



The Institute of Vocational Learning and
Workforce Research in Health and Social Care

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Commissioned by



Health Education England

Independent Evaluation of the University of Bolton and Lancashire Teaching NHS Foundation Trust Non-commissioned Nursing Degree – Year One Interim Report Summary.

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Introduction

This is a summary of the first-year findings from a three-year evaluation commissioned by Health Education England North West and being undertaken by the Institute for Vocational Learning and Workforce Research. Data comes from student focus groups, follow-up questionnaire and interviews with the key Trust and University stakeholders.

The key features of this degree are:

- Students fund their own studies, unlike the majority of nursing degrees in England¹.
- Cohorts sizes are deliberately small, around 25 students per intake.
- Recruitment is jointly undertaken by Trust and University in equal partnership. The process includes patients from the Trust and aims to take a holistic approach.
- Some of income from the degree is spent at the Trust to create a support team for placements which consists of:
 - Clinical Advisors (one linking to each module, whose objective is to make the students practice ready).
 - Clinical Tutors to ensure teaching support for students.
- A Patient Coach role has been developed to embed service user engagement providing reflection after each practice placement.

Key Findings

Students are committed to the profession:

- All respondents plan to become nurses, and plan to work in the NHS.
- The opportunity to learn and progress is very valuable to these students, with some already expressing ambitions for higher level study after graduation.
- They hold the nursing profession in very high regard.

Students found many elements of the degree course to be particularly good including:

- The smaller cohort sizes.
- The clinical tutors on placement.
- Their increased chances long term of gaining employment and picking up bank work due to close involvement of one trust.
- The level of support from peers, in part due to the size of the cohort.

Students also expressed their belief that:

- The course has a more holistic approach to recruiting for the degree than other courses.
- The learning experience is very good.

¹ Nursing degrees have traditionally been funded by the NHS, though this funding arrangement is due to end by October 2017, after which students will pay for their own studies.

The programme aims to engender in students a sense of belonging at both university and placement provider:

- Just over 90% of survey respondents feel they belong at the University.
- Just under 90% of respondents feel supported by the Trust.
- Responses from these year one students suggested a greater sense of belonging at the University than the Trust.

Issues that were causing anxiety were:

- Money, especially given the difficulties in meeting the course commitments and doing any additional paid work.
- Travel time and costs; primarily to and from placement rather than university campus.
- Finding the time needed for the degree, placements and their wider commitments (e.g. family).

Students felt confident at this stage that they could meet the demands of the course:

- Students generally felt able to cope with academic demands of the course (10% were 'very worried', around 50% expressed 'some worries').
- Most students were confident that they could acquire and demonstrate the practical skills needed to become a nurse.

Financial issues are complex and concerning to the students:

- Money is not the primary motivation for these students, and they have many compelling non-financial reasons for their decision to study nursing.
- The high likelihood of a job at the end of the course is clearly very important.
- Many struggle to make ends meet whilst on course.
- Paying for their own studies through the loans system does not seem to be an important issue for the majority of respondents. Typically, the reasons included small amounts of repayment tied to income, and that loans were standard for most students.
- However, some were unhappy that they were ineligible for some support available to those students on bursary schemes (for example, support with travel costs), finding this unfair.
- Some of the students expressed a belief that they should be paid for their placement work.
- Most students do not appear to be judging their degree course on a value for money basis, and they do not appear to mind the debt because it is building towards a career they want.
- However, some expressed resentment when they were asked to undertake tasks on placement that did not have apparent learning value; this was one time when students expressed themselves akin to customers who are not receiving the experience they feel they have paid for.

The University and Trust partnership

The partnership approach employed by the Trust and University was considered important by the stakeholders, and seemed to carry through to the students who reported, for example, that the university teaching was well matched to the placement expectations.

The development of the programme is marked by the joint approach with University and Trust as equal partners. Stakeholders reported taking advantage of this opportunity to shape the course, particularly the support available whilst on placement and the cohort sizes. The underlying strengths of the programme so far were identified by stakeholders as:

- Transparency.
- Partnership.

The business case process created a transparency between partners about the fees and costs and allowed for an open discussion about how best to resource the academic and placement elements of the course so that students are well supported both in the classroom and the care setting, which in turn led to risk and responsibility sharing.

For further information about this ongoing evaluation, please contact john.bateson@bucks.ac.uk.

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