



## **Assessment**

### **The tripartite relationship at The University of Teesside. A strategy to support student learning and assessment in practice**

The University of Teesside School of Health and Social Care has developed a “tripartite” approach to support student learning and assessment in practice. This strategy has been used within pre-registration nursing programmes since 1997 and also in midwifery, foundation degrees, and some post registration awards. It involves establishing a relationship between the student, their practice mentor and their academic mentor which is formalised through tripartite meetings held in the practice setting.

There are three tripartite meetings in summative placements. The academic mentor attends initial and final meetings, unless concerns are raised regarding a student’s progress, when further meetings will be held and an action plan agreed. Each individual records the meetings on dialogue sheets, which are placed in the student’s practice portfolio, and personal file.

The meetings explore:

- Student support, including any disability requirements
- Learning needs, learning contract development and the practice competencies
- Practice mentor support from the academic
- The student’s professional development
- During the final meeting, achievement of learning contracts and practice competencies

Within the tripartite process the practice mentor is responsible for assessing the student’s performance in practice. The academic mentor considers the student’s written supporting portfolio evidence and knowledge application.

Support from the senior nurses within the partnership sites, and the School’s commitment to promoting practice based education was fundamental to establishing and developing the tripartite system. Category 1 teaching hours are allocated to the academic mentor’s role. This has equivalent status to classroom teaching and is vital as one student’s summative placement corresponds with 1.5 hours of tripartite meetings and additional portfolio reading time.

#### **Challenges and actions:**

A shared understanding of the tripartite process was essential. The programme team prepared practice and academic mentors through workshops and placement visits. A protocol was written and roles defined. The protocol recognises that sustaining the system depends upon ensuring academic and practice mentor time is used effectively. Thus students negotiate meetings with their mentors around the priorities of the placement setting. This flexibility means that postponements are rare.

Since implementation the major challenge has been increasing student numbers and the geographical spread of placements. Originally academics followed students around the placement circuit. Subsequently a zoning system was introduced with academics covering tripartites’ in their link areas, reducing travel time between visits and enhancing the link tutor system. Zones are allocated according to realistic student/academic ratios ensuring workload manageability.

**Impact and benefits:**

These are substantial. Academic mentors are much more visible within the clinical environment. Partnerships are established, and clinical and educational initiatives discussed and shared. Improved communication networks mean that failing students no longer come to the attention of “The School” at the point of assessment. Whilst some students still fail, they have had the benefit of remedial action to give them every opportunity to achieve. Crucially, practice mentors are supported in their assessment decisions. Academic mentors are able to contribute directly to students’ practice learning experiences, increase their knowledge and observe the effectiveness and relevance of their teaching within clinical practice.

Jill Foley

Programme Director Pre-registration Nursing

University of Teesside School of Health and Social Care

[Jill.Foley@tees.ac.uk](mailto:Jill.Foley@tees.ac.uk)

A more detailed version of this article is currently being prepared by J Foley,

B Wallis, K Mitchell and L Inayat