

Unit Six

Career planning and development for health care assistants from an education provider's perspective

Key messages

Reading this unit will:

- *explain how education providers can support NHS employers to develop their staff*
- *explain the importance of integrating education providers and local NHS employers to identify career development needs*
- *describe the outline content for career planning and training resource.*

Further education providers

The more links there are between the NHS and the local further education colleges, universities and other educational bodies the better. Through these links, PCTs and other NHS trusts can feed the results of training needs assessments from staff members' annual appraisals into the planning process for course development.

With the knowledge education providers have about how health care assistants (HCAs) working in general practice are funded to undertake courses to support their career development; they could offer this information to general practice employers to enable them to proactively support their HCAs career development.

Southwark PCT and Torbay PCT have a variety of training and development initiatives that have come from close working with educational bodies – see the first example below. South Liverpool PCT has also helped HCAs to move forward to undertake new roles as they complete NVQ training in a widening access scheme.

Example: PCT support for HCA education

Southwark PCT is working with South East London Shared Services Partnership Learning and Development Department to create a centre of excellence for HCA training and development. The PCT encourages HCAs to access Primary Care Assistant Practitioner Foundation Degree programmes. The HCA career path to nurse training is encouraged by providing HCAs with opportunities for secondments to pre-registration training.

Torbay PCT supports HCAs to undertake an Open University degree for HCAs to become registered nurses and then move into practice nursing. Individuals sustain close links in primary care throughout the 4-year course. It is all part of workforce planning and recruiting, and retaining an essential workforce for the future. Their professional and educational career framework for nurses and support workers in general practice is a comprehensive framework that:

- *supports the ongoing development and training of both HCAs and nurse practitioners in primary care, and commissions training for needs identified in a nurse profiling initiative*
- *provides a clear career pathway for primary-care-based nurses, demonstrating that primary care can offer exciting career progression and prospects.*

The framework comprises the following:

- *job description template*
- *personal development plan and development cycle*
- *Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats (SWOT) analysis*
- *appraisal*
- *clinical supervision*
- *education and training provision accessible to general practice.*

Thistle Moor Medical Centre has managed to provide career development for staff on the path to becoming HCAs by generating work-based training, as the example below shows.

Example: Work-based training

Some general practices provide a large amount of staff training in-house.

When Thistle Moor Medical Centre trained reception staff as HCAs, they invited specialists in each field to teach staff when no PCT-commissioned education was available. This included blood pressure checks, ECGs, spirometry and Doppler techniques, urine testing, phlebotomy and blood sugar testing.

The transition to HCAs has meant substantial career development for the original reception staff working towards gaining professional qualifications.

Involving the educational body

The educational body needs to be involved early in planning the right sort of training to prepare the HCA workforce for their future roles. There is often a lead-in time of up to a year to validate and accredit new courses, and this should be taken into account when planning a new course.

In 2003, 18 HCAs across Torbay and Teignbridge PCT started an NVQ Level 3 in Care with modules relating to general practice, eg spirometry. The collaboration between the educational body, PCTs and practices employing HCAs in general practice enables NVQ courses for HCAs to be tailored to the particular health setting. Early involvement of the educational body should also ensure the mentors supporting students on training courses are of the right general practice background. The professional and educational career framework that Torbay and Teignbridge PCT has evolved for nurses and support workers employed within general practice is a model that other PCTs might adopt or adapt.¹

Education strategy

The National Institute of Adult Continuing Education (NIACE), the National Institute for Careers Education and Counselling (NICEC), and the Guidance Council, have worked together to research what development is needed to provide an integrated information, advice and guidance model for the public sector.² Their research in Shropshire found that all the NHS trusts had some form of training and education strategy that incorporated lifelong learning. However, the uptake of NVQs varied across the trusts and within different staff groups. Learning accounts had been publicised with varying success. Their proposed model for providing information, advice and guidance to those working in, or contemplating a career in, the NHS recommends five components.

1. **Assessment** – activities to provide individuals with feedback on their performance, and to give the person and their employer more information about their strengths, interests, learning styles etc.
2. **Action planning** – planning of specific, time-based learning and development activities by individuals and PCTs/practices – enhancing performance in current roles or establishing building blocks towards career and personal aspirations.
3. **Learning and skill development** – learning and practical activities to promote or deliver skill improvement.
4. **Exploring work and learning options** – activities to assist individuals and their line managers in understanding current and future career and job options; exploring further learning that will support both career and personal development.
5. **Job access** – activities designed to help individuals access the internal labour market, in line with PCT/practice needs and culture, and job applications and transitions.

Education providers and strategic organisations need to work closely with PCTs and practices to design and deliver this model, which demonstrates the need for good integration of education with career development and progression. They need to understand what the professional requirements are for the various health disciplines (see [Tool - Careers support information for health care assistants](#)).

Summary

- Employers need the support of education providers to develop meaningful career development resources for their staff.
- Employers have access to important sources of data that can be used by education providers to map local needs and capacity requirements for education.
- Education providers and employers need to create opportunities to share information.

References

1. Teignbridge PCT and Torbay PCT. *A Professional Educational and Career Framework for Nurses and Support Workers Employed in General Practice*. Teignbridge PCT and Torbay PCT; 2005.
2. The National Institute of Adult Continuing education (NIACE), the National Institute for Careers Education and Counselling (NICEC), and the Guidance Council. *Development of an Integrated Information, Advice and Guidance Model for the Public Sector*. Shropshire: Learning and Skills Council; 2003.