



Department
of Health

Preceptorship Programme of Support for Newly Qualified Health Visitors Within Southern Health NHS Foundation Trust

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This publication was withdrawn in February 2026

It has been superseded by the [Delivery of the healthy child programme](#) guidance.

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Preceptorship Programme of Support for Newly Qualified Health Visitors Within Southern Health NHS Foundation Trust

Prepared by

Southern Health NHS Foundation Trust

Purpose of document

This case study focuses on an improvement in service quality, innovation or a new way of working, specifically along one or more of the strands of the health visiting service vision and family offer:

Community

Universal

Universal Plus and

Universal Partnership Plus.

Case study overview

The Department of Health's *Health Visitor Implementation Plan 2011–15: A call to action* (February 2011) recognised that health visitors are able to make an important contribution to families within the community and are committed to growing the present national workforce of health visitors. This increased workforce will help to support the delivery of the Healthy Child Programme and promote early intervention during the first five years of childhood.

Southern Health NHS Foundation Trust will increase the workforce by 130 full-time health visitors by 2015; it trained 36 student health visitors for 2011/12, an increase of 31 on the previous year. This has been a huge challenge for an organisation with depleted health visitor numbers. Therefore, an innovative approach to practice teaching had to be implemented and embraced by the team at speed. A long arm mentoring approach was set up within Southern Health and practice teachers were asked to oversee up to three student health visitors. All the students throughout Hampshire were placed with a health visitor mentor. Support for mentors and practice teachers during this period was provided by action learning sets to allow staff to reflect on practice issues with their peers. The innovation of this approach was in the rapid spread and adoption of the model, which has been successfully implemented across the whole cluster – Solent, Isle of Wight as well as Hampshire – with positive feedback from staff.

As the student health visitors were due to qualify in September 2012, Southern Health discussed and prepared how the Trust could successfully support a Preceptorship Programme for these newly qualified students in their new role and provide an ongoing learning environment. Concerns about the quality of new recruits have been raised nationally and internally, as the impact of the rapidly developing Health Visitor Implementation Plan could have had a detrimental impact on the quality of their experience both during training and as newly qualified health visitors.

Southern Health already had a formal preceptorship process provided by the Learning Department which can be used for all grades of trained staff within the organisation. The Children's Division felt that a new approach was

necessary in light of both the Health Visitor Implementation Plan and the high numbers of newly qualified health visitors within Southern Health. They also wanted a Preceptorship Programme which clearly defined the new staff's specific learning needs for their new role.

Achievements

A new way of working was discussed, agreed and supported by senior management, clinical managers, the Safeguarding Team, human resources managers, the Learning Development Team, practice teachers and health visitors within the Southern Health Children's Division.

As a result of this agreement, all newly qualified health visitors have been matched with a health visitor preceptor to guide and support them during the first year after qualifying. The practitioners meet with their preceptor monthly for the first six months to ensure that continuous support and guidance is in place for them. This is followed by a meeting every two months for the rest of the preceptorship year. This partnership working will help the newly qualified health visitors to develop their practice skills at their own pace.

A generic preceptorship workbook, created by clinical managers across Southampton, Hampshire, the Isle of Wight and Portsmouth (SHIP), has been introduced to all newly qualified health visitors within Southern Health.

The preceptorship workbook includes a Health Visitor Competency Framework which was matched with a Clinical Leadership Competency Framework. It includes a section for reflective writing and an action plan for individual learning. This written record will help practitioners to link their learning in practice with health visitor learning outcomes and clinical leadership competencies.

The generic workbook was further adapted for Southern Health by adding the Trust's own appraisal documentation which promotes professional behaviours and leadership skills.

Action learning sets have also been set up for the newly qualified health visitors to aid learning by the use of reflection.

Benefits

Through working in partnership and negotiating their learning needs with their preceptor, practitioners have the opportunity to develop and demonstrate critical thinking, reflection, enquiry, problem solving, innovation and critical self-awareness as well as demonstrating the use of evidence-based practice.

This approach to preceptorship encourages practitioners to be self-directing in seeking out learning experiences, including the evidence-based practice, research and literature specific to the area of practice.

The Preceptorship Programme within Southern Health enables newly qualified health visitors to demonstrate learning and competencies within the practice environment which meet the required practice level for Part 3 of the Nursing and Midwifery Council register and will promote continued professional practice.

All newly qualified health visitors receive the same level of support and opportunities for learning throughout Southern Health to ensure that a high quality of service to clients is maintained.

Challenges

The main challenge was to ensure that all 30 newly qualified health visitors, who were based across a very large geographical area, were given the same support and learning opportunities, and that all clinical managers within the Children's Division were in agreement with this additional structure of support for the new staff.

It also raised the challenge of how support could be successfully implemented for so many students qualifying at once, while ensuring that the time needed for support did not encroach on service delivery.

The clinical managers ensured that student and preceptorship support were discussed regularly at their meetings so that they became an integral part of the business focus. This enabled any risks, concerns or examples of good practice to be shared with the clinical leads and senior management team.

It also allowed all involved to voice their opinion of how this programme could work effectively within Southern Health and also to acknowledge the importance of 'getting it right' for newly qualified health visitors so that Southern Health is seen as a good place in which to work.

As Southern Health is currently training 60 students and will train 70 next year, all involved were eager to agree a robust structure of support during the first year of the Health Visitor Implementation Plan which could then be used successfully in subsequent years.

Learning, sharing and sustainability

The Children's Division Safeguarding Team within Southern Health produced a Safeguarding Induction Pack which has been slotted into the preceptorship workbook. This was introduced at their first safeguarding supervision session with the newly qualified health visitors and will work as an additional part of the workbook.

As a result of introducing this generic preceptorship workbook, the Safeguarding Team have further adapted it for use as an induction pack for

their own Specialist Safeguarding Nurses (Band 6), who have just started within their team.

The workbook was also adapted within Southern Health for use with newly qualified school nurses.

As part of a post-qualifying health visitor questionnaire within Southern Health, the new health visitors were asked to give their feedback on their training and transition to the new role. Nearly all of them reported that they had received a high level of support and opportunities from their mentors and practice teachers during their practice placement and found the Preceptorship Programme valuable for the transition period.

It is hoped that these extra layers of support will be sustained for all future students who qualify in Southern Health as health visitors and that they will promote quality and ongoing professional development in the health visitor workforce.