

Valuing the Role of Educators in Practice

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The correlation between enabling high quality practice learning environments for health and care learners and their ability to deliver quality person-centred care is not a new concept. Indeed, Health Education England (HEE) outlined the importance of improved clinical placement education systems, whereby healthcare education and training is well-led, effectively managed and provides supportive learning environments (HEE 2017).

Despite the Covid-19 pandemic, in 2020, Greater Manchester (GM) embarked on a Health Education England Funded pioneering Enabling Effective Learning Environment project, reviewing the complex factors surrounding sufficiency and effectiveness of practice learning environments.

To start the project a period of extensive scoping took place by the four GM Universities together with practice educators from their partner health and care organisations (March -September 2020). Initial scoping clearly demonstrated the pivotal role that educators in practice play in ensuring the positive learning experience for not only student nurses but for all health and care learners.

An Enabling Effective Learning Environment project sub-group was therefore set up to focus on the key topic area of 'Educating the Educators'. One of the project outcomes was to develop a GM Professional Development Framework that for the first time identifies the knowledge, skills and behaviours required of practice educators to meet the health and well-being needs of the 2.8 million GM population. The framework identifies:

- Roles and responsibilities of educators from within diverse practice learning environments

- Knowledge, skills and behaviours required of a GM educator in practice
- The journey to becoming an educator in practice
- Trajectory for educator's professional development: including a gap analysis to ascertain any development and future needs

The Framework is underpinned by a revised GM Governance Framework for Education, providing support and resources for educators to progress, whilst also providing sustainability of the EELE project outcomes.

Integral to the framework is the GM Educator Profile with its three levels, clearly identifying the knowledge, skills and behaviours required by the educator (see table 1 that provides an extract taken from the profile). Level one is the minimum standard which must be achieved by all those encountering learners. Subsequent levels of achievement are recognised as part of an individual's continuous professional development within their educator role. For example, Level 2 is a designated person who has responsibility for learners within a learning environment, whilst Level 3 are those in roles who lead, facilitate and manage health and care education from within the practice learning environment.

Integrated within the profile is the Advance Higher Education Fellowship UK Professional Standards Framework (UKPSF), enabling us to award fellowships for educators working in practice learning environments <https://www.advance-he.ac.uk/fellowship>

A consultation to review the GM educator profile and its content has been carried out with educators in practice. The 44 responses from an inline questionnaire identified that the knowledge skills and behaviours in the profile are indicative of those required by GM educators in practice. Highlighted were gaps around the current and ongoing education and development opportunities for educators. Ongoing work includes collating examples of career pathways across the diverse range of learning environments. Our consultation has particularly highlighted that educators are highly motivated and enthusiastic and are also extremely highly qualified in GM. All educators started their educator role journey from a firm clinical foundation and most reached their status through accidental encounters in health and care settings, often taking risks to progress their practice educator pathway.

The findings from the project have been valuable and, in many ways, confirm that more targeted support is required for those educating our healthcare learners and for those who lead on setting the culture for practice learning.

The next steps in our project are to build on the development of the Professional Development Framework for Educators; using the Educator Profile as a benchmark whereby educators can self-assess their current knowledge, skills and behaviours and for it to inform quality assurance processes. Additionally, a research-based Educator Career Pathway and the future development of a Practice Education Centre of Excellence will provide a practice guided, university informed partnership towards sustainable evidenced based practice education.

Created and launched in May of this year is the first GM Health and Care Learning Environment Strategy with more information found at: Greater Manchester Health and Care Learning Environment Strategy 2021 – 2024: <https://sites.manchester.ac.uk/effective-learning-environments>

Table. 1 Extract taken from the GM Educator Profile

	Knowledge	Skills	Behaviours
	Those supporting practice education / learning will have a sound knowledge of:	Those supporting practice education / learning will demonstrate the skills to:	Those supporting practice education / learning will display values and behaviours which will:
L1	K1 Their own role and how that role supports the delivery of quality health & social care	S1 Demonstrate to learners the required skills within their role	B1 Encompass equality and diversity values within their role
L2	K1 How to prepare the learning environment for learners	S1 Provide and deliver a robust local induction to ensure learners are practice ready and respective expectations are well managed	B1 Welcome learners into a caring, compassionate and supportive safe and effective learning environment
L3	K1 Using innovative approaches in the creation of quality assured environments for learning	S1 Use negotiation as a tool to open new and maintain the quality of existing learning environments	B1 Endorse creativity and flexibility for learning environments

References

Advance HE Fellowship: <https://www.advance-he.ac.uk/fellowship>

Health Education England (2017) Facing the Facts, Shaping the Future – A draft health and care workforce strategy for England to 2027, Health Education England:

<https://www.hee.nhs.uk/sites/default/files/documents/Facing%20the%20Facts%2C%20Shaping%20the%20Future%20%E2%80%93%20a%20draft%20health%20and%20care%20workforce%20strategy%20for%20England%20to%202027.pdf>