

Building Capacity for Social Care Research

(Enablers and barriers facing HEI academic staff in Wessex)



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Introduction

Aim:

The National Institute for Health Research (NIHR) has a long history of significant funding for National Health Service (NHS) research and research infrastructure and has pledged to extend support into social care sectors. However, strategies and tactics that are used to support research in the NHS are not so easily transferred to the social care system, and it is important to develop new models which more specifically respond to the needs of the sector.

This report describes findings of a study funded by the Clinical Research Network (CRN) Wessex to develop a better understanding of the challenges of building capacity to undertake social care research in the Wessex region (Dorset, South Wiltshire, Hampshire and the Isle of Wight) and the opportunities for building research engagement and capacity. It focuses on the enablers and barriers facing Higher Education Institute (HEI) academic staff in Wessex from the perspective of current academic staff who work in HEIs and who regularly interact with the social care sector.

A partner report, issued simultaneously, focuses on the enablers and barriers facing practitioners in Wessex from the perspective of current practitioners within Wessex and HEI academic staff. This is due to the quantity of data collected and report length considerations.

Context

The importance of more practice-based evidence

An effective health service is reliant on an effective social care system, and it is therefore vital that we develop a robust research base for social care, to ensure that local authorities and charities provide the most effective services within a wider integrated system of health and social care. Over twenty-five years ago the Department of Health (DH) produced a strategy document - '*The Gilbert Report*' - on research and development in Social Services (DH 1994). This report identified weak links between research in a context of evidence-based practice. Building on the themes identified, Marsh and Fisher (2005) highlighted the importance of more practice-based evidence focused on providing practice improvement. This suggested the need for more ground-up and inclusive approaches to research generation and development within local authorities, including by practitioner generated research. This is important as it has been suggested that practitioners often rely on knowledge derived from colleagues, supervisors, and personal experience rather than knowledge from research or other external sources (Iversen and Heggen, 2016).

A solid infrastructure for RCD

To achieve a growth in practice focused research, social care requires a solid infrastructure including a skilled research workforce, funding and a framework of national, strategic priorities (Marsh and Fisher, 2005). Building health service research capacity in the UK is viewed as a core function planned through research and development, which support an organisational approach to building research capacity development (RCD) (Whitworth et al. 2012). RCD

requires the support and development of sustainable abilities and skills, to enable individuals and organisations to perform high quality research. This suggests that a culture of research can be fostered by a strong internal organisational infrastructure, which supports individual career planning and skills development (Gee and Cooke, 2018).

The challenge

There is currently a lack of a systematic approach to RCD across social care and a paucity of research to illuminate best practice. Social care needs to develop its own system and research infrastructure to develop understanding of what works and why (data and analytics to create new innovations), with improved pathways to impact, demonstrating the value added of good social care (Geoghegan and Fenge, 2022).

In 2020, an NIHR Research Design Service consultation identified three main areas of challenge concerning designing and conducting social care research:

1. The complexity of social care organisations and funding - social care comprises multi-sector organisations that can go through frequent system changes and that work with severe budgetary limitations.
2. Research culture and research readiness - there is less of an infrastructure to support research cultures and research activity in social care compared to health care.
3. Opportunities to undertake and develop social care research - there are limited opportunities to commission social care research, priority-set and translate research for practice.

In 2008, a survey circulated to UK social work academics completed by $n=249$ respondents (Moriarty et al., 2015) revealed respondents' enthusiasm for undertaking research but highlighted the practical difficulties they faced in terms of relief from teaching responsibilities; access to research funding; and a comparatively limited infrastructure for social work research.

In 2018, responses from $n=200$ participants of a study by Teater et al. indicated that 73% of respondents were research active, but revealed that academics spent less time on research and teaching, and more time on administration than expected by their employing HEIs. Analysis also found that less time spent on administration and teaching, more university support and being from a pre-1992 university predicted more time spent on research. These findings indicated that the administrative burdens associated with teaching and assessment in social work education resulted in academics struggling to fit research into their roles, despite initiatives to raise the profile and productivity of social work research. The authors suggesting that research support infrastructures and strategies should be reviewed in light of these findings.

Helping to address the challenge

The need for a more integrated approach has been recognised by the NIHR, which has already supported the inclusion of social care with new roles and targeted funding streams. Currently a number of NIHR funded projects are in progress to explore the challenge of building research capacity in social care. These include a regional research network for RCD (NIHR F&A, 2022a);

embedded researchers (NIHR F&A, 2022b and NIHR F&A, 2022f); research practice partnerships (NIHR F&A, 2022c); research in practice teams (NIHR F&A, 2022d); and the development of communities of practice (NIHR F&A, 2022e).

Methodology

The purpose of this study was to generate deeper insights into the challenges of building capacity to undertake social care research across the sector and the opportunities for building research engagement and capacity across HEIs and the social care sector. For this reason, a qualitative approach was undertaken (Mason, 2017).

Questionnaire Design

All participants were asked complete an online questionnaire. The HEI questionnaire was designed to address the following areas:

- Workplace research capacity within HEIs
- Views on research
- Experiences of research from an HEI perspective
- Training support
- Access to research materials and evidence
- Past and future reflections on relevance and priority of research and research support to academic/researcher roles (and practitioner roles during interactions with/previous histories within these roles)

To promote awareness of the online survey, the researchers utilised HEI academic staff contacts at local HEIs within Wessex and also recruited through online channels. These included posts about the study on the National Centre for Post-Qualifying Social Work website and Twitter feeds and direct approaches to possible participants via LinkedIn. University specific channels were also utilised (via those working in Social Care research and academia).

The participants ($n=9$) were HEI academic staff working within the Wessex region (responses denoted in quotes as P2xx).

Interviews

A subsample ($n=5$) of HEI academic staff were also invited for a follow-up interview. A semi-structured interview schedule was constructed to collect positive and negative views of their experiences to date of research and of supporting external research projects and staff in the course of their job. Interviews were recorded and transcribed verbatim (responses denoted in quotes as P2xx FI).

Data Analysis

Quantitative questionnaire data were analysed and summarised using descriptive statistics.

A generic qualitative approach to thematic analysis was used (Caelli et al., 2016) with inter-researcher interpretation. Data analysis was conducted by two members of the research team, with themes and sub-themes identified and coded and then agreed between the two reviewers.

Ethical Approval

Ethical approval was obtained from Bournemouth University (BU) prior to data collection taking place. Approval was sought from the Bournemouth University Social Sciences & Humanities Research Ethics panel.

HEI academic staff survey and interviews (data collection from academics and researchers working in HEIs within Wessex) – granted 22/03/2022 - Ethics ID 42232

Limitations

This study may have been affected by respondent selection and bias. Participation was on a voluntary basis and respondents were self-selecting, on the basis that people with views they would like to communicate were more likely to agree to participate. The study took place in one region of the UK and thus may not be nationally typical.

Results

Demographics

Self-reported Descriptives – HEI academic staff

In total, $n=9$ HEI academic staff completed the online survey with $n=5$ subsequently being interviewed.

Variable	
Sex, n (%)	
Male	3 (33.4%)
Female	5 (55.5%)
Unanswered	1 (11.1%)
Age (years), mean (SD), range	50.7, (9.5), 40-71
Ethnic group or background	
White	7 (77.8%)
Black/African/Caribbean/Black British	1 (11.1%)
Prefer not to say	1 (11.1%)
Job Role	
Social Work Academic	7 (77.8%)
Allied Health Professional Academic	1 (11.1%)
Other – Senior Lecturer	1 (11.1%)
Work location	
FTE (over 30 hours)	8 (88.9%)
Part Time Work	1 (11.1%)
I am interested in doing research	
No	0 (0%)
Yes	9 (100%)
I am confident in doing research (of those interested)	
No	0 (0%)
Yes	9 (100%)

Overview

Analysis of qualitative data revealed the following key themes as significant factors in participants experience and perceptions of their exposure to research.

Research enablers	Research barriers
Seven main themes were identified as enablers: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Personal• Organisational• Academic• Logistical• Research skills• Access to research• Research support	Seven main themes were identified as barriers: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Personal• Organisational• Cultural• Academic• Logistical• Research skills• Research support

Research enablers

Research enablers are categorised as themes and sub-themes which could help to enable a positive research environment for HEI academic staff.

Personal enablers

Desire to mentor/provide support

[Mentoring]

I - ...and in terms of, say where you're located at the moment, in your department, had-are you able to offer any advice to other people. Because obviously, you've written a couple of bids, and maybe some other people haven't.

P206 - No. Being in a position to help, I am, but it's something that I haven't done...that.

I - Ok. But you'd be happy to do that in the future, if the opportunity occurred?

P206 - Yeah. Yeah, no problem.

[Giving confidence]

I think, it's about, often it's confidence. It's access to learning. So access to books and papers and journals etc.

[P200 FI]

...and a mentor often is about, it's that softer support about 'you can do this', 'have you thought about?' etc, etc, rather than necessarily teaching or instruction. [P200 FI]

[Giving practical advice]

It's also about having an understanding about how you do it. So, sometimes it's-you just need some guidance on searches, you know, how to use the library, all that sort of stuff. But people have probably forgotten, or never have from their qualifying days. So, I think that's something that would be quite good. [P200 FI]

[NIHR Fellowship]

I was in close contact, with someone who was hoping to get a fellowship and went through, we did quite a lot of work together, looking at the NIHR fellowship. [colleague forename], her and I. [P200 FI]

[PhD research]

...in terms of the framework across the region, I'd be more than happy to examine or to mentor people on doctoral, undertaking doctoral research here, particularly around those areas that I was talking about, you know, I'd add to them social pedagogy, which is a particular interest of mine, which I've written quite a lot about...and community development and youth work, whatever and so I'm happy to be involved in those kind of things. [P208 FI]

...yeah, I'm not quite sure of the structure to be honest. I think that something which was built around those partnerships that there could be a doctoral sub-group of it or something yeah...and-but, senior academics or experienced academics like, people like myself, that have been involved for a long time and could contribute to that. [P208 FI]

Of the 7 (of $n=9$) HEI participants who were interested in helping to support and promote research within the Wessex region, ($n=3$) were interested in acting as a mentor (equating to 42.8% of those interested in supporting research and 33.3% of all participants). Only 3 (of $n=9$) HEI academic staff (33.3%) noted they had previously provided support for research projects and/or staff within the Wessex region since joining their organisation.

These mentoring opportunities had allowed them to give practical advice, inspire confidence in mentees and offer 'soft' support. Support had also included helping a potential NIHR Fellowship applicant with guidance around the application process (until the practitioner had needed to abandon the application due to their Local Authority (LA) withdrawing support). Mentoring of students was also undertaken (see *Logistical enablers - Students*), in addition to supervising doctoral students and examining internal and external PhD Vivas. One participant involved in these activities was keen to support a regional doctoral support group, if it could be formed either online or face-to-face.

Desire to promote good principles

...I think, well that should be a priority and I make that a priority in my teaching, you know, it's kind of, I think it's really important because as academics, we are promoting those notions [P208 FI]

...there should be ways of working with people, which are much more enabling, are much more concerned with hearing what they've got to say, you know, it's kind of...rather than just imposing very limited structures on them, you know. [P208 FI]

A desire to promote good principles in teaching and pass on research inquisitive perspectives to students was expressed by some participants. This included rebuilding social work to promote the idea of listening and encouraging people to promote voice and reflect on the power dynamics of relationships they might make in the course of their role and how these areas could be improved.

Desire to research

Everything, as a researcher and an academic, research underpins my world view and every part of my working life. [P202]

Currently working on my PhD- reading and writing. Learning about research methodology and methods,

getting a grounding in research philosophy. Research for me means that I am furthering and challenging my own thinking, develop ideas and create mechanisms to take those ideas forward and test them. [P204]

It is a central element of education and should be at the heart of practice. Research is really exciting and I want to go beyond being a consumer of research towards being far more active in producing research [P205]

[talking about encouragement from degree]

So, I've always loved the learning and for me the learning comes with the research, my dissertation eighteen years ago was based on my own research. I studied in [country 1] so the concept was different around dissertation, it wasn't just a literature review. And that really took my interest and hasn't stopped really. [P204 FI]

[Desire to Analyse]

...you know, doing, collecting data I find quite fascinating as well, interviews, that you're doing, you know. That would be something. [P201 FI]

I mean I've got some really rich data that I want to unpack. [P201 FI]

[Desire to Publish]

I - ...have you got a particular interest in continuing on your research around [research area]?

P201 - Absolutely I have. And I have got a couple of papers that I'm dying to write.

...and we've written that up. And that's been published in Social Work Education and we're working on a second article out of that research as well, which we're hoping to get published, yeah. So we're beginning to change it, yeah. [P208 FI]

A desire to research was expressed in a number of different ways. Research was seen as a key part of creating evidence for service provision, challenge existing processes and enquire into social issues. Occasionally underpinning and helping participants to progress through their working life, or influence their world view. Sometimes the initial desire had come through strongly or been inspired during their degree programme, sometimes during doctoral study. It could also be seen in comments regarding the desire to reanalyse data, which had been collected previously or a wish to work on publishing articles around issues previously investigated. This was partially based on a wanting to see publications emerge from doctoral studies.

Desire to seek research funding

...however, in order to run those kind of events I need funding. And for that I need to write applications for funding. [P204 FI]

I - So how are you able to sort of find the time and the inclination to actually put that bid in? Have you, have you had second thoughts about doing that? Or...

P200 - Oh No, no. No-no-no. No, I'm excited about it! [sounding enthused]

I - Yeah. Well that's good to hear. Yeah.

P200 - I can't wait for it. If, if we got it I'd be absolutely thrilled to bits.

[talking about re-activating old NIHR bid]

...and anyway it is a possibility, yeah. I'd have to give it serious consideration and do like a, quite a long run into it, you know, so we could re-activate the contacts and all that... [P208 FI]

[NIHR funding sources]

Currently building a stage 1 NIHR bid re developing [research area] [P200]

As a project team we might apply for funding to boost our capacity to undertake more in depth research. [P205]

[Non NIHR funding sources]

BA Leverhulme Small Grants funding. [P202]

None yet - seeking funding for a number of projects [P203]

There are different project ideas around residential child care where we aim to apply for different funders to develop a longitudinal study into outcomes for [research area]. [P205]

Notably, two thirds of participants ($n=6$) had submitted bids for external funding for research, or for research training or development in their current role. Participants had submitted 13 bids in total of which 3 had been successful – a percentage success rate of 23%. All participants were also asked whether they had any future plans to submit a research application or career development application linked to research within the next year. Just under a half ($n=4$) (44.4%) were planning to submit a bid to the NIHR whilst $n=3$ (33.3%) were planning to submit bids to other funding sources. The drive to search for funding came across strongly in several comments, in some cases when unsuccessful applications had been made previously.

Desire to upskill

[Research upskilling]

I - Do you think there's more that they could be doing, in terms of helping you develop your research career, than they are at the moment? Do you think it's up to you to have to sort of you know, skill yourself up...

P206 – Yes.

[Promotion]

But also to, yeah, further my own career, in how far...but I'm, I'm told I need to build up my research profile, in order to ever get promotion. [P204 FI]

[move from practice to HEI]

I've been in frontline practice for over twenty years and was looking for something different, anyway. And I've always been keen to well I've always been a continuous learner I think and engaged with learning. And I enjoy an academic environment. It was a-is a, was a great privilege to come and do further research. [P200 FI]

[Doctoral level]

I started the PhD on the [dd/mm] last year. So I was already in post with [university location 3]. [P204 FI]

[Presenting research at conferences]

...the event we've got tomorrow, which is that conference around practice education, I'm going to present some of my own research, it put that deadline in for me to do the reading, do the writing and develop something that I can talk with confidence and competence about, to an audience of 200 practitioners. [P204 FI]

One reason for a desire to upskill was to improve career opportunities to progress and increase the chances of promotion. Career pathways were generally clearer in HEIs than in LAs and utilising research as an aid to progress upwards was mentioned by some participants. Some had

moved from practice into academia initially. These reasons included holding a lifelong ambition to move, getting frustrated with constant structural reorganisations at the LA they worked for and also the need to work somewhere where they were able to perform more research as a part of their role. Once in an academic role, Masters and Doctoral studies were more likely to be supported and undertaken in a more encouraging environment if they had not been previously achieved. New skills which might be learnt included article publication, conference presentation and integrating research elements into teaching. All were seen as being potential ways of upskilling within an academic environment.

Future organisational inertia

*[talking about changes occurring in future, concerning the relevance/priority of research]
I hope it will increase and be given hours to pursue research [P201]*

Higher priority [P203]

I anticipate that there will be a much stronger focus on research. Especially, because there is a greater organisational demand on producing research output. I can see that a great organisational focus on research will make a significant difference. [P205]

Personally, HEI academic staff are working in an environment that they hope might be more positive towards research in the future, but which they pragmatically acknowledge is getting increasingly difficult to pursue, with more HEIs prioritising 'core' teaching over research. From a positive perspective, this might not affect their belief that they have the power to help affect positive change or affect their approach or desire to pursue and apply for research funding and work on research projects.

Goodwill

There's many a conversation...and, as I've said before, there's no shortage of goodwill I think...it's just people having the time to see these ideas through. [P200 FI]

The goodwill of staff was seen as one enabler, in helping to push forward a positive research approach within their organisation.

Improved time management

...you know, we all of us, use the excuse of 'no, we have no time'...for all of the various things. Don't we? And it is a bit of a cliché, but, often time can be found by-in other ways or you know, by organising ourselves properly. And I'm an arch faffer, so I'm no person to say this...so, I, I wouldn't want it to be seen as an excuse. [P200 FI]

One participant acknowledged that focusing on being more pro-active with their time management might enable them to work more effectively on research activity. Although this carries the caveat of whether this might only be applicable in some cases, when faced with differing organisational demands.

Organisational enablers

Career development

*[talking about changes occurring in future, concerning the relevance/priority of research]
Involvement with the [university location 4] Research Pathway [P208]*

I think if it's linked to a research career development. I think that will sum up a lot of them. [P206 FI]

Having a solid research career framework to work towards was viewed as a key mechanism for stimulating research work within HEIs. This could include highlighting the training opportunities which were on offer to improve aspects of research skills.

COVID-19 - Organisation

...so I see it a bit as a two-edged sword, because yeah, they wouldn't have been able to come on a-on a Friday afternoon, from one 'til four to join the teaching. But what they could do, is do a half an hour, or an hour pre-recorded lecture with me on their specialist area. [P204 FI]

So, I've been able to increase practitioner input into my unit, because we went to do some online teaching. And I'm now still using some pre-recorded lectures, I've been able to get judges and solicitors to join me, which otherwise wouldn't have been happening. [P204 FI]

We are back on to standard placement, but actually we've developed those. We've, we've had filmed case studies made, to enhance that experience for students because we-at one point, we didn't know whether we'd be going back into, you know, a lockdown of, of the magnitude of the first one...so we have developed it, but it's sitting on a shelf and it's something that I like to think I've got in my back pocket should anything else go awry. [P201 FI]

So CO-when COVID came, it actually came with like opportunities to start writing some grants and stuff and some of them were, they were not successful. But I think it was actually an opportunity at the same time. It was my decision, it challenged...but it was an opportunity to try and write some, some grants in relation to COVID-19. [P206 FI]

The drive to implement online learning – sometime overnight – had caused an incredible increase in workload for some participants – notably when pre-COVID-19 there had not been a tremendous online learning presence in some HEIs. However, this had also afforded new opportunities in this area which could be investigated and utilised in the future as new ways of engaging with students and involving practitioners. This method of delivery – with benefits such as anytime accessibility and reusable components - might have the knock-on effect of helping to save academics time in the future, although this was as yet unproven.

COVID-19 had also offered opportunities to develop research bids in the areas of social care participants were interested in (see *Research skills – Research inquisitive*).

COVID-19 - Students

...but some of the students that they did things like had meetings in parks and things, which democratised the relationship in a sense, you know that, when, when you're in, you're a social worker and you're visiting somebody's house, you go in with a power dynamic which is different, yeah...and when you're having a walk

along in a park and sit on a bench and have a conversation that, is to some extent breaks down some of the power dynamics, yeah. So, that was a positive thing and I'm not sure that that's been carried through into current practice, you know... [P208 FI]

In the view of one participant COVID-19 had offered opportunities for students to see a different power dynamic in their relationship with service users, democratising the relationship as meetings were carried out in the open rather than within a housed environment. However, they were sceptical about whether this approach would carry through into the post-COVID working environment.

Curriculum development

Yeah, so I think there's ways of delivering the curriculum, which we could change, yeah. And I think that's a really good example and [university location 4] is starting to do that now... [P208 FI]

...and like, in [university location 2], for example, they work very closely with a service user group, and they test the students through the use of things like drama and kind of performance and, and film and whatever and so their work, they-the students work with a service user to explore their life histories and say so, as an example. And to allow that experience to be explored in a way which is sensitive to the service users and which they can express through performance and all the students go 'I'm not doing that, I'm really, I'm not interested in performing'...[laughs]...by the time the unit is finished they're kind of promoting it almost I think...[laughs]...and they, they get a real buzz about performing to the cohort, yeah. Some of them...and I think, occasionally to outside people as well, yeah. [P208 FI]

...so I think that there are much greater opportunities to promote new ways of delivering the curriculum, which kind of give us a more kind of empathetic, balanced workforce, you know, it's kind of...and then hopefully, they can transfer that into practice... [P208 FI]

Curriculum development was seen by one participant as a way of enabling change within the social work arena and of also promoting a more balanced, empathetic and research positive workforce. They had been able to enact positive change by helping to develop and enhance the social work curriculum in universities to include a greater emphasis on creative methods of teaching.

Evolving organisation

In terms of the university, you know, we have a [model name] model here, and that's great, and I, and I, certainly, us in our team, we're all, all active researchers in one way or another and we're all active in practice. Again, in one way or another. And we all teach. [P200 FI]

It doesn't matter how much work I'm doing in my role at the moment, and that actually a lot of it is focused on, practice development, well if we're looking at [model name], yeah, it's focused on practice and education... [P204 FI]

...I haven't seen any changes. But every departmental level, I know there are, there are discussions now to try and increase research outputs through joint publications with students, things like that. [P206 FI]

I - Yeah. So in terms of research, the directives are coming from higher up about 'Hey! This is a good idea to try and get more people publishing'.

P206 - Yes, it's a good idea. And I think there is a...[thinking]....another initiative that involves the, I think, the

Dean, where there's a weekly kind of session, to just discuss research within the department...something positive in studied research.

[changes occurred since joining]

It has been much more possible to undertake research. [P205]

Well, [university location 4] are trying to develop their research culture, yeah... [P208 FI]

[supporting research bids]

But, you know, we put the application in, and it was supported by the faculty, in [university location 2], and stuff, anyway, yeah, but... [P208 FI]

Participants had identified areas of evolution within their HEIs that might help improve the possibility of a positive outlook for pursuing research. The overall mood was that the desire was there individually to pursue research projects, but that time was precious and strategic demands during the pandemic had focused organisations on teaching as the core objective. Some research had also had to be curtailed due to COVID-19. Differing HEI models of overall strategic direction, role requirements and career frameworks garnered varying allowances for research activity. Sometimes this depended on the status of the HEI and the historic background of how the HEI had developed, in relation to the balance between research and teaching. There was similar thematic divergence with research positive initiatives highlighted within some HEIs– such as looking at ways of encouraging increased research outputs, stimulating discussions about ongoing departmental research projects and supporting the development of bids - but not others.

Funding training

[talking about doctoral funding]

I can only do this now because...I've got a contract with [university location 3]. [P204 FI]

I completed the research leadership project management course that I enrolled through, through [university location 3]. I think the department or was it the faculty organised some training, with a consultant firm. And then I managed to attend that and I think that one was also very helpful. Because it touched on a lot of topics, I mean, developing the project, I mean, managing the time...you know, dealing with rejection, all those other, other issues. [P206 FI]

HEIs came across positively in wanting to advance career development within their organisation (especially in comparison to the LA environment where some participants had previously worked). Funding for training was only ever discussed positively, however other organisational demands might mean that although the financial encouragement was there, it wasn't always backed up by allowing time for some studying to take place within normal working hours.

Managerial

[encouraging doctoral qualifications]

...there were also quite a lot of students and some of those would have been colleagues within the team as well. And I mean, I was trying to promote the idea that we should raise the level of PhDs within the social

work academic team at [university location 2], yeah... [P208 FI]

...We were, were, I think we had...[counting]...two, three, four, with myself, so there were four doc-people with doctorates and there were at least another four working towards doctorates, yeah. So we were, had increased the level of doctoral input into the programme, into the academic side of the programme considerably I think... [P208 FI]

Research positive managerial positions were seen as a key force in being able to champion, facilitate and support additional initiatives in this area. This included promoting the idea of upskilling staff via doctoral study.

Mentorship initiatives

...the other thing is, I know that there is provision for staff to look for mentors and mentorship...which is fine. I've gone out and reached out to some people and I think I haven't, I haven't seen the results yet, but I think maybe, it could be helpful. [P206 FI]

HEI initiatives around mentoring schemes and linking up mentees with possible mentors were described in one HEI as being a positive enabler. Although participants who described the scheme were waiting to find out who they had been linked up with at time of interviewing. So, it was too early to tell how helpful this had been at the current time.

Academic enablers

Practitioner involvement in teaching

...and we have-it, it strengthens links. So they're the people who provide our placements primarily...Because we're a half and half course and I say we have lists of practitioners who come in and support us with teaching and learning. [P200 FI]

...when I was in the teaching partnership, one of our workstreams was to make greater links between academia and practice. Whether that was essentially my role. And part of that was to bring practitioners into teaching. And get academics out into practice a little bit more... [P204 FI]

...generally the feedback from certainly our qualifying degree students in, in [feedback system name] is that they really value the practitioners coming into teaching, that really enhances their learning and it makes the links to what practice will look like in my unit for law and social policy, it, it brings it home to them that they actually need to know pieces of legislation. [P204 FI]

[Integrating doctoral work into teaching]

So, at the moment I'm what I refer to now as to cross pollinating, so I've taken my, my research interests and have taken on unit leadership for a couple of units where I can use my research as part of the teaching. Which is really fulfilling and is, is an in-incredibly creative place to be...[thinking]...but it's difficult to say that some of those parts of that role are then PhD related, when actually they're more teaching related and unit development. [P204 FI]

From an academic perspective, securing practitioners to become involved in teaching was a great way of helping to embed research into teaching practice. If the research area involved practitioners this could also be incorporated into teaching sessions with current students to give them a better understanding of certain areas and highlight the value of research to them.

Service user involvement in teaching

[Inclusion in teaching sessions]

...and she is coming into my teaching session, actually, on Friday, to talk about the legal implications of, and the decision making in her families case. And that is a, a huge privilege for the students to be able to listen to that first-hand account, and having to sit there and listen and not just dismiss it as, 'Well, this is just one person's voice really'. [P204 FI]

[Inclusion in teaching sessions]

No. I don't think it's necessarily it's a challenge. I don't think it's a challenge. Because, you know, we, for our teaching, we work with, with PI as well. So there are people who are really eager to do things. [P206 FI]

[inclusion in curriculum]

...and yeah, in [university location 4] at the moment I use some of the service user's from [university location 2] in my teaching and they come in and they'll, they'll talk about the social medical models for instance. But in a way which is based on a real life understanding, not just a theoretical model of what the social work and medical model means, you know. They use theory because they understand it see, the way that theory governs the way that they've been dealt with, yeah. [P208 FI]

From an academic perspective, encouraging service users to become involved in teaching sessions was a great way for them to provide a different point of view concerning services and issues, provide potential research ideas and contributing to more informative and useful discussions and learning opportunities.

Logistical enablers

Academic

...well we haven't actually filled in the paperwork entirely. [work colleague forename] I think is drafting it.. [P200 FI]

...I actually approached somebody to, to join the team from within, within my project. Someone who had just recently joined [university location 3]. And I just thought ok, maybe it would be a good idea to, to be working together. [P206 FI]

...I've made contact with [university research group 1 lead name] and we've had some discussions. I could see maybe becoming connected with some of the work that is happening there. Compared to what is happening within my own department, if you get what I mean? [P206 FI]

[curriculum]

...but I think, but I've also worked with colleagues in another university. So we're doing elements of that as far as [university location 6] do some, [university location 8], I'm working closely with [university location 7], where we are trying to build creativity into the curriculum in [university location 7], because I was an external there, external examiner there, and I was also external PhD examiner there, yeah. And so I probably had a good relationship with the team and some of, yeah, they came, [university location 2]'s been done and they've introduced it in [university location 7]... [P208 FI]

[talking about research funding challenges]

I suppose, it's just about networking with people. Then-and then it starts from there. [P206 FI]

HEI colleagues working in the same organisation were mentioned as a positive research enabler in terms of helping to drive forward research initiatives and assist in the development

of applications, papers and research documentation (such as ethics applications). Also assisting in curriculum development. Internal research groups were also highlighted as a useful means of collaborating and progressing mutual areas of research interest, as were external academic colleagues who were viewed as a great source of networking opportunities for linking up with new contacts and initiatives and assisting with research funding bids.

LAs

[Academics into Practice]

...and we would go off and do a mini-literature review because practitioners don't have access to the [university location 3] library, or any research journals...and we would then do a synopsis of that and would bring it back to the team and share what latest research was out there on that specific topic. Now I had heavily invested into that and, and let's say advertised it in the local authorities, wherever I went... [P204 FI]

...because it...it really could have been a model that would have enabled academics to do short pieces of work with the local authority, really be aware of what are the practice issues? Make strong links with practice, practitioners could have made those links with academics and actually, seen as not as is a unicorn or people in an ivory tower. People who are really having a vested interest in making services operate really well and, and offer guidance and well, yeah, that consultancy, a different level of supervision maybe. [P204 FI]

[encouraging doctoral study]

I mean I think it would be good for universities to go into local authorities and talk about doctoral level studies, yeah. It's kind of a, and get the organisations to think about how they can provide support for that, yeah it's kind of, even if they, you know, the applicant pays half the fees and the organisation pays the other half, or something, you know, but it's, it seems to me that would really motivate some of the people, or might affect people's commitment to the organisation and prevent burnout, you know, it's kind of, particularly if they're researching a topic which is important to their practice... [P208 FI]

[Generic]

...each of the local authorities have workforce development leads, who we work closely with. Placements and what have you. And recruitment, and we work with the local-with the Principal Social Workers. [P200 FI]

[Mentorship]

...well I think there's, there's scope for some shared work between the university and the local authorities in this instance, in social work. [P200 FI]

We could be doing some research mentoring. And so, my colleague [work colleague forename] had also tried to establish, and I don't quite know where it's got to like a joint role, where...[thinking]...he was sitting in the local authority a morning a week, able to access their systems for research purposes. So that kind of-but I'm not sure with that, where that sits now actually... [P200 FI]

[Masterclasses]

We can do, we, we run masterclasses for them, through the teaching partnership. [P200 FI]

[New Unit Development/CPD]

...my involvement is mostly around again, unit development that has been purchased or spot purchased or requested by the teaching partnership... [P204 FI]

...and a couple of local authorities where I've got those, those links because of the business of being the CPD framework lead essentially and the principal social workers are engaged in, well sourcing training and CPD opportunities for their staff. [P204 FI]

[Teaching Partnership]

...a lot of my old colleagues and new ones come in and support me with teaching...So yes, yes. And they're part of the teaching partnership that we have here...It, it's a group of local authorities. So [LA location 3], [LA location 1] and [LA location 4], and the university work together to support learning and teaching [P200 FI]

...we're in conversations now about... one of the ideas that the teaching partnership was that we might involve, get involved in when practitioners have research questions, but that's never really taken off...So yeah, we've got various links and there's lots of conversations. [P200 FI]

And there's other things. So with the teaching partnership, which has just been renewed, and we're looking at student research workers, research off-well researchers in the local authorities, we're looking at ways that as part of their qualifying programme for the Masters students, they have the option of a service improvement project and working with local authorities to identify something that they could use as their project type thing, you know, that the local authorities want doing. [P200 FI]

And part of that was to bring practitioners into teaching. And get academics out into practice a little bit more... [P204 FI]

I've had a, well a kind of part of my role in the teaching partnership was to do an academic consultancy in practice...where practitioners were encouraged to essentially share their, their problems, their practice problems [P204 FI]

HEIs have a number of links into LAs, which varied across the Wessex region in their level of interaction. For example, HEI academic staff might meet with workforce development leads to discuss placements, Principal Social Workers (PSW) for teaching partnerships and training requirements and other practitioners for mentoring and research support (if asked). Also providing consultancy to discuss various aspects of social care, such as improving inclusion strategies. LAs and PSWs sometimes provided input into training requirements for new HEI programme unit development and CPD unit creation.

By utilising the embedded Researcher in Residence model (Marshall et al., 2014), the possibility of an Academics into Practice scheme (academic residency in a LA) had been investigated between one LA and HEI. This was still in the early stages of its development and so it was too early to comment on how this was progressing when the interview took place.

Promoting doctoral opportunities within LA locations and mentorship relationships - which was tentatively being investigated by LAs and HEIs in some cases - were also mentioned.

Teaching Partnerships between HEIs and LAs served a number of purposes and the areas covered varied across the region. These included supporting learning and teaching, bringing practitioners into teaching, attempting to place academics into practice more often, offering practitioners support with research questions and practice issues and looking into future possibilities around student research workers in LAs. Masterclasses had been run face-to-face and also online (during COVID-19) as a part of this relationship.

LA research partners had also provided staff to participate in Steering Committees, which would help to oversee research if it was funded and also offer help with initial bid preparation.

Practitioners

...and we held a listening event last week, with practitioners to find out what their research priorities might be, so that was good. [P200 FI]

...practitioners have contributed to projects, so one of my research projects they've contributed to. We've got researchers, and we're, we are just in the process of...so, some of the research projects that I've been involved with, they've acted as pilot people. [P200 FI]

Practitioners were identified as a driver in suggesting what the current research priorities and issues were within LAs, as they were working in this environment on a daily basis. Listening events were identified as one method of obtaining their views, ideas and feedback. Practitioners had also contributed to research projects either as partners or as pilot participants.

Research Project Steering Committee

[talking about drawing from peer partnership]

We need to, as a steering group, need to think about how we're going to involve others. And we need to hand that back to the steering group to, to discuss, so yeah, because of course, people are donating their time and, and stuff, and it needs to be something that, that is meaningful to them. [P200 FI]

...we've got, in preparation for an NIHR bid at the moment we've got a steering group, made up primarily of local authority partners. So they're helping us. And I'll oversee the research if we do get funded. [P200 FI]

...so for example, with this, the NIHR bid we're looking at, that's why we've got the steering group early. So that its stakeholder led. [P200 FI]

Project steering committees (made up of different groups like practitioners, service users and academics) were seen as a positive enabler for research. From early in the research design and ideas generation stage, through to managing the day to day issues concerning the research project.

Service users

[Peer Partnerships]

So we're very fortunate, with the peer partnership here at [university location 3], we can draw on those experts with lived experience [P200 FI]

[talking about drawing from peer partnership]

...and in fact when I was doing my [area of interest] work, had quite a few volunteers, on that front as well. So that was quite good. [P200 FI]

[Inclusion in research papers]

Yeah. I've been very privileged to be able to work with a woman with lived experience, she's been a victim of domestic abuse and we've written a book chapter together on social exclusion and in doing that we've built up a relationship, we've met a lot to talk about her experiences...I was able to put some context around the legal stuff and helped her to understand some of the decision making. So she, I think is now less angry towards individuals, but more against the system, if that makes sense? [P204 FI]

And get them to co-create alternative ways of delivering educational experiences and I can't see why that model can't be applied to practice... [P208 FI]

A service user peer partnership at one HEI had allowed staff to draw on experts with lived experience during some of their research projects. Service users were seen as another positive enabler for reflecting on, driving forward and inspiring research ideas. They had been able to participate in research project steering groups, as research study participants, contribute to the production of research papers and book chapters and also take part in a variety of teaching sessions to highlight real life rather than theoretical perspectives, which might stimulate new research ideas.

Students

[Regular meetings after graduation]

I meet with Principal Social Workers quarterly. And that's generally about, around BAME issues. Because some of, some of that is quite interesting in, in you know, different cultural perspectives and how that works out in practice. In terms of Social, you know BAME Social Workers and also in terms of the success of BAME students, once they've qualified. So, the alumni, in their first year, assessed year in practice. [P201 FI]

I am currently engaged in a research project with students from racially minoritized group on their experiences of social work placements [P207]

Mentoring of students [P207]

Regular meetings after graduation had been arranged on a quarterly basis with PSWs in LAs to look at student issues and potential research topics in one instance. The relationship between social care students and academic members of staff – which could include mentoring - was also noted as being an enjoyable aspect of their job and also an inspiration for potential research opportunities. This academic relationship might also be maintained once a student had graduated and subsequently started working in practice.

Research skills

Confidence level

I have been involved in research since the early 2000s (over 20 years). Either collecting, analysing, evaluating or writing it up (mostly all three). [P202]

Confidence in the ability of participants to research was high, with all who were interested in researching ($n=9$), being confident in researching.

Online training

...the best I could hope for with that is to go to a workshop, an online workshop on how to write a bid or an application for something. And I don't think that that's necessarily, I think that's quite generic, so I'd have to take from that what I could. [P201 FI]

Whilst not an ideal solution, online workshops were described as a possible cost-effective and time friendly method for obtaining training on research skills - like writing grant applications.

Research Inquisitive and originator of ideas

[Origination of idea]

...it's the continuation of a previous research project that was funded by [funder]. And we were looking at opportunities to-where next to take this work. [P200 FI]

[Future research Ideas]

I was talking to somebody from the BAME community...who volunteers with us for that, and they you know, said how strange it was that their service that they-they're helping to run, there were no Asian people there. And they wondered what the reasons for that were, where, how they could find out. So, you know, that's an area of research... [P201 FI]

[background]

So I was doing my post-doctoral work as you'll-I wasn't tied to a particular project, but I did do a number of research activities across a range of projects. And it was really interesting. It was, it was a great change for me, from working in frontline practice for all of those years. [P200 FI]

[COVID-19]

And what I've done is, I've tried to build that research culture in [university location 4] by, we carried out a research project around COVID and the impact on work placements for students... [P208 FI]

Being inquisitive and an ability to visualise new ideas for research projects from previous research data; being able to originate new research ideas from conversations with service users, practitioners, and third sector contacts; and working on research ideas with social work students within an academic context, were all research skills described. A background of working in practice previously had also been a catalyst for a number of prospective research reflections and subsequent investigations within social care. COVID-19 had also been another prompt for a number of different research projects in this area.

Training suggested

...with research methodologies, I mean, I am quite comfortable with them...but I think it's about, any new changes, you know. But ok, if there's a new research method, or if there are some changes of doing certain things, you know. I would be interested to know, ok these are now the changes. Because I'm also involved in teaching research at level six. [P206 FI]

Participants were open to continuous training to improve their research skills. Notably, all participants were interested in taking up further training opportunities on writing grant applications ($n=9$) and $n=7$ on documenting people's experiences. Also high on the list were career development, research methodologies, service evaluation, service development and needs assessment (all $n=5$).

Access to research

Subscriptions

BASW, JSWEC, SHIP/SWEN [P201]

ECR Network [P203]

I suppose there are the other ones, like Research Professional that I, I mean I subscribe. They regularly send through, funding bids. [P206 FI]

I - ...and do either of those send out information about research, potential research bids?

P206 - Yeah they do.

I - ...did you see what you were going to apply for through there, or did you hear about that somewhere else?

P206 - [thinking]...no, I, I saw them there. The grant that I applied for, I saw it there.

[are you a member of an organisation or subscribed to any mailing lists?]

No but I should be. [P207]

A variety of subscriptions were described, which were beneficial in terms of obtaining research information. Individual BASW membership could include access to the British Social Work Journal for an additional fee (although this journal should usually be available within most HEI library subscriptions). The Early Career Researcher Network, Joint Social Work Education and Research Conference, British Sociological Association, British Society for Gerontology, Research Professional and Southampton, Hampshire, Isle of Wight and Portsmouth (SHIP) SWEN were also mentioned individually. Only two participants (22.2%) did not mention subscribing to any mailing lists.

Research support

Awareness of support services

...so [work colleague forename] and I will be driving it...He's attended various NIHR events and things. [P200 FI]

...I supervise a number of doctoral students and so the NIHR is always an interesting place to go to, to find out other information. [P200 FI]

And so, yeah it's, it's not somewhere I look at a lot, but it's somewhere that I have in the back of my mind. [P200 FI]

I have the awareness because [PhD supervisor forename] is my supervisor [laughs] but that's as far as my awareness goes... [P204 FI]

I - Ok, so that's your supervisor's let you know about those. That's fine, you know, we're getting that...

P204 - I know she is involved in it...but I've not had any guidance of 'Ooh actually', maybe for the conference we could add funding here...or maybe there's a workshop that you could really attend there, because you, you're now going down this route, and this would be really helpful, and maybe that's what I'm actually looking for, but I've not had it.

[talking about awareness of NIHR/CRN Wessex/ARC Wessex]

Yeah. I wasn't very sure, because it might be something that I've heard people talking about...but not really got

involved in. But that bit, I'm not really sure about, yeah... [P206 FI]

All participants were aware of the NIHR, although there was much less awareness of either ARC Wessex ($n=6$) or CRN Wessex ($n=4$). Colleagues were identified as a good source for originally providing this information, after previously utilising NIHR services or attending NIHR events. Supervisors of HEI academic staff on doctoral studies had provided another source for this information. Awareness had also been prompted through doctoral student supervision and supporting practitioners looking to make applications to the NIHR (such as a Fellowship application).

Use of support services – Internal RDS

I - Yeah. And the interaction between yourselves and RDS – has that been ok?

P200 – Yeah. Yes.

I - So they've been quite good at enabling the bid to the stage you're at with it?

P200 – Yeah.

[talking about internal research support previously available]

But at the particular time we were doing it, I mean, it seems to be quite patchy at the moment, even still. But there's been people brought in to try and drive that forward. [P201 FI]

P206 – ...assistance in writing the bids?

I - In terms of things like looking at how the funding might need to be costed or, you know, maybe getting some support...

P206 – Oh ! [exclaims]...is that what you mean? Oh, yeah, yeah...

I - Yeah.

P206 – ...for that one, that bit was covered by RDS yes.

...an ongoing workshop where the RDS will say if you have a rejected bid, we're looking at repurposing them and then rewriting them and going through sort of like a mock panel and things like that. Yeah, that would be helpful. [P206 FI]

Feedback on internal research and design services (RDS) varied between different HEIs. In some, the service was classed as good whilst in others, unsatisfactory. One department had been affected by the level of professional support staff redundancies, which meant it was running on a reduced number of staff. Initiatives described included an RDS running ongoing workshops to assist with repurposing and rewriting rejected bids.

Use of support services - practicalities

[If Yes to aware, have you used of any of their services?]

No. [P203]

[Online Materials]

I - ...the times that you've used it, there-has it been ok? Is there anything that you could say oh, it would be, you know, it's confusing to find what you're looking for, or...

P200 – Well, I've always found it ok.

Well I've looked at the information around the bid. [P200 FI]

[NIHR Social Care Research Conference]

I've attended a NIHR conference in York when they expanded into social care research [P201]

Absolutely. And I was really impressed with...the fact that it was an open book...they wanted to get, to include social care in their research and...I imagine, I don't know, I think from memory it was spurred on by the government initiative to draw health and social care closer together and it was amazing to hear about the different opportunities that could be developed and actually, you know, the proper-some proper funding to support that...with, with health. Because of their remit had....had been just health I believe, up until that point. [P201 FI]

[talking about things of interest at conference]

...but I remember reading them and thinking 'Oh that's not a particularly good fit with what I'm doing'. So you know, haven't pursued any of that. But it's something that again, I would like to be involved with and support... [P201 FI]

...it was very inspirational, but I can't actually give you any details, because I don't think there was any [chuckles] at that conference...because I think it was very much, you know, they were setting out their stall and asking us how they could effectively include social care into what they were doing and, and the, you know, the adjustments that they would need to do that. [P201 FI]

NIHR Applied Research Collaboration [P208]

While there was great awareness of the NIHR only $n=4$ participants had actually utilised NIHR services. One participant had visited and made use of the NIHR website, including looking at NIHR stage 1 bid information and the various support information around the NIHR Fellowship application process. Another had attended the first NIHR Social Care Research conference and was very complimentary about the event and it acting as an inspiration for research projects in the sector (although acknowledging that this was at an early, exploratory stage). Another had utilised the NIHR Applied Research Collaboration, whilst a fourth had attended training events and had made use of one-to-one advice and guidance (both of these participants were not interviewed, so no further data on these aspects could be collected).

Research barriers

Research barriers are categorised as themes and sub-themes which might prevent or limit a positive research environment for HEI academic staff.

Personal barriers

Career change

[talking about changes occurring in future, concerning the relevance/priority of research]

None for me due to me being at the end of my career [P207]

As career changes occur, this can impact on how many research projects HEI academic staff might want to participate in – for example, as thoughts of retirement emerged.

Demands of the jobs

You know, it's all these multiple roles and it does feel a bit much really. [P200 FI]

[talking about changes concerning relevance/priority of research since joining]

None, opportunities are limited and generally take place in the summer months while on leave. [P201]

Time is the number one limit to research capacity. [P202]

...it is a huge role. It also comes with...[thinking]...a legacy. And its own issues there. So a lot of my work is picking up bits and pieces of things that have been managed in a certain way, but aren't necessarily of [to themselves] what choice?...[thinking of how to phrase]...of good academic standards... [P204 FI]

Because they're not necessarily seen as vacancies. Because we've been very good at soaking the work up and just get on with it and become really smart in, I dunno, in my case it's cooking on a Sunday for the rest of the week. But that's time management, so I don't need to worry about cooking dinner in the evening when I still have some work to do, some emails to reply. [P204 FI]

...my boss was doing my job before me, and, you know, she says to me 'You know, I don't know how you manage', she said, 'Because we haven't, didn't have half of what you have to report on, develop, manage'. That when she was doing it, to what you do now. And it seems that expectations have increased, but, there aren't the bodies to actually do the work. [P201 FI]

So for example I'm covering three jobs at the moment. I'm also the admissions tutor, which, you know, at certain points in the year, particularly sort of like December to April, May is, could be a full-time job...in itself. Well, not a full-time job, but it's certainly something that a lecturer could do as well. [P201 FI]

...the reality I suppose, I'm teaching three modules. But even so, that would be considered a full-time role in itself. Just teaching three modules. [P201 FI]

I think we're approaching the stage where both practice and the academy are stretched too thinly to meaningfully take part in research, due to a lack of qualified personnel and funding. [P201]

[Course/Programme Leader]

... it's, sometimes I think it's a bit like running my own business, you know [laughs]...but without the ability to hire and fire. [P201 FI]

And they're wanting, well certainly the Dean here is wanting us to take on more managerial responsibilities, but we don't have the power that that role needs to have behind it, you know...so it seems to be rather a nonsense. And just another addition to our, well to my role...which is being passed down again. [P201 FI]

[further support might help you apply for future funding]

To relinquish the Programme Lead role. [P200]

Participants continually described the demands of the job as affecting their time and energy to engage in research based activities (these comments covered many pages of data). Academic roles were seeing a lot more administrative responsibilities being added to them (partially as a response to the numbers of professional staff HEI's were employing being reduced). Demands for their time covered a lot more areas than previously. Recruitment challenges in the sector were impacting on the number of staff available to teach, putting more pressures on those remaining. In addition, the drive to move to online learning and arrange social work

placements during COVID-19 had placed an immense amount of extra work onto academics in the last two years. Participants noted that the time they were allocated to be bought out wasn't always able to be used for research, due to other pressures.

Particular roles each had particular demands. For example, the Course/Programme leader role required a lot of additional managerial and administrative responsibility, whilst at the same time parts of this responsibility were excluded (such as participating in recruitment) making the role more difficult.

Desire to mentor/provide support

Also, workloads in academia are quite excessive, so time for research and supporting research will be needed. [P202]

...and I don't know whether the Social Work pathway for the Professional Doctorate is still running, but you know in, I can't think of many people within that team, you know, given [lecturer forename]'s commitment to the [region 1] project. I can't see many people who'd have the time really, to be able to support...doctoral research and stuff... [P208 FI]

*[research support challenges]
Time [P203]*

*[academic challenges]
Even when we achieve grants to buy out our time, we are not given it. This makes research virtually impossible to do, particularly large scale projects, supporting researchers in non-academic settings. [P202]*

*[research support challenges]
I am at a very early stage of my research career [P204]*

*[talking about doctoral students supported at moment]
I - So the doctoral students you're actually supervising, are some of those actually, practitioners within the Wessex region?
P200 - No.*

Notably, no participants were currently supporting any Wessex based practitioners who required support/supervision (although they were supporting doctoral students elsewhere in the country). Only 3 (33.3%) said they had previously provided support for research projects and/or staff within the Wessex region since joining their organisation. This suggests a disconnect between linking Wessex HEIs with practitioners who require support. In addition to time constraints and existing demands on their role, another barrier noted in terms of ability to provide support or mentorship was that an academic might be at too early a stage of their career to consider this.

Desire to seek research funding

Not funded - research into use of creative ways to encourage reflection [P203]

And that's where I'm then looking at, well we had looked at the ESRC, but we didn't get the funding. Unfortunately, so my next task would be to potentially look at where else can I get it from? [P204 FI]

[research support challenges]

Gaining funding to do the research. [P202]

[reaction to unsuccessful bid]

I mean if you looked at all the stuff around you know, patient voice and the kind of patient participation and stuff, we met all of those criteria, yeah. Because we had people on the steering group who were either current users or ex-users of services, you know...we had a range of organisations including a consultant psychiatrist involved, we had social work organisations, so I don't know what more we could have done besides that really to be honest... [P208 FI]

A desire to seek external research funding was tempered by the knowledge that it was a very competitive area, with a low percentage of successful bids. Internal funding had a slightly better chance of being funded, but was still seen as more competitive than previously. The ability to satisfactorily process an unsuccessful application and then move on to look at alternative options, was a personal trait that could sometimes negate or override the desire to seek funding again.

Desire to upskill

[talking about move to research pathway role]

P201 - ...I was, I wasn't given a number. What they said to me was that you need to start publishing to around two papers a year. If...

AP – Two papers a year. Ok.

P201 – Before your application would be, even be considered. Considered, yeah.

AP – And that's on top of all your, your other work as well?

P201 – Yeah. So...well I, that will need to happen. So I won't be paid for that. That will need to be happening in, in, in my own time.

[Masters Level]

...the Nursing department, have got a number of staff who haven't finished their Masters, for example, yet. And need to do that. And they're mostly not that the person I've got in mind, she's mostly doing that in her own time, at night, when the children are in bed. [P204 FI]

[Doctoral Level]

...and my PhD work was usually an hour in the morning, between six and seven o'clock, and then at the weekends. And it took quite a lot of time for me to at least put a day in my diary for PhD. But...it's not there yet, that I can just use that time for my research. [P204 FI]

But I also know, I'm privileged enough to yeah, have that rusty camper van, and that my children are of an age where they are very independent and have moved out, and I can say to them, 'Actually I'm, I'm not available at the moment'. And I'm in a secure enough relationship where my husband says 'Yeah, you just do your thing, it's ok'...that isn't the case for very many people. [P204 FI]

[talking about doctoral study length]

No, it ran on while I was teaching as well. And actually, my Viva was only in 2020. So, it was a particularly j-long journey for various different reasons: births, marriages, deaths, accidents, those sorts of, you know, life events that happen. [P201 FI]

[talking about changes concerning relevance/priority of research since joining]

None in my dept - research is not valued it seems! I'm the only person who has a doctorate [P207]

[talking about PhD study time]

...they were potentially, had been given one day a week, you know, but they all complained that it was almost impossible [laughs]...to allocate one day a week, you know, it's kind of, yeah, and you know, particularly at certain points of the year, you know, when they were assessed on deadlines and when there were exam boards and all of that, you know, it's kind of and then it could be almost impossible then... [P208 FI]

Well of course. Yeah, I think you've got to...normally you would do a doctorate part-time if you were an academic wouldn't you?...And so you talk about giving six years commitment here. And it's, you know, given the way the sector is these days, how many people are going to be able to, or are going to be interested in kind of saying 'Well, I want to spend six years doing this' [P208 FI]

In some HEIs the pathway to a potential research career necessitated the member of staff to be publishing at least two academic papers a year before an application would be considered. This was problematic, if an academic had time pressures put on them to be able to satisfactorily fulfil this requirement.

Academic qualifications at a Masters or Doctoral level would usually be undertaken alongside their day-to-day job, if they were not qualified at that level when starting in an HEI post. In addition to the challenges of trying to fit this in with not much research or study time available (forcing a lot of the work into weekends and evenings), some participants noted that life issues would also complicate the path to qualifying and in some cases prolong it. This was especially relevant to the PhD pathway which is a much longer route, with more literature to read and data to collect, analyse and write up than a Masters study. These reasons might be putting off some HEI academic staff from pursuing these options (as comments from one participant highlighted).

Future organisational inertia

[talking about changes occurring in future, concerning the relevance/priority of research]

I think research will become more and more side-lined in academia, particularly in teaching intensive universities. [P202]

Further staffing pressures and teaching pressures. [P204]

Research priority seems to be less and less with education overshadowing it. [P206]

Personally, HEI academic staff are working in an environment that they hope might be more positive towards research in the future, but which they pragmatically acknowledge is getting increasingly difficult to pursue, with more HEIs prioritising teaching over research. From a negative perspective this could make them feel that this is not in their own power to affect. Organisational inertia towards research might also affect them negatively in terms of any future plans that they might have in this area.

Organisational barriers

Career development

[Lack of framework]

...my HEI, we're, there isn't, you know, a post-doc plan for staff members, in terms of research and development.

That's you know, develop-career development where we're going, it's all very, sort of like shadowing, buddying up, with people that are...that, so then what I'm trying to say is that there needs to be more of a framework I think. [P201 FI]

I - ...you think it's really lacking at the moment?

P201 - And I think there is at other universities, I think it's just not mine [laughs]

I - Yeah. Do you think there's ever been one at yours? Or, or...

P201 - No. Because my university historically has been a teaching university for the professions...and for example, I mean, they want to do a fifty-fifty approach now, which is great, in some ways, but they're not resourcing it properly.

...and so that's, you know, so the aspirations are there, but there's a definite disconnect with the resources to enable that to happen. [P201 FI]

One participant described a lack of a structured career development framework for post-doctoral staff in terms of research and development at their HEI. This seemed to be more applicable to historical teaching universities, but they compared poorly to other HEIs, where this wasn't always the case.

Contractual status

[why not planning NIHR and non-NIHR bids in next year]

Yeah, I wouldn't be able to do that at the moment. Unless, I mean, I'm not even sure NIHR would accept a bid from an Associate Lecturer to be honest, yeah. So it's kind of, you know, because by definition you're not permanent... [P208 FI]

Although I hope my post will be made permanent. And that now have continuity of service... [P208 FI]

Contractual status and uncertainty surrounding permanence in some cases affected the ability to think in the longer-term about applying for research funding, if a permanent contract was not in place. This could also apply to post-doctoral research staff on temporary contracts – a situation which has increased in recent years within HEI resourcing.

COVID-19 - Organisation

[Effect on Recruitment]

COVID was a driver, I think, for a lot of redundancies. [P201 FI]

[Effect on job]

And as you can imagine, COVID...[pauses for thought]...it's drastically changed. So I took on the PL role just before we went into lockdown. [P200 FI]

...but there are times when we had to down tools on the research I think, you know, when COVID struck and went into lockdown, we had to concentrate on the teaching. [P200 FI]

[talking about teaching partnership role]

I - Well I, the other thing you've mentioned there was about getting academics out into practice, how, how do you think, how easy do you think that is?

P204 - Well COVID happened didn't it?

A tremendous increase in admin. I mean... [P201 FI]

...[thinking]...it was, it, it, you, overnight, I mean, I sometimes envy those people who were furloughed [laughs]... [P201 FI]

[Online Delivery]

Because suddenly, we had to get very skilled on online delivery. [P200 FI]

...[exasperated], I was already teaching the law and social policy unit, and a CPD unit in my teaching partnership hybrid role. And then COVID happened during that time, so I was, certainly with the law and social policy unit, very busy putting that online. [P204 FI]

It was also a unit that I had reviewed and developed with practice partners because it-it's the one unit we've had a lot of comments, concerns raised that our qualifying degree social work students don't necessarily have the basic knowledge of the what are called 'bread and butter' pieces of legislation for social work...so to bring that into an online environment was a bit of a challenge. [P204 FI]

...the Dean phoned me up at ten o'clock, the night before they decided to close the university and [gender] said 'You need to do whatever you need to do, to put your course online for, for an indefinite period'. And there was an, you know, there was no guidance, it was ex-absolutely, up to individual programmes how they did that. I mean eventually, there was frameworks to work within. But they came along months later. [P201 FI]

...and as well as that, I was then being asked to teach level four students and I'd previously been doing doctoral supervision and teaching MSc students, yeah. So it's quite a big issue for me, on that changing of levels as well, you know, it's kind of yeah, I could just see that MSc students had a solid base, yeah. Than the level four students would have, you know... [P208 FI]

I mean there was no contingency for this, for a-for the pandemic. And it was, really doing the best that we could. [P201 FI]

Three particular impacts of COVID-19 on organisational issues were noted by participants. Firstly, one participant had noticed a rise in the level of redundancies and financial instability at their HEI. Secondly, concerning day-to-day responsibilities, organising teaching over research had become the main priority and there were more administrative responsibilities placed on some staff as HEIs were locked down – down to a combination of reduced professional staff levels and COVID-19 sickness. Thirdly, the drive to implement online learning – sometime demanded overnight when the first UK lockdown occurred – had caused an incredible rise in workload for some participants – notably when pre-COVID-19 there had not been a tremendous organisational online learning presence.

COVID-19 - Research

I - ...during COVID, being able to sort of progress research was probably more difficult, in terms of just business as usual.

P200 – Yeah. Yeah. We were, we were in the middle. So I was PI at that stage on a, on the big, funded project...and we put it on hold for six months and a little bit more actually. Because we just couldn't do it.

P200 -...one of our research partner at that time, prior to COVID hitting, [NHS Trust Location 3] had agreed to be our research partner and then they pulled out, because they had to prioritise COVID-related research.

I - Ok. And didn't come back at any point afterwards then? They just totally pulled out?

P200 – So...they just could not manage it.

I - Yeah.

P200 – Because we were looking at the Mental Capacity Act and Mental Capacity practice. So we found a different research partner, who wasn't NHS. And we found, so [organisation 1] joined us instead. And we were able to complete the project, that was fine, but not the way we'd planned.

... we were trying to do something with an LA around social work resilience. Social workers resilience, sorry, immediately prior to the [chuckles] to COVID, and that just hasn't, it's not been possible to pick that up again...since. Because of the lack of practitioners, available practitioners doing the jobs. [P201 FI]

...if we are to compare with the pre-COVID situation, still I don't, I don't see anything much in the way of publications coming from even before COVID. [P206 FI]

COVID-19 had impacted on HEI research projects with either postponement delays or project cancellations. NHS research partners had had to pull out of one social care project because they had needed to prioritise COVID-19 related research, so a different research partner had been required to be found. Another social worker project around resilience had needed to be cancelled and then had not been able to be restarted post lockdown due to issues with recruiting practitioners. One participant had noted no visible change in the amount of publications coming out prior to COVID-19 in comparison to afterwards, suggesting there had not been a rise in free time during this period for research to take place.

COVID-19 - Staff

[Equipment issues (working from home)]

...I mean certainly that wasn't there. It took the university three months sort of, or longer I think, to you know, get everybody a laptop. Well it was longer, because I think we went down, well it was closer to a year before they-we could get a laptop and so before that, I was trying to do a Zoom teaching on my old, battered laptop... [P201 FI]

I – So again, you're having to fork out for new equipment, or, you know, say your battered old laptop had failed...

P201 – Yeah.

I – And you're three months away, you know, it sounds like the university were caught, quite unprepared for that.

P201 – Yeah. Wholly unprepared.

I – Yeah.

P201 – And it does make one wonder, you know, if a bomb went off in the university or, a major fire, or some other major incident, whether there are any contingencies in for those events, you know.

[DSE (working from home)]

...[lost for words]...they-I can remember when they wanted us to do a risk assessment, of our working environment at home. And we had to measure our office chairs. And we had to send that sort of report in, and then I think mine came back and said your office chair isn't fit for purpose, which frankly, it wasn't, because I hadn't done that volume of work at home. I'd been into the office. So I...it suited my needs and they-so I said 'Right, well, you know, can you get me a chair?' And they said 'No, that's your responsibility'. [P201 FI]

[Effect on Mental Health]

...and that's without all the, you know, because I think at that point it was very worrying for everybody...because people were dying. [P201]

Three impacts on HEI academic staff of COVID-19 were noted. Firstly, equipment demands were placed on staff having to utilise their own equipment in the short term, as HEIs were unprepared for supplying suitable alternatives. This had taken a long time to sort out which left some staff in the position of having to work on small, aging machines for long periods of time. This could put a strain on their physical health and on the equipment and on whether it could meet the demands of some of the new tools being used for online delivery. Benchmarks of home broadband might also not be as quick or stable as in the workplace, depending on the home workplace location.

Secondly, leading on from the equipment being used and the screen size of available equipment, was the position and location of the office environment when working from home and whether it met Display Screen Equipment (DSE) needs. In one case, even though a DSE evaluated report came back saying a chair wasn't fit for purpose, the individual had been placed in the position of having to sort this out, not their HEI. These two areas both highlight a lack of contingency planning within HEIs for emergency situations.

Thirdly, there were many additional stresses and strains placed on HEI academic staff during this time, with priorities shifting, team sizes reducing, impacts on practitioner placements and the drive to put course materials online overnight. As with respondents to the practitioner survey, maintaining good mental health in this changing environment was noted as being particularly challenging.

COVID-19 - Students

[Effect on student applications]

We haven't had the same impact for social work. We thought we might do, particularly with you know, wellbeing and people's mental health, we thought that we'd get a lot of people applying to be social workers, but that doesn't-it certainly hasn't happened, for us. [P201 FI]

[Effect on Placements]

Absolutely, well most, well no, some placements ceased overnight. [P201 FI]

...and it was a-because our regulator, our public service regulator, Social Work England require that s-students as they, you know, the end, as nursing students are required to do so many hours, days in practice placement, and there was no direction [sarcastic chuckle] from Social Work England about what we should do. Whether it was acceptable...to just meet the professional capabilities, rather than meet the hours, the days that they needed, the students needed to do. So we really sort of like had to make decisions without any guidance and just hope that we wouldn't, you know, fall foul of various systems. [P201 FI]

I – Did they come in retrospectively? Social Work England with anything? or...

P201 – All they said to us, well, all they said to us was, write every-evidence everything, write everything down. So for those, so that was another increase in, in workload because obviously, we wouldn't normally do that...because we'd be adhering to the set days that we, that the students need to evidence their practice for. So...[thinking]...it was, it, it, you, overnight, I mean...

...we had with those students that their placements said 'We're sorry, we can't support students now, we're in the frontline, we haven't, you know, we just haven't got time'. Well, we as the programme, you know, as the social work programme, we still had to ensure that those students were doing those days, meeting those

professional capabilities, so we had to then act as practice educators, because a lot of those had gone as well, because they were either called back into frontline practice...or, well yeah, they were called-generally called back into frontline practice, particularly those who were integral to local authority departments, we, we had to instigate something, you know, a simulation of practice. And that was the [name of simulation] that we brought in. Which we had to write from scratch, because, you know, we, we had no contingency for that either. So it was, it was, it was extremely pressured... [P201 FI]

[talking about placements being online]

Yeah. I mean, that's why we did it really. Because we were concerned about the, you know, the impact that would have on students, you know, because in social work in particular I think, it's really important to have the hands-on experience and being able to apply the theory that we provide. To understand the real life situations they're working in...And they weren't really real-life, they were in some cases. [P208 FI]

Two impacts of COVID-19 were noted by participants on students. Firstly, applications for social work had not seen the same positive increase as other disciplines like nursing, since the beginning of the pandemic. This impact might have financial implications for the HEI going forward as a result. Secondly, there were more pressures placed on staff, with placement cancellations due to COVID-19 causing additional resourcing demands. These included a lack of clear guidance from Social Work England and - at short notice - an urgent need to provide adequate simulation of practice as opposed to usual placements whilst lockdown was in effect. The effect of moving placements online might also have impacted on the student learning experience.

Curriculum development

Yeah, it's nothing to do with me, I came in as an Associate lecturer at [university location 4]...with a course already designed. You know, so I haven't really had much input in that. [P208 FI]

Existing, previously developed curriculum and units could have a negative impact on research if they did not contain certain elements of learning – specifically a low research subject and skill percentage. Being unable to influence or change this position immediately was viewed as a frustration, with negative longer term impacts for the profession.

Financial

...there were lots of budgetary, in my naivety I thought that education would be better. Huh [sarcastic laugh]. But, subsequently I found out that it isn't particularly... [P201 FI]

[talking about time saved by going online]

...workload has certainly increased, because of the redundancies that the staff that we've no longer got. Because of...of, well, I d-whether that was to do with COVID, or whether that was to do with the fact that the university were, were losing money, or both. [P201 FI]

[Internal Research Funding]

Internal research funding needs to be increased covering a wider range of topics. [P206]

Current budgetary constraints within HEIs were commented on by some participants. The financial stability of one HEI during the pandemic had been mentioned. This HEI had been

looking at redundancies during COVID-19 as one way of perhaps reducing expenditure. In one case, a participant hoped to see more internal funding provided for a wider range of topics, suggesting this is one area that HEIs see as a potentially easy place to cut costs.

Journal access

For example, our library has taken some cuts to its funding. So our journal situation wasn't brilliant to start with. Certainly not on a par with [university location 3]. And now I've noticed we're doing even more inter-library loans. [P201 FI]

[Open Access Journals]

...yeah, generally, I think so, because obviously I was doing some, I was doing a literature review for the paper that we were looking at...but seemed to be more freely available than for other stuff, that I, or articles that I'd been looking for pre-pandemic, but that maybe just that I'm more...[thinking]...more adept at the wrinkles that you can use to get to stuff [P201 FI]

Participants noted that journal access outside of the subscriptions that they and their workplace subscribed to, left a lot of articles unavailable for access. This varied depending upon the financial situation of the different HEIs and their levels of funding into library access (and also the tier of HEI). Open access offered a partial solution to this issue (and access had been greater during COVID-19, when some journals had granted free access for a limited time period). However, there still remains a tremendous pool of research knowledge – for example recently published embargoed articles - currently off limits to some HEI academic staff.

Lack of dedicated research time

We are supposed to have one day a week for research, but in reality, research takes place in our own time, evenings, weekends and holidays. [P202]

[talking about time for writing papers]

So...well I, that will need to happen. So I won't be paid for that. That will need to be happening in my own time. [P201 FI]

I am doing most of my PhD research in my own time. The 15% is nominal but often not a reality. My 'Day job' appears to be more important to the organisation. [P204]

Yeah, what, what I prefer was, if there was a possibility to have fifty-fifty, fifty percent research, fifty percent teaching. Is something that I want to have. [P206 FI]

The research time allowable in a HEI role was surprisingly at the lower end of expectations. Figures given by participants ranged from 1% of a working week ($n=1$), 5% ($n=1$), 10% ($n=3$), 15% ($n=1$) and 20% ($n=3$). No participants had more than 20% of time allocated. The mean time allocated therefore equates to 12.3% of a working week, which is not a great deal more than in the accompanying practitioner study (where the mean time equated to 7.9% of a working week, a difference of 4.4%). This had the impact of forcing research specific work such as studying, composing applications for funding and article writing to be pushed into practitioner free-time - either at weekends or during evenings or in holiday periods (such as over the summer).

Nature of Time Available (On and Off and Outside Core Time)

...it's just, clearing the space, because you will know, you know, it's not that you just can't nip in for an hour and start to write stuff, you've got to get the, you know, your mind in that frame, to be able to go and do that. And space to think about it, you know, and think about what you're going to be writing and, and recommending and all that sort of thing... [P201 FI]

P201 – ...I'm expected to have to write my stuff, you know, when I've got annual leave in August.

I - Yeah. Yeah. And I mean is that stuff that you're going to take from your PhD, or do you need to do more sort of interviews to sort of get those articles out?

P201 – No, I mean I've got some really rich data that I want to unpack. And, to be honest [chuckles] yeah, yeah I can't really say it's, I'm not gonna say it's from a PhD when I do write it, because they'll say 'Well this is quite old now'...but, and a...but I think it's still equally as valid, I don't think anything's particularly changed, and I don't think COVID would necessarily impacted on that...

Well on Friday, literally after teaching I will sit in my rather rusty camper van and drive off to the [Beauty Spot 1], park somewhere, most likely where parking isn't encouraged overnight...and sit there for two days, away from everyone else, my family in particular, away from my hobbies, away from all the tasks that I may need to do at home, and just do PhD work. And I do that once a month. And if I don't do that, I wouldn't be able to progress my research at all. [P204 FI]

...to expand, sometimes I had to continue working in, after hours to just get something done. [P206 FI]

One of the challenges in researching is finding enough dedicated time in enough of a block to allow complete immersion in the data collected and then to be able to write in that moment. The writing process is an ephemeral one. Participants had noted that much like having a regular amount of unbroken sleep in one block, having unbroken dedicated time for research - without interruptions - was important to be able to progress with PhD study, data analysis or article writing. One participant had noted that this had delayed the submission of possible articles taken from their doctoral work, to the extent where it might be questioned as to whether the data collected was too old to accept for publication.

Organisational strategy, priorities and readiness

The education and social care sectors are under significant pressure, which means we all need to prioritise those activities which support the core purpose of the organisation, be that the university or a social care organisation. This is short term thinking but reality. [P200]

...if it's a requirement to do your job, to be good at your job, and to ensure that there is equality of teaching for the students, then I think that the employer should enable us to do just that. Because our research is directly influencing our professionalism, in our teaching. [P204 FI]

...whether, nobody thinks about where do we evidence that within the annual workplan, workload plan, you know, so...absolutely love to get into that side of things but I think, you know, other universities have a more balanced perspective or approach to that where...research knowledge exchange and teaching form part of the whole role. [P204 FI]

*[reasons why since joining HEI no involvement with research/evaluation/service development projects]
Nothing has been happening in my department [P206]*

[Same or less positive towards research recently]

Research is not a priority now. Teaching is a business and research is seen as a hobby for academics. [P202]

[talking about changes concerning relevance/priority of research since joining]

None. [P203]

P206 – [thinking]...what I've seen, And I think what I would say is, my observation is, it's mainly the Russell Group universities...

I - Ok. The Red bricks...

P206 – ...people like [university location 1] for example. If you look at their level of research and quality in OT, it's way, way beyond what we do here.

Like LAs, within some HEIs, research based activities were viewed as a low priority organisationally in the view of many participants - as they were not included within the core purpose of the organisation. This might make it difficult for them to influence the research strategy or contribute to it in a noticeable way. Research might not actively be happening in some departments. The 'business' of teaching and day-to-day pressures with smaller resources and more time constraints, had affected the ability of some participants to focus on what was sometimes considered as a 'hobby for academics'. Many feeling that the HEI they currently worked for was less positive toward research recently. Some HEIs – not necessarily located within Wessex - were considered to have a much more research positive attitude.

Recruitment challenges

[Redundancies]

Out of that twelve and a half staff that I mentioned, six and a half of us were made redundant, yeah...and we were all, yeah, I was at the top of a principal lecturers scale...which was yeah, and I had been five or six years, yeah, and nearly all of the others were at the top of the senior lecturers scale, yeah. And they brought in people on lecturer contracts to replace us. [P208 FI]

[Restructuring]

P208 – ...it is that issue around casualisation and about, kind of, not giving people proper er, terms of service and stuff that, so you know...

I - Yeah. And I mean it's happening

P208 – It's a policy...

[job role requirements]

...and then, at the same time the university is saying, they only want to employ lecturers with doctorates, yeah. The two things don't match up really... [P208 FI]

[Lack of Academics]

...so, actually taking that role on after five of eight staff had left within a year, which left a number of units without any lecturers [P204 FI]

We still carry vacancies. Well my own post or hours that are funding my post had been vacant for two years until it was even advertised. So we've been carrying vacancies for a long time...[thinking]...I can't see that necessarily changing now we're coming out of COVID, when I think there, there are significant financial...hoops that we need to jump through, in order to get a vacancy filled. Because they're not necessarily seen as vacancies. [P204 FI]

There seems to be a great resistance to recruiting...at the moment. It seems, it's all, it's...it seems now to be based on student numbers...which I take to a certain extent, but, apart from marking, you've still got to prepare

for lectures, for even if there were five people - students - in front of you...than you know, a class, a theatre full of sixty of them. [P201 FI]

[Lack of professional staff]

...and it's a lot of my role now is just dealing with stuff that the university are, you know, handing down, because a lot of the backroom people have gone. [P201 FI]

...and I think it's because, and some of it has to do with, it's not just funding it's the lack of-well, which comes down to funding. It's a lack of personnel. [P201 FI]

[talking historically]

...and I had two admin support workers, working with me, yeah. And that's unheard of now [laughs], because you don't get any, so if you've got any admin to do, you have to do it yourself. Whereas in those days, I could delegate that to the people... [P208 FI]

The recruitment challenges facing the HEI sector were reflected in participant comments. Redundancies, dismantling and restructuring of social care departments had impacted on the academic sector in the past few years as with other university sectors (although this had varied within different HEIs). Existing vacancies were difficult to fill from an academic perspective (sometimes due to requirements for doctoral level experience), with a lot of experienced staff leaving HEIs and an influx of new staff where recruitment was allowed. Similarly, there had been a large outflow of professional staff leaving the HEI sector due to redundancies – some again not by personal choice - and these posts were not always being replaced. Therefore this workload was being passed on to academic staff to perform, in addition to existing duties.

Research culture

If you want to, if you look at publications for example, amongst the team, ok, it is a very small team, yes, but publications within the past three years, maybe we might, we may only be having really two people that have published. Myself, and another person. [P206 FI]

It's just that from my observations, I might be wrong but from my observations, it's just that that research culture is not really like cutting through in the places where I work. [P206 FI]

...so I think it was a different culture, I think there was more of a research culture -well, and there is I think, more of a research culture in [university location 2] than there is in [university location 4], to be honest... [P208 FI]

I - Do you think that's the university putting in priorities due to COVID or, you know, prioritising teaching over research?

P206 – No, I- I don't think this is something that has a lot to do with COVID, you know, what I have observed is that different institutions have got different cultures.

So that bringing service users to monitor and evaluate with academic support or not, to monitor and evaluate the way that current services are being provided, yeah. Because I don't think generally social work is as good as it should be at continuously evaluating its' models of practice, yeah, and they don't seem to be doing that at [university location 4]... [P208 FI]

The size and strength of research cultures varied in different HEIs and within different departments within each HEI. This might make researching more difficult to pursue in some

locations and departments, where there were less research positive or experienced colleagues to discuss and work together with on research projects and articles.

Size and structure of organisation

[talking about departmental structure changes]

I think the changes that I've witnessed is the changes in terms of the programme lead and the head of department. And then from there, the headcount. [P206]

Like LA restructures, structural changes within HEI departments could cause uncertainty and impact on the ability to research – say, for example, if a research positive head of department left to be replaced by a less positive one.

Unwilling to buy out staff time

...it's time, and even if somebody were to buy me out of that time it-I wonder how that might happen. Because my job doesn't get done if I'm not there [laughs]...I suppose in those circumstances it would be. But, you know...what to pick up when I, do come back because you know-whoever that person may be, would be very temporary and wouldn't be particularly, there would be a lot of handover, having to go on and, you know, so that's quite a lot of work as well isn't it? [P201 FI]

[academic challenges]

Getting the time to do research. Even when we achieve grants to buy out our time, we are not given it. [P202]

Participants were doubtful on the willingness of their organisation to provide a replacement for them – freeing them up to work on a research project – even if financial payment was available to cover them. One participant had recently experienced this, after obtaining grant funding.

Work Culture [over and above core hours]

I've even felt at times when I was due to teach, that teaching was seen as a bit of a luxury and certainly preparation for teaching was seen as a luxury. Because that's what we do in the evenings, once we sit in front of the telly and we don't really need to plan [said very sarcastically]. That's my, that does not work for me. [P204 FI]

...I would like to have a work environment where we don't play business top trumps, and with that I mean I would really like to work in a team where it is not just ok, but the standard that we go and do our research work, our reading, our writing within our work time, and not say to our colleagues, that that's what weekends are for. [P204 FI]

...so, actually taking that role on, after five of eight staff had left within a year, which left a number of units without any lecturers, meant that my workload, at times was more on the fifty to fifty-five hour week. [P204 FI]

I – So you're probably well over your core hours every week. I mean, someone else had mentioned they were doing like fifty to fifty five hour weeks. One of the other....

P201 – Definitely. Yeah, I mean I have to make myself stop work at about seven o'clock...

The working culture in certain HEIs was described by some participants as being pressurised. So some staff might feel obliged (or have to) work well over their core hours and into evenings

and weekends regularly. This culture can then become ingrained within an organisational structure so that it becomes expected and the norm to progress regular duties effectively.

Cultural barriers

Limited funding

...I mean, a lot of OTs are not in research. Or, this is-the research is not taking place because those opportunities are actually not there. But to a good extent I think it's because those opportunities are not there. [P206 FI]

I mean the number of opportunities are also not massive. There are some calls, some funding that they provide, but there are not a lot and where they appear, they are not like, huge sums of money. Just £10,000 and maybe £30,000. [P206 FI]

Limited funding opportunities for particular areas – Occupational Therapy was highlighted by one participant – was seen as a limiting factor on the ability to apply for funding and carry out research in areas that they some participants were interested in.

Societal and political

So, thinking more about social care...we know that there's been twelve years of austerity policies, ten years plus, two years of COVID, which has had a profound impact on health and social care and on funding and opportunities and prioritising etc, etc. And it is not a social priority. Social care never has been. [P200 FI]

[academic challenges]

Finding ways in which we can reframe social work/social care and health in the light of austerity and the crisis in practice and theory in these areas. This will involve promoting the voice of PWLE and other disadvantaged/marginalised people and communities [P208]

But I do think that, I suppose research also its part, thinking about our cultural response to research in our society in, there is that strong idea about 'we don't need any more experts' and all the rest of it and a distrust of experts and research and, you know in the media. [P200 FI]

I – ...because someone else mentioned almost like, they were having to retro-fit their research interests into funding streams to actually be able to apply...

P208 – Yes, yeah. No, I think that's right. And I...and I think, you know, I've been involved, you know I've worked as a qualified social worker, I've worked as a social worker and I've worked as a social work academic...And I think our understanding of anti-oppressive practice is much more sophisticated than other profession's is, yeah. Yeah, we're interested in things like intersectionality, we're interested in things like promoting voice, yeah, you know. It's kind of, those things are understood quite differently I think, in other professions. [P208 FI]

Societal impressions and misunderstandings (impacted by media and political discussions around issues like Brexit – with a significant anti-expert thread running through debates) were thought by some participants to have filtered through and negatively impacted on the overall priority that funding social care research was given. This had historically been endemic for many years, in terms of the impact of austerity measures and also the continuing impacts of what key deliverables were required to be measured and prioritised in social care. Social care as one participant said was not a social priority and never had been.

Academic barriers

Uncomfortable topics for students

...but I've also had some conversations with students already today to say they, they're not coming because that topic is too close to home. And they don't want to listen... [P204 FI]

Embedding their research into teaching to highlight particular issues was seen by one participant as a way to help advance their research. In this case a victim of abuse had come in to talk about the legal implications of the decision making in their families case (as a part of the therapeutic process for them), but some students had found this uncomfortable and didn't want to attend the teaching session.

Logistical barriers

Academic colleagues

...to a certain extent maybe it's about areas of research interests...or just interests in research. Because I mean, ever since I joined, I've not seen any single project where people have collaborated. I mean I have, when I did the previous application... [P206 FI]

...it is very different to research or research areas, and it is very difficult to just work together for the sake of working together. [P206 FI]

I'm just looking from my own perspectives, but I haven't, also and all the other, I haven't had any colleagues who say 'Oh look ! there's a project that I'm doing here, anybody who wants to join', or, you know, that kind of thing, I haven't had that sort of conversations. [P206 FI]

A lack of academic colleagues working in similar research areas or those with no interest or time to pursue research projects or funding, was viewed as stifling potential opportunities to encourage and participate in research in some instances.

Funding application challenges

Research topics or focus is dictated by funders and this limits creativity of researchers and forces people to do research that is not in line with what they really want. [P206]

...I think the thing that I find challenging is my area of focus is, it's rather specific and sometimes I don't see funding opportunities that come along those lines. So some of the time it's a matter of, well thinking, ok well, this call is specific for these issues. How can I adapt so that I can apply for that. But it's not something that you'd like 'Oh yeah! this is what I'm looking for. This is what I wanna do.' [P206 FI]

P206 – And then these are concepts that I'm really interested in developing. You know...

I - Yeah. So it's almost like you're trying to retrofit a lot of your particular research interests...

P206 – Yeah. Yeah.

I - ...into the call, rather than the call reflecting...

P206 – Yeah.

[talking about direction of application vs NIHR models]

P208 -and maybe that I've always only been interested in qualitative research and then not been interested in quantitative research really, so it's kind of...I mean that might be the problem as well, yeah...

I - They want more about the numbers rather than the actual...

P208 – Yeah.

[fatigue]

the same (from previous question - time, resources, funding and respect) and also research fatigue for my research topic - GRT (Gypsies, Roma and Travellers) [P207]

[PI role]

P206 – Ok. That one, what I did was, I was actually trying to avoid being the PI [laughs]...

I - Ok. [laughs]...

P206 – Yes, [laughs], because I had just done one recently and I wanted to give myself a break.

...and if you are a PI, then you, you've got to be engaging with all the stakeholders that you were, all the people that you wanted on the team. And it takes a lot of time... [P206 FI]

[Time required]

I mean to a great extent working with, and I understand why people who sometimes not want to go for those bids because it takes time. To expand, sometimes I had to continue working in, after hours to just get something done. And it also takes a lot of time to, you know, I think strong bids involve many people working together... [P206 FI]

[Funders changing streams]

And when we first submitted it, they were really keen on it. And then they transferred us to another stream, and we didn't get through. And that's-so that was really disappointing actually... [P208 FI]

[Poor feedback on unsuccessful bids]

I - ...did you get any feedback from your unsuccessful bids? From the funding...

P206 – Yes, yes, I, we, we, there was feedback.

I - Was it any use? Or was it quite sort of generic and not very helpful?

P206 – [laughs]...I think that's the problem isn't it, with these bids. Because they tend to be generic.

And when you think about how much work goes into those applications, you know, it's kind of...[laughs]...basically I think I, particularly at two paragraphs back, you know, it's kind of...[laughs]...was bitterly disappointing to say the least. [P208 FI]

In terms of funding challenges, one participant mentioned that some funders had quite strict approaches to what they would cover in their research calls. This might affect the approach to the research question that some participants might have to take, or having to rethink and reframe their themes, concepts and ideas to match the call requirements, rather than what they were personally interested in, or divert away from areas which required researching. One participant had seen their original bid transferred to a different funding stream post submission but before a decision was made about whether it would be granted – this was subsequently unsuccessful. These funding decisions might also be affected by financial, organisational, cultural, political and societal imperatives (see *Cultural barriers*).

Time demands associated with writing a strong bid and also the particular demands of taking on a Principal Investigator (PI) role, were discussed as being challenging when considering whether to participate or take the lead in a bid for funding. Funding fatigue for particular groups was also considered a challenge at the moment, by one participant researching social care in relation to Gypsies, Roma and Travellers. Contractual status might impact on an ability to submit an application for funding. Finally, personal reactions to unsuccessful bids, which had

taken a considerable amount of effort to produce and seemingly unhelpful feedback on rejected bids were mentioned as both a source of frustration and a potential disincentive to making future bids or refining unsuccessful applications for revision and resubmission.

Links with LAs

[Academics into Practice]

[talking about academic into practice scheme issues]

...but generally again it, it was seen as something that wasn't quite ticking the boxes in the local authorities.

[P204 FI]

[talking about academic into practice scheme issues]

But...practitioners were too...[thinking]...busy and discouraged to even reach out but just to, yeah, tick the box. Do the visit, write it up and move on to the next. [P204 FI]

[Organisational Changes]

I think in local authorities if that's who we're focusing on, as our research partners. There's an awful lot of movement. And sometimes people will be really keen to be involved, but then they'll change job, or something will happen and then things drift. So that becomes more tricky. [P200 FI]

[talking about academic into practice scheme issues]

I - So has that sort of foundered now or is it, are you still trying to carry that on?

P204 - It's...well, I've left my job in the teaching partnership, I wasn't replaced. So that's died its death really.

[Teaching Partnership Funding]

...but there have been issues around funding. We've just been told that we have more funding for the next academic year [chuckles]. But that actually has only just been emailed yesterday, literally. And so it, it ebbs and flows... [P204 FI]

I know that there have been, well, there's one local authority within the teaching partnership that doesn't even have a principal social worker...and hasn't had for many years. [P204 FI]

And, in other places, yes, there have been changes, fairly organically, one principal social worker realised that the job wasn't for him. In another place, the person retired and has been replaced. [P204 FI]

[Research Co-ordinators]

It needs really somebody to co-ordinate it, somebody who's identified as like a research co-ordinator, a research sharing co-ordinator, be part of their job role or something. Because it needs dedicated time and energy. [P200 FI]

[Negative Attitudes to Fellowship Applications]

...we did quite a lot of work together, looking at the NIHR fellowship. [colleague forename], her and I. And then had to abandon it, because the local authority weren't gonna play ball. But we're looking at it for somebody else, another practitioner, in a different local authority, who might have more luck with it. [P200 FI]

Barriers which academics and research staff faced when engaging with LAs were identified in a number of areas. Firstly, initiatives concerning getting academics out into practice were affected by COVID-19, organisational pressures on practitioners working in LAs, and the strategic direction of the LAs, who weren't always particularly positive about it in terms of aligning with their other operational priorities. Secondly, organisational changes – staff and

managers leaving jobs in LAs and sometimes not being replaced, alongside strategic changes of direction – had impacted on research and teaching partnerships with LAs.

Concerning Teaching Partnership links, varying funding issues were a challenge and changes in the organisation had also impacted on the ability to successfully arrange these initiatives. Finally, negative attitudes to a practitioners NIHR fellowship application had been noted by one participant, which had caused one application to be abandoned within a particular LA. Research co-ordinators were suggested as one area which might help to improve the research relationship between HEIs and LAs.

Practitioner challenges

The main challenge (personally) is that access to practitioners in frontline services is often difficult due to a lack of research governance arrangements in Local Authorities. This prevents direct research into practice of social work. [P205]

Research governance was described as a challenge, concerning access to practitioners and a lack of suitable research governance frameworks within LAs. This is due in part to a lack of an embedded research culture within some LAs – an area which is discussed in the partner report.

Service user challenges

[Lack of research projects]

...if somebody is not coming up to say 'I worked on a research project and that's what I do'... Then you wouldn't expect service users to jump up and say 'Hey, let's do this and let's do that'...[laughs] [P206 FI]

[ethical]

... I worked in children and family social work predominantly and the reason why people are in, in contact with those services is because usually their children are at significant risk of harm. And that significant risk of harm usually or mostly stems from within the family, unless you've, you've got issues of criminal and sexual exploitation that comes from the outside. But if we're sticking to those who aren't involved in those kind of 'county lines', for example, situations, it's usually the abuse within the family. And then children get removed and parents are very angry and if, if that would happen to me, I would be really angry. And therefore it's a really difficult place to engage then, with service user led research where you are not just offering a, a vehicle to...actually be, possibly abusive towards children services staff...but inform services to, to develop and become better at providing a service [P204 FI]

I - And ethically it's a minefield isn't it? To try and get, you know...

P204 - Absolutely.

I - ...ethical approval for that sort of stuff.

P204 - Yeah.

[Teaching practice]

And within social work now, the Social Work England has, there's much more of a drive to include service users in teaching in every aspect of our developing of students. And that is very time consuming, arranging that, because obviously these people aren't paid...so that takes an awful lot of co-ordination, so that's another pull on my time. [P201 FI]

[Meaningful involvement]

And then that individual or that population group, their knowledge is being taken and used, but not by them.

And the research hasn't been led by them. So it may not be even something that's meaningful to them. So, people would give their time and knowledge...and yet it's not then to their-doesn't serve a purpose for them. And, and that's ok. People might want to do that anyway. But, I think we need to be undertaking more research that's led by the people who are going to be on the receiving end of it. [P200 FI]

[talking about drawing from peer partnership]

We need to, as a steering group, need to think about how we're going to involve others. And we need to hand that back to the steering group to, to discuss, so yeah, because of course, people are donating their time and, and stuff, and it needs to be something that, that is meaningful to them. As I say, but...You know, it's no good just getting peers. [P200 FI]

[Relevancy and impact]

Yeah. I think, certainly historically, an awful lot of research has happened 'to people', rather than with them. And it-a lot of research has been led by academics or others, rather than the person concerned. [P200 FI]

[service user challenges]

If we don't invest in research and listen to the lived experience, we will inform our thinking from within our bias and not from the service-user perspective [P204]

[service user challenges]

Relevancy. [P203]

[service user challenges]

...I mean, if there isn't much research going on...then, I mean, it is a disadvantage to service users as well. Because, if you look at service delivery, it has to be shipped by cutting edge research, you know...but if that is not happening, then it is, we're not going to be having the innovations that we'd otherwise be having for the service users.

[Austerity]

...but also still, very much under measures of austerity, and where, when in my view not supporting families early enough and good enough. [P204 FI]

[COVID-19]

[service user challenges]

Risks from Covid-19 infections would I imagine be the main challenge. Ensuring any primary data is done safely and accessing personal experiences of being a service user in social care is very important and I would imagine would be their priority. [P202]!

[Supporting service user research]

...I should be in a position to say 'Right, well let's, let's do this!', you know, 'Let me help you with that and steer you through all that'...but as you've said, it's time and even if somebody were to buy me out of that time it-I wonder how that might happen. Because my, my job doesn't get done if I'm not there [laughs]...[P201 FI]

[Research Language/Ability]

[service user challenges]

Barriers to comms such as research terms [P201]

I've noted that they have been talking about research, but haven't known where to start with that, because they're not, excuse me, they're not aligned with, you know, they don't have a research, a background in even some of the terms, you know, of, of, they may have heard of focus groups and I think that's probably about it. But, so that's an area where I think we need to do a lot more work, with service users, in a meaningful way for them, not you know, as a Masters student, or even an undergraduate student would be introduced to all that, as, as, to research. [P201 FI]

So, you know, that's an area of research, and it, it was, I mean, you will know all the ethical considerations, all the proper scaffolding that goes on around research...that although they wanted to find out, they wanted to write about it, there wasn't that sort of like background or knowledge to support that to be publishable if you like. [P201 FI]

[Problems with PPI recruitment]

...trying to recruit someone onto that, at this stage has been problematic. But-and we did recruit someone who has actually withdrawn because she can't promise the time. So we're going to have to try and re-engage someone but...[thinking]...that's the sort of thing I'd like to have a bit more time to do now. [P200 FI]

[talking about drawing from peer partnership]

...we can draw on those experts with lived experience and-but Mental Capacity in this instance was something that was, didn't garner a huge response from, from the peer partnership...membership, in terms of people who've got knowledge or experience about it, because it needs to be somebody who's-knows about it. So that was a bit difficult. [P200 FI]

[service user challenges]

To develop participatory and action research strategies to develop changes to current practice in research and associated activities. [P208]

There were many logistical barriers noted in being able to engage service users with the research process. Firstly, it was highlighted that there was a lack of research projects for service users to get involved with at some HEIs. Overcoming ethical challenges in certain areas of social care research – like Child Services or Mental Health Capacity – might make it difficult to initiate and obtain approval for research projects. Involving unpaid service users in teaching practice was described as being very time consuming for the academic arranging it.

Being able to meaningfully involve service users was viewed as a challenge, as was developing effective participatory and action research strategies to help initiate changes to current practice in research. Also the ability to make the research being undertaken both relevant to the people involved and also to have a lasting impact on them afterwards. Listening to service users ideas and concerns to see what they wanted researching, did not always dovetail with societal, political and organisational funding directions for research (see *Cultural barriers*).

Being able to provide adequate support with service user research during and after COVID-19 was mentioned as a consideration and also the demands on HEI academic staff of being able to fit in enough support provision, alongside other operational demands. Service users themselves might want to research particular areas, but lack the knowledge of research terms and processes - including applying for funding - without enough support and encouragement from HEIs. This was considered a major barrier in being able to enact service user led research projects. Finally, recruiting from service user pools via peer partnership groups, as an example, could also be challenging. In terms of the nature of the topic being investigated – for a topic like Mental Health - and the particular demands of that group.

Research skills barriers

Knowledge of research processes and practicalities

[talking about research applications]

I have, not in terms of research. But in terms of practice placement I have... [P201 FI]

Although confidence and knowledge of research skills across all participants was deemed generally to be good, there was acknowledgement that they would be happy to obtain further training (see *Enablers – Research Skills*).

Lack of confidence to pursue research applications

[Possible NIHR funding sources]

[why not planning in next year]

I am not sure it is necessary at this early stage of my researcher career. [P204]

[Possible Non NIHR funding sources]

[why not planning in next year]

Time. [P200]

Barriers of confidence to pursue research funding opportunities only really applied to those at an early stage of their research career and operational demands on (all) HEI academic staff time, rather than from a perceived lack of knowledge on the end to end bid processes an application might entail.

Research support barriers

Awareness of support required

Further support for NIHR funding

Don't know. [P204]

Further support for non NIHR funding

Don't know. [P204]

Of the two participants who said that they were not planning to submit a research application or career development application to either NIHR or non-NIHR funding sources linked to research within the next year, only one was unsure of what further support they might require. This does suggest that a percentage of staff might benefit from more information and support in this area going forward - either internally or from external support services like the NIHR.

Use of support services – Internal RDS

...it was the department that was to deal with it, that was tricky to get [laughs] I think it was one of those departments that were sort of decimated by redundancy and there were sort of a couple-two or three people running the research department at one time... [P201 FI]

...the amount, so they then said if you want this funding, here's all the bureaucracy that needs to happen to enable that. So, again that came to me. And they just signed it off. Which I suppose is usual, in some ways, but

it was a- a tremendous challenge just to get seed funding, because of the vast amount of admin, if nothing else... [P201 FI]

[talking about internal research support previously available]

Well it didn't seem to have. Certainly not. But at the particular time we were doing it, I mean, it seems to be quite patchy at the moment, even still. But there's been people brought in to try and drive that forward. [P201 FI]

[talking about RDS bid workshop]

But again, that demands a lot of time. Like for me, I know, initially I was involved but then I just dropped it later on, because I realised that this is actually taking a lot of my time. When I know that this is not the speed that I'm submitting for, But I'm trying to sort of like, go through a process of learning, or refining a bid. So it's, it's ease of time as well. [P206 FI]

Because I say, there were issues about the timelines. Because, you know, they want that, that four week period to process everything and then, you know...but there was not like a problem for me really. [P206 FI]

Feedback on internal research and design services varied between different HEIs. In some, the service was classed as good whilst in others, unsatisfactory. Internal support services had been impacted - like other HEI supporting departments - by redundancies. Accessing these staff to provide support was therefore made difficult in some cases and the ability for RDS staff to respond in a timely manner was also made more difficult. The amount of paperwork required to access and apply for internal research funding was described by one participant as a 'tremendous challenge'. In this case, they had eventually been successful in securing the internal research funding that they had applied for.

In terms of support workshops on offer, the bid repurposing workshop one participant had been involved with, which was run by their RDS, had become too time consuming to continue with.

Use of support services – NIHR

...yeah, to be honest I haven't found NIHR that supportive to be honest with you. I know that they're, they were based in [university location 2] as well, yeah. But I always, well I thought we were speaking two different languages to be honest. I thought, I'm very much into engagement and innovation and inclusion...and they were much more into the technical aspects of the application, yeah. It's kind of, so it might have been partly my fault as well. I might be, I think I grew frustrated with that. [P208 FI]

Well I think they could definitely improve on that actually to be honest. Because, I just think that they're...[thinking]...well, it might be me, to be honest, but, I think they pay lip service to some extent to what involvement and inclusion means, yeah. It's kind of, to me it means people being involved at every part of the process... [P208 FI]

Negative feedback on NIHR support provided by one participant focused on a tendency to concentrate on the technical aspects of a potential bid, rather than the principles contained within it and a smaller interest in involvement and inclusion included within their application.

Discussion

The aim of this evaluation was to develop a better understanding of the challenges of building capacity to undertake social care research in the Wessex region and the opportunities for building research engagement and capacity.

Data paints a picture of HEI academic staff who might be positive towards research facing many hurdles in influencing or helping to build research strategy (both internally and externally), advance their research skills and embed their research into practice.

Organisationally, HEIs have been forced to concentrate on their core business of teaching during COVID-19. The drive to move teaching online during this period and the need to substitute face-to-face placements with alternative methods of practice simulation caused many additional pressures to be placed on academic teams. There also seems to have been a noticeable churn in posts, with experienced staff leaving (or in some instances being asked to leave) to be replaced by newer team members. However, some posts have not been replaced due to tougher funding restrictions within HEIs. Unsurprisingly, COVID-19 had also impacted on the ability of research to be effectively carried out, with some projects being suspended and not always being completed at a later date due to the delays.

Against this picture, there is also the continuing addition of administrative and managerial responsibilities onto academic staff, which was happening pre-pandemic (partially due to staff numbers in professional services being cut). This is causing research time to be crunched - notable in the surprisingly small difference between research time allocated within HEIs (12.3%) vs LAs (7.9%) in our sample. Doctoral and Masters qualifications are also more difficult to pursue and obtain unless holidays, weekends and evenings are utilised.

However, research is still being carried out and HEI academic staff are still very research positive, confident and wanting to engage in research, even when set against a difficult funding environment and operational stresses. Unfortunately, the difficulties of the role, including problems with engaging with LAs and service users effectively for support and research projects is perhaps limiting the overall effect that they are able to have on promoting a research positive attitude across and within these groups at the moment.

Across Wessex (and nationally) different small-scale initiatives are being trialled, but they are not joined up. When coupled with the picture emerging from within LAs (see partner report) – where at present, the barriers outweigh the enablers in effectively building social care research capacity within Wessex – this highlights the tough conditions in being able to scale up research capacity within this sector.

In the short term, there are six areas where resources could be focused on helping to improve the current picture.

Contact

In an incredibly busy and stressful environment HEI academic staff might not be in receipt of information or opportunities which are sent through traditional internal email systems or reside on

static websites. These messages do not always get through to reach them.

Publicising the survey for this research project, the research team encountered many difficulties in actually being able to contact the people whom we needed to complete the survey and be interviewed. Innovative methods of direct contact – such as connecting through LinkedIn for study recruitment (see also Stokes et al., 2019) - proved much more effective at direct contact than via email or blog and twitter posts about the study (even with the researcher for this study working within the same HEI as some of the participants). Emails sometimes disappeared into a 'black hole' or were being marked as spam by internal systems before receipt. This method or use of another online forum or social media platform might bear more fruit in forming and maintaining more direct channels of communication with HEI academic staff looking for information, inspiration or support going forward.

Encouragement

HEIs and senior management need more encouragement to view research as an essential, integral part of the social care sector (allowing time for research to take place against other operational pressures), not as a solely academic hobby or luxury which can be sacrificed in preference for teaching. This should not be seen as a theoretical ambition or an empty voice which is verbalised but then ignored.

HEI operational imperatives (both prior to the pandemic and which have now been exacerbated by COVID-19) are increasingly forcing research specific work such as applications and article writing to be pushed into practitioner free-time - either at weekends, during evenings or in holiday periods (such as over the summer). HEIs are increasingly focused on teaching before research as resources have been cut within the sector. Sustaining a positive research atmosphere is increasingly fragile. The NIHR could proactively look at ways of influencing these areas by engaging at all levels of the HEI network.

Support (for LA and HEI link ups)

Research positive practitioners should be encouraged.

Practitioners might be interested in making Fellowship applications if they can link up with HEI mentors for the process who might be able to encourage them (if they doubted their own abilities), or, potential HEI supervisors at an early opportunity. Mentors/Supervisors might also need to positively encourage practitioner management in LAs to support and engage in this process, explaining the tangible benefits to the organisation. Research co-ordination within LAs currently makes it difficult to engage with them in some instances and could be improved.

Support (for Service user and HEI link ups)

Research positive service users should be encouraged.

Being able to meaningfully involve service users was viewed as a challenge and also the ability to make the research being undertaken both relevant to the people involved and also have a lasting impact on them afterwards. Service users themselves might want to research particular topics, but lack the knowledge of research terms and processes – including applying for funding - without enough support and encouragement from HEIs. This was considered a major barrier in being able to enact service user led research projects.

Improvements to academic research training

Research positive staff would benefit from more training in some areas.

As all participants had expressed an interest in further training on writing grant applications ($n=9$) alongside other high scoring areas: documenting people's experiences ($n=7$) and also career development, research methodologies, service evaluation, service development and needs assessment (all $n=5$), it is suggested that more resources or training materials are made available to HEI academic staff if possible, either in a face-to-face or online environment.

Improvements to practitioner research training

HEI academic staff could help to promote a research positive ethos within curriculum development and by the sector more generally.

HEI academic staff can be an influential voice for championing research and for increasing research elements within new and existing curriculum. Curriculum development was seen by one participant as a way of enabling change and of also promoting a more balanced, empathetic and research positive workforce. This voice could also be heard in a desire to promote good principles in teaching and pass on research inquisitive perspectives and attitudes to students before they start working as practitioners.

Conclusion and Recommendations

From an HEI perspective, barriers are hindering the enablers in effectively building social care research capacity within Wessex.

Recommendations - Contact

- Consider the current use of social media by the NIHR (such as Facebook, LinkedIn) to raise awareness of Wessex wide research funding opportunities and scholarships, via direct contact with HEI academic staff (in addition to traditional email pathways), which might provide alternative channels for reaching intended targets.

Recommendations – Encouragement

- Consider sponsoring interested research champions within HEIs at all academic and research staff levels to start to build a cohesive collaborative research voice.
- Engaging with senior HEI management about the realities of research vs teaching on a day-to-day basis and how they can benefit from a positive research environment and explain why research is not a luxury but an essential component.

Recommendations – Support (for LA and HEI link ups)

- Consider creating regular opportunities for interested practitioners to meet up with HEI academic staff in an online environment (whether by online meeting, forum, or email questions, which can then be answered in a podcast or other recorded response).
- Consider how research co-ordinator posts could be encouraged within LAs to improve research relationships between the two organisations.
- HEI Mentors and Supervisors/HEI Research Champions/NIHR Representatives engaging more/interceding with senior LA management on behalf of practitioner applicants to explain tangible benefits of supporting staff members during the application process.

Recommendations – Support (for Service user and HEI link ups)

- Consider creating regular opportunities for interested service users to meet up with HEI academic staff in an online environment (whether by online meeting, forum or email questions, which can then be answered in a podcast or other recorded response).
- Consider sponsoring interested research champions within the domiciliary and residential sector and voluntary organisations to start to build a cohesive collaborative research voice.

Recommendations – Improvements to academic research training

- Examine ways of providing direct face-to-face (through regional HEIs) or online training around areas of high demand suggested by participants in this study: writing grant

applications ($n=9$), documenting people's experiences ($n=7$), career development, research methodologies, service evaluation, service development and needs assessment (all $n=5$).

Recommendations – Improvements to practitioner research training

- Investigate regional HEI and non-HEI training provision and elements of research included (at Apprenticeship, Foundation, Degree, Masters levels) to see if when mapped they need to be revised or can be expanded.
- Lobby for more research elements to be included in annual professional registration for social workers and other health care professionals working in the social care sector going forward.
- Initiate scoping and development of social care research skills modules by HEIs which can be used for basic training, or as a refresher (online or face-to-face).

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