

Short courses at Bristol Business School help gear the NHS up for change

NHS Learning Disabilities Service Director, Deborah Furniss, undertook a one-day course on *Leading through Complexity* at Bristol Business School, in order to prepare for a period of change within the Gloucestershire Learning Disabilities service for which she is responsible. The process reminded her of studying for her MBA:

“The NHS is starting to be more business oriented,” says Furniss, 45. “It is very useful to be able to gain a range of non-NHS perspectives and gather commercial expertise as feedback for NHS strategic planning.”

“The short course at Bristol Business School had a fantastic mix of people, all from different backgrounds, so we were able to draw on experience from a variety of fields. It reminded me of my MBA in that respect – in terms of sharing knowledge, so that the learning process comes from other people on the course as well as the lecturer.”

Furniss has 27 years of experience within the NHS, starting as a general nurse and working up to her current management role, heading up the operational and strategic development of the learning disability service across the county of Gloucestershire.

Furniss is about to oversee a period of change within her unit and was keen to learn more skills to help manage that process better. She attended the course along with a member of her management team: “It was great to be able to share the learning experience with a member of my team and take it back to the service,” she says.

Indeed, Furniss was keen to get back to work to start putting into practice everything she had learnt: “Talking about S-Curves was fascinating and really relevant for us in terms of the stage we are currently at in Learning Disability services,” she says.

“The course looked at when and how you should change teams. It helped us to be more analytical in thinking about how we put a team together in the first place, how we run a service and when we ought to change a service and/or the team configuration.

“People and organisations tend to get stuck in comfort zones,” continues Furniss. “The course taught us that if a service is working now it’s probably time to change it!

“It gave us the tools to convince our colleagues that we need to make changes and improve on things even when they are working well. We learnt how to articulate that better.”

Furniss was impressed with the overall delivery of the course: “The teaching was excellent,” she says. “It included a mix of presentations followed by break out group sessions where we looked at case study work and were able to share ideas.”

While it was the course content, over and above the course length that initially attracted Furniss, she admits that a one day course is easy to accommodate into a busy working schedule: “It was easy for us both to attend the course and to fit it into our normal working week,” she says, “but it was the content that really grabbed our interest in the first place, and the course certainly delivered on its promises.”

Furniss’ ambitions are high. She would like to reach executive director level within the NHS. She believes courses like the *Leading through Complexity*, which was developed with Human Insight, will help prepare her for such roles: “I think courses like this can enable you to progress in your career if you use the opportunity,” she says.

“I took away lots of reference material and have done further reading since taking the course and am already putting into practice what we learnt. I am definitely better prepared and better skilled to manage the forthcoming changes as a result of taking this course.”

Furniss hopes to return to Bristol Business School for future professional development: “It was such a pleasure to be there,” she says. “It was a very welcoming, pleasant setting and the course was very well organised. The whole experience was entirely positive and definitely something I would recommend to others.”

Ends

Notes to editors

Human Insight is a leading practitioner of management ecology, working with leaders of major organisations, to develop effective strategies to manage and profit from change (www.human-insight.com).

For further information on the *Leading through Complexity* course, see <http://courses.uwe.ac.uk/z20000022/2008>.

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