

Healthcare Support Workers as Educators Scoping Study

Executive Summary

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Executive Summary

Background, context and drivers

A key ambition for the Scottish Government is to improve the health of people in Scotland. Achieving this requires a range of long-term policy interventions, including through a renewed focus on optimising the impacts of available resources, such as supporting the upskilling of Healthcare Support Workers (HCSWs). This has arguably become even more important as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic and its impact on the health and social care workforce, ways of working, and the pressures and responses that have been required and continue. The Associate Practice Educator role presents an opportunity to effectively support the training and development of HCSWs.

There are a range of strategic drivers underpinning the implementation of the Associate Practice Educator role which has been developed in NHS Tayside and NHS Grampian. The NHS Education for Scotland (NES) Strategy 2019-2024: A Skilled and Sustainable Workforce for a Healthier Scotland, sets out five key areas of focus including three that are specific to training and learning. The Scottish Government's NHS Recovery Plan: 2021-2026 presents ambitions to ensure long term workforce and service sustainability in Scotland including training opportunities and development pathways. The National Workforce Strategy for Health and Social Care was published by the Scottish Government in March 2022 and outlines actions to support staff upskilling and career progression pathways.

Between 2016 and 2018, a pilot scheme in NHS Grampian introduced the Associate Practice Educator role and following this, NES delivered a test of change project from 2018 to 2020 to understand how Band 4 Associate Practice Educators could enhance the education infrastructure for HCSWs in Allied Health Professions. A subsequent review of wider career pathways for HCSWs at Levels 2-4 of the NHS Career Framework for Health in NHS Scotland highlighted the need to further build the pilot evidence base with a view to appointing Associate Practice Educators across all Health Boards in Scotland.

Associate Practice Educators

Associate Practice Educators are skilled and experienced HCSWs who operate at Level/Band 4 and are embedded in Practice Education/Practice Development teams in two NHS Boards. Their role is to facilitate learning and development opportunities for HCSWs.

The Associate Practice Educator role was introduced in NHS Grampian and NHS Tayside to ensure that HCSWs were able to find and access education, training and development opportunities that matched and improved their skill levels in line with their day-to-day responsibilities. Associate Practice Educators perform a wide variety of activities and responsibilities to facilitate these opportunities for HCSWs, including: the development and delivery of group, person-centred, education provision; training and information sessions; drop-in opportunities; work-based mentoring; signposting to guidance materials and resources; and support with employability skills and mock interviews.

Associate Practice Educators also have a role to play in networking and building relationships across Health Boards, such as through participation in national conference events.

It is important for Associate Practice Educators to develop a range of key person-centred skills, values and knowledge. Through the role, Associate Practice Educators have developed wider, cross-cutting skills such as

strong communication and public speaking, planning their own workload and taking initiative, adaptability and collaboration, and professionalism. Associate Practice Educators also require, and typically develop, good digital literacy and training delivery capabilities in the role.

There is a strong feeling that the level of investment in the Associate Practice Educator role, both in terms of the financial investment in developing and maintaining it and the supervisory time spent supporting Associate Practice Educators, has been matched by the role's impact on HCSWs within both NHS Grampian and NHS Tayside.

Benefits and successes

The introduction of the Associate Practice Educator role in both Health Boards has seen a range of benefits and successes for HCSWs but also for Associate Practice Educators themselves. Associate Practice Educators operating in the role typically come from a HCSW background, meaning they have an understanding of what the role entails, and the challenges faced by HCSWs on a daily basis. This provides them with valuable knowledge and insight into how best to engage with HCSWs. As a result of this engagement, HCSWs are more likely to undertake education and training and reflect on their own learning and development needs – ultimately this can lead to service improvement.

Through learning the role, Associate Practice Educators have been able to develop a variety of tangible and transferable skills, including how to train staff, preparing and delivering presentations, improved communication, and personal workload planning. They have also been able to develop a range of important and emerging skills, including key digital tech competencies, for instance through the development and delivery of online presentations to HCSWs. In many cases, these skills are new to Associate Practice Educators.

Collaboration and relationship building between and across Health Boards has seen Associate Practice Educators develop positive relationships with each other and HCSWs, supporting the facilitation of best practice sharing. Newer entrants to the role have been supported to settle into it and gain confidence as a result of this strong collaboration element. HCSWs have benefited significantly through a strong multi-facet communication strategy, employed by Associate Practice Educators, encouraging engagement and identifying different learning and development opportunities for HCSWs.

From a career progression perspective, the role has opened up a new career pathway for HCSWs which has helped with retention in the workforce due to new opportunities for individuals to develop and learn new skills. For HCSWs, there is an overriding sense that Associate Practice Educators are always available and approachable which gives HCSWs more confidence to engage with them around any questions or issues they may be facing.

Recommendations

- **Recommendation 1:** A formal induction process that is structured and comprehensive should be implemented for Associate Practice Educators. This would help new starts make the shift from clinical delivery to the role of educator and would help with practical aspects of the job, such as engaging with HCSWs, networks with wider teams, sourcing education and training, providing 1-2-1 support, identifying learner needs, and preparing materials and sessions.
- **Recommendation 2:** Experienced Associate Practice Educators should be involved in the recruitment process for new Associate Practice Educators. This would give them an opportunity to articulate to candidates what the role entails and the benefits of undertaking it.

- **Recommendation 3:** Consideration should be given to providing an Associate Practice Educator career development structure, for example by accessing Further and Higher Education, and courses such as the Professional Development Award: Healthcare Professionals, Facilitation of Learning, and Training and Assessment in the Workplace as SCQF Level 8.
- **Recommendation 4:** There should be more effective promotion of the role to HCSWs and their managers to enhance reach and engagement through additional activities undertaken by Practice Education teams to raise awareness of the role and its benefits for HCSWs.
- **Recommendation 5:** Associate Practice Educators see great value in delivering 1-2-1, in-person support sessions which largely stalled due to the pandemic, and more of these should be delivered to ensure person-centred and tailored provision is offered to HCSWs, some of whom may find this engagement less daunting than attending group sessions.
- **Recommendation 6:** Consideration should be given as to how every NHS Health Board in Scotland can develop an Associate Practice Educator workforce to support HCSWs. There should also be more Associate Practice Educators in NHS Grampian and NHS Tayside

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