

Review

Supporting new academic staff Quality Improvement (QI) project in the School of Nursing and Health Care Leadership

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Recruiting and retaining appropriately qualified academic staff is vital for the delivery of high-quality teaching in any academic setting, including health care and nursing. Evidence suggests that transition from an expert clinician to becoming a novice academic in the field of adult nursing could be challenging. A Quality Improvement project was undertaken to develop a structured induction and orientation programme in the School of Nursing and Health Care Leadership ensuring a smooth introduction to academia. The outcome of the QI project suggests that novice academics benefit from a structured induction and orientation programme helping in the smooth transition from expert clinician to becoming a novice academic.

Key words: Novice academic staff, support, induction and orientation, professional development, quality improvement, project.

INTRODUCTION

Recruiting and retaining appropriately qualified academic staff is vital for the delivery of high-quality teaching in any academic setting, including health care and nursing. Evidence suggests that transition from an expert clinician to becoming a novice academic in the field of adult nursing could be challenging (McArthur-Rouse, 2008). Supporting and mentoring is crucial to introduce new staff to academia ensuring a smooth start (Thomas et al., 2015).

The Plan-Do-Study-Act (PDSA) (Taylor et al., 2014) Quality Improvement (QI) cycle was used to develop a structured induction and orientation programme in the

School of Nursing and Health Care Leadership ensuring a smooth introduction to academia.

PLAN

Staff with significant clinical experience but with no or minimal academic experiences were recruited by the School of Nursing and Health Care Leadership (SNHCL) at the University of Bradford in 2022. Most of the newly recruited academics reported finding the transition from clinical to academic settings challenging. A short survey

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was therefore carried out using Microsoft Form to find out the views and experiences of novice academics and to identify lessons learnt for future improvement. Feedback from the survey identified the need for a structured orientation and induction programme, focusing on multiple aspects as highlighted:

“Checklists of training, the introductory meetings in groups with other new starters, shadowing a variety of staff on various modules to become more familiar with the structure of the modules and programme overall” (Participant 1).

“The organization assuming we know how to do everything still applies to this date. This is particularly important for staff coming from different countries as the education systems differ, this includes how we mark, which can have serious repercussions on the students” (Participant 5).

“Full training on all of the systems; what they are, how they are used, when one might be preferable to another should be carried out. Also, how to create a canvas page and how to create a SharePoint site should be done” (Participant 2).

DO

All participants identified the need for a structured orientation and induction program, alongside having a line manager and a mentor. The SNHCL leadership team listened to the new staff and created a new post titled “Staff Development Lead (SDL)” with 50% of full-time equivalent time allocation. Based on the feedback provided in the survey, and in agreement with relevant staff, the following actions were taken to support new staff joining the School of Nursing and Health Care Leadership.

Weekly meetings were arranged by the SDL and all new staff were invited. In these meetings questions were answered, and concerns raised by the new staff were communicated with the school leadership team. These meetings were also used for training sessions arranged for new staff on various topics such as how to use the IT systems e.g. canvas and eVision, how to teach large and smaller groups and professional development. Other experienced members of the school were also invited to some of these sessions which they found useful. These training sessions were recorded and re used for new starters joining the school.

A welcome pack was developed for new staff joining the university containing links to all the training sessions and courses available at the university level, as well as welcome emails from the head of school and information about the structure of the faculty and school. The

welcome pack also includes a list of all mandatory and essential training courses to be completed by new staff during the probation period. Line managers are advised to use this welcome pack alongside the probation reviews and meetings.

Apart from the weekly group meetings, one to one meetings were also arranged as needed with SDL using an individualized approach to provide support and guidance on issues relating to professional development and respond to questions and concerns.

STUDY

All the initiatives highlighted earlier were greatly appreciated by the novice academic staff but also by senior colleagues. The SDL role was initially approved for six months ending in September 2023. A second survey was carried out to collect the views of staff about the role so an informed decision could be made by the school leadership team whether to continue the role in its current format or make changes. The survey results overwhelmingly supported the role of SDL, 90% (9/10) participants wanting the SDL role to continue. Most participants appreciated the role of SDL and found it useful such as the opinion of two participants:

“It is very helpful in gaining knowledge and understanding how the university runs. He provided a platform for new starters to share experiences, reflect, and learn from each other” (Participant 1).

“Knowing that there was a lead for staff development was particularly important as my role is new to the school, so there was no-one to specifically shadow or learn from 'on the job'. The booklet that ... provided was particularly helpful as I am new to academia and much of the structure and terminology was unfamiliar. The role also indicated that the school is committed to welcoming new staff and ensuring ongoing development. The Wednesday afternoon sessions were also a really key part of feeling like I had opportunities to get to know the school ways of working, including the recordings of previous sessions” (Participant 8).

ACT

Based on the feedback from novice academic staff and reflection from the SDL role, the following actions have been agreed by the Head of School:

- (1) The SDL role will continue, however, with reduced hours;
- (2) The mentors and line managers will be advised to use the welcome pack as a resource for supporting new

academic staff alongside their probation review documents;

(3) The success of the SDL role has not only been acknowledged by colleagues in the SNHCL but also by staff in other schools and departments of the faculty. The dean of the faculty has advised to present this project to the faculty leadership team and consider implementing it across the faculty.

CONCLUSION

The introduction of the SDL role has been a great success and vital in supporting staff new to the school of nursing and academia. This QI project has shown that a structured induction and orientation program helps in smooth transition from clinical settings to academia and thus professional development and retention. Findings of this QI project could be used by others to support novice academic staff, especially those with no previous academic experience.

CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

The authors have not declared any conflict of interests.

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