



FINAL REPORT EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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Project Number 174/02

Project Team



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Acknowledgements

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The learning materials would not have been developed to the high standard achieved had it not been for the hard work and expertise of the writing and review teams. Thanks also go to all participants at the regional working groups and to the many organisations who hosted the project team at conferences and workshops. These were invaluable to the project's dissemination strategy.

Finally, particular thanks go to; the project evaluator, web designers and graphic designers who were pivotal to the project and very much part of the core project team; the universities' senior management teams who were supportive to the project and the project team throughout. The project administrators and project managers are particularly acknowledged and thanked for their hard work, commitment and motivation and the professional manner in which they conducted the work undertaken.

Joan Mulholland

Project Director

Preface

This report has been written for a wide range of audiences and for a number of purposes. This report is for submission to the Higher Education Academy (HEA), Department of Employment and Learning (Northern Ireland) (DEL) and the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE). It is also of interest to anyone who is involved in the area of practice or work-based learning, the development of web resources or managing a project. Sections One and Two follow the template required for the formal reporting mechanism and Sections Three, Four, Five, Six and Seven are accounts of the various aspects of the project which it was felt by the Steering and Working Group as important to capture and document.

SECTION ONE: EXECUTIVE SUMMARY: This section is for future publication as the orange booklet and information pack produced by the HEA and the HEFCE. This is a summary of all the sections.

SECTION TWO: MAKING PRACTICE BASED LEARNING WORK ...OUTPUTS AND OUTCOMES has six aspects to it and is specified by the HEA guidelines.

SECTION THREE: SCOPING PRACTICE BASED LEARNING outlines the context, methodology, literature review, findings and recommendations arising from five discipline specific case studies undertaken in Phase One of the project.

SECTION FOUR: SUPPORTING PRACTICE BASED LEARNING considers the experiences and work undertaken in phase two of the project, in the development of the web portal, learning materials, mapping of standards and other project outputs.

SECTION FIVE: ENABLING PRACTICE BASED LEARNING discusses Phase Three of the project; strategies and approaches adopted in the dissemination and evaluation of the project outcomes.

SECTION SIX: MANAGING THE MAKING PRACTICE BASED LEARNING WORK PROJECT reflects upon how the people, processes and resources were managed in order to meet the required project outcomes.

SECTION SEVEN: THE WAY FORWARD IN PRACTICE AND WORK BASED LEARNING provides the summary and conclusions and considers the future of the project during the transferability phase.

1.1 Introduction

Practice education is a core element of all educational programmes that prepare health care professionals for academic award and registration to practice. Ensuring quality and effectiveness involves partnership working between higher education institutions (HEI's) and health care providers, social care communities, voluntary and independent sectors offering client care throughout the United Kingdom and Republic of Ireland. Clearly practitioners who support, supervise and assess learners for entry to their respective professions need to be well prepared and supported in their roles as practice educators. However it would appear that the nature of this support and preparation varies across disciplines and that good practice is not easily shared.

With this in mind, the Making Practice Based Learning Work (MPBLW) project aimed to make practitioners more effective at supporting and supervising students in the workplace across a range of health care disciplines. The Department of Employment and Learning (Northern Ireland) and the Higher Education Funding Council for England funded this collaborative project involving staff from Ulster, Northumbria and Bournemouth Universities. The predicted outcomes for each phase of the project were:

Phase One:

- Identify and document good practice on how practitioners are prepared for their educational role.

Phase Two:

- Develop and evaluate learning materials for use by practitioners across five health care disciplines.
- Make learning materials available in a number of efficient media, e.g. paper, electronic, CD-ROM and web-based.
- Develop a programme applicable to interprofessional and uniprofessional contexts.
- Widen access for a multicultural workforce.

Phase Three

- Embed best educational practice through the establishment of an academic-practitioner network.
- Disseminate a range of materials and processes across the wider academic and health and social care communities.

This executive summary presents an overview of the MPBLW project completed between January 2003 and March 2006. A more detailed report follows the summary and is available in print form as well as being accessible at the project website. (www.practicebasedlearning.org)

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Overview of project phases

1.2 Overview of project phases

The project was completed in three phases of unequal length. Due to funding issues the project did not officially commence until March 2003.

1.2.1 Phase One

Phase One was undertaken during the first eighteen months of the project and involved a 'scoping' exercise using the case study method. The case study focused upon five health care professions namely Dietetics, Nursing, Occupational Therapy, Physiotherapy and Radiography and considered the nature of the preparation of practice educators. As a result of this exercise, seven key themes were identified and these were used to structure the development of resources in Phase Two. The themes were:

- Learning & teaching in practice
- Supporting learning & teaching in practice
- Reflection on & in practice
- Assessment in practice
- Interprofessional learning in practice
- Diversity in practice
- Generic & specific skills resources

The full case study is available on the project website:

<http://www.practicebasedlearning.org/casestudy/case%20studies.htm>

1.2.2 Phase Two

Phase Two commenced in September 2004 and was completed in July 2005. Responding to data from the case study, the goal of this phase was to design, pilot and implement resources to enhance preparation of practice educators, being cognisant in particular of the needs of culturally diverse health and social care teams. Phase Two had two main outputs: first a web-portal of learning resources and second a series of commissioned learning materials available in a variety of media. Both outputs are freely accessible, aimed in particular for use by practice educators in curriculum design and delivery. These learning resources and materials can be accessed from the project web site: www.practicebasedlearning.org

Focusing first on the web-portal of learning resources, the six content-specific themes from Phase One were used to group learning resources and a search facility was provided. The resources included on the web-site were identified by a range of stakeholders and quality assured by a panel of evaluators including practitioners, academics and experts in the themed areas. In addition, the project team identified the need for a theme around generic skills that might apply across all the areas.

The case study revealed that these themes were central to the development of any person involved in supporting learning in practice settings. As such it was useful to map them across the competencies required by:

- Health Professions Council
- Nursing and Midwifery Council
- The Department of Health: Knowledge and Skills Framework

This mapping exercise is available on the project web-site. In addition to identifying and grouping useful web-resources under each theme, the project team also commissioned the development of learning materials in areas where little seemed to be freely available for use across disciplines. Even on project completion this is potentially an area of growth for the web-site but to date materials include:

- Understanding Dyslexia: An Introduction
- Reflection on Practice
- Learning and Assessing through Reflection
- An Introduction to Practice Education
- Managing the Placement Learning Environment
- Managing the Placement Learning Experience
- Developing New Supervisors and Assessors of Practice Learning
- Communication Skills Workbook
- Assessment of Students in Health and Social Care: Managing Failing Students in Practice
- Mentoring

Again these materials underwent a peer review quality assurance process by the project team and a panel of evaluators. Learning materials are on the website as well as on CD ROM. The materials include workbooks, video clips, interactive materials and multimedia presentations.

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Summary of project report

1.2.3 Phase Three

Feedback on the utility and effectiveness of the learning resources and materials was the focus of this phase as the project drew to conclusion in March 2006. The goals were to review developed resources and to disseminate and embed the project outcomes in a planned and comprehensive manner within and across health and social care disciplines. To this end, the resources and learning materials sections of the website remained under constant development. An on-line questionnaire was made available for evaluation purposes. The project team has also actively engaged with relevant statutory and professional bodies. Several dissemination events were delivered across the UK and feedback from attendees was used to inform on-going review of the website. In addition the project team has presented at many inter-professional and uni-professional conferences and is engaged in publication plans in order to inform the wider academic community.

1.3 Summary of project report

The project report is divided into six sections and a summary of each is now provided.

1.3.1 'Making practice based learning work': outputs and outcomes

This section describes the findings and phases of the project and how it was managed using the headings specified by the HEA guidelines. The deliverables and outcomes are listed; returning to the original project goals, the actual deliverables and outcomes are outlined against each goal and then any variations are detailed and the reasons provided. Details of dissemination meetings through the lifetime of the project are provided, after which a comprehensive list of the products of the project with their location is included. The dissemination strategy is then outlined. An overview of the project evaluation follows, including a review of the extent of take-up and use of products and deliverables, a discussion of the effectiveness and impact of take-up and use plus a reflection on the lessons learnt to inform future HEFCE initiatives. This section concludes with a brief summary of external evaluation and outlines the continuation strategy and associated activities.

1.3.2 Scoping practice based learning

This section of the report outlines the context, methodology, literature review, findings and recommendations arising from five discipline-specific case studies undertaken in Phase One of the project. The context for the project is briefly considered and then the methodology adopted for the case study approach is explained.

Case study methodology (Yin 1994) underpinned the choice of data collection methods used to map the current nature of practice education in each of the project disciplines. The remit of the project precluded a formal research study and so the intent of Phase One was to complete a 'scoping' exercise using the case study method. From this, insights and good practice could be shared across disciplines. Similarities and differences in practice education processes and roles could also be determined in preparation for Phase Two of the project.

Data collection methods used included a survey questionnaire, focus groups and finally analysis of secondary documentary data. Heads of departments of all the participating disciplines within HEI's were targeted, with a request to pass the questionnaire to the most relevant person in the HEI to complete. A total of 193 questionnaires were distributed. The response rate overall was 40.9 % (n=79), Dietetics 46.2% (n=6), Nursing 23.8% (n= 19), Occupational Therapy 67.7% (n= 21), Physiotherapy 56.8% (n= 21) and Radiography 46.2% (n = 12). Focus groups were conducted at two regional workshops aimed at staff involved in practice education to gather more detailed qualitative data. Four groups of ten participated from the first workshop and two groups of ten at the second. Descriptive statistical analysis of quantitative data was undertaken. Qualitative data were analysed using thematic analysis (Polit and Hungler 1995).

Secondary source data was obtained for each of the participant professions through accessing professional and statutory body reports. Case study writers used their experience and networks to access relevant HEI and placement-based policies and documents. These secondary sources were used to provide insight into professional expectations and were compared with current practice through triangulation with both questionnaire and focus group data.

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Summary of project report

Limitations of the case study approach included a poor response rate to the nursing questionnaire. This may, to some extent, be compensated by the dominance of nursing within the literature. Intercultural issues were not fully explored due to limitations in the questionnaire design.

The literature review was conducted as part of the case study scoping exercise and this is now summarised. In keeping with the aims of completing a 'developmental project' rather than systematic research, the literature review was primarily an appraisal of current issues rather than a systematic review of the literature. A key conclusion of this review is that empirical evidence on issues surrounding practice education yields results that arise predominantly from small, local, uni-site and uni-professional data gathered from stakeholders such as students, practice educators and HEI lecturers. In addition there is no evidence of a common preparation route for practice educators from the participant professions.

The literature review considered the broader context and then key issues, focused around four main areas:

- The nature and effectiveness of practice education
- The role and development of the practice educator
- Interprofessional learning and practice education
- Intercultural issues in practice education

Following the data collection phase and the literature review, areas of good practice and innovation were extracted from the case study data by the project team and these were used to inform the structure for Phase Two. Six broad themes emerged:

- Learning and Teaching in Practice.
- Support for Learning in Practice.
- Reflection in Practice.
- Assessment in Practice.
- Interprofessional Learning in Practice.
- Diversity in Practice.

In conclusion, Phase One of the project revealed some important insights into the nature of the preparation of practice educators in five health care disciplines and these were used to inform Phase Two of the project. The project

team originally intended to develop a cross-curricular practice educator preparation programme. However the case study data had indicated that differences in professional standards and requirements would make this difficult to achieve and embed. Instead the project team responded to data from the case studies by deciding that Phase Two of the project would instead include development of a freely-accessible web-portal of learning materials for use by anyone involved practice education.

1.3.3 Supporting practice based learning

This section of the report is divided into six parts and provides information on the process of designing the project related materials, particularly the project web site, learning materials and resources, plus the exercise to map these materials against the requirements of statutory, professional and other bodies.

The development of the 'Web Portal and Other Dissemination Materials' is first described in detail. Initially the concern was to ensure an effective public presence as this would be an essential aspect of ensuring successful engagement with a range of stakeholders as well as being able to effectively communicate the project's outcomes. A team of designers was consulted and this resulted in the project logo and development of the website design, which was revisited as more information became available and the project outputs developed. There was an on-going dialogue between design and project teams as the project unfolded in order to ensure the web-site not only met the project goals but the needs of the users it was designed to serve.

Having outlined the use of innovative communication tools throughout the project, the process by which the learning resources and materials were developed is then explored. Looking first at the web-portal resources, using the key themes that emerged from Phase One, the project team worked with practitioners and experts in each area to search and then review web-resources in support of each theme. The resources were evaluated using a checklist and recommendations for inclusion or otherwise made. For the selected resources an annotation was written. The final list of identified suitable resources plus the annotation were then published on the project web site, with the hyperlink address.

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The development of learning materials involved a tendering process, in which all applications were reviewed prior to the offer of contracts. Ten applications were successful and these resources are now freely available via the project web site. Feedback from four final regional workshops indicated a high level of satisfaction with the learning materials and resources. Areas of clarification and suggestions from these workshops were taken on board by the project team and amendments to this area of the web-site were subsequently made.

1.3.4 Enabling practice based learning

This section of the report discusses Phase Three of the project, in particular the strategies and approaches adopted in the dissemination and evaluation of the project outcomes. Whilst dissemination and evaluation principally constituted Phase Three of the project, these activities occurred throughout the project's life.

The dissemination strategy is outlined and dissemination activities were considered at different levels. At the individual level, activities included the development of a practitioner database and focus group and workshop participation which influenced the project as it evolved. Group dissemination activities included practice educator workshops and engagement with the HEA Health Science Network special interest group in this area. At the organisational level, presentations were given to a range of HEI's, CAIPE and a variety of professional bodies. Work with the wider community occurred via the web site questionnaire, national conference presentations and publications. Overall the dissemination strategy was judged to be comprehensive, although it could be argued that it favoured electronic means over others.

Turning to the evaluation strategy, the project evaluation included a range of methods and involved the independent evaluator, practitioners, employers and professional bodies. The Project Working Group monitored all aspects on an on-going basis and reported to the Steering Group on a twice-yearly basis. Monitoring of outputs involved peer evaluation including expert panels and, most importantly, feedback from the practice community. Specifically practitioners, employers, professional and statutory bodies

were involved at various levels in the identification and development of learning materials. Independent evaluation occurred formatively at intervals during the project and summatively at the end.

The project achieved all its proposed outcomes, albeit with some variation dictated principally by the feedback from the sector and the practitioner community. In terms of deliverables, the project team has received very positive feedback. All projects have limitations; however these were managed as opportunities rather than set-backs. As the project unfolded, the outcomes had to be adapted in the light of contemporaneous developments in the sector and feedback from practice educators. The external evaluator commended the involvement of others outside the core team for this work and the wide-ranging set of resources that was created as a result.

The evaluation strategy appeared to prove effective because it was planned at an early stage, in order to maximise opportunities for feedback throughout and to act upon this in the on-going development of the project. In this way the project products and deliverables are much more likely to be used by the community for which they were designed. Establishing effectiveness of take-up and use is difficult within a 3-year project timeframe and, to a certain extent, all that can be expected is for the project team, through an active dissemination approach to 'sow seeds' at as many levels as possible as to the presence, potential and outcomes of the project in the hope that some of these seeds bear fruit. By working with colleagues engaged in similar initiatives, cross-fertilisation is also likely.

1.3.5 Managing the Making Practice Based Learning Work Project.

This section reflects upon how people, processes and resources were managed in order to meet the required project outcomes. Although in starting the project no conscious consideration was given to the use of a theoretical model to underpin the management style adopted, one emerged over the lifetime of the project. Contingency theory (Fiedler 1976) proved useful in analysing the project management activity.

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Using this theoretical background, the management strategy and philosophy that underpinned the project is explored, looking in particular at managing people, processes and resources. In terms of managing people the purposes of any project are to achieve its goals and outcomes and in this particular project, to ensure deliverables were produced on time and in budget. A secondary purpose was the development and support of the individuals and groups involved. The management style adopted was, therefore, focused on these outcomes. Path-goal theory (House 1976) suggests that the leader and managers use four types of behaviour to motivate people and accomplish goals. These behaviours are directive, supportive, participative and achievement-orientated and are considered in this section.

The management processes centred on the tasks and people, which at times required some innovative and creative thinking. The management of the change process was probably the most dynamic within the project. To effect change within the professions involved in the project, it was important to engage with the professional and statutory bodies. Resistance to change was much less than anticipated with project outputs being well received. The reasons for this were considered using Kotter and Schlesinger's (1979) work on resistance to change. Four possible approaches to reduce resistance to change were explored: Education and Communication, Participation and Involvement, Negotiation and Agreement and Manipulation.

Finally the management of resources is briefly considered, the project resources comprising mainly the people involved and the monies received and required few additional physical resources other than project deliverables. The universities provided the project infrastructure, including computers, office space and telephones as agreed in the original bid. This section concludes with a number of reflections from those involved.

1.3.6 The way forward in practice and work-based learning

This section describes the summary and conclusions of the project and considers its future during the transferability phase. First the project outputs are reiterated, followed by a summary of the strengths and limitations of the project. A number of recommendations are then outlined:

- Undertake collaboration with service users and practitioners to explore how service user involvement might inform use of the resources by practice educators.
- Conduct a systematic examination of how students might use the online resources to enhance educational aspects of their role during practice placements.
- Undertake activity to assess the transferability of the online resources for use by non-health care disciplines.
- Carry out a systematic evaluation of how practitioners use the online resources to enhance the role of the practice educator.
- Explore ways to ensure effective long term maintenance and development of online resources.

Finally the transferability bid is described. The project team successfully submitted a proposal to the Higher Education Academy for transferability funding. This additional activity will enhance the role of work-based educators who support students on placements as part of non-health undergraduate degrees within new partner institutions. It will build upon the project's outcomes by transferring the resources for use in developing the role of work-based educators in the context of work-based learning as part of the academic experience. This will be achieved by facilitating the new partner institutions to adapt and contextualise existing resources. The HEA subject centres of Hospitality, Leisure, Sport and Tourism and Health Science and Practice will be pivotal to the transfer and application of this activity.

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Conclusion

1.4 Conclusion

The reports concludes by stating that the project team believes it has been able to meet the overall aim of the project as evidenced by informal feedback with potential users, formal evaluation evidence, external evaluator's reports and comments from relevant external bodies. Feedback indicates that the resources have been received as a very positive development in the field of practice-based education and a major achievement given the circumstances that the project operated within. The success of the transferability application indicates that the project's materials may help address the current agenda to increase graduate employability by enhancing student learning during practice/work-based placements.

Reference

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PROJECT AIMS

The Project aimed to make practitioners more effective at supporting & supervising students in the workplace across a range of healthcare disciplines.

The professions involved in the project were:

- Dietetics
- Nursing
- Occupational Therapy
- Physiotherapy
- Radiography

The principal questions to be addressed in this project were:

- What constituted effective practice in placement education?
- How could effective practice be implemented at organisational, professional and practitioner levels so as to maximise student learning on placement?
- How could this good practice be developed and embedded in the contexts of health?

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