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BUILDING FUTURE RESEARCH CAPACITY IN STUDENT HEALTHCARE
PRACTITIONERS THROUGH RESEARCH-INFORMED-TEACHING.

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Introduction:

The Research-Informed-Teaching (RIT) agenda aims to broaden the scope of learning and teaching within higher education (Jenkins, Healey and Zetter, 2007). This may encompass raising students' awareness of the research environment and knowledge base relevant to their discipline, developing advanced skills in critical appraisal of published research, engaging active researchers in the delivery of teaching, plus facilitating students' direct experience of research processes and conduct. It may be anticipated that that RIT is already intrinsic to the nature of professional education in healthcare, where Evidence-Based Practice (EBP) is a now a fundamental requirement of professional regulation (Health and Care Professions' Council (2014). However frameworks of RIT are not necessarily sufficiently defined to promote the required depth of critical reflection on clinical practice (Dey, Downe, Milston, Roddam and Hart, 2009).

Within the two programmes in the School of Sport, Tourism and the Outdoors (SSTO) Physiotherapy and Sports Therapy (PaST) Division there is a strong track record of support and innovation for research and knowledge transfer. This is evinced by a high profile for RIT, with particular emphasis on facilitating student experience of research processes, including writing for publication. The curriculum is heavily focused on EBP and the academic team works closely with key stakeholders in clinical services to develop programmes which equip our graduates with the academic skills and expertise required for competent practice, life-long learning and timely responses to organisational change. However, the premise that these student cohorts will consequently be better equipped to contribute to the future 'knowledge economy' has still not been evidenced and there is a dearth of research to support any correlations between students' experiences of RIT, their perceptions of the discipline-specific research agenda, their self-efficacy in research skills and their future career aspirations.

UCLan's Allied Health Professions research unit also hosts the Cumbria and Lancashire AHP Research Network. This network group has a strong track record of supporting research capacity building in local clinical services, and collaborative partnership working to facilitate high-quality research activity relevant to the needs of practitioners in response to health care issues: effectively mentoring clinical staff in Practice-Based Evidence (PBE).

Research aim:

The aim of this research project is to assess perceptions of the current students across all programmes in the PaST Division. The project will elicit students' experiences of RIT, their self-efficacy in EBP, and their future career aspirations. The study findings will highlight recommendations for further enhancing teaching and learning approaches as well as indicative discipline-specific themes, to answer the research question of whether these measures are sufficiently specific and sensitive to reflect the Division's incremental RIT approach.

Methods:

This study uses a questionnaire-survey design based on a composite of two published tools. The first is a survey developed by Healey, Jordan and Short (2002) to elicit students' experience of Research-informed-Teaching. The second is a validated measure of students' self-efficacy in Evidence-Based-Practice (Spek, Wieringa-de Waard, Lucas and van Dijk, 2013). The final questions elicit students' expectations of the relative focus on research activity in routine clinical practice for their specified professional group, plus their personal career aspirations. The data collection will take place in May 2014.

Participants:

The participants are the total cohort of current students across the Division of Physiotherapy and Sports Therapy (all year groups, including taught postgraduate routes, n= 240). The questionnaires are completed anonymously except for an identifier of the programme (Physiotherapy/Sports Therapy) and year group (1, 2, 3 or postgraduate). In line with the methodology of the previously published studies

(Spek et al, 2013), the students will be given time to complete paper copies of the questionnaires within a module session, maximising response rates. Each data collection session will be introduced by a member of the research team to present the rationale for the research question; supplemented by a succinct participant information sheet. In line with good research practice all students are assured that they are free to choose not to take part without any impact on their studies and without having to give any reason. Once the questionnaires have been collected all the data will be used as no responses are identifiable.

Results:

Initial descriptive analysis of the survey results will indicate any trends in the students' self-reported measures that reflect the incremental emphasis on research design and direct application of research skills across the year groups. Comparative analysis between programmes of study may additionally generate indicative correlations with specific aspects of RIT approaches across these disciplines, and give insights into the students' emergent professional identity in relation to research activity in clinical practice. The study findings will also be reviewed against published findings of student experiences from other disciplines (Lindsay, Breen and Jenkins, 2002; Roberston and Blackler, 2006; Healey, Jordan, Pell and Short 2010) as well as international comparators (Verburch, Elen and Clays, 2006; Turner, Wuetherick and Healey, 2008).

Anticipated outcomes:

The study findings will be disseminated to support the on-going development of practice in teaching and learning. The findings will also inform the design of further research studies, including comparative evaluations of reported student experiences across other disciplines, and in other institutions. There is also the potential for international comparative studies which will build on existing links with higher education institutions in Norway, Finland and Bulgaria. The expected completion date for this study is September 2014.

Conclusions:

This study will generate valuable original insights into the students' experiences of Research-informed-Teaching and will indicate priorities for further development of teaching and learning strategies in these disciplines.

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