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Reflecting on 18 months of SCEiP: barely scratched the surface?

Blog Editor

A dedicated pot of funding and two years to bring practitioners (broadly defined) and researchers together to exchange knowledge and to explore knowledge exchange methods seemed like an immense opportunity when we started in August 2012. The freedom to decide with them what we were going to do in the project, rather than telling them what we would do, and the possibility of increasing engagement between research and practice by the end of the project was amazing. It still is... but as we've been through the first 18 months of the Social Care Evidence in Practice (SCEiP) project we're learning a lot and realising that perhaps even the funding, time and freedom we have through the SCEiP project may not be enough to do more than scratch the surface.

Hi! I'm the project manager for the SCEiP project, and have spent some time reflecting on the first year of the project before fully getting into year 2 activities. There's a lot to reflect on and lots of recommendations and suggestions coming together... I won't go into all of those in this post, but will do in follow-up posts. Here I just wanted to briefly reflect on where we have reached.

When we started the SCEiP project in August 2012 we wanted to:

- "work with researchers and practitioners (in the first instance) to identify key issues in social care that are pressing or a priority, and apply research evidence to address those priority issues;
- further enhance dialogue between these stakeholders to support joint knowledge development and exchange;
- increase the demand for, and utilisation of, research evidence by practitioners by demonstrating the economic value of research; and provide a means of demonstrating the impact from social sciences research that can be used to make the case for such research" (as it says in our project proposal).

We had a very interesting and active first year with a large number of activities, and little time to reflect on them. We:

- started early on with a [call for engagement](#) to social care professionals to suggest practice issues for the project to explore, and received over 100 responses
- held an ["unconference" in October 2012](#) which drew together about 40 practitioners and researchers to look at the themes emerging from the call for engagement and how to ensure social care research is used in practice and makes a difference. The discussion was summarised in a [visual note](#) (which we love!)
- also held an [initial workshop at LSE](#) in October 2012 to explore some of the issues that have been arising through various channels in exchanging research evidence with practitioners
- began work on a methods matrix of the different approaches/activities that could be used by researchers and practitioners to exchange knowledge about research (at any stage) and welcomed some guest bloggers on different topics ([tweeting](#); [blogging](#); [graphic novels](#), [journal clubs](#))
- held a workshop in Birmingham in January where over 45 senior managers and assistant directors from social services departments in the West Midlands came together to explore research on prevention and how to put an economic value to preventative services
 - that led to a Leaders' Forum which took place from 8 to 9 May in Dartington, jointly with research in practice for adults. The Forum welcomed 50 senior leaders and managers from across 16 local authorities, and explored some of the key issues and barriers with both engagement with research (and how to apply research evidence to their practice concerns, especially at a time when budgets are being cut) and the need for an evidence-based Preventions Framework (which provides a robust evidence-based standardised approach to prevention for local authorities, and an approach to evaluating outcomes and cost-effectiveness for these services)
 - which led to a workshop at LSE in [September 2013 on developing such a preventions evaluation framework](#).
- explored infographics and visual notes as a way of communicating research finding
- commissioned four mini projects from local authorities who worked with researchers on specific practice issues and applied research evidence to those issues

- exhibited and promoted research evidence at Community Care Live in May 2013 and the National Children and Adult Services Conference in October 2013
- hosted a Provision Forum session with The College of Social Work and the Social Services Research Group at Community Care Live in May 2013 with a full room of 60 very engaged practitioners and explored issues around barriers that practitioners face in engaging with research
- held a discussion with local authority directors, provider sector leaders, the Department of Health, the President for the Association of Directors for Adult Social Services (ADASS), and key senior researchers on [17 July to discuss the role of evidence in practice](#)
- worked with RAND Europe on a bibliometric analysis of social care research and on a project to scope of the possibility of demonstrating the economic return from social care research.

I think that may be all... The project has done a lot and we're spending some time trying to summarise the individual activities, report on them and reflect on how they went (we'll be doing this in the next few posts). And in doing so draw together guidance on best practice, what works and what doesn't.

A lot of what we have learnt through the first year will be things we were aware of before starting the project. That it can be difficult for practitioners to engage with research and researchers to engage with practice, because of the culture that exists and barriers that are not easily overcome, but at the same time there is lot of interest in engaging and breaking down those barriers. But perhaps I still held some preconceived notions. We went into our Provision Forum session at Community Care Live wanting to talk about research but thinking that this may not be important to others, and so were expecting to have maybe two or three delegates joining us. It was great to see the level of interest – we filled the room and still had people wanting to join the discussion. The messages around the need to address cultural/organisation issues while providing training on what counts as good evidence and proper access to research findings were clear. On the other hand there perhaps was not as much interest as we had hoped in our Evidence Clinic (exhibition stand with us on hand to provide advice and guidance on the evidence available) at the National Children and Adult Services Conference in October; the interest was probably very connected to key talks at the conference. Yet it was good to be there and be accessible, and perhaps to understand the different ways to present research evidence to make them more explicitly relevant.

There is a lot more to reflect on and we'll do this as we post about individual activities over the coming weeks. Key suggestions from what we have learnt and experienced in the first 18 months have been to:

- make sure we write up and reflect on individual activities as they happen or soon after!
- think about whether we are just targeting those who are already engaged (with research or practice) and how to find – and work with – those who are not engaged at all (and understand why)
- look at self-funders, service users and carers and how to engage them in research to help research findings get into practice and vice versa
- target early career researchers/practitioners (the future leaders and possibly more open to innovation)
- find the right balance between exploring best practice methods for knowledge exchange and engagement in research so we meet our project objectives
- and probably most importantly realise the sector is huge and we can't change the world (although a new ecosystem where research and practice develop into the same thing with merging paths might be nice!).

There has been a bit of lull going into the second year, partly while we try to reflect on what has worked and may not have, and what we could do over the next few months. And partly because our project coordinator finished with us in October last year so we're picking up where she left off! But we're moving ahead of actions for the coming months, including:

- finalising all outputs and learning from our first 18 months;
- a second unconference ("ideas shop") on 29 or 31 March – with the aim of matching researchers and practitioners together to spend the day agreeing an issue that practice and research needs to work together to take forward and pitch at the end of the day to a panel with possibility of funding to undertake the project;
- a residential in mid June (probably 19-21) – targeting early career researchers but open to all to cover training around knowledge exchange, re-designing the research process, and impact assessment approaches;
- a social care research app regularly summarising the latest research findings; and
- a few things yet undecided. Do send through any suggestions for activities (comment below or email ke-socialcare@lse.ac.uk!)

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