

Bitesize Case Study: Equitable Placement Allocation for Orthoptic Students

HEE Quality Standards met:

- 1 - Learning Environment and Culture
- 3 - Supporting and Empowering Learners
- 6 - Developing a Sustainable Workforce

What was the issue or problem? What did you set out to do?

Availability of placement sites for orthoptic students has been an ongoing issue for many years. Many placement sites go above and beyond to accommodate students often at short notice, creating added pressure to already busy departments. The Equitable Placement Allocation scheme was designed by the three universities currently offering the orthoptic degree (The University of Liverpool, The University of Sheffield and Glasgow Caledonian) as a way to relieve the pressure on these sites and hopefully allow for a surplus of placement sites available for orthoptic students.

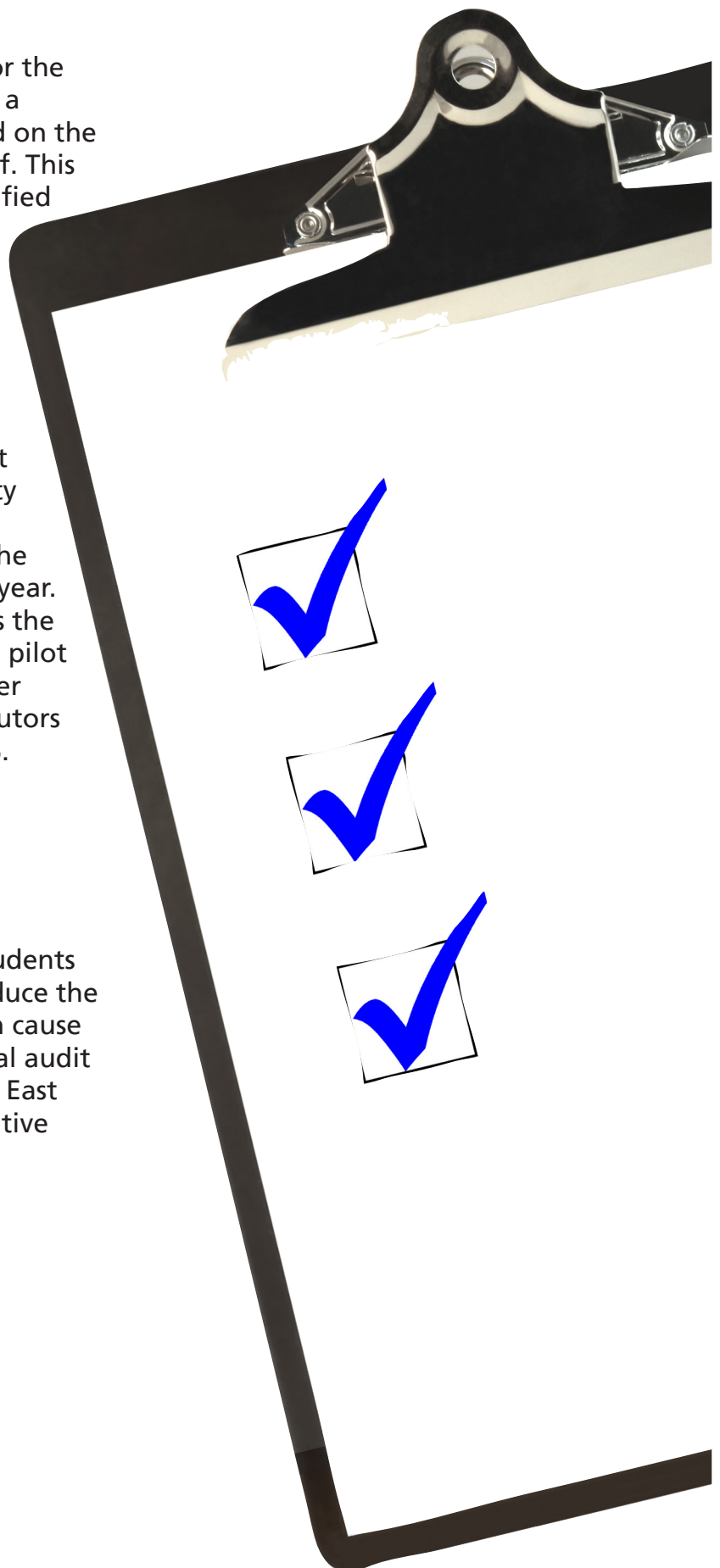


What did you do? What was the intervention or initiative?

The North West piloted this scheme for the year 2015/16. The sites were allocated a number of students for the year based on the number of whole time equivalent staff. This included both qualified and non-qualified tutors within the department. Details of the allocation were issued to all departments in the north west area and lead tutors were asked for their thoughts on their personal allocation. East Lancashire Teaching Hospitals (ELTH) were allocated twelve students for the year based on a WTE of ten. At the time, due to sickness and maternity leave, the team was understaffed so after discussion with the universities the allocation was reduced to ten for the year. This equated to five placements across the academic year. The experiences of this pilot were presented, along with three other departments, at the national clinical tutors meeting held in Sheffield in May 2016.

What were the Key Outcomes?

The aim of the scheme is to allow for adequate placements for orthoptic students across all three universities, and to reduce the extra pressure mentoring students can cause in clinic. Although there was no official audit or statistics recorded during this pilot, East Lancashire ultimately felt it was a positive approach to orthoptic placements.



What were the lessons learned?

- The scheme could be used in many areas of health education. Sharing the pressures of placements more fairly, based on the size of a department, benefits not only the students (who ultimately receive better mentorship and learning environments) but also boosts staff morale, and encourages engagement with students on placement.
- As Orthoptics is a small profession it is important that students travel to various areas of the country on placements and work in a variety of areas (including smaller and bigger departments) in order to encourage recruitment in previously unknown departments. Sharing placements more equally allows for orthoptic departments of all sizes to be involved in education and training.



I was informed with much more time about upcoming students (I now get placement dates and when to expect students at the beginning of the year!) Previous to this scheme I would often get last minute phone calls asking for us to take students, meaning it was difficult to adapt clinics, arrange accommodation and timetables. This meant that staff were often unprepared to teach and with busy clinics it is difficult to give students the type of mentoring we would normally hope to deliver. This ultimately left our department feeling that we offered poor placements. Since the scheme has been running I am able to plan timetables, clinics and tutorials much more effectively and our accommodation manager also has less stress as I do not need to ring her at the last minute to try and fit students in! The department as a whole also feels the benefit of my extra planning time”

Sian Maymond, Orthoptist at ELHT

Organisation: East Lancashire Hospitals NHS Trust (ELHT)

Key contact(s): Sian Maymond sian.maymond@elht.nhs.uk

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