Changemaker: Preparing student midwives for employability, qualification and beyond

Abstract

The Royal College of Midwives (RCM) estimates a short fall of 3,500 full-time midwives in England (RCM, 2016) and with a third of practising midwives being over 50 it is evident that recruitment and retention are key to the ongoing success of maternity services in delivering high quality care to women with ever more complex medical, social and obstetric backgrounds. The role of Higher Education Institutions (HEI) is not only to ensure student midwives meet the requirements of the EU Directive 2005/36/EC and achieve the NMC Standards (NMC, 2009), it is also to support them to prepare for job applications; navigate the recruitment process and be fully cognisant of their legal, ethical and professional responsibilities upon qualification. This article will discuss an e-module which adopted an innovative approach to learning, teaching and assessment in relation to student midwives’ employability, social awareness and preparedness for professional practice.

Keywords: employability; recruitment; Changemaker; pre-registration midwifery education; social responsibility

Introduction

The role of Higher Education Institutions (HEI) is not only to ensure student midwives meet the requirements of the EU Directive 2005/36/EC and achieve the NMC Standards by being competent in the four domains of effective midwifery practice; professional and ethical practice; developing the individual midwife and others; achieving quality care through evaluation and research (NMC, 2009:23), it also has a responsibility to prepare students for the recruitment process and ensure they understand the legal, ethical and professional frameworks of their chosen profession as they apply to join the register and practise in the United Kingdom (UK). This article will discuss an e-module for third year midwifery students which has adopted an innovative approach in supporting students to critically reflect on their professional journey, prepare for qualification and work towards employability as a safe and competent midwife.

The University of Northampton’s (UoN) approach to learning and teaching is ‘Active Blended Learning’ (ABL), which is a student-centred approach to support the development of subject knowledge and understanding, independent learning and digital fluency. In the context of this module, by ensuring learning is collaborative, with clear links to the interactive e-learning package, learning is multidimensional encouraging students to develop autonomy, confidence and
adaptability (UoN, 2018). A previous article in this series discussed the development, delivery and evaluation of an innovative approach to teaching clinical skills using the ABL approach (Power and Cole, 2017). This article will make the same observations for a theoretical module to see how innovation in pedagogical approaches can enhance students’ learning and ultimately their employability.

**Employability: Changemaker**

The aims of the module are twofold: to prepare students for employability (preparation for CVs, personal statements, interviews) and to prepare them for safe and effective practice in line with legal, ethical and professional requirements. As the first university in the UK to be awarded the Changemaker Campus designation by Ashoka U in 2013, the University is internationally recognised for its commitment to developing student employability through engagement with social innovation which distinguishes the University within the higher education sector (Alden Rivers and Maxwell, 2015). Social innovation is a contested concept emerging from many disciplines (Ayob et al., 2016); however the European Union adopts the definition that draws together a number of perspectives and defines social innovation as:

‘...new approaches to addressing social needs. They are social in their means and in their ends. They engage and mobilise the beneficiaries and help to transform social relations by improving beneficiaries’ access to power and resources’ (TEPSIE, 2015)

For students at Northampton, Changemaker is simply about spotting a social problem and doing something about it. In 2014, the University committed to social innovation as a core competence that would enhance the student experience and contribute to improved student outcomes aiming to be the UK’s number one university for Social Enterprise (UoN, 2010). Alden Rivers et al. (2015) identified a Changemaker employability framework which mapped social innovation competencies to 21st Century skills development and how employability and curriculum could be aligned to Changemaking (Irwin and Maxwell, 2015). The adoption of this framework created an approach that embedded Changemaker into the curriculum and allowed for subject specificity to be articulated.

Central to the approach was the priority to provide students with the opportunity to explore social problems within the context of their chosen subject. This enabled student to apply social innovation techniques to real world situations giving them the opportunity to develop their ideas and potentially, entrepreneurial mindsets, within their chosen career or places of work. Ashoka U’s Changemaker Director, Michele Leaman, praised the University’s approach, commenting ‘Social innovation and entrepreneurship is on every corner at Northampton, offering a unique example of a Changemaker Campus’ (The University of Northampton, n.d.). Involvement with Changemaker would allow students to be socially innovative, explore social issues they are passionate about and make a real difference to society.
One e-tivity required students to develop a midwifery focused Changemaker Project, designed to have a social impact on self, peers and the community. One student (Laney Holland) with a keen interest in FGM (Power and Holland, 2018) wants to develop training for community midwives to enable them to run a midwife-led, community-based FGM de-infibulation clinic. After developing her project through the module, she submitted her idea to the Changemaker Hub and has been invited to present at an upcoming ‘Give it a Go’ panel to pitch for funding from the University. ‘This online learning module not only raised my awareness of the Changemaker programme, but enabled me to explore the Give it a Go programme. Three months later and my idea has been invited to present at the next panel meeting!’

In addition to addressing a social problem, embedding Changemaker enabled students to relate this experience to their employability story and skills development and as such can be demonstrated through not only assessment practice but through the employability award, Employability Plus. The Award encourages students to undertake activities they can reflect on such as social change activities, community engagement and involvement with social entrepreneurship, further enhancing their employability and providing them with real world examples for graduate jobs.

The university’s Careers and Employability team sits within Changemaker and has been voted as one of the best in the UK by the student crowd website (2017). As a Career Development Coach within the Changemaker Hub, Tasneem Dakri supports and coaches students in developing their employability and preparing them for the graduate labour market, including support both in and out of curriculum. As part of this module Tasneem worked with the pre-registration midwifery students to prepare them for employment through the building of an online Curriculum Vitae (CV) which she also provided feedback on; the development of a personal statement and mock interview sessions which included peer review and feedback. This process included a thorough analysis of current employability skills through the Skills Self-Assessment resource based on Schwarzer General Self-Efficacy Scale (Schwarzer and Jerusalem, 1995), enabling students to better understand themselves and become more self-aware in relation to their strengths and areas for development.

**Legal, ethical and professional frameworks**

This element of the module focused on revisiting and consolidating knowledge and understanding of how midwifery practice is regulated in the UK and how legal, ethical and professional requirements ensure the care women receive is of the highest standard. Students engaged with synchronous online learning in a ‘virtual classroom’ hosted by the University’s virtual learning environment (VLE). An important aspect of the module was to challenge students’ perceptions of themselves as learners, future midwives and the workplace and political landscape they will join on qualification. With this in mind, in small groups students researched and developed a range of resources which they then...
presented (and at times defended!) to their peers. Topics included revalidation; Professional Midwifery Advocates (PMAs); continuing professional development (CPD); politics in normal midwifery practice; the reflective and autonomous practitioner; peer support and mentoring.

‘Without change there is no innovation, creativity or incentive for improvement’
(William Pollard: 1828-1893)

Examples of positive student feedback:

- [This was] a different way to learn, which made use of independent learning and made the teaching a lot more intellectually stimulating
- The new way of learning collaboratively and online with new software was innovative and exciting
- I enjoyed working in breakout groups to learn from other students
- A differently approach to learning and really beneficial for when we apply for jobs
- Being forced to think about how to be professional and promote yourself when applying for jobs
- I feel this has been a really interactive module and very enjoyable
- I have enjoyed this module and would definitely recommend it for further modules in the future
- I like that the Module Leader was very supportive and encouraging of this very new way to interact and learn
- I liked the online classroom and feel it was very accessible and was great for collaborative learning
- This module was very interactive working both within a group and individually
- Loved the fact it was online and interactive

Conclusion

The University of Northampton is committed to providing its students with a high-quality learning experience as they prepare for employment and beyond. Our commitment to pre-registration midwifery education is to ensure that on qualification our students are confident and competent practitioners, equipped to deal with the ever more complex demands of their chosen profession. The fact that students are unique individuals, with individual preferences is acknowledged and celebrated. Active Blended Learning offers a range of learning and teaching approaches both face to face and online to meet the diverse needs of students, thereby supporting them to develop their autonomy, confidence and adaptability. By embedding Changemaker in the curriculum our students will be knowledgeable graduates, who are socially responsible and digitally proficient with the potential make a positive impact on the communities they serve as registered midwives.
References


**Authors**

Alison Power (Senior Lecturer – Midwifery)
Tasneem Dakri (Career Development Coach - Changemaker Hub)
Wray Irwin (Head of University Centre for Employability and Engagement)

**Acknowledgements**

Thank you to September 15 Cohort for their comments and wishing everyone the best of luck as they approach qualification - so near to achieving the dream!