



NICHE Workstream 3: Workforce Optimisation through exploring effective strategies for recruitment, retention and retainment.

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Introduction

I started working as a NICHE funded Research Associate in December 2023, working under the supervision of Dr Rebekah Hill Associate Professor at UEA and Retention lead for NICHE. The work we are completing falls under the NICHE 3 Workstream, exploring workforce optimisation. Our retention work to date has had a focus on looking specifically at the retention of pre and post qualification nurses. This is a concern within the workforce due to poor attrition. Nurses and health visitors are the largest staff group working within health and care sectors (NHS England, 2024¹)

Since starting this post, I have spent a lot of time looking at the international academic literature around nursing retention, including the factors influencing poor attrition and initiatives aimed at improving it. There are of course multiple issues effecting retention, so with the support of other academic and clinical staff, we are in the process of narrowing down a subject in which to complete a literature review.

Examples of retention projects underway

One of the studies currently underway looks at the benefits of nursing students self-assessing their professional skills, which was completed during a theory block (held at the university) prior to their attending a clinical placement.

The students were asked to rate themselves in five domains: *Timekeeping; Communication and Interpersonal Skills; Professionalism and Respect; Teamworking; Evidence Based Practice*, with a tutor also rating them as an independent assessment. The students then compare the two ratings, with an option to discuss this with the tutor, and gain insight into their abilities and any areas of development. This skills assessment exercise will be completed twice during the term. Working this way will offer further opportunity for students to work to improve not only their own self-awareness and insight, but also to have the chance to work in a safe (non-clinical) environment to improve specific skills.

When I started the post, the first self-assessments had been completed, and I entered the data from 100 students and 4 staff members into a spreadsheet. With this information, I was able to analyse the data and present this in a number of graphs and pie charts for an initial report. Once the second phase of self-assessments have been completed, I will be able to compare the data. Findings so far have been positive, with students really appreciating getting the feedback.

¹ NHS Workforce Statistics (2024) <https://digital.nhs.uk/data-and-information/publications/statistical/nhs-workforce-statistics> (last accessed 16/5/2024).



A second study underway is called '*Time Place Face*'. This study is trialling additional methods of supporting nursing students during their clinical practice placements.

- *Time*: students are given their off-duty rotas 4-6 weeks in advance, and are then able to make off-duty requests in good time.
- *Place*: students are able to choose the NHS organisation with which they complete all their placements. This allows them to feel embedded as part of the organisation for their entire course of training.
- *Face*: educators have weekly contact with their students, in order to build relationships, provide support and get to know each other's skills and abilities.

This month I set up an online interview booking system and have begun interviewing the clinical educators to get their opinions of how the project is being adopted locally, and transcribing their responses. As many students as possible will also be interviewed. I am looking forward to analysing this qualitative data, to determine what themes emerge. Students and staff are also being asked to complete surveys to determine whether the project aims were adhered to.

I am also looking forward to helping disseminate the ongoing findings of these studies. Dr Hill and myself have been accepted to present at two conferences this year, and we presented at the NICHE Shared Learning Event in April 2024.

As an Occupational Therapist (OT) by background, I will also be sharing a 'bite sized video' at an OT conference around how the OT workforce can learn from nursing retention research.

In summary

Nursing retention is an important subject, vital in order to maintain the workforce, and these studies are helping to explore ways in which nurses can be supported in their personal and professional development. The NICHE findings will help to inform future initiatives and will be useful to link in with work around recruitment and retention of other health and social care professionals.

Useful resources/further reading:

[NHS England » Looking After Our People – Retention hub](#)

[Retention of nurses UoS Report 28 6 2022.pdf \(soton.ac.uk\)](#)

Contact me

You can reach me to discuss ideas or experience of retention strategies further at:

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