

Research Report
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This report was compiled by TWIG Associates on behalf of NHS Education for Scotland in September 2017.

1. Introduction

Research carried out by TWIG Associates for NHS Education for Scotland (NES) in 2016 identified a need to identify how Boards¹ and colleges across Scotland could work together to improve access to qualifications for Healthcare Support Workers (HCSWs) in NHSScotland.

The research made various recommendations, including the development of ‘mutually supportive partnerships’ and identified some areas where these partnerships already exist. As a result, in March 2017, NES commissioned TWIG Associates to carry out a further research and development project to identify and illustrate best practice in collaborative working between Boards and colleges in support of access to qualifications with a focus on HCSWs.

2. Aims

This project aimed to investigate how NES can support more effective collaboration between Boards and colleges in the area of qualification provision for HCSWs. The work had two main purposes:

- a) To gather information about existing collaborative working and develop case studies based on this information. These case studies are intended to help the sharing of learning and illustrate a range of different approaches to partnership working.
- b) To identify how the learning from existing collaborations might underpin a set of resources (e.g. a guide). These resources could support others who might be interested in establishing or extending collaborative working.

This report summarises the work completed during the project and provides recommendations to support further collaborative working.

3. Interviews

The information gathering for this project took the form of individual interviews with staff² in colleges and Boards who are collaborating to deliver qualifications for staff.

A number of avenues were explored to identify areas where collaborative working was taking place in order to identify potential interviewees. This included:

- A review of interviews undertaken during the 2016 research to identify where collaborative work had been described
- Interviews with NES Learning & Development Leads responsible for learning projects for HCSWs

Appendix 1 summarises the responses to the quantitative question asked in the interviews. As a result of these reviews and interviews, ten telephone interviews were conducted:

- Four with staff
- Four with college representatives
- One with a Modern Apprenticeship provider
- One joint interview with a NHSScotland and college partner

The interviews used a common set of open questions to gather information about:

- The context of the collaboration and how it developed
- How the collaboration works now and any plans for the future
- What works well and what could be improved
- What advice the partners would give to others in a similar situation

The approach to interviewing began with key contacts in Boards. Information from these interviews led to follow up with the relevant college and college contact(s). The interviews identified some different models of collaboration, common themes in the strengths and weaknesses, and some clear advice. This information is summarised over the next two pages.

¹ ‘Boards’ refers to NHSScotland Boards

² ‘Staff’ refers to NHSScotland staff

Who participated – and how do they work together?

NHS Borders

Providers:

- Edinburgh College
- Borders College

Staff Groups:

Estates & Facilities

Qualification:

- SVQ Facilities Services
- SVQ Facilities Management Assessor Award

Collaborative Model:

- Assessors trained up in-house to carry out assessment; Edinburgh College provides verification services
- Borders College have responded by becoming an approved centre for Facilities Services; the model above to continue

Notes:

This collaboration began as part of a NES demonstrator project. NHS Borders sees local links with college as important hence the move to Borders College. However, they will continue to use Edinburgh for MA provision.

NHS Forth Valley

Provider:

Forth Valley College

Staff Group:

Clinical HCSWs (mainly AHPS)

Qualification:

Foundation Apprenticeships

Collaborative Model:

Formalised group looking at potential collaboration; includes college and local authority

Notes:

NES Specialist lead – NMAHP is a member of the group

NHS Lanarkshire

Provider:

New College Lanarkshire (NCLAN)

Staff Group:

Business & Administration

Qualification:

SVQ Business & Administration

Collaborative Model:

- Longstanding one-to-one relationship between respondents
- Flexible provision – selecting or combining units that meet workforce needs

Notes:

Have put a confidentiality agreement in place to allow in-work assessment

NHS Shetland (1)

Provider:

Edinburgh College

Staff Group:

Estates & Facilities

Qualifications:

- SVQ Facilities Services
- SVQ Facilities Management Assessor Award

Collaborative Model:

- Began with assessors coming in from Edinburgh but there has been capacity building in terms of on-site assessors
- Board wants to move to using Shetland UHI for verification, however, Shetland UHI not yet approved for these qualifications

Notes:

Collaboration began as part of NES demonstrator project. NHS Shetland project lead sees advantages in using the local college for this particular staff group, helping them to perceive themselves as 'students'.

Who participated – and how do they work together?

NHS Shetland (2)

Providers:

Shetland College

Staff Groups:

Business & Administration

Qualifications:

–SVQ Communications Unit
–Four candidates doing SVQ Business & Administration

Collaborative Model:

Case study gives information about a ‘ladder’ appearing and managers coming on board more; also highlights the learning needs of the project leads in both the college and the Board

Notes:

College cites problems with managers seeing SVQ assessment as breaching confidentiality – could learn from Lanarkshire’s experience.

NHS Shetland (3)

Provider:

Train Shetland

Staff Group:

MAs

Qualifications:

–MA Plumbing
–MA Data Analytics (in process)

Collaborative Model:

–Provider is the MA Contract holder (in Shetland Council)
–Keen to develop a strategic approach with the Board and to place MAs with the Board
–One plumbing apprentice starting and currently looking at other possibilities (including Data Analytics)

Notes:

Provider highlights difficulty of finding the right person to speak to and long lead times needed. NHSScotland lead highlights that she would like to understand more about the role of Train Shetland and its relationship with Shetland UHI.

NHS Tayside

Provider:

Dundee & Angus College

Staff Group:

‘Admin Academy’

Qualification:

SVQ Business & Administration

Collaborative Model:

–Cohorts of 20 young people doing SVQs in NHSScotland, local authority and University
–Placements in many different areas of NHSScotland
–MOU in place for the Academy

Notes:

Provider; ‘Because we work closely with NHSScotland we can feed what’s happening in the real world into the curriculum’.

Several Boards

Provider:

Borders College

Staff Groups:

–Clinical
–Estates & Facilities
–Business & Admin

Qualifications:

Range of SVQs, including Adult MAs

Collaborative Model:

–Working across Boards, with provision tailored to the Board
–Harnessing technology so contact can be maintained at distance
–Working with employer to understand needs

Notes:

Provider sees working with NHSScotland as important for helping college to increase its range of provision and its profile with employers.

4. Findings

All interviewees were asked to identify what works well in their collaborations and what could work better. Over the ten interviews, a number of key themes emerged.

The key themes were as follows:

1. The importance of good communication

- A number of respondents highlighted the importance of finding the right person to speak with, and of maintaining close working relationships – most of the collaborations discussed were not formally constituted, but reliant on the close collaboration of individuals within the college and the Board
- Delays in response either from the college or from the relevant departments in a Board were seen as important obstacles to effective and timely collaboration
- Key advice included:
 - Identify an appropriate key contact (see below)
 - Spend time on building the relationship; the most positive reactions came from individuals feeling that they had a good relationship with their contact
 - Have plans in place to ensure sustainability; this should include identifying others within the organisation who need to be involved / informed; many of the respondents were unsure if their collaboration would survive if they were to leave their post

2. The importance of understanding context

- This point links to communication: several people mentioned the importance of the need to understand workforce learning needs, including college staff who spoke about needing to fully understand staff learning needs and NHSScotland respondents who spoke about the need to understand their Board's workforce plans
- The need for greater understanding of the structure and function of the partner organisation was noted by a number of respondents from both sides
- The interviews included one quantitative question, where respondents were asked to agree or disagree with a set of statements about their collaborative work.

Some noticeable differences emerged: three NHSScotland respondents said that they met regularly with their college partner to discuss learning needs, but only one college partner stated they met regularly.

In addition, when asked if they discussed the qualifications most relevant to the staff's learning needs, four college partners said yes whilst only two NHSScotland respondents agreed.

This could indicate a different understanding of what is meant by 'discussions' and how staff learning needs and the selection of qualifications are examined and negotiated. A summary of responses to this question is included in Appendix 1.

- Lack of funding for learning was a recurrent issue, and some of the interviews highlighted the importance of understanding where relevant funding streams in the education sector might be identified and used effectively
- Areas of difficulty included: the need for colleges to negotiate confidentiality issues when undertaking work-based assessment; the need for colleges to have guarantees of student numbers before applying for approval to offer a specific qualification; the need for staff to understand more clearly the different types of qualifications on offer
- Key advice included:
 - Take time to learn about the other organisation, and to provide clear guidance about your own context
 - Develop agreements (MOU; Confidentiality agreements) to give processes for addressing differences
 - Discussion is essential; be prepared to discuss staff learning needs, and be open to suggestions from the other partner
 - Look for other potential partners (e.g. local authorities) who might have similar learning needs to bolster the case for colleges to introduce additional qualification

3. The importance of understanding the benefits of collaborative working

- NHSScotland respondents were able to identify possible benefits to the service of being involved in education. However, most did not see what

the colleges might gain from collaboration, apart from increased student numbers

- Some of the NHSScotland respondents spoke about the importance of speaking with service managers about potential benefits to the service and to their staff
- All college staff saw advantages to staff participating in learning. A number (particularly those directly involved in the delivery of assessment) spoke about the advantages for individual learners, including improvements in possible career pathways. Some college respondents gave very clear reasons why working with NHSScotland was of benefit to their organisations. However, some college staff were not able to identify any benefit. Benefits included:
 - Raising the profile of the work they do in colleges by working with a major employer
 - Fulfilling contract requirements (e.g. for apprenticeships) more easily; informing their own curriculum by being closely involved with up-to-date day-to-day work in NHSScotland
 - Developing their own range of services by responding to the needs of NHSScotland (This identification of how working with NHSScotland might address some of the strategic goals of the provider meant that the respondents seemed to take a very positive approach to extending the range of work they might do in the future)

4. The importance of considering assessment models

- One of the main models to emerge from the interviews was one where the responsibility for the assessment of SVQs was shared by the partners. This involves building in-house capacity for assessing SVQs (i.e. college training assessors alongside a cohort of SVQ candidates). The NHSScotland partner then takes responsibility for the internal assessment, whilst the college retains responsibility for quality assurance (i.e. verification). They also retain all of the responsibilities of the registering 'centre'. A number of advantages were seen in this model: it shares the workload, reducing work and costs for both partners (i.e. costs to NHSScotland of being a centre; costs of assessment to the college); it ensures that the assessors are fully up-to-date with NHSScotland requirements; it overcomes any qualms regarding confidentiality;

it provides mentoring experience and development opportunities for staff who are becoming assessors.

- However, some respondents identified obstacles to the use of this model; one college respondent suggested that helping senior staff to understand the benefits of the model to the Board might help the Board make more appropriate, cost-effective and sustainable decisions to support the delivery of SVQs
- Key advice included:
 - Look at the qualifications staff need to do: what can each organisation contribute to the learning and assessment process?
 - Consider the costs (both time and financial) and potential benefits of different levels of involvement: which bring the greatest benefit to the learner and to the partner organisations?

5. Case Studies

Although the interviews drew on a small number of collaborations, patterns emerged in the information provided by the respondents. These case studies aim to highlight different ways in which colleges / providers and Boards are working collaboratively.

Each case study includes:

- The aim of the collaboration and a short description of how it works
- The results of the collaboration
- What has worked well (statements from both partners)
- Advice for others (statements from both partners)

The series includes case studies about the following partnerships:

- NCLAN & NHS Lanarkshire
- Edinburgh College and NHS Borders
- Dundee & Angus College and NHS Tayside
- Shetland College UHI & NHS Shetland
- Train Shetland and NHS Shetland
- Borders College and four different Boards

One of the case studies (Case Study 6) focuses on a range of different models of collaboration which Borders College has established across four different Boards. In this case study, the focus is on advice for providers on how to establish collaborative working with Boards.

6. Conclusions & Recommendations

As the information gathering and the case studies have highlighted, key themes have emerged in the collaborative working which this study has investigated. In particular, the advice given by the respondents in the study could support the development of resources to support wider collaboration between colleges / learning providers and Boards.

The suggested resources could include:

- a) A short guide for college and Board staff embarking on partnerships. Based on the advice given, this could include 'things to bear in mind before you work together and while you are working together', for example:
 - Finding your possible partner(s)
 - Getting to know your possible partner(s)
 - Planning the first collaborative project
 - Making collaboration sustainable

It is suggested that each element include short guidance for college / provider and for NHS, a checklist to consider, examples or templates for documents (e.g. MOU; Confidentiality Agreement) and illustrations taken from the case studies

- b) A presentation on supporting collaboration, for dissemination by the NES team. Many of the partnerships we have looked at have come about as the result of seed funding from NES, and NES's contribution would appear to have an important role to play in helping others to benefit from the outcomes arising from this funding.

Appendix 1: Summary of Responses

Respondents were asked a series of closed questions about the nature of their collaborative working. 'Notes' column includes any additional comments made when responding to these questions.

In my situation, the collaborative working between the NHSScotland Board and college(s) / providers...	Yes		No		Maybe		Comments / Notes	
	B ¹	C ²	B	C	B	C	B	C
a) is a one-to-one relationship between the Board and a single college / provider	3	3	2	2				
b) is formally-constituted, with specified membership from each organisation and clear reporting structure	1	1	4	2		2		Maybe – in planning
c) is semi-formal, without formally-specified membership and with a loose reporting structure into one or both organisations	1	1	2	3				'Aiming for C'
d) has evolved as an informal education partnership which depends on links between individual staff members in the Board and individual colleges / providers	3	4	2	1				
e) meets regularly, i.e. at least twice annually, to discuss staff's learning needs	3	1	2	3		1		1 Not yet
f) discusses and agrees the most relevant qualifications for staff based on their roles and learning needs	2	4	3					
g) agrees an annual plan for qualifications delivery, including how and where learning and assessment is delivered	3	2	3	2		1		'But it's fairly informal' 1 Not yet
h) shares the responsibility for the assessment of learning programmes, e.g. some Board staff teach on the qualifications delivered to staff	3	1	1	3	1	1		'All done in-house' 1 Not yet
i) shares the responsibility for the assessment of learning, e.g. some Board staff conduct the formal assessments required for the qualifications	2	3	3	1		1		1 Not yet
j) works together to identify potential opportunities for qualifications for staff, e.g. additional funding streams and new qualifications coming on stream	3	2	2	1	1	2		1 Not yet
k) has a process for integrating lessons learned into future delivery	3	3	2	2				
l) has a shared member of staff who works between the college and Board to facilitate partnership working			5	5				

¹ 'B' refers to Boards Respondents

² 'C' refers to College / Provider Respondents