



# Case Study: Healthcare and Professional Skills level 4 – 30 credits) at Coventry University

## Introduction

In 2022, CU Coventry (part of the Coventry University Group) took part in the Office for Students (OfS) and the Department for Education (DfE) trial of Higher Education Short Courses as part of the government's approach to delivering the Lifelong Loan Entitlement (LLE).

Nationally, there is a well-documented and significant shortfall, in both workforce and skills across the health and social care sector. This is compounded by a changing landscape including the shift to care for people in the community rather than in hospital and the increasing complexity of the 'patient journey'. In order to address these shortfalls, programmes that raise awareness of, and develop an understanding of the professional values and standards in the healthcare sector are vital.

This online short course was designed to prepare learners for a health or social care career. The module consists of 5 units which are based upon the core principles necessary, for working within the Health and Social Care sector and have been developed in conjunction with key health and social care stakeholders. It has been developed in line with the FHEQ Level 4 descriptors as outlined by the QAA and learners will gain 30 credits upon successful completion.

## Context

The short course examines the importance of the professional values, standards and working practices required to support person-centred care. It equips students with the skills to acquire new knowledge that can be applied in and across the sector. The course also examines the central importance of effective communication and inclusive practice and its importance for quality service delivery across a range of service users and groups in diverse contexts, enabling students to develop an understanding of communication and inclusivity.

The course was designed to be highly transferable, attractive to employers and flexible for learners who are not, or perceive themselves not to be in a position to access the 'traditional' Higher Education (HE) offer. The skills and learning outcomes achieved, prepare learners for their chosen pathways; the principles can be applied to developing within the healthcare sector or the continuation of level 4 study.

The short course was developed using a co-creation model, led by CU Coventry in partnership with The Skills Network (TSN). The course follows the unique CU 'carousel' delivery model – providing high quality, accessible HE level provision to groups of 'non-traditional' university learners e.g. older/mature learners, 'harder to reach' groups, under-

represented groups, those in work, or who have not followed a 'traditional' learner pathway. The delivery model will meet the needs of target learner groups and sectors by combining three essential elements: a pre-join engagement and support package; a learner-centred flexible learning experience; and an outward-facing 'next steps' employability focus. The timeframe for completion will be 12 weeks, with in the region of 300 self-directed guided learning hours (GLH).

### **Key features ensuring success**

Employer involvement was baked into the design, development and delivery of the course, ensuring that employer insight, needs and experience directly informed the process through design. The Project Team facilitated a co-creation course development approach. This involved bringing in direct industry experience, intelligence around skills gaps, current and future workforce development needs and testing the proposed content of the course and ensuring its relevance to industry need.

Once a potential learner expresses an interest, a structured engagement programme is planned to familiarise them with the offer and build a knowledge base of that individual taking account of diverse learning needs; supporting any uncertainty or wellbeing issues. CU Coventry provides a holistic package of support and help, including employability development, careers coaching, advice and guidance, welfare support and signposting, as well as social and support networks.

The Coventry University programme approval process is sufficiently agile enough to respond to this new type of provision, with no compromise on quality assurance and rigour, just a lighter touch to reflect the scale and nature of provision.

### **Key challenges**

Recruiting learners has been the biggest challenge, with no formal conversions to date. This has been attributed to the very short timescale to develop, market and recruit. Combined with a lack of awareness of about this type of provision, in terms of skills-related courses and no marketing or publicity nationally of scheme, or the LLE and its aim. We are also experiencing a cost of living crisis, which could impact on decision-making around such a significant financial investment.

Another key challenge, also highlighted by partners, is the cost to the learner. There is LLE funding <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/higher-education-short-course-loans> as part of the HE Short Course trial, but the clarity of accessing LLE funding and also on bursary funding was offered quite late in the development process. There was an assumption with the trial that the cost would be met by employers, however, this is unlikely to be the case in the Healthcare sector.

### **Evaluation and reflection**

TSN's in-house Product Development team used cutting-edge teaching and learning theory and digital technology to create engaging and inspiring e-content. When combined with the academic expertise from CU Coventry, this ensured we developed a high-quality e-learning programme for learners to access via their innovative learning platform EQUAL.

Strong employer support and engagement in development of this provision suggests that employers have a major requirement to upskill workforce in this space and that the health care and professional skills theme was the right focus. However, we have yet to discover if there is demand for a short course market alongside apprenticeships, HTQs, etc to meet employer workforce development requirements. We will continue to explore ways to market this high-quality product.

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