



Innovation in Teaching and Learning in Health Higher Education

Executive Summary

February 2015

Although innovation is a familiar buzzword in both health and higher education (HE), there has been surprisingly little work to explore how health HE creates and adopts new practices in teaching and learning; the predominant themes of innovation for these disciplines; and the extent to which this is evaluated. The gaps in evidence are even more apparent on questions related to the cultures that encourage or inhibit health HE innovation. This lack of enquiry is perhaps surprising given the dominance of narratives in both sectors that are predicated on the need for impact and effectiveness to be evidenced, particularly where public money is invested.

The absence of a clear picture of health HE innovation carries risk for the future of education for these professions within universities. Without understanding its scope, themes and how it is nurtured, it is difficult to make a case for the value of innovation in teaching and learning. Since both HE and health policy are dealt with by the devolved administrations, the details differ significantly across the UK. However, these are broad trends that affect all universities involved in providing health professional education.

In this context, the Innovation in Teaching and Learning Project, a UK-wide endeavour jointly sponsored by the Higher Education Academy (HEA) and the Council of Deans of Health (CoDH), has sought both to identify pedagogical innovations in health HE for nurses, midwives and allied health professionals (AHPs) and better understand the culture in which innovation is developed and nurtured. The project had two core objectives:

- To provide a forum through which universities can share and disseminate their innovative practice to a wider audience in HE
- To showcase this innovation to the policy makers who shape the context in which health education is delivered.

The project's first year focused on scoping innovations, including the thorny issue of developing a definition of innovation, and developing a student journey as a framework on to which innovations could be mapped. Over 120 case studies were then collected from universities engaged in nursing, midwifery and AHP education across the UK. Since there were relatively few surveys of the existing evidence of innovation in health HE, a literature review was also commissioned to examine education innovations for all health professions, including internationally. This was followed by a second literature review addressing the question of the culture that embeds and develops innovative practice.

The project revealed both depth and breadth in pedagogical innovations across the UK and uncovered a wealth of creative practice in teaching and learning. At a time when the media is often sceptical of the value of higher education in health education, the survey findings demonstrate that innovation is thriving. The project found that health education was often in line with core health policy objectives, with clusters of innovation in areas such as involving users and carers in education. Equally, the case studies indicated that health HE is sometimes ahead of the policy agenda, for example in the engagement of

students as co-producers and innovators. The project also developed new insights into the environment most likely to foster innovation in health HE, finding that key features included:

- Encouragement of interdisciplinary and collaborative approaches
- Critical reflection
- Rewarding staff for new approaches.

Having put the spotlight on an often undervalued area of higher education, the project's approach of capturing innovation will be embedded into the Council of Deans of Health's core activity and a second call for case studies will be launched in May 2015. In light of some of the gaps highlighted by the project, the project team has recommended that the Council and other stakeholders in health HE should focus on opportunities to develop the evidence base for the impact of education and that robust evaluation should be set as a condition for funding educational innovation.