

# **RESEARCH UNIT FOR RESEARCH UTILISATION (RURU)**

A member of the ESRC's Network for Evidence-Based Policy and Practice

UNIVERSITY OF ST ANDREWS

## **REPORT OF ONE-DAY SEMINAR ON 6 MARCH 2002**

### **MAKING IT HAPPEN**

#### **Developing understanding of research utilisation and EBP implementation**

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# **MAKING IT HAPPEN**

## **Developing understanding of research utilisation and EBP implementation issues**

### ***Introduction***

This was the first in a series of seminars organised by RURU, a member of the ESRC's Network for Evidence-Based Policy and Practice. The seminar brought together a cross-sector group of people (see Annex A) with interest in and experience of research utilisation and evidence-based policy and practice (RU/EBP) implementation. The organisers would like to formally thank all those who participated in the seminar for their insightful comments and active enthusiasm throughout the day.

The seminar had two key aims:

1. To share understanding of the state of current knowledge in the research utilisation/ EBP implementation field
2. To set an agenda for further work in this area.

The introduction to the day outlined four requirements for developing evidence-based policy and practice:

1. Agreement as to the nature of evidence
2. A strategic approach to the creation of evidence and the development of a cumulative knowledge base
3. Effective dissemination of knowledge and the provision of effective access to this knowledge
4. Initiatives to increase the uptake of evidence – in policy formation, policy implementation and service delivery

Each of these presents a major challenge but the focus of the day was around the third and, particularly, the fourth of these requirements.

The seminar was designed to be highly participative and was structured around four presentations. This report provides an abstract for each presentation and summarises the discussion that arose during the day. The final section of the report considers the agenda for further work in this area.

### ***Presentation 1: Getting evidence into policy and practice: a map of the terrain – Sandra Nutley, RURU, University of St Andrews***

This presentation took as its starting point the rich but diverse and widely dispersed literature relating to RU/ EBP implementation. A map of the key features of this bewildering terrain was offered. This highlighted six main interrelated concerns in the existing literature:

1. The types of knowledge relevant to understanding RU/ EBP implementation
2. The ways in which research knowledge is utilised

3. Models of the process of utilisation
4. The conceptual frameworks that enable us to understand the process of RU/ EBP implementation
5. The main ways of intervening to increase evidence uptake and the effectiveness of these
6. Different ways of conceptualising what RU/ EBP means in practice

Each of these six areas was discussed further in the seminar and those wishing to know more should consult the discussion paper referenced below.

This map of the terrain was offered not just as a useful organising schema but also as a valuable framework for thinking through RU/ EBP implementation problems and processes. It provided a framework for the discussion groups that followed the presentation (summarised in the next section of this report).

**Reference:**

Nutley SM, Walter I and Davies HTO (2002) *From knowing to doing: A framework for understanding the evidence-into-practice agenda*. Discussion Paper 1, Research Unit for Research Utilisation, University of St Andrews (downloadable in pdf format from <http://www.st-and.ac.uk/~cppm/home.htm>).

***Group discussions***

Small groups discussions were guided by the questions listed in Annex B. These discussions ranged widely and reflected participants' very different experiences in different sectors, organisations and roles.

Key common issues were:

- Questions of terminology. Groups recognised that the terms used around research utilisation often had no common meaning - within sectors, between sectors and across nations. It was felt that greater clarity and agreement on definitions would support shared understandings in the field. However, in practice this was unlikely to develop because using particular terms can accord legitimacy in different areas.
- Concerns about the nature of evidence. Discussions centred on what is meant by evidence, how to develop an evidence base and the purpose of evidence. Groups considered how consumers/clients might be involved in this process and the implications this might have across different sectors. Another important aspect was the need to understand the tacit, or "craft", knowledge of both practitioners and policy-makers, and how this could be integrated with evidence.
- The research/policy/practice gap. This seemed to vary in nature and intensity among the sectors represented. For some participants, the "two communities" model reflected their day-to-day experience. For others, this concept was less relevant and they noted the capacity for compromise. There was a clear common statement that all three groups - researchers, policy-makers and practitioners - need to recognise and draw on their shared knowledge base. Rooted in practice, this can play a crucial transformative role.

- The importance of context. Groups discussed both the possibilities for and their experience of specific roles which can mediate between research, policy and practice. They located different structures for shaping relationships between these groups, and explored how such structures might shift and support flows of evidence. More generally, participants felt there needed to be a better understanding of what contexts encourage research utilisation and whether conducive contexts vary across sectors. Critical factors were thought to be team working, the role of key individuals, the way evidence fits with the local value base and the interests of key individuals and groups.
- Partnerships. There were general concerns about the value of "partnerships" in research utilisation. Some felt partnerships between researchers and policy-makers were unrealistic because of the differences between the two groups and what they are trying to achieve. Problems of sustaining partnerships were also discussed. The point was made that the notion of partnership maintains the idea that there are "two (or more) communities" and hence perpetuates the status quo.
- Using evidence to change behaviour. Some felt it was important to create dissatisfaction with existing practice as an important part of the utilisation/implementation process. It was also noted there is a tendency to assume that evidence will always direct us to something new, whereas "use" may also involve demonstrating that something does *not* work. Given that many practitioners belong to professional groups, there was a feeling that we need to understand how evidence-based practice fits with notions of professionalism.
- Issues specific to policy-making. It was generally recognised that policy-makers were in a difficult position when it came to implementing evidence, with pressure both from above to take action, and from below, from practitioners, to improve their knowledge. Many felt there was a need for better understanding of the policy process in which research evidence is only one of a multitude of influences. Researchers could usefully start from policy-makers' requirements and agendas and examine the role evidence plays within these. The place of pressure groups, as both driving and inhibiting the use of evidence, was also discussed. There was debate about how rationality, obsession and politics might interact in attempts to implement evidence.

Overall, groups were optimistic that change *can* happen and recognised the value of taking a long term view of the impact of research on policy and practice.

### ***Presentation 2: Investing to Deliver: Reviewing the implementation of the UK Crime Reduction Programme – Peter Homel, Home Office***

Peter (a secondee to the Home Office) talked about a review he is undertaking for the Home Office of the implementation of the Crime Reduction Programme (CRP). The CRP (1999- 2002) represents a major investment by the government in 'an evidence based strategy to pilot new ways of tackling crime' (HM Treasury). The overall objectives of the programme are to:

- Achieve long-term and sustained reduction in crime through implementing ‘what works’ and promoting innovation into mainstream practice
- Generate a significant improvement in the crime reduction knowledge base
- Deliver real savings through the reduction of crime and improved programme efficiency and effectiveness.

The implementation review has considered how the process of implementation has been organised centrally and regionally. It has identified the main challenges to implementation as:

- The translation of research into policy and practical projects
- Managing programme implementation and coherence
- Delivering financial and other resources
- The management of an active evaluation, learning and change process

Analyses of these challenges and how they have been handled in the implementation of the CRP has led to the elaboration of five lessons for future programmes:

- Invest to deliver
- Organise centrally to support efficient local implementation
- Research the evidence base to learn for programme delivery
- Build, implement and maintain an effective knowledge management system
- Create flexible fund management models

The implementation review is in its final stages and it is anticipated that a review report will be published by the Home Office (as part of its Home Office Research Studies – HORS – series).

The discussion that followed confirmed that the main challenges encountered by the CRP were not confined to the criminal justice area. Similarly, there was optimism that the five lessons for future programmes would have relevance across a range of public policy areas.

***Presentation 3: Promoting Action on Research Implementation in Health Services (PARIHS project) - Jo Rycroft-Malone, Royal College of Nursing***

This project developed from the long experience of the Royal College of Nursing (RCN) in looking at Quality Initiatives and improvement, Practice Development and Research focussing on implementation. From this collective wisdom an evolving framework has emerged:

SI=f(E,C,F), where Successful Implementation is a function of Evidence, Context and Facilitation.

Previous work has set each of these elements on a continuum, and recognises that each can vary within a given situation. It appears that facilitation is the most crucial element

and currently the team are focussing more intently on the nature and definition of facilitation and considering the ways (i.e. 'doing or enabling') in which facilitators actually bring about implementation. This has arisen from findings, which suggest that poor evidence and context can be overcome with good facilitation and implementation is least successful when the facilitation is poor, even when evidence is good and context conducive to change.

Work is ongoing into further developing, testing and refining the framework and the emerging hypothesis and current thinking is to be published in the June edition of *Quality in Healthcare*.

Discussion following the presentation centred on the elements set out with the RCN framework. The possibility was raised of extending the context element to include 'hard' (e.g. finance) as well as 'soft' (e.g. cultural) parameters. In relation to cultures, one of the key issues is the extent to which there is a need to work with existing cultures or work towards creating new ones. Finally, there was some discussion around the need to change behaviour at different levels (national policy, local policy and personal practice) and the challenge that this brings.

#### ***Presentation 4: Reflections on What Works for Children? - Helen Roberts, City University***

This presentation discussed developments within the 'What Works for Children' node of the ESRC's Network for Evidence-Based Policy and Practice. This is a collaboration between City, Barnardo's (Di McNeish) and York (Trevor Sheldon), with a focus on sharing and implementing research evidence. Helen suggested that good research evidence is potentially empowering for children and young people in much the same way as women using maternity services, through some of the childbirth campaigning organizations, had helped to change the way that midwifery and obstetric services are delivered through using the findings of the Cochrane collaboration. She described work they are planning to include children and families as active stakeholders in these processes. She also noted the importance not only of understanding what works, but what does not work as well. Stopping doing things which have been shown to be ineffective can be as difficult as implementing the more effective interventions.

Within the project, evidence is being shared through:

- producing overviews and providing brief summaries of evidence, peer reviewed by both users and researchers
- trying to ensure that this information is provided in accessible ways
- developing an 'evidence map' of the whole territory and an evidence guide for more focused information
- straightforward dissemination through website and print materials
- supporting ESRC CASE PhD studentships between Barnardo's and academic organisations

Evidence implementation is being developed through a group of Children's Fund partnerships, mainly in Yorkshire. Priorities are jointly identified and a supportive network of external 'experts' is being created. Work is also being done to address some of the barriers to implementing evidence. For example, researchers were often reluctant to make clear recommendations even where evidence was strong, but practitioners wanted definite guidance on what works. They also wanted the skills to challenge researchers, and training and development work is being undertaken to help staff critically appraise evidence.

The project will be evaluated to see how it makes a difference and to share learning.

Discussions after the presentation centred on notions of partnership: whether partnerships were strictly functional in nature, or were more representational and primarily concerned with image management. The issue was also raised about where practitioners can go for information and help on the critical appraisal of research findings.

### ***Concluding remarks***

Huw Davies brought the seminar to a close by highlighting what he considered to be the main issues to emerge from the discussions:

- What does it mean to think through 'evidence into policy' rather than 'evidence into practice'?
- If we can understand the process of social construction of knowledge better, can we harness such understanding in devising innovative implementation strategies? – or does such understanding just add further layers of complexity and ambiguity?
- What are 'conducive cultures' for EBP? And how can we generate them?
- How wide do partnerships extend? Researchers, research users, yes, but what about clients? Can we gather some exemplars of partnerships?
- Partnering involves not just sharing power and legitimacy, but also ceding to other groups. How can this be achieved? What 'hidden commitments' might prevent the development of full functioning partnerships?
- What models of facilitation and learning can help us understand the evidence into practice process better and devise more effective interventions?

These provide a tentative agenda for further work in this area and it was agreed that a follow-up seminar would be organised in Autumn 2002 to take these discussions forward.

## ***Annex A: List of participants***

<b>Name</b>	<b>Institution</b>
Annette Boaz	UK Centre for Evidence Based Policy and Practice, Queen Mary, University of London
Joe Curran	Central Research Unit, Scottish Executive
Huw Davies	Research Unit for Research Utilisation, University of St. Andrews
Peter Homel	Research, Development and Statistics Directorate, Home Office
Rachel Jones	Higher Education Funding Council for England
Tobias Jung	Research Unit for Research Utilisation, University of St. Andrews
Alison Loftus-Hills	Quality Improvement Programme, Royal College of Nursing Institute
Margaret Malloch	Social Work Research Centre, University of Stirling
Oliver Merfels	Criminal Justice Social Work Development Centre for Scotland, University of Edinburgh
Ann Millar	Central Research Unit, Scottish Executive
Andrew Morris	Learning and Skills Development Agency
Sandra Nutley	Research Unit for Research Utilisation, University of St. Andrews
Fiona Reid	Higher Education Funding Council for England

Helen Roberts

City University

Joanne Rycroft-Malone

Quality Improvement Programme, Royal  
College of Nursing Institute

Karen Tosh

Centre for Public Policy and  
Management, University of St. Andrews

Moira Walker

Social Work Research Centre,  
University of Stirling

Isabel Walter

Research Unit for Research Utilisation,  
University of St. Andrews

Joyce Wilkinson

Research Unit for Research Utilisation,  
University of St. Andrews

***Annex B: List of discussion questions for group discussion: sharing knowledge and experience of research utilisation/ evidence based practice (RU/ EBP) implementation***

The questions were intended to guide discussion but not inhibit it.

1. What are the key concerns that need to be addressed in order to improve RU/ EBP implementation?
2. Do these concerns fit within the framework outlined in the presentation '*Mapping the terrain*'? If so where do they fit? If not, in what ways are they outside of the framework?
3. Is there a need for greater clarity in the terminology we use to discuss issues in this area? For example, how do terms like evidence-based practice, research utilisation, knowledge utilisation, and knowledge transfer relate to one another?
4. Do the models of process outlined in the framework encapsulate the different ways in which you have thought about – or taken forward – the process of utilisation?
5. Are there bodies of literature relevant to RU/ EBP that are not encompassed by the framework?
6. Is the overwhelming support for partnerships between researchers and practitioners, as the way forward, something we should be wary of? Maybe it is a recommendation driven more by fashion than by an analysis of what works? Has anyone had experience of using partnerships to help get research into practice?
7. We have argued that there are at least two dimensions along which different conceptualisations of EBP vary: the type of evidence to be used, and the focus of attention (individuals or broader systems). This provides us with the 2 x 2 matrix shown in the presentation. Are there other dimensions that you would wish to highlight in order to encapsulate the way in which you think about EBP?
8. What conceptual frameworks have you found most helpful for thinking about how RU/ EBP implementation could be improved?