Introducing Maternity Support Workers in Wales

Report of the working group to establish an all Wales curriculum for maternity support workers

Stage 2
Introducing Maternity Support Workers in Wales
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Introducing Maternity Support Workers in Wales

Foreword

The impetus for developing an all Wales curriculum for maternity support workers has come from a number of directions.

The role of the maternity support workers emerged primarily to support midwives to undertake perceived ‘non-midwifery’ duties under the direction and supervision of a midwife. While support staff represent a substantial proportion of the health care workforce, the growth of their role has taken place without regulation, clear boundaries, or systematic education and training. This has raised serious concerns, especially with regard to the issues of patient safety and quality of care. As women’s expectations continue to increase, managers of maternity services are required to demonstrate that they are using all the resources available to them, including the workforce effectively and creatively.

Support workers are valuable members of the maternity care team and their contributions in supporting midwives, women and babies has been acknowledged for many years. In recent years many Trusts have invested in education and development programmes for support workers but generally many of these programmes have been sporadic and diverse and have not provided accredited training that is transferable.

For the first time support workers in maternity care settings across Wales will access the same curriculum that is accredited and offers transferability of skills to equip them with the necessary skills, knowledge and competence to support midwives, women and babies throughout the range of maternity care settings.

For some maternity support workers successful completion of this education programme could be the springboard to undertake further education which may lead to them becoming registered practitioners. For others it will be the foundation which enables them to deliver high quality, safe and effective care across maternity services. This programme supports the WAG initiatives for a flexible and sustainable workforce.

We are delighted to launch this new, innovative and flexible curriculum which we see as an exemplar of best practice. Employers, Midwives and in particular women using the maternity services will benefit from appropriately trained, skilled maternity support workers.

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Introduction and Background

Introduction

Healthcare support staff make a valuable and important contribution to the care of mothers and babies within the maternity services and are a well established resource for clinical teams. Experiences across the UK and Wales demonstrate that the contribution of support workers within the NHS is growing (UNISON 2006). Healthcare support workers (HCSW) make up 20% of the maternity workforce in Wales. They are employed in a variety of different clinical areas and carry out a range of tasks and procedures.

This project, to establish an all Wales curriculum for maternity support workers (MSWs), was jointly funded by the National Leadership and Innovation Agency for Healthcare (NLIAH) and Skills for Health (SfH) working in collaboration with the Royal College of Midwives (RCM) Wales and with the agreement of the Heads of Midwifery Advisory Group for Wales (HOMAG). Significant partnership working with the Open College Network (OCN), and Edexcel was a key component in the successful development of this all Wales curriculum.

This report presents stage 2 of a national initiative to establish the role of maternity support workers in Wales. Stage 1 (Tyler et al 2008) provided the foundation for the development of a national curriculum for this group of workers. The purpose of the curriculum is to produce an accredited, flexible and transferable qualification that will provide a standardised and coherent approach to training and education provision in Wales that will be recognised across Wales, the UK and Europe.
Background

Stage 1 of the national review focused on the need to adopt a more managed approach to the development of MSWs in Wales. The key aims of this stage were:

- Reducing some of the stresses that contribute to poor retention rates amongst midwives.
- Improving the deployment of available workforce resources.
- Establishing career opportunities and pathways for MSWs that would secure their long-term commitment.

This stage highlighted that:

- Despite the lack of any formal development, many maternity units in Wales were using their support staff to assist in clinical as well as non-clinical duties.
- The provision and type of training provided to MSWs varied significantly.
- Training was ad hoc and poorly planned.
- There was variation in the roles, responsibilities, development and career opportunities.
- Baseline information collected by Heads of Midwifery in Wales in 2006 indicated that only two Trusts had established training programmes and none of the Trusts had any formal requirement or entry criteria for accessing MSW training.
- All Trusts were utilising in-house training programmes for support workers e.g. mandatory training.
- There was a lack of qualifications and external programmes

The situation in Wales mirrors the rest of the UK relating to the provision of training for support staff in the maternity services. Access, content, duration, accreditation level and educational providers vary considerably (Health Professions Wales (HPW) 2004; NHS Employers 2006, 2007; NHS National Workforce Projects 2008). This lack of standardisation, nationally, creates confusion regarding clear roles and responsibilities and does not allow for the transferability of skills. The expansion in the roles of health care support staff has over time taken place without regulation, clear boundaries, or systematic education and training. From a governance perspective this represents a risk, with the potential for inappropriate tasks to be delegated to support staff. Adding to the confusion regarding roles and responsibilities is the myriad of ambiguous titles held by support staff. This lack of standardisation and consistency of approach will be addressed through the development and implementation of an all Wales curriculum.
Policy Context

Maternity Services

National audits and reviews of maternity services continue to highlight poor outcomes relating to multi-professional working, staffing and training. Examples include the Confidential Enquiry into Maternal and Child Health (CEMACH) 2007, a report from the National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence (NICE) and the NSF for Children, Young People & Maternity Services (2005). The Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists (RCOG) Safer Childbirth report (2007) acknowledges the importance of team working and the role of support staff as part of the local maternity care team. The report also identifies the importance of providing basic and continuing training for all staff. The Standards for Maternity Care (RCOG 2008) have been developed to assist managers and professionals within the maternity services to prioritise their workforce planning and allocation of resources. A review of maternity services in England by The Commission for Healthcare Audit and Inspection provides an analysis of the activities undertaken by support workers. The report highlights that many Trusts are not making as much use of these workers as they could (2008).

Work by the RCM Wales and Welsh Assembly Government (WAG) indicated that whilst there was no significant recruitment problem in midwifery, retention of experienced staff was a serious concern. More than half the midwives who responded to the NHS Wales Staff Survey (2005) indicated that they often think about leaving their current employer. As with other professions, midwifery has an ageing workforce and many midwives no longer see the NHS as a long-term career option. NHS Wales should therefore explore all avenues to promote a positive working environment in order to ensure that midwives make a longer term commitment to careers in the NHS.

Two significant elements of discontent and stress amongst midwives, identified in the survey, was a high workload and in particular, time spent on non-midwifery tasks (NHS Staff Survey 2005).

In 2005 an NHS Wales midwifery workforce planning project was completed (Oakley 2005). A prototype midwifery workforce model was subsequently built, based on a pilot area. The report cited the need to reduce the call on midwives’ time, where possible, for non-clinical duties, by employing ward clerks/receptionists/administrative assistants. In addition the project recommended reviewing the potential role of maternity healthcare assistants.

NHS Strategy

The ‘One Wales’ (WAG 2007) strategy sets out the programme for the Welsh Assembly Government to build a strong and confident nation. A key message within this strategy is the vision of a society where lifelong learning is the norm. The delivery plan for implementing the ‘One Wales’ objectives reinforces the need for training programmes to be targeted to improve the skills of the workforce.
“Designed for Life” (2005) provides the strategic context for the Welsh Assembly Government’s ambitions to create a world class health service in Wales by 2015. The strategy emphasises the importance of the workforce in securing change. One of the five core elements of the strategy identified the need to create a flexible and sustainable workforce that will be well educated and trained thereby contributing to the economic and social fabric of Welsh society. “Designed to Work” (2006) sets out the workforce and people management strategy to deliver ‘Designed for Life’. It identified the requirements to ensure that the NHS in Wales has the right staff, with the right knowledge and skills doing the right jobs.

In response to these strategies the Flexible and Sustainable Workforce for NHS Wales produced a series of recommendations for NHS Wales in (2008). The report states:

‘In the past decade there has been unprecedented investment in the NHS and it is recognised that this level of investment will not continue. As pay accounts for the largest proportion of the NHS budget it will be essential to ensure individual and collective skills are utilised fully and appropriately to deliver high quality cost effective services’. (A Strategy for a Flexible and Sustainable Workforce for NHS Wales 2008: page no 9)

The report provides the foundation for NHS organisations to review their staffing skill mix, develop new and extended roles and enhance staff training and development to support improved utilisation of the workforce more effectively and more creatively. The productive time programme in England is based on the premise that a more highly-skilled workforce is a route for employers to achieve higher productivity. In the public sector, skills can help deliver more efficient and effective public services (NHS DH 2008)

**Education and Training Strategies**

In addition to the health sector strategies a number of training and education strategies have been produced which will have an impact and support development of the non-regulated workforce in NHS Wales.

Skills That Work for Wales (2008) is based on the ‘One Wales’ vision of a strong economy. This strategy describes the ambition for a highly-educated, highly-skilled and high-employment Wales and draws on the recent analyses and conclusions of two major independent reviews, the Leitch Review of Skills in the UK (2006) and the Webb Review (2007) of the mission and purpose of further education in Wales. The Webb review calls for a substantial increase in the breadth, delivery and quality of vocational routes and an expansion in the quantity and availability of experiential, practical and work-based learning. The Review emphasised that employers should prioritise improving the skills of the existing workforce.
Summary of the Project

The project commenced in September 2008 and finished in February 2009. Full project management methodology was adopted which facilitated completion of the work programme and supported the identification of risks, whilst ensuring the project progressed within the agreed timescale to achieve the terms of reference set by the project Steering Group. The following is a summary of the key activities:

- A sub group comprising of a cross section of education partners was established to develop the curriculum.
- A desktop mapping and critique of best practice relating to educational programmes accessed by maternity support staff across Wales and the UK was completed.
- A mapping to inform development of the curriculum was completed.
- A desktop mapping process to identify the range of tasks currently undertaken by support workers in maternity units within the UK was completed.
- An all Wales consultation event to agree the tasks and roles suitable for delegation to MSWs was completed.
- Heads of Midwifery from the 13 maternity units in Wales were invited to comment on tasks identified for delegation to MSW.

Details of the project methodology can be found at www.nliah.co.uk

The All Wales Curriculum

At present there is a full National Vocational Qualification (NVQ) available at education level 3 in Health with a specific pathway for Maternity Workers. Consultation with representatives from the maternity services and managers in Wales favoured this qualification. However, it was felt that there was a need for a strong taught element which is not always delivered via NVQs, and this was seen as a risk in terms of the knowledge development of MSWs. The service highlighted that this can be particularly problematic when people are new to the maternity services either as a result of a transfer into a maternity role, or if someone is new to the health service.

Taking these factors into consideration, the curriculum was constructed, to enable existing workers in maternity services to attain recognition for their knowledge and skills. The resulting Curriculum is mapped carefully to the National Occupational Standards (NOS) which make up the NVQ 3, and to the NHS Knowledge and Skills Framework (KSF).
Credit

The Curriculum is in keeping with the Sector Skills Council Learning Design Principles (www.skillsforhealth.org.uk) and accrues credit in line with the Credit and Qualifications Framework for Wales (CQFW 2006). Credit is the European currency for educational achievement and all qualifications in the UK are moving to be delivered in this way. The Welsh Credit and Qualifications Framework allows a credit to be earned, following formal assessment for every ten hours of learning time. The Curriculum will enable a learner to earn 26 credits either through the OCN Wales or 26 credits in the form of a BTEC Level 3 Certificate in Maternity Support Work with Edexcel. Trusts may use either OCN or Edexcel Centres for registering candidates for this award.

Flexibility leading to an Advanced Apprenticeship

The framework for Maternity Support Workers in Wales includes the NVQ Level 3 in Health (Maternity Pathway) and centres may use any awarding body that offers this award. This offers flexibility as different Trusts may be registered with different awarding bodies or may choose to access local colleges as education providers who are registered with different awarding bodies.

It is intended that in the future, a Key Skills (Essential Skills Framework) Assessment will be added to this framework to form a full apprenticeship and work will continue between NLIAH, the RCM and Skills for Health to enable this to happen, when all the NVQs become credit based by the end of 2010. This will provide employers with the potential to have this education fully funded in terms of registration and certification for learners, by linking with recognised DCELLS providers (Department for Children, Education, Lifelong Learning and Skills).

Flexibility of the Curriculum

The curriculum offers a flexible approach to learning in both theory and practice to meet learner and service needs. This flexible approach is crucial; it is recognised that learners accessing the programme will have a diverse range of working patterns and annual leave entitlements and these impact on service needs and the planning of staff rotas. Although learners will be expected to achieve the programme of learning in a designated timeframe, and in line with awarding bodies assessment requirements, the flexibility of the curriculum will allow this without disruption to day to day clinical commitments and the delivery of services.

Learners will gain underpinning knowledge through formal teaching hours that will be delivered by designated programme coordinators and programme coordinators may determine the frequency and duration of the specified teaching hours. This means that formal learning may be planned and delivered to suit service needs. For example 15 learning hours may be delivered over 3 (5 hour) days or 6 (2½ hour) sessions. Some programme coordinators may choose to deliver days together or spread them out over several weeks. The curriculum is also flexible in that programme coordinators may
determine the order of the content (scheme of work) of the formal teaching hours. Programme coordinators may choose to set up a rolling programme of study days/hours for the formal classroom based teaching so that learners have the opportunity to access sessions on more than one occasion. This will be of benefit to the service as it may not be possible to release all learners accessing the programme at the same time.

In the workplace, learners will gather evidence to demonstrate competence through the completion of NOS that will make up the NVQ award and this evidence will be assessed by designated midwife assessors. Learning that takes place in this respect is informal learning and although completion of NOS to achieve the NVQ Award has to be achieved by the end of the programme learners will have a degree of flexibility in how quickly individual units are achieved. For example one learner may require more time to achieve a competence than another.

The required units for the NVQ Award may be undertaken in any order throughout the programme so again this demonstrates flexibility. Some programme coordinators may choose for learners to complete all of the theory first and then complete the NVQ Award. Others may choose to provide theory sessions with the assessment of competence of NOS running in parallel.

**Flexibility for Learners**

The OCN and Edexcel credit based units may also be undertaken as stand alone individual units by other support workers as part of Continuing Professional Development (CPD). For example a support worker may have been working in a general nurse setting with an NVQ Level 3. This worker will not have completed NOS that relates specifically to maternity care. This flexible approach of accessing individual units may benefit learners with an existing NVQ level 3 wishing to seek employment in maternity care settings; they may complete units that focus on the role of MSWs and care of women and babies.

**Building on Foundations**

This curriculum will enable transferability of skills and provides the foundation for the education of all MSWs. The completion of other existing NOS and the future development of new units and qualifications will equip MSWs to work in other roles, for example, obstetric theatre support.
# Qualification Timeline

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Following the launch of the curriculum, learners will be able to access OCN Level 3 Certificate in Maternity Support Work or Edexcel BTEC Level 3 Certificate in Maternity Support Work and the existing NVQ Health (Maternity Support) Level 3. This programme will then move to fall under the UK Qualifications and Credit Framework (QCF) at the earliest opportunity.

At this point this programme will move towards becoming a full advanced apprenticeship framework composed of a Vocationally Related Qualification (VRQ), NVQ and a Key Assessment Skill.

**Benefits**

- Better use of midwives time/skills
- Enable MSWs to work flexibly across all care settings
- Transferability of skills
- Improved utilisation of workforce
- Potential to improve staff Retention
- Enhanced team working
- Safeguarding productivity
- Improved efficiency
- Midwives more able to deliver continuity of care
- Service users receiving more timely care
- Enable midwives to delegate appropriately to MSWs
- Clarity of roles for MSWs
- Enhanced CPD and career progression
Conclusion

High-quality maternity services rely on having an appropriate workforce with the leadership, skill mix and competencies to provide excellent care to women and their families. Modernising the maternity workforce is both a challenge and an opportunity, to utilise workforce resources more effectively and creatively in the future. Employers should take advantage of this new more flexible learning opportunity to up-skill their support staff through the delivery of this curriculum which will bring significant benefits to both the service and workforce agendas of the maternity services.
## Recommendations

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<tr>
<th>Recommendation</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Maternity units throughout Wales to produce an action plan to identify how and when they will introduce the new national MSW curriculum.</td>
<td>NHS Employers</td>
<td>September 2009</td>
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<tr>
<td>2. Develop a coherent list of core activities that may be delegated to MSWs.</td>
<td>Heads Of Midwifery Advisory Group Wales</td>
<td>August 2009</td>
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<td>3. NHS organisations working with education providers will identify a current midwife registrant, with or working towards a teaching qualification as the programme coordinator.</td>
<td>NHS Employers</td>
<td>September 2009</td>
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<td>4. Develop guidance for delegation and accountability issues.</td>
<td>WAG/NLIAH</td>
<td>March 2010</td>
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<tr>
<td>5. Undertake an impact assessment and evaluation of the curriculum.</td>
<td>NLIAH/RCM/SfH</td>
<td>March 2010</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Record learners who have completed the programme in ESR and eKSF.</td>
<td>NHS Employers/ NLIAH</td>
<td>Ongoing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Fund first cohort during 2009</td>
<td>NLIAH</td>
<td>March 2010</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Individuals successfully completing this curriculum will be awarded the title Maternity Support Worker (MSW).</td>
<td>WAG/NHS Employers</td>
<td>September 2009</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
References


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NHS Partners’ Research and Information (2005) NHS Wales Staff Survey Summary 2005 All Wales


Introducing Maternity Support Workers in Wales


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