

Changemaker: Preparing student midwives for employability, qualification and beyond

Abstract

The Royal College of Midwives estimates that there is a shortfall of approximately 3500 full-time midwives in England and, with one-third of practising midwives aged 50 or more, it is evident that recruitment and retention are key to the ongoing success of maternity services. The need for high-quality care is especially acute, given that women are presenting with increasingly complex medical, social and obstetric backgrounds. The role of higher education institutions is not only to ensure student midwives meet the requirements of the EU Directive 2005/36/EC and achieve the Nursing and Midwifery Council Standards, but also to support them to apply for jobs, navigate the recruitment process and understand their legal, ethical and professional responsibilities on qualification. This article will discuss an e-module that was introduced at the University of Northampton, entitled 'Becoming a midwife'. This module adopted an innovative approach to learning, teaching and assessment in relation to student midwives' employability, social awareness and preparedness for professional practice on qualification.

Keywords

Employability | Recruitment | Changemaker | Pre-registration midwifery education | Social responsibility

The role of higher education institutions is not only to ensure that student midwives meet the requirements of the European Union (EU) Directive 2005/36/EC and Nursing and Midwifery Council (NMC) standards (NMC, 2009); but also to prepare students for the recruitment process, and ensure that they understand the legal, ethical and professional frameworks of their profession as they apply to join the register. This article will discuss an e-module for third year midwifery students, entitled 'Becoming a midwife', that adopted an innovative approach in supporting students to critically reflect on their professional journey, prepare for qualification and work towards employment as a safe and competent practitioner.

The University of Northampton's pedagogical style is 'active blended learning' (ABL), a student-centred approach designed to support the development of subject knowledge and understanding, independent learning and digital fluency. In this module, collaboration and clear links to the interactive e-learning package ensure that learning is multidimensional, and encourage students to develop autonomy, confidence and adaptability (University of Northampton, 2018a). A previous article in this series discussed the development, delivery and evaluation of teaching clinical skills using active blended learning (Power and Cole, 2017). This article will make the same observations for a theoretical module to see how pedagogical innovations can enhance students' learning and employability.

Employability: Changemaker

The aims of the module are twofold: to prepare students for employment (including CVs, personal statements, and interviews) and 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 social innovation, which distinguishes the University within the higher education sector (Alden Rivers and Maxwell,

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2015). Social innovation is a contested concept (Ayob et al, 2016); however the EU's Theoretical, Empirical and Policy foundations for building Social Innovation in Europe (TEPSIE) project defined social innovations 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: 4)

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

Central to the approach was providing students with the opportunity to explore social problems in the context of their chosen subject. Students could apply social innovation techniques to real-world situations, developing their ideas and entrepreneurial mindsets within their chosen career or places of work. Ashoka U's Changemaker Director, Michele Leaman, praised the University's approach, commenting that:

'Social innovation and entrepreneurship is on every corner at Northampton, offering a unique example of a Changemaker Campus.' (University of Northampton, 2018b)

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 themselves, their peers and the community. One student, Laney Holland, with an interest in tackling female genital mutilation (FGM) (Power and Holland, 2018) wanted 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'

Box 1. Student feedback

'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 different 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

panel to pitch for funding from the University. When asked for her feedback, Laney said that:

'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, Changemaker enables students to relate this experience to their employment plans and skills development, which can be demonstrated through assessment practice and an award, Employability Plus. The award encourages students to undertake activities such as social change activities, community engagement and social entrepreneurship, which further enhances their employability and provides them with real-world examples for graduate jobs.

The university's careers and employability team forms part of Changemaker and has been voted as one of the best in the UK by the student crowd website (Bates, 2017). As a career development coach, Tasneem Dakri supports students to develop their employability and prepare for the graduate labour market. During the module, Tasneem worked with pre-registration midwifery students to prepare them for employment through activities such as building an online CV, developing a personal statement and taking part in mock interview sessions. This process included a thorough analysis of employability skills through the skills self-assessment resource, based on

Key points

- Higher education institutions have a duty to prepare students not only to meet the increasingly complex needs of women in maternity services, but also to prepare them for employment
- The University of Northampton uses active blended learning to deliver modules, including the 'Becoming a midwife' module, designed to improve students' employability skills
- As part of Changemaker, students have the chance to take part in social change activities, community engagement and social entrepreneurship
- Students also benefit from careers advice, such as feedback on CVs, personal statements and performance in mock interviews

Schwarzer General Self-Efficacy Scale (Schwarzer and Jerusalem, 1995), and feedback on their CVs and personal statements. This helped students to better understand themselves and become more self-aware in relation to their strengths and areas for development (Box 1).

Legal, ethical and professional frameworks for midwives

This element of the module is taught through synchronous online learning in a 'virtual classroom' hosted by the University's virtual learning environment. Its focus is on revisiting and consolidating students' understanding of how midwifery practice is regulated in the UK, and how legal, ethical and professional requirements ensure that the care women receive is of the highest standard. An important aspect of the module is to challenge students' perceptions of themselves as learners and 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; continuing professional development; politics in normal midwifery practice; the reflective and autonomous practitioner; and peer support and mentoring.

Conclusion

The University of Northampton is committed to providing 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. Students' individuality and preferences are acknowledged and celebrated, and active blended learning offers a range of teaching approaches, both face to face and online, to meet the diverse needs of students, supporting them to develop their autonomy, confidence

and adaptability. By embedding Changemaker in the curriculum, our students will be knowledgeable, socially responsible and digitally proficient graduates, with the potential to make a positive impact on the communities they serve as registered midwives. **BJM**

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