

Connecting Communities: Building Relationships - Improving decision-making and practice in Public Health and Social Care research by making the connections between Cardiff Council and Cardiff University.

Background and scientific rationale:

In their 2015 final report on the ESRC Local Government Knowledge Navigator, Martin et al. commented that

“there is a strong case for supporting closer engagement between academic research and local government The UK has a strong research base but engagement between local government and researchers is a hit and miss affair. Local government has very little awareness of the research undertaken by the UK’s universities and dwindling capacity to engage with it.”

This project, with the support of NIHR funding, aims to start addressing these issues in Cardiff by making the connections between the separate worlds of local government, public health and academic research.

Martin et al. (2015) highlighted the

“need for a change of culture in both communities and the development of more systematic approaches to achieving connectivity between them.”

The project will explore the mechanisms, relationships and networks needed to support and fund high quality research activity in Cardiff, enabling the local authority to become research active. With particular reference to the links between social service activities and public health outcomes, the work will investigate relevant and achievable topics for research-

There is a growing body of research literature which considers the issues of local government and health engaging as a research partners. For example, research investigating the co-production of research has shown that policy officers and planners benefited from working closely together by discovering new knowledge through dialogue (Frantzeskaki and Kabisch (2016).

Other research has shown that knowledge co-production approaches between researchers and practitioners can generate multiple benefits. Not only is knowledge produced during the interaction, but the process of working together and embedding a new model of working is crucial (Miszczak and Patel, 2018). It is important that these relationships are built on trust and Cardiff Council and the University have forged initial links which can generate potential impacts.

There is a lot of rhetoric on the potential of coproduction to improve access to citizens and to data; and lead to research that is more credible to policymakers (Cotterill and Richardson, 2010), but there is little empirical evidence on whether it works. This project will set the foundations for a research system that enables Cardiff Council to become research active.

The Wales Centre for Public Policy (WCPP) at Cardiff University is uniquely placed to work on this project; they are currently undertaking research on evidence use in policy making, service design and implementation in their “Evidence Informed Policy Making (EIPM) at the Local Level” project, as well as their other work on the impact of the What Works Network across the UK, public engagement on health and social care transformation, children and young people looked after and domestic abuse.

Their research on evidence-use and evidence-based policy making has informed approaches to mobilising social science knowledge to improve policy making and public service delivery in Wales. They have designed an innovative, demand-led model of knowledge mobilisation that involves working closely with Welsh Government ministers and leading researchers from across the UK and internationally. They have also conducted research that outlines the value and limitations of 'knowledge brokering', where an intermediary organisation can translate academic research to help address policy makers' evidence needs (Mackillop et al. 2019). The Centre is therefore well-placed to bring this experience in working with central government to a project based in local government.

This project will complement the existing literature and ongoing work of the Wales Centre for Public Policy at Cardiff University, providing research grounded in the geographical location of the multicultural Welsh capital city and laying firm foundations to establish Cardiff Council as research active, able to fully participate in social care and public health research. They will work with Cardiff Council to understand how evidence can be used at the local level and help the council to identify their evidence needs.

Research questions:

The project will explore how Cardiff Council could form the basis of a research system and become research active. Mindful of the barriers highlighted by previous research, the project will begin to make the necessary connections between the worlds of local government, public health and academic research to enable a lasting system to be put in place to facilitate active public health and social care research in the Cardiff area.

The project will ask the relevant key stakeholders, including representative PPI groups and organisations, what mechanisms, relationships and networks need to be in place to support and fund high quality research activity in Cardiff.

With particular reference to the links between social service activities and public health outcomes, the project will also consider how to generate small projects to demonstrate value similar to the "Need to Know" approach highlighted by Martin et al, as well as how best to encourage the coproduction of research agendas and projects which bring together the needs of the public health and social care sectors.

Research Plan and Methodology:

With an initial focus on Children's Services, in the autumn of 2020 the project will undertake three focussed workshops with a concurrent structured online survey. With academic oversight from Prof. James Downe at Cardiff University, the online survey and focus groups will be facilitated by the Cardiff Research Centre and the lead applicant.

Given the timescales of the project, recent increased restrictions on working arrangements due to the current Covid 19 crisis in Wales and two separate inspections of Cardiff Council taking place in November and December, three online focussed workshops and an online survey were seen as the most efficient and effective means of gathering data from a wide range of participants. The survey will be created, disseminated and responses compiled by the Cardiff Research Centre between Oct 2020 – Jan 2021.

Preliminary project work between Cardiff Council, Cardiff University and Social Care Wales has indicated that three focussed workshops will enable more relevant, in-depth information to be gathered from key stakeholders with a concurrent online survey collecting baseline data.

The focussed workshops will be facilitated by the Cardiff Research Centre and take place between Oct 2020 and Jan 2021. The workshops will concentrate on three main areas; where we want to get to in Cardiff, how can research use best be supported and what needs to happen next. Each of which will enable stakeholders to consider the research questions of how connections can be made between different agencies and what mechanisms and networks need to be in place to sustain progress.

“Where we want to get to” will include consideration of issues involved in; evidence based practice, staff being research literate, the council becoming research active and undertaking reflective practice.

“How can research use best be supported” will focus on which types of approach would be suitable to encourage research use in Cardiff by testing a number of examples, such as embedded researchers, knowledge champions, communities of practice, the Need to Know approach.

“What needs to happen next” will build on the two previous workshops to focus on the relationships, networks and mechanisms which need to be in place to take things forward in Cardiff.

Key areas for the survey to cover will be developed during the project initiation, and could include;

- Any existing working links/relationships between local authority social services, Cardiff University and public health
- Previous experience of engagement in research
- The right people to involve to put a productive system and structure in place. From senior management through to front-line staff, elected members and the people who use services
- What are the relevant questions for research to be asking? Making connections between public health and social care on issues suitable for a small scale “Need to Know” approach and larger longer term research projects

The project will bring together key local stakeholders including

- Cardiff Council Social Services and other departments e.g. housing, education, leisure
- The Wales Centre for Public Policy at Cardiff University
- Social Care Wales
- Public Health, Cardiff and Vale University Health Board and
- Cardiff Research Centre (CRC)

The views of key contributors will be sought from amongst others;

- Social services staff, senior management, leaders and elected members,
- University researchers, senior managers
- PPI via key representative organisations,
- Regional Partnership Board

- Public Health and other health staff
- Other local authority departments, such as housing, education, leisure

The project will investigate how local authority initiatives, with an initial focus on Children's Services (including Children Looked After and Child Protection) impact on health and health inequalities and vice versa. As well as considering how making better connections between the local authority, academia and public health could improve the use of evidence already in existence and support more relevant research in the future.

The findings from both the online survey and targeted focus group will be written up into a report as well as the required PowerPoint presentation.

Dissemination, Outputs and anticipated Impact:

The direct outputs of this project will be a written report (no more than 5,000 words) and a PowerPoint presentation of up to 20 slides, including recommendations on how a research system can best be established in Cardiff, what additional resources would be needed to make it fully operational and what relationships and mechanisms already exist to support the development of a research system. The report will be delivered end December / early January 2021.

As well as disseminating the findings to NIHR and DHSC, the report will also be distributed to key stakeholders and other contributors; local authority staff and managers, elected members, Cardiff university staff and management, health and public health partners, Social Care Wales, the Regional Partnership Board and PPI groups and organisations. A presentation on the report's findings will be offered to the relevant agencies and organisations, with the aim to develop an Action Plan to further establishment of a research system.

It is hoped that engaging in the project will in itself build positive relationships between local agencies and organisations which will bring further benefits beyond the remit of the project. We will work with Social Care Wales and other partners to disseminate the findings across Wales, including with the Welsh Government, local authorities, third sector, universities and public health departments.

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Project timetable:

October –	bring together key partners, devise research questions, create and disseminate online survey
November/ December	
January -	hold focussed workshops, disseminate online survey, analyse results
January -	analyse and compile online survey and focus group data, write report and PowerPoint presentation

	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan
Steering group				
Workshop 1 Identify participants Design format Collate data / analysis				
Workshop 2 Identify participants Design format Collate data / analysis				
Workshop 3 Identify participants Design format Collate data / analysis				
Online survey Identify participants Design format Collate data / analysis				
Data synthesis				
Final outputs				

Impact of the research:

The research will have an impact beyond the direct results of the project. Positive links and relationships between the different organisations will be fostered (in fact, they already have been through the development of this application). The anticipated long term benefits will be to enable Cardiff Council to become research active and the creation of a research system which will support both short term “Need to Know” research work of relevance to both the local authority and public health but also the co-production of longer term research projects and activity.

On-going connections between local authority departments, especially social care and public health will facilitate positive links on an operational basis beyond the remit of the research agenda. The project will also foster creative relationships between Cardiff Council and Cardiff University and via the involvement of the Regional Partnership Board raise the status of research in local multi-agency planning.

Due to the time constraints this project focussed on Cardiff only but another long term impact of the research will be to widen the work of research system out to the Regional level and include the Vale of Glamorgan Council. Good regional links already exist and Cardiff and the Vale University Health Board operates across both counties.

From the start the project will include representative PPI organisations but as the work develops individuals and groups from the community and those who use services will be engaged. Any research which flows from the project will therefore aim to be rooted in the needs and experience of individuals and communities; leading to better informed local policy and practice and improved relationships between communities, professionals and elected members.

Project management and governance:

The project will be managed by the two co-applicants, Keith Bowen and Prof. James Downe. Cardiff Council and Cardiff University will be the lead organisations but other key stakeholders will include Public Health, Social Care Wales and Cardiff Research Centre, and small virtual steering group will be set up from these organisations to help plan and oversee and monitor the project. Given the current Covid 19 restrictions communication will primarily be by email and Microsoft Teams.

Ethics and regulatory approval:

This project has been discussed with Prof James Downes, WCPP at Cardiff University and he has confirmed that this project would not be considered as research and does not require a formal ethical opinion. He has provided a letter confirming this.

The Wales Centre for Public Policy complies with the Economic and Social Research Council's (ESRC) research ethics framework and Prof. James Downe sits on Cardiff Council's Standards and Ethics Committee.

Project / research expertise:

Keith Bowen is a registered qualified social worker with over 30 years social care experience in both the statutory and voluntary sector. He has a research Masters degree from Bristol University and has a long standing interest in research, having contributed to the ESRC UK Research Seminar series Researching the lives of disabled young people 2010-11 and undertaken published research with Dr. Peter MacKie from Cardiff University on disabled facilities grants and young disabled people's housing choices (supported by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation).

James Downe is a Professor in Public Policy & Management in Cardiff Business School and Director of Research at the Wales Centre for Public Policy. He has more than fifteen years' experience of conducting evaluations on local government policy, including a project for the UK government on the Local Government Modernisation Agenda, an ESRC-funded study of performance improvement regimes in England, Scotland and Wales, and research on the Welsh Government's policy for local government, including its' executive and scrutiny arrangements.

Patient and Public Involvement:

Co-production is a crucial element of a successful local authority research system. Given the timing and nature of this project patient and public involvement will primarily be via third sector representative organisations, to ensure the views that represent those who are most dependent on council services are included. We are committed to involving the people we would hope would benefit most from this work in any future research.

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