

University of Nottingham and Slimming World

Practice-based Learning Dietetic Programme case study



Below is a case study on the Dietetic Programme collaboration between the University of Nottingham and Slimming World Head Office and how this was adapted during COVID-19 and beyond.

Learner dietitians are supported within the Nutrition, Research and Health Policy Department at Slimming World Head Office, located in Alfreton, Derbyshire. The nutrition and health function of the team is fulfilled by two dietitians and three registered nutritionists, and their role involves areas such as responding to nutrition and health related queries (via email and telephone), the accuracy and quality of nutrition-focussed written information and materials (such as online features, magazine articles, and blog posts), and writing training materials to support Consultants (who run the public-facing Slimming World groups).

The learner training programme at Slimming World was launched in 2017 when a learner dietitian from the University of Nottingham spent two weeks of their wider 12-week clinical 'B' Practice-based Learning with the team. This was soon extended to enable four learners per academic year to experience two weeks of their wider Practice-based Learning experience in a non-traditional setting. In time, the learner training programme was expanded further, and a partnership was formed with Birmingham City University (BCU). Postgraduate dietetic learners from BCU undertake a stand-alone two-week non-traditional Practice-based Learning experience, which Slimming World supports as a Practice-based Learning provider.

Learner dietitians are provided with a range of opportunities during their two-week Practice-based Learning including responding to nutrition and health-related queries from members and consultants, completing a health promotion project (such as undertaking a short literature review or writing a blog post on a certain health condition or topical subject), undertaking a journal paper review and presenting this to the team, analysing eating plans by eye and/or using Nutritics and providing recommendations for change if appropriate, reviewing written materials for accuracy of nutrition and health messages, observing a community-based weight management group. Over recent years, the learner training programme has been rolled out further to enable learners from both the University of Nottingham and Birmingham City University to complete stand-alone health promotion projects and final year research projects with the team, generally remotely.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, members of the Nutrition, Research and Health Policy Department transitioned to working from home. As a result, the learner training programme was adapted to support learners virtually. For example, learners attended a virtual Slimming World group (held on Zoom), attended daily team catch-ups (which were initiated during the pandemic to enable collaboration despite remote working), and presented projects over Microsoft Teams.

This new virtual way of working also enabled the team to support learner dietitians from

further afield, who otherwise wouldn't have been able to experience Practice-based Learning at Slimming World.

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Virtual learner Practice-based Learning worked well for both the providers and learner dietitians while both parties were working remotely. However, it became more challenging as the team transitioned back to working from the office. Learners working remotely were more isolated from the team as there was no longer a need for daily team catch-ups, and team members weren't as readily accessible on emails/Teams due to meetings being conducted face-to-face in the office. As a result, the learner training programme continued to adapt "post COVID-19" and Slimming World now offers to support learners face-to-face in the office, or via a hybrid approach (where learners are expected to commit to at least 3 days in the office per week). The team continue to support learners from both the University of Nottingham and Birmingham City University with stand-alone health promotion projects, and final year research projects, entirely remotely. This approach continues to work well, is time effective, and makes the experience more accessible to learners who otherwise wouldn't be able to complete a project with Slimming World due to the feasibility of commuting to the office.

Overall, as a team we love gaining new perspectives and a fresh pair of eyes, being challenged with questions that keep us on our toes, and tasks such as journal paper reviews that learners present to the team provide opportunities for our own CPD. Our advice to other educators would be to keep an open mind and always remember that supporting learner dietitians is a two-way process where both sides learn and benefit from the experience. Exposing learner dietitians to your role in a non-traditional workplace can also help shape their future career and be a major advantage to your team when recruiting for new positions.

