



**Assessment & Learning  
in Practice Settings**

## **Strength in Numbers?**

*A collaborative approach to innovation in professional  
education*

<b>Janet Hargreaves</b>	University of Huddersfield
<b>Idah Nkosana-Nyawata</b>	University of Huddersfield
<b>Viktoria Joynes</b>	University of Leeds
<b>Luke Millard</b>	Birmingham City University
<b>Rebecca Freeman</b>	Birmingham City University

## **Strength in Numbers? A collaborative approach to innovation in professional education**

Janet Hargreaves	University of Huddersfield
Idah Nkosana-Nyawata	University of Huddersfield
Viktorija Joynes	University of Leeds
Luke Millard	Birmingham City University
Rebecca Freeman	Birmingham City University

### **Acknowledgements**

Thank you to all the members of the ALPS programme who have given their time and thoughts to the production of this report.

### **Contents**

▪ Summary.....	3
▪ Introduction.....	4
▪ Project Aims and Objectives.....	5
▪ Methodology.....	5
▪ Results.....	7
▪ Discussion.....	8
▪ Barriers and Facilitators for Success.....	13
▪ Conclusion.....	14
▪ References.....	14
▪ Appendix One: Nominal Group Technique (NGT).....	15

## Summary

From the point of writing the initial bid for funding the Assessment and Learning in Practice Settings (ALPS) programme has been predicated upon the need for a flexible, collaborative ethos between partners. The five ALPS partner universities, Strategic Health Authority and 16 professions had experience of working together in many ways but the scale, complexity and sustained engagement has been a unique experience for all parties. At the outset a matrix of management and working meetings was created in conjunction with a small central Core Team and a highly devolved budget. This structure has necessitated the sharing of work, mutual trust and reliance.

In order to identify ways in which the ALPS programme impacted on collaboration between the 5 participating Universities, following ethical approval, an evaluation was undertaken utilising documentary analysis, reflective accounts, individual interviews and nominal group technique.

The overarching aim was to explore the barriers and facilitators to building successful partnerships in Higher Education in order to inform future practice.

Objectives:

1. To identify the impact of the ALPS programme with regard to collaboration between the 5 HEIs as perceived by ALPS participants
2. To analyse participants' perceptions of the change in the relationships within and between each institution.

Five themes: 'PSRB engagement'; 'measurable outcomes'; 'we got further than we would have done on our own'; 'size', 'money and time' emerged from the data and led to a conclusion that:

**Facilitators** of successful collaboration include organisational elements such as effective, strong leadership, clear channels of communication and shared vision. They also include 'softer' less measurable factors such as the space and time to make mistakes and the nurturing of a trusting and supportive culture.

**Barriers** to successful collaboration lay in the size and range that ALPS represented. With so many potential outcomes, the nature of 'success' was nebulous; the possibility for aims to become lost in the infrastructure, or for failure of one partner to deliver on one aspect to jeopardise others achievement was a potential problem.

With regard to the size of ALPS, the creation of the Core Team and management structure, whilst sometimes the subject of tension and conflict, was pivotal to the success of the collaboration.

Furthermore, it is difficult to categorise 'funding' as either a facilitator or a barrier. Whilst the funding was the catalyst for the development of the programme, it is impossible to calculate its influence regarding the success of the collaboration. The money could be enabling and liberating, because of the financial benefit, or because it signified validation and respect for the project and the staff involved. However it also had the potential to be divisive and negative. This is an interesting finding, worthy of further exploration, as the HE sector faces a period where little additional financial incentive for change and innovation is to be available.

## Introduction

A number of developments, reflected in several recent policy and funding initiatives, have led to an interest in collaboration within Higher Education Institutions (HEIs). They include the expansion of higher education, and the recognition of the need for higher level skills in a competitive, knowledge-based economy. Assessment and Learning in Practice Settings (ALPS) is an example of one such collaborative programme between five Higher Education Institutions: the University of Huddersfield, the University of Bradford, the University of Leeds (lead partner), Leeds Metropolitan University and York St John University. There are 16 professions across the partnership<sup>1</sup>; and a wide range of partners including Yorkshire and the Humber Strategic Health Authority, practice networks and professional bodies. The five HEIs have a proven track record for excellence in teaching and learning in health and social care and have shared interests in technological innovation, knowledge transfer, achievement of National Targets for Education and Training (NTETs) and lifelong learning.

ALPS is a Centre for Excellence in Teaching and Learning (CETL), one of 74 projects funded within the UK by the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) between 2005 - 2010. From the point of writing the initial bid for funding the ALPS programme it was always anticipated that there would be a need for a flexible, collaborative ethos between partners. The five universities, Strategic Health Authority and 16 professions had experience of working together in many ways but the scale, complexity and sustained engagement over this five year programme has been a unique experience for all parties. At the outset a matrix of management and working meetings was created in conjunction with a small central Core Team and highly devolved budget (see figure one). This structure has necessitated the sharing of work, mutual trust and reliance with regard to: innovating for assessment and learning in practice settings; agreeing priorities; facing challenges and developing a united approach to Professional Statutory and Regulatory Body requirements.

We contend that a major outcome of the programme, additional to any processes or artefacts is the current and potential latent strength of interprofessional, interorganisational collaboration. Collaboration, defined here as working in combination but not necessarily in integration (combining parts into a whole) (Duff et al 2009) has not only become more common but also more necessary in modern society (Axelsson and Axelsson (2009). Huxman (1996), suggests that the main reason for collaboration is the advantage it affords over working in isolation or competition. It is widely acknowledged that building and sustaining partnerships is crucial for effective education interventions yet there is equally wide agreement that such 'joint working' is demanding, time-consuming and laborious (Soultatou and Duncan 2009). We therefore felt that a systematic evaluation of the collaborative aspects of the programme would be valuable.

---

<sup>1</sup> Audiology, dentistry, medicine, midwifery, nursing, occupational therapy, operating department practice, podiatry, pharmacy, physiotherapy, radiography, speech and language therapy, social work

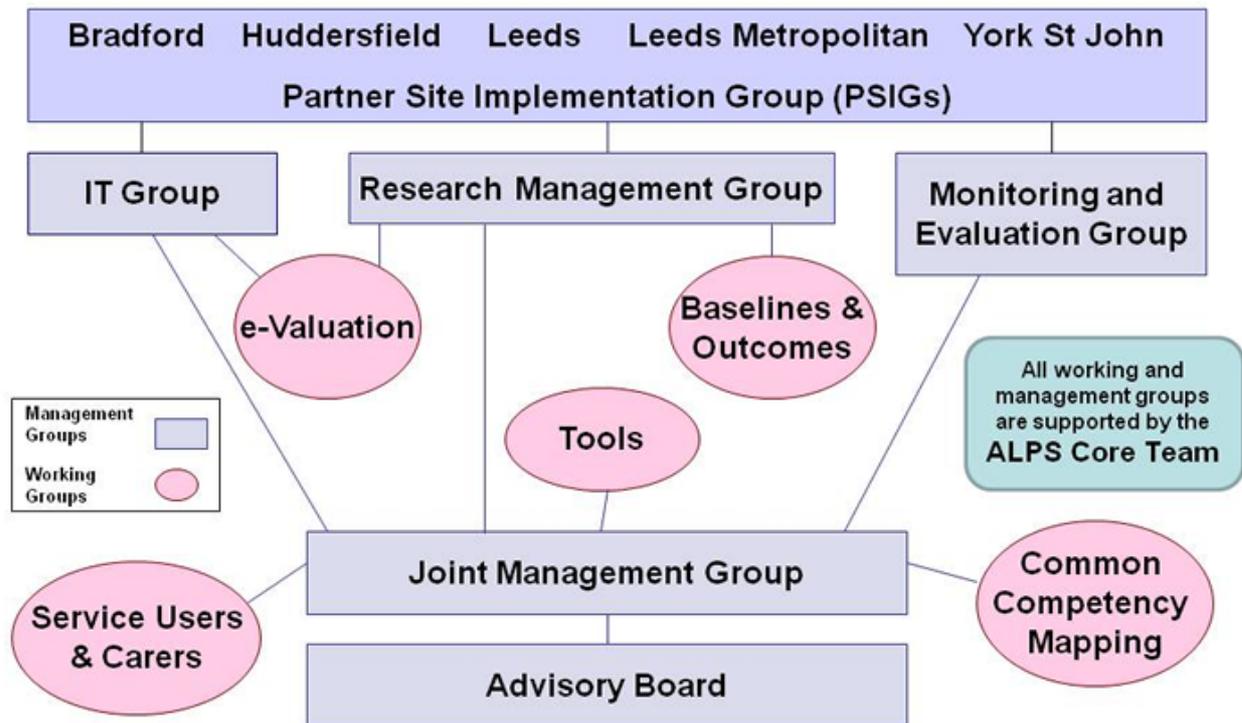


Figure one: ALPS management and communications structure.

## Project Aims and Objectives

The overarching aim of this evaluation is to explore the barriers and facilitators to building successful partnerships in Higher Education in order to inform future practice, locating it within a theoretic framework of collaborative endeavour

Objectives:

1. To identify the impact of the ALPS programme with regard to collaboration between the 5 HEIs as perceived by ALPS participants
2. To analyse participants' perceptions of the change in the relationships within and between each institution.

## Methodology

Given the exploratory nature of the project, a qualitative methodology was utilised. Qualitative research makes its greatest contribution in areas in which little research has been done (Hutchinson and Wilson 2001) and through data collection and analysis understanding can be generated in order to provide insight about a phenomenon. This makes qualitative research an appropriate methodology for this project because the paucity of research concerning collaboration between institutions of Higher Learning and more specifically Health and Social care departments means that many of the variables relevant to the concepts of this phenomenon are yet to be identified and any understanding that is

brought through this study can be used in later projects to test, verify or extend the qualitative hypothesis that will have emerged from this initial research.

- **The collaborative focus:**

The potential for exploring collaboration within the ALPS programme was huge. Service users and their carers (SU&C), the Strategic Health Authority, Professional, Statutory and Regulatory Bodies (PSRBs), students, colleagues within placements settings and colleagues within the wider communities in each HEI were important to the success of ALPS, but brought the number of potential people affected by the programme to many hundreds. In order to maintain a manageable, defensible methodology, we theorised that the collaboration between the 5 HEIs, including the Core Team, was a significant population within ALPS that could yield interesting and useful data. In line with the established ALPS communications strategy, the proposals for this evaluation were submitted to the Research Management Group and Joint Management Group (see figure one) who made further suggestions and gave approval. The Joint Management Group requested a significant addition to the focus in order to include some exploration of the collaboration with PSRBs, as this had been a particular strategy in the planning and execution of the programme.

- **Rigour and validity:**

Considerable thought was given to the methodological difficulties of exploring collaboration from within the 'family' of ALPS. We acknowledged that, as participants within the programme ourselves, we would not be able to probe as deeply as researchers from outside and that as the work was still ongoing; we may not feel that all of our findings were definitive. In order to attempt to make the evaluation as rigorous and valid as possible, we requested the support of external colleagues to conduct some of the data gathering on our behalf (see nominal group technique below) and to offer a critical dialogue with regard to the analysis and findings. We also included within the data set an external colleague who had been researching ALPS as part of a PhD study, thus linking the two projects.

Data collection commenced at the beginning of November 2009 and was completed by June 2010. The project utilised the following methods of data collection:

- **Reflective Accounts:**

Participants were asked to write a reflective account (of around 500 words) of their experiences of collaborating with other professionals in the ALPS project; they were free to write whatever was relevant for them. We sought accounts from members of the Core Team as well as each participating HEI, targeting people who had had a specific role in ALPS, leading a work stream, contributing to a meeting or having a secondment/ fellowship appointment. (N=13)

- **Documentary analysis:**

Documentary analysis was conducted to achieve a contextual understanding of the nature of the collaboration. A 5 stage process was adapted from Appleton and Cowley (1997), using a proforma developed by Eston and Fulop (2002) which addresses a series of questions to the text based on a conceptual model of partnership.

As with the overall evaluation, the range of documents available for potential analysis was large. Five years worth of meeting minutes, reports, bulletins and press releases constituted a complex data set. Three major documents - the ALPS original bid, the interim evaluation report and the final report were identified as a useful and manageable sample. The rationale was that these documents charted ALPS over time and frequently subsumed other documents into the text.

- **Semi –structured interviews:**

A small number (N=3) of key individuals who were not part of each HEI 'group' but either had an external or overall management role were selected purposively for semi-structured interviews. These occurred after the completion of the reflective accounts and documentary analysis where broad themes and issues had been identified. Interviews were taped and transcribed verbatim.

- **Nominal group technique focus groups:**

This is a well established technique for gaining group ideas (Carney et al 1996, Castiglioni, et al 2008). The purpose of these focus groups was to provide insight into the broad themes and issues that are relevant to the collaborative process as they have been experienced through involvement with ALPS. The groups were run by colleagues external to ALPS from Birmingham City University (BCU). This enabled the development of a data set that was gathered and analysed independently of the ALPS programme. Participants were asked to address the question 'what have been the implications, for you and the organisation, of the ALPS programme, with regard to collaboration'. From the list generated by this process group members then voted for the answers that best match their own beliefs, thus creating a list of the most frequently agreed concepts. Further detail the process of NGT can be found in appendix one. The aim was to run five groups - one at each HEI. It was anticipated that some of the membership would overlap with people who had completed reflective accounts, but that the group technique would allow for colleagues who had a more peripheral involvement with ALPS to give a view that was more focused on the collective Institution aspect, than individual experience. The logistic difficulties of scheduling times and dates where a group could be formed led to less groups taking place (N=4), involving 4 of the HEIs and the Core Team.

- **Ethical considerations:**

Ethical approval was granted by the Research Ethics panel at the University of Huddersfield. A reciprocal agreement reached across ALPS meant that this was then accepted by the other participating HEIs. However, in addition to this process there were a number of specific ethical issues that emerged as we analysed the data. It became apparent at a very early stage that almost all of the participant responses were identifiable to that individual. Having assured confidentiality as part of the process, although some individual phrases or words are used from the data, indicated in the text by italics and quotation marks, we decided to not include detailed verbatim quotations. Whilst some of the richness of discussion may be lost by this decision, we do not believe that the aim to identify consistent themes from across the four data sets has been compromised.

## **Results**

Results were initially processed as four separate data sets. Thematic analysis was then inductive, taking place continuously with each stage of the data collection and analysis building on former stages, forming an iterative process. Results were reviewed to look for core themes and subjected to testing through critical discussion with our external research partners. Care was taken to remain with the core objectives: to 'identify the impact of the ALPS programme with regard to collaboration between the 5 HEIs as perceived by ALPS participants' and to 'analyse participants' perceptions of the change in the relationships within and between each institution'.

It was self evident from the data analysis that many of the themes and sub themes were related to interprofessional working, education and learning. Rather than treating this as an extra theme, we acknowledged it as an overarching consideration for many participants; that sometimes 'working collaboratively' meant 'working interprofessionally'. It is therefore not surprising that many of the areas for discussion below could equally be applied to a purely interprofessional project, or that there is broad consensus with much of the interprofessional literature. However, for ALPS the collaboration was frequently between single disciplines in different institutions and between health and social care professionals and other HE colleagues. We therefore have not included interprofessional working as a separate area for consideration.

Four broad themes, plus a consideration of the engagement with PSRBs emerged for discussion.

## **Discussion**

The themes for discussion include:

1. Professional Statutory and Regulatory Body engagement
2. Outcomes
3. 'We got further than we would have done on our own'
  - 3.1 Culture
  - 3.2 Trust
  - 3.3 Leadership
4. Size
5. Time and money

### **1. Professional Statutory and Regulatory Body engagement:**

Whilst data was not formally gathered from the PSRBs, the research team had been asked to keep this within the scope of their evaluation. Four annual meetings have been hosted by ALPS, inviting representation from the PRSBs for the 16 professions. As the final meeting occurred within the timescale of this collaborative evaluation, delegates were asked to reflect on the meaning of collaboration and its impact within ALPS. The core definitions this generated of 'sharing' and 'compromise' nicely mirror aspects of the discussion below.

Where participants were asked specifically to comment upon engagement with the PSRBs this is unanimously seen as a successful outcome of the collaboration. Early anxieties that PSRB regulations would block the more radical ideas regarding interprofessional assessment were not founded, as regulators were open and willing to discuss progress and change. The extent to which the ethos of ALPS facilitated this is hard to quantify; a difficulty captured within the conclusions below.

Where participants were not specifically asked about PSRBs they rarely occur in the data, but where they do it is to emphasise the positive effect ALPS has had on developing a

partnership and promoting interprofessional assessment. This would tentatively suggest that a strength and outcome of collaboration through ALPS has been this partnership.

## **2. Outcomes:**

Most participants in trying to weigh up the collaboration, attempted to quantify measurable achievements, as well as mourning the things that looked as if they may not be possible.

The creation of Common Competences was universally cited as a positive outcome of collaboration that was unlikely to have been achieved without the funding and leadership of ALPS. The success of translating the competences into meaningful, reliable assessment tools is more ambiguous and it was possible that the wide ranging ambitions and multiple priorities of ALPS meant that more time was needed. Participants' views about the extent to which the collaboration around multi –professional assessment had been sacrificed to the development of mobile technology were mixed, relating to their relative enthusiasm for the technology.

Most participants talked about the mobile technology. Measurable, positive outcomes related to collaboration included the development of the shared helpdesk and the negotiation of spending the capital grant money provided by HEFCE. Interestingly, not everyone agreed on the direction of travel taken, but the process of learning, negotiation and working together was a positive one.

A further clear outcome cited was the development of a shared agreement for research ethics, whereby each HEI respected the ethic panel decision of the other partners, thus streamlining governance procedures. Knowing how difficult research governance can be, this was a real and valued achievement.

Many more outcomes of ALPS were discussed by participants, but these are much more difficult to quantify, particularly the extent to which the 'ALPS effect' was a cause of the development, a catalyst for change or incidental. The relationship with PRSBs discussed above may come into this category. Many people talked about their personal achievement: they had engaged in research, made new friends, prepared bids, attended conferences, gained promotions, developed work in practice and with SU&C. Some, but not all of their achievement could be traced to collaboration in ALPS.

## **3. We got further than we would have done on our own**

A recurrent aspect to be found in the themes emerging from the data was participants' attempts to examine the very complex, multi layered nature of the ALPS collaboration. Themes around culture, leadership and trust all contributed to this; one of the key phrases from the nominal group technique focus groups – *'we got further than we would have done on our own'* expresses this theme well.

The collaboration between the 5 HEIs included four distinct subsets (see figure 2):

- The individuals, bringing their own skills, expectations and agendas
- The five institutions
- Management and working groups created for the purpose of progressing ALPS
- Professional groups - 16 in all but also non –health and social care professionals with either IT or management roles.

All of the people involved with ALPS fulfil at least three of these categories. For example a social work lecturer at one institution attending an ALPS group meeting may bring an institutional view to the work of the meeting, but may also feel that they are representing

their profession across several HEIs, as well as bringing their own personal skills and beliefs.



**Figure 2 ‘We got further than we would have done on our own’**

### **3.1 -Culture:**

Many participants talked about the influence that culture had on the collaboration of ALPS. Culture could be a positive thing: shared cultural understanding between people within the same profession, or between universities that perceived themselves to be ‘similar’ in outlook or size led to strong relationships being developed that aided ALPS progress. Cultures internal to different organisations or professionals also inclined them to lead on aspects of work, or to bring particular skills and attitudes to bear on the issues facing ALPS; for example, greater research capacity, or greater willingness to embrace technology, influenced participation and collaboration in these areas.

Culture could, however, also be a barrier: defensiveness, ‘tribalism’ and shared histories about how collaborative ventures had fared in the past all had a bearing on the progress of ALPS. This could be between professions or institutions, as well as between departments within each HEI. A further factor was the way in which the work colleagues were engaging with on ALPS was viewed externally. An enthusiast within the ALPS context could meet with a luke warm response from colleagues within their own institution or profession who saw the work of ALPS as ‘not their business’.

### **3.2 -Trust:**

Clearly trust played an important part in overcoming or exacerbating cultural aspects. Many participants talked of the development of trust and the ways in which, for example, the early work developing the Common Competences built an atmosphere of interprofessional and inter-departmental trust that facilitated later developments. Where trust was established smaller groups of people could progress ALPS aims with less ‘*regulation*’ as colleagues

trusted them to be representative and fair. The development of trust was said to be '*empowering*' and to be closely related to respect for each other. Clearly in some cases people liked each other and developed trusting friendships. Where these developed they sometimes transcended the aims of ALPS and overcame aspects that were, to others, barriers.

Conversely, where trust was not established it caused tensions. This aspect was not explored in any great depth by participants, so it is hard, on the basis of the data to draw any further analysis. However, issue with regard to lack of trust are implicit in some of the discussion regarding personal opportunities, and the way that money was allocated and spent ( see below).

### **3.3 -Leadership:**

The importance of leadership was apparent in analysis of all data sets either as a separate theme or embedded in others. The view that 'good' leadership was pivotal to the success of ALPS was unanimous, but what this meant varied considerably.

The role of the Director and Core Team was to lead ALPS through the agreed management structure, but each institution and each strand of work also required leaders. The quality of this leadership affected the productivity and effectiveness of outcomes. Some people were given the job of engaging with ALPS and thus were not necessarily enthusiastic volunteers, others emerged as time when on. Some had the support of colleagues, institutional leads or professional groups, whilst others were in isolation from these. All of this paints a complex pattern of different leadership styles and abilities. Where leaders did not convey a consistent message, or where the message was ill received, motivation to support ALPS was diminished and left some people feeling that promised aims were not realised.

Throughout ALPS the dominant leadership styles have tended to be facilitative and transformative, attempting to enable disparate groups to make decisions by consensus. This made progress slow at times, for example taking 18 months to reach a conclusion regarding the first of the three Common Competences. Whilst this may have seemed frustrating at the time, it proved to be an essential and successful element of ALPS, nurturing a shared culture and mutual trust, establishing the context for working together.

There appear to have been times where participants acknowledge that leadership could be problematic. Where natural leaders did not emerge, or nominated leaders were weak this sometimes created a hiatus where work did not get done, leading to cultural tensions and erosion of trust. Furthermore, strong and enthusiastic leadership related to one particular aspect of ALPS, may have led to an imbalance in terms of overall achievement. This links with themes below relating to time and money, as well as outcomes around personal achievement.

There were occasions where more direct leadership was required. Two particular points within the programme were at the IT procurement stage, where decisions regarding a large capital spend needed to be made within a tight time line, and in the final year, where final deadlines increased the pressure to deliver on outstanding outcomes. In both cases leadership was much more direct and forceful. The data supports the necessity for shifts in style, recognising that they are important in the management of any time limited project, but this is also challenging as it may distance some people from the decision making process, or expose others who may not be willing or able to deliver.

In summary, 'good' leadership seemed to equate to 'decisive'. This did not necessarily mean leading from the front, but did involve people who were prepared to make and follow though decisions.

#### 4. Size:

ALPS is a large and complex programme of work, a factor that is returned to on many occasions by the participants. Size can be defined by either participation or scope.

With regard to **participation**, the collaboration between the 5 HEIs alone is large but not of itself remarkably so; however when this is combined with the collaboration across 16 professions and three regulators (HPC, NMC, GSCC) it becomes more significant. Additionally, whilst this evaluation has a limited focus, the **HEI** collaboration cannot be seen in isolation from the involvement of services users and carers, students, industrial partners and placement providers. Whilst the collaboration between the 5 HEIs is generally viewed as successful by the participants, an outcome supported by the Return on Investment report (2010) and the final report to HEFCE, it is fair to say that the 'reach' of ALPS into these other areas is more variable.

This report does not attempt to evaluate all of these collaborations, but the data suggests that where there have been very clear shared goals, for example with regard to SU&C involvement, with individual practice areas and the procurement and use of mobile technology, some significant collaborations have been possible. Where goals have been more problematic, for example the introduction of students carrying mobile devices in clinical practice settings, ALPS has raised awareness and promoted acceptance regionally, but it has been beyond its power to significantly influence and bring about sustained change within the 5 year timescale.

With regard to **scope**, the plan for ALPS was wide reaching and ambitious. Six overarching aims led to a strategic plan that included more than a hundred objectives. The sheer volume of work to be completed and the complex communication systems needed to support it, meant that progress on any one strand of work could be jeopardised or significantly slowed down simply by the process of organising meetings and other opportunities to get the work done. The development of the shared agreement for research ethics was an example of ALPS collaborating to effectively to shrink the issues of size to a manageable and streamlined process.

Whether ALPS is 'too big' is difficult to evaluate from this distance. Several participants expressed views that, had we limited our scope we would have progressed further; for example focusing on the development and implementation of the Common Competences, at the expense of the mobile technology, may have led to greater engagement with practice and interprofessional assessment. By contrast, others see the opportunities to experiment with the technology in such a supportive and well funded programme as the greatest achievement in ALPS. The divergence of views illustrates the section above regarding the nature of culture, trust and leadership.

A further feature related to size is the way in which the collaboration was created. Whilst there were some natural connections – these were essential for the bid to have been conceived, written and successfully defended - it is an 'unnatural' or, maybe 'manufactured' phenomenon. The extent to which it was created solely from the success of the bid, rather than being a natural organic growth of mutual interest is hard to determine. What is clear however, as illustrated in the section above on outcomes, is that the collaboration has now led to an effective network which cuts across professional and institutional boundaries.

#### 5. Time and money:

Size is clearly related to the time and money allocated to ALPS. It is acknowledged by several participants that the period from writing the bid to the completion of the programme (over 6 years), was a long time for the programme to run. Within HE funding is often short

term and episodic, so this was perceived by participants to be a great opportunity enabling the slow and careful nurturing of collaboration that took place in the early stages.

Generally ALPS was seen as time to do things, to experiment and maybe to make mistakes to learn from, and overarchingly as time well spent. Despite these positive feelings there is no denying that the reality of the collaborative nature of ALPS meant that it was often time consuming and sometimes frustrating. Only a few individuals were solely employed by ALPS, the rest had to juggle a number of priorities and roles. Participants commented about the challenges to balancing ALPS work with other roles and the priority that ALPS was, or was not perceived to have within their own institution or profession

However, huge changes in the provision of health and social care have occurred in this period, as well as the inexorable progress of IT and mobile enabled technology. Participants were reflective and accepting that measurement of success against the programme aims and outcomes identified at the outset was not the only or best way of judging the effectiveness of the collaboration. Processes, subtle lessons learned about change management, interprofessional engagement and the development of new partnerships were acknowledged to be more difficult to define, but were important.

The majority of the funding for ALPS can be simplistically correlated with time. With the exception of a ring fenced budget agreed to support the Core Team, most funding was allocated to the 5 HEIs on a pro rata formula calculated from student numbers. Transparent account was required by HEFCE, but each HEI spent the budget to promote ALPS aims in the way that suited its internal mechanisms and ethos. This meant a significant difference in the way the budget was handled across sites. For some participants money was well spent in that it facilitated and/ or rewarded engagement. For others lack of clarity over the use of funds, or discrepancies in entitlement across HEIs could cause tensions.

Additional to the general allocation of funds, HEFCE made available an extra fund for capital investment that carried a much shorter time line for decision making and procurement. This proved to be catalytic for ALPS; it enabled the purchase of a large quantity of mobile technology and infrastructure. However in doing so it limited the flexibility and control the programme had over achieving its aims. Whilst many participants saw the opportunity to experiment with cutting edge developments within the safety of an assured budget as greatly valuable and cite the intense discussions around IT procurement as a key feature of the collaboration, there is acknowledgement that this has had a defining, and maybe disproportionate influence of the direction ALPS took.

### **Barriers and Facilitators for success**

Having analysed the data and identified key areas for discussion, the objectives for the evaluation have been achieved. The overall aim: to identify 'facilitators and barriers to building successful partnerships in Higher Education' identified by the evaluation can now be outlined.

**Facilitators** clearly include organisational elements such as good, strong leadership, clear channels of communication and shared vision. They also include 'softer' less measurable factors such as the space and time to make mistakes and the nurturing of a trusting and supportive culture.

**Barriers** to success lay in the size and range that ALPS represented. With so many potential outcomes, the nature of 'success' was nebulous; the possibility for aims to become lost in

the infrastructure, or for failure of one partner to deliver on one aspect to jeopardise others achievement was a constant and challenging problem.

Bearing in mind the size of ALPS, the creation of the Core Team and management structure, whilst sometimes the subject of tension and conflict, was pivotal to the success of the collaboration.

Furthermore, it is difficult to categorise 'funding' as either a facilitator or a barrier. The funding was the catalyst for the development of the programme, but it is impossible to calculate its influence regarding the success of the collaboration. The money could be enabling and liberating, but also had the potential to be divisive and negative. This is an interesting area theoretically, particularly as the HE sector faces a period where little additional financial incentive for change and innovation is to be available.

## Conclusion

This evaluation has attempted to explore the nature of 'collaboration' across the five HEIs involved in the ALPS programme. A mixed qualitative approach using reflective accounts, documentary analysis, interviews and Nominal Group Technique has led to the discussion of 5 core themes and the identification of a number of facilitators and barriers to success.

## References

- Appleton, J.V. & Cowley, S. (1997) Analysing clinical practice guidelines. A method of documentary analysis. Journal of Advanced Nursing, 25 pp 1008- 1017.
- Axelsson, S. and Axelsson, R. (2009) From territoriality to altruism in interprofessional collaboration and leadership. Journal of Interprofessional Care, 23(4) pp 320- 330
- Carney, O; McIntosh, J; Worth, A (1996) The use of the Nominal Group Technique in research with community nurses, Journal of Advanced Nursing, Vol 23 pp1024-1029
- Castiglioni, A et al. ( 2008) A Pilot Study Using Nominal Group Technique to Assess Residents' Perceptions of Successful Attending Rounds. Journal General Internal Medicine 23(7):1060–5
- Duff, G., Garnett, D., Jacklyn, P., Landsberg, J., Ludwig, J., Morrison, J., Novelly, P., Walker, D. and Whitehead, P. (2009) A collaborative design to adaptively manage for landscape sustainability in north Australia: lessons from a decade of cooperative research. Landscape Ecology 24 pp. 1135- 1143.
- Elston, J. & Fulop, N. (2002) Perceptions of partnership. A documentary analysis of Health Improvement Programmes. Public Health, 116 pp 207-213.
- Hutchinson, S. and Wilson, H. (2001) 'Grounded Theory: The Method' in Munhall, P. (Ed) (2001) Nursing Research- A Qualitative Perspective 3<sup>rd</sup> ed, Sudbury, Massachusetts, Jones and Bartlett Publishers.
- Huxham, C. (1996). Collaboration and collaborative advantage. In C. Huxam (Ed.), *Creating Collaborative Advantage*. London: Sage.

ROI Cost Benefit Analysis report 2010 <http://www.alps-cetl.ac.uk/CostBenefitAnalysis.html>

Soulatou, P. and Duncan, P. (2009) Exploring the reality of applied partnerships: The case of the Greek school health education curriculum. Health Education Journal 68(1) pp 34-43

## **Appendix One**

### **Nominal Group Technique (NGT)**

There are four stages to the NGT and these are explained to the participants at the beginning of the session.

The first stage involves the participants working quietly on their own to consider their own responses to the question and these are noted on a worksheet that is provided to them.

The participants are then asked to feedback in a round robin style one point at a time which is written up on a flipchart by the scribe. Discussion is limited at this stage but questions for clarification are taken.

Once all the responses have been listed a group discussion takes place to expand, refine and integrate points following which a numbered shorter list is created. The aim is not to reduce the detail but to ensure that separate points do not overlap.

The final stage requires the participants to identify their five most important points from the list. Participants are given five index cards each on which they note one point per card. They are then asked to rank these in order of importance and assign scores. These scores are then tallied publicly and participants are asked to discuss the resulting patterns.

Each groups' most important points are collated and presented to the whole group for discussion within the session.

The NGT process is discussed in more detail in Carney, O; McIntosh, J; Worth, A (1996) The use of the Nominal Group Technique in research with community nurses, *Journal of Advanced Nursing*, Vol 23 pp1024-1029

Rebecca Freeman