

Project Team



Sam Abdulla (Project Lead)

Is a registered nurse in Learning Disability, and worked as a nurse with children and young people with complex health needs and life shortening conditions, and as a community Learning Disability nurse for adults and children. Sam is a lecturer and researcher in Learning Disability nursing at Edinburgh Napier university. Sam is the lead for practice learning in nursing at Edinburgh Napier University and in this role sits on several national practice learning groups. Sam is also the Scottish representative for the Learning and Intellectual disability nurse academic network, a UK and Ireland wide network of learning disability nurse lecturers. He has been involved with many inclusive research projects that included people with learning disabilities as citizen researchers. Sam is doing a professional doctorate programme, looking at the factors that affect professional identity development in placements and the impact of these in where Learning Disability nurses choose to work.



Dr. Natasha Spassiani

Natasha is an associate professor and researcher at Edinburgh Napier University. She has a PhD in Disability Studies and completed her postdoctoral studies in knowledge exchange and acute healthcare for people with a Learning Disability. Her research focuses on disability health equity for people with a learning disability and is she likes to do participatory research and knowledge exchange. Natasha leads the Knowledge to Action Research Group in Learning Disability in the School of Health and Social Care, a group that focuses on learning disability research.

Natasha has experience in leading research that is co-designed and co-produced with people with learning disability and communicates and shares information well to a range of people, including people with learning disabilities, families and health and social care staff. Natasha works with the NHS emergency and out of hours care for people with learning disabilities in general hospitals.



Dr. Valerie Houghton

Valerie is a qualified learning disability nurse, specialist practitioner (learning disabilities), registered nurse tutor, and nurse lecturer. She has worked with children and young people and adults with learning disabilities and their families before teaching student learning disability nurses and social workers at university. She is interested in social justice, disability hate crime, stigma, and culture in care services. Valerie has worked closely with health and social work staff for several years. Valerie has worked for many years as nurse tutor and assessor, and has a postgraduate certificate in Higher Education nursing and practice, a masters in Psychology, PhD in Applied Social Science (Law) from Lancaster University and is a Fellow of the Higher Education Academy.



Jacqueline Taylor

Jacqueline is a Registered Nurse in Learning disabilities and Child Health; Lecturer and Programme lead for learning disability Nursing at Edinburgh Napier University. She has lots of experience supporting children and adults with learning disabilities, to address their health needs. In both community and residential settings, working with other professionals to tackle health inequalities that people with a learning disability experience. Jacqueline has been a Nurse academic for 3 years and is eager to become more involved in research to better understand how to provide better care for people with a learning disability. She has a masters in advanced practice in learning disability nursing, which explored the barriers and enablers to ongoing training for newly registered learning disability nurses. Jacqueline is also an active member of the Scottish Learning Disability Lead Nurse group.

Citizen Researchers: Edinburgh Napier University has a good working partnership with grassroots learning disabilities groups (e.g., get2gether, Enable Communities, and Scottish Commission for People with Learning

Disabilities) that have agreed to work with the research team to identify citizen researchers with learning disabilities who are interested in joining the research team. The citizen researchers will be paid members of the team who will be involved in all areas of the research project the data collection tools, data collection, analysis, and sharing the findings.



Alan Middleton

Alan is a Senior Lecturer in Nursing and Community Health; he also is in charge of international exchange experiences for students and staff. Alan has a masters in Community Health, a post graduate certificate in Higher Education, and a degree in Health Studies with a Diploma in Community Health Nursing. He is a Nursing and Midwifery Council registered Learning Disability Nurse, he is also a registered Adult Nurse, and has a Lecturer/Practice Educator qualification. Alan has a special interest in the additional and unmet health needs of people with learning disabilities, his Doctoral study is a PhD by Previous Publication with focussed on promoting the sexual health and wellbeing of people with learning disabilities. Alan is an External Examiner for other UK universities and a Fellow of the Higher Education Academy.



Mark Gallagher

Mark is a Senior lecturer in Learning Disability Nursing at Glasgow Caledonian University. Mark graduated in 2003 and worked as a Community Learning disability Nurse in NHS Lanarkshire and NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde before becoming a lecturer in 2014. Mark is the deputy chair of the Scottish Learning Disability Leads Group and is part of the Positive Behaviour Support Scottish community of practice. Mark is also lead for Learning Disability Nursing at Glasgow Caledonian University and was the programme lead for all fields of nursing.



Linda Steven

Linda is a registered nurse and has worked in lots of roles. She has written university programmes and lead university modules and teaches at undergraduate and post-graduate levels. Linda believes that the experiences and diversity that students bring to the learning makes a situation better and enjoys building relationships with her students. Linda regularly gets good student feedback and has been nominated for many awards.

Linda had part-time clinical practice role until 2018, so has a good understanding of current practice. She is a member of lots of strategic learning disability nursing networks at a local and national level. Linda is a learning disability nurse and a mental health nurse; her main area of interest is in forensic nursing. In practice Linda was nominated for and won awards for projects she ran.

Linda is the Lead for Learning Disability Practice Placements at Glasgow Caledonian University. Linda has set up and chairs the national West of Scotland Learning Disability Practice Placement Group. Linda is doing a Professional Doctorate in Nursing, contributing to She is also a Fellow of the Higher Education Academy.

Project Proposal

Background

The Scottish Government asks three universities in Scotland to deliver Learning Disability Nurse education. Edinburgh Napier University (ENU) and Glasgow Caledonian University (GCU) have worked together for a long time on projects such as the “National Model”. This started in 2010 when the Scottish Government decided to only deliver Learning Disability Nurse education in two central places: ENU in the East of Scotland and GCU in the West of Scotland.

Both universities work together to support Learning Disability Nurse education and the needs of the Learning Disability Nurse workforce to improve the health and well-being of people with learning disabilities. This is done by working with health and social care services and the government. We also work with

including the Scottish Learning Disability Nurse Lead Group, the Scottish Government, NHS Education Scotland (NES), The Chief Nursing Officer Department, and The Scottish Executive Nurse Directors Group.

Despite both universities working together and the support of these partners, Learning Disability Nursing education still has a lot of problems. There are less and less people applying to nursing programmes, particularly Learning Disabilities Nursing. This means Learning Disability Nursing programmes do not get enough students, and do not meet the numbers of students expected by the Scottish Government.

Not having enough Learning Disability Nurses might impact the health and wellbeing of people with learning disabilities and increase the effect of health inequalities. In 2022, NES said that Learning Disability Nursing was an area of concern, and that we needed to do something different to attract people into the profession and keep people who are already nurses working in services.

For students, accessing placements, is hard for a lot of reasons. Health and social care services are still having difficulty support student nurses after COVID, having less Learning Disability Nurses to support students, Learning Disability services changing how they work and new education standards all cause challenges for practice placements. Without having a enough placements to prepare Learning Disability Nurses, nurses might entering the workforce unprepared to reduce the health inequities experienced by people with learning disabilities.

This project wants to understand these challenges and improve the experience in placements for student Learning Disability Nurses. We will do this by improving access to a wider range of placements in new and different practice placement settings, recognising that learning disability nursing skills might be useful elsewhere to improve the health and well-being of people with a learning disability, their families and carers.

How we will do the project

Project Aims

To work together with people with learning disabilities and student nurses to develop a model of practice learning which can be work in a lot of different health and social care settings. By going to these placements student learning

disability nursing will develop the skills and knowledge to meet the health needs of people with learning disabilities.

Objectives

1. To understand what makes it more difficult, and what makes it easier to learn in practice learning environments that support or could support learning disability nursing education.
2. To understand the lived experiences of people with learning disabilities within health and social care and consider how making learning disability nursing practice education better can be informed by these experiences.
3. To develop a model of practice learning that could work in a range of health and social care environments to;
 - Place more students in practice learning environments that are already used,
 - Develop new a practice placement.

Research questions

1. What is the current landscape of practice learning in nursing as it relates to providing care for people with learning disabilities? (*Stage 1*)
2. What are the needs of people with learning disabilities in health and social care settings? (*Stage 2*)
3. How can the practice learning experience for student learning disability nurses be enhanced? (*Stage 3*)

Research Stages:

Stage 1: Looking at the research that has already been done in practice learning in nursing, across all the different types of nursing and other health and social care professions. This is so we can understand what is already known about what is helpful or what is not helpful.

We will also look to speak with people who work in other universities to understand what types of placement models they have. We will do this through an online survey

Stage 2: Speaking to people with learning disabilities, their carers, and those who matter to them to understand what skills they think learning disability nurses need. This is so we can understand people thoughts and experiences

better. Once we have spoken to people, we will make a list of the things that people thought were important and ask them to vote on which of the issues matter most. We will then focus on these.

We would like to speak to between fifteen and twenty people at this stage.

We would join this up with the information we found in stage 1

Stage 3: Speaking to student nurses and speaking to people who do or could provide placements to understand what is good and bad about placements, and what could make that better. We would like to speak to people in groups of seven. We will want to discuss the things we found in stage 1, the new education standards for nursing and what they mean for learning disability nursing education in Scotland.

We will speak to student nurses in different groups to the nurses and managers, just in case they are uncomfortable speaking together.

We will record these conversations and then look to find any common themes, and any thing that is difficult, or anything that might be a chance to do something new.

These groups will also be asked to discuss what might be needed to develop new placements in the areas voted for stage 2.

Findings from Stages 1- 3 will be brought together to make a new model of practice placement, we might develop more than one model. will be developed. People who took part in any stage will be asked to join an expert group to give feedback on the model and how we put it in place.

Ethics

Ethical approval will be obtained from the School of Health & Social Care at Edinburgh Napier University and Glasgow Caledonian University before the project starts. We will start applying for this as soon as the project is approved.

Safeguarding

This project looked at by an experienced researcher at Edinburgh Napier University who offered feedback.

Getting Ethical approval and following what is agreed will keep people safe.

People with a learning disability will be supported to take part in the research project by the research team who is very experienced in inclusive research.

Edinburgh Napier University safeguarding policy has been submitted as part of this project paperwork.

Timescales and Key Performance Indicators

Key Performance Indicators (KPIs)	Date
To get Ethical approval to do the project from the university ethics committee.	Dec 2024 – March 2025
Find a research assistant to do stage 1 and help with stage 2 and 3	Dec 2024 – March 2025
Looking at the research that has already been done in practice learning in nursing	April 2025
Speaking to people with learning disabilities, their carers, and those who matter to them to understand what skills they think learning disability nurses need.	May – June 2025
Speaking to student nurses and speaking to people who do or could provide placements to understand what is good and bad about placements, and what could make that better	June – July 2025
Go through the information from these stages and understand what is happening.	April – August 2025
Design a new model and check with reference group for feedback	September – October 2025
Identify as many places to try this as we can.	November 2025
Test the model in these places. Because of when placements happen this might be after the 12 months. We have spoken to the RCN about this.	November 2025 – January 2026

Impact

Outputs

A co-produced model of practice learning that will help student nurses in a lot of different health and social care placements. This will help student learning disability nurses to better meet the needs of people with learning disabilities.

An article that will be published within a nursing education journal so people can know what we have done. Citizen researchers will be co-authors of any article to make sure they are included in all parts of the project.

Outcomes

This project will develop a new model of practice placements that can support learning disability student nurses to develop the skills and knowledge that the Nursing and Midwifery Council say that they should. This will also allow us to have a better understanding of the health and social care needs of people with learning disabilities.

This project will help us understand what practice placements are like in learning disability nursing programmes, and the challenges and opportunities that the Nursing and Midwifery Council Standards for Student Supervision and Assessment might cause.

Any model will be tested across lots of different places and NHS boards, learning disability nursing leaders and NHS Education for Scotland have agreed to help us with this. It is possible that the model may be used in settings like education, social care, specialist learning disability wards and services.

Impact assessment and evaluation

The project outputs will be evaluated in different ways.

1. As we build the model, we will ask for feedback from an expert group to make sure we are thinking about what we did in each of the stages.
2. Information will be taken from online placement information systems.

This will tell us

- a. How many learning disability nursing placements there are before and after we use the model.
- b. Identify how many students a placement can support before and after we use the model. pre and post model implementation.

3. We will ask student nurses and the people who support them to give us feedback on how well the model works.

Dissemination

We will share the findings of this in lots of different ways. We will do things like write articles for nursing journals. We will try to write an article for a journal that people can access for free. Citizen researchers will be asked to take part in writing and presenting at conferences.

This project will take place in Scotland, the model might be useful in other rural places like Wales, Cumbria, and Cornwall have similar problems with practice placements. To help with this we will send this our colleagues across the UK and Ireland.

Equity, diversity and inclusion

This project will make sure that people with learning disabilities have fully included role in each stage of the project. People with learning disabilities will be citizen researchers. They will be paid members of the research team, and be involved in, collecting and understanding the information collected in conversations and sharing these through articles and conferences.

This project will try to meet the health and social care needs of people with learning disabilities, by thinking about the of health and social care environments that they might use and their experiences; developing a model that means student learning disability nurses will have placements in these environments. By including people with learning disabilities as part of the research team the, we will make sure the in the voices of people with learning disabilities are throughout the whole project.

Environmental Sustainability

We will try to make sure this project has as little impact on the environment as possible. Project team meetings will all be held online, and all papers will be shared digitally. Where groups are held in person, this will be done locally. The research team are based across Scotland which will mean we need to do less long travel. We will only print papers when people need this for accessibility.

Section C: Project Costs and Resources

Item	Cost £	Explanatory note	Funded by?
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Research assistant	£19,000	Research Assistant to do stage 1 and help with stage 2 and 3	RCN Foundation
Citizen Researchers (People with a LD)	£1,800 (3 people for 30 hours each at £20)	To pay citizen researchers for their time working on the project as part of the research team.	RCN Foundation
Transportation cost	£200	Transport for citizen researchers and other people who take part in groups.	RCN Foundation
Catering/Event Planning	£500	Catering for people who take part in groups (tea/coffee/other refreshments).	RCN Foundation
Printing	£400	Printing cost of materials for accessibility requirements.	RCN Foundation
Transcribing	£5,000	Transcription of focus groups with health and social care service participants.	RCN Foundation
Dissemination activity	£1000	Help project team to take part in conferences.	RCN Foundation
Total Budget	£27,900		