

INTRODUCING THE NHS UNIVERSITY - QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

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NHSU

What is the NHSU?

The NHSU is being created to develop the skills and potential of NHS staff. It will be both a real, concrete institution and a virtual body - the best of what is called a 'bricks and clicks' approach. The University will work with partners to support the learning and development needs of all staff in their role as NHS employees so they can provide better quality healthcare to patients.

Who is it for?

The NHSU will be for all NHS staff, to ensure they have the skills and support they need to deliver a high quality health service. Everyone will have a personal development plan that sets out a clear path for their development. The University will then offer skills training, vocational training, education and academic development throughout their career.

Why is it needed?

In a 'people business' like health care, the quality of service offered to patients depends first and foremost on the availability of well-qualified staff. All major employers recognise that the future of their

organisations depends upon their ability to develop the skills and capacities of their staff.

A university for the NHS can look at the workforce as a whole and consider how the roles and skills of staff can be developed to provide high standards of care and meet the needs of patients. There is no other national institution in a position to do this at present.

Why not use existing universities?

Universities and the NHS have well developed partnerships to meet the educational and training needs of healthcare professionals and other staff working in the NHS. We want to build on these partnerships and open up educational and career opportunities to a wider range of healthcare staff.

How will it operate?

One million people work for the NHS. To reach as many staff as possible, the NHSU will make use of e-learning and distance learning. This will mean developing and commissioning high quality materials to be delivered through the Internet and other means.

But we know that personal contact is also very important and so e-learning will be supported by face-to-face support in the workplace and elsewhere, drawing on the experience of the Open University and similar institutions.

What will it provide?

A whole range of programmes will be provided, developed and expanded over time.

Early priorities will include the development of a common induction programme for newly appointed staff, training in communications skills, and access to management and leadership development programmes.

How will the NHSU decide its priorities?

It will focus on identifying gaps in current provision and working with educational providers and NHS organisations to fill these gaps. The NHS currently makes a significant investment in the development of its staff. However recent reviews by the Audit Commission and the National Audit Office have highlighted wide variations between NHS organisations and occupations in both the volume and quality of educational provision.

Is it just an NHS training organisation?

The NHSU will not simply be a large training department by another name. It will offer a wide range of courses and programmes relevant to staff at all levels of the service. Some of the programmes will be at degree or post-graduate level and the NHSU will seek, in due course, to meet the recognised criteria and standards for a university. But this will take time.

How will it work with existing universities?

We need a full discussion with the higher education sector and other bodies on how to turn the government's vision for the NHSU into reality. Our aim is to build on existing partnerships and their successes. Understandably, there are concerns among universities that a new entrant like the NHSU will present a threat rather than an opportunity. In reality, it will build on rather than replace what already exists. Productive discussions with Universities UK have already started.

What about existing professional training?

Existing universities will continue to undertake pre-registration training for nurses, midwives, allied health professionals, pharmacists, doctors and dentists.

Will it commission or provide education, training and development?

It will do both. It will work with education providers, commission some new programmes, and directly develop and deliver others. Where appropriate it will develop joint ventures drawing on the strengths of all partners. Partnership is the key. The NHSU will not seek to duplicate existing work which meets required standards.

How does NHSU fit with life-long learning?

The NHS is committed to staff development and life-long learning. This will - with the support of the NHSU - help NHS employees to have a more structured and targeted career plan. Staff will be able to acquire skills and qualifications throughout their working lives and to take on additional responsibilities as they do so. In this way, receptionists and porters can train to become health care assistants, health care assistants can acquire nursing qualifications, and the range of regulated health care professionals working in the NHS can extend their roles.

Will the NHSU award its own qualifications?

The NHSU will work closely with universities and NHS organisations to promote greater use of existing qualifications and to integrate better credit accumulation and transfer systems. Where appropriate the NHSU and individual universities will jointly accredit awards.

The NHSU aims to become an awarding and accrediting institution in its own right, by meeting the standards required to become a university.

Will the NHSU undertake research?

The NHS is already extremely active in research. Staff in most NHS Trusts, and in many primary care organisations, conduct research in collaboration with academic partner organisations. This should provide a sound platform on which to build the NHSU's progression to university status

How big will the NHSU be and what will it cost?

It is too early to say. The current plan is to create a central hub and about 30 'spokes' to provide local input and support alongside workforce development confederations. The eventual size and cost of the NHSU will depend on many factors, not least of which is the extent of partnership with other institutions.

Where will the money come from?

The NHSU, with the Department of Health, will be seeking additional resources to invest in the training and development of staff. The NHS already makes a very substantial investment in the development of staff and the NHSU will be looking to see this is well spent.

How will the NHSU relate to workforce development confederations. Aren't their roles very similar?

There are parallels between the roles of the NHSU and workforce development confederations and there is scope for a very fruitful partnership between them. The WDCs are addressing workforce development needs at local level, and the NHSU will do the same at national level. The WDCs will be expected to help shape and influence the NHSU's activities and programmes. The NHSU will be able to draw on the knowledge and networks of WDCs at local levels and provide training modules and input to meet identified needs.

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