

Making a difference to professionals and practice: an evaluation of the Florence Nightingale Foundation Leadership, Research and Travel Scholarships

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Abstract

The Florence Nightingale Foundation (FNF) is a charity which awards Leadership scholarships, and Travel & Research scholarships to nurses, midwives, and other healthcare professionals to promote excellence in practice, and have real impact on patient care. Travel and Research scholarships are available to nurses and midwives with at least one year's post-registration experience. Leadership scholars in this evaluation were healthcare professionals typically in higher bands although opportunities are now available at a range of levels. This article draws from the findings of the two recent triennial evaluations of the 1) Leadership, and 2) Travel/Research scholarships to demonstrate their value in improving services for patients, carers and users, as well as enhancing the careers

Key points

Florence Nightingale Foundation Scholarships:

- Increase self-confidence and self-awareness creating positivity
- Expand influence
- Assist in promotion success
- Encourage and enable the use of networks
- Impact on other colleagues, and care in scholar's organisations

of the individual scholars. This article addresses the findings from both.

Methodology

Each of the two separate evaluations covered three cohorts of scholars between 2012 and 2015. There were a total of 64 Leadership Scholarships awarded during that period, and 59 scholars responded, a response rate of 92%. Travel/Research awards totalled 128 and 91 scholars responded, a 78% response rate. Of the latter respondents, 48 were Research scholars (74%) and 43 were Travel scholars (68%). The Leadership Scholarship evaluation was carried out by Dr Richard Giordano of the University of Southampton. The

Travel/Research Scholarship evaluation was led by Professor Candy McCabe and Professor Angela Todd. Each evaluation included the use of an online electronic survey to gather data. The surveys collected data on all of the scholars' expectations and overall experience of their scholarships; the scholars' perceptions of the impact of their scholarships on their professional and clinical practice; the outcomes of their scholarship awards; and suggestions from the scholars on areas for improvement or future dissemination of the scholarships. The Leadership Scholarship evaluation additionally involved the use of telephone interviews. This provided the opportunity to explore issues in more depth with scholars and additionally to collect views from organisational 'sponsors' such as the scholar's line manager, CEO or Head of Service etc. 40 out of the 59 that completed the online survey (68%) participated in a telephone interview and 29 'sponsors' also did.

Overall findings

Overall, 98% (n=55) of Leadership scholars, and 80% (n=71) of Travel/Research scholars rated their experience as 'Excellent'. This was the highest score that participants could select on the survey. Speaking about the experience of their scholarship, many respondents described various positive changes in their lives and careers. *"It was simply life, and career changing. It has influenced and changed the way I think and practice."*

Impact on Career

Reinforcing the findings of previous scholarship evaluations (Baillie, Taylor & Giordano, 2013), it is evident that the Foundation's scholarships have an impact on scholars' careers. 97% (n=86) of the Travel/Research scholars agreed that the scholarship had a positive impact on their careers. The positive impact *'included an immediate opportunity for career promotion, or increased confidence'* (McCabe & Tod, 2016). For example, a Scholar reported that they had been shortlisted for a post two bands above their current role, citing the scholarship as a factor.

For Leadership scholars too, the evaluation highlights impact on their career as one of the major benefits of the programme. When interviewed, 33 of fifty 59 respondents had changed roles and what the interviews and survey responses uncovered is the importance scholars attributed to the scholarship in increasing their confidence to apply for more senior roles, and dispelling any sense of imposter syndrome (Clance & Imes, 1978). Actual instances of career progression as a consequence of this increased confidence are multiple. Examples include scholars moving from Deputy Director of Nursing to Director of Nursing; Regional Head of Nursing to a National Nursing Role; Lecturer to Senior Lecturer; Clinical Professor to Dean; and so on.

Confidence and Ripple Effect

Perhaps more surprising is that the confidence gained by Leadership scholars is transmitted to other staff in the scholars' organisations - increasing their colleagues' confidence and engagement in turn. In particular, dialogue with organisational sponsors in the telephone interviews uncovered this phenomenon. The leadership evaluation reports how one sponsor said that a scholar *'takes people along with her'*, and another said that their employee had *'empowered other staff to think about their personal development.'* This ripple effect of the scholarships was articulated frequently by those surveyed. Table 1 shows the results of a question from the online Leadership survey, and displays how Foundation scholars facilitate and enable others:

The Leadership Scholarship has influenced your profession as a whole or your colleagues								
	Agree Strongly	Agree	Agree Slightly	Disagree Slightly	Disagree	Disagree Strongly	N/A	Total
Impact on profession	20 (36%)	19 (34%)	12 (21%)	2 (4%)	0	0	3 (5%)	56
Impact on Colleagues	27 (48%)	23 (41%)	5 (9%)	0	0	0	1 (2%)	56

Table 1:

Similarly, the Travel/Research evaluation found that 95% (n=84) of scholars believed their scholarship work had a positive impact on their immediate colleagues. The evaluation reveals that, through their research or Travel, scholars' work is represented in a different light, with a raised profile. Certainly, in their survey responses many Travel or Research scholars put their learning experience and confidence boost down in part to the fact that somebody had confidence in, and valued, them.

Patient Care

The evaluations sought out evidence of the impact of the scholarships on individuals and organisations that have led to improvements in patient care. All Leadership scholars must create and deliver their own patient care improvement project with the support of their cohort and the Foundation. An example of this is case study 1.

Case Study 1: Leadership Scholarship Patient Improvement Projects- Safe Staffing Levels

One scholar wrote that the project altered her views regarding the introduction of mandated staffing levels: *[My project analysed] evidence to support the introduction of mandated staffing levels. I altered my thinking as a result of my study and would not support mandated staffing ratios. There is little evidence to support the positive impact of mandated staffing ratios and it would be my assertion from what I learnt through my study that registered nurses are best placed to determine safe staffing ratios based on patient need and acuity.*

Another project examined how staffing is determined abroad, and affected hospital practice:

My project was looking at levels of nurse and midwifery staffing to provide safe and quality care. Looking at the evidence available it has allowed me to inform my Board in more detail about how staffing is carried out in other parts of the world. It has also allowed me to successfully secure a business case to purchase an electronic system to support the management of our staff.

Organisational sponsors were able to identify clear evidence of improvement that could be attributed to the Leadership scholarships. One said *'one knock on effect was that it made the team around them (the scholar) step up.'*

Benefits to patient care were also evident in the Research and Travel Scholarships. Nearly 90% (n=80) of Travel/Research scholars reported that their scholarship had a positive impact on patient care. Table 2 summarises the results of a question from the online survey:

Table 2:

The Travel/Research Scholarship has impacted on patient care safety and experience								
	Agree Strongly	Agree Moderately	Agree Slightly	Disagree Slightly	Disagree Moderately	Disagree Strongly	N/A	Total
Patient Care	47% 42	28% 25	15% 13	0% 0	2% 2	0% 0	8% 7	89
Patient Safety	28% 25	27% 24	19% 17	6% 5	4% 4	0% 0	16% 14	89
Patient experience	52% 46	29% 26	8% 7	0% 0	2% 2	1% 1	8% 7	89

Furthermore, improvements and impact was commonly expected to increase over time once their work was disseminated more widely or their projects progressed to the next level. Indeed the overriding message from Travel and Research scholars was to promote the scholarships by emphasising the impact they can have on practice.

"If you are working in a clinic and want to improve your own knowledge and skills that will ultimately benefit patient care and health services then you should apply - don't be scared - be proud to be passionate and share your passions with others through a scholarship!"

Dissemination of scholars' work is also an important way of having a positive impact on patient care. Scholars disseminated their work in many different ways. These included peer reviewed publications, poster or conference presentations, and workshops and presentations within and outside their organisations.

Case Study 2: Travel Scholarships Impacting on Patient Care

One of the Travel scholars worked on a gap identified in the services offered by their local trust to patients with faecal incontinence and obstructive defecation problems. The service provided previously was disjointed with no clear dedicated treatment pathway, and so they travelled to London, Oxford and Manchester to observe best practice there so as to help set up a good service in their local trust. Having observed the services offered in these locations during the scholarship, our scholar's patients are now being offered similar treatments and interventions, and patient feedback is becoming more and more positive. As the scholar said upon completing the scholarship programme: *'Before, no one seemed to listen or want to engage with setting this service up, now we are able to move things forward'*.

Networking

Networks are vital to professional success and the importance of women in particular developing their networks and networking skills has been recognised in the literature (Ibarra et al, 2013)

Leadership scholars explained that for them networking was a manifest expectation of their scholarship and was important because it gave them an opportunity to gain perspectives from outside their workplace, to broaden their knowledge, and to get a sense of how others saw and addressed problems and challenges. Leadership scholars used their scholarships to network both outside and within their own professions. Networking with leaders from outside the NHS was particularly valuable. For example, one said, *'It provided a great opportunity to meet with other people and focused discussion. It was great to learn from what other people knew and shared in the scholarship as nurses and colleagues. It really helped me to move to take a much wider perspective on challenges which has paid many dividends in my work since.'* The design of the Leadership programme included opportunities to come together with other leadership scholars as part of the scholarship, this acted both as a web of support for scholars during the scholarship and built valuable connections for the future.

Travel and Research scholars noted that the scholarship allowed access to mentors and encouragement to contact Alumni with similar projects which *'gave further opportunity for networking at a senior level.'*

Strengths and improvements

The feedback from most scholars was overwhelmingly positive. Most leadership scholars suggested that nothing else was needed, only requesting even more group meetings/activities throughout the year, with one claiming that being an FNF Scholar is *'like joining a professional family and community'*.

Travel and Research scholars also rated their experiences very highly. However, they suggested that increased networking opportunities with other scholars *'would be beneficial'*

and that they would have welcomed a '*greater connection between scholars*'. Other suggestions for improvement included promoting scholarships to more junior nurses to guarantee maximum impact on their future careers, and providing optional leadership support to aid those attempting to implement change as a result of the knowledge acquired during their Travel and Research scholarships.

Most scholars said they would encourage others to apply for an FNF scholarship, and many struggled to find an obvious area for improvement.

Summary

The recent two evaluations of the Florence Nightingale Foundation Travel/Research and Leadership Scholarships share the same decisive conclusions. That the scholarships are an enormously positive experience for scholars, patients and organisations alike:

not only do they make a significant impact on the scholars' careers, they positively impact patient care. Research/Travel and Leadership scholars felt more valued in their profession and had a greater sense of pride in themselves. Leadership scholars described themselves as being on '*the most effective leadership programme available to healthcare professionals*.' Colleagues in their organisations said that Scholars made '*important and long lasting contributions to their sponsoring organisations, and importantly see their personal development as an opportunity to develop others around them*.' Indeed, this has been reiterated in the press, where The Guardian considers the Foundation an '*example of outstanding Leadership training for both managers and clinicians*.' (Vize, 2015) Ultimately, the similarity between the findings of these most recent evaluations and previous ones, indicates that the quality and value of the Foundation's Research/Travel and Leadership Scholarships have remained consistent over time.

References

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Information on the scholarships can be found at: www.florence-nightingale-foundation.org.uk

