

AHP PrBL Recovery



Cross / Third Sector Project 2023

AHP Practice-based Learning (PrBL) Recovery: Cross / Third Sector 2023

Situation / Background

Allied Health Professions (AHP) education programmes are required by the Health and Care Professions Council (HCPC) to include Practice-based Learning (PrBL) as a principal and integral part of the structure and framework for learning. Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) must manage the governance around this PrBL provision, and HEIs should “make sure that learners have access to an appropriate range of practice-based learning experiences which reflect the nature of modern practice and the range of practice settings of the profession they are preparing to enter” (HCPC, 2017 p.38).

The scope of this project was to support the sustainability of the increase in offers and range of PrBL offers made. Where numbers of PrBL offers were satisfactory the focus was on further developing diverse placements opportunities in keeping with new ways of working, and the requirements of HCPC for PrBL in AHP pre-registration education. The scope of the project includes working closely with NHS Education for Scotland (NES) infrastructure projects, and resources created. The scoping and networking activities carried out by the cross / third sector Practice Education Lead (PEL) from September 2021 identified that several cross / third sector organisations nationally are seeking to employ AHPs within their organisations to enhance their existing service provision. For the purposes of this project cross-sector means working across organisations including third sector (voluntary organisations and charities), private organisations and other non-health organisations.

Stakeholders for this project were identified from previous findings from NES studies, established NES networks, and Scottish Government funding programme key contributors. Stakeholders were also identified using networks created with existing Board PELs, Uni-Professional and Infrastructure PELs. The NES cross / third sector PEL identified current professional networks to determine people and organisations who might have a professional interest in the project.

A NES Cross / Third-sector Stakeholder Placement Recovery group was formed with the purpose of ensuring a consistent, collaborative approach to cross-sector placement recovery through consideration of the four pillars of practice, a shared sense of responsibility, and ensuring the maintenance of quality PrBL placement development, informed by the Quality Standards for Practice Placement and student evaluation. This group met quarterly for the duration of the project.

Task

In keeping with the aim of the NES AHP Placement Recovery programme, the cross / third sector project aimed to apply examples of good practice to offering PrBL experiences for pre-registration AHP students within other organisations and settings i.e. non-health, whilst ensuring the quality of the PrBL is maintained. It also identified settings and organisations who, until that point, hadn't considered offering pre-registration AHP student placements and who were now prepared to do so. This allowed the project to identify the modern and diverse nature of current and potential AHP PrBL opportunities.

Scoping identified that there are no AHPs in some organisations who can offer formal Practice Educator (PE) supervision and assessment of placement learning outcomes. Therefore, another method of delivering formal supervision and assessment would be needed, for example using long arm supervision (LAS). Long arm supervision refers to the process whereby a supervisor (practice educator), who is located at a distance to the practice learning area, takes responsibility for supervising and supporting the student, (NES 2013).

Placement preparation was acknowledged in terms of the amount of time and work it takes. Within the cross / third sector the preferred methods of placement delivery/type were Peer Assisted Learning (PAL), and project placements.

As the projects progressed, and Scotland was experiencing post-COVID economic crisis, the issue of the cost-of-living crisis was identified by HEIs as having a significant and detrimental impact on students' ability to take up face to face/one to one placement, or any placements that required travel and subsistence costs.

Actions

A framework for creating, growing, and sustaining placements was developed based on work by Janet Thompson, Occupational Therapist in NHS Grampian. This drew together the examples shared of good practice in offering non-conventional or atypical placements and provided a template that could be used, amended, and further shared by organisations. The framework was refined based on the outcomes of each small cross / third sector pilot project. A 'Placement Delivery Package' was created which included checklists for long arm supervisors; steps/timetables to be followed; resources that could be used by PEs and students as part of placement preparation and delivery; tutorial support; and suggestions for how PrBL outcomes can be evidenced by students in non-clinical settings.

Small pilot studies were created to trial and evaluate models of PrBL delivery using the emerging framework within selected organisations using a Plan, Do, Study, Act approach to testing change and improving quality. Areas of current good practice were sourced and evaluated with a view to informing these smaller pilot projects. Each small pilot project was evaluated using a qualitative approach and the findings used to inform the aims of subsequent cross / third sector pilot projects. The findings were shared with the stakeholder group members and disseminated via stakeholder networks, HEIs and other means such as social media and roadshows/workshops. These findings were also subsequently shared with new cross / third sector placement providers taking part in the projects, as well as with any potential cross / third sector placement provider who had approached NES for support with developing their PrBL opportunities for AHP students.

There was a firm focus on LAS as part of the NES cross / third sector pilots as there are few AHPs employed within the third sector/non-NHS organisations in comparison to the more conventional placement setting of the NHS. Those organisations who do have AHPs already offer and support the maximum number of placement hours as possible.

Therefore, the LAS PE role was scrutinised, trialled and developed as an integral part of the overall project.

Impact

The cross / third sector project applied examples of good practice to offering PrBL experiences within five cross / third-sector organisations. These organisations were Braid Health & Wellbeing, West Lothian; Central Scotland Adventures, Lanarkshire; Simon Community Scotland, Lanarkshire; a Highland Education location; and Eric Gray Centre, Shetland. It also identified settings and organisations who, until that point, hadn't considered offering pre-registration AHP student placements and who were now prepared to do so. This allowed the project to identify the modern and diverse nature of current and potential AHP practice opportunities.

The five cross / third-sector organisations who volunteered to host these pilot projects, each did so with varying degree of NES support. All cross / third sector pilot project placements were developed as new role emerging opportunities within each organisation, had hybrid or blended attendance, PAL, long arm supervision via NES, and a project component. From June to December 2022, these were primarily occupational therapy and physiotherapy focussed. During this period 22 students attended full time placements totalling 158 weeks. From January to March 2023, placements were occupational therapy and podiatry focussed with two students each attending an 8-week full time placement, and a further 30 students attending for one day over a 6-week period.

The cross / third sector projects created surplus PrBL hours which weren't required by any of the HEIs therefore supporting the immediate needs of placement recovery and graduates entering the workforce in a timely manner.

The cross / third sector organisations all valued the opportunity of being able to offer AHP pre-registration student PrBL and all had clear ideas for projects that could be carried which were authentic in contributing to the service they provided. They welcomed the support from the NES PEL and resources created; and recognised the benefit of regular communication and building a relationship with the HEI, which can continue to be developed overtime. Clear links were established between cross / third-sector organisations and HEIs as part of the sustainability for future PrBL offers and provision.

Students' perceptions of LAS are captured in the relevant NES AHP PrBL Recovery Project Uni-professional reports. The majority of students who provided feedback stated that they felt supported on placement; found the resources provided and resource tools, such as a dedicated Microsoft Teams page, useful or very useful; and all praised the support they received from their PE. Suggestions were also provided to support placement provision improvement.

Learning and Recommendations

Long Arm Supervision: It should be noted that the purpose of the NES AHP Placement Recovery Programme was to recover placement hours for AHP pre-registration students and as such the cross / third sector project met this need. However, the outcomes and results were possible because the NES cross / third sector PEL, and Uni-professional PELs (occupational therapy and physiotherapy) were available to act as, or source, long arm supervisors. As a sustainable aspect this needs to be further supported if these pilots can be replicated as ongoing offers.

For the project outcomes to be sustained it is important to understand the perceptions of the role including the challenges and benefits. The feedback from the LAS PEs in the pilot projects is that several things went well including support from NES and other PEs, the opportunity to access the pre-placement preparation where it was needed, regular contact with other PEs, and a high standard of student engagement and performance. LAS was described as real-world learning in which students benefited from being more responsible for their learning.

Drawbacks from the LAS PE perspectives include the sense of being overwhelmed with information during the preparation stage of the placement, which must be balanced with the PE's main working role and duties. Unsurprisingly, more time and more support from HEIs were offered as suggestions for improving this.

The relationship between the LAS PE and the placement provider is viewed as crucial to the success and sustainability of these placements. When combined with PAL placement

delivery one LAS reflected that keeping student numbers within manageable limits is vital for the PE to allow them to balance placement delivery with their work role.

Further consideration should be given to long arm supervision and how this may be provided more robustly. Huge potential for PrBL opportunities within cross / third sector organisation have been identified, however not all organisations are necessarily in a position (financially or otherwise) to prepare for AHP pre-registration students. This is, to date, an untapped and underdeveloped source of AHP PrBL opportunities which could make a significant contribution to the education of AHP pre-registration students, would support the broadening of the AHP service provision and promote an understanding of working across NHS and cross / third-sector services. The consistent message is that cross / third sector organisations and the HEIs wish to develop and build PrBL opportunities which takes time and workforce to facilitate.

Discussions with HEIs suggest that having the framework for these placements in place will assist but as a LAS list of PEs doesn't exist then they may have to rely on their existing infrastructure at present. Opportunities that may be explored further in the future are outlined below.

Discussion with Health Education England AHP colleagues has identified the development of long arm supervisors using a bank staff system (currently being piloted and evaluated). This would allow payment to happen - e.g. for non-NHS AHPs but also for those NHS AHPs who perhaps work part time and would like to earn extra money or develop their CPD (where their substantive post doesn't allow for this). The outcomes of this project could be applied within Scotland if found beneficial.

An interesting and long- term discussion within the stakeholder group was around targeting retiring AHPs to act as long-arm supervisors, using the notion of a 'Flying Finish' scheme. This would allow the retiring AHP to scale down clinical work with PE responsibilities and a stepped down approach. This would perhaps mean that the PE role would be their final formal role and potentially one which they could continue, on a bank staff basis, after their formal retirement.

Resource to support ongoing development: The NES Cross / Third Sector Stakeholder Group recognised the value of the cross / third sector PEL role and highlight the need for identified capacity to support the continuation of the NES projects. Some cross / third-sector PEs commented on the excellent support they received and one further commented that “knowing NES were available in addition to HEI was useful” in establishing a PrBL offer and placement delivery. The NES cross / third sector project has allowed for resources to be developed to support the sustainability of the placements created; this includes a cross / third sector placement framework and a placement delivery package all of which will be distributed to relevant University programme placement leads, placement organisations and PEs.

Raising awareness of new opportunities: Others made the suggestion of raising the profile of cross / third- sector organisations so that non-NHS placements are held in the same regard as NHS ones by both students and AHP PEs. The NES Cross / Third sector Stakeholder group has allowed this to be raised and discussed as an open and honest starting point. It also allowed examples of good practice to be shared and disseminated giving an opportunity to raise awareness of the benefits of PrBL within third sector and non-NHS settings so seen as the valuable PrBL experience it is by PEs and students alike.

Further recommendations target the longer term and are made in support of the work of each HEI. Feedback from placement providers and practice educators suggest HEIs should continue to offer robust preparation to students particularly around atypical modes and methods of placement delivery so that they can prepare for the modern and diverse practises within the wider job market e.g. hybrid and virtual working patterns. This would support students in managing their expectations for placements in non-healthcare settings. As new areas of modern practice are opening up for graduate AHPs, the need for placements to diversify in a sustainable way is needed. The NES cross / third sector projects offered quality PrBL opportunities that reflect this emerging practice area. Continued stakeholder engagement and collaboration will be vital to continue to take this forward and ensure sustainability.

Further information is available within the learning stack: <https://api.ltb.io/show/ABSQX>

This resource may be made available, in full or summary form, in alternative formats and community languages. Please contact us on **0131 656 3200** or email **altformats@nes.scot.nhs.uk** to discuss how we can best meet your requirements.



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