

University of Chester



Below is a case study from the Dietetics Programme at the University of Chester working in collaboration with the Countess of Chester Hospital, which details our approaches to Practice-based Learning for Dietetic learners during COVID-19 and beyond.

Over recent years the University of Chester has been working collaboratively with the Countess of Chester Hospital to deliver sustainable Practice-based Learning expansion.

Last year at the Countess of Chester they were able to increase their dietetic learner numbers by adopting a Peer Assisted Learning (PAL) approach moving away from the traditional 1:1 supervision model to a 2:1, 3:1 and at times even 4:1 learner to clinical educator ratio. PAL is well accepted and widely recognised method of teaching used both in the university and the clinical setting, involving learners working together to navigate a particular task. PAL activities provide a framework whereby learners are permitted to practice and develop their skills alongside each other.

By using this PAL approach, they have also managed to increase the number of learner dietitians they can accommodate per academic year from 5 up to 10 and next year they are planning to take 12 dietetic learners across the academic year. They have also been able to offer their first part-time paediatric Practice-based Learning which has led on to a band 5 paediatric post which has increased the opportunities to new graduates in this speciality.



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In order to support the increased number of learners and ensure they were familiar with what would be expected of them with regards to PAL, the department produced a new induction and pre-Practice-based Learning information pack for learners to save time when they arrive on Practice-based Learning and to make them feel welcome. Timetables were updated to allow the current learners to fully embrace the PAL approach originally taught at the University and now being used in Practice-based Learning. Remote learning packs were also developed to enable learners to continue to complete Practice-based Learning hours at times where they are unable to attend the hospital or needed to work remotely.

At the University we run 2 weeks of Practice-based Learning in the first and second year of the UG and PG programme. This involves the use of simulation and incorporates PAL and coaching. When Jessica Cristofoli-King was appointed transformational lead back in December 2021 she wanted to take this idea a step further and successfully hosted an Allied Health Professional (AHP) interdisciplinary learner training week which involved learners across 4 AHP professions using peer assisted learning and coaching in a simulated environment with the aim of meeting learner competencies and help them to develop an understanding of the roles within AHP services. This idea could be developed so that AHP training weeks run throughout the year allowing for an increase in learner numbers and learners being exposed more to their fellow AHP learners utilising peer assisted learning and coaching.

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The projects were not without their challenges, some learners were not as comfortable with peer assistance learning at first but most come to see the benefits and embrace the technique. Providing peers with constructive feedback was a challenge for most learners and something some felt uncomfortable doing. By providing sessions on how to give and receive feedback to support the development of good feedback practice this has helped learners to improve this skill which will also be useful in future practice when they themselves become Clinical Educators.