Mobilising knowledge to improve UK health care: learning from other countries and other sectors

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Aims and objectives

Few would argue that the linkages between research effort, knowledge enhancement and informed action are yet working to best effect (Lavis et al. 2006; Tetroe et al. 2008; Nutley et al. 2010). *Better understanding of how research-informed knowledge can be shared and applied remains a challenge.*

The overarching **aim** of this study is to inform how the NHS uses research-based information for improved services and better patient care. Specifically, we are interested in how large-scale knowledge mobilisation (KM) strategies are designed and implemented to bridge between research effort and research application. We will do this by collating, analysing and making readily available learning from KM strategies developed and applied in health care (in the UK and internationally), as well as analogous UK experience in social care and education. The study is focusing on KM strategies at the 'macro' level: that is, the activities undertaken by key research funders, major research producers and key research intermediaries.

Three key **objectives** with associated **research questions** (RQs) are as follows:

1. *Mapping the knowledge mobilisation (KM) landscape* –

   a. What knowledge mobilisation strategies have been *developed in health care* (in the UK <u>and</u> internationally) to better promote the uptake and use of research?

   b. What analogous knowledge mobilisation strategies have been developed *in social care and education* within the UK?

2. *Understanding the models, theories and frameworks that underpin approaches to knowledge mobilisation* –

   a. What models, theories or frameworks have been used explicitly – or can be discerned as implicit underpinning logics – in the development of the knowledge mobilisation strategies reviewed?

   b. What evidence is available from existing reviews and secondary sources on the mechanisms of action of these models, theories and frameworks?

3. *Learning from the success or otherwise of these enacted strategies* –

   a. What evaluative data are available on the success or otherwise of enacted strategies, and what do these data suggest are the most promising approaches to successful knowledge mobilisation?

   b. What formative learning has accumulated through the practical experience of the programmes as implemented?

Methods

The overall approach is pragmatic and multi-method. We will use a combination of desk research, telephone and face-to-face interviews, a web-based survey and interactive workshops to address each of the research questions (RQs). The primary outputs will be oriented towards practical application within the NHS and related research agencies (including various intermediaries), although expected outputs will also include contributions to the international peer-reviewed literature.

A core aim of our analysis is to produce a concept map (Creswell 2009) of KM strategies. This would set out visually the dimensions or clusters of dimensions identified by our review and would provide the first cut of a broad classification of KM strategies. The concept map would draw on and

extend existing typologies by bringing these typologies together and combining them with an analysis of the *'theories in use'* by key agencies.

Study strands

Desk research: We will begin to construct the concept map by making full use of the array of research reviews of KM produced to date (e.g. Graham et al. 2006; Mitton et al. 2007; Tetroe et al. 2008; Ward et al. 2009; Best and Holmes 2010; Contandriopoulos et al. 2010) which draw mainly on published work. Based on our current knowledge of such reviews and some initial keyword searching of key databases we envisage that this meta-review will draw on no more than 30-40 existing reviews.

At the same time as our initial exploration of the key KM research reviews, we will carry out careful mapping of the key research funders, major research producers and key research intermediaries (e.g. research collation agencies, think tanks, charities, professional and membership organisations). Review of these materials and compilation of a 'key contacts' database will provide a sampling frame on which future work will be based. Throughout, our focus will be on key agencies that have substantial investment in programmes of knowledge mobilisation (e.g. funders, research producers and intermediaries) rather than on the delivery units, policy settings or sites of research application.

We will analyse the KM strategies using a range of criteria including: perspective on the nature of the task, focus of KM activities, any apparent complementarities and contradictions within an agency's KM strategy, and complementarities and contradictions across a range of agencies working in the same field.

Any evaluations uncovered of existing knowledge mobilisation work in the agencies will be summarised taking a realist synthesis approach (Pawson et al. 2004); that is, looking for evidence of the impacts of mid-range context-mechanism interactions that provide some explanatory power for why effects are seen.

In laying out the theoretical and empirical underpinnings to the concept map of knowledge mobilisation activities, we will link to relevant research reviews and summaries that relate to postulated mechanisms of action (addresses RQ2b). That is, the mapping will have added value by not just being descriptive of theoretical underpinnings but by linking to evaluative summaries of empirical findings and other key resources in those areas. By combining syntheses of published research with the grey literature on knowledge mobilisation practices, unpublished evaluations, and key informants' perspectives on the lived experience of implementation, we hope to build a much richer picture of activity and evidence in the field.

Interviews: From the sampling frame developed as above we will devise an interviewing strategy (telephone and face-to-face, augmented as necessary with email dialogue) to elicit clearer understandings about the models, theories and frameworks that (explicitly or implicitly) underlie the development of specific strategies (addresses RQ 2a). In developing a sampling strategy for the interviews we will pursue first those respondents responsible for a significant *scale* of activity, and those highlighting especially *innovative approaches*. Interviewing will also be used to identify formal and informal evaluative work, as well as to tease out the local learning from implementation challenges (addresses RQs 3a & 3b). The interviews will allow us to revisit and refine the concept map and associated tables.

Given our current understanding of the relevant bodies and agencies (one of the applicants has already compiled a list of some 40 key agencies as part of other work), and given the likely saturation of data as interviews proceed, we would expect to conduct *around 50-60 major interviews* augmented by follow-up conversations and email dialogue. Interviews will be semi-structured and will therefore follow a topic guide while allowing scope for participants to raise other issues. The

main topics to be covered will be: the history, origin and development of the knowledge mobilisation approaches used; any models, theories and frameworks that have been used in developing and using these approaches; the nature of and results from any formal or informal evaluations that have been carried out by the agency or of which the agency is aware; any formative learning or practical experience that has accumulated through the agency's use of the approach; the interviewee's assessment of the conceptual soundness and completeness of the concept map.

Web-based survey: As key propositions emerge from the mapping work and interviews (e.g. helpful models, theories and frameworks; key challenges and pitfalls; evaluative insights) we will develop a short e-questionnaire (using Survey Monkey or similar) and use this to capture wider perspectives in a more systematic way, drawing on the sampling frame as elaborated above. While the interviews will focus on those agencies responsible for a significant scale of activity and those using particularly innovative approaches, the web survey will be broader and will be sent to *all* of the identified players.

Workshops: Congruent with the thinking behind this work (that there is no neat separation between knowledge production and knowledge use) workshops will not just be used as 'dissemination tools' but instead will form an integral part of the enquiry methods. Two formal workshops, aiming for 35-40 participants at each, one early in the process (month 6) and one later (month 16), will be used to share the research thinking, preliminary data and analysis, and future empirical and analytic directions. From these we hope to identify (a) areas for refined data gathering, (b) clearer articulation of the mapping domains and supporting literatures, (c) creative ways of presenting findings and insights from our data, and (d) mechanisms for encouraging key actors in the UK to interact with our emerging findings.

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