WHAT MAKES A GOOD PLACEMENT?

A nursing student’s placement is a vital part of their learning experience. Creating a culture of supportive learning for students can have benefits for them and you, as an employer.

This document describes some features of effective student placements in the NHS. All of the examples used are from employers who were each recognised for excellent provision of placements in community settings as runners up at the 2013 Student Nursing Times Awards.

As well as providing food for thought about placement provision, their examples also demonstrate the 6Cs in practice, and the importance of embedding these values in practitioners from the very beginning of their learning, and their careers. The following things contribute to a positive student placement experience:

- **compassion** and other values embedded in the team
- **time to care**
- **excellent communication**
- **competent** leaders, mentors and colleagues
- **commitment** to learning
- **courage** to be flexible and try something different

The runners up in the Student Nursing Times Award 2013 ‘Community placement of the year’ category, who contributed to this document are;

**Bradford District Care Trust, Hillside Bridge health visiting team**

**South Tees Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust, Low Grange community services team**

**Rotherham Doncaster and South Humber NHS Foundation Trust, Student induction team**

**City Healthcare Partnership CIC Hull, Supporting people with long term conditions team.**
Compassion and other values embedded in the team

Clarity of the organisation and team’s values, which are embedded in practice and ‘lived’ by existing staff. This will help the students to align their own values with them, and integrate quickly.

**Compassion in practice - Bradford District Care Trust, ‘Hillside Bridge health visiting’ team**

Despite staff reductions, increased demand for placements (due to the growth of the health visitor workforce), and the added pressures of providing a learning environment for health visitor students, trainee Community Practice Teachers (CPTs) and junior mentors, the Hillside Bridge team has not only maintained but has enhanced the quality of this placement area. Although the team holds a large and demanding corporate caseload, the atmosphere remains welcoming, and enthusiasm for the service that Hillside provides shines through.

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**Time to Care**

Adequate time for staff and students to provide personalised care, and to spend time with patients and their families where appropriate.

**Care in practice - South Tees Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust, ‘Low Grange community services’ team**

This team has made a shift from using paper-based records to electronic patient records, to mobile working which has meant huge changes for staff, but they have used this to their students’ advantage. Students have had the opportunity to see how mobile working benefits patient care and improves documentation and care planning. The team’s transforming services programme has had a positive effect on community nursing, as students learn and understand first-hand how important closer to home care is for patients and families.

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**Excellent Communication**

Time and space for students to reflect with other professionals on care they have given.

**Reflection in practice– City Healthcare Partnership Hull, ‘Supporting people with long term conditions’ team**

Students on placement in this team have regular formal meetings with their mentors. They also each spend one-to-one time with their mentor when they are undertaking clinical duties, visiting patients and travelling to and from patients’ homes. This travelling time is used productively for discussions between the student and their mentor to anticipate and reflect on patient visits and care, and on how the placement is meeting the individual learning needs of the student.
Opportunities for students to contribute to team developments, and discussions and have their opinions valued.

Valuing students in practice - South Tees Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust, ‘Low Grange community services’ team

The time spent with mentors at South Tees helps to build their students’ confidence around delivering the 6Cs as well as the assessment of fundamental nursing skills required to provide excellent nursing care for both patients and families in their own homes. Students are included in complex case management and sometimes challenging situations, addressing things such as advanced communication skills and recognising safeguarding issues. This is always done with the support and supervision of a mentor. Students are encouraged to participate in complex patient management, including attendance at gold standard framework meetings in GP practices. Their opinions are sought and valued by staff.

Competent leaders, mentors and colleagues

A ‘together we are better’ approach.

Team working in practice – Bradford District Care Trust, ‘Hillside Bridge health visiting’ team

‘Together we are better’ is a key ethos of this team, which makes every effort to ensure that students work with each team member. This gives students a full overview of the service and really helps them to integrate. Students’ views are valued, and they are encouraged to be self-directive during periods where mentors need to complete documentation and other work. A live student file has been generated that students can update and record their learning experiences to, which acts as a useful learning tool for subsequent students.

Access to mentors who are exemplary role models, and who are able to take sufficient, dedicated time away from practice to spend it with their students.

Active mentoring in practice: Rotherham, Doncaster and South Humber NHS FT, ‘Student induction’ team

Six qualified community practice educators have been exempted from holding a caseload so they can concentrate on the learning and development needs of the staff. This also allows time to concentrate on pre-registration and post-registration students attending for placement.

All members of the team contribute to student learning.

Team contribution to learning in practice: City Healthcare Partnership Hull, ‘Supporting people with long term conditions’ team

The passion the team feels for delivering high-quality care is made evident to students as soon as they start on placement. Learners are welcomed into the team and their contribution to team working is valued. All team members are encouraged to act as role models to learners, have high professional standards and demonstrate strong leadership skills. This may be a highly pressured workplace, but learners are shown how to undertake all their duties with respect and compassion and shown how to use the nurse’s best coping mechanism – a good sense of humour.
Commitment to learning

Access for the students to lots of different experiences, procedures, and evidence based learning materials - and time to complete their paperwork.

A learning environment in practice – Bradford District Care Trust ‘Hillside Bridge health visiting’ team

The Hillside Bridge Team has worked hard to generate a placement that places an emphasis on assisting students with the transfer from theoretical learning to practice. The team’s focus is on educating first placement students - as well as those moving forward on the programme - that skill is about understanding rather than simply doing. This team has acquired an excellent reputation for providing a thoughtful approach to assessing students against practice standards.

The team has also purposefully set out to create a stress-free learning environment by engaging the whole team and assigning them roles within the practice learning experience. Students are given the opportunity, for example, to work with the team member who manages the caseload allocation and generates the visit schedule so they gain an appreciation of the full health visiting process, from allocation to visit and ongoing plan.

A structured approach – as far as possible. This is difficult in all nursing settings, where you often have to expect the unexpected, but having a plan which you can be flexible with will be beneficial to the student and the employer.

Structured learning in practice: South Tees NHS Foundation Trust. ‘Low Grange community services’ team

The placement experience is tailored to each student, by recognising and identifying each student’s own learning needs. This is achieved by working with each student to develop a specific learning contract at the beginning of their placement. This is a formal and structured way of making sure the student nurse delivers all that is expected of them within the placement, but also focuses on specific learning needs that they have identified, such as palliative care, catheterisation, wound management and diabetes management.
Courage to be flexible and try something different

Exposure to a range of innovative and different ways of working will enhance the learning experience for students and better equip them for the unpredictability of patient care, and a changing approach to nursing.

Personalised learning support tailored to the student’s skills and experience, rather than a ‘cookie cutter’ approach to learning. Enabling access for students to their own space, post tray and learning plan helps them feel valued.

Personalised learning in practice: Bradford District Care Trust, ‘Hillside Bridge health visiting’ team

Acknowledgement and appreciation of an individual student’s needs and requirements are at the heart of the learning environment at Hillside Bridge. The team does not have a generic template approach to the design of the learning experience offered. It recognises that students come from a variety of higher education institutions and different disciplines, and are at different stages of their academic programme. This does pose challenges as the team works to manage different assessment approaches and documentation but it has forged solid relationships with regional higher education institutes (HEIs). Each student is encouraged to consider their own learning objectives, which are then considered and discussed with both primary and associate mentors to develop a progression plan to achievement collaboratively.

Flexibility to allow the student to work around their needs and to change the approach if it’s not working.

Flexibility in practice: Rotherham, Doncaster and South Humber NHS FT, ‘Student induction’ team

What made this placement stand out for the judges of the Student Nursing Times Awards 2013, was the emotional and work-life balance support offered to students. Mentors know the course curriculum so they can understand the pressures on the student. The placement team recognises, for example, that students are often travelling lengthy journeys and using various methods of transport, so staff do all they can to offer them flexibility, while still focussing on the best outcomes for the community it serves.