

Recipient of the
Workforce Development
Innovation Fund 2016/17



learn
from others

Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead

English language examination training for nurses who qualified abroad

There is a rising shortage of nurses working in social care, and a large number of internationally-qualified nurses who are currently under-employed as care workers. This council identified English language competency is a key barrier to achieving UK nurse registration. The Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead piloted a project to fill the care vacancies by helping internationally-qualified nurses improve their language skills.

According to the Royal College of Nursing and Midwifery, there are currently about 24,000 unfilled nursing jobs in England. There has been a sharp decline in the number of nurses from the European Union registering to work in the UK and the number of applications to UK nursing degree courses fell by about one quarter last year. There is a rising shortage of registered nurses in the UK, yet anecdotal evidence suggested that many nurses who qualified abroad, particularly from non-EU countries, find it difficult to register in the UK. Some of these internationally qualified nurses are employed as care workers in care homes. This is an untapped resource.

Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead and Windsor, Ascot and Maidenhead Clinical Commissioning Group explored ways to support nurses who qualified abroad and are currently working as care home workers to progress towards UK nurse registration. This is particularly important as the Royal Borough of Windsor

and Maidenhead looks after the needs of 1,500 residents in 46 care homes. This area has the largest number of nursing / residential homes per head of population in England. There is a higher than average population of people over the age of 65 (17%). Scoping within the locality found that an average of two care workers in each nursing home had qualified abroad but had not registered in the UK. A key barrier mentioned by these care workers was the cost, complexity and process with the English language competency examination. Thus the borough was motivated to test innovative approaches due to the high population need (large number of older people needing nursing care), the potential for change and the barriers reported by internationally trained nurses.

What we wanted to achieve

The programme had two main aims, to test the feasibility of offering a course to increase internationally qualified nurses' confidence in taking the English language test (component

of UK registration) and to support at least five internationally qualified nurses to complete their English language competency test.

The expected benefits were to improve strategic planning locally and nationally by learning from the outcomes, and to support individual care workers and care homes in their development with the potential enhance the pool of registered nurses available locally in the longer term.

What we did

Six of the care homes who had taken part in a scoping activity to examine potential approaches for supporting internationally qualified nurses put forward candidates on a bespoke training programme to build confidence in taking the English language competency examination (IELTS - International English Language Testing System).

The course comprised five three-hour sessions. It was offered at two separate times: one in the afternoon and one in the evening weekly for five weeks. The sessions focused on practising and building confidence in skills examined by the International English Language Testing System examination, particularly reading and writing in English. Nineteen people enrolled and 16 people completed this phase of the programme.

Participants took part in English language tests at the beginning and end of the programme. At the end of the five sessions, the eight top-scoring participants were invited to attend a further four sessions to consolidate their skills. This is because the course was not designed to teach English skills, but rather to teach exam-taking skills and help people prepare for the exam. Those with the highest likelihood of passing were selected for more support.

All eight people who completed the second phase booked to sit their English language examination. Results were pending at the time of writing.

What we achieved

The programme engaged with 19 care workers across six care homes. Of these, 16 completed the first phase of an English language examination preparation course and the other

three were referred to community colleges for English language tuition (as they were not yet at a standard ready to benefit from the exam training).

The eight highest scoring phase one course participants achieved the minimum standard and were offered the opportunity to further refine their skills. All eight have booked to sit their examination. All of these eight reported increased confidence to take the exam.

Those who did not move on to the final stage sometimes reported feeling disappointed that they had not received extra tuition. However they said they felt more motivated to continue with the registration process as they felt support was available and they were not trying to achieve everything alone.

Care home managers reported an increased sense of optimism that people currently working as care workers may in time register as nurses and continue working in nursing homes.



These nurses work hard and can progress further. This course has given them the opportunity to develop themselves and the confidence they can do it. It will help us as a home to have another nurse as we find it really hard to fill vacancies.

Care home manager



What we learnt

The key learning from this programme was the significant pool of untapped resources available within care homes. The programme estimated that about two care workers per home were internationally qualified nurses. If these nurses are supported to register in the UK, this could help address nursing shortages within care homes. This could have implications for areas throughout England, as many other localities may have an untapped pool of internationally qualified nurses working as care workers within the NHS, social services and private care providers.

The programme tested the value of a short series of sessions designed to help people understand the examination requirements. This was well received and resulted in eight people booking to sit their examination. However the English language competency test is just one of many components of the registration process. In order to help more internationally qualified nurses progress to UK registration, a wider menu of support is needed, tailored to the needs of individuals. For instance, nurses who have lower English language competency could be signposted to classes at community colleges as a pre-requisite to lessons for passing the examination. Those with higher levels of competency could be supported through examination techniques and practice, with a clear pathway and timetable set out for achieving other requirements. Support for the clinical assessment and other components of registration could also be provided.

The cost for an internationally qualified nurse to register in the UK is about £1,600 (assuming success at each of the three exam stages first time). This was found to be the biggest barrier, especially to those receiving relatively low care worker wages. In this programme, funding training and examination fees helped motivate people to move forward along the pathway. This was made possible by a Workforce Development Innovation Fund grant from the Department of Health administered by Skills for Care. In future Health Education England, community education provider networks, care homes and local authorities and clinical commissioning groups may need to consider the value of investing in these types of workers. Pump priming to support the registration of internationally qualified nurses has the potential for relatively 'quick wins' for those who have the necessary clinical and language competence, as happens with support in acute trusts.

Nurses who have trained abroad are working as carers in care homes because the requirements for registration in the UK are complex, costly and time consuming. We helped eight carers prepare for the English language component of the registration requirements which takes them one step closer to registering. This will benefit the individual carer, the homes they are working in and the wider health and care economy.

Training commissioner

I think the most helpful lesson I've learned is how to write the essay in a proper structure and how to link one sentence to another. [The course] has been very informative, improved my knowledge and boosted my confidence with the writing part.

Course participant, care home carer

This project addressed the 2016/17 priority on:

Ensuring registered managers or frontline managers are skilled in attracting, selecting and keeping high quality social care workers, including registered professionals.

For more information please contact:

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Skills for Care recommends

Skills for Care produces a wide range of products and services aimed at helping employers recruit the right people and that they have the right core skills.

Core skills

We've developed learning activities to check social care workers have the right core skills (English, number, digital, employability) to work safely and meet quality standards.

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