

# GUIDELINE

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## ON CLINICAL NURSE MENTORS' MENTORING COMPETENCE DEVELOPMENT



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Erasmus+



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This European Union (EU) guideline aims to strengthen clinical nurse mentors' mentoring competence development, which can improve health system resilience in EU countries. The guideline is based on critically evaluated research evidence and has been developed during the years 2018-2021 through the Erasmus+ project - Quality Mentorship for Developing Competent Nursing Students (QualMent) under the leadership of an international team of experts with extensive knowledge and expertise in mentoring.

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This document has been reviewed by expert panels in Belgium, Finland, Lithuania, Slovenia and Spain.

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## SUMMARY OF THE GUIDELINE

**Background:** *A significant proportion of nursing education is carried out in clinical learning environments. Clinical nurse mentors have an important role in supporting nursing students' professional competence development. Mentors who attain core competencies in mentoring are able to better support nursing students in obtaining the eight competency areas defined in European Union Directive 55 Article 31.*

**Aim:** *To provide recommendations on the development of clinical nurse mentors' competence in mentoring nursing students in clinical practice.*

**Objectives:** *1) To promote and support effective mentoring practices; 2) to enhance mentors' competence development; and 3) to improve nursing education on an international level through high-quality mentoring and clinical learning environments for nursing students.*

**Target groups:** *Clinical nurse mentors, nurse educators and educational organisations, nurse managers at all levels, other health professionals, undergraduate and postgraduate nursing students, national nursing associations, nursing regulatory bodies, politicians and policymakers.*

**Recommendations:** *Countries across the globe continue to search for solutions to address challenges related to maintaining a sustainable nursing workforce. Securing high-quality clinical learning environments and supporting mentors' competence development in mentoring nursing students continue to be important strategies in improving the recruitment, retention and graduation of competent nursing students. Strengthening of quality mentorship should be priority of the political agenda of Member States, along with the requirement that clinical mentors in all healthcare settings participate in structured mentoring education.*



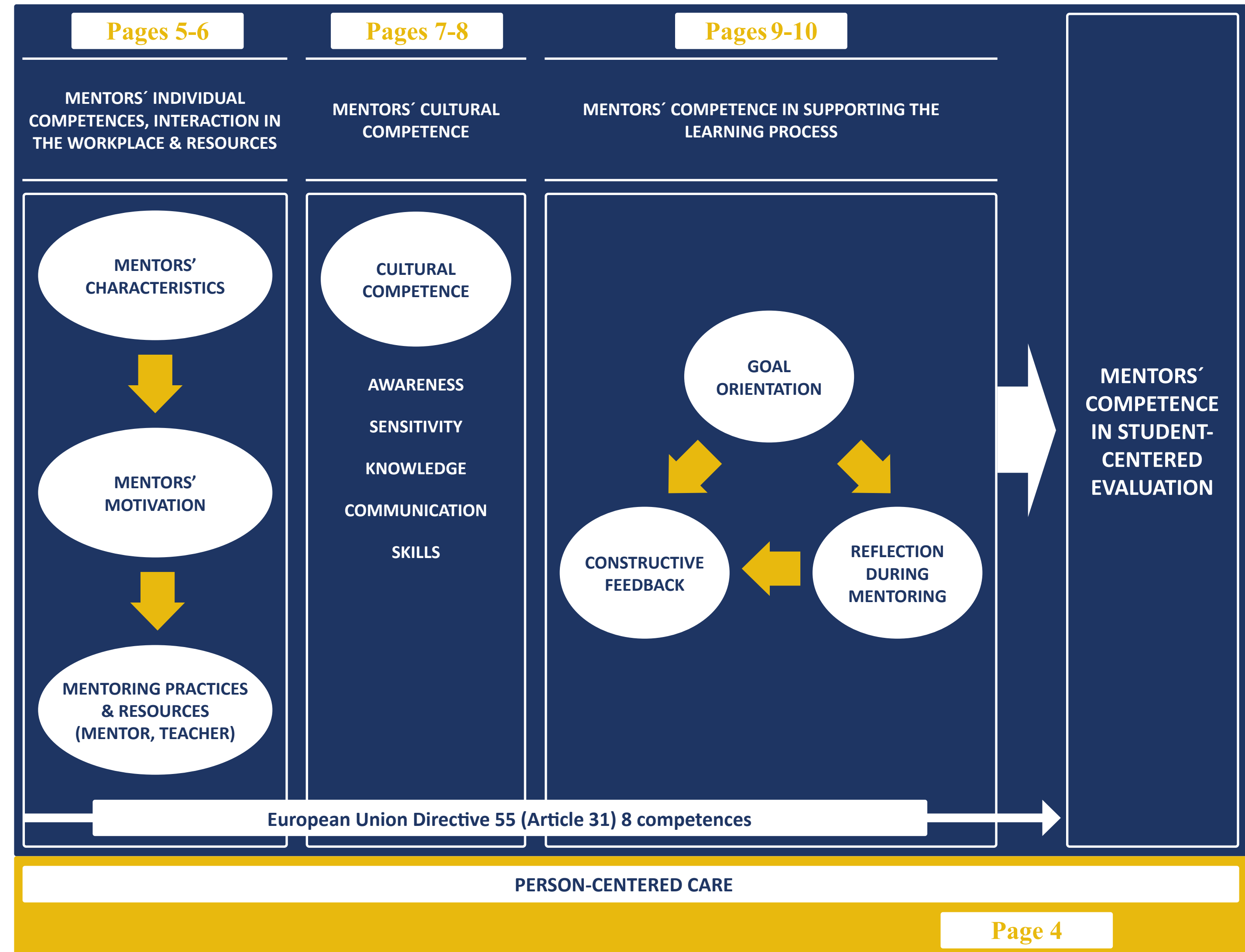
# 1 Mentoring competence

Designed to support you in your role as a clinical nurse mentor, this guideline outlines your responsibilities and opportunities in supporting nursing students' learning. The importance of the role of clinical nurse mentors and of the realisation of quality mentorship cannot be overemphasized. High-quality clinical learning environments are crucial in the preparing the sustainable nursing workforce of the future. It is in these environments that students apply their knowledge, learn key skills and achieve the required competence needed to practice nursing.

The evidence-based clinical mentors' competence model (Mikkonen et al., 2019) outlines the key components of mentoring competence. Clinical nurse mentors act as role models to students and have the opportunity to instil professional values and integrity in clinical settings. They support students in practicing safe, person-centred care that is in line with EU Directive 2013/55/EU Article 31 (page 4).

Mentoring competence consists of 1) mentors' individual competences, 2) cultural competence in mentoring and 3) competence in supporting students' learning process (pages 5-10). Recommendations for mentoring in clinical learning environments can be found on pages 10-11 of this document.

## The evidence-based clinical nurse mentors' competence model

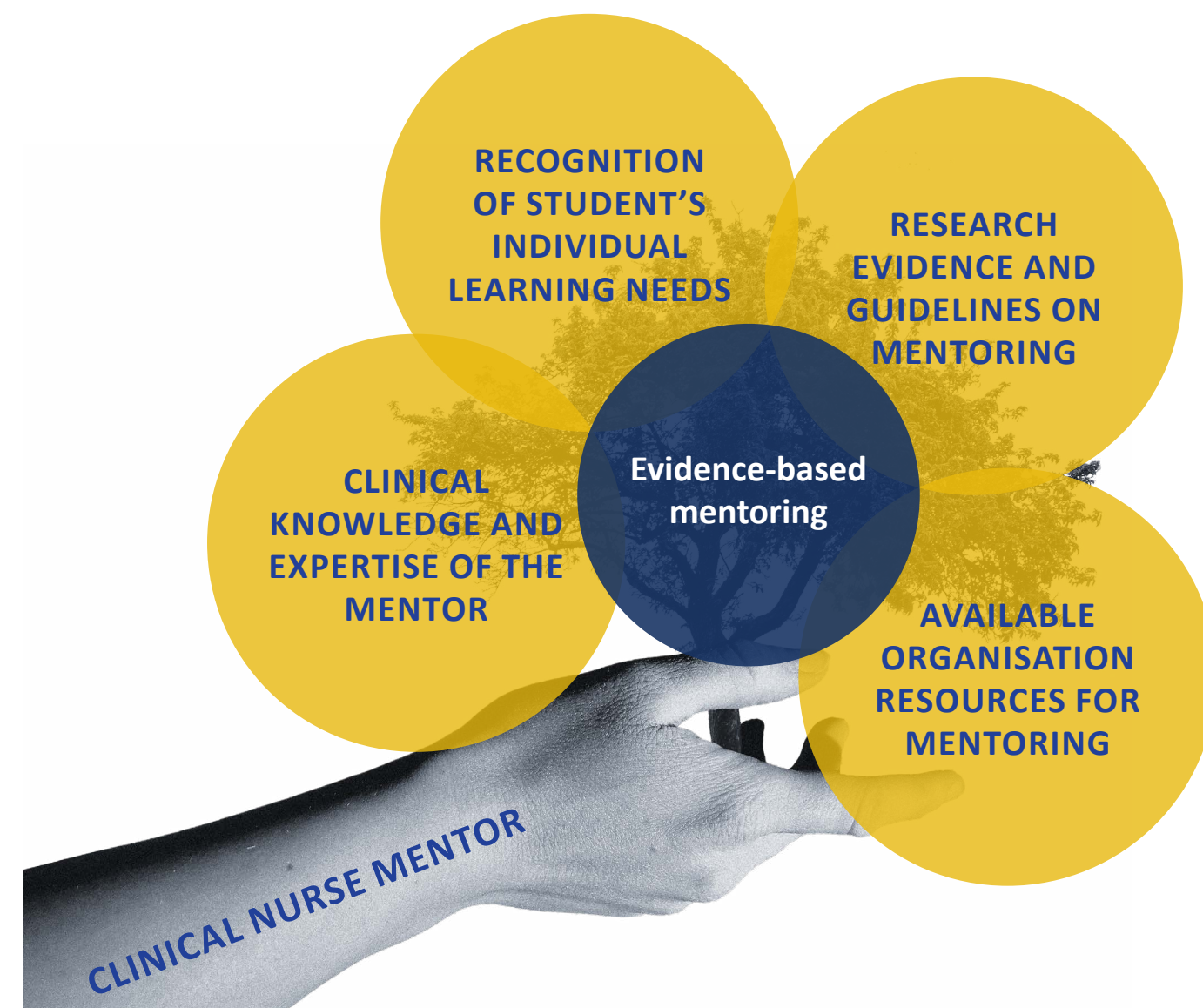


## 2 Foundation of mentoring

Mentors have expertise in both the clinical area they operate in and in their pedagogical approach in supporting the learning of nursing students. Mentors are not only clinical experts, but act as role models for students and help them develop into professionals competent in providing high-quality, safe and person-centred care.

### 2.1 High-quality and evidence-based mentoring

Mentors are responsible for mentoring students in an evidence-based manner. The elements of evidence-based mentoring are defined below.



*What is needed to ensure that mentoring is of high-quality and evidence-based?*

The realisation of quality mentorship requires the development of practices that better meet nursing students' needs and advance their professional identity as nurses. A study conducted in four Central/Eastern EU Member States revealed that nursing students were very satisfied with their clinical

placement experiences and the majority of students felt their mentor was an important professional role model (Antohe et al., 2015). It was recommended that continuing professional development programs on mentorship being offered to nursing staff at the basic and advanced levels.

### 2.2 Person-centred care

Mentors support students' professional growth in becoming responsible professionals who integrate the approach of person-centred care into nursing practice. This approach is the main focus of students' clinical learning process. It is essential that mentors are competent in guiding students in consciously adopting the perspectives of individuals, families and communities into clinical reasoning and decision-making processes.

### 2.3 European Federation of Nurses Associations competency framework

Clinical mentors are required to support students in such a way that they obtain the eight competency areas defined in Directive 2013/55/EU Article 31 which include: [\(click here for more details\)](#)

- To independently diagnose the nursing care required using current theoretical and clinical knowledge and to plan, organise and implement nursing care when treating patients;
- To work together effectively with other actors in the health sector, including participation in the practical training of health personnel;
- To empower individuals, families, and groups towards healthy lifestyles and self-care on the basis of the knowledge and skills acquired;
- To independently initiative life-preserving measures and to carry out measures in crises and disaster situations;
- To independently give advice to, instruct and support persons needing care and their attachment figures;
- To independently assure quality of and to evaluate nursing care;
- To comprehensively communicate professionally and to cooperate with members of the other professions in the health sector;
- To analyse the care quality to improve their own professional practice as a general care nurse.



# 3 Mentor's individual competences and interaction in the workplace

## 3.1 Mentors' individual competences

The personal characteristics and motivation of clinical mentors has great impact on development of a successful mentor-student relationship. Mentors play a key role in integrating students into work environments and into interprofessional healthcare teams. Mentors must be familiar with mentoring practices and on the available resources that exist for mentoring. Mentors involve all relevant stakeholders such as nurse educators, students and other staff members into the mentoring process.

Important characteristics of clinical mentors include:

- Confidence in personal competence in performing nursing tasks and meeting the responsibilities of being a mentor
- Ability to create a supportive climate for learning
- Taking initiative in strengthening relationships and collaboration with the student and the nurse educator
- Competent in integrating students into healthcare teams and introducing students to colleagues
- Willingness to discuss students' learning experiences on a regular basis
- Ability and willingness to express an empathetic attitude towards mentoring and person-centred care
- Understanding of the mentor's own role and responsibility in the students' learning process.

Motivation towards the mentoring of students can be seen in:

- the mentor's willingness to mentor students and interest in getting to know students
- recognition and understanding on the importance that motivation has on the learning of students
- the mentor's continuous strive to develop as a mentor
- the mentor's ability to identify his or her own level of motivation as a mentor as well as the students' level of motivation to learn

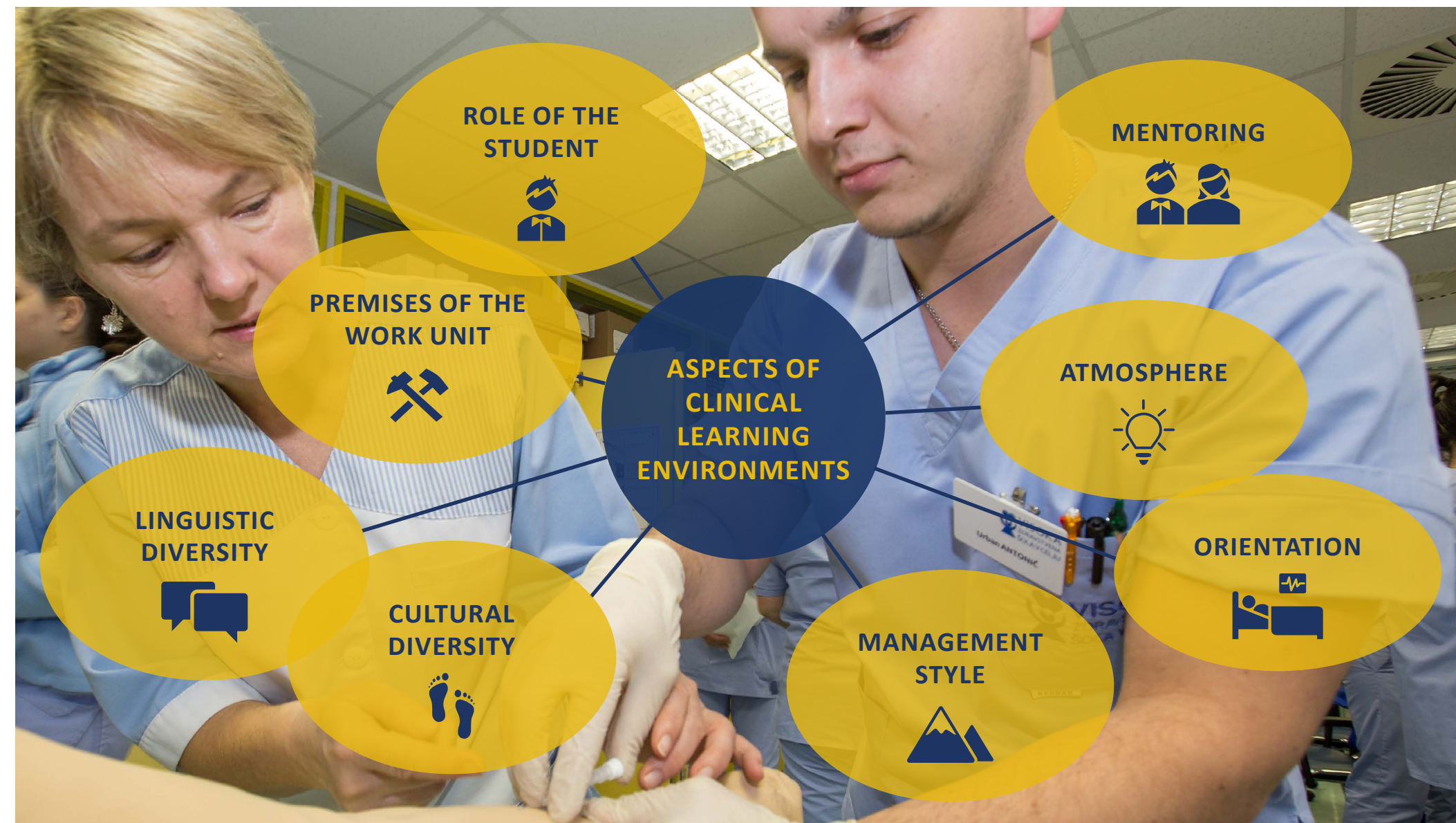
Mentors must be familiar with mentoring practices and on the available resources that exist for mentoring. These are an essential part of mentoring success. This includes:

- knowledge of mentoring practices within one's own organisation and beyond
- knowledge of students' current level of competence, their educational context and background
- the ability to effectively collaborate with the nurse educator and to recognize when there is a need for additional contact
- understanding of resources available to mentors to support them in their mentoring role



### 3.2 Mentors' role in high-quality clinical learning environments

Mentors play a key role in maintaining clinical learning environments that are physically, socially and emotionally safe. The picture below defines important aspects of clinical learning environments. Students come from various cultural and linguistic backgrounds, and it is vital to maintain respect towards differences. Additional key aspects of clinical learning environments include premises of the work unit, the role of the student, mentoring, atmosphere, orientation and management style. It is essential that organisations and all professionals within healthcare teams commit to maintaining the safety of students ensure greater consistency in approaches and foster appropriate learning environments for the future nursing workforce. Hence, nurses' mentorship must be based on and argued in research and evidence.



*High-quality mentoring can influence what kind of professionals enter the nursing field and help increase the retention of professionals.*

### 3.3 Tips on maximising positive learning experiences and outcomes for students as an organisation

Tip #1 Integrate positive mentoring practices into the organisational culture of healthcare environments.

Tip #2 Make a conscious effort to integrate students into work environments and into interprofessional healthcare teams.

Tip #3 Strengthen mentor-student-nurse educator collaboration as it can help students succeed in clinical practice.

Tip #4 Recognise the core characteristics of new generation (Millennial and Generation Z) students in order to consider how to successfully engage with and coach these students.

Tip #5 Use learning and knowledge technologies and case studies during mentoring to enhance students' learning process.

### 3.4 Tips on activities that can be integrated into mentoring education

Tip #1 Highlight the importance for providing nursing students time to orientate to the new clinical learning environment. Clinical mentors can reflect on how they can help students feel welcome and safe.

Tip #2 While practicing relevant nursing skills, students need to be supported and clinical mentors must ensure that professional standards are maintained. Clinical mentors can share experiences on strategies used while coaching students in the planning and assessment of patient care.

Tip #3 Integrate strategies into mentoring education that assist clinical mentors in developing the student-mentor relationship and other competence areas essential for effective mentoring in clinical placements.



## 4 Mentors' cultural competence

### 4.1 Development of mentors' cultural competence in mentoring

During clinical placement, nursing students from diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds often face challenges related to cultural differences and language barriers. The role of the clinical nurse mentor can be a challenging one and require special attention on the development of mentors' cultural competence in mentoring. The need to educationally prepare mentors in providing culturally appropriate mentoring and to meet the professional learning needs of students is key.

### 4.2 Definition of cultural competence in mentoring

Cultural competence has been defined as a “complex know-act grounded in critical reflection and action, which the health professional draws upon to provide culturally safe, congruent, and effective care in partnership with individuals, families, and communities living health experiences, and which takes into account the social and political dimensions of care” (Blanchet Garneau and Pepin, 2015, p. 12). Cultural competence in mentoring is defined as “the process in which the faculty mentor continually strives to achieve the ability and availability to effectively mentor within the cultural context of the student mentee” (Campinha-Bacote, 2010, p. 131).

Mentors' cultural competence encompasses the following attributes.

- cultural awareness, sensitivity and knowledge
- intercultural communication and interaction
- cultural skills and the ability to create a culturally safe learning environment.

### 4.3 Mentoring of diverse nursing students

Specific competences required to provide culturally congruent person-centred care and culturally conscious mentoring to culturally and linguistically diverse students are defined below.

Cultural awareness, sensitivity and knowledge:

- desire and commitment to integrate, mentor, and support culturally and linguistically diverse

students

- knowledge of one's own cultural background
- reflection on how one's own culture and belief system impacts one's actions as a professional and interactions with others
- willingness to give up possible prejudices and attitudes towards patients/clients or students and to develop cultural sensitivity
- recognition of the importance of cultural acceptance of culturally diverse patients/clients and students
- fostering a welcoming attitude towards different cultures and views of care
- respect for diversity in person-centered care and in the mentoring of students

Intercultural communication and interaction:

- having the skills to engage in effective communication and to interact with culturally diverse patients/clients and students
- having an understanding of the effects of culture on patterns of verbal and nonverbal communication

Cultural skills in nursing and mentoring:

- having the skills to deal with culturally challenging situations in person-centred care and in mentoring
- skills to comfortably and effectively work with culturally diverse students while understanding their individual learning needs and communication styles
- ensuring the culturally diverse student is able to function in the healthcare context and provide safe, culturally congruent care to the patient/client

### 4.4 Tips on activities that can be integrated into cultural competence education for mentors

Tip #1 Clinical mentors reflect on their role in assisting the culturally and linguistically diverse student to overcome challenges faced in clinical placement and on their role in supporting the



integration and adaptation process of the student.

Tip #2 Clinical mentors identify and define the attributes of cultural competence in mentoring and use these to plan their personal development in cultural competence.

Tip #3 Clinical mentors reflect on their own personal cultural background and how their own value and belief system may have an impact in multicultural encounters.

Tip #4 Culture often has an effect on patterns of verbal and nonverbal communication. Communication difficulties have been reported as being stressful for both students and mentors. Integrate content on how students' professional language development and proficiency in the local language can be supported. Consider utilizing the expertise of linguistic experts in developing content regarding the topic.

Tip #5 Clinical mentors' play a vital role in ensuring safe, culturally sensitive clinical learning environments that support culturally and linguistically diverse students' learning. Mentors must take immediate action to address possible prejudice, stereotypes and racism in clinical learning environments. Create simulation exercises where clinical mentors can practice their cultural skills in various real-life mentoring scenarios.

Tip #6 Mentoring culturally and linguistically diverse students can be stressful and time-consuming. Clinical mentors can think of ways they can get the support they need to succeed in their role.

Tip #7 Allow the voice and experiences of culturally and linguistically diverse students be heard. Integrate strategies into mentoring education such as videos, digital stories, interviews or panel discussions with students.





# 5 Mentor's competence in supporting students' learning process

## 5.1 Assessment of nursing students' clinical competence

Assessment of nursing students' clinical competence is complex and challenging for both mentors and nurse educators. It is extremely important to maintain objectivity during the process of finding out whether or not the student has achieved required competencies. The use of effective assessment methods and reliable and valid assessment tools is encouraged.

Mentors can overcome assessment challenges by consciously supporting students learning process throughout the entire clinical practice. The mentor and student continuously reflect on clinical learning and on achievements made during clinical practice.

## 5.2 Student-centeredness during evaluation

A student-centred approach to evaluation can be facilitated when the mentor succeeds to integrate the following continuous cycle into daily mentoring practice.

1. Goal orientation
2. Reflection during mentoring
3. Constructive feedback

## 5.3 Goal orientation in mentoring

Goal orientation in mentoring means that the mentor and student work together as a team so that the student can achieve the learning goals that have been set for the clinical practice. It is essential that goals are clearly defined at the start of the student's clinical practice. Mentors should have knowledge on the competencies that nursing students are required to achieve and on how to support students in achieving these competencies.

Mentors can support students in setting their learning goals by:

- explaining clinical activities and interventions that can be completed during the clinical practice
- referring to the learning goals and assessment criteria set by the educational organisation for the clinical practice in question
- identifying the student's level of competence prior to the start of the clinical practice and making a plan to assist competence development through the assignment of appropriate tasks
- ensuring that the student sets short and long term goals that are specific, measurable, attainable, relevant and time-bound.

## 5.4 Reflection during mentoring

Reflection during mentoring means that the mentor encourages the student to critically reflect on, for example, how clinical tasks were performed or how the student succeeded in interactions with clients. The mentor and student embark in regular reflective discussions.

In order to promote effective reflection during mentoring, mentors should

- create a safe atmosphere where discussion on learning experiences can be openly shared between the mentor and the student
- ask the student to answer questions throughout the clinical practice and encourage the student to reflect on their own actions and developmental areas
- integrate various methods to improve the student's self-reflection and reflection on learning with peers
- use a structured approach to promoting mutual dialogue with the student. For example, ask the student on a daily basis to share how the day went, what the student learned and what the student is looking forward to learning more.

## 5.5 Providing constructive feedback

Constructive feedback that is timely, useful and given frequently encourages and motivates students to further develop their professional competence.

Giving constructive feedback is not always easy. Be empathetic towards to student and remember



that the student needs time to learn and develop to become a competent nurse. It is important that mentors also ask for feedback from students on their mentoring competence and use this to develop their own competence.

### The main barriers to giving effective feedback

- Lack of specificity when feedback is given. Phrases such as “You need to be more proactive” does not give the student sufficient details that the student needs to create a solution to becoming more proactive.
- Giving the wrong type of feedback. When a student has less experience in delivering a certain task, he/she needs more positive feedback. When the student’s experience level grows, constructive feedback can help to improve professional performance.
- Giving feedback in the wrong setting, for example, giving feedback to a student during a team meeting with other students or staff members can be stressful and cause embarrassment.
- An overabundance of constructive criticism or excessive negative feedback may impede effective clinical learning. Clinical mentors should consider what is the ideal ratio of positive to negative feedback for improving interpersonal relationships.

## 5.6 Tips on activities that can be integrated into mentoring education

Tip #1 Introduce important issues related to the evaluation of students’ learning process. Present various real-life assessment scenarios to clinical mentors and ask them to think of strategies to overcome assessment challenges.

Tip #2 Clinical mentors can share experiences on maintaining the triangle of communication between the nurse educator, nursing student and the mentor – which can succeed to avoid feelings of working in isolation.

Tip #3 Support clinical mentors in identifying the individual learning needs of students and in identifying aspects essential in creating effective clinical learning environments. Provide different real-life case examples and tips on how to support students’ learning process throughout the entire clinical placement.

Tip #4 Help clinical mentors to feel empowered in establishing effective mentoring relationship, assessing nursing students’ learning and creating a safe environment for learning.

Quality mentorship offers students well-planned learning opportunities that incorporate the provision of preparation, support and coaching for students together with an appropriate level of supervision. This all is dependent on students’ expectations, experiences and what is required of them during their placement in order to meet their learning outcomes and achieve set competencies.

High-quality clinical training is central to the preparation of future general care nurses. It is in these environments that nursing students are able to integrate theory into clinical practice and achieve the required competencies as outlined in Annex V of the EU Directive 2013/55/EU.

Therefore, it is fundamental that healthcare organisations within the EU that offer clinical placements to nursing students address and implement the modernised Directive 2013/55/EU and ensure that curricula learning outcomes are in line with the Directive.

### RECOMMENDATIONS URGE CLINICAL NURSE MENTORS TO:

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- Refer to set criteria and guidelines that support implementation of quality mentorship and use these to guide the mentoring process.
  - Effectively support students in achieving their set learning goals and the eight competency areas defined in Article 31 of Directive 2013/55/EU.
  - Create and maintain a physically, socially and emotionally safe atmosphere in clinical learning environments.
  - Continuously reflect upon personal mentoring competence and plan strategies to develop professionally and as a mentor.
  - Ask for constructive feedback on personal mentoring competence from students and colleagues and use this while creating strategies for competence development.
  - Facilitate collaboration with nurse educators from educational organisations to strengthen nursing students’ learning process and achievement of learning outcomes.
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### RECOMMENDATIONS URGE HEALTHCARE ORGANISATIONS TO:

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- Assess the current level of quality in mentorship on a regular basis within the organisation.
  - Plan and implement effective strategies on an organisational level that improve the quality of mentorship of nursing students completing clinical practice.
  - Empower staff members to develop their mentoring competence according to the Evidence-Based Clinical Nurse Mentors' Competence Model (Mikkonen et al., 2019).
  - Support staff members' continuous professional development and ensure that the necessary resources are in place for effective mentoring. Offer mentoring education to all staff members who mentor students. [Click here](#) for additional details on a course framework for mentoring education.
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### RECOMMENDATIONS URGE EU LEVEL AND NATIONAL INSTITUTIONS TO:

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- Include the topic of strengthening quality mentorship of nursing students in political agendas in order to build resilience in the nursing workforce.
  - Ensure that each Member State is obliged to set criteria that enable quality mentorship of nursing students completing clinical practice under the supervision of qualified mentors.
  - Promote the use of the EFN Competency Framework as a tool to ease the implementation of Article 31 of Directive 2013/55/EU into nursing curricula throughout the EU.
  - Develop further standards and mandatory regulation through national laws and curricula through which clinical nurse mentors can be supported and educated in providing quality mentorship.
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## Expert evaluation on the guideline on clinical nurse mentors' mentoring competence development

*In total, 19 experts took part in the evaluation of the guideline. The overall feedback from experts was very positive as illustrated through the quotes below.*

*‘Theoretically consistent, reasonable and the logical text of guidelines.’*

*‘This is a useful and necessary tool for standardized mentoring training.’*

*‘The guidelines have been correctly and clearly directed for clinical nurse mentors and healthcare institutions. The guidelines have been written according to the evidence-based clinical mentors' competence model and the eight competencies' areas according to the requirements which are defined in EU Directive 2013/55/EU Article 31. These ensure that mentors are competent in guiding students in consciously adopting the perspectives of individuals, families and communities into clinical reasoning and decision-making processes.’*

*‘The guidelines are a very good methodological tool for mentors to facilitate the organization and development of mentoring activities. The guideline contains a detailed description of mentoring practices, counselling for students, the significance of reflection, consideration of cultural differences and tips for appropriate communication.’*

*‘The tips given in every chapter are really valuable, and I think the guidelines should be based mainly on the detailed methodologies focused on KNOW HOW already practicing mentors could daily improve their competences, and on HOW educational organizations should assess mentor's individual and cultural competences.’*

*‘The guidelines are visually nicely designed. There are useful tables and figures that reflect the main aspects related to the guideline content.’*

*‘The content is consistent, not overloaded and easily complementary.’*

*‘The image is attractive and easy to understand.’*

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