

Sperrin Lakeland Health & Social Care Trust

Sperrin Lakeland Health and Social Care Trust covers three District Council areas, Omagh, Fermanagh and about one third of Strabane.

The Trust delivers health and social care to approximately 118,000 people spread across 1,000 square miles in some of Northern Ireland's most remote and marginal rural areas. The organisation employs nearly 4,000 staff in the delivery of these health and social care services. The qualification profile of the workforce ranges from staff with no formal qualifications to highly qualified professional staff.

The Trust has always invested significantly in developing staff at all levels of the organisation. Sperrin Lakeland Trust has been delivering NVQs for over 10 years as part of the Western Health and Social Services Board NVQ Assessment Centre. The Trust is also a Recognised Training Organisation approved by the Department for Employment and Learning to deliver Jobskills and New Deal Training to people from the local community, many of whom gain employment with the Trust and other health and social care providers.

One element of the Trust's workforce development strategy focused on the requirement to reduce the hours worked by junior doctors within the hospitals and, in a wider context, to prepare for the projected national shortage of nurses. The Trust's objective was to create a pool of trained competent staff to undertake some of the duties that would free up nurses and junior doctors to carry out more specialised functions.

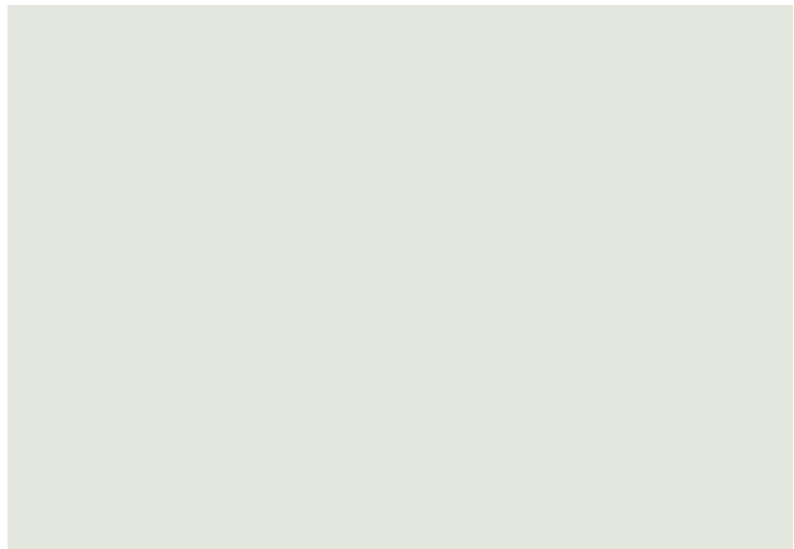
The Trust introduced a workforce development project which would provide existing nursing auxiliaries with the skills and knowledge to take on additional roles and widen their job remit. The project concentrated on nursing auxiliaries in 2 acute hospitals, the Tyrone County Hospital and the Erne Hospital. The programme of training and assessment was focused on a specified number of NVQ level 3 Care units to ensure the nursing auxiliaries had the necessary competence to practice their new skills on the wards. The specific areas of skill development were:

- Performing routine ECGs (particularly from 5.00pm – 9.00pm)
- Venupuncture – taking blood samples (24 hour)
- Basic monitoring of BP, Pulse and Respiration

Twenty-seven nursing auxiliaries were recruited from the existing staff in the hospitals. The posts were advertised as new jobs with a contractual requirement for successful completion of an NVQ level 3 within two years in order to receive a higher grade. The applications were oversubscribed, with around 80 staff applying for these posts. The recruits came from different wards in the Erne and Tyrone County Hospitals and were in post by February 2003.

As a result of years of involvement with NVQs a pool of qualified NVQ assessors already existed within the Trust. Two full-time peripatetic trainers/assessors were recruited, one based in the Tyrone County Hospital, the other based at the Erne Hospital. The nursing auxiliaries were first trained in the skills required and then assessed as soon as they had reached the level of competence specified in the NVQ unit.

Whilst many wards welcomed this development, some areas were resistant to the expansion of the nursing auxiliary role. However, with support from senior managers such as Mr Larry McGrath, Senior Nurse – Human Resources and Mr Gerry McLaughlin, Director of Human Resources and Operational Planning, the enhanced auxiliary role is now well embedded. In the year since the project began, 10 candidates have already completed their NVQ and the other 17 are expected to complete by June 2004.



This workforce development project was aimed at alleviating the pressure on junior doctors and on increasing the pool of personnel available in the future. Through the success of this project the Trust has also succeeded in its broader aim to improve patient care by up-skilling the existing workforce and freeing up professional staff time to be used more appropriately.

There have been many additional benefits, including the enhanced job satisfaction and motivation of the participating nursing auxiliaries.

'The NVQ level 3 has greatly increased my knowledge and clinical skills. I can communicate much better with all levels of staff. My work has become much more interesting and fulfilling. I feel I can offer much better care and as a result of this and I am now a much more confident person.'

Alison Allen
Nursing Auxiliary
Erne Hospital

The increased skills and confidence of the nursing auxiliaries also opens up new opportunities for them in terms of further development and career paths, including professional nurse training. Senior nurse managers are linking in with universities to get the level 3 Care NVQ recognised for entry into the nursing degree course.

The full-time assessors appointed have made an invaluable contribution to quality assurance within the NVQ Assessment Centre as they also carry out the role of internal verifier to other assessors in the Trust. With this expertise available in-house the Trust is now seeking funding to facilitate a new group of staff to complete the NVQ level 3 and similar projects are currently ongoing with community nursing auxiliaries and a group of mental health nursing auxiliaries who will be starting level 3 Care in the near future.

Of great importance, however, has been the outstanding support from senior managers who have realised the considerable potential of existing staff and have created a workforce development plan that fulfils both future organisational needs and individual aspirations.

'This programme has been very rewarding for all concerned, in that it provided an opportunity for individual growth for nursing auxiliaries, whilst enhancing their role as qualified members of a nursing team delivering a high quality of care to our patients and clients.'

Mr Larry McGrath
Senior Nurse
Human Resources

