

The development and implementation of an electronic practice assessment document in pre-registration nurse education

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The Context

The aim of the project was to develop and implement an electronic practice assessment document at the University of Nottingham within the School of Health Science - Division of Nursing for all pre-registration nursing students from September 2017. This is a large undertaking with 300 BSc Nursing students and 150 Graduate Entry Nursing students per cohort, across 3 fields of nursing; adult, child, and mental health. These students will undertake practice placements in 9 major practice organisation across Nottinghamshire and Derbyshire within the United Kingdom (UK). A project group, led by Rachel Bacon as project manager, was established in August 2016 involving a small team of lecturers, learning technologists, students and practice partners with the remit to develop and implement the electronic practice assessment document.

The Problem

In the UK currently, 50% of the nursing programme is facilitated and assessed by practitioners in the practice environment. Practitioners are required to undertake Nursing and Midwifery Council (NMC) approved "Mentor" training to equip them with the requirements of the role. Nevertheless, the assessment of practice-based education is reported to be a significant barrier for mentors. Duffy's (2003) seminal research highlights that mentors may 'fail to fail' students because of their lack of knowledge of the assessment process and documentation. Many researchers support these findings and report that mentors lack awareness, knowledge, and understanding of the student's practice assessment documentation (McIntosh, Gidman, and Smith, 2014; Frazer, Connolly, Naughton and Kow, 2014; Pulsford, Boit and Owen, 2002; Hurley and Snowden, 2008). The assessment process can break down due to staff shortage, time management and workload as mentors lack the time to complete the students' documentation. Furthermore, research suggests that the practice assessment documentation needs to be improved to ensure the document is more efficient and user-friendly (Frazer et al., 2014 and Hurley and Snowden, 2008).

Mentors can lack confidence or feel inexperienced in the assessment process and it is therefore imperative that Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) provide practice assessment documentation that enhances the quality, validity, and reliability of assessments. The document needs to be user-friendly and efficient. Traditionally, in the UK the development of the practice assessment document has been restricted to a paper document that the student needs to have available at all times in the practice setting.

The document is large and reportedly not very user-friendly. There is restricted space for mentors to write feedback or develop actions plans and there is a risk that the document may be lost or damaged. There are incurred costs for producing and printing the paper document and additional cost for administration time for processing and photocopying. The processes for gathering data and producing reports are timely and inefficient.

It is envisaged that the development of an electronic practice assessment document would, therefore, provide the innovation and flexibility to enhance the quality of the practice learning assessment and improve the student and mentor experience. Significant advantages have been reported to reduce cost, save time, improve efficiency, improve student monitoring and holistically improve the quality assurance of the practice assessment (Morgan and Dyer 2015). The development of an electronic practice assessment document is therefore considered a natural progression to enhance the quality of the practice learning experience within nurse education.

The Approach

The implementation of the project was subdivided into the following themes:

Design and development – creating a user-friendly document that is fit for purpose.

The project group decided to transfer the existing paper document into an electronic format (see Appendix A for details). This was deemed to reduce the change for mentors during the transition to an electronic document. It was identified that this could limit the functionality and design capability of an electronic document but it is believed that the familiarity of the document would ease the transition. Considering future changes to nurse education it was deemed important to maintain some consistency.

Market research – what can we learn from others.

Scoping other healthcare professional electronic documents gave an insight into what could be achieved. At the University of Nottingham, the division of midwifery has successfully implemented an electronic practice assessment document which enabled the group to learn from what they had produced. Other universities including University of Southampton, Sheffield Hallam University, University of York, Keele University and Kings College London also shared their experiences.

Identify an electronic platform for the practice assessment document.

Several options were considered but PebblePad was chosen for the following reasons:

- PebblePad is used widely in our nursing programmes and faculty-wide.
- Midwifery has used PebblePad for their Practice Assessment Document.
- Students and academics are proficient PebblePad users.
- Mentorship programme uses PebblePad – Mentors are familiar with the system.
- It has the functionality required compared to other options.
- In-house learning technologists are available to develop the document using PebblePad.
- It works!

Access to technology

This was considered a significant hurdle. Research suggested that giving students their own devices was not a viable option for many reasons. There are maintenance and security issues, own devices on placement policies, cost implications and also students often preferred to use their own personal devices. It was, therefore, decided not to provide devices for students. Instead, extensive communications were undertaken with professional leads and IT departments of all 9 organisations to ensure that each organisation had the IT equipment and internet access to support the electronic document. This was critical to the success of the project.

It also proved essential to have a back-up plan to loan laptops/devices and dongles.

Familiarising and training

Good communication with all stakeholders during the development of the project was important to ease the transition. Training for Externals using a variety of methods was provided and all evaluated well, including workshops, posters, PDF guides, video guides, face-to-face visits, helpline contacts, and University Link Lecturer support. Resources and training workshops were provided to academics. Students have an 'Introduction to PebblePad' workshop at the start of their course and a preparation to practice session specifically focused on the electronic practice assessment document prior to the commencement of their placement.

Implementation

In January 2018 the first cohorts of 300 BSc Nursing students and 150 Graduate Entry Nursing students started placement using the electronic practice assessment document. These students undertake practice placements in 9 major practice organisation across Nottinghamshire and Derbyshire within the United Kingdom. To date, there have been minimal issues raised.

Ongoing support and sustainability

Having a central support contact for inquiries helped streamline and provide fast solutions for students and mentors who may be anxious about the issues raised. Ongoing University Link Lecturer support and workshops continue to be provided as the rollout continues.

Next steps

A full evaluation of the experiences of students and practice partners using PebblePad is being undertaken to inform the future development of the practice assessment document. By 2020 there will be approximately 1500 nursing students using an electronic practice assessment document and thousands of external users.

Scaling up

We are working in partnership to develop and implement a collaborative practice assessment document across England.

The Results

Initial feedback has identified that there are many advantages of an electronic practice assessment document, including cost reduction, time savings, and improved efficiency. From a student's perspective, it prevents loss or damage of the document. Both mentors and lecturers agree that it is easier to access a student's document at any time and that it is easier to monitor underachieving students and support students at risk.

The key areas of concerns were that mentors might not have access to a computer or device where a private meeting can be held between student and mentor. They also fear that initially this could increase the time it takes to complete the assessment and this may result in mentors completing assessments in their own time. Other issues regarding internet access and mentors forgetting their password were raised. Furthermore, culturally there is a resistance to advancements in technology, due to a fear of change or lack of ability to utilise new equipment or systems.

Conversely, in the initial phase of implementing the electronic document, it is empowering to find that students and practice partners are embracing this change. Many of the foreseen concerns have been minimal with very few queries being raised by students, mentors, and academics. The vast majority of enquiries so far have related to external users/mentors needing PebblePad accounts to be activated. Students have also found the auto recovery function confusing which has led to increased anxiety. Largely, it is evident that these initial issues are reducing as the rollout continues.

The project is now focused on undertaking a full evaluation of the experiences of students and practice partners using PebblePad to inform the future development of the practice assessment document. Subsequent cohorts will be utilising the electronic practice assessment record and by 2020 there will be approximately 1500 students using an electronic practice assessment document and thousands of external users. It is therefore imperative to refine the electronic document and enhance processes to improve the user experience and also improve the overall quality assurance of the assessment process.

Lessons Learnt

- Keeping the document similar to the paper version helped the transition to the electronic document and provided mentors with some familiar content so they were not overwhelmed with change.
- Using PebblePad was key to our success as this is a familiar system which students use in many aspects of their nursing programme and mentors use during their mentor preparation course.
- Good communication with IT departments of all our placement organisations was important to ensure our external users had the infrastructure to access and use PebblePad.
- A provision to loan laptop/devices and dongles was essential. Although these were rarely used, it was valuable having a backup plan for any complaints or issue regarding access to computers or internet.
- The biggest challenge was to get all External PebblePad accounts set up. This resulted in the majority of issues and was time-consuming.
- Good training for Externals, utilising a variety of methods, was important. Some mentors wanted the freedom to access self-directed guides and others preferred face-to-face contact and support.
- Having a central support contact for enquiries helped streamline and provide fast solutions for students and mentors who may be anxious about the issues raised.
- PebblePad issues with recovered documents caused problems and anxiety for students and mentors.

The next steps...

The future of nurse education within the UK is currently at a transitional point. New Standards of Proficiency for Registered Nurses, Education Framework, and nursing curriculums are being implemented from 2019. Considering this transitional time, cross-organisation collaboration is required to provide a strategic and shared approach from HEI providers, and NMC for the future of nurse education. The Shape of Caring review highlights the current inconsistency in the practice assessment requirements between HEIs, which are open to differing interpretation (Willis, 2015). Willis (2012) recommends the need to develop a more standardised national assessment framework. This need for consistency emerged at NMC consultations, with practice partners and HEIs all asking the NMC for standardised assessment of practice documentation.

Within the UK there are projects working in partnership to implement a standardised practice assessment document. The University of Nottingham is currently working collaboratively with 29 HEIs across England to develop and implement a standardised nursing practice assessment document. This project aims to positively impact on thousands of students and nurses across the country. Furthermore, the intention of the project is to develop the collaborative practice assessment document to be used on an electronic platform.

The overall aim is to share experiences, best practice and work in partnership with other HEIs in England in the development of an electronic practice assessment document. It is reported that many HEIs are already using or are considering using PebblePad as the electronic platform for the new practice assessment document. The intention is to work collaboratively to design and implement a practice assessment document which is innovative, effective, practical and valid; and to create a system which is fit for purpose and exceeds our previous expectations. Considering that our users will equate to 100,000s we want a system that is dynamic and transferable into a diverse range of settings; and is user-friendly, easy to use and intuitive for all users, making processes quicker and more effective.

Take home messages about 'Scaling up'

- Aim to improve quality
- The importance of the student and mentor experience
- Work in partnership with others

References

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Appendix

The OAR Workbook

The multi page workbook contains everything that students and mentors need to record progress against the key standards and competences. Sections include:

Links to help materials, including a screencast video (Vodcast) explaining how to navigate the workbook and complete the various sections, and in-page help with asset linking.

Links to templates for collating evidence.

Timesheets for recording hours worked.

Space for recording meetings and action plans.

Space for attaching evidence of learning and verifying achievement of competence.

Students are asked to complete the built-in progress tracker so that an ongoing record of progress with completing the documentation is available.

Pages are time released as students progress through the programme.

Link to the workbook asset:

<https://v3.pebblepad.co.uk/spa/#/public/GzcMrr7ny9nWztb7mxjGZs6Wbw>

Link to the vodcast:

https://mediaspace.nottingham.ac.uk/media/eOAR+Vodcast/0_gg3y58pq

Screenshot of workbook:

Screenshot of workbook:

The screenshot shows the PebblePad interface for a workbook titled "NMC Ongoing Achievement Record | Undergraduate BSc in Nursing". The interface includes a top navigation bar with "Save" and "Preview" buttons, a secondary navigation bar with tabs for "Student Details", "Guidance", "Mentor Status Record", "OAR Part 1 Adult", "Essential Skills", "Mother and Baby", "Additional Placements", and "Help and Support". The main content area features a sidebar menu on the left with options like "Student Details", "Guidance", "Mentor Status Record", "OAR Part 1 Adult", "Placement Activity", "Placement 1 Hub", "Placement 2 Spoke", "Placement 3 Hub", "Service User and Carer Feedback", "Action Plans Part 1", "Essential Skills", "Mother and Baby", "Additional Placements", and "Help and Support". The central display area shows a header image of three people, a title "NMC Ongoing Achievement Record | Undergraduate BSc in Nursing", and a main heading "Achievement of Standards for Competence for Entry to NMC Professional Register: Adult Field". Below this is a "Contact details" section with a table:

Contact details	
Student name:	Test Student
Centre:	Derby
Cohort:	1709
Tutor name:	Jo Bloggs

To view further case studies from PebbleBash 2018 please visit <https://bit.ly/PB18PUBS>