

Oxford Brookes University have been successfully running an undergraduate adult nursing exchange programme with the University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia, for 20 years. Unusually, our exchange is clinically immersive and involves 2nd year nursing students exchanging places for 1 semester. This fully immersive model is distinctive, relying on an approach to curricular alignment whereby modules from both institutions are mapped and a nursing clinical placement is central to the experience. Students study both theory and practice modules in the exchange university, which provides the opportunity to experience both didactic learning and professional practice in another country and, importantly, a markedly different healthcare system.

The opportunity to develop this exchange programme began when faculty staff visited the University of Pennsylvania more than two decades ago and negotiated the exchange arrangements with Professor Sarah Kagan, the educator assigned to participate on behalf of the University of Pennsylvania. The perceived benefits of the exchange initially focused on the chance to study nursing abroad, however over time we realised the opportunity provides much more than an educational adventure for a few students each year. The larger opportunity lies in creating a culture of shared values and greater understanding with much of this broader benefit derived from comparing professional knowledge and practice as well as establishing long-term relationships and collaboration between faculty staff. As a result, students and educators not directly involved in the programme connect and learn with peers and colleagues whom they might not otherwise meet. We commonly hear “I just met the new students on exchange. I’m learning so much from them.” Our sustained partnership with the University of Pennsylvania and in particular with Professor Sarah Kagan strengthens with each passing year, resulting in clear evolution of our original exchange model. Last year, with the development of a new curriculum at Oxford Brookes, the opportunity arose to extend the programme to include our children’s nursing students, and the proposal was reviewed as an NMC major modification and approved.

The review was concluded earlier this year and the programme was commended stating: *The relationship with the UPENN; offering students the opportunity to exchange and gain insight and experience in a differing healthcare contexts is commendable. The support provided to students in the UK whilst they ready themselves for this exchange experience, and again when in the USA before they enter practice, is commendable. This is designed to prepare students to work differently, often at higher levels of competence. ... The inclusion of child field students in the exchange programme with the UPENN will provide added value in the depth and breadth of experience in practice learning for these students.*

This external appraisal of the innovation validates our own assessment that the immersive model offers a valuable learning experience for all involved. Our future interest lies in evaluating the range of models through which nursing students study abroad. We are currently formulating an international survey of study abroad programmes in nursing, aiming to synthesize evidence to describe those models and document the perceived value and impact by both teachers and students alike. We welcome enquiry about our exchange programme and can be contacted via email.

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