



University of Essex



Professional Clinical Appearance Code of Practice

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Introduction and Purpose

Introduction

Healthcare students at the University of Essex have a responsibility to present themselves in a professional manner that mirrors national and local policy on clinical uniform and workwear. This responsibility is also set out in relevant professional and statutory regulatory bodies codes of practice and professional standards. As the University has a duty to prepare students for qualified practice, and enable them to move seamlessly into employment, we aim to facilitate the development of this professional attitude and compliance with relevant codes of practice throughout their time with us.

Placements take place in a variety of organisations and settings but a large number of placements take place in NHS organisations and with NHS service users, therefore all students should be aware of and comply with current [NHS Uniform and workwear guidance](#), which supports specific legal requirements, including those stated in the [Personal Protective Equipment at Work Regulations 1992](#), and the [Health and Social Care Act 2008 Code of Practice](#)

The specific principles underlying this uniform and workwear guidance relate to:

- patient safety (cross infection and unintentional injury)
- public confidence (clean and professional appearance)
- staff comfort (unintentional injury)

Individual organisations will have their own local guidance offering greater clarity on their specific requirements, and students will be made aware of this in their pre-placement information and induction. It is the responsibility of individual University of Essex students to be aware of and follow local policy when on practice placement, as stated in the relevant practice placement handbook.

To meet this requirement when on practice placement, all pre-registration healthcare students will be provided with clinical uniform free of charge, prior to commencing practice placements.

It should be noted that this University of Essex uniform must ONLY be worn on University of Essex placements and NOT for any other work.

Purpose of this Guidance

The University of Essex is committed to being a welcoming and inclusive student community, where diversity is celebrated.

The University of Essex Professional Clinical Appearance Code of Practice aims to provide clarity on how this diversity is recognised alongside the requirements placed on students during their studies at the University of Essex, both when on campus for academic learning, and when on practice placement with a partner organisation.

This guidance is not intended to replace national legislation or policy, or local organisation policy. It is designed to provide clarity to students on what may be considered 'standard' expectation, and how this may be reasonably adjusted when on campus, or to account for an individual's religion, beliefs, or body image. Such reasonable accommodations may be requested by students when undertaking both academic study on campus, and when on practice placement with partner organisations.

Students should be aware that as part of their study and the preparation for a clinical workplace, students will ultimately need to respect and comply with both University Code of Conduct, and local policies in place at partner organisations. If University of Essex students do not follow these, they may be considered to be in breach of the University of Essex Code of Conduct (relating to safety on University premises) and the responsibility to follow relevant regulatory and/or professional body codes of practice. This may lead to students being referred for investigation by the Conduct Team, and referred to the Professional Suitability Group as per Fitness to Practise procedures.

Part 1 - Standard Professional Expectations

Section 1: Working with others during a programme of study

1.1 Working with the Multidisciplinary Teams (MDT) at the university and on placement

A MDT is likely to include people with different characteristics, including age, race, religion, sexuality and gender/gender identity. Students must be prepared to work with fellow students, qualified health professionals and service users with all characteristics at university and on placement.

We recognise that some students may adopt different verbal and non-verbal communication approaches based on religious, moral or cultural reasons (eg avoiding eye contact and handshaking). Communication skills are crucial to developing a good professional relationship, and in the UK, eye contact and handshaking are recognised as an important courtesy that helps build rapport.

Refusing a handshake or avoiding eye contact is not a disciplinary matter but students must always be mindful of not causing offence to others, especially service users. If a student wishes to offer an alternative greeting, they must handle this matter sensitively and professionally.

1.2 Working with service users with different characteristics during placement and practical exams

To become competent health professionals and to reach the 'core competencies' required of any programme of study, students are expected to work with patients with different characteristics during placements and practical examinations.

1.3 Clinical skills practice

Clinical skills training involves practicing core skills with or on student peers/volunteers, irrespective of different characteristics. This training is important in helping students gain core skills and competencies in preparation for practice. Students are not required to act as 'patients' to be examined or practice with or on peers/volunteers, but it is considered to be a cooperative and generous gesture to fellow students to do so, and reflects professional behaviours around Equality, Diversity and Inclusion.

We recognise that due to religious, moral or cultural beliefs, some students will prefer not to practice with peers/volunteers of a different gender/gender identity or be examined by peers of a different gender/gender identity. Arrangements like a separate cubicle can be provided as an 'opt-in' resource for any student who wishes to conduct a clinical skills examination or practice in a single-sex pair. The student may be required to return to the mixed group for observation and discussion.

1.4 How to request reasonable adjustments during practical class activities

Should a student require reasonable adjustments during clinical skills activities they should request this from the programme lead, who will communicate with the person(s) leading the activities.

Section 2: NHS Uniform and workwear policies

2.1 Individual organisations have responsibility for their own local uniform policies and dress codes, guided by the NHS Uniform and Workwear Guidance. The most recent guidance aims to ensure organisations are more inclusive and culturally responsive for staff, patients and carers, considering the needs of all. This guidance was produced having consulted many stakeholders on issues such as infection prevention and control, safety and the needs of different faith groups.

2.2 The guidance is comprehensive, and covers the 3 key areas of:

- patient safety (avoiding injury during handling from eg. watches, badges, nails)
- public confidence (presenting a professional image and avoiding offence to people of different cultures or beliefs)
- staff comfort (avoiding injury from restrictive clothing or assault).

Specific recommendations include evidence based best practices around:

2.2.1 Uniform hygiene

- Change into and out of uniform at work or cover uniform completely when travelling to and from work
- Uniform or work clothing should be changed immediately if; visibly soiled, contaminated with bodily fluids, or after an Exposure Prone Procedure (EPP)
- Uniform or workwear should be laundered after each use to ensure a clean uniform can be worn daily
- Uniforms should be washed at the hottest temperature suitable for the fabric (or at least at 30 degrees), with a detergent powder
- Footwear should be closed over the foot and toes

2.2.2 Bare Below Elbow (BBE) and hand hygiene/nails

- Any direct patient care activity requires clinicians to be bare below elbow, to reduce the risk of cross contamination, and enable effective hand hygiene
- Any sleeve must be able to be pulled or rolled back securely during direct patient contact and hand washing- **there is no exception to this important safety rule**
- Nails should be kept short, neat, clean and unvarnished- i.e. no false nails

2.2.3 Jewellery

- No jewellery (including wrist-watches or activity trackers) should be worn during direct patient contact
- Some organisations may permit one plain ring and plain stud earrings

2.2.4 Hair

- Long hair should be tied back neatly off the collar

2.3 Individual organisations will base their own local policies on this national guidance and may include further detail or clarification on what is permissible. These additional rules may extend to:

2.3.1 Piercings

- Non-ear piercings that are visible (eg nose, tongue, eyebrow) must be minimal and discrete, consisting of a small, plain stud and not a hoop

2.3.2 Tattoos

- Visible tattoos may be discouraged and may need to be kept covered if deemed offensive or provocative to others

2.3.3 Beards and facial hair

- Beards and facial hair should be kept clean, trimmed and neat

It is the responsibility of students to check what is permitted at the start of each practice placement, understanding that there may be variation between individual organisations and settings.

Section 3: Suitable attire for practical skills sessions

3.1 University of Essex healthcare students are frequently required to participate in practical skills sessions. These require students to be able to move freely and safely during lying, kneeling, sitting, standing and walking, often whilst carrying and using equipment, or supporting others.

Students will also be practicing new skills on fellow students, and so certain rules must be followed to maintain infection prevention and control, and the health and safety of all involved.

3.2 Clothing: Students must wear:

- loose fitting (but not flared) trousers or shorts
 - A modest and loose fitting, short-sleeved T-shirt/polo shirt (some programmes will supply their students with a University of Essex polo shirt for this purpose). Please see section 7 for adjustments for religious or cultural reasons.
- flat and supportive shoes with a closed foot and toe
- if instructed to do so by programme staff, students must wear the uniform provided by the University for practical skills sessions/examinations

Students will NOT be permitted to take part in practical sessions if wearing long skirts, long sleeves, denim or unsupportive footwear.

Students are not to wear headwear during practical sessions unless this is for religious or cultural observation (Please see section 8).

3.3 Jewellery/Piercings: Students must ensure:

- only one plain metal ring (no stones) and plain stud earrings can be worn during practical sessions
- facial piercings should be removed for practical sessions or limited to:
 - one small and discrete metal tongue stud
 - one small and discrete metal nose stud
- no necklaces, bracelets, wrist watches or other hand/wrist adornments should be worn during skills sessions (please see section 12 for symbolic jewellery and religious adjustments)
 - medic alert jewellery can be worn if it is plain, cleanable and discreet
- badges should be removed when not required for identification

3.4 Hair: Students must ensure:

- long hair (beyond shoulder length) is always tied up neatly and off the collar
- facial hair should be kept neat and short (close to the face).
 - Where students do not cut facial hair for religious or cultural reasons, it should be tied and rolled to a short length to ensure it does not contact others during practical sessions.

3.5 Nails: Students must ensure:

- nails are clean and always cut short
- nail varnish, nail coatings, acrylics or extensions must not be worn during any practical session

Section 4 Suitable clothing for laboratory work

4.1 University of Essex students on Biomedical Science programmes will be required to undertake laboratory work, both at university and on placement.

4.2 Students should follow the guidance below to ensure they adhere to Health and Safety procedures inside the laboratory.

- Students will be required to wear Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) to protect themselves and their clinical work. This may extend to:
 - lab coats, gloves, overshoes, eye protection (safety glasses or face shields), and full-face masks (including fitted FFP2 and FFP3 masks)
 - where it is not practical to face fit a (FFP2 or FFP3) mask due to facial hair, then provision of standalone forced air overhead hoods with a visor may be required
- students must wear the laboratory white coats available over their clothes and close the coat up completely
- students must wear flat, closed toe shoes or boots
- students should not wear any trailing or loose clothing that can touch the floor, as this could potentially pick up contamination from the floor surface, contact chemical or biological hazards, or become a trip hazard
- students may choose to wear a long sleeve top but with the cuffs hidden under the lab coat
- students are free to wear head coverings, but these should be tucked into the lab coat to prevent any contamination. Any headwear must always allow full frontal and peripheral vision and must allow for communication in an unobstructed manner especially during emergency situations or when alarms are sounding

4.3 When on placements, students will be required to adhere to the organisation's uniform policy, which is a health and safety requirement dictated by the sometimes very hazardous environment in which staff are expected to operate.

Part 2: Reasonable adjustments for religion, belief and body image

A MDT is likely to include people of different genders. Students must be prepared to work with fellow students, qualified health professionals and service users of different genders at university and on placement.

The University of Essex, along with partner organisations, is committed to celebrating the diversity of all in our community and upholding the nine protected characteristics of the 2010 Equality Act. As such, appropriate and sensitive consideration of clinical uniform and professional appearance is given to all in our community as necessary, ensuring that all can observe and express cultural and religious practice, and body image, in a way that continues to meet professional standards, and does not impact on safety in clinical skills learning or practice.

The University respects the rights of those who wish to observe these practices, providing that a professional image is upheld and clothing adheres to required policies.

Students are encouraged to discuss any individual modifications to standard professional appearance guidance with the personal tutor and programme leads as necessary. The below sections may assist students in understanding the reasoning behind certain clinical expectations and consider how standard expectations may be reasonably adjusted to suit individual needs.

Section 5: Scrubbing in

5.1 If there is the opportunity to participate in 'scrubbing up' for theatre, correct local procedure for putting on the relevant personal protective equipment should be followed. This will involve exposing the arms while washing which may be of concern for some individual learners.

5.2 In the situation where a learner would prefer an observer to be of a particular gender, it is reasonable to make this request. However, learners need to be aware that it may not always be reasonably practicable for this choice to be accommodated irrespective of the reasoning behind it.

Section 6: Alcohol hand gel

6.1 Alcohol-based hand gel contains synthetic alcohol that does not fall within the Muslim prohibition against natural alcohol (made from fermented fruit or grain). Alcohol-based gel is widely used within healthcare settings in Islamic countries and it is permissible for Muslims to use such gels.

Section 7: Forearms

7.1 The transfer of micro-organisms by direct contact can lead to the transmission of infections, therefore all clinical staff must be 'Bare Below the Elbow' when providing direct patient care. Good hand hygiene is well recognised as the single most effective way to reduce the risk of cross infection. Hand hygiene policies may vary by placement area and some will clearly state that staff must be 'Bare Below the Elbow' from the entry door to that clinical area.

7.2 NHS England, in collaboration with faith groups such as the [British Islamic Medical Association](#), recognises that exposure of the forearms is not acceptable to some staff because of their Islamic faith or for other reasons such as injury and/or scarring. Reasonable adjustments may be requested by clinical staff and students as follows:

7.3 Practical classes:

- students may wear full length sleeves between direct practice of clinical skills providing they are not overly loose
- sleeves must be able to be rolled or pulled back and kept securely in place during hand-washing and direct contact skills activities
- disposable over-sleeves (elasticated at the elbow and wrist), may be used but must be put on and discarded in the same way as disposable gloves
- strict hand washing procedures must still be followed

7.4 On placement:

- students should follow local policy, if available.
- uniforms may include provision for sleeves that can be full length when staff are not engaged in direct patient care activity
- uniforms can have three-quarter length sleeves
- any full or three-quarter length sleeves must not be loose or in contact with patients. They must be able to be rolled or pulled back and kept securely in place during hand-washing and direct patient care activity.
- disposable over-sleeves (elasticated at the elbow and wrist) may be used but must be put on and discarded in exactly the same way as disposable gloves

Section 8: Headwear

8.1 Campus based activity: Any form of headwear worn on religious grounds is permitted during campus-based activity.

8.1.1 Face veils: Some female Muslims may choose to wear a face veil during their studies.

These individuals should understand that learning to communicate effectively is a core skill and competence for healthcare professionals, and as such, students will be expected to expose their face in certain situations:

- when working in practical classes with staff and other students
- when taking part in practical examinations
- for identification purposes (see section 9)
- on practice placements

8.2 Placements: Headwear worn on religious grounds is allowed during placement but must follow local policy to ensure patient care, health and safety, infection prevention and control and security and safety of patients or staff is not compromised.

- The cloth used to cover the hair, ears and neck must be clean every day and washed at the hottest temperature suitable for the fabric.
- Headwear must be unadorned, secured neatly and tucked into the collar to prevent trailing of fabric.

8.3 In surgical theatres: Headwear worn on religious grounds should be discussed with your educator, and local policy for theatre staff must be followed. This may state:

- there is no need to wear an underlying surgical cap, but an orthopaedic hood or a single disposable head garment (approved by infection prevention and control) can be worn instead over turbans, kippot and in place of a hijab
- hair, neck and ears may be covered but the face must be visible

Section 9: Identity checks

9.1 ID checking for individuals who wear any type of face covering and would not want the opposite gender to check their identity: The university and practice placement may wish to verify the identity of individuals in the following circumstances:

- taking examinations

- carrying out security checks
- allowing access to premises

This will usually be done by checking an individual's face against the issued ID. The individual is entitled to request that the identification (removal of face covering) takes place only in the presence of staff of the same gender.

9.2 Obtaining a Photo ID: For reasons similar to those outlined above, some individuals may be uncomfortable having their photograph taken for their ID card. In this situation, it may be appropriate to have a member of staff from the same gender take the photo in a private room (if available). If this is not available, an alternative may be that the individual with a facial covering provides a passport photo, which is then verified by a female member of staff in a private room and this photo is then scanned onto the ID card.

Section 10: Loose and modest dress

10.1 Campus based activity: Individuals may wish to wear loose clothing which promotes modesty through non-revealing attire, due to religious or cultural belief. Some Muslim females may wish to observe these practices by wearing items such as a jilbab (loose full-length dress covering the arms) or a chador (full-body cloak).

10.2 Practical classes: Students taking part in practical classes will be expected to wear clothing that permits the observation, assessment and movement of body parts for learning purposes.

- Students would need to wear clothing that protects modesty but enables safe completion of practical skills, with attention to infection prevention and control and prevention of slips, trips and falls
- Students who wish to undress to practice skills, may request to work in a same-gender group and may work behind modesty curtains available in practical labs
- Students taking part in practical sessions with a members of a different gender should make it known that they do not wish to be used for skill demonstration purposes

10.3 Placement: While on placement, students are expected to adhere to local dress code policy.

Section 11: Menopause adjustments

11.1 The University of Essex recognises that each individual's menopause journey is unique, and that our community must be flexible in the support and reasonable adjustments offered under the Equality

Act 2010. There is various guidance on symptom management available from the NHS, and this includes guidance for employers of NHS staff.

11.2 On Campus: More information about measures the University can assist with can be found in the University of Essex document Menopause Matters.

11.3 On practice placement: Students should refer to any local policy available and follow any suggested reasonable accommodations. These may include:

- being able to wear cotton scrubs instead of usual uniform when experiencing temperature fluctuations
- having access to a fan in the workplace, if safe to do so
- being able to take more regular breaks
- having access to fresh and cold drinking water

Section 12: Religious symbols

12.1 It is understood that some students may wear religious symbols that cannot be removed. Examples include the Kara (bracelet), the Kirpan (ceremonial sword), or a cross/crucifix.

12.2 On campus: Students are permitted to wear religious symbols on campus but should understand that some symbols may cause alarm to other members of the University community. They should therefore be worn discreetly under clothing.

12.3 In practical classes: Students should wear religious symbols discreetly and ensure they remain under clothing when possible. The Kara should be pushed up the arm and taped securely to maintain effective hand hygiene.

12.3 On placement: Students should follow local policy on the wearing of religious symbols.

Section 13: Taking part in procedures

13.1 Taking part in abortive procedures/human embryo/ fertility treatments: If a student does not wish to participate in any procedures which use abortive procedures on human fetuses and other human embryo and fertility treatments, they can ask for a reasonable adjustment to be made.

13.2 Taking part in procedures involving blood products: Learners may be expected to take part in procedures that involve taking blood from others or the delivery of blood products. These procedures

may not be avoided; however, learners may request reasonable adjustments on religious or cultural grounds.

Section 14: Changes to the academic or exam timetable

14.1 Exams and religious observance: If students are unable to take exams or attend lectures during religious festivals or faith-based activities (e.g Ramadan or Yom Kippur):

- students should notify the Student Wellbeing and Inclusivity Service by [downloading this application for exam arrangements form \(.docx\)](#), completing and saving it, and then emailing it to include@essex.ac.uk
- evidence of religious commitments will need to be provided
- for further discussion around the application process, students can contact the [Faith Centre](#)

14.2 Deadlines for applications: For December/January examinations: no later than 31 October, For May/June examinations: no later than 31 January.

Section 15: Multi-Faith facilities

15.1 The University of Essex celebrates a rich and diverse community of students and staff from all over the world, bringing together a mix of cultures, faiths and religious practices. Our Colchester and Southend campuses have dedicated [multi-faith spaces and personnel](#) who can support students with their faith and spiritual needs.

15.2 On placement, students will need to check local policy, and speak to their educator to establish what faith spaces are available and how any individual needs might be accommodated.

Section 16: Other requests

16.1 This code of practice is not exhaustive and there may be other requests for reasonable accommodation of specific needs relating to an individual's religion, beliefs or body image. If a student has a specific request that is not covered in this code of practice, they should speak to their Personal Tutor or Programme Lead so it can be discussed further.

Section 17: Making and recording of student requests

17.1 Requesting reasonable adjustments: Students wishing to make a request for a reasonable adjustment to standard expectation around professional clinical appearance should speak to their personal tutor or programme lead first. If they then consent to the request being considered and processed, it should be put in writing to the programme lead, at which point it will be considered sensitively in line with this Code of Practice. The student will be notified of the decision, and relevant programme staff will be informed of the reasonable accommodations to be made.

17.2 Recording and monitoring of requests: Programme staff will keep a record of all student requests (based on religion, belief or body image), and subsequent accommodations made.

17.2.1 LEAP data: Individual request information will be recorded on the student's LEAP file.

17.2.2 Faculty level data collection: To enable programme staff across all pre-registration healthcare programmes within the Faculty of Science and Health at the University of Essex to make consistent and equitable decisions around requests for reasonable accommodations, data will be collected and shared via a secure database.

Data collected will include:

- student registration number (to identify multiple requests)
- School and programme of study
- the nature of the accommodation being requested
- the religious, cultural or other grounds for the request
- if the accommodation was made, and how
- if the accommodation was not made, and why not -a justification must relate to professional standards, national healthcare policy, or University code of conduct should the institution receive a legal challenge.

Anonymised information will be supplied to the University Equality & Diversity Committee if requested. Data will be deleted when the student completes their pre-registration healthcare programme at the University of Essex.

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