

HOT TOPIC: STUDENT QUALITY AMBASSADORS

The Student Quality Ambassador (SQA) Project was rolled out in December 2011 by the North West Strategic Health Authority. Any healthcare student from across the North West can become an ambassador, with students so far including; nurses from four different fields, midwives, a dual qualification nurse/social worker, a speech and language therapist and a biomedical scientist. Having started out with just 5 SQAs in 2011 the number has grown rapidly, with 106 currently in post, and students coming from 9 of the North West universities.

SQAs act as ambassadors and champions of care both within NHS and non-NHS placements. They are empowered to promote good practice by challenging standards of care within the workplace and by suggesting areas for improvement. SQAs work alongside and liaise between practice education facilitators (PEFs), higher education institutes (HEIs), students, and service users/patients and carers, as well as showcasing student innovation projects within trusts. They are also test subjects for innovations such as trialling the use of the electronic practice assessment record (PAR), the numeracy assessment project (SNAP) and the North West Values and Behaviours tool.

The SQA project aims to support the Energise for Excellence (E4E) agenda as it is recognised that healthcare students represent fresh eyes and ears in each practice placement, which enables them to share best practice and identify areas for improvement. This allows students' voices to be heard, meeting with the recommendations of Keogh (2013) who recognises that by including students in open discussions the NHS can gain frank and honest opinions on the quality of care. *"(Keogh) would strongly encourage directors of nursing to think about how they can harness the loyalty and innovation of student nurses, who move from ward to ward, so they become ambassadors for their hospital and for promoting innovative nursing practice"*.

Key Outcomes

Benefits for Patients

Listening to SQAs has led to a range of different benefits for patients. For example:

- funding was secured to put decking over an overgrown lawn. This space is now accessible to clients in wheelchairs
- different handover techniques have been implemented in the accident and emergency department (AED)
- discussion with patients regarding their hospital stay has led to changes in the admissions procedure



- the ways in which doors open has been changed to allow easier access for disabled patients
- changes have been made to the infection control policy which has led to safer disposal of soiled appliances
- students' involvement in multi-professional team meetings has led to the production of leaflets and posters to raise the profile of a diabetic out-of- hours service
- an information pack was created for the relatives of patients who have been admitted to A&E
- critical appraisal of quality reports has allowed areas to be identified for service improvement

Benefits for Staff/Students

Research is currently being carried out which looks at the experience of SQAs, however the findings have yet to be published. In the meantime anecdotal evidence suggests that this programme promotes positive and worthwhile student/ staff experience as it is seen to:

- develop and strengthen students' leadership skills
- enable the SQA to gain experience of utilising and analysing different quality matrix tools used within the NHS
- improve SQAs' communication skills, as they are required to give presentations to other students and staff in addition to having discussions with a wide range of senior healthcare workers
- allow the student to gain confidence in challenging practices and celebrating good practice
- give staff the benefit of fresh eyes assessing their routines

Benefits to the NHS

- An international conference in California was attended to promote the role. This helps the NHS extend good practice internationally and promotes the organisation as a world class leader in healthcare
- SQAs highlight positive, as well as negative, aspects of care, both of which can be used to help build a better service

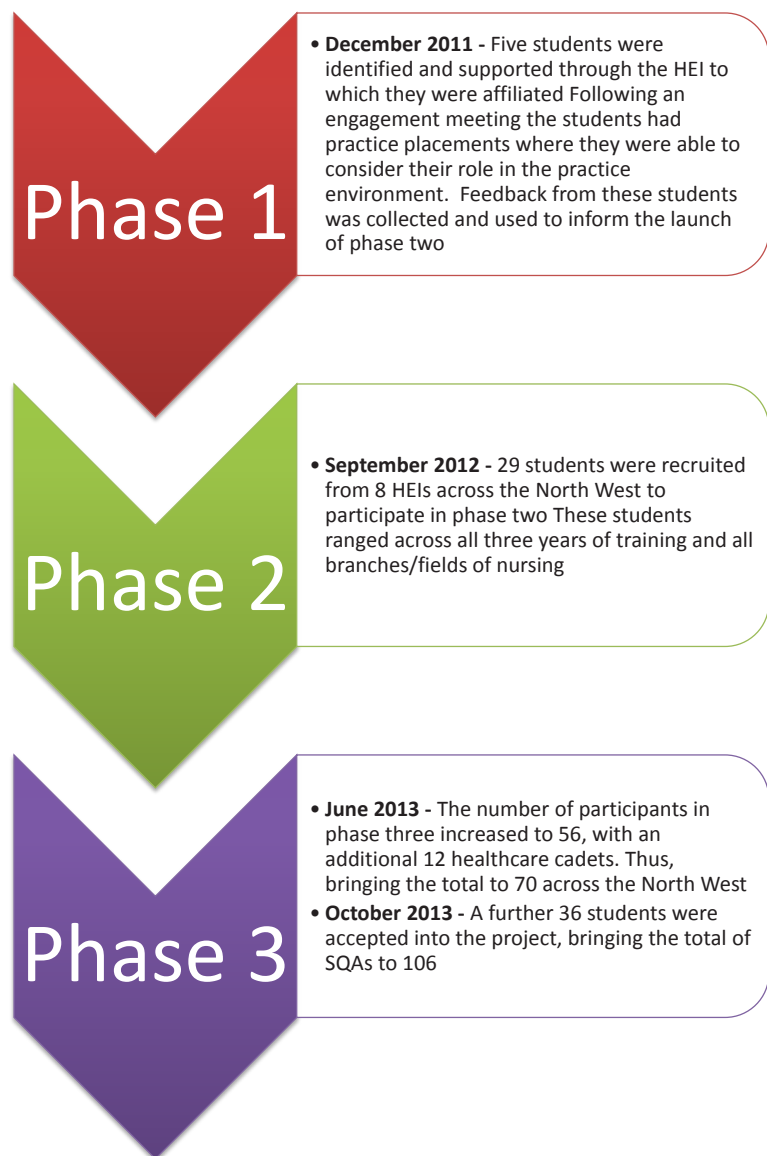
Background

The values and behaviours expected of health and social care professionals are enshrined in the NHS Constitution, and within the current policy context of health and welfare reforms. Respect and dignity are increasingly viewed as core elements of quality services although recent media reports suggest that this is not always the case and the Care Quality Commission has concerns regarding wider 'failings' of the health and social care system and the decline of compassionate care. Following the Francis Report there is great deal of discussion regarding the need for openness, transparency and candour. The SQA project is based upon this rich evidence-base and aims to achieve the recommendations outlined in each report.

Key Aims

- Embed SQAs within HEIs and practice areas in order to share best practice and contribute to innovation, and to showcase student innovation projects within trusts
- Engage SQAs from a range of professions to promote the role inter-professionally
- Provide an online space where students can share best practice across the region
- Work alongside quality measurement tools, including recruitment tools, the Open and Honest Care tool and Friends and Family test, to drive improvements in care
- Actively become involved in the development of tools to support quality such as the North West Values and Behaviours Tool, SN@P, and values and behaviours events

Key Stages of Setup



How It Works

Project Management/Governance

The project lead is Ann Butler, who in addition to leading on this project is also a quality improvement and assurance manager from West Lancashire Clinical Commissioning Group. Ann oversees and co-ordinates SQA activity in the region. Overall governance is provided by Health Education North West, which took over this role from the North West Strategic Health Authority when it closed down in April 2013.

15 Steps Challenge

Whilst on placement the SQAs utilise the 15 Steps Challenge toolkit (NHS Institute for Innovation and Improvement: 2012) to assist in identifying and sharing best practice. The students have 'fresh eyes', looking at the environment and sharing experiences from other areas where they have been on placement. The SQAs have found this tool very user-friendly as it can be completed quickly and easily. The SQA project will work collaboratively with NHS Innovations to develop the toolkit into a quality matrix measurement tool. This will then enable triangulation of data with other such tools already in use.

SQAs have four development days a year, where they receive training on utilising the 15 Steps Challenge, additional leadership skills, and training on key issues, such as infection prevention, dementia, and mental health awareness, so that these skills can be incorporated into the 15 Steps Challenge when it is carried out in clinical areas.

Online Group

In order to give SQAs an online space where they can share innovation and offer peer support a virtual community group is hosted on eWIN, where trusts and SQAs can communicate easily across the region.

Resources

Resources for the project include the project lead for two days a week, training for the SQAs as well as merchandise for the branding of the role.

Key Challenges

- It is difficult to make clinical and HEI staff aware of the SQA role and its positive impact upon patient care, as the role can be seen as negative, and perceived as spying/whistle-blowing. However this is largely overcome through marketing and presenting the role at regional events
- Early in the project recruiting SQAs was found to be difficult due to the timing of the project. Applications for phase two were low due to the timing of the launch which occurred over the summer months of July and August

- Attending events and meetings across the North West was a challenge for the project lead. This has been overcome by appointing regional SQA chairs who support the lead in empowering SQAs to present on their own roles, trusts and universities
- As this is a North West wide project students come from across the whole region, making travel potentially onerous for some if events are held in one place. This is overcome by rotating the venue around the region, sharing content from the development days electronically and the students utilising a secret Facebook group to share their ideas

Key Learning

Timescales were tight for recruitment to phase two, and ideally, more time should have been taken to promote the role within universities and to PEFs within trusts so that there was a better understanding of the role. To have recruited bigger numbers in the second phase would have helped SQAs to feel less isolated when out in practice across the region talking about the role. Some trusts did not have any SQAs at all going out on placement.

Sustainability

As trusts recognise the qualities and skills that SQAs have to offer, they are being incorporated into quality initiatives, thus being enabled to influence care as well as the patient and staff experience, which drives and improves standards.

Next Steps

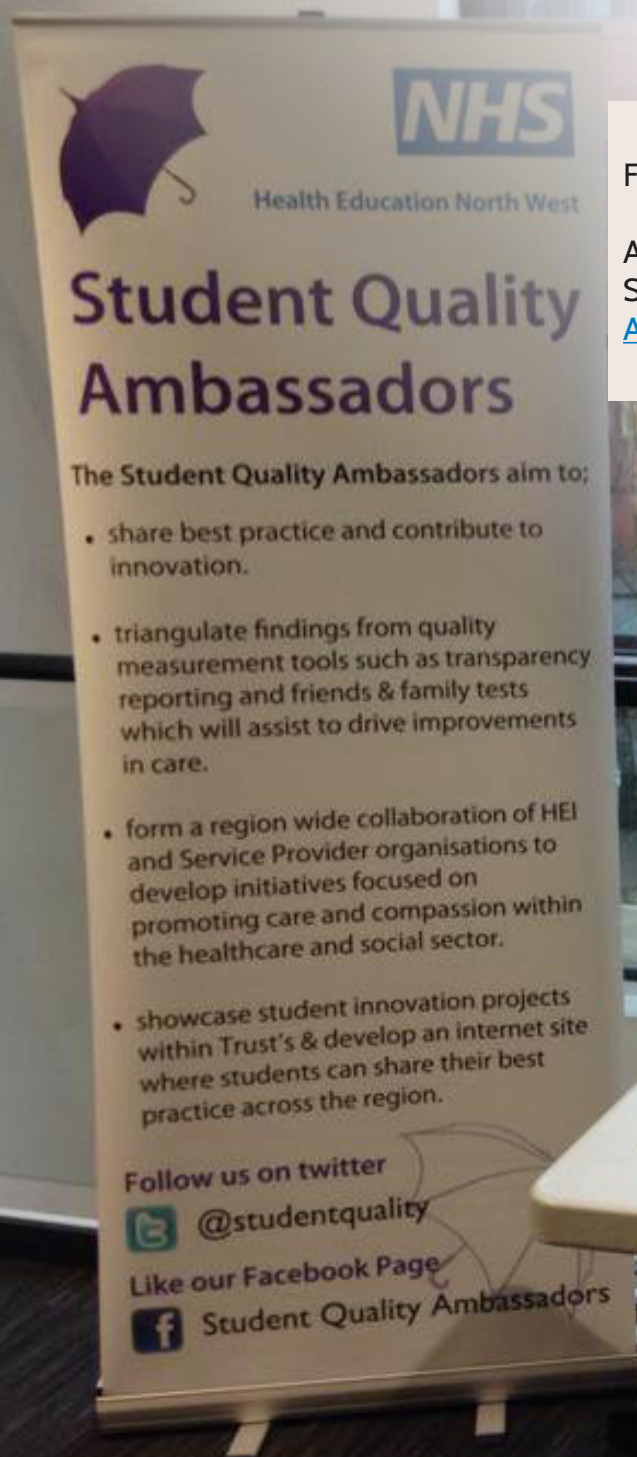
- Develop a role for the quality ambassador, once the students have qualified. Approximately twenty SQAs will qualify during 2014. This role will be developed in conjunction with the qualified SQAs and the trusts where they are employed
- It is hoped that improvements to care can be achieved by providing students with an app that mirrors questions from E4E's Open and Honest Care tool and the Friends and Family Test. These questions can be answered anonymously by students as part of quality surveillance. See Appendix 5 for further details

Supporting Material

- Appendix 1 - Information Leaflet
- Appendix 2 - Job Description/Role Profile
- Appendix 3 - Student Application Questions
- Appendix 4 - Real Life Stories
- Appendix 5 - SQA Application Form
- Appendix 6 - 15 Steps Challenge toolkit
- Appendix 7 - Facebook: [Student Quality Ambassadors](#)
- Appendix 8 - Twitter: [@studentquality](#)
- Appendix 9 - [Student Quality Ambassadors Group on eWIN](#) (please note you will need to be logged into the site to join this group)

References

- Francis R. (2013) Report of the Mid Staffordshire NHS Foundation Trust Public Inquiry - Executive summary London: Crown Copyright
- Keogh B. (2013) Review into the quality of care and treatment provided by 14 trusts in England. www.nhs.uk/NHSEngland/bruce-keogh-review/Documents/outcomes/keogh-review-final-report.pdf
- National Leadership and Innovation Agency for Healthcare (2013) Student Quality Ambassadors (SQAs) [Online] Available at: www.wales.nhs.uk/sitesplus/829/page/67581 [Accessed 8th January 2013]
- NHS Institute for Innovation and improvement (2012) Energise for Excellence: A call to action for Nurses and Midwives.) [Online] Available at: www.institute.nhs.uk/images//stories/Call_to_Action/E4E%20document%2021-02-2012%20%282%29rev.pdf
- NHS Institute for Innovation and improvement (2012) The 15 Steps Challenge: Quality from a patients perspective. www.vmp.nu/documenten/category/22-studiereizen.html?download=46%3Astudiereis-londen-juni-2013-nhs-st-george-hospital-the-fifteen-steps-challenge



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