP will not stipulate a set number of ‘in-the-room’ practice hours, but students must have some experience of working in this way in order to be assessed as competent; this is an important principle which is about the best interests of clients not just trainees. It will be up to the course to decide how many ‘in-room’ hours are required, the time frame in which these need to be achieved and how students will be assessed for competence.

Where this is not possible, we will be exploring whether this needs to be demarcated in some way in terms of the final award. As many of you have commented, none of us has a crystal ball and what is reasonable to expect depends to some extent on how things which are beyond our control change. Whatever is decided needs to be thought through carefully so that students are not disadvantaged at a later stage while maintaining standards and keeping in mind the needs and safety of clients.

Your responses demonstrate the immense hard work and tremendous creativity that has gone into adapting your training and assessments in order to continue to support your students. Within the extremely rich feedback you have given, there are numerous suggestions for adapting the delivery of courses and resolving issues around course completion. It would be helpful if we could collate some of these ideas into a document that can be shared with other courses, which will of course be completely anonymous. Please let us know if you do not want the ideas that you shared with us to be included in this wider document.

We will continue to monitor the situation as it unfolds. In the meantime, we will continue to analyse the feedback and we will be in touch in due course with our findings.

In the meantime, if you haven’t yet had chance to view our ‘Train the Trainers’ online resource there is still time to access this here: <https://www.bacp.co.uk/events-and-resources/bacp-events/ttt2020/>

Kind regards

Caroline Jesper

Head of Professional Standards