

Case Study:

Widening access in Health and Social Care



Introduction

2023-2024 proved to be a successful year for South Lanarkshire College's Health and Social Care provision, supported through an enhanced curriculum designed to address the skills-gap in this key Scottish Government sector.

The Regional Skills Assessment for Lanarkshire continues to report an increase in Human Health and Social Work Activities over the mid-term (2024-2027), with a projected requirement for 5,200 posts. The refreshed curriculum design prepares our students with the skills needed to gain employment in this vital sector, as well as upskilling existing employees; improving their socio-economic agility.

Health and Social Care Provision Overview

There are circa 350 students in the Health and Social Care curriculum area; which offers courses from Scottish Credit and Qualification Framework (SCQF) Level 5 through to SCQF Level 10. Students on these courses achieve well, and the unconfirmed performance indicators for 2023-2024 demonstrate achievement across both Further Education and Higher Education provision as significantly above average, with the largest majority of students in Part-Time Further Education courses obtaining a 95% pass rate. Courses offered include:

- National Certificates in Health;
- Scottish Widening Access Provision (SWAP) in Social Work;
- SWAP in Nursing;
- Higher National Certificates in Healthcare Practice and Social Services; and
- A new Diploma in Education and Social Services, introduced in August 2023, with progressing onto the BA in Social Work, at Strathclyde University.

The Health and Social Care Team work with various stakeholders to ensure delivery meets the requirements of industry. These include NHS Lanarkshire, the University of the West of Scotland (UWS), Glasgow Caledonian University (GCU), Strathclyde University, third sector Organisations and South Lanarkshire Council. In addition, the Team collaborate with The Care Academy steering groups, the Child Poverty Action Team, the Health Network etc.

All lecturing staff are professionally registered with the relevant regulatory bodies, for example, the Nursing and Midwifery Council, the Scottish Social Services Council (SSSC) and the Health and Care Professions Council and undertake regular industry training opportunities, which ensures staff are relevant and up to date with current practice.

Health and Social Care Skills Gaps

The Nursing and Midwifery staff group is the largest in NHS Scotland, and accounts for 42% of their workforce. There are continued challenges regarding recruitment and retention with approximately 6,200 current vacancies. Recent reports suggest a 43% increase in Allied Health Professional vacancies with another circa 1,500 vacancies 2023-2024.

These statistics, together with the NHS Recovery Plan, the National Work Force Strategy for Health and Social Care, and Lanarkshire Health and Social Partnership highlight the continued demand

for courses which respond to the health and social care crisis. The College has ensured that courses delivered have strong progression routes to serve industry requirements. An example of the how the College supports, and benefits, the Health and Social Care Sector is given below.

Professional Development Award (PDA) in Acute and Community Care (AAC) Practice

NHS Lanarkshire is currently developing their Band Four Clinical Support Worker role. This will result in increased skills and responsibilities to address and support current pressures in the NHS. To practice at this level, staff are required to achieve an SCQF Level 8 qualification and are supported to do so. A Higher National Diploma (HND) is under development, it is anticipated this will provide a progression route with direct articulation to third-year of the associated degree programme, thus servicing the workforce pipeline.

To optimise opportunities in the interim, it was agreed to introduce the PDA: ACC, at SCQF Level 8; this provides a stepping stone towards the HND Health Care Practice (HCP). This is an exciting professional development opportunity for experienced staff to increase progression opportunities within the NHS. Challenges related to the cost-of-living crises can inhibit individual's opportunities to access continuing education. This model offers the opportunity to "earn while they learn", whilst the NHS still have the benefit of their valuable skills and experience.

The Health Care Support Workers, studying in 2024, were all practitioners in acute or community settings, 84.2% of which achieved successfully. All students that completed the programme succeeded. Within this first cohort of the PDA: AAC there was a total of 320 years of combined experience working in the NHS across a variety of specialties, which has now been further enhanced. The students were highly motivated and happy to share their practical experiences and demonstrated their capacity to relate practice to theory. Whilst undertaking the PDA: ACC students are registered as Trainee Practitioners and on completion promoted to Band Four. Our delivery has supported the direct promotion of 16 practitioners in this vital sector. In continued partnership with NHS Lanarkshire, the College is delivering this programme to a further cohort of 9 students, who commenced in August 2024, and we have committed to supporting activity in 2025-2026.

The NHS partnership continues to grow, with increased interest and applications for Modern Apprenticeships (MAs) in Social Services and Healthcare, at SCQF Level 7. This day-release partnership programme has attracted 18 applicants this year, which is a 50% increase in demand from the previous session. All of the applicants are now actively studying towards their MAs and express a desire to work towards the SCQF Level 8 qualifications required to achieve a Band 4 post. Our College, the students and our NHS partners hope that this model provides a sustainable pathway for NHS practitioners to thrive and develop a passion for life-long-learning and professional development.

