

GATEWAYS TO THE PROFESSIONS

Growing our own professionals for the new NHS



**Utilising credit and qualifications
frameworks to support learning
and career progression**

Part of the
Thames Gateway Project

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Background

In 2004 the Secretary of State for Education and Skills commissioned an independent report to examine routes into the professions. Sir Alan Langlands, Vice-Chancellor of Dundee University and former Chief Executive of the National Health Service in England from 1994-2000* led the work and made recommendations to Ministers on action that could be taken by employing organisations to provide clear, accessible gateways for people who wished to pursue a career in the professions; his report was submitted on 20 July 2005. There was a concern that the introduction of variable tuition fees would have an adverse impact on recruitment to the professions. The Langlands Report highlighted the challenging issue of how to widen access to the professions.

The Government's response was published on 1 November 2005. One of the key elements of the response was the establishment of a 'Gateways to the Professions' development fund. The aim of the fund was to support projects tackling the full range of issues and barriers faced by people seeking to enter the professions through higher education. The importance of collaborative working between professional bodies, employers and education providers was a key issue raised by Sir Alan Langlands and consequently the fund placed a strong emphasis on such collaborative partnerships.

* <http://www.dundee.ac.uk/principalsoffice/biographies/siralanbiog.htm>

Bids were invited in two phases which addressed:

- **widening participation**
- **diverse learning needs and diversity of higher education provision**
- **issues relating to equality & diversity**
- **issues relating to recruitment & retention in the professions**
- **issues relating to access to the professions**
- **fair & equitable recruitment practices**
- **social mobility**
- **flexible learning/training routes; and**
- **access to information about career choices.**

The Department of Health's Widening Participation Unit was successful in securing a second round bid on behalf of a stakeholder group from the Thames Gateway area, where it was thought that given the scale of the area, the findings could be comparable across other healthcare economies and so form the basis for introducing similar approaches to staff development in other healthcare organisations and communities.

The second round bids were announced by Bill Rammell, Minister for State at DIUS, at the Widening Participation in Higher Education conference, 10 May 2007.

" Today I'm pleased to announce that the second round of the Gateways to the Professions Development Fund is supporting thirteen organisations in the delivery of projects focused on a range of cross-cutting issues. These include:

**widening participation;
social mobility;
equality and diversity in the
professions; and
access to information and resources.**

“Contracts have been signed with four Aimhigher Partnerships, the DH on behalf of the Thames Gateway Project, the Social Mobility Foundation and QED-UK (an organisation from Bradford representing ethnic-minorities), amongst others.

“These projects will encourage students from a range of backgrounds to take up professional career paths.

“Our investment of time, money and resources to widen participation in HE and beyond continues. This fight demands focus, strong partnerships and commitment. But it’s essential.

“Giving everyone with talent and ability, whatever their background or circumstance, the chance to go to university and succeed is essential to our future economic prosperity and social well being.”

The Thames Gateway Project

The project theme was based on developing progression routes into the professions for staff already employed in lower grades.

The aim of the project was to identify and create innovative workforce solutions that will prepare professionals to respond to the service improvement requirements of the NHS as it seeks to develop integrated care pathways for clients and patients, and to meet the key performance standards identified in the NHS plan.

The project encompassed nursing and the allied health professions. The intention was to develop effective ways for the NHS to grow its own professionals. Given the financial constraints in the NHS, the emphasis of the project was on better utilisation of the talents and potential of the current workforce, in particular enabling support staff to develop and extend their skills. The project assessed how foundation degrees (FDs) could be used to enable staff to grow into much needed Associate/assistant practitioner (AP) roles.

Sub projects

Seven sub projects were commissioned from the Thames Gateway area to undertake work to review specific elements of learning and progression for this population.

These projects were:

- **E-learner support system (led by the Open Learning Partnership);**
- **E-mentoring programme (led by the Brightside Trust);**
- **A good practice guide on negotiated curriculum design and co-delivery, National Vocational Qualifications and Foundations Degrees (partnership between London South Bank University and Newham University Hospital NHS Trust);**
- **Patient and public involvement (led by Benedict Taylor Associates);**
- **Workplace learning (led by Jan Walmsley Associates);**
- **Careers information and advice (led by Anne L. Sabine Associates); and**
- **Utilising credit and qualifications frameworks to support learning and career progression (led by Canterbury Christ Church University).**

The following guide and case studies demonstrate how best to utilise Credit and Qualifications Frameworks (CQFs) to support the learning and career progression for NHS employees in bands 1-4.

Utilising Credit and Qualifications Frameworks (CQFs) to support the learning and career progression

Objective

To produce a guide and case studies on utilising CQFs to support the learning and career progression for NHS employees in bands 1-4.

The full report is available at www.skillsforhealth.org.uk/gateway/cqfs

Methodology

A scoping exercise to assess the range of education and training provision on offer in the Thames Gateway area, followed by case study interviews to understand local processes and challenges and an analysis of the policies and procedures for the accreditation of prior and experiential learning (AP(E)L) and recognising and recording progress and achievement (RARPA).

Stakeholders were brought together in three project teams to take forward the detailed work of each of the seven sub projects, under delegated authority given by the Project Steering Group. Project team three stakeholders were responsible for the e-learner support, the e-mentoring and careers information and advice sub projects. The members of this project team are recorded at the end of this document.

Summary

This report provides a draft guide for supporting and maximising portability of credit within and between education providers and employers. It considers the findings within the context of:

- * The need to develop the skills and employability of the existing workforce through widening participation in learning and a demand-led skills system.
- * Demographic influences of an ageing population, an increase in people suffering from long term illness, and the implications for the health care workforce and future service demands.
- * The need to develop the skills of staff in bands 1-4 of the NHS pay and careers framework, who have traditionally had few learning opportunities to develop and progress in non-traditional roles.

* The need to recognise non-formal and informal learning acquired in the workplace, and to develop competences and qualifications that are transferable and enable progression.

* Developments in credit and qualifications frameworks in Scotland, Wales, Northern Ireland and England and their alignment with the European Qualifications Framework, in particular in the QCF currently under 'test and trial'.

* The need to provide effective health care services in the rapidly expanding Thames Gateway area.

A scoping exercise assessed the range of education and training provision; policies and procedures for the accreditation of prior and experiential learning (AP(E)L) and recognising and recording progress and achievement (RARPA) were analysed; and case study interviews with managers and staff in NHS Trusts were undertaken to obtain exemplars of how these processes are/ are not being used to support learning and career progression. The findings indicate that:

* HE and FE institutions in the Thames Gateway area offer a variety of programmes at NQF levels 1-5. These range from BTEC introductory diplomas in health and social care at level 1 to Foundation Degrees at levels 4/5.

* There are a number of awarding bodies and qualifications which can be confusing to individuals seeking a programme at the correct level for their needs and abilities. Additionally, both NQF and FHEQ levels are used.

* Healthcare staff and their managers have difficulty in locating and interpreting this information. There is a lack of understanding regarding how courses and experiential learning can be used to develop qualifications and career progression. Advice from managers to staff tends to be ad hoc and based on informal contacts.

* Communication between NHS Trusts and education providers can be problematic. There is a lack of understanding of organisational structures, who to approach, processes for programme development, etc.

* Key drivers for role development include seeking Foundation Trust status and are not necessarily based on workforce needs.

* Workforce plans are not well developed, there is work still to be undertaken on developing career ladders and embedding Agenda for Change and the Knowledge and Skills Framework (KSF).

* Much in-service training is undertaken, including e-learning modules for mandatory training, but this is not accredited or utilised to gain formal credits via the APEL/ RARPA routes. The processes for gaining credit in this way are not well utilised or understood.

* Challenges to promoting education and training opportunities for staff in bands 1-4 include workload/lack of time, perceived commitment of the staff member/learner, the need to provide someone to support the learner in the workplace, funding, and lack of knowledge and guidance regarding what is available.

* Challenges to developing learning and career progression identified by staff in bands 1-4 include a lack of understanding on the part of service users and carers regarding the new roles, some resistance from colleagues in more senior roles, and lack of progression opportunities beyond band 4.

* Examples of good practice include providing time for continuing professional development (for all bands of staff), using the appraisal system to identify learning needs and development plans, providing strong workplace support, the appointment of an Information, Advice and Guidance (IAG) lead, having clear role descriptions and plans for identifying new roles.

A number of good practice points and areas that could be improved emerged and were used to draft a guide and some recommendations for utilising credit and qualifications frameworks to support learning and career progression.

Recommendations

For healthcare organisations

Develop clear learning and development strategies linked to service and workforce plans, incorporating a career framework approach.

Identify skills required for particular roles linked to national occupational standards/ national workforce competences and the knowledge and skills framework.

Map in-service training packages to NOS/NWC and the KSF and consider using quality assurance processes (e.g. RARPA) to record learner achievement and facilitate transferability of learning.

Utilise portfolios/ learner achievement records to maintain a log of learning.

Use the appraisal system and personal development planning to chart career progression and direct learning activities in a systematic way.

Provide expert IAG to staff to ensure appropriate programmes of learning are planned and accessed in a systematic and co-ordinated way.

For education providers

Develop effective lines of communication with education providers and work in partnership to design relevant programmes of study.

Develop effective lines of communication with health care organisations and work in partnership to design relevant programmes of study.

Develop flexible and adaptable programmes that meet the needs of health care organisations' workforce plans.

Aim for consistency of terminology, credit usage and transferability of credit between institutions.

Work collaboratively to develop a co-ordinated approach to programme development to avoid unnecessary duplication and maintain viability of programmes.

Provide clear information regarding the use of credit and qualifications frameworks and promote the use of APEL and WBL more effectively, possibly using exemplars to illustrate progression pathways.

Map units of learning/ modules/ qualifications to NOS/NWC and the KSF.

Provide information regarding which role(s) programmes are appropriate for or will provide skills/ knowledge/ competences for, possibly using a career framework approach (SfH).

Consider ways in which in-service training programmes could contribute to the award of credit (e.g. using APEL).

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