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A2 HEALTH IMPACT ASSESSMENT (HIA) COLLABORATION BETWEEN FINNISH AND SCOTTISH HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS

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Introduction to HIA

Health impact assessment (HIA) is relatively new and a rapidly evolving field in many health and social environments globally. HIA emerged in several different forms as it has been applied to a wide range of issues in diverse social, health and policy plans, projects or programs in different settings for example in fields like urban planning and local government projects. It also informs decision-making which deal with conflicts within an ever changing political climate taking into account the stakeholders views.

Usually HIA means any combination of procedures or methods by which proposed policies or programs may look at the effects on the health of populations. Its two main purposes are: firstly, to predict the likely health effects of a proposal on a specific population group or groups and secondly to inform policy-makers to improve evidence-based recommendations in the decisions-making process. In so doing minimizes the adverse effects and maximizes the good impact that follows from different plans, projects and programs. This enables predictions of potential consequences of a decision before it has been implemented (Kemmer, Parry & Palmer 2008).

Two Erasmus partners in their higher education programmes looked to cultivate closer teaching ties by exploring the benefits sharing teaching around HIA in their curriculum. It is anticipated that such joint working will facilitate sharing of resources across courses in public health for Master's level students.

HIA in Finland and Scotland

Many countries are actively developing impact assessment methodology and building capacity for its implementation. In Finland the Ministry of Social Affairs and Health is developing and implementing different types of Impact Assessment, for example Human Impact Assessment (HuIA) which is focusing on prospective assessment and classifies the effects of different options and alternative solutions. Another impact assessment often used is Social Impact Assessment (SIA). The aims of SIA are to identify and assess social consequences caused by projects, plans or programmes. In Finland it is very common to use Child Impact Assessment (CIA) and Gender Impact Assessment (GIA), with the aim of generating ways of identifying impact on different groups that other types of assessments partly fail to do (National Institute for Health and Welfare 2015). The Environment Impact Assessment (EIA) is also widely used in Finland. Today HIA, GIA and EIA are based on Finnish laws this impact assessment is part of the Finnish legislative drafting process.

In Scotland, HIA was proposed in 1998 green paper 'Working Together for a Healthier Scotland' this was to enable the consideration of health in 'policy formulation across the spectrum of Scottish Office responsibilities' (Scottish Office 1998). The 1999 white paper 'Towards a Healthier Scotland' made a commitment to health impact assessment which reinforced the Governments' commitment to placing health at the centre of planning and decision making at national and local level (Scottish Executive 2003). HIA was seen as vital consideration when formulating policy at both levels.

The Medical Research Council's Social and Public Health Sciences Unit at Glasgow University undertook a systematic literature review to identify existing health impact assessments as well as papers looking at the way HIA should be carried out in Scotland. The Scottish Needs Assessment Programme (SNAP), which was a national network with well-developed links of service and academic strands of medical and non-medical Public Health, was commissioned by the Scottish Executive to pilot the HIA process within Scottish settings. In October 1998, SNAP hosted a seminar to discuss HIA and bring together stakeholders and other interested parties for discussions which led to the establishment of two groups to consider the development of HIA for two key policy areas with major implications for health – urban regeneration and transport.

Given the overview of Finnish and Scottish implementation of HIA, it can be seen to have followed similar trends in its origins and forward planning.

Framework for HIA in HEI in Finland and Scotland

Given the similarities identified above, Higher Education Institutions (HEI) have evolved over many years, and there is greater collaboration between European Union countries through mainly Erasmus programmes. Teacher exchange has shown that there are similarities in curriculum; however, there are also areas where the different institutions can learn from each other. One such example is a distant learning public health course shared by the two institutions where many of the topics covered are similar for example health promotion/education and factors that affect the populations' health and welfare. Inclusion of HIA would be beneficial to students to share and exchange ideas about the approaches used HIA in their respective roles in Public Health. Drawing on expertise from academics in the two countries would require strategic planning to ensure that the strengths of academics are fully utilized to facilitate effective student engagement and learning. To this end the HIA framework by Pollack et al. 2014 will be used to develop a joint working across the two institutions in Finland and Scotland. Although the study by the aforementioned authors was pulling together institutions with the United States, the proposed collaboration will provide different challenges as it will be across two distinct countries with its own cultures, languages and legislation.

In conclusion, it is evident that HIA can be used within courses taught across the two educational institutions; the proposed project will first assess the feasibility of such a project and the practicalities of its implementation. This will not only provide a clear template for joint working but identify potential challenges that need to be managed for this collaboration to be a success.

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