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Poster Presentation

Developing the Workforce of the Future – Work Based Learning

The purpose of this poster is to highlight the development of work based learning in the school and bring to the attention of a wider audience, within the health & social care professional, an alternative and flexible mechanism for study that is clearly focused on practice and career development.

The Governments modernisation agenda both now and in the future is immense and will permanently change the way in which services will be delivered and the way in which the workforce is prepared to manage these demanding changes.

National initiatives stress the need for flexible workers and the need to break down traditional boundaries within the health & social care arena.

As a consequence this enormous impact on service has highlighted the need for educational providers to think very carefully about the role they will need to play in developing the workforce of the future. Nursing is a continuous learning profession.

The need for learning which has a direct impact on improving patient and service outcomes was emphasised in 'Working Together, Learning Together (DH 2001) and has since featured in many government policy documents since 1999. Of particular note is the introduction of 'Agenda for Change' and its component 'The NHS Knowledge and Skills Framework' (DH 2004). These two documents have a particular relevance to NHS staff as they highlight very clearly the links between requirements for the job, personal and professional development and indicators for career progression.

At National level, Strategic Health Authorities have increasingly embedded work based learning into strategy and policy related to education. Locally, Greater Manchester Strategic Health Authority spearheaded workforce redevelopment plans and commissioned work based learning curricula to support cadet nursing, assistant and advanced nursing practitioner programmes. The newly formed NHS Northwest is likely to continue this trend and it is fortunate that the University of Salford has already established an excellent reputation for providing innovative work based learning programmes which support the development of pioneering roles in the contemporary NHS. This will be of particular importance in the near future when practice based commissioning of education becomes a reality. Gray (2001) identified that work based learning is a significant element in the UK policy debates of professional development and lifelong learning, a move away from teacher centred to one of learner centred approaches.

The School of Nursing has been proactive in encouraging and developing work based learning as part of post-qualifying education provision. The flexible delivery methods and focus on real practice issues allows students to choose the focus of their own study, which in turn they can link directly to personal and professional development needs. Essentially work based learning promotes learning that is practice led and encourages practitioners to analyse and evaluate their practice with a view to implementing change. The collaboration of the manager in the learning process allows them to become directly involved in the education of their staff, particularly when considering the often implicit knowledge, acquired through experience which underpins their practice.

The development of the BSc (Hons) Professional Practice Development has extended the School of Nursing portfolio and taken teaching outside the boundaries of nursing alone to include health and social care professionals from a range of NHS and non NHS backgrounds. Professional standards, working directives and career frameworks within these areas are governed by a number of different bodies but the ethos of work based learning is still applicable: the promotion of learner autonomy; learners learning to learn and taking responsibility for their own learning. There are increasing opportunities for students to develop their roles in new ways. These new roles may have great potential to reconceptualise professional relationships and ways of working.