

Sam Daly

Non-clinical practice-based learning case study



Hello! My name is Sam Daly. I'm a mature student – finally studying to be a dietitian 20 years after first becoming interested in the profession. You are never too old to learn! I am currently in my first year of an MSc in Dietetics at Manchester Metropolitan University (MMU). It's the first year MMU has run this course, so it's exciting to be in the first cohort of dietetic students that will graduate from there.

I've recently completed my first Practice-based Learning which was in a non-clinical setting. I was placed in a school, for children aged 3-19 years, with a range of needs and learning difficulties. The Practice-based Learning focus was around professionalism, communication, and reflection – all important skills for a dietitian to have. Although I was unsure what to expect, and what would be expected of me, I knew I would be able to demonstrate these skills.

I was nervous on the first day, it was that 'first day of a new job' feeling. Those feelings quickly disappeared when I got to the school though. The headteacher was very welcoming and made me feel at ease. She gave me a tour of the school and a timetable of the classes I was planned to spend time in for the first week. I think this really helped me to give my week some structure and focus. I was thrown in the deep end a bit though when on the initial tour we walked into an assembly, and she asked me to stand up at the front and explain the role of a dietitian to the children!

One of the main things I learned from this setting was around communication. Not all the children were able to speak, but they were able to communicate in ways that I had never seen before. Some children had talk-pads; some communicated using eye movements or other non-verbal signals. This really brought home to

me the importance of the service user 'voice' and is learning I will take forward into practice.

The days on Practice-based Learning were very varied. I spent time talking with the children about healthy snacks and helping them to make posters about seasonal fruit and vegetables. I worked with a small group of children in the vegetable plot – although my lack of green fingers meant I relied on the children telling me which plants were weeds! I was also lucky enough to join the school trip to a local farm where the children were learning where food comes from.

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The days were not all dietetic-related, and that was okay - it was the communication that was important. There were classroom observations, games of rounders, jubilee parties, and music sessions to get involved in - it was great fun!

One of the real advantages of this setting was the access to other health professionals. The school has a nurse on site, and speech and language therapists and physiotherapists regularly visiting. I was lucky enough to spend time with these health professionals. I learned so much observing them interact with the children and asking them about their roles in paediatrics. They were all very generous with their time and happy to answer my questions.

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The hardest thing I found about being on Practice-based Learning was the transition from having flexibility with the times I study to having fixed full-time hours, and still trying to be mum and juggle home life. I found I had to be really organised – batch cooking on the weekend and filling the freezer worked for me. I also found it helped to write my reflections in the evenings, as I went along, even if it was just brief notes. I was experiencing so many new things, I don't think I'd have remembered everything if I'd waited until the end of the week. I certainly thanked myself for doing this when I came to finalise my Practice-based Learning portfolio! Overall, the Practice-based Learning was tiring at times, but the learning and enjoyment I took from it was more than worth the effort.

The advice I would give to anyone entering a non-clinical Practice-based Learning setting is to not get concerned if what you're doing is not directly related to dietetics. Think of the transferable skills you are using, and work on them. Also, get involved with as much as you can and keep asking questions.

Good luck and enjoy your non-clinical Practice-based Learning!