

Delivering high quality practice-based learning for smaller allied health professions: Does size matter?

Sarah Foster RD & Professor Christopher R Burton



What and why?

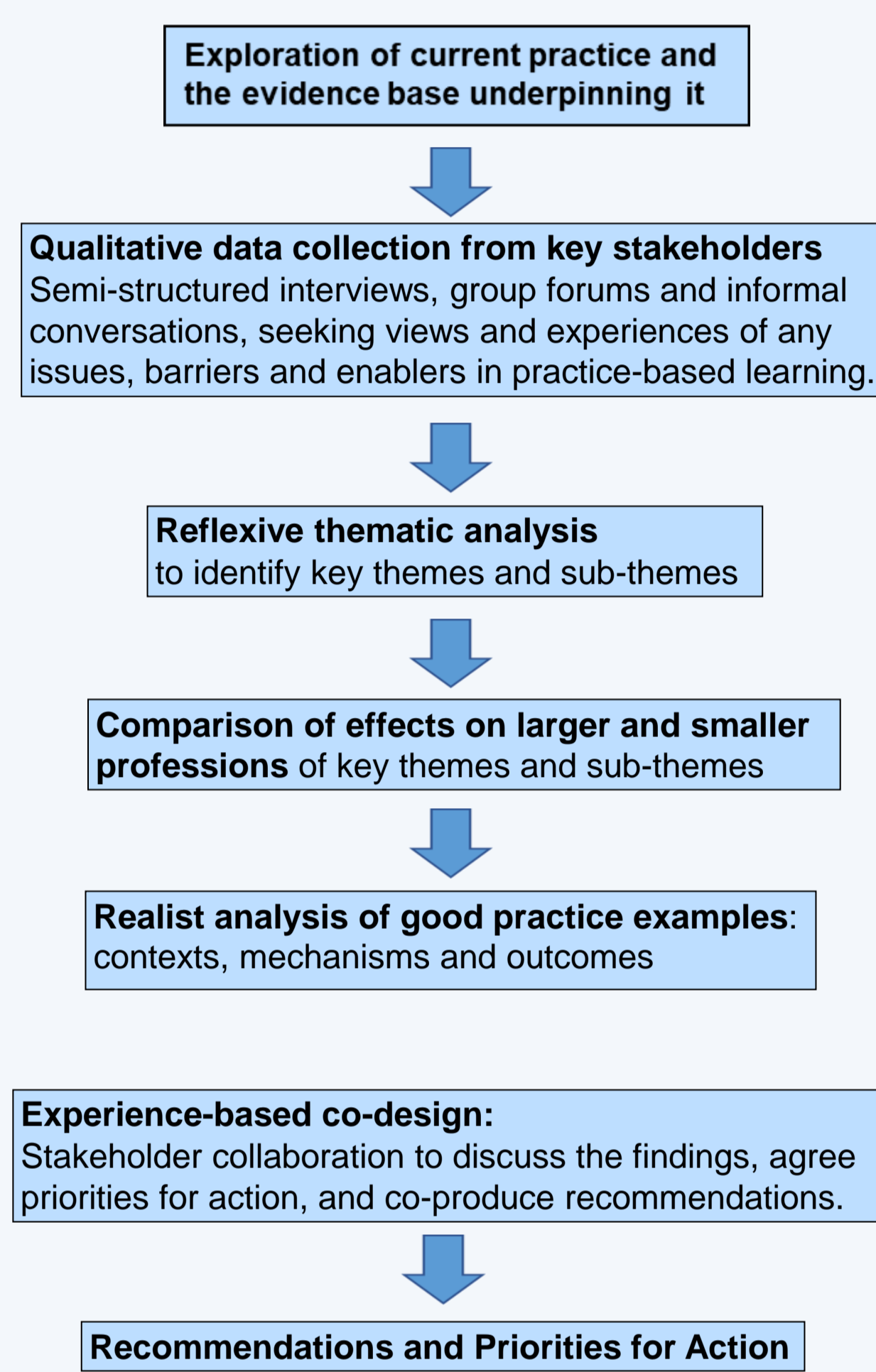
What?

A 12-month project, funded by HEE South East, exploring how we ensure **sustainable, high quality practice-based learning** for pre-registration students in smaller allied health professions, and whether profession size makes a difference.

Why?

High quality practice-based learning prepares students well to join the workforce, as confident and competent practitioners, and so ultimately **improves patient care**.
The perception in the smaller professions that there are factors which make it more challenging for them had not previously been explored, so there was a **gap in the knowledge base**.

Methodology



Key messages from stakeholders

Quality is key because we are training health professionals to provide safe and effective patient care.

There is **increasing pressure** on an already pressurized system, and the “status quo” cannot deliver the practice education capacity and capability we need to supply the increase in AHPs to deliver on the NHS Long Term Plan.

Those in smaller professions often feel that they “**slip under the radar**”, compared with “larger professions, who have louder voices and make a bigger noise”.

Key themes from qualitative data

7 key themes were identified to take forward for discussion in the stakeholder co-design workshop:



Top 5 priorities for action

1. Standardised learning outcomes and assessment portfolio content
2. A review of placement structure
3. Student training in job plans and time allocated for it
4. A profession-specific, national practice education forum to bring practice educators and universities together to share ideas, learning and resources
5. Online practice educator training and resources

Discussion

New findings include challenges for smaller professions, and the feeling that they often “slip under the radar”, lack of “economies of scale”, and a need for greater support, and perhaps additional funding, which is not in proportion to student numbers. Standardised assessment documentation was already being developed by some other AHPs. This project found strong support for it within dietetics. National approaches to collaboration and provision of resources may be of particular benefit in smaller professions, with fewer people to share this work, but regional or inter-regional collaboration may be better for sharing practice education capacity. One size may not fit all.

Influence and impact were achieved throughout the project, voicing the concerns of smaller professions and getting these on the agenda. This also led to invitations to join relevant steering committees and working groups. This involvement continues.

Transferability to other smaller professions is likely, especially around particular challenges faced by smaller professions, and strategies which are likely to work for them.