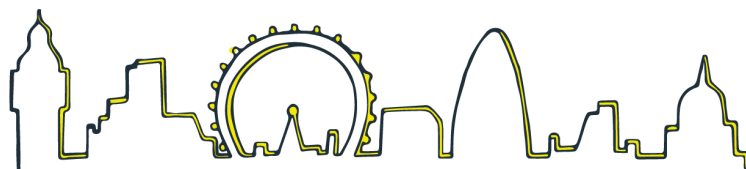# Supporting second year student nurses

A pan-London best practice framework for higher education institutions and placement providers

January 2021

Contents

Introduction

The second-year student nurse support framework is a pan-London resource for Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) and health and social care placement providers. Our aim is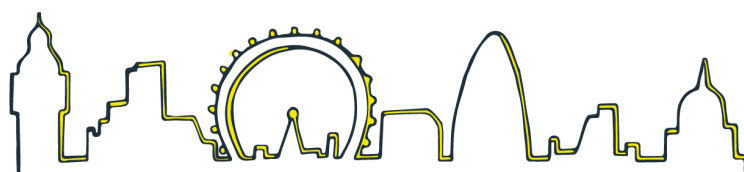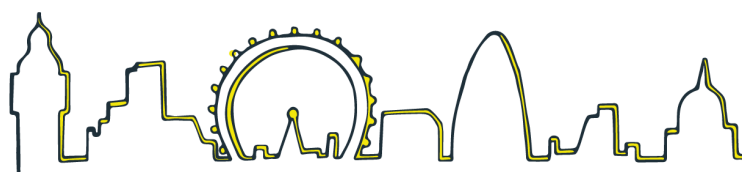 to provide an additional resource for these organisations when supporting second year student nurses, to reduce attrition during their pre-registration programme. The approach has been developed through an extensive stakeholder engagement exercise involving practitioners and student nurses from health and social care organisations and HEIs across London, representing all fields of nursing.

Engagement has encompassed task and finish group meetings, workshops, and sharing best practice across organisations; extensive learning has been drawn upon from the Barts Health NHS Trust RePAIR programme (Reducing Pre-registration Attrition and Improving Retention) while also taking into consideration the recent global pandemic.

Our approach recognises that one of the key implications of attrition identified from the RePAIR project was that pre-registration students were more likely to leave during the second year of their programme due to receiving less support, compared to first and third year students. As a result, this can contribute to the nursing shortage supply currently in play regionally and nationally.

This framework sets out key best practice principles for placement providers and HEIs, specifically focused to reduce attrition during the pre-registration programme, and as a result could improve a student's experience. In addition to this, if a student has consistently good placement experiences, they are more likely to want to remain with that organisation upon qualifying, therefore having a positive impact on an organisation's recruitment.
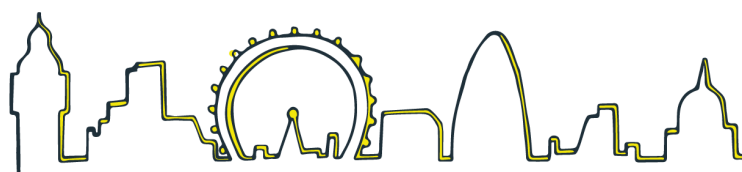
Background

Student attrition from pre-registration clinical education programmes is a long-standing challenge in healthcare. The RePAIR project (2018) was funded by Health Education England (HEE) to establish a detailed understanding of the multi-factorial aspects of attrition and retention in pre-registration education and training, and to further identify approaches to reducing attrition and improving retention during and post pre-registration training.

A key finding on attrition identified from the project is that pre-registration students were more likely to leave during the second year of their training due to receiving less support compared to first and third-year students. A recommendation was made that HEIs and healthcare providers should work together to develop specific programmes of support for this student group. This links with a priority objective of the NHS People Plan (2020) to tackle the nursing shortage challenge.

It is hoped that this framework will act as a conduit in meeting this objective, using the CapitalNurse brand ensuring that more people come to study in London to be nurses, and for more of those who begin their studies to enter the nursing workforce in London.

Higher Education Institutions

The following principles, based on existing best practice, are set out to assist HEIs with additional approaches to support student engagement. It is not intended to replace existing methods of engagement and can be used as an add-on or in isolation.

Online open office hours

Ensure there is dedicated time in the week when key people such as the programme/module leaders are available to meet informally. This is a way of replicating the student drop-in service to ask questions.
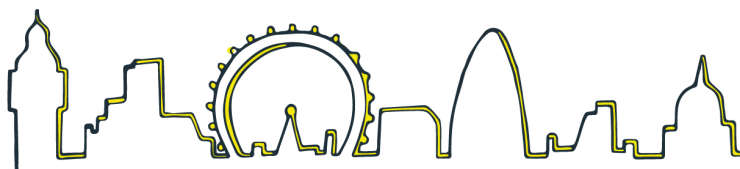
Methods of communication

Students have differing communication preferences such as phone, virtual meetings or email. Communication with students needs to reflect their preferences. Offering this flexible approach in the student's preferred method of communication helps make them feel valued.

One-to-one meeting

This is a regular one-to-one meeting with students either face-to-face or online. Regularity could be every three months or more frequently depending on staffing and student needs, however as a minimum, consider factoring in at least once per placement block. It can be as part of the personal professional tutor role, to ensure that universities are checking in, not just to check academic status, but also to check financial/pastoral/placement issues, and then be able to raise support early if required. Taking a personal interest in their wellbeing, progression and concerns will support the student feeling valued.

Cohort meetup

To encourage and replicate group cohesiveness within a cohort, consider holding online social gatherings such as quiz nights, discussions on films or books – this could be for the entire cohort or in smaller groups. Ideally these events will be led by student suggestions.

Co-production

Co-production involves working together and sharing responsibilities to complete a task or a project. For example, obtaining feedback and suggestions from students and using it to create different ways of learning is beneficial in keeping the student engaged in addition to enhancing creativity and leadership skills.

Art of nursing

Setting up alternative learning opportunities can help broaden a student's scope of learning and having these resources available to challenge students who wish to be challenged, then recognising this work with awards/certificates. One example is an online
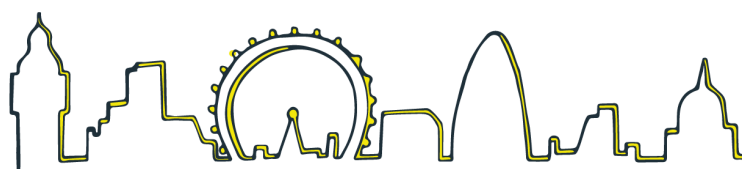
Art of Nursing page, where students get the opportunity to watch, read and share reflections on a range of films, books and other online media related to nursing and wider health issues.

Valuing student contributions

Recognising student attendance and celebrating success is a good way of engaging your student and supports them to feel valued. This can vary in approaches from sending postcards/certificates/personal notes or electronic formats to students' home or email address. You may also want to consider how you welcome the student at the start of their second year.

Identification of those students not engaging

You will need to have a constructive and direct conversation about the level and type of engagement you expect from the student and offer support/suggestions as to how to improve this collaboratively.

Virtual learning resources

The resources need to be engaging and from different platforms which should include films, documentaries, podcasts that can be accessed remotely.

Disseminating information to students

Having information that is visible and easily accessible on the student's intranet page is a good way for centralising resources, for example, student support services/networks and having a list of the link lecturers for each trust. Generic reminder emails could also be sent out regularly with information of what support is available from the university such as personal tutor, buddy system or student cohort representative and who is best to contact.

Buddy system

All second year students should be allocated a third year student buddy to provide peer-to-peer support. This should be co-ordinated by the HEI and considerations should be made on the third year's student academic capacity to act as a buddy. A third year buddy should not be supporting more than two students throughout the academic year. The

CapitalNurse is jointly sponsored by Health Education England, NHS England and NHS Improvement
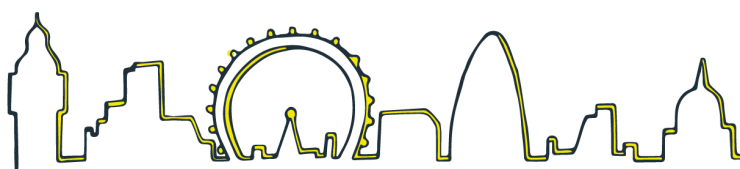
gold standard would be to introduce the buddy system to support first, second and third years (See Appendices for Buddy System guidance).

Learning hubs

Face-to-face or virtual learning forums for second year students from different fields should be in place on a quarterly basis as a minimum. This is where discussions of learning experiences can be shared. Discussions of other alternatives if students want to leave the programme.

Mental health and wellbeing support

Universities should offer flexibility in accessing mental health and wellbeing support, allowing for virtual support sessions that consider placement schedules. In addition to this, online/phone consultations should be available for counselling services, as this will benefit those on placement unable to attend in person.

Celebration forums

Start of year two

Universities in partnership with their placement providers could offer a start of year two forum (face-to-face or virtually), delivered at the end of year one. The forums aim to:

- celebrate and value the contribution made during year one;
- prepare for what is expected for year two regarding placement support, delivery of care, and academic writing;
- introduce the buddy system scheme;
- remind the student of support is available; and
- increase transparency between placement providers, student and university.

End of year two

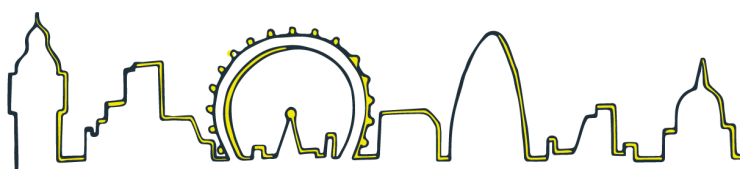Universities in partnership with their placement providers could offer an end of year two forum (face-to-face or virtually). The forum aims to:

- celebrate and value the contribution that second year students are making to delivering safe quality care to the people of London;

- provide a forum to hear from students about their experience of being a learner;
- help and prepare second year students for their final year with a focus on opportunities and ideas for their final dissertation/service improvement project, which would support the key priorities of placement providers;
- provide time to consider the breadth and depth of careers for healthcare professionals across placement providers; and
- provide guidance and information on early careers, newly qualified employment offer and preceptorship.
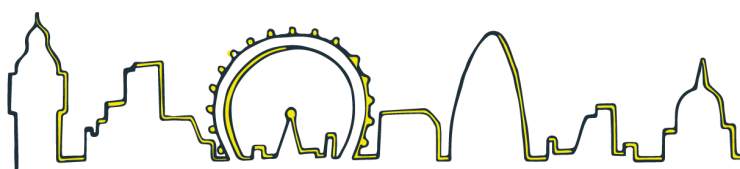
Placement providers

Student forums

Placement providers should offer peer support drop-in forums during clinical placements. It is recommended these are led by third year students to facilitate peer led discussions. It should be co-ordinated by the placement provider to ensure room availability and release from practice as protected time.

As a minimum, a fortnightly peer group could take place to ensure students working shift have an opportunity to attend. Some placement providers may wish to have a practice educator present in these sessions as an additional resource and to support the third year students. It may not always possible due to limited resources, therefore as a minimum, an overview or debrief of the session's key issues and learnings should be fed back electronically to the practice educator by the third year leading the session.

Protected learning time

HEIs in collaboration with placement providers should ensure that student teaching timetables are shared and cascaded to all students in placement. Universities should cascade the planned teaching session timetable out to placement providers and students at the beginning of placement to ensure this can be reflected in the rota. Placement providers should schedule all student teaching sessions as protected time and sign the hours towards the student attendance as soon as possible, this can be done face to face or online.

A protected learning hour should be factored into the student's shift pattern, to allow them to carry out research in the library or on a computer to present back to the manager, or to use the hour to spend time with other members of the multi-disciplinary team. Students should not be made to feel bad for leaving the ward/team short, however if a clinical emergency occurs where the protected learning time cannot be granted, it should be cancelled and re-arranged.

The ward/team manager should make every effort to ensure all staff (including agency staff) in the area are aware of their supernumerary status. The gold standard would be to facilitate the protected learning time as much as possible.

Career conversations

The aim for developing career support clinics or workshops for the second year students are to broaden their knowledge of the different services/careers available in the organisation and to explore and plan their career destination beyond preceptorship.

Placement providers should support second year students with sessions delivered by their organisation's recruitment team on how to write job applications and present themselves in job interviews. The students should be invited to attend career clinic sessions, either at bespoke level or to join an existing clinic already set up in the organisation. To support and aid these conversations, student should be encouraged to use the CapitalNurse Career Framework.

Support in practice

Practice assessors and supervisors should always ask in the initial interview if the student has any specific support they need for that placement, as this will enable transparency in supporting and putting in place any additional development needs that can help meet a student's needs. This should be appropriately documented in the Practice Assessment Document (PAD). Signing of the PAD should take place throughout the placement period and not to be signed solely at the end of the placement; this ensures feedback can be given to the student in a timely manner.
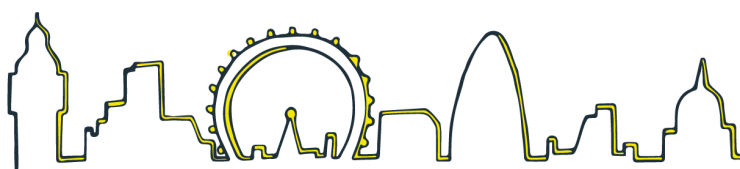
If placement providers have the resources to do so, additional support from practice development nurse/practice educators should be considered, which will benefit the student in achieving their competencies within the PAD, as students should not be seen as an extra pair of hands.

Pastoral lead

It is good practice for a trust to have a pastoral lead for second year students; however, the gold standard would be to have a pastoral lead within each organisation for first and third year student nurses as well.

The pastoral lead role is to be an additional resource of support for the student to contact if needed and should not be used to replace the existing practice assessor or supervisor. It is recommended that the student documents the pastoral lead's details within their PAD.

The lead should contact the student at the start of their placement area to introduce themselves, letting them know that they can be contacted upon for extra pastoral support or advice if needed. The pastoral lead doesn't necessarily need to provide regular email or telephone support; however should a student make contact, the gold standard would be to meet with the student either face-to-face or virtually to address their concern and offer some support. The pastoral lead should be a nurse working in the same organisation as the student but working outside of their ward/team.

If any concerns are identified the pastoral lead should escalate these as soon as possible to the student's placement manager/practice assessor or supervisor or link lecturer and inform the student of them doing so.

Placement wellbeing sessions and support

A student wellbeing session delivered within a trust or within their integrated care system (ICS) footprint is a great opportunity for student nurses on placement to have a break from the placement environment and focus on themselves. These sessions can provide students with some headspace to reflect on clinical environment and provide an opportunity to meet other students from different years and universities.
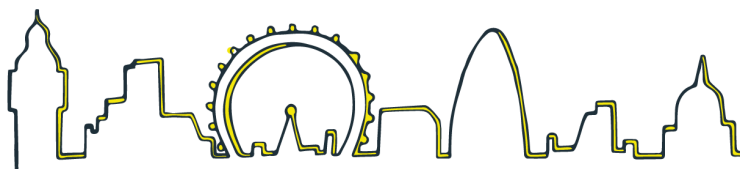
Wellbeing services may already be set up and available to staff working in the organisation. It is valuable to advertise this within a trust during the student's induction or orientation to the placement environment/trust.

The benefit of offering these sessions is that they are aimed at enhancing student work life balance and promoting self-care and workplace resilience. Possible session plans could include:

- arts and crafts;
- personality quizzes – reflection on how this shapes them as a nurse;
- therapy dogs;
- yoga;
- decorating biscuits;
- techniques and tools for managing stress and anxiety; and
- meditation and relaxation.

Education ward visits, clinical support, and teaching

It is good practice to include regular ward rounds by the education team to visit students out on placement to check in, answer questions and provide support. If virtual face-to-face check-ins are not possible then telephone or virtual should be considered. If resources permit, providing tailored teaching to second years whilst on placement will help put theory to practice

Student evaluation

It is important to evaluate a student's experience at the end of each placement to allow HEIs and placement providers to understand the student's view and their experiences. Evaluations can be done individually or jointly between HEIs and placement providers (See Appendix for joint evaluation guidance), however; if any issues/concerns are identified, the gold standard would be for HEIs and placement providers to work in collaboration to address these concern/issues to improve the learning environment.
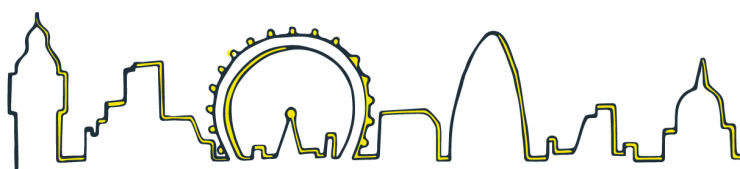
Appendices

1. Buddy guidelines for second year student nurses

Barts Health NHS Trust introduced the buddy system within their RePAIR programme and have developed guidance for HEIs, placement providers and students. The following can be flexible in its approach and tailored to first year and final year students. It is not intended to replace existing buddy systems that are already embedded in organisations.

What is the buddy system?

The buddy system is a key principle within the pan-London second year student support best practice framework. A second year student will be appointed a third year student nurse 'buddy' for the entire second year of the undergraduate programme. This will enable the second year student to share and draw meaning from the learning experiences in practice. The main advantage of the buddy system is that it will give an opportunity to reflect on professional development and link theory to practice using a more holistic approach.

Who makes a good buddy?

A good buddy is somebody who is prepared to be:

- a friendly face;

- an informal source of information;

- somebody who can share their experiences;

- an active listener;

- somebody who is open and honest to provide constructive feedback;

- committed, approachable and considerate; and

- a person that offers constructive feedback and asks challenging questions.

Who can be a buddy?

A third year student nurse will act as a 'buddy' and meet/communicate with the second
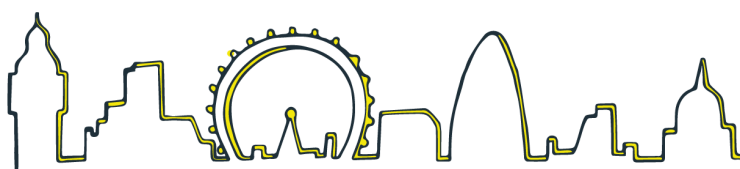
year student at stages throughout the second year of placement, providing the opportunity to reflect on academic and learning experiences. A buddy can give guidance and support in what helped them to succeed during their second year.

A buddy would be separate from the practice assessor/supervisor process and is not involved in the assessment. The student will continue to have support from supervisors/assessors, link lecturers and the personal tutor.

How often would the student meet/communicate with their buddy?

A minimum of five times in the year aiming for an hour minimum per session, depending on the arrangement made in advance. The format can be a one-to-one meeting face-to-face or online. The buddy should be given the student's name and email address by the university. Once this is made available the buddy should make the initial contact.
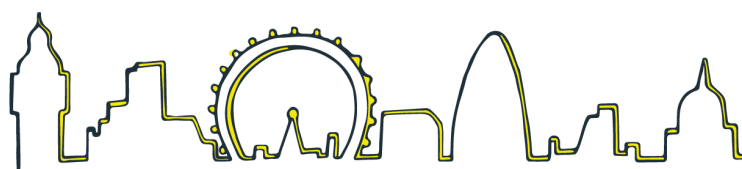
2. Student buddy factsheet

Being a buddy (third year student)

As a buddy you are there in the role of supportive colleague and friendly face. Your role as a buddy will be varied depending on the student nurse you are allocated, but could involve:

- contacting your student within the first week of receiving their details from the university;

- showing/discussing how to organise aspects of their student nurse role with them;

- sharing your experience during the second year and offering advice on what could help;

- answering questions;

- providing information, signposting information and providing informal support;

- introducing them to other colleagues/nurses;

- encouraging them to ask questions if unsure about any aspects of their role; and

- arranging to go for coffee or lunch sometime.

Buddies are not expected to review or proofread students' assignments. However, the content can be discussed and reflected upon. You may need to refer your student back to their university personal tutor if personal issues arise that may affect the student's ability to complete their programme.

Having a buddy (second year student)

You are expected to respond to your buddy within the first week of receiving your buddy's communication. You will be given a contact name and email by the university and you will need to demonstrate professional courtesy by attending arranged meetings and participate in the processes to enhance your professional development.
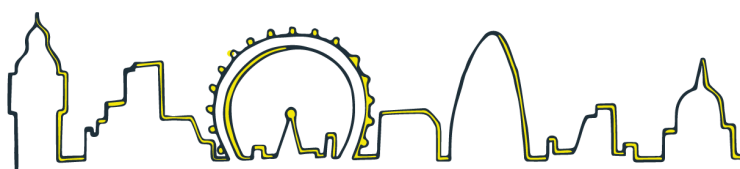
It is important that you differentiate between the role of a practice assessor/supervisor in practice and that of a buddy who is befriending you and be aware that your buddy does not assess your practice or review your assignments. However, you can discuss your academic work during your meetings, as your buddy may be able to sign-post resources that they utilised.

If you have identified any concerns during your placement you must escalate them to your practice learning assessor or ward sister/charge nurse/link lecturer and do not wait for your buddy meeting.
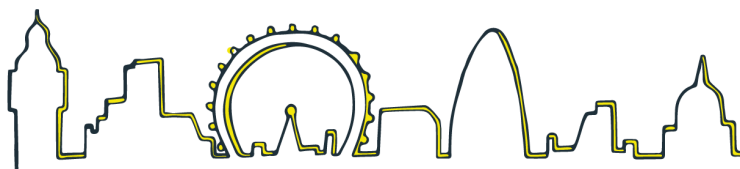
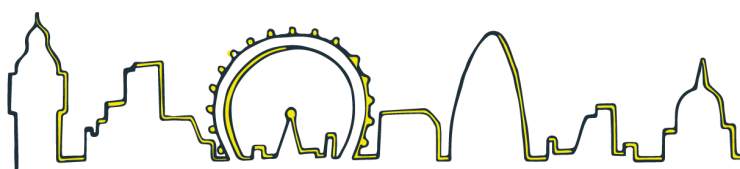## 3. Career clinic workshop agenda/activities

Agenda items might include:

- introduction and purpose of the workshop;

- employment offer upon qualifying;

- overview of the range of services in the trust;

- career pathways available in the organisation; and

- Q&A.

A group activity to consider:

1. Allocate students into groups of four or five.

2. Within the group, ask student to identify two areas they perceive as most exciting to work as a nurse and explore why.

3. Get the group to feedback/share their selected areas and why the areas are their preference.

4. After feedback, get the group to explore the knowledge and skills they have in order to work in the areas.

You might also want to consider some interactive activities with the student nurses, for example getting them to complete a personality test:

https://www.practiceaptitudetests.com/personality-test/

4. Orientation and preparation checklist to placement area for second year students

Placement agreed

A welcome email to include in the placement orientation pack can assist in increasing awareness of significant placement information, speciality and opportunities available.

Orientation

Nominating a staff member to orientate the student to the clinical area can reduce any anxiety that the student may be experiencing when going to unfamiliar areas where established teams are formed.

Rota

Preparing a four-week rota in advance enables the personal and professional planning.

Breaks

Allocating breaks with other staff members helps build relationships, reduces an isolated feeling and creates a pleasant and progressive environment.

Skills

It is important to involve and encourage students to participate in as many skill-based activities as possible, as this will aid in increasing their knowledge, interpersonal skills, questioning, and decision making. In addition, it will empower their confidence in delivering safe and effective nursing care.

Learning opportunities

Ensure when there are two or more second year students, there are opportunities for each student to achieve the same learning.
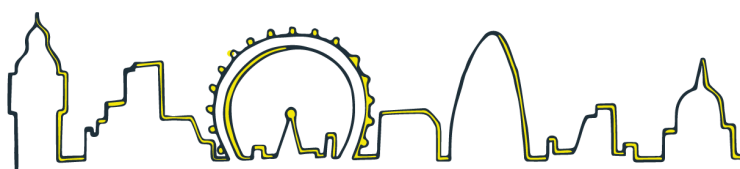
5. Focus of evaluation

1. Understanding the student's views about their placement, i.e. the allocated placement area cultivates a conducive learning environment by seeking information on:

- if they felt welcomed by the ward;
- if they were provided with ward/department orientation booklet;
- if an off-duty was made available to them when they first contacted the area;
- if their learning needs were fully considered;
- how confident the student feels about raising concerns.

2. Understanding the student's views about the support they received from their practice supervisors and assessor are useful in making improvements for future students, and can be achieved by asking the student:

- if their practice supervisors/assessors were accessible;
- if there was enough support given by their practice supervisors/assessors;
- if they understood the clinical role of their practice supervisors/assessors; and
- if other members of the multi-disciplinary team were approachable.

3. The student's view about the support from trust educators and facilitators:

- during induction (preparing them for the placement) – usefulness of their placement induction; and
- during placement – usefulness of the regular visits by the practice education facilitator and the drop-in sessions.
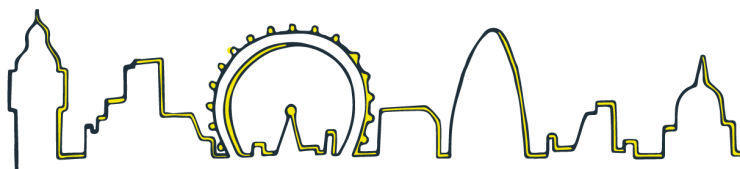
6. Best practice case studies

A student narrative of attending a celebration forum

"In November 2019, I had the chance to attend the Barts Health Celebration Event at Mile End hospital site. It was a warm and welcoming day, and we all got an opportunity to listen to different service managers from across the sites. Different specialities such as oncology gave short overviews of their wards and service users and what the newly qualified nurse could expect in the form of support in their onward progression and education.

"There was also an interesting talk on the preceptorship programme offered and what mentorship would be available in the first year to 18 months after recruitment. In between talks there were individual stands manned by those working in that speciality for further explanations which were showcased. Brochures were available and it was possible to express interest.

"Overall, it was an interesting day and I learned of opportunities and felt that if I chose a Barts Health job I would be well supported in my ongoing learning and become a valued member of the nursing staff. I have now got a job offer for when my PIN comes through as a Band 5 on the acute trauma ward at Royal London."

Tessa Somerville, second year student nurse, Middlesex University
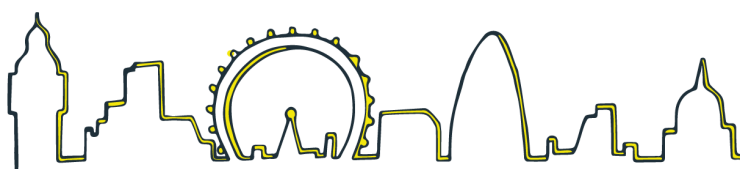
London South Bank University's approach to offering extra support for second year student nurses

Undergraduate student nurse programmes are multifaceted and can trigger stress, anxiety and burnout, with many students not seeking support to help with these challenges. The main barriers to seeking support have been identified as fear of experiencing stigma, being treated differently, and being judged (Wynaden et al, 2014, Mitchell, 2018). To eliminate these barriers, London South Bank university (LSBU) embedded a session '*Self Leadership and Personal Autonomy for Children's Nurses*', into the curriculum for second year student children's nurses, which was delivered by the mental health and wellbeing team.

The students were asked to evaluate the session by completing a questionnaire. The findings showed that most of the students benefited from this session. 84 per cent felt confident in their ability to cope with placements/assignments, with 93 per cent reporting they agreed or strongly agreed with recommending the session to others. 79 per cent of students reported that they agreed or strongly agreed that they had a better understanding of their emotions following the session. 67 per cent of students agreed or strongly agreed that they felt more confident they can succeed in their studies.

While the session was well received, it generated many discussions of emotions and strategies to manage the challenges they faced. Students identified further training on how to help others would be useful, alongside some optional practical mindfulness sessions.

This feedback indicates that embedding similar sessions into the curriculum will empower and prepare undergraduate student nurses to face the challenges during their undergraduate education.

Catherine Hewitt, course director BSc Nursing, LSBU
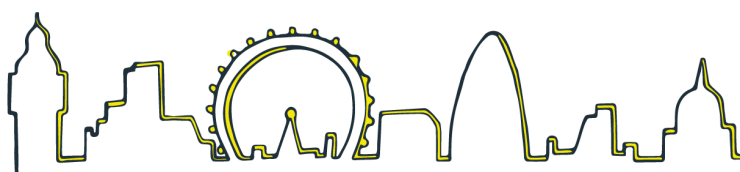
## A paediatric student nurse's experience of a student support forum

"At Great Ormond Street Hospital the student practice facilitators (SPF) introduced 'Forum Friday'. This forum facilitates students from all universities and all stages of training to come together to share experiences, offer advice and seek support.

"The structure of this forum is for each student to write one positive and one negative experience from their week on a piece of paper which is put into a box. A third year student is chosen to lead the discussion, selecting notes out of the box one by one and reading them out loud to the group. This then opens discussion to the group, allowing students to ask questions and discuss strategies for overcoming any barriers and ways of dealing with various situations.

"Previously, examples of topics discussed have included tips for preparing for night shifts, balancing university and placement, finding ways to obtain feedback in a busy area and the importance of self-care and looking after your mental health. There is always a SPF present to support the third year students if they are unsure how to answer the question and to ensure that advice given is professional and accurate.

"Forum Friday is a very popular session which students are keen to attend. It is highly praised and when speaking to students about the session, it is clear it has contributed to positive placement experiences."

Neve Richards, third year paediatric student nurse, Great Ormond Street Hospital
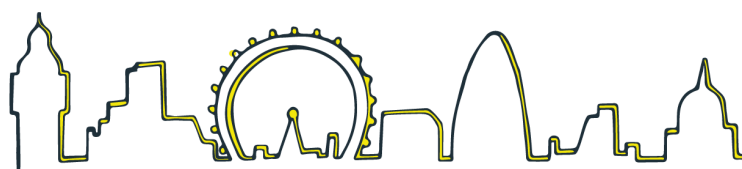
A mental health student nurse's perspective on how to set up a support forum across placement geographies

A sharing of a best practice framework was proposed by MSc Mental Health Nursing students detailing session guidelines, aiming to create community, student autonomy, and reduced isolation. During placements, two-hour sessions with groups of six MSc students meet voluntarily to discuss observed practices and offer peer-to-peer solution-focused support. A safe space is paramount for students to discuss such varied experiences and possible challenges in the field without senior overview.

Within the three Host trusts, South West London and St George's Mental Health Trust, South London and Maudsley NHS Trust, and Central and North West London NHS Foundation Trust, a student from each trust is nominated to manage logistics while on placement: location, time, and date. Logistical challenges appear with students on different placements around London, therefore the aim is to offer a central location accessible to everyone, arranged via a room booking system at King's College Hospital or the hosting trust.

At every session, a group facilitator is identified to monitor time management, fair communication dynamics, and check for inappropriate content. The facilitator is a voluntary role that enables a student's opportunity to practice leadership, communication, and therapeutic engagement skills – all of which are essential as future mental health nurses. Subsequently, the facilitator completes a short session overview including attendees, that is sent to the MSc programme lead as evidence for signing off PAD hours and session outcomes.

Jason Miles and Alicia Fairbairn, MSc Mental Health Nursing, King's College London
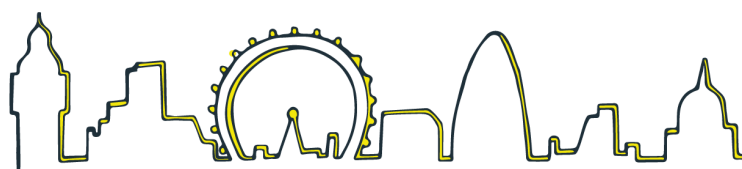
A learning disability student nurse's experience of staying connected with peers during placements and studying

"My best advice is to have a network of peers that you can turn to for advice and support. When I first started at university it was quite daunting, thankfully there were support networks in place. All three year groups for learning disability nursing were together in a what's app group, this was an excellent way to ask questions and share ideas while feeling part of a wider network.

"As the learning disability field by nature is generally a smaller cohort, it is beneficial to expand your contacts to include students from other universities, also qualified nurses, and practice partners. Twitter and other social media platforms are a great place to make new contacts and the support and learning opportunities you can get on there are valuable.

"Don't be afraid to ask questions and to reach out, placements can be daunting but ask questions, do your research and be an ambassador for your field of nursing. I get great pleasure in 'flying the flag' for learning disability nursing and sharing how varied a role it can be. Your personal tutor group will be a great support alongside your personal tutor. Make the most of every opportunity, even if it feels overwhelming, the possibilities are endless."

Martina Gomez, Learning Disability Student Nurse, Kingston University
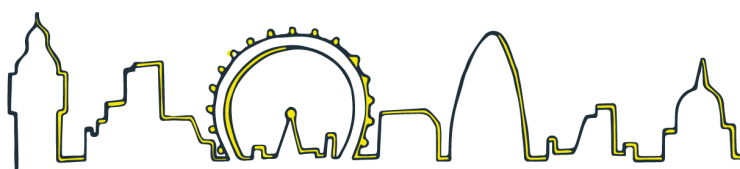
How small adjustments in pastoral care can make a big difference

At University College London Hospital NHS Foundation Trust we recognise that our student nurses balance the dynamics of their professional role and other roles in their personal lives. We support students to feel comfortable to raise issues that may be affecting their practice and provide staff with right skills to detect, explore and escalate concerns regarding wellbeing in a timely manner. Over the years we have supported students experiencing mental health issues and making health reasonable adjustments (RA). Below are two examples:

1. The university inform us that a student is returning from maternity leave, is due to start placement and is still breastfeeding. Our team contacts the student to understand what her needs are. Due to the pressure and anxiety around not delaying training, new mothers tend to return to placement much earlier after delivery of their baby. We review the placement allocation to ensure that it is appropriate, book a suitable private space in our maternity or paediatric wards for breast milk expression and work out preferred times that the student can leave the area to do this. Breast expression equipment can be provided and there is a special fridge to store the breast milk. This reduces the student's anxiety, normalises and helps them navigate their recent delivery and enables them to continue their placement.

2. Stressors at times can be overwhelming for even the most resilient of students. The ward manager escalates to the team that a student seems withdrawn on the placement. Their clinical skills are good and their practice is safe; however the student is quieter than usual. The student confides that they have been struggling with low mood due to exams and loneliness and not being able to visit family for a few months. We agree that the number of work shifts reduce to two long days a week for a specific period to enable the student to rest. They are also signposted to self-help services. After two weeks there is a visible change in the student's mood, they continue to perform highly, pass their placement and become qualified.

Nikita Hill, Senior Nurse Undergraduate Education, University College London Hospitals
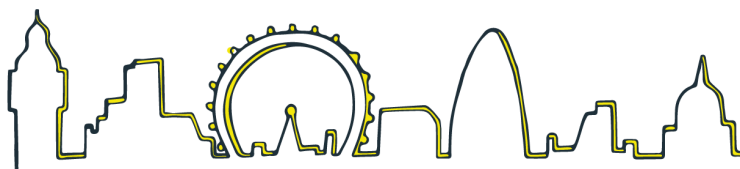
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