

Exploring Collaboration in the Implementation of a National Assessment Strategy: Perspectives of Advanced Practice Educators

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Introduction

Collaboration on course design (rather than research) between Higher Education Institutes (HEIs) in an increasingly competitive market is still relatively under researched, particularly in the UK. This study focuses on a series of workshops facilitated by the Association of Advanced Practice Educators UK (AAPEUK) to gather the faculty staff of HEIs intending to deliver the Advanced Clinical Practitioner (ACP) apprenticeship end point assessment (EPA), to operationalise and meet the requirements of the EPA assessment plan. These workshops eventually led to the formation of the EPAO Network, which currently has representation from over 50 HEIs across England. The perceptions of the ACP EPAO network members regarding the collaborative community of practice developed to support the implementation of a national assessment strategy were sought.

Aims and objectives

To examine the perceptions of the ACP EPAO network members of a collaborative community of practice.
 To evaluate the impact of a collaborative learning community for course design in higher education.

Methodology

A mixed methods approach was used to collect data on the participants' experience of the ACP EPAO Network. All sixty-three network members received an email invitation to participate in a 30-minute online survey comprising seventeen closed and free text questions. Participants had the option to withdraw their answers at any time. Data was collected through the Qualtrics platform, with participants providing their consent for data usage. Anonymous data was securely stored on password protected devices and kept electronically in Arkivum for ten years following the research project, in line with Oxford Brookes University Ethics guidelines.

References

Chang MK. 2018. Reevaluating collegiality: relationality, learning communities, and possibilities. *Policy Futures in Education*. 16(7):851–865.
 Chrislip D, Larson CE. 1994. *Collaborative leadership: how citizens and civic leaders can make a difference*. San Francisco: Jossey Bass.
 Newell C, Bain A. 2018. *Team-based collaboration in higher education learning and teaching: a review of the literature*. Singapore: Springer.

Results

Sixteen participants responded to the survey. Most respondents were programme/course leads and nurses, although the study population reflected the diverse makeup of the EPAO network. The majority had extensive educational experience in teaching or supporting roles in higher education (table 1). The survey indicated high satisfaction with the network and potential positive impacts on members and therefore students' knowledge and understanding of the EPA (table 2). Thematic analysis of the free text responses revealed three key themes: Collaboration, Support, and Quality and Consistency (figure 1).

Current primary role (%)	Role	Count (Percentage)
Professional Clinical background (%)	Lecturer/senior lecturer	4 (25%)
	Programme/course lead	9 (56.25%)
	Work based learning tutor	1 (6.25%)
	Apprenticeship manager/team	1 (6.25%)
	EPA unit lead	1 (6.25%)
Time employed in teaching/supporting role in HE (years) ± SD	Physiotherapist	1 (6.25%)
	Nurse	13 (81.25%)
	Paramedic	1 (6.25%)
	Podiatrist	1 (6.25%)
First EPA (number)	2021	3
	2022	6
	2023	6
	2024	1
Length of attendance (months) ± SD		11.75 ± 9.69

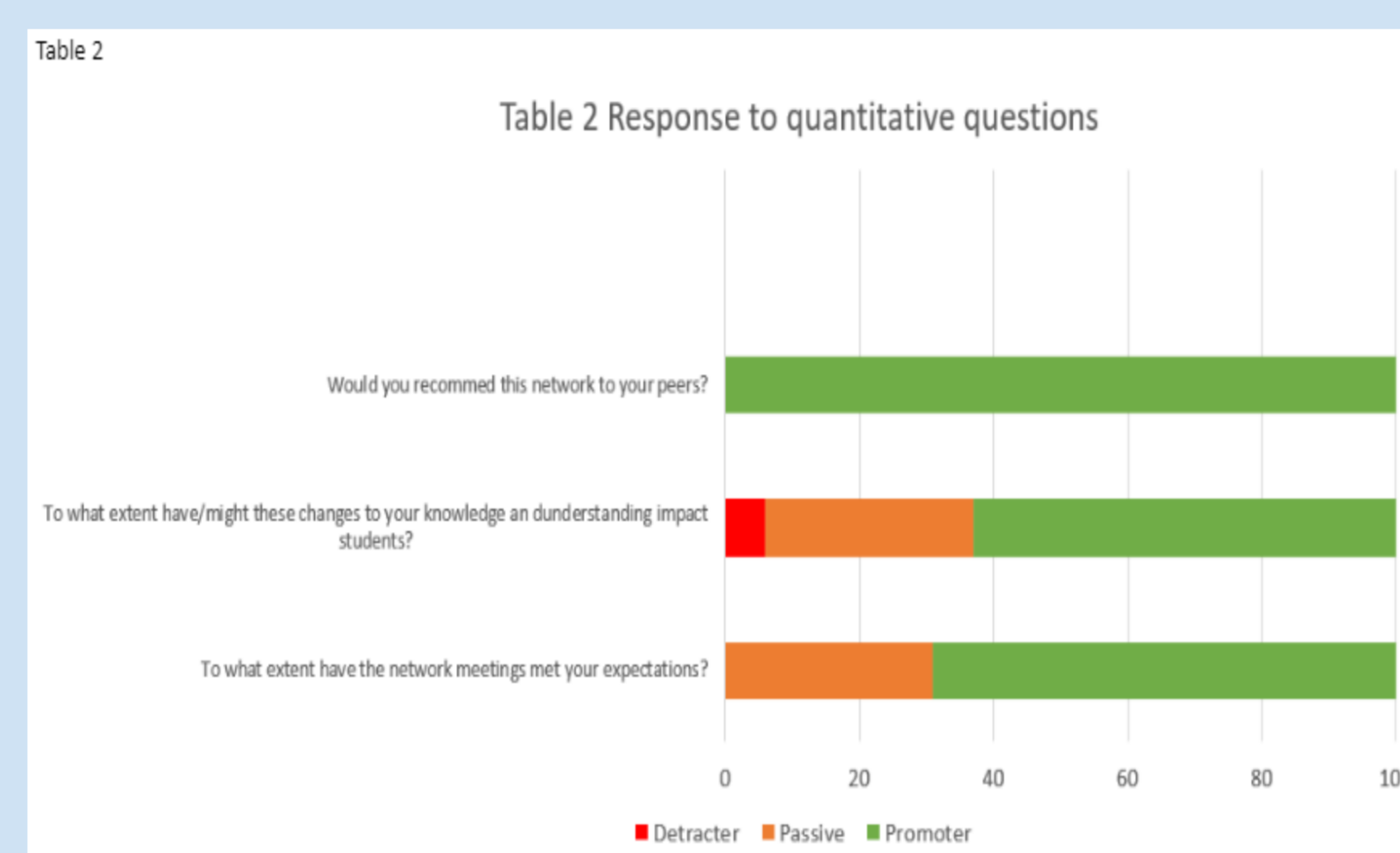
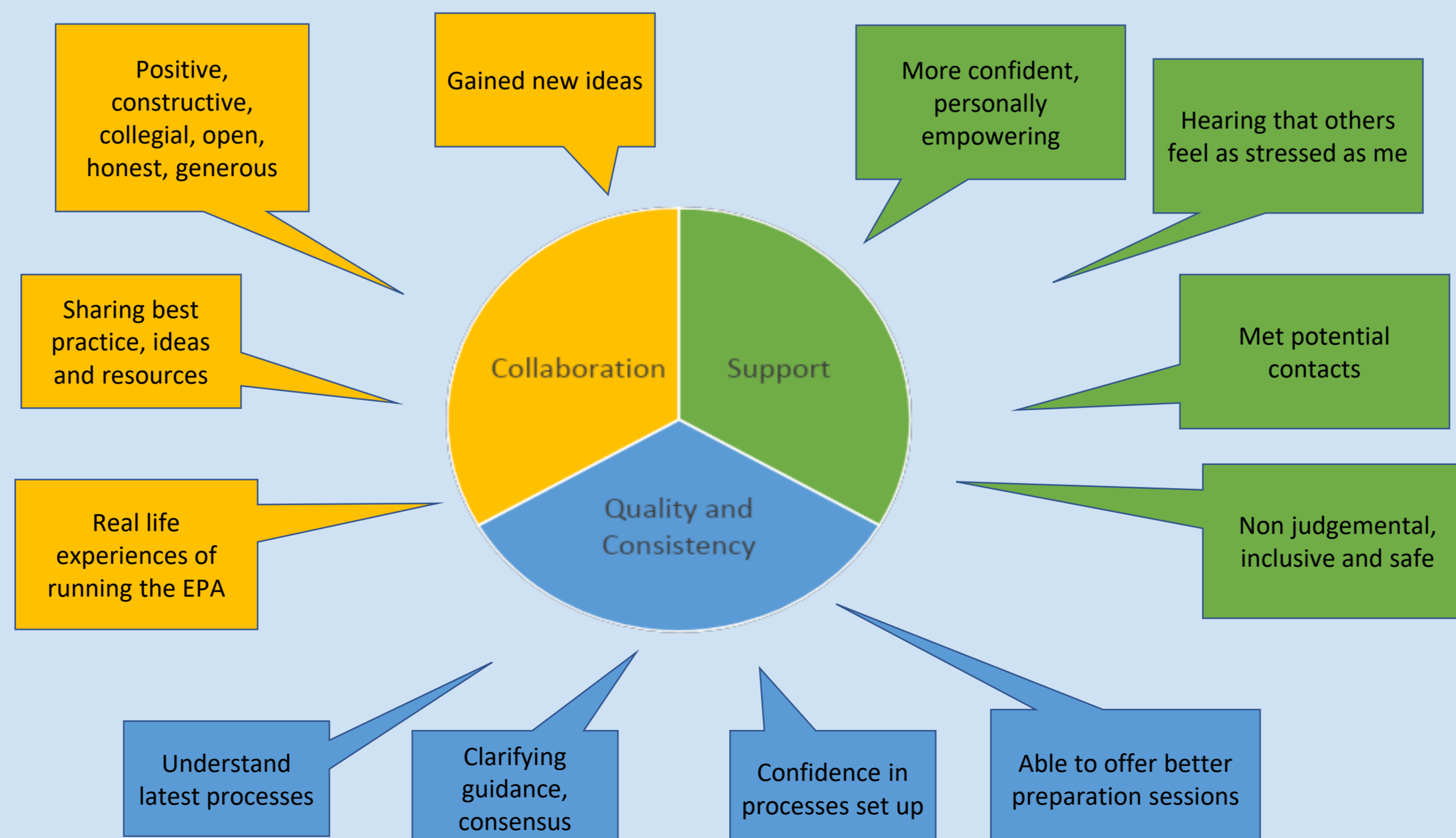


Figure 1. Themes from the study



Discussion

Collaboration

Collaboration is defined by Chrislip and Larson (1994 p.5) as a 'mutually beneficial relationship between two or more parties who work toward common goals...the purpose of collaboration is to create a shared vision and joint strategies to address concerns that go beyond the purview of any particular party'. This collaboration helped members with the practical aspects of setting up the assessment and supporting colleagues and students. The respondents attributed the beneficial experience of collaboration to positive and constructive discussions, as well as the honest, open, and generous collegiality within the group, creating an environment where sharing experiences, even when things didn't go according to plan, and supporting each other were valued. This collaboration is significant when changes to UK higher education over the last 15-20 years mean that Universities find themselves in an increasingly competitive market.

Support

While collaboration was seen to provide practical support in delivering the EPA assessment leading to professional growth, respondents also reported gaining personal benefits from being part of a supportive network leading to personal growth. Chang (2018) would argue that the fact that many respondents reported these personal benefits should be considered as much a measure of the success of the network as the achievement of the groups' original aims related to the EPA. The impact of the network on the successful delivery of the EPA across multiple HEIs in England is as much to do with empowering educators as with providing practical resources.

Quality and consistency

Newell and Bain (2018) argue that successful programme design in HE relies heavily on collaboration as a crucial element particularly as student populations become diverse, societal expectations of education increase, and external drivers mean academics cannot meet these demands alone. Through the collaborative and supportive environment, members have been able to learn from each other and share best practices and ideas and this has resulted in improvements to their provision in line with other HEIs. This activity has resulted in consistency among those HEIs who are members of the network.

Conclusion

This study adds to the existing literature on collaboration in HE by identifying that collaboration has the potential to produce benefits to the design of programmes, the personal growth and empowerment of educators, and the quality and consistency of provision. The findings of this study show the importance of a community of practice and how they can be successfully implemented to ensure rigour and quality across a number of HEIs in the UK.