

CASE STUDY: ONLINE STUDENT PLACEMENT CHOOSE AND BOOK SYSTEM

Aintree University Hospital NHS Trust has developed an online student placement choose and book system, where students from all disciplines can select and book spoke placements. Placements are available for spokes (one to four weeks) and short visits (from a few hours up to five days). These opportunities supplement their main hub placements and lend themselves to broader learning experiences. This innovative system provides a platform for high quality inter-professional learning (IPL) opportunities, reduces the administrative burden on mentors and educators, and increases students' safety whilst on placement as this system enables tracking of student movement across the Trust placement circuit.

The Trust's practice education facilitators (PEFs) started the project in September 2013 and the system was launched in February 2014. This online system functions similarly to the patient choose and book system. Students are able to review all placements open to them and request those that best suit their needs. Mentors and educators upload their availability and students apply electronically. This system allows for efficient use of mentor/educator time which was previously spent fielding ad hoc placement enquiries from students and manually recording student activity. Previous to the launch of

the new system, students arranged learning opportunities by obtaining contact details themselves and either visiting the areas or leaving messages. It was often the case that students were unaware of the range of experience available and much time was spent by the student seeking out this "hidden" world of learning.

Key Outcomes

- Increase in spoke placements – a review of the number of spoke placements undertaken before and after the pilot showed a significant increase in student activity. Since the system has been introduced 76 placement experiences have been accessed by students over 14 different placement areas, including placements such as theatres, medical assessment units, critical care and laboratories.
- Greater interprofessional learning (IPL) – IPL strengthens communication, improves the ethos of team working and drives quality of patient care to improve outcomes (Nursing Times, 2013). This new system fosters IPL by allowing students to work within interdisciplinary teams and alongside other professionals. For instance, a nursing student can undertake a spoke placement alongside a physiotherapist in a stroke ward, thus gaining knowledge not only of stroke care but also of the role a



physiotherapist plays in patient care. The added benefit of this “working together, learning together” ethos is ultimately to improve communication and break down professional barriers.

- Increased student knowledge and understanding – feedback shows that students are now taking more ownership of their development and have greater awareness of other placement areas applicable to their work. For instance, many students did not previously know what function the chaplaincy service provided, and may not have considered asking to be placed there. However five students have now undertaken a placement in this area and gained a greater understanding of the work carried out, as well as how their role as a future nurse could support this service: “I never realised how much the chaplaincy service can offer” was one comment made by a student nurse, whilst another stated “I now have a better understanding of what a hospital chaplain does and it’s not just giving Holy Communion to the sick”.
- Some smaller departments, tend to be under-recognised by students, but students are now considering a broader range of placements. The flexibility offered by the student choose and book system allows these underutilised areas to offer short placement experiences, as longer placements in these areas would not be feasible. This subsequently raises the department’s profile, staff morale and ultimately leads to more integrated working.
- Easier governance process – as the system automatically captures data about student placement activity, this can be used to populate learning and development agreement (LDA) schedules, meaning there is no longer the need to count hours manually.
- Ward capacity increased – mentors and educators spend less time fielding placement enquiries and can schedule office time to arrange visits, instead of interrupting patient care. Students can now access experiences that were not accessible prior to choose and book.
- More spoke placements – mentors and educators can upload placements as short as one day. This allows greater flexibility both for the student and for the placement on offer.
- Improved quality of placements – this online system has led to better learning opportunities and has increased one-to-one mentoring, as placements are scheduled by mentors and educators when they have availability and when relevant ward activity is high.

Background

Aintree University Hospital NHS Foundation Trust serves a population of around 330,000 people in the North of Liverpool. The Trust gained Foundation Trust (FT) status in 2006 and has over 13,000 public and staff members. Aintree is a teaching hospital of the University of Liverpool which offers a range of acute and non-acute specialties and works in partnership with other organisations to provide community-based services.

However Aintree also supports placements for students from the local universities of Chester, Liverpool John Moores, Edge Hill and The University of Liverpool, and thus there was a high demand for an efficient placement booking system. The Trust has on average 1000 non-medical students per year.

In 2010 the Nursing and Midwifery Council (NMC) Standards for pre-registration nursing education were updated. These guidelines set out what nursing students must demonstrate to be fit for practice at the point of registration with the NMC. Students are now required to have longer but fewer rotations, with an emphasis on greater flexibility and access to a broader learning experience. Extended placements either in a hospital or in the community lend themselves to the hub and spoke model: longer hub placements enable learning to be planned by the educator and student and allows for students to spend time with other disciplines on spoke placements. This change prompted staff at Aintree to develop a system to assist students to find a greater variety of spoke placements to complement their hub placement and to make them aware of the learning opportunities available to them.

The Francis Report (2012) also emphasises the need to promote and provide inter-professional learning in practice.

Key Aims

- Increase the safety of students whilst on placement by tracking where students are at all times via the online system, even if mentors/educators are on leave or unavailable
- Improve students’ knowledge of the range of placements available by incorporating placements within smaller, or lesser known departments
- Reduce the workload of students and mentors/educators through cutting down the amount of time which staff spend fielding enquiries from students
- Increase inter-professional learning across multi-professional teams by enabling students to undertake spoke and short-term placements in other teams
- Reduce interruptions to patient care by allowing staff the opportunity to schedule office time to arrange placements rather than responding to ad hoc requests

Key Stages of Setup

The initial stage of set-up began in October 2012 with the creation of a project plan to present to the Trust Project Management Office. The plan was agreed by this group, and subsequently at executive level, where the project gained support and funding. After a long review process the next step was for the project to be assured by information governance. From there the software development team developed the software and meetings were held for mentors and students to give their feedback. Minor alterations were made and the system was piloted with eight placements between September and December 2013, finally being launched in February 2014.

Students were encouraged to use the system and were given basic training via student forums, an awareness stand outside the hospital canteen and upon induction into the Trust.

The pilot was conducted over four months and then evaluated. Students and mentors who participated gave feedback via a survey and minor alterations were made to the system, such as re-wording the automatically generated emails.

In February 2014 the system officially went live and was rolled out to other areas of the Trust. The PEF team have administrative rights to the system and can monitor activity easily as they are provided with an email prompt each time there is activity on the system. The student choose and book software system links in with the Trust business intelligence reporting platform which allows monitoring and reporting on the number of students booking placements, the number of hours completed and so forth. This also serves to provide evidence for Health Education North West's Learning and Development Agreement (LDA).

How it Works

The online placement system can be accessed via the Trust's intranet.

PEFs have administration responsibilities, such as adding new placement wards and areas, or adding various categories.

When the system is accessed there are sections identified for both mentors/educators and students. Mentors/educators access the site to upload details of when they can accommodate students and how long for. They can also list details such as ward number and contact email address.

Students are presented with a list of available spoke placements and short visits with information including the time and duration of placements, which student year the placement is applicable to, a link to an external placement learning support system (PLSS) so they can view their learning outcomes, and the area of the placement. Students can then apply electronically to the placement. The application form requires information such as why the student had chosen that particular department, whether it has been approved by their mentor and where their current placement is. An email is then generated automatically and sent to the mentor/educator to approve the placement, and one is sent to the student with details of their visit.

Resources

The primary resource required was the time of the two PEFs who set up the project. Writing the project plan and obtaining information governance approval required a significant investment of their time. This resource would not be required if the programme were rolled out elsewhere as the process does not need to be repeated.

[Home Page](#) [Home](#) [Students](#) [Staff](#) [Admin](#)

Welcome to AHT Spoke Student Booking System

Student

[Available Spokes](#)

[Help](#)

Staff

[List My Spokes](#)

[New Spoke](#)

Admin

[List All Spokes](#)

[Manage Wards/Areas](#)



The software for the system was developed in-house over approximately four weeks and funding was provided by the Trust. There were no purchase costs and the only other resource utilised was IT staff time. The system is self-managing, and as staff become more familiar with the site it will save time; the new system is more efficient and allows for planned, instead of ad hoc management.

Key Challenges

- **Project plan** - getting the project approved was a complex and lengthy process. The online system had support from senior staff but the project plan had to be reviewed by the board before funding could be allocated. The challenge of completing all the relevant paperwork was overcome with support from other staff.
- **Taking the project through information governance (IG)** - ambiguous forms made this a challenging process but the project did not meet any resistance and with support from the IG lead this challenge was overcome.
- **Student awareness of the system** - uptake of the system has been slow because knowledge of the system is not yet widespread. To promote the choose and book system, information was provided outside the staff canteen, on student forums and during the Trust induction.
- **Converting mentors/educators to the new system** - mentors/educators are in the habit of accepting students on an ad-hoc basis. They are shown the system at mentor updates and link groups to encourage use. To date there has been no resistance to the project. Additionally this has been shared at a PEF-led Allied Health Professional trust placement forum where there has been great interest in using the system including the development of the "blood sciences" placement.

Key Learning

- It is vital to work in close partnership with the Trust's IT department as this allows discussion of suggestions, and creation of a system that works from all perspectives
- This process has shown that there is lots of potential to develop more multi-disciplinary learning
- If this project were to be conducted again more time would be allocated to promoting the system to staff and students prior to launch, as uptake has been slow

Sustainability

The online student placement choose and book system is readily accessible on the Trust's intranet, so it is easily embedded into everyday practice. Furthermore, the new system is more efficient and saves staff fielding student enquiries, so it is preferred to the old method. It is hoped that through word of mouth other managers will be encouraged to adopt this system. There are currently 170 opportunities on the system available until May 2015.

Next steps

The next steps are to roll the system out to other departments within the Trust and to encourage managers to use the system.

Currently the system is unique to Aintree University Hospital. The Trust is not able to directly share access to the system, as it is built in-house and only accessible on Aintree's server; however it is happy to help facilitate other trusts in copying the system.

There is also a possibility that the system could be copied into the wider placement learning support system (PLSS), which is accessible to far more trusts, but this opportunity has not yet been explored.

Supporting Material

The project plan and completed information governance forms are available upon request.

References

- Barwell, J., Arnold, F. & Barry, H. (2013) 'How interprofessional learning improves care' *Nursing Times*; 109: 21, 14-16 [Online]. Available at: <http://www.nursingtimes.net/Journals/2013/05/30/p/q/j/290513-How-interprofessional-learning-improves-care.pdf> (accessed: 05/11/2014)
- Francis, R. (2013) *The Mid Staffordshire NHS Foundation Trust public inquiry*, The Stationery Office

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