

Case Study: Student Placement Enhancement Project

The project began in 2015 and is a support resource for student nurses focussing on their experiences of placements. It features a printable information booklet with practical advice for students to take into placement with them and refer to when required.

The leaflet is supported by an online blog where more experienced student nurses write about things that they have experienced or felt when on placement.

The intent is to reduce anxiety and answer questions students have about what it is like to be a student nurse on placement. These outputs are facilitated through regular meetings and some training initially, to ensure a high quality of "end product".

<https://uomstudentnurseplacementenhancement.wordpress.com>

Placement is a huge part of the degree as a whole and a student's placement experience can make or break their training. Reasons for leaving (nursing) courses are complicated, inter-linked and multi-factorial (Deary et al 2003; Glossop 2002; Glogowska et al. 2007).

The current experiences of some student nurses is that the support being offered to students struggling in practice is far less substantial than those struggling in University.

These resources will provide extra support for students on placement, reducing attrition.

Key Outcomes

- An Informal survey in 2014 revealed over 70% of students felt they were not given enough information about their first placement highlighting the need for a project of this kind. The survey also suggested 50% of respondents found the site useful and 47% advised they were unaware of the site at time of survey but felt it would be useful
- The project does require some more formal feedback to help sculpt and refine it further and develop breadth of collaboration. As a result the team are looking for funding to evaluate it formally. With assistance from the University's Educational Research Team, focus groups will be run consisting of the target audience - the First Year Cohort of Student Nurses. Transcription of four in depth open discussions about the benefits and areas the project can be improved may prove costly so further funding will be sought to enable thorough analysis of the data received.
- Attrition fell from 19.8% to 9.9% in comparative cohorts in the two years of the project development and publication in part due to the student involvement (BNurs(Hons) 2013 statistics).
- The reflective skills of students currently involved in the blog have been improved as well as the team's technical skills and knowledge of online resources. Both branches of the project also encourage and advocate speaking out safely against poor practice and active reflection to improve independent practice.

Background

The School of Nursing, Midwifery and Social Work was the first institution to offer a nursing degree in England and currently provides undergraduate and postgraduate education to more than 2,000 students.

It is the home to the UK Centre for the History of Nursing and has a national and international reputation for teaching and research across nursing, midwifery, social work and related disciplines, working in close collaboration with the NHS.

The project was peer organised and run with university staff support. It was officially set up in 2015 to support student nurses (School of Nursing, Midwifery and Social Work, University of Manchester). Julia Cooper and Gina Williams (September 2013 Cohort – 3rd year adult nurses) originally conceived the idea of the placement survival pack with the guidance of Mary Cooke (Lecturer - September 2013 Cohort). This led to the online resource being founded later in the year after recruiting members of the 2014 Cohort including current chair of the project Natasha Wragg. Jane Griffiths (Lecturer – September 2014 Cohort) and Janet Ellis have been crucial supporters of the project throughout.

A Gap in provision of knowledge and support was identified from PASS (Peer Assisted Study Scheme) sessions where peer to peer support is provided but focuses on a different aspect of student education. Originally devised to assist students with bioscience revision, students frequently requested information about placements predominantly.

“What will we actually be doing on placement?” was a very common question that simply can’t be answered during these short sessions. Originally it was suggested a student-run lecture may allay these concerns but the wealth of information senior students had to offer was too vast to fit into one lecture.

Key Aims

- To ease student anxiety about their first placement
- Provide extra support for current students on placement to enhance their experience in practice
- To create a supportive resource easily accessible to students, by students
- To create a more informal platform for peer support



Key Stages of Set-Up

1. Mary Cooke facilitated the setup of the project but its functional operation was left entirely down to the students. All content was originally checked by Mary Cooke initially but as confidence and competence grew with training from Keith Radley the project became entirely student lead. Initial setup and training was funded by the University of Manchester Learning Enrichment Fund. It was decided both a physical resource (booklet) and an online one (blog) would be helpful for the modern nursing student as one could be taken into placement for reference and the other accessed at any time. Ascertaining and sourcing what practical information was required for the booklet was discussed with the group, led by Gina Williams. The content was collected from University literature, trust policy and personal experience of the team. Mary Cooke revised the content prior to publication.
2. Training students to write and present blogs professionally including constructing and copyright of images. Keith Radley of Sheffield University assisted with running training sessions for volunteers to enhance skills and knowledge of this area.
3. Promotion of site and increasing awareness amongst student body. This was carried out via social media groups (Facebook, Twitter etc.) and the University email. The team spoke directly to the 2015 cohort to introduce the Project and explain how it might be of help.
4. Staff support in overseeing and checking content. Staff involvement is all voluntary - Mary Cooke was able to recommend relevant members of staff with appropriate expertise to further the team's goals. For instance Jane Griffiths is an expert in research methods and joined the project to help with planning a formal evaluation process.

How it Works

A team of under 15 students are trained to understand the workings and intent of the site. They are encouraged to blog about their own feelings and experiences whilst out on placement as well as university life in general that impacts on their practice training. They are then independent bloggers and can upload content whenever they deem it is relevant and informative.

Less experienced students can look for suitable content applicable to their own situation and understand more about what practice is like and how to make their time on placement more enjoyable and efficient e.g. taking advantage of learning opportunities.

The online blog is continuously being renewed, improved and added to, in order to create a full and comprehensive resource relevant to the local area and can be accessed by any online device including phones and tablets.

The Survival Pack also requires yearly reviews to ensure all information is still correct and relevant. A copy of the survival pack can be downloaded from the website at any time and paper copies were handed out during Welcome Week. The pack includes valuable information such as travel advice, PEF information, guidance on shifts as well as sickness and absence information and essential contact details. The pack contained all the information students expressed they wish they had known before their first placement experience.

Resources

Learning Enrichment Fund was accessed to help source training to set up publishable submissions to the site and produce the booklet, both to a professional standard. The Learning Enrichment Fund supports a wide variety of projects and programmes across campus to enrich the academic and wider university experience for the student body as a whole through the generosity of Alumni.

Key Challenges

- Teaching students the workings of the site in regards to administration and publication of blogs. As a result students attended a series of training sessions where their submissions were reviewed.
- Gathering up to date information regarding travel and contact information for each trust location. This took a great deal of time and research both online and through word of mouth from lived experience.
- Finding enthusiastic and reliable peer support across the fields of Nursing. This was combatted by canvassing and the willingness of students to volunteer for the project.

Key Learning

The need for regular checks to ensure information is up to date is a necessity looking ahead - time will need to be allocated for someone to ensure this is undertaken. Structured succession team planning will also be necessary over time.

Organised registerable sessions required to ensure students were adequately trained to understand the importance of delivering a professional result.

Sustainability

The resource is discussed in practice with staff on placement to encourage sharing of experiences. It is used as a tool to prompt engaging discussions with students about how their educational experience can be improved.

Students will share what they have read with colleagues and peers and feedback. This provides evaluation on the project and can highlight future need. Prior to formal evaluation feedback is provided via the project email and word of mouth.



Next Steps

- To formally evaluate the project through independently run focus groups to discuss potential improvements and successes of the current content.
- To promote the site extending awareness within each nursing cohort. Advertising around campus and via social media to increase readership.
- Extend site to include other departments within school – Midwifery and Social Work.
- Recruit and train new students to succeed 3rd year students who will leave.
- Facilitate annual training sessions for new team members



Supporting Material

- Appendix 1 – Student Survival Pack

<https://uomstudentnurseplacementenhancement.files.wordpress.com/2015/09/placement-survival-pack.pdf>

- References

Deary I.J., Watson R. & Hogston R. (2003), A longitudinal cohort study of burnout and attrition in nursing students. *Journal of Advanced Nursing*, 43(1): 71–81.

Glogowska M., Young P. & Lockyer L. (2007), Should I go or should I stay? A study of factors influencing students' decisions on early leaving. *Active Learning in Higher Education*, 8(1), 63–77.

Glossop C. (2002), Student nurse attrition: use of an exit-interview procedure to determine students' leaving reasons. *Nurse Education Today*, 22: 375–386.

- The Blog

<https://uomstudentnurseplacementenhancement.wordpress.com>

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