

# CASE STUDY: ADVANCED PRACTITIONER DEVELOPMENT USING WORK-BASED LEARNING SETS

**As part of their workforce modernisation strategy East Lancashire NHS Trust (ELHT) has developed a number of advanced practitioner posts. These have been established in clinical areas where the organisation has identified a need for the role through workforce and business planning processes. Training requirements for the role include completion of a Masters in Advanced Practice as part of a two-year development programme.**

As with any new role there is a need to demonstrate the impact of the role to colleagues and commissioners. It is therefore critically important that the trainee advanced practitioners (TAdPs) can apply their learning in practice, acting as innovators and champions of service transformation initiatives. They can only achieve this if their learning experience is robust and equally supported by both education and practice. As such a proactive programme has been developed within ELHT to support TAdPs in the workplace through the facilitation of work-based learning sets (WBLS).

This strategy was jointly designed by UCLan and ELHT staff in 2011. Since that time the activities and processes of the WBLS have been refined in response to students' feedback and reflection of the facilitators. The current model has been operational since 2012 and the sets are co-facilitated by a member of staff from the NHS Trust and HEI. For each cohort of trainees WBLS are held six times per year, each

set is timetabled for a full day, and attended by TAdPs with managers attending for specific items. The activities in the WBLS are all designed to enable students to develop the skills required for an advanced practice role.

## Key Outcomes

- The value of the partnership in supporting TAdPs to implement improvements in practice successfully has been recognised externally and was shortlisted for a Student Nursing Award in the Partnership category 2014.
- Quantitative data collected from 18 TAdPs who had participated in WBLS for a minimum of 12 months demonstrates that 57.2% (n = 11) of participants found the WBLS to be very useful, and 16.6% (n=3) found them to be extremely useful in supporting service improvement.
- Qualitative data clearly identifies the value of the strategy and the partnerships that have developed as having a direct impact on the learning experience of the TAdPs, which ultimately translates to direct impact on patient experience.



## Student Perspective

*“There is a striking level of collaborative working between both UCLan and ELHT senior staff which has enhanced the experience of this programme. In particular the ‘work-based learning’ days facilitated by Gill and Lynne have led to deeper integration of our studies into clinical practice. Together they have encouraged us to identify development needs, find solutions and given us the courage to challenge practice and be ambassadors for service improvement. Their professional relationship exemplifies effective cross-organisational working.”*

- second year TAdP

*“The MSc at UCLan is extremely challenging and motivates students to look at their area of practice, with an intention to improve the care that patients receive. The work based learning days (WBL) have been designed as part of the MSc programme, and they have enabled students to work with both the university and the health care organisation collaboratively. This ensures a consistent alliance between the two main gatekeepers, and also students, allowing students to construct and implement changes in both a timely and co-ordinated manner.”* - second year TAdP

## NHS trust Perspective

*“The WBLs have been crucial in developing students for advanced practice roles. The students have very different backgrounds, experience and initial expectations. The WBLs have enabled exploration of this and as the facilitators are very knowledgeable about their respective organisations they are able to challenge and develop the expectations of the students. Having the WBLs co-facilitated has really developed partnership working between the Trust and the HEI; they enable queries to be dealt with in real time and ensure dynamic development of the programme. The WBLs ensure that theory is actively transferred to practice which has increased the profile and creditability of our TAdPs and made significant impact on patient care.”* - Head of Clinical Education Lead, NHS trust

## Higher Education Institute (HEI) perspective

*“Lynne and Gill facilitate the WBLs jointly. This collaborative approach is clearly based on mutual respect, transparency, open and frequent communication. The programme is truly owned and shared through this close working partnership. The usage of WBLs within the Advanced Practitioner programme is critical to the ongoing development of the student as it enables them to take a solution-focused approach in a safe, supportive learning environment. Feedback highlights that students are highly motivated by this approach and are able to maximise their learning whilst also recognising growth in their confidence and competence. I truly believe that this programme is a clear example of excellent partnership working between the HEI and NHS Trust, which is having a direct impact on improving patient experience. The integrated approach to student learning ensures they have a clear understanding of the strategic and operational aspects of delivering high quality care in a complex clinical environment.”* - Associate Head of School, HEI

## Commissioner perspective

*The students are also supported to further extend their competence in the area of research and critical analysis. Such skills and experience will be of great benefit to the organisations the students work for, both now and in the future, by improving services and, ultimately, care for patients. In this forum the students are exposed to the opinions of their peers at a level they may not have been before and, as such, they will hone their communication and reflection skills, their self-awareness and their general emotional intelligence – all of which will be invaluable to them in their day to day work with patients and colleagues.”* - Workforce Modernisation Manager, HENW

## Background

Work based learning (WBL) is a process centred on the student and their learning in the workplace. The approach views learning as arising from action and problem-solving within work contexts, being centred on live projects and challenges to individuals and organisations. WBL curriculum models support and facilitate the translation of theory into practice. The use of WBL within this specific course and aligned to this role development has been evaluated and is valued by trainees and is seen as one of the keys to successful workforce transformation (Acton Shapiro, 2009). This report also argues that creation of effective partnerships between the HEI, trainee and employer is crucial to its success. WBLs are the vehicle that supports the evolution of a new role to assure maximum impact on patient outcome and experience. WBLs serve as a hub through which learning opportunities are created, evaluated and co-ordinated. It provides a platform from which students can share experiences and a forum which supports dissemination of learning from and within the group.

## Key Aims

- Enable TAdPs, who are in the vanguard of this role development, to form an active learning community learning with and from each other
- Reinforce and support joint ownership between the HEI and Trust for the delivery of the advanced practitioner curriculum and role development
- Create a forum for open communication and discussion about practice-related issues. Learning from the Francis Report clearly identified the need to create a forum for staff to voice concerns and challenge practice in a constructive manner
- Provide parity of opportunity and assurance that learning is standardised across the organisation
- Increase opportunities for collaboration and promote learning from the experience of others
- Support the concept of fitness for practice, purpose and award as learning is overt, progress and achievement are apparent and the development of action plans ensures TAdPs are enabled to move forward
- Create a safe environment to enable the sharing of experiences and participation in peer review, receiving and giving open and honest feedback on performance

## Key Stages of Setup

This strategy was developed in response to increased numbers in AdP cohorts, in order to provide some parity and sharing of learning opportunities and experiences. A handbook has been developed to identify the purpose of each element of the WBLS and to outline the expectations of participants as active learners in the set. Induction events for both TAdPs and managers are also delivered to clarify expectations. ELHT host the sessions, dealing with the logistics of room allocation and more importantly have identified attendance as mandatory for TAdPs.

The below timeline indicates how work-based learning sets can be implemented across similar organisations.

## How it Works

TAdPs attend six WBLS per year over the two year training period. Each set is timetabled to last a full day and a variety of activities are included within the set. Each activity requires TAdPs to participate in some way. For example, presenting project updates, reporting on action plans, active listening or critical questioning.

Appendix 1 contains the structure and outcome of WBLS and elements of a WBLS.

### Establishing Phase (up to 2 months)

- Partners (HEI and employer) to agree model, structure and organisation of WBLS. This may take a number of meetings to establish as it may require senior/executive level commitment.
- Identification of key facilitators. One from the HEI and one from the employing organisation. There should be consistency with the individuals and this should be factored into their workload. The selection of the individuals should be based on their role within the partner organisations and skill set.

### Organising Phase (1 month)

- Plan dates for the WBLS for the academic year and book rooms. Sets to take place bimonthly, taking account of the demand of the academic programme.
- Produce handbook.
- Prepare managers to support WBLS, a workshop to review the purpose and structure and to clarify their role as participants in the WBLS.
- Prepare students to participate in WBLS, can be undertaken as a component of an induction programme, the focus should be in their role and responsibilities as active participants.

### Implementing Phase

- Identify any 'hot topics', book speakers and prepare the WBLS agenda.
- Disseminate the agenda two weeks prior to each WBLS (dates for the year to be disseminated at the preparatory workshop/induction events).
- Facilitate the WBLS.
- Disseminate notes from the WBLS within two weeks.



## Resources

The WBLS are held in the Trust's learning centre, which is located on the hospital site but out of the direct clinical environment, making it the ideal place for such learning. This means that participants remain connected and are firmly located within their workplace but have some time and space away from the clinical areas. The venue is also easily accessible by participants who may attend for agenda items, such as clinical managers. There is no additional cost to the organisation in using a training room on-site.

The course commissioners support the work-based learning ethos of this course, providing a financial contribution to support a member of staff from the HEI to assume the role of work-based learning facilitator. The funding for this role is based on student numbers; at UCLan this amounts to two days per week. The work-based learning facilitator role is multi-dimensional and has many facets including supporting organisations to develop and embed the role, recruitment and regional network activity. The administration and facilitation of six WBLS per year requires 8.5 days of HEI staff time.

ELHT has also invested in role development overall and identified a key member of staff within the Trust to support and co-ordinate advanced practitioner role development. Supporting the WBLS forms part of the portfolio of the education and workforce lead. It is key that the role is sufficiently senior within the organisation to have both an overview and ability to influence and negotiate across divisional boundaries.

## Key Challenges

In the current climate practitioners are faced with the dilemma of dealing with capacity and demand issues which impact on the ability of clinical areas to release staff to attend WBLS. For the TAdPs the financial support offered by commissioners and the core offer from the employer to support attendance at the WBLS assert commitment to the activity. However, managers find it a challenge to attend. They have competing demands on their time and clearly service needs are of paramount importance. Nevertheless the involvement of managers is seen as a key factor as it demonstrates support for the TAdPs and their role development, and activity is focused on service need and business planning processes as well as providing a forum in which to raise issues and formulate action plans which may require the managers direct action. To assist managers in attending, a formal timetable is developed and disseminated two weeks prior to the WBLS and the presentation of work by TAdPs from each division is grouped together so that managers may be able to adjust their work to enable them to attend key points in the day or to deputise for each other.

Active participation by TAdPs is seen as a requirement of attendance, this means that each attendee has a responsibility within the WBLS; they are required to prepare before attendance, actively participate during the sessions

and deliver on agreed action plans after the session. Students on a master's degree are not expected to merely be the passive recipients of information, the WBLS requires students to move along the dependence to independence learning continuum which is clearly commensurate with study at this level (QAA 2010).

The establishment of purpose, function and management of the WBLS is crucial to the success. Participants are issued with a handbook which outlines the requirement for each element of the WBLS. Joint facilitation by representatives for the HEI and Trust is both desirable and ensures consistency of approach. The role of the facilitator is crucial to ensure that the session is kept on track and whilst issues that TAdPs wish to raise are recognised, they need to manage the session so that other agendas are dealt with appropriately. As a result a 'car park' session enables students to articulate in writing concerns, issues, and 'moans and groans'. These are posted in the car park, and the facilitators review the issues and identify appropriate action to be taken.

## Key Learning

Factors that support the effectiveness of WBLS

### Effective partnership working

- partnership is firmly based on mutual respect, transparent and open communication
- joint ownership and responsibility for the development, delivery and evaluation of the WBLS
- investment by HEI and Trust in terms of time to support the facilitation of the WBLS and access to resources to hold a learning activity
- supports and creates opportunities for MDT working and learning together

### Creates the links between theory and practice

- supports the translation of theory and its transference or application in practice (Revans 2011)
- creates a safe environment for TAdPs to move from a comfort into a discomfort zone to enable learning to take place (Senge 2014)
- enables inductive and deductive reasoning, the testing of ideas and solutions

### Enhances organisational knowledge

- raises awareness of the organisation and key personnel within it
- creates networking opportunities
- reinforces links between the Trust Executive Board and clinical practice/practitioners
- supports the principles of a learning organisation (Senge 2014)
- opportunities for staff to have a voice

## Supports role development and evolution

- aligns role and role expectations to service and patient need
- role evolution informed by feedback on patient experience and outcome
- influences the practice of others and creates collegial working relationships
- creates time and space for staff to reflect on and talk about what is happening in practice

## Preparation for effective participation

- managers and TAdPs are prepared through attendance at a briefing event to maximise the impact of their participation
- clarifies roles and responsibilities of participants within the WBLS
- provision of a handbook detailing processes for each element/activity

## Peer support

- promotes peer support and collective problem solving
- creates a 'buddy' scheme – second years supporting first years
- provides a safe environment to support reflection on performance, provision of assurances and reinforcement of good practice
- fosters collegial working relationships between HEI and Trust

## Sustainability

The WBLS dates are identified at the start of the academic year and are distributed to managers and TAdPs. The dates are aligned with university study days, to avoid any conflicts and wherever possible avoiding key touch point/time in practice settings. Attendance at the WBLS is compulsory for TAdPs and the time is factored into their allocated work-based learning time.

## Next steps

In conclusion, the WBLS provide a vehicle for the sharing of experiences, challenging practice and developing key skills. The environment supports students to move out of their comfort zone in a safe manner, thereby enabling learning to take place. Student feedback indicates the benefits to them of taking part in the sets in the development of their confidence and competence. The WBLS assist in ensuring students contribute to the delivery of safe effective and personal patient care through the application of their learning in the clinical environment, ensuring real service improvement through the development of the projects. Therefore the aim is to sustain the WBLS and further develop structure and operationalisation in response to feedback from key stakeholders.

## References

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