Reviewer's report

Title: Implementation of collaborative governance in cross-sector innovation and education networks: evidence from the National Health Service in England

Version: 2
Date: 5 May 2014
Reviewer: Roman Kislov

Reviewer's report:

This is a well-written paper providing some new evidence on a previously underresearched aspect of inter-organisational and intersectoral collaboration. It has great potential in terms of publishability but some more work would be required to maximise the impact of the study by positioning it in the context of existing literature and spelling out a number of (theory-informed) generalisable conclusions.

1. Is the question posed by the authors well defined? Yes.
2. Are the methods appropriate and well described? Yes.
3. Are the data sound? Yes.
4. Does the manuscript adhere to the relevant standards for reporting and data deposition? Yes.
5. Are the discussion and conclusions well balanced and adequately supported by the data? Yes but the discussion needs further elaboration – see below.
6. Are limitations of the work clearly stated? Yes.
7. Do the authors clearly acknowledge any work upon which they are building, both published and unpublished? Yes but the reference list seems rather thin at the moment.
8. Do the title and abstract accurately convey what has been found? Yes.
9. Is the writing acceptable? Yes.

Major Compulsory Revisions (which the author must respond to before a decision on publication can be reached):

1. The subsection entitled ‘NHS innovation landscape’ is very helpful but needs some further expansion and analysis. I would suggest that the authors should:
   a) Reconsider the heading: Is this subsection really about innovation? Perhaps, its main focus is on collaboration?
   b) Bring in some evidence from emerging empirical literature on the collaborative initiatives in healthcare, such as the CLAHRCs;
   c) Make clearer the similarities and differences between the HIECs and other collaborative initiatives described – perhaps in a tabular format;
2. The paper would benefit from discussing the findings of the study in the context of existing literature on collaborative governance. What theoretical significance do the authors’ findings have? To what extent are they applicable to other collaborative partnerships in healthcare (particularly to the AHSNs)? How do the findings change our understanding of inter-organisational and intersectoral collaboration? It may well happen that addressing these issues will need to be accompanied by providing a more extensive literature review in the beginning of the paper – this is however for the authors to decide.

3. Figure 1 at the moment seems quite controversial – what evidence has been used to assign different collaborative initiatives along the two dimensions? What are the criteria used to determine the strength of the mandate and the amount of resources? Do you really need this figure?

**Level of interest:** An article whose findings are important to those with closely related research interests

**Quality of written English:** Acceptable

**Statistical review:** No, the manuscript does not need to be seen by a statistician.

**Declaration of competing interests:**
I declare that I have no competing interests.