Assistant Practitioner Steering Group Meeting  
7th February 2008

Present:
Jon Bramley (Progress 2 Succeed)  
Sue Byrne (Oxfordshire PCT)  
Sam Donohue (Oxford Radcliffe Hospitals Trust)  
Mike Foster (Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire Mental Healthcare Trust)  
Camilla Leach (NHS Education South Central)  
Ruth Monger (South Central Strategic Health Authority)  
Jenny Simmons (Heatherwood and Wexham Park Hospitals Trust)  
Liz Starbuck Greer (Progress South Central)  
Mark Statham (NHS Education South Central)  
Emma Wilton (NHS Education South Central)

Apologies:
Anita Esser (Southampton University Hospitals Trust)

1. Welcome and Introductions
1.1 Introductions were made and apologies given

2. Background to development of Assistant Practitioners
2.1 A questionnaire was circulated from SC SHA and NESC in September 2007 regarding development of the workforce within bands one to four across NHS South Central.

2.2 Trusts and PCTs were asked about funding which they would endorse to support development of this section of the workforce. Foundation Degrees were mentioned by numerous organisations to support development of new roles at band four, to increase flexibility and productivity.

2.3 A small number of organisations were more cautious about endorsing investment in Foundation Degrees. This was due to the perceived threat to band five roles and the limited number of band four roles which exist within the current workforce. However, it was acknowledged that as skills gaps are identified and need for the Assistant Practitioner is recognised, band four roles will be created.

2.4 Funding has been received from Foundation Degree Forward to develop Assistant Practitioners within the area of Long Term Conditions (LTC). Work is being undertaken with the University of Southampton and Thames Valley University to pilot a LTC pathway within the existing Health and Social Care Foundation Degrees. 40 Foundation Degree places will be commissioned, 20 from each HEI, beginning in September 2008. Within the first year of the programme students will study generic Health and Social Care modules and in the second year they will study LTC modules. Service user mentors and practitioner mentors will be trained to support students. The Expert Patient Programme will train service user mentors.

2.5 A drive exists nationally to develop a workforce which is affordable, flexible and competent. The Learning for a Change in Healthcare Report states that
Assistant Practitioner schemes should not only be recognised and applauded, but they should be built upon and extended across the whole service. The report acknowledges that sustainability over a longer period needs to be both properly assured and underpinned with appropriate levels of funding and organisational support.

2.6 Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire Mental Healthcare Trust have a small number of band four roles. Prior to the creation of South Central SHA interest existed in the North in developing the Assistant Practitioner and bids were submitted to Thames Valley SHA. This was put on-hold due to the SHA reorganisation.

2.7 Work is being undertaken across Oxfordshire to develop Assistant Practitioners. HEFCE Funding has been received from Progress South Central to fund Foundation Degree places via Oxford Brookes University. A multitude of pathways are being developed based upon service need. Clinical Teachers will work with Oxford Brookes University and students to deliver work-based learning. Students will be recruited from the existing workforce and will be employed within training posts. They will spend 2 days a week in university.

2.8 Workforce figures indicate that currently 40 Assistant Practitioners are employed across NHS South Central. Different areas across the country are further advanced in development of the Assistant Practitioner.

2.9 Feedback from Southampton University Hospitals Trust indicates that they would not welcome a tight correlation between development of Assistant Practitioners and Foundation Degrees. They would prefer to use NVQ Level 4 with CPD units, which would equate to a Foundation Degree.

2.10 NESC should consider supporting development of a suitable learning infrastructure to encourage work-based learning and mentorship.

3. Current Foundation Degree Commissions
3.1 Foundation Degree funding has been strongest in the South, which reflects the 18 week wait pressures. The health and social care foundation degree commissions at the University of Southampton are reducing from 60 to 40 in 2008/09. This reflects service needs.

3.2 Funding for the Oxford Brookes foundation degree needs to be considered separately. Across Oxfordshire funding is being sought for 20 places.

3.3 Progress South Central and Progress 2 Succeed are looking at a cross HEI framework to accommodate small pockets of provision across South Central.

4. Terms of Reference
4.1 The Assistant Practitioner is the agreed term which will be used across South Central for new band four roles.

4.2 Agreement was reached that education providers will be represented via the Lifelong Learning Networks. Individual providers may be asked to join the steering group or task and finish groups, as required.
4.3 Responsibilities of the Steering Group were agreed as follows:

4.4 Developing a South Central generic definition of an Assistant Practitioner, which all Trusts and PCTs will be asked to endorse.

4.5 Development of the Assistant Practitioner will be driven by the identification of skills gaps within the workforce and the desire to develop knowledge, skills and competences at band four the NHS Career Framework. Once a need has been identified for the Assistant Practitioner role, suitable education provision will be designed.

4.6 CL was asked to explore how current Assistant Practitioners work in practice across NHS South Central. This will provide some evidence regarding the roles they hold, the increased levels of responsibility they assume and any benefits to service delivery and patient care. CL will undertake interviews with Assistant Practitioners and their managers. The information will be written up and circulated across NHS South Central. **Action:** CL to explore Assistant Practitioner roles across NHS South Central.

4.7 Trusts who are currently submitting Foundation Trust applications are looking at the structure of their current and future workforce in terms of skill mix and affordability. This may provide an insight into their requirements for the Assistant Practitioner role.

4.8 RM and EW have developed a South Central Widening Participation Strategic Framework. RM will send this to Trusts and PCTs asking for copies of any local widening participation strategies. This will highlight the current position of organisations in their development of staff within bands one to four.

4.9 Modernising Nursing Careers has implications for staff within bands one to four.

4.10 Development and implementation of the Assistant Practitioner will be linked to the Knowledge and Skills Framework and National Occupational Standards.

4.11 To enable clarity of the Assistant Practitioner role a South Central code of conduct will be developed which will incorporate issues such as accountability, authority etc. This will help employers and staff members to understand what they can expect from the new role. **Action:** EW to search for codes of conduct which could inform development of a South Central code.

4.12 Development of the Assistant Practitioner should be undertaken in partnership with Local Authorities. Milton Keynes may provide a good example of how this works in practice. **Action:** EW to contact representatives from Milton Keynes.

4.13 Work undertaken across NHS South Central will be linked to the national regulation of Healthcare Support Workers. In November 2007 the RCN publicised a Policy Briefing regarding the regulation of Healthcare Support Workers. A recommendation was made that Healthcare Support Workers should be regulated in the interests of public protection and patient safety. The first pragmatic step towards achieving this within the NHS is recommended to be the regulation of Assistant Practitioners in Nursing. It is proposed that the NMC establish a register for Assistant Practitioners in Nursing.
4.14 A South Central Education Framework will be developed encompassing both Foundation Degrees and NVQs. This will be developed in partnership with the Lifelong Learning Networks.

4.15 Competences will be mapped against the Educational Framework to ensure that individuals already employed as Assistant Practitioners across NHS South Central have the required competences.

4.16 Supporting a suitable learning infrastructure is essential to successful development of the Assistant Practitioner. Work-based learning is a crucial element of the Foundation Degree. Consideration should be given to the provision of work placements, mentorship etc. **Action:** EW to discuss placement capacity with the Quality and Learning Environment Team within NESC.

4.17 It was recognised that across NHS South Central a number of projects are being undertaken looking at development of new roles at band four. A mapping exercise needs to be undertaken to establish where these projects exist and how they link to development of the Assistant Practitioner. **Action:** EW to undertake mapping of existing band four projects.

4.18 The Steering Group will lead development of an Education Commissioning Framework for Foundation Degrees. This will enable sustainability of provision and will help the Assistant Practitioner role to become embedded within local workforce plans. The Learning for a Change in HealthCare report criticised funding for development of staff within bands one to four because it is often ad-hoc, patchy, unsustainable and vulnerable. Development of an Education Commissioning Framework will help to overcome this and ensure sustainability of funding.

4.19 Progression pathways into and from Foundation Degrees/ NVQs need to be mapped. This will be undertaken in partnership with the Lifelong Learning Networks. It is recognised that the Assistant Practitioner will be a valued role in its own right, it will not exist purely as a progression route into nursing. Information, advice and guidance will need to be provided to staff working within bands one to four.

4.20 At the last SHA Board Meeting it was agreed that NESC will have a management board. It was agreed that the steering group will be accountable to the NESC Management Board.

4.21 **Action:** EW to amend the Terms of Reference and circulate a final draft to members of the Steering Group.

5. **Identification of need for Assistant Practitioner role**
5.1 This was discussed within agenda item 6.

6. **Next Steps and Priorities**
6.1 Minutes of the Steering Group Meeting, Terms of Reference and additional information will be circulated to Trusts and PCTs across NHS South Central. Each organisation will be asked to nominate one individual as a point of contact for Assistant Practitioner development. EW will ask individual contacts for indicative workforce planning numbers for development of the Assistant Practitioner.
**Action:** EW to circulate information across NHS South Central and collect indicative workforce planning numbers for Assistant Practitioner Development.

6.2 An action plan will be developed outlining targets of the steering group.  
**Action:** EW to develop action plan.

6.3 SD is speaking at a forthcoming RCN conference. She will promote development of the Assistant Practitioner across NHS South Central and will attempt to make links with the regulatory bodies regarding regulation of the role.

6.4 Any investment made by South Central SHA and NESC in Foundation Degrees or NVQs will be included within the Joint Investment Framework between the SHA and the Learning and Skills Council.

7. **Membership of the Steering Group**
7.1 It was agreed that membership of the Steering Group will remain the same, except for addition of the following members:  
The Education Commissioning Team are currently appointing a post focussed upon Learning Disabilities. Once in post this individual will be invited to join the Steering Group.  
A Local Authority representative will be invited to attend the next Meeting.

7.2 Chris Wintle from Skills for Health and Lee Thomas from the LSC will be sent information.

8. **Date of Next Meeting**
8.1 EW to circulate a date in April for the next meeting.