

OUTSTANDING TEACHING, LEARNING AND ASSESSMENT TECHNICAL SKILLS NATIONAL PROGRAMME

5. Work Placement Summary

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Introduction

Work placements in the health care sector are an excellent way of ensuring that learners are aware of some of the different career pathways that may be available to them in health and science. Gaining real-life experiences can have a positive impact on a learner's personal development, technical knowledge and transition into the world of work. There are a wide variety of clinical and non-clinical roles in health that learners and parents/carers may not be aware of.

Background and aims

Outstanding work placement experience is not consistent across the health care sector, and the quality of learner's technical knowledge on vocational programmes is poor. Teachers and employers can help make the experience more beneficial in a 'joined up way', by supporting learners to engage, progress and achieve to the required technical and professional standards by ensuring that the work experience links to the specific learning outcomes of the health and social care vocational route.

The placement workbook currently disseminated to learners at Epping Forest College does not support them to seek out and use new information to develop, consolidate and deepen their knowledge and understanding of theory gained in the classroom, and in turn apply technical skills gained in placement to academic knowledge in the classroom.

Teachers do not set high expectations for learning on placements. Challenging targets are not set and there are missed opportunities for feedback about what learners can do to improve their knowledge, understanding and skills.

Approach

Two learners, (A and B) 17-years old and 18 years old respectively currently engaged in the second year of an Extended Diploma in Health and Social Care at EFC agreed to trial a new workbook that requires them to evidence employability skills and technical knowledge of one unit of their course – Unit 39: Infection Control.

The learners carried out their placement at the Harley Street Hospital. The workbook was designed in response to testimonials from placement providers over the previous academic year at EFC.

The learners began their placement in October 2017 and attend 1 day per week during term time.

FINDINGS

Feedback from placement providers linked to the college

- Time keeping - learners arriving late, or not at all, and requesting to leave early with emphasis placed on not working over usual college specific hours.
- Professionalism – not behaving appropriately as employees and “not really sure what being a professional means”.
- Values – not demonstrating the values expected in care such as communicating with patients/ service users; e.g. “introducing themselves to patients, explaining what they are going to be doing”, and “being aware of the privacy and dignity of patients, e.g. giving them individual choices and ensuring they are appropriately covered, basis principles that they should already have been taught and know”.
- Being passive
- Lack of maturity
- Not adhering to dress code, infection control and how to behave in a clinical setting.
- Poor communication skills e.g. “if a student feels uncomfortable dressing or helping wash a patient they should say so, rather than not returning to placement and letting the teacher know instead”.
- Not taking any initiative
- Not asking questions to improve knowledge and understanding.
- No tangible assessment criteria linked to learning required on placement. A significant amount of feedback from a range of health and care settings stated that knowing what evidence learners needed to collate, and what level of learning and competency they were expected to gain from the work experience, would help them better support the learner and in turn help the learner in taking responsibility for their own learning.
- Infection control was raised by a significant number of placement providers, e.g. “We consistently struggle with learners not adhering to infection control and other safety guidelines.” A ward manager said “young people are very poor at wearing gloves and washing hands between patients.

Feedback from teachers at the college

- General view that sufficient benefit is not being gained from the current placements.
- Insufficient opportunities for learners to gain experience in hospital and clinical settings. Majority of learners are placed in care homes or nurseries.
- Many learners are not supervised and expected, often directed (told) to carry out cleaning duties, tea making, and serving food. They are expected to “do the minimum”.
- Learners not gaining enough experience to complete their placement log book.
- No opportunity for learners to feedback and share placement experiences when back at college, i.e. timetable doesn’t allow this.
- No opportunity to visit learners in placement
- Little or no idea what learners are doing in placement, only hear complaints e.g. learner not attended and poor behaviour from learner.

Feedback from learners at the college

- Placement is boring
- I was bored and felt that I was getting in the way of other staff, so I sat in the kitchen room, then my final placement report said that I lacked initiative.
- I was doing the washing up every time I went there, I eventually told my mum and she told me not to go back there.
- There was nothing to do, the residents were asleep most of the day.
- I was told I had to wash patients, but I'm not comfortable doing that.
- I didn't learn anything, and hung around bored all day, I thought I would learn a lot being at a hospital.
- I was told I had to clean up and help with serving food.

Current placement workbook

General with no specific links to employability or technical skills:

- What is my daily routine and responsibilities (e.g. timetable or list)
- Discuss possible experiences and opportunities for learning (e.g. spending a day with a physiotherapist or nurse)

Pilot workbook

Direct link to employability skills, e.g. effective communication and multi-disciplinary team working.

- Give an example of an interaction between two or more named professionals that you observed. Name the specific communication skills you observed and evaluate their importance.

Direct link to curriculum learning outcomes e.g. Unit 39 BTEC Extended Diploma in Health & Social Care: Infection control.

- What precautions does your work experience setting take to prevent the spread of infection?
- How would your placement setting manage an outbreak of infection, should it occur?

OUTCOMES

Testimonials from the two learners involved in trialling the pilot workbook:

Student A:

"I want to be Nurse so was really pleased to get a placement in a hospital, which I did ask for. I was nervous to speak to the staff at first but because I had a lot of information I needed to find out to complete the workbook, it helped with my nerves and I could ask them [the nurses] some questions directly by going to my workbook. After more weeks at placement I'm much more confident, and challenge myself all the time to ask questions and get involved with almost everything the nurses do".

"The part of the workbook that asks us for information and evidence on infection control is really helpful, although it's extra work it is really helping me with the unit. Getting the information from a real-life hospital is much better than getting it from a powerpoint slide!"

"Before going on this placement, I thought that hospitals were just full of doctors and nurses, I didn't realise that there were that many specialist areas including different types of surgeons, children's consultants and different types of nurses, there is even a nurse who just takes blood called a phlebotomist. I say 'just' but it looks like a really interesting job to me".

Student B:

"This placement has helped me be more aware of my career options, I have been in many different departments at the hospital, from cardiology, paediatrics, cancer care and I've even observed several times in theatre. Watching a triple bypass operation was amazing and now my unit on anatomy and physiology makes much more sense".

"I am amazed at the confidence I have in myself now, a year ago I didn't think I could actually one-day train to be a nurse, now I know I can for definite".

"I have learnt a lot about hygiene this past few weeks. We were told about how to dress in a sterile work environment, being an observer in theatre this was especially vital. We were not allowed to wear make-up, and our nails had to be short, with our hair tied up. We were shown how surgery instruments are sterilised, this was really interesting, and I soon realised how important everyone's job is, no matter what role, whether you are the surgeon, the nurse, the anaesthetist or the cleaner, everyone has to be professional and communicate effectively to prevent any harm coming to the patients".

Overall outcome of project

As well as fuelling an interest in the healthcare industry, a positive placement experience and challenging workbook also supports the development of a range of employability skills.

This placement experience is giving the learners the opportunity to experience the best of both, working towards a recognised technical qualification by studying in college and gaining technical knowledge and skills in a hospital setting.

The enthusiasm the two students have shown is tangible. They are eager to know how they can improve their work and develop their knowledge, understanding and skills.

They capitalise on opportunities to use feedback to improve their work based skills and check their own learning and understanding of relevant academic work and its application in the hospital setting. This checking of understanding with professional staff is having a notable impact on these learner's academic understanding, e.g. Infection control, Anatomy and Physiology.

The expectations of the placement co-ordinator at the Harley Street hospital is high and the workbook sets challenging targets for the learners to achieve.

Next steps

- Expand workbook to include learning links to more units on the vocational pathway.
- Disseminate workbook to all learners required to undertake placement on health and social care pathway in the department.
- Embed, where appropriate, English, mathematics and ICT skills into the workbook.
- Plan opportunities in the timetable for learners to share placement experiences and showcase skills learnt.