



Front L-R - Rachel Culyer, Julie Derbyshire & Lisa Smith

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First students in the UK due to graduate from a new pre-nursing course

Eleven nursing students from the north east are to become some of the first students in the UK to graduate after completing a new pre-nurse training programme delivered by Northumbria University, Newcastle and the NHS.

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The new programme was introduced in 2013 as part of a national pilot scheme by the NHS education and training arm, Health Education England. The programme was set up following a report into care failings at Mid Staffordshire NHS Foundation Trust. The aim is to provide aspiring nurse students with experience in caring by working as a paid healthcare assistant for up to a year before starting a degree to see if nursing is the right career choice for them.

Northumbria University is one of only six universities nationally and the only one in the North East to successfully deliver the pre-nursing programme, which was introduced as a pilot by Health Education England.

City Hospitals Sunderland NHS Foundation Trust, South Tyneside NHS Foundation Trust and Gateshead Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust have been involved in the programme from the start with the University, including the recruitment process. They have also provided health care assistant positions for the students as well as development, training and further placements whilst they have been studying for their degree.

The programme has been so successful in the north east that it has been expanded with further students taken on each year and Newcastle Hospitals NHS Trust, Northumberland, Tyne and Wear NHS Foundation Trust and Northumbria Healthcare NHS Foundation Trust are also now becoming involved.

Lisa Smith will be the first of the students to graduate. She worked as a health care assistant at City Hospitals Sunderland NHS Foundation Trust for six months on a cardiology ward before starting her nursing degree at Northumbria University. She said: “I had been thinking about going into nursing for a few years but I didn’t have any experience. I was particularly attracted to the pre-nursing course as it was recruiting specifically for values rather than experience. I always thought I would make a good nurse but I didn’t have any health care experience.

“I am really excited about my new career as there are so many opportunities open to me now I have graduated. The support you gain from Northumbria University and the Trust during the programme is fantastic. My friends and family are so proud of my achievement and after all the hard work we are looking forward to the graduation ceremony.”

Lisa has secured a nursing role working in the accident and emergency department at South Tyneside Hospital.

[Julie Derbyshire](#), Senior Lecturer and the Course Leader at Northumbria University, has been involved in the development of the programme from the start. She said: “Nursing is a wonderful and rewarding career. However, it isn’t necessarily right for everyone and this course provides an excellent opportunity for aspiring student nurses to gain real life experience first to discover if it is the right vocation for them.

“Northumbria University has delivered nursing programmes for over 20 years and has an excellent reputation for delivering academic excellence and for innovation in nurse education and training; offering a number of routes into nursing. This programme is a great example of that, using a new approach to nurse training whilst ensuring high quality education and training.

“The pre-nursing course has proved very successful and this is thanks to our joint working with the NHS trusts. There is a very thorough recruitment process for the course and an excellent support programme for the participants. We are delighted that out of the original recruits they are all graduating this year apart from one who loved being a health care assistant so much she decided to stay in the role and another who went on to train as a chiroprapist.”

Julie continued: “I am incredibly proud of all the students, they have worked

extremely hard. Having worked as a health care assistant first has definitely provided them with an advantage going into their degree. I am confident they will go on to have fantastic and rewarding careers.”

Dennis Little, Workforce Development and Education Manager at City Hospitals Sunderland NHS Foundation Trust, said: “We are delighted to have been involved in the pre-nursing programme from the start and will shortly be recruiting our seventh intake. We have been so impressed with the candidates, the University and the benefits it brings to the Trust and our patients that we would commit to doing this regardless of any additional funding.

“It provides the participants with great experience of how patient care is provided in a ward setting before they commit to undertaking a degree. The students are also more confident entering a nursing degree because of their prior experience, and can relate their real life experience to their studies. One of the students actually said to me that everyone should do a year as a health care assistant before beginning their degree in nursing; a great testament to the success of the programme.”

Rachel Culyer spent a year working as a health care assistant at Sunderland and Newcastle Hospitals. She said: “Working as a health care assistant gave me great experience and just confirmed the fact that it was what I wanted to do. It also allowed me to learn first-hand about ward routines, hospital values and all the fundamentals of caring. It really helped me in my first year as a student nurse, providing a real step up.

“The support you receive from the staff at Northumbria University and trusts is amazing too. I would definitely recommend it as a route into nursing. At the end of the day you feel like you’ve made a difference and it’s not every job you can say that about.”

Health care assistant posts were also provided to some of the students in primary and community care.

Stacey Ramsey, from South Shields, worked as a health care assistant for a year as part of the course at South Tyneside Hospital working at the minor injuries unit and in the community. She said: “I’d completed a psychology degree and as part of careers advice I learned more about mental health and nursing. However, I knew you needed experience and unfortunately I hadn’t

any so working as a health care assistant was a great stepping stone.”

Michaela Musk, Practice Placement Facilitator at South Tyneside NHS Foundation Trust, said: “We are delighted to be involved in the first pilot of the pre-nursing scheme. The students we chose to take part were those who we felt demonstrated a real understanding of the programme, together with the courage to be involved in a pilot, which had the potential to help shape the future of nursing.

“We felt it was essential that those taking part showed care and compassion, that they wanted to experience hands on nursing before committing to a nurse training programme, and who also had the desire to work in South Tyneside.”

Speaking about Stacey, Michaela said: “Stacey was passionate about choosing nursing as a career then, and remains so now three and a half years later – her training as part of the scheme has served to reinforce that it was the right career choice for her, and the Trust is pleased to have given her that opportunity.”

Katie MacKay-Christie lives in Chester-le-Street and worked as a health care assistant for ten months at the Queen Elizabeth Hospital in Gateshead. She said: “I’d been working in retail for eight years and really wanted to work in health care but I struggled getting any experience. Thanks to the course, I have gained the fundamentals of caring as well as invaluable experience and a real appreciation of the role. It also provided me with the re-assurance that it was what I wanted to do. I love nursing and can’t wait to start my new career.”

Yvonne Tamburro, Practice Placement Facilitator and Lead Nurse for Pre-Registration Education at the Queen Elizabeth Hospital in Gateshead, said: “In our experience at Gateshead NHS Foundation Trust, we have found the pre-nursing experience programme supports the cultivation of competent and confident potential students.

“All of our pre-nursing experience programme candidates have successfully commenced adult nurse training and our experience has been of excellent student nurses with high standards and significant knowledge and skills acquired through the pre-nursing experience Programme.”

Sophie Bell also lives in Sunderland and worked as a health care assistant for ten months at City Hospitals Sunderland NHS Foundation Trust. She said: “I joined straight from college having completed my A levels. I always wanted to work in a hospital and to look after patients but hadn’t any experience. The pre-nursing course gave me more confidence; I couldn’t have talked to patients beforehand, now I’m speaking at conferences as part of my degree!”

Jill Smith, the Strategic Workforce Development Manager at Health Education England north east office said: “Health Education England has been very pleased that this programme has supported the development of new applicants to the nursing workforce. It has provided opportunities for potential students who may not have had the required experience to be appointed direct to a nursing degree.”

Applicants for the pre-nursing programme still have to meet the UCAS entry requirements for the three-year degree course. Health Education England have provided funding to NHS trusts to support the programme and are evaluating the pilot nationally.

For more information about a career in nursing visit www.northumbria.ac.uk/nursing

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