Assistant Practitioner Steering Group Meeting
28th April 2008

Present:
Julie Abdalla (Hampshire PCT)
Jon Bramley (Progress 2 Succeed)
Anita Esser (Southampton University Hospitals Trust)
Camilla Leach (NHS Education South Central)
Christine Palmer (Basingstoke and North Hampshire Foundation Trust)
Toni Sanderson (NHS Education South Central)
Liz Starbuck Greer (Progress South Central)
Mark Statham (NHS Education South Central)
Emma Wilton (NHS Education South Central)

Apologies:
Sue Byrne (Oxfordshire PCT)
Sam Donohue (Oxford Radcliffe Hospitals Trust)
Mike Foster (Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire Mental Healthcare Trust)
Barry Hodgson (Portsmouth Hospitals NHS Trust)
Ruth Monger (South Central Strategic Health Authority)
Jenny Simmons (Heatherwood and Wexham Park Hospitals Trust)

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

2. Minutes of Steering Group Meeting on 07.02.08
2.1 The following amendments will be made to minutes of the Steering Group Meeting on 07.02.08:
Point 2.9 should read Southampton University Hospitals Trust prefer to use NVQ Level 3, not 4, with CPD units, to equate to a Foundation Degree.
Point 4.16 should read EW to discuss placement capacity with the Quality and Learning Resources, not Environment, Team.

3. Matters Arising
3.1 EW has yet to gain Local Authority representation on the steering group.
Action: Steering Group Members to send EW Local Authority contacts.

3.2 EW met members of the Quality and Learning Resources team to discuss placement capacity. Toni Sanderson agreed to join the Steering Group.

3.3 Following the last Steering Group, minutes of the meeting, terms of reference and a copy of the action plan were emailed to all workforce development leads across NHS South Central. Each organisation has nominated a contact who has agreed to disseminate information to key individuals within their organisation.

3.4 Information is being collected regarding existing Assistant Practitioner development projects. Work is being undertaken in Hampshire PCT, Southampton University Hospitals Trust and Berkshire Healthcare Foundation Trust. EW is meeting Berkshire Foundation Trust to discuss their project.
3.5 A discussion was held regarding the collection of indicative workforce planning numbers for Assistant Practitioners. EW to discuss with Ruth Monger the workforce figures contained within the Local Delivery Plans to obtain whether these highlight demand for band four roles.

**Action:** EW to discuss LDPs with Ruth Monger.

4. **Review Action Plan**

4.1 The group reviewed the action plan which contains objectives, key indicators, outcomes, timescales and an identified lead. It was agreed that objective 1, defining the Assistant Practitioner role, should be undertaken prior to the stakeholder conference in July.

**Action:** EW to circulate definition of Assistant Practitioner for comment.

4.2 Objective 3, identifying skills gaps at band four, is crucial to driving development of the Assistant Practitioner and ensuring staff have roles to progress into. Work is currently being undertaken by Southampton University Hospital Trust, led by Heads of Nursing, to identify the activities which staff perform in acute wards at bands three, four and five. This will help to articulate the differences in roles, freedom to act and identifying skills gaps.

**Action:** AE to share results from Southampton University Hospital Trust exercise with Steering Group.

4.4 Objective five, development of an educational framework, will be supported by Progress South Central.

4.5 Objective seven involves work of the Education Commissioning Team within NESC. Education Commissioning are committed to supporting development of staff at band four and main-streaming funding for Foundation Degrees.

4.6 Discussion around objective six, mapping progression pathways into and from Assistant Practitioner roles, highlighted the importance of sustaining development of staff in bands one, two and three. Recruitment and retention of these staff can prove problematic and therefore it is important to promote these career opportunities within schools, colleges, job centres etc. The Society, Health and Development (SHD) Diploma will also act to attract young people into NHS employment. The SHD diploma is being launched in September 2008 and will provide young people with skills appropriate for employment. The diploma will be delivered at three levels: Level one is equivalent to five GCSEs at grades D – G, Level two to seven GCSEs at grades A – C and level three to 3.5 A Levels. The diplomas are taught around case studies. Skills for Health is leading the development and Ed Excel are the awarding body.

4.7 It was agreed that objective eight, developing the learning infrastructure, could best be supported by funding assessors and mentors within the workplace. Work needs to be undertaken to change the culture of the current infrastructure to encourage staff in bands one to four to develop as assessors and mentors to support their peers.

5. **Conference Update**

5.1 Following the initial Steering Group Meeting EW met colleagues from Education Commissioning to discuss Assistant Practitioner development. It was agreed that to assist the achievement of objectives outlined within the
action plan and engage stakeholders across South Central, stakeholder conferences would be hosted. The first of which will focus upon raising awareness of the Assistant Practitioner role and outlining need across NHS South Central. A second conference will be held to look at developing an education framework to support the new band four role.

5.2 The first conference has been given the working title ‘Assistant Practitioners, Making it Happen’ and will be held on Thursday 17th July at a venue in Newbury. Dr Patricia Oakley has agreed to speak about the national drivers for development of Assistant Practitioners and Helen Kilgannon and Suzanne Southern have agreed to talk about their experiences of developing the Assistant Practitioner across NHS North West. Camilla Leach, NESC, will discuss the evaluation of Assistant Practitioner roles across NHS South Central.

5.3 It was agreed that in addition to the above speakers the following people should be invited to address the conference: Ruth Monger to discuss NHS South Central drivers for development of the Assistant Practitioner, including workforce planning priorities. Chris Wintle to discuss the role of Skills for Health in the Assistant Practitioner agenda. Assistant Practitioners who are either qualified or studying a Foundation Degree to outline their experiences of the role in practice.

**Action:** EW to approach above conference speakers.

5.4 Initially the programme was developed to offer delegates the opportunity to participate in table discussions around topics such as development of a Code of Conduct for NHS South Central, identification of need for the new band four role, levers and barriers to development etc as well as workshop sessions. It was agreed however that table discussions may be more productive than workshops at the July conference and therefore two table discussions should be added to the programme and workshops removed. Delegates will be given the opportunity to display posters sharing information and ideas about their current programmes of work.

5.5 It was agreed that, if possible, up to five people from each Trust and PCT should be invited to attend the conference, along with education providers and key partners. Trust/PCT representatives should include a Clinical Director, Head of Service, Workforce Development Lead, Team Leader and aspiring/current Assistant Practitioner.

6. **Code of Conduct**

6.1 At the last meeting a need was identified for development of an Assistant Practitioner Code of Conduct. Examples of existing Codes were found from Cumbria and Lancashire and North Bristol. Using these examples, as well as a document developed within Hampshire PCT relating to Therapy and HCA staff at band three, EW drafted an NHS South Central Code of Conduct. It was agreed that this would be used to establish the standards of practice expected of Assistant Practitioners across NHS South Central. Trusts and PCTs would be asked to endorse this, requesting that Assistant Practitioners and their line managers sign the Code of Conduct.

6.2 A discussion was held about whether the draft Code of Conduct was too detailed and whether it should be reduced to a one page document. However it was agreed to keep the detail but outline in the introduction the expectations
of South Central SHA, Trusts/PCTs and Assistant Practitioners. This should be sent to Union representatives for consultation.

**Action:** EW to update Code of Conduct and re-circulate for comment.

7. **Evaluation Update**

7.1 A letter was sent to Workforce Development Leads asking them to identify Assistant Practitioners who may wish to become involved in this evaluation, which is being led by CL. The aim of which is to explore the roles currently undertaken by Assistant Practitioners within NHS South Central, ascertain the benefits brought by Assistant Practitioners to service delivery and patient care and investigate educational and training development needs of future/existing Assistant Practitioners. CL is interviewing Assistant Practitioners and sending questionnaires to their line managers.

7.2 CL has arranged ten interviews, all involving Assistant Practitioners in Radiography in Southampton, Portsmouth and Milton Keynes. A small number of questionnaires have been received from line managers. CL outlined some reported benefits of Assistant Practitioners which include patients being happy with the treatment they receive from Assistant Practitioners and some successful examples of skills escalation. CL asked steering group members to send her information about other Assistant Practitioners employed across NHS South Central. CL to contact Sarah White from Education Commissioning for information about individuals who have completed the Health and Social Care Foundation Degree at the University of Southampton.

**Actions:** Steering group members to send CL information regarding Assistant Practitioners employed within their organisations.

CL to contact Sarah White for names of Assistant Practitioners.

8. **Outline of Lifelong Learning Networks**

8.1 Lifelong Learning Networks (LLNs) are funded by the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) which is part of the Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills (DIUS). Each LLN is funded for three years, based upon the date of establishment. Thirty LLNs exist across England, their purpose is to encourage and promote progression routes into and from higher education. Each LLN has formed a partnership network involving Higher Education Institutions and Further Education Colleges, with one HEI acting as the lead.

8.2 Progress South Central covers Berkshire, Buckinghamshire, Oxfordshire and Surrey. It is led by the University of Reading with Buckinghamshire New University, Oxford Brookes University, the University of Surrey and FE Colleges. It aims to improve the rate of progression into higher education for vocational learners. The LLN is working to increase the awareness of vocational learning amongst HEIs. It is currently focused upon developing progression agreements, which is where the LLN hopes to provide support to this Steering Group. Hampshire and the Isle of Wight LLN is led by the Healthcare Innovations Unit at the University of Southampton. It is focused upon curriculum development.

9. **Next Steps and Priorities**

9.1 Next steps and priorities were agreed as follows:
• Finalise conference programme and re-circulate.
• Develop definition of Assistant Practitioner for comment.
• Amend Code of Conduct and re-circulate.
• Send minutes of meeting to contacts list across NHS South Central.

10. Any Other Business
10.1 MS suggested inviting Richard Billing from NESC to join the Steering Group to provide a link to the national work being undertaken with healthcare scientists.

11. Date of Next Meeting
11.1 EW to circulate a date in July for the next meeting.