



Foundation of Nursing Studies

Review of Small Grants Programme
Executive Summary

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1. Background

The Foundation of Nursing Studies (FoNS) is an independent charity that supports nurses, midwives and health visitors to develop and share new ways of working to improve patient care. One of FoNS' key aims is to work UK-wide and across all healthcare settings to advance practice by supporting individual practitioners and teams. The small grants programme (SGP) is one of the ways in which FoNS attempts to achieve this aim.

The SGP supports local projects and initiatives, which propose to improve healthcare practice and patient care in any branch of nursing, midwifery and health visiting and in any healthcare setting. It has been running since the mid 1990s, during which time, an average of 8-12 small grants of up to £1500 have been awarded each year. In 2004, the Burdett Trust for Nursing committed to supporting this programme for three years.

2. Aim of the review

This review aims to:

- evaluate whether the SGP is relevant, accessible and responsive to the needs of practitioners

with the purpose of informing:

- the future and ongoing development of this approach to supporting the development of practice and improvement of patient care
- the development of a proposal to seek continued funding from the Burdett Trust for Nursing

3. Overview of review process

The review has included the following activities:

- An analysis of inquiries and applications received in 2005 to determine:
 - who FoNS' current customers are
 - the reasons why applications were successful/unsuccessful
- Telephone interviews with a sample of people from each of the key nursing groups
- A questionnaire to gain feedback about the SGP from recipients of small grants in 2004
- An appraisal of current channels of publicity and dissemination

4. Analysis of applications and inquiries

4.1 Breakdown of applicants into key nursing groups

67 applications were received during 2005 of which, 7 were successful. Applications were received from all the key nursing groups. Ward managers and clinical nurse specialists were the most frequent applicants. Practice development nurses were the most successful applicants.

4.2 Analysis of applications and inquiries

The applications and inquiries¹ were analysed using the PARIHS framework developed by Kitson et al (1998) and the definition of practice development by Garbett and McCormack (2002) to inform the process.

1 The inquiries included in this analysis are primarily those received by email and that provided a relatively detailed outline of what was being proposed. Practitioners whose inquiries are considered to have potential are offered support from FoNS to enable the further development of their proposal before completing a full application.

4.2.1 Successful applications

Analysis of the successful applications showed that these practitioners were proposing to develop innovative approaches to practice and were able to demonstrate that they had considered many of the following factors:

- how **evidence** from multiple sources had or would be used to inform the project
- the **contextual** factors that could impact on the development
- the role of **facilitation** in supporting changes in practice in the workplace

They were not all perfect proposals, but the applicants had shown that they had an understanding of factors that may impact on processes of change and development thereby providing the potential for developing a more robust proposal to support the implementation of sustainable changes in practice.

4.2.2 Unsuccessful applications

In comparison, unsuccessful applications tended to fall into the following categories. These proposals:

- focused on education and training alone (professional development)
- involved the development and/or purchase of resources and /or equipment alone
- could be considered to be service developments rather than innovative practice developments

5. Telephone interviews

A total of 50 interviews were undertaken over a two week period in March/April 2006. Participants were recruited by sending an email asking for volunteers via the FoNS e-news. Within one week of sending the email request, in excess of 200 positive responses had been received. As far as was practically possible, interviews were arranged to ensure a spread of participants from across all the nursing groups and all four countries of the UK.

A telephone interview schedule was used to inform and guide the interview process. With the agreement of the participants, hand written notes were made to record the main points from the interviews.

5.1 Analysis of telephone interviews

A thematic analysis of the notes from the telephone interviews was performed. Initially the responses were analysed within the key nursing groups and common themes identified, before comparisons were made in and across the nursing groups.

5.1.1 Where do people receive information about the FoNS small grants programme from?

The majority of participants stated that they received information about the SGP via the FoNS e-news. However, a variety of other sources of information were also identified. These included:

- the FoNS website

- passed on by others members of their organisation, usually senior nurses or practitioners with a specific interest in research and development
- the RCN Co-ordinating Centre's electronic bulletin
- RD Info website
- Nursing press (although only small numbers of participants recalled seeing this information)

5.1.2 What did participants do with the information they received about the small grants programme?

The majority of participants shared the information they received with others. Most tended to use targeted approaches and forwarded information to people who they thought it would be relevant to e.g. lead nurses, practice development nurses and clinical educators. Some used a more general approach and forwarded the information to large numbers of staff across organisations.

5.1.3 Had participants considered making an application?

5 participants had applied or supported an application for a small grant. For most of these applicants, it was the first time that they had applied for funding to support a practice development. Most felt that the application form and process was clear. It seemed that most of these applications were funding driven.

Several other participants reported that they had considered making an application. A variety of reasons were given as to why they had not applied. These included the timing not being right, it felt too complicated and being able to secure internal funding.

5.1.4 Ideas for making programme more accessible

A variety of ideas for making the FoNS SGP more accessible were offered. These included targeting specific organisations, groups and people and increasing publicity through publications and other networks.

Many of the suggested avenues are currently being used or have been used in the past, however, it may be worth revisiting all of the suggestions and considering how effectively they could be or are being used. Some gaps were also identified, e.g. CNO bulletins in Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland.

5.1.5 Do healthcare practitioners need funds to help them develop practice?

The vast majority of participants believed that healthcare practitioners needed funding to help them develop practice but that these funds need not be large amounts. Four main themes arose from these responses. Funding:

- validates work
- helps some projects to get started
- provides time
- enables learning

5.1.6 Would support and facilitation from FoNS be helpful?

There was a general sense from participants that support and facilitation from FoNS would be helpful for people who are involved in development work, although some participants felt that it may not be necessary as local support should be available. This was especially true of participants working in larger organisations. However there was an acknowledgement that people working in smaller organisations, or outside of the

NHS, in care homes, for example, may not have access to such support locally. Overall, it seemed as if a mix of local support and help from FoNS would be beneficial. FoNS could either help practitioners to access local support or fill in the gaps if no help was available.

5.1.7 Other comments

Participants were able to identify benefits of the SGP for individuals, nursing and organisations and acknowledged that FoNS fills a gap that no other organisation does. Participants felt that many structures were in place to drive practice development but suggested that what people actually need is support. It was therefore recognised that facilitation from FoNS instead of money alone would help many people.

Some practical suggestions for improving the SGP were offered including developing a template for completing application forms. It was also acknowledged that the focus of the SGP should be on novices and practitioners at the bedside and therefore the grants need to be promoted as a unique resource for clinical practitioners that are relevant, accessible and user-friendly so that practising nurses do not think that they are just for academics and senior nurses.

6. Feedback from grant recipients in 2004

Recipients of the 8 small grants awarded in 2004 were included in this review as they have had a recent experience of the whole process of the SGP. A questionnaire was developed based on the telephone interview schedule and emailed to all 9 project leaders (1 project had 2 project leaders). 8 questionnaires were returned.

6.1 Where had they received information about the FoNS small grants programme from?

Recipients had received information about the FoNS SGP from a variety of sources.

6.2 Ideas for making programme more accessible

One recipient stated that the programme was already well advertised, however, she was familiar with the work of FoNS through an association with a nursing network.

Others offered the following suggestions:

- Disseminate previous projects through RCN bulletin or articles in nursing journals to raise the profile of the programme
- Use more online resources e.g. Nurse Net and the British Journal of Nursing online
- Run a workshop at a national conference focusing on the process of developing and implementing a project
- Produce hard copy flyers as some practitioners are dependent on senior nurses to disseminate the information downwards

6.3 What made recipients apply for a small grant from FoNS?

The majority of recipients stated that they had applied for a small grant because they needed funding for their project. Some also commented on the timeliness of the funding, the appropriateness to what they were doing as opposed to research monies and the ease of the application process.

6.4 Ideas for improving the application pack

Several recipients stated that they thought that the application form was “fine”, “simple” and “straightforward”. Two recipients suggested that an example of a successful application would be useful and another stated that you should be able to complete the form online.

6.5 Ideas for improving the application process

Most of the recipients reported that they were happy with the application process. The initial proposal from one recipient was rejected, however, she commented that she had felt supported by the feedback that she had received from FoNS and that this had enabled her to successfully redevelop her proposal. Two of the project leaders (from the same project) however felt that the application process should be shortened as it seemed to be lengthy and stated that they would have liked quicker feedback regarding the outcome of their application.

6.6 Receipt of support and facilitation from FoNS

Recipients had received a variety of support from FoNS. Most felt that the support had been timely and appropriate, however, the recipients from one project stated that they would have liked more support during the project and were disappointed with the amount of work they had to put in for the amount of money that they received.

7. Publicity and dissemination

Several channels are currently used to publicise the SGP. These include:

- the FoNS website which currently receives receiving approximately 1200 unique visitors per week. From 1st April 2005 – 31st March 2006 there were:
 - 8493 visits to the small grant funding page
 - 3498 small grant application packs downloaded
 - 14382 visits to individual small grant project pages
- the FoNS e-news which is sent out at least 5 times a year to an e-mailing list of 5500 recipients UK and world wide
- press releases about the SGP which are sent out approximately 3-4 times per year. The current list of contacts includes the nursing press; statutory bodies, organisations e.g. Department of Health, RCN; funding databases e.g. RDinfo; network contacts
- dissemination series reports which are currently sent to 1300 recipients UK wide. This includes all the nursing and healthcare libraries, and many Directors of Nursing. In addition, all the reports are available to download free of charge from the FoNS website in pdf format. From 1st April 2005 to 31st March 2006, 19161 Dissemination Series reports were downloaded from the FoNS website

8. Discussion

The aim of this review was to evaluate whether the SGP is relevant, accessible and responsive to the needs of practitioners with the purpose of informing the ongoing development of the programme and future funding bids.

8.1 Is the small grants programme relevant?

Evidence from the review suggests that the SGP is both relevant and needed. FoNS is the only UK wide organisation working across all healthcare settings that provides

funding and support to develop healthcare practice. Interview participants and recipients of grants acknowledge this unique and valuable role.

Many of the interview participants held the view that the SGP should be focused towards clinically based nurses for the following reasons:

- receiving a small grant can be a developmental opportunity. This was supported anecdotally by interview participants who had received a grant or award from FoNS and some of the grant recipients in 2004
- senior nurses and academics have access to wider funding opportunities than those who are more clinically based

This evidence would suggest that the current focus of the SGP towards clinically based nurses is appropriate; however, FoNS may need to consider the ways in which it can enable more successful applications from ward managers, for example.

8.2 Is the small grants programme accessible?

The accessibility of the SGP will be considered under three headings, information about the SGP, the application process and expectations.

8.2.1 Information

It was apparent that information about the SGP is received from many sources, however, it is also acknowledged that many channels may focus on more senior nurses and therefore clinically based nurses may be reliant upon this information being passed on. FoNS may need to develop stronger links with Director of Nursing forums and the CNO bulletins in all four countries to highlight the relevance of the small grant programme to clinically based nurses and therefore encourage the wide dissemination of information about FoNS throughout organisations.

Some participants suggested that FoNS approach nursing journals to negotiate an agreement for the inclusion of articles written by recipients of small grants. This could not only raise the profile of the SGP but also demonstrate the relevance of the programme to more clinically based nurses.

Approximately 3500 small grant application packs were downloaded from the FoNS website last year. As many practitioners are accessing information about the programme via the internet, FoNS needs to continue to explore effective ways of publicising the website and evaluating the accessibility of the information held on it from the perspective of practitioners/site visitors.

8.2.2 Application process

Overall, feedback about the small grant application process and the application pack from interview participants and grant recipients was positive. Most thought that the application form was straightforward and that FoNS offered appropriate and timely support with the application process. However, there was a sense that the availability of facilitation from FoNS was not particularly explicit of the application pack and some people had not been clear about how funding could be spent.

Some practical suggestions were offered from improving/supporting the application process. These included:

- creating on line application forms

- developing a template for applications
- providing examples of successful applications/proposals
- creating a FAQs section or a checklist of things that applicants should consider

8.2.3 Expectations

By considering the unsuccessful applications, in particular, it could be suggested that in some cases, there is a difference in expectations about what is required for a successful application between FoNS and some applicants. To assist with the application process and to make FoNS' expectations more explicit, FoNS should redevelop the information and application pack so that it clearly states that applicants need to consider the processes that they will use to achieve changes in practice rather than focusing on quick fix solutions. This does not mean that FoNS will only be looking for 'perfect proposals' as it should be made clear that FoNS would welcome the opportunity to work with people who have a good idea to help with the development of project proposals. Other resources that may also provide applicants with help are a Frequently Asked Questions section and examples of successful proposals/applications.

8.3 Is the small grants programme responsive?

For the programme to be responsive, it needs to react quickly and/or favourably. In all cases, applicants are responded to within the one month timescale that is stated on the application pack. In most cases, FoNS responds well within this timescale. All unsuccessful applicants are offered feedback about why their application was unsuccessful. Where possible, FoNS also provides suggestions as to other funding bodies that applicants may approach.

9. Conclusions

A detailed review of the FoNS SGP has been undertaken to determine if it is an effective approach to supporting the development of practice to improve patient care. The findings indicate that the programme should definitely continue as it is providing unique and valuable support to nurses, midwives and health visitors UK wide. The findings also suggest that broadly speaking; the current format of the programme is relevant, accessible and responsive to the needs of healthcare practitioners and teams. However, some areas of the programme that could be strengthened have been identified and these will be addressed in the recommendations.

10. Recommendations

This review demonstrates that the FoNS SGP provides unique and valuable support to healthcare practitioners UK wide. To further strengthen the programme and increase its accessibility the following recommendations are made as a result:

- Focus on clinical practitioners
The primary customers of the SGP should be clinically based practitioners. FoNS should therefore encourage applicants to develop academic links to support their projects rather than encouraging academics to be lead applicants
- Increase accessibility

FoNS should explore channels for wider publicity that will reach clinically based practitioners including effective use of Director of Nursing forums, CNO bulletins across the four countries, articles in popular nursing press

- Increase the profile of facilitation
There is an overriding notion that 'funding and support from FoNS is more than just about money', however, FoNS should explore how the availability of facilitation can:
 - be made more explicit to potential applicants
 - be negotiated with applicants to meet their needs and within the resources available to FoNS
 - outlined so that applicants will know what this may include e.g. supporting practitioners to access local support, filling in gaps when support not available

- Clarify the application process
The information and application pack should be redeveloped so that:
 - it clearly states that FoNS can provide support to help applicants develop project proposals
 - it clearly states that applicants will need to consider the processes that they will use to achieve changes in practice
 - a template is available for applicants to completeFurther resources should be developed to assist applicants e.g. a FAQs section and example proposals

- Review funding
The current funding level of £1500 has been in place since the establishment of the SGP. As costs of resources and staff time will have risen over time, it seems appropriate that the level of funding be reviewed.

11. References

- Garbett, R and McCormack, B. (2002) A concept analysis of practice development. *Nursing Times Research*. Vol.7. No.2. pp 87-100.
- Kitson, A. et al. (1998) Enabling the implementation of evidence-based practice: a conceptual framework. *Quality in Health Care*. Vol.7. No.3. pp 149-158.