Advancing Social Work Research 2017-2020

22 November 2018

Programme

• Why am I here?
• Why all this fuss about research?
• What’s happening in the UK?
• Does this mean anything for Australia?

Why am I here?

• A survivor of research excellence assessments since 1978
• Director of National Institute for Social Work Research Unit
  • 1986-2001 – the sole government funded research unit in social work
• Head of Research, Social Care Institute for Excellence
  • 2001-2012 – standards for evidence in social care
• Currently Professor of Evidence-Based Social Work
  • Preparing for REF 2021…

Why all the fuss about impact?

• Redefining the relationship between the state and academia – ‘enough of experts’
• Banking failure, austerity and
  • Britain has had enough of experts, says Gove
  • The growth of lobby groups and organisations of people with lived experience
• The research – practice time lag
  • two decades?

What do we mean by impact?

• Impact is defined as an effect on, change or benefit to the economy, society, culture, public policy or services, health, the environment or quality of life, beyond academia
• Impact is the contribution that research makes to the economy, society, environment or culture, beyond the contribution to academic research
• For REF 2021, recognition of
  • impact on teaching beyond the host university
  • the role of research in preventing poor policy or practice
  • the danger of high impact, poor quality research

What’s happening in the UK?

• UK research internationally successful
• But research assessment is now a major industry
• The hidden costs of research assessment exercises: the curious case of Australia
  • The hidden costs of research assessment exercises are now a major industry
  • The hidden costs of research assessment exercises are now a major industry
• Limited understanding of impact

£852,000,000,000

• The growth of lobby groups and organisations of people with lived experience
• The research – practice time lag
  • two decades?
Impact stories – chilli

The chilli story – look what is NOT required

- A cast of hundreds, or thousands
- Complex risk assessment and multiple ethical approvals
- Safeguarding protocols
- Engagement with public debate and public policy
- Careful assessment of how research can be integrated into existing professional knowledge
- Changes in national or local policy

Impact stories – low hanging fruit?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Overall Rank (62)</th>
<th>Impact scores: University</th>
<th>4*</th>
<th>3*</th>
<th>2*</th>
<th>1*</th>
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<tr>
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Impact stories – ageing & interdisciplinarity

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Main panel</th>
<th>Key discipline</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Life Sciences</td>
<td>154 Public Health</td>
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<tr>
<td>Engineering &amp; Physical Sciences</td>
<td>41 Computer Science</td>
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<tr>
<td>Social Sciences</td>
<td>56 Social work &amp; Social Policy</td>
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<tr>
<td>Arts &amp; Humanities</td>
<td>60 Art &amp; Design</td>
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Impact takes time

- I suspect that the story of the impact of the social sciences will not be written for 500 years. It will take at least that long for the implications of present knowledge to work themselves out….


The answer is 17 years: what is the question?

- It is frequently stated that it takes an average of 17 years for research evidence to reach clinical practice…(cardio-vascular disease)


Impact is not linear

- Age and alcohol misuse statistics in Northern Ireland
- Accidental breakthroughs that lead to future research
- Impact may be unanticipated and/or detrimental
- Critical mass of adopters, who then recruit others
- Beware selective adherence, personal reinvention and attrition

Impact requires dialogue: demand

- Chilli example – demand for a cheaper and more reliable way of assessing chilli strength
- Ageing example – agency demand for ways of reducing dispensing error in care homes
- What dialogue exists between stakeholders and universities about research requirements?
- What incentivises policymakers and practitioners to use research?

Impact in 12 case studies

Impact requires dialogue: engagement

- Collaboration from the outset to define the research problem and process
- Engagement is not free – how do you resource it?
- Good engagement resembles consultancy: the influence is diffuse as well as specific
- The role of people with lived experience, or service users

The continuum of engagement

Engagement, impact and measures

- productive interactions [are] exchanges between researchers and stakeholders in which knowledge is produced and valued that is both scientifically robust and socially relevant... The interaction is productive when it leads to efforts by stakeholders to use or apply research results or practical information or experiences....
- Social impacts of knowledge are behavioural changes that happen because of this knowledge. (p.2)

Take home messages

• Impact should start when policy and practice issues are defined as requiring research
  • collaborative, developmental approach
  • involve people with lived experience
• Impact requires time
• Impact isn’t free – where are the resources?

Thank you
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