

Preparing the next generation

The role of the Dugald Baird Centre in capacity building for the future

The University of Aberdeen, in its mission statement, seeks to promote research and scholarship and capacity building. Naturally, this is also one of the cornerstones of activity in the Dugald Baird Centre (DBC). Capacity building can mean different things in different contexts. Within IMMPACT, capacity strengthening is a crucial activity concerned with enhancing capacity in different countries for health research for development but also for evidence-based decision-making and rigorous outcome evaluation. More generally, the DBC has focused on capacity building throughout the last decade by contributing to the education and training of dozens of researchers and research students, both undergraduate and postgraduate, from a range of backgrounds and countries.

Undergraduate education and research training

DBC staff have been and continue to be involved in the teaching of University of Aberdeen students on the undergraduate degree in Medicine (MB ChB), the BMedSci and the BSc Health Sciences. Over the years, several BSc Health Sciences students have conducted final-year projects in the DBC. These have involved both qualitative and quantitative methodologies. For example, in 2000 a qualitative study to explore the long-term consequences of teenage pregnancy was carried out. BSc Health Sciences and BMedSci research projects have led to publications in peer-reviewed journals.

Postgraduate education and research training

In addition to the undergraduate courses, staff have regularly contributed to the MSc in Health Services & Public Health Research. In particular, staff have contributed to the teaching of demography and epidemiology on the MSc in Health Services & Public Health Research, bringing to it women's health as well as a developing world perspective. DBC staff have also been involved in MSc work at the University of Edinburgh.

Several MSc students have conducted research for their MSc thesis project in Public Health or in Nursing under supervision of DBC staff. Completed projects include: *Teenage pregnant women's perception of their male partners' influence on resolutions of unplanned pregnancies in Grampian: A comparative study* (1990); *An exploratory study of the experiences of drug using pregnant women in seeking and receiving care* (2001); and *Antenatal steroid therapy in Aberdeen Maternity Hospital: temporal trends and clinical practice (1991–2002)* (2002).

Capacity building applies equally to staff members as DBC students and several current DBC staff have successfully completed an MSc and carried out their research in the DBC. Others have chosen to attend specific courses on the MSc to strengthen capacity at an individual and unit level in areas such as statistics and health economics. Several members of the DBC are also currently conducting PhD research while others have undertaken an MSc by research.

From the outset, senior members of staff have been involved in PhD supervision. This has included joint supervision across departments within the university and with other institutions. In 2004 the DBC saw its first successful home-grown PhD graduate who was funded by a studentship from the Institute of Applied Health Sciences, University of Aberdeen.

Capacity building has been an important focus as research grants have been taken on in the DBC. For example, research looking at emergency obstetric care in Bangladesh was conducted as part of the SAFE project. The largest UK programme in the DBC, the 'Evaluation of Healthy Respect' has

generated a number of student projects, first and foremost, PhD research identifying *How teenagers' knowledge, attitudes and behaviours relate to sexual health*. Two further undergraduate projects grew out of Healthy Respect: (i) *Focus on sex: a qualitative study of current attitudes and behaviour of young men towards sexual health relationships*, which was submitted as a BMedSci thesis in 2003, and (ii) *A qualitative study of the current attitudes and behaviour of young women towards sexual health and relationships*, which was submitted as a BSc Health Sciences thesis in 2004.

Health professionals undertaking research

The unit has been the host for a number of midwives conducting their first research projects. In 2004, a midwife undertook research for her MSc in Midwifery within the Remote and Rural Maternity Services project. In addition, the DBC actively encourages research collaboration with NHS staff. For example, an open day was recently held for midwives and trust staff in Aberdeen to inform them of research activities and how they may become involved in research.

Although the DBC is very much a research unit, education and research training have always been an important part of DBC work. This has benefits for individuals progressing in research and also has lasting effects for research within the Centre and the University and for collaborations outside the University. This is reflected in the breadth and strength of research covered in this publication.

Emma Pitchforth

Lecturer in Social Science and Health Department of Health Sciences, University of Leicester

Edwin van Teijlingen

Reader in Public Health

About the authors

Edwin van Teijlingen is a medical sociologist and co-ordinator of the MSc in Public Health & Health Service Research. He is seconded (part-time) to the DBC where he has been involved in reproductive health research projects in the UK and abroad. He has produced many papers and several books on different aspects of maternity care. He has also written a series of papers on social science research methods.

Emma Pitchforth joined the DBC after graduating from the University of Aberdeen with BSc(Hons) Health Sciences. Her PhD studentship ran from September 2000 to September 2003 and after this she was Evaluation Project Manager for a multi-site study looking at maternity services in remote and rural Scotland. In January 2005 Emma took up post as Lecturer in Social Science and Health at the University of Leicester, but she maintains links with the DBC as a grantholder on the remote and rural project.