



Case Study 1: Work-Related Learning – Clinical Skills Centres

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Background to Working in Health Access Network

Between 2003 and 2009, the University of Aberdeen Medical School participated in the Working in Health Access Programme and Network (WHAN), consecutive phases of a national widening participation in health careers project. This was sponsored by the Scottish Funding Council and NHS Education Scotland, and focused particularly on schools under-represented in Full-Time Higher Education (FTHE), or with a remote and rural profile. Since the end of the WHAN project in summer 2009, the Medical School has embedded and continued to develop its widening participation programme, in collaboration with partners across north-east and north Scotland.

Work Experience and the role of Clinical Skills Centres

As Schools Project Officer for the Medical School and WHAN Field Officer for north-east and north Scotland since 2003, a major part of my role has been to develop, for S4 –S6 pupils interested in health careers (but focused particularly in my own case on Medicine and Medical Science) a programme of progressively more challenging events such as practical workshops, expert

presentations and conferences providing insight into these careers. While events have in the past taken place in a variety of venues including schools and community centres across north Scotland, all are now held in the new Clinical Skills Centres on the medical campuses at Foresterhill Aberdeen and Raigmore Inverness. Access to these centres has been a very important development: their state-of-the-art equipment and expert staff, otherwise involved in the training of undergraduate and post-graduate health professionals, make it possible for pupils to participate in simulated ‘real life’ situations, so that genuine work experience activities can take place. The simulated wards, sophisticated electronic manikin ‘patients’ and superb equipment can offer very illuminating experiences, as our feedback from schools consistently shows.

Each year we offer three key events in the Centre for Health Science Inverness, for Highland schools:

(i) Fancy Working in Health?

For this whole-day event held in the Clinical Skills Centre, Raigmore, Inverness, network providers recruit a wide range of health professionals to lead hands-on workshops for S4 pupils in clinical skills of nursing, midwifery, physiotherapy, radiography,



occupational therapy, paramedic, dietetics, medicine and medical science. Pupils are assigned to at least two workshops in line with expressed interests, but with some allocated activities and some free-choice time as well. Lecturing staff and senior university students of most professions are also on hand to talk about admissions and student life.

(ii) So You Want to be a Doctor?

These whole-day medicine and medical science workshops, held in the Clinical Skills Centre, Raigmore, provide small groups of S5 pupils with the opportunity to work in different consultant-led clinical teams where they experience a range of clinical situations. Aberdeen University Admissions Dean for Medicine provides an information session and medical students attend at lunchtime to talk informally about student life.

(iii) 50 Years of Medicine and Medical Science

These S5 and S6 full-day events, now in their second year, consist of presentations by a range of eminent consultants drawn from the university and NHS, highlighting what each considers to be the most important advances in their field in recent times. A Q&A session follows each presentation



and pupils then vote electronically for what they consider to be the most important advance in each case. The day ends with an informal discussion session where speakers and pupils speculate on where each field of research might go in the next 50 years. The events are open to all schools in the area and have attracted capacity audiences in both Inverness and Aberdeen.

Working in Partnership to deliver valuable Work-Related Learning

Building a network of partners (including higher education institutions, schools, the independent health sector and NHS Scotland) linked to Highland Education's Determined to Succeed project has been essential in achieving our goals. For 'medicine and medical science-only' events, the medical school and Clinical Skills Centres



organise and staff events. For general health careers, the network leads, with all partners involved in collaborative planning and recruitment of professional staff for events. Highland Education facilitates the distribution of information to the schools, arranges school bookings and shares in the processing of evaluation forms, which we always distribute and report back on. Highland Education also handles the distribution of attendance certificates, which are provided for all events so that so that pupils may keep a record of attendance and also mention that as evidence of work-related learning in subsequent Higher Education applications. Building a network of people has been the key to the quality of events we offer.

Helping People to make Career Choices

The events do not provide all the opportunities young people need in order to get into the health professions, but they are seen to contribute greatly, as our ever-increasing numbers of applicants and positive feedback shows. For those pupils who, having tried their hand, decide that a health career is not for them (and our feedback demonstrates some of these cases too), network partners look on these events as nevertheless offering a very

positive experience in that it may have helped a young person avoid making a very costly mistake in career choice in both financial and personal terms.

Case Study

For each of the work-related learning programmes referred to in the previous case study: “Fancy Working in Health?” “So you Want to Be a Doctor?” and “50 Years of Medicine and Medical Science”, university students take part in the events to talk about their studies and other aspects of student life to the school pupils. Often this happens in an informal way, such as at lunch times or during breaks between scheduled programme activities.