Building Capacity for Social Care Research

(Enablers and barriers facing practitioners and HEI academic staff in Wessex)

Overall Executive Summary
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Study overview

- This summary 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.

- Two groups of participants were recruited. The first group (*n=22*) were practitioners working in social care within the Wessex region.

- The second group (*n=9*) were Higher Education Institute (HEI) academic staff working within the Wessex region.

- Data was collected between February and September 2022.

- All participants completed an online questionnaire (with separate survey being passed to each group).

- A subsample (*n=6*) of practitioners were interviewed to collect positive and negative views of their experiences of research and of using research evidence in their job role.

- A subsample (*n=5*) of HEI academic staff were interviewed 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.

- Two reports were produced.

- The first report focused on the enablers and barriers facing practitioners in Wessex from the perspective of current practitioners and HEI academic staff who regularly interacted with, or had previously worked within the sector. HEI data used within this report focused on the role of practitioners and where the worlds of HEIs and practitioners crossed-over.

- The second report focused on the enablers and barriers facing HEI academic staff in Wessex from the perspective of current academic staff who worked in HEIs and who regularly interacted with the social care sector.

Practitioner report

Findings

At present the barriers outweigh the enablers in effectively building social care research capacity within Wessex. In the short term there are five areas where resources could be focused on helping to improve the current picture.

Recommendations

1. Contact:
   a) 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 social care staff (in addition to traditional email pathways), which might provide alternative channels for reaching the intended targets.

2. Encouragement:
   a) Consider sponsoring interested research champions within LAs at not just a Principal Social Worker level but also with ground level practitioners to start to build a cohesive collaborative research voice.
   b) Consider offering to sponsor or co-fund embedded Researchers in Residence to support and promote the development of a research culture within LAs.
   c) Engaging with senior LA management about how they can benefit from a positive research environment and explain why research is not a luxury but an essential component.
   d) Sharing good practice of UK wide examples, where embedding social care research into practice has made a difference.

3. Support (Applications):
   a) Consider creating regular opportunities for interested practitioners to meet up with potential mentors or supervisors for Fellowship applications in an online environment (whether by online meeting, forum or questions posed via email, which can then be answered in a podcast or other recorded response).
   b) Consider innovative ways of promotion to ensure a wide variety of practitioners are aware of the opportunities.
   c) Mentors/Supervisors/LA 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.

4. Support (General):
   a) Consider whether the NIHR can fund temporary access to research journals currently locked off from LAs to see if this is one way of increasing interest in research articles.

b) Alternatively investigate options for the NIHR to host an open access journal focusing on a range of new and existing social care research.

c) Consider creating regular opportunities for interested practitioners to meet with researchers and other research positive practitioners in Wessex in an online environment (whether by online meeting, forum or questions posed via email, which can then be answered in a podcast or other recorded response).

5. Improvements to practitioner research training:

a) 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.

b) 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.

c) 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).

HEI report

Findings

From an HEI perspective, barriers are hindering the enablers in effectively building social care research capacity within Wessex. In the short term there are six areas where resources could be focused on helping to improve the current picture.

Recommendations

1. Contact:
   a) 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.

2. Encouragement:
   a) Consider sponsoring interested research champions within HEIs at all academic and research staff levels to start to build a cohesive collaborative research voice.
   b) 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 <u>not</u> a luxury but an essential component.

3. Support (for LA and HEI link ups):
   a) 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).
   b) Consider how research co-ordinator posts could be encouraged within LAs to improve research relationships between the two organisations.
   c) 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.

4. Support (for service user and HEI link ups):
   a) 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).
   b) Consider sponsoring interested research champions within the domiciliary and residential sector and voluntary organisations to start to build a cohesive collaborative research voice.

5. Improvements to academic research training:

a) Examine ways of providing direct face-to-face (through regional HEIs) or online training around areas of high demand suggested by HEI academic staff 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*).

6. Improvements to practitioner research training:
   a) 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.
   b) 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.
   c) 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).