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# NHSU – A ‘University for the National Health Service’



“By 2010 the NHSU will have played a major role in improving patient care, contributed to the beginnings of a UK learning revolution, and helped to make the NHS one of the best places to work anywhere in the world. We will also have become one of the world’s first chartered corporate universities.”

(Learning for everyone – a development plan for the NHSU)

This is the forty-third in a series of briefing sheets which aim to provide an introduction to a variety of lifelong learning issues

Also available:

- 42. Adult participation in learning
- 41. European initiatives and lifelong learning
- 40. Increasing participation and raising achievement of black and minority ethnic group adults in post-16 education
- 39. ICT in active citizenship
- 38. ICT mentors
- 37. Valuing People – for LDPB’s
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Many earlier titles in the Briefing Sheet series are still available, please contact us for more information about these titles

Copies of this and other sheets are available from NIACE, 21 De Montfort Street, Leicester LE1 7GE.  
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E-mail: [information@niace.org.uk](mailto:information@niace.org.uk)  
They are also available on the website at [www.niace.org.uk/information](http://www.niace.org.uk/information)

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The decision to establish a university for the NHS was announced in October 2001, following a commitment in the 2001 Labour Party manifesto. It followed a number of reviews of skills, workforce planning and development in the NHS:

*The NHS Plan* (Department of Health, 2000) outlined a programme of investment and reform to rebuild the NHS for the 21<sup>st</sup> century: a health service designed around the patient.

*A Health Service of all the Talents* (Department of Health, 2001) identified a number of weaknesses in the workforce planning including a gap between the needs of the NHS and the investment and priorities of educational providers and professional bodies.

*Hidden Talents* (Audit Commission, 2001) identified common learning programmes for all health professionals based on core skills, with flexible arrangements for take-up and delivery.

*Working Together – Learning Together* (Department of Health, 2001) set out for the first time a comprehensive lifelong learning strategy for the NHS.

The vision of NHSU is “to contribute to the transformation of the NHS and to help secure radical and tangible improvements for healthcare in this country, by providing learning for everyone. Working in partnership, NHSU will multiply and diversify learning opportunities throughout healthcare for all staff, patients and carers... NHSU will play a leading role on implementing policies for lifelong learning [and] the realisation of a skills escalator in the NHS... We will stimulate and support the creation of learning cultures across the whole of healthcare.”

This overall vision of a ‘university for the NHS’ – NHSU – is to be welcomed by all who believe that learning transforms lives. Not since the creation of the Open University has there been

such potential for development of adult learning and for more and different adults to learn.

## What is NHSU?

Due to launch in autumn of 2003, NHSU is a new kind of corporate university that will make training and development available for everyone at every level of the NHS, including those traditionally left out of workplace learning. The sole focus of NHSU will be to deliver training and development for staff in healthcare, which benefits patients and service users through better patient care. It is being established to help modernise the NHS and deliver the NHS Plan. With over one million people working in healthcare, and a million plus more in social care, NHSU will be the world's largest corporate university.

## Why do we need NHSU?

The NHS believes that the quality of healthcare offered to patients depends first and foremost on the availability of well-qualified staff. NHSU aims to improve patient care by providing staff with the skills and experience, which they need to deliver the best service at every level. This can improve career opportunities, retain and motivate good staff within the service and encourage more people to consider careers in healthcare.

Within the NHS, there are large numbers of staff with little or no experience of education and training since leaving school. NHSU aims to realise their potential to raise standards across the whole service and make learning a part of everyday life throughout the NHS.

## Who is it for?

NHSU will provide learning opportunities for everyone working for and with the NHS, from those without any qualifications at all, right through to those who already have postgraduate degrees and professional qualifications. In time, NHSU will also include social care.

## What will be delivered?

A whole range of programmes will be provided, developed and expanded over time. Early curriculum development has been driven by a combination of programmes suggested by key

officials and strategies within the NHS and Department of Health.

A dedicated NHSU helpline will provide comprehensive advice, support and information, including signposting to existing courses and support for staff looking to return to learning.

Initially, NHSU is developing four programme areas designed to improve patient care – induction to the NHS, communication skills, first contact, and cleaning and infection control – as well as provision to support staff who work within the NHS – skills for life and health, health informatics, educator support, management skills, and clinical fellowships. NHSU also intends to offer staff who have been working in the NHS for over five years, without a formal qualification the opportunity to study for a Foundation Degree.

Eventually NHSU will establish a 'Learning Needs Observatory' which will collect data to establish what training and development is needed and also to measure the benefits of learning on patient care

## Where and how will learning be delivered?

People will learn at work, in tutorials, with computers through the internet, in teams and face-to-face. NHSU will design programmes to be delivered where, when and how people want them - taking account of their commitments and lifestyle. Opportunities for peer support will be facilitated through the development of networks of learners, working both on-line and face-to-face. NHSU will offer all learners tutorial support, mentoring services and access to specialist services.

## How will NHSU work with existing educational organisations that currently provide training?

NHSU intends to enhance rather than duplicate provision. It will work in partnership with a wide range of health and education organisations, to complement and extend what is already available as well as purchasing training. Key partners currently include the Open University, Ufi/learndirect, UK e-university, NIACE, Campaign for Learning, Learning and Skills Council, Sector Skills Council, Department for

Education and Skills, Department for Health, Health Authorities, NHS Trusts, Workforce Development Confederations, Primary Care Trusts, Modernisation Agency, Royal Colleges, professional bodies, universities, colleges and private learning providers.

## NIACE and the NHSU

NIACE has a strong relationship with NHSU, with staff seconded to develop its skills for life and health portfolio, establish NHSU learner awards as part of Adult Learners' Week, and provide advice and support in widening participation and capturing the voice of learners.

**Skills for life and health** is the NHSU programme to develop the skills of literacy, numeracy and spoken English used by people employed in a health and social care context and by patients and the wider community when they come into contact with health services. It is a key element of NHSU's initial portfolio of learning opportunities, and one of its highest priorities, as it is estimated that at least 60,000 staff may have some difficulty with such skills. The programme aims to complement and reinforce this existing activity by improving the supply and quality of learning opportunities available to NHS staff, offering them relevant information and support and raising awareness of the issue among potential learners and managers. Following an initial review of models of provision, to identify and describe good practice in the delivery of skills for life within a health context, pilot work is taking place in two Workforce Development Confederation areas – Devon & Cornwall and Birmingham & the Black Country.

For more information contact Peter Lavender, email: [peter.lavender@niace.org.uk](mailto:peter.lavender@niace.org.uk)

The NHSU is supporting **Adult Learners' Week** 10-16 May 2003 and **Learning at Work Day** 15th May 2003, through the celebration of learning of staff working for or with the NHS or in the health and social care sectors. It will raise awareness of the development of NHSU to both health and social care staff as well as providers of education and training opportunities. By supporting Learning at Work Day, NHSU will stimulate workplace learning in the NHS reaching NHSU target publics. NHSU will also recognise a tutor or trainer who is working in or with the

NHS or in the health and social care sectors as part of the national tutors award scheme co-ordinated by NIACE.

For further information contact Kate Malone, Campaigns Manager on 0116 2044 236 or 07787 534 415 or email [kate.malone@niace.org.uk](mailto:kate.malone@niace.org.uk)

## Further Information

Further details about the NHSU can be found on the website [www.nhsu.nhs.uk](http://www.nhsu.nhs.uk)  
Or by calling freephone 0800 555 550

## References and Useful Resources

**Everyone : introducing the NHS University.** Department of Health, 2002

**A health service of all the talents : developing the NHS workforce.** Department of Health, 2000  
[www.doh.gov.uk/pdfs/workforce.pdf](http://www.doh.gov.uk/pdfs/workforce.pdf)

**Hidden talents : education, training and development for healthcare staff in NHS trusts.** Audit Commission. National Audit Office, 2001. ISBN 1 86240 270 1 £20.00  
<http://ww2.audit-commission.gov.uk/publications/pdf/brhidden.pdf>

**Learning for everyone : a development plan for the NHSU .** NHSU. Department of Health, 2002. [www.nhsuniversity.nhs.uk](http://www.nhsuniversity.nhs.uk)

**The NHS plan : a plan for investment : a plan for reform.** Department of Health. Stationery Office, 2000. Command Paper 41818-1. £15.00  
[www.doh.gov.uk/nhsplan](http://www.doh.gov.uk/nhsplan)

**Working together, learning together : a framework for lifelong learning in the NHS.** Department of Health, 2001  
[www.doh.gov.uk/lifelonglearning](http://www.doh.gov.uk/lifelonglearning)

NIACE, the National Institute of Adult Continuing Education, has a broad remit to promote lifelong learning opportunities for adults. NIACE works to develop increased participation in education and training. It aims to do this for those who do not have easy access because of barriers of class, gender, age, race, language and culture, learning difficulties or disabilities, or insufficient resources.  
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