

Making Research Count (University of York)

THE UNIVERSITY *of York*

ANNUAL REPORT 2008-09



I. INTRODUCTION

Making Research Count is a national research dissemination initiative, run regionally across the country by 10 universities. This is the 2008-09 annual report for the Making Research Count programme run by the University of York. The other 9 universities involved in Making Research Count are Bedfordshire, Brighton, Central Lancashire, East Anglia, Keele, King's College London, Northumbria (in partnership with Teesside), Salford and the Open University. Making Research Count is funded regionally via subscriptions from member agencies, including local authorities, health and voluntary organisations.

Each university determines the shape of its programme, and this is largely dependent on the wishes and requirements its subscribers, as well as the level of subscription income. The objective of Making Research Count is, however, consistent nationally in promoting knowledge-based practice in social work and social care.

Currently, the University of York's Making Research Count programme is funded by subscriptions from the social services departments from 8 local authorities in the Yorkshire & Humberside region – these being East Riding, Hull, Leeds, North East Lincolnshire, North Lincolnshire, North Yorkshire, Wakefield and York. All 8 are subscribers for both Adults and Children & Families.

2. NATIONAL UPDATE

During the year 2008-09, there are a number of national Making Research Count activities to report:

- The University of Northumbria, in partnership with the University of Teesside became the 10th university to deliver a regional Making Research Count programme in the North East of England
- Having successfully provided research support to practitioners undertaking small-scale research projects under the Children's Workforce Development Council's programme of practitioner-led research projects, Making Research Count is again working with practitioners in the 2009-2010 CWDC programme, with the potential to extend to 2012
- Working as a delivery partner with SCIE, in the DCSF funded Centre for Excellence and Outcomes in Children and Young People's Services - C4EO. The four core partners in C4EO are the National Children's Bureau, the National Foundation of Educational Research, the Social Care Institute for Excellence, and Research in Practice (RiP)

- Collaboration in the production of a series of research briefings. Originally commissioned by the Department of Health and known as Quality Protects Research Briefings, they subsequently became Every Child Matters Research and Practice Briefings: children and families and are published by DfES/DCSF. All sixteen briefings can be downloaded from the Making Research Count national website (www.makingresearchcount.org.uk)
- Making Research Count regional teams collaborate to produce 'Research News', which provides a brief account of some of the recent research which has taken place. All items have electronic links to either the published reports or to the email addresses of the researchers, and are designed to represent the diversity of topics in both child and family care and in adult social care actively research by the 10 universities. These are accessible via the Making Research Count website.

3. THE 2008-09 UNIVERSITY OF YORK PROGRAMME

Overview and Update

Along the lines of previous years, the programme of events delivered by the University of York was based on:

- Attracting staff with operational, policy or training responsibilities
- Ensuring the programme met the wishes and requirements of subscribing agencies
- Covering the full range of service areas and user groups across social work and social care
- Providing a range of different types of events, including research briefings, joint adults and children's seminars, and conferences.

During the 2008-09 programme year, a number of events took place that are worthy of note:

- Stephanie Lacey became the new regional coordinator at York from November 2008, taking over from Paul Dyson who had provided interim coordination for a few months following the departure of Leslie Hicks in the summer of 2008. Stephanie comes from a background in housing, having previously worked in research and strategy roles for housing associations and local authorities, as well as also having spent time in housing management. She works 2.5 days a week on the Making Research Count programme, and is supported by Jane Phythian who continues to provide an administration and event management role for the programme. Stephanie is line-managed by Juliet Koprowska, Head of Social Work, and works with Ian Shaw who is the academic lead for York's Making Research Count programme
- In early 2009, a number of visits were made to agencies subscribing to the York programme, with the aim of introducing the new regional coordinator, but also offering the opportunity to discuss the future development of the programme from the perspective of the agencies. Of the 4 visits that took place, a number of invaluable discussions took place, particularly around engaging with more senior staff, and involving practitioners in the delivery of events when appropriate to provide good practice sharing
- For a number of years, the Making Research Count programme at York has had different 'yearly schedules' to operate within – namely the academic year (October – September, and

also the MRC programme year), the subscriptions year (April – March, in line with agencies' financial years), and the University's own financial year (August – July). This has created difficulties in obtaining a true and accurate financial position at any given point. Therefore, the decision was taken earlier in 2009 to harmonise the years, such that the programme year will now run from August each year in line with the University financial year. However, agencies will still pay subscriptions in April each year. The result of this has been that the 2008-09 programme was just 10 months, with the 2009-10 programme starting 1st August 2009 – subscription fees were adjusted accordingly to reflect this, and all agencies were informed of the changes.

Summary of events held

Given the harmonisation outlined above, the 2008-09 was just 10 months in duration. This reduced the number of events held for the year; furthermore, the change in personnel and the interim arrangements during the summer of 2008 also led to a slightly slower pipeline of future events being forward planned. However, despite this, a healthy and successful programme of events was delivered, comprising:

Regional Conference

- *The Changing Face of Children's Social Work*

Research briefing seminars

- *Law, ethics and child care practice*, Michael Preston-Shoot, University of Bedfordshire
- *Saying Hello Every Day: combating loneliness and isolation among older people*, Steven Shardlow, University of Salford
- *Domiciliary care agencies and personal budgets: perceptions of opportunities and risks*, Kate Baxter, University of York
- *Abuse in care: acting to prevent the abuse of adults with learning disabilities in residential care*, Caroline White, University of Hull
- *Using a supported respite service to support families with children on the edge of care*, Jo Dixon, University of York
- *I Know What I Want: participation and choice for adults with learning disabilities...and children too?*, Ian Buchanan, University of York and Karen Spencer, self advocate
- *Partnerships and Regulation in Adult Protection: the effectiveness of multi-agency working with the regulatory framework*, Bridget Penhale, University of Sheffield
- *Young Adult Carers: experiences, needs and services for carers aged 16-24*, Fiona Becker, University of Nottingham
- *Safeguarding Young People: understanding neglect and maltreatment*, Gwyther Rees, The Children's Society

A two-day subject module had been planned, but during its planning, it became apparent that it would work well as a larger than usual research briefing:

- *Personalisation – the same for everyone?: the implications of personalisation for social workers*, Jill Manthorpe, King's College London and Rob Blackstone, Wilf Ward Family Trust

A further larger research briefing was also hosted, due to significant agency interest in the subject area:

- *Kinship Care Placements: Quality and Outcomes*, Joan Hunt, University of Oxford, Debra Lane, East Riding Council and Paul Dyson, independent social worker

Attendance and evaluation

During the year, a total of 401 people registered to attend events, comprising 308 from subscribing agencies, with a further 93 registrations from non-subscribing organisations who pay to attend. The overall attendance rate was 86%, with non-attendance (i.e. registered but not attending on the day itself) being evenly split between those with free places and those who had paid to attend.

Evaluation forms are provided at all events, and a total of 253 were completed during 2008-09, representing a 74% response rate. Evaluation forms cover a number of items, a summary of the main findings shows:

- Across all events, 91% reported that they thought the pre-event administration was either excellent or very good
- For research briefing seminars, 87% said the content was excellent or very good
- In the evaluation forms, respondents are asked to think about how they might disseminate what they've learnt as well as how clear they are about their next steps following the seminar – the scores for these questions tend to be lower, and this is felt to reflect the changing pace of service delivery, resource limitations affecting the ability to disseminate and the strict frameworks within which practitioners operate. However, higher scores were recorded for these questions from the two larger research briefing events on kinship care and individual budgets – this could possibly be due to including a practitioner perspective in terms of presentations and/or that the sessions were longer therefore allowing for more productive discussion.

Finances

Making Research Count (York) finished the financial year with a small surplus, after allowing for all income (subscriptions and paying places) and all expenditure (salaries, event costs, speakers' expenses, overheads, etc).

During the year, as a result of the harmonisation process described earlier, it was found that there were some additional funds that had been carried over from previous years, and some relating back to original set-up money. In light of the University's 'Better Management' initiative, which devolves planning and financial responsibilities to departments, it was felt this additional money would best be allocated to some business development activities. This has included

production of some new promotional material, a laptop for events hosted off-site, and offering some free places to potential new subscribers and smaller voluntary organisations.

Historically, the programme has largely relied on the goodwill of presenters to deliver seminars for free. Increased pressures on researchers' (and funders') time, and tighter resource management at universities, mean that it is more routine to negotiate a fee when inviting an individual to lead an event. In the 2009-10 budget, a clear allocation has been made for this – this is affordable given the sustained registration of non-subscribing agencies who pay a fee.

The decision has also been taken to increase the amount of administrative support to the programme. Jane Phythian, who remains the programme administrator will now work 18.5 hours per week (up from 13.8 hours). Provision has been made for this within the budget.

4. PLANS FOR THE FORTHCOMING YEAR

Context for the year

Whilst the focus of Making Research Count remains on the practical dissemination of quality and topical research findings, the frameworks for social care and social work are currently very focused on some key agendas – safeguarding, the media, workforce, an increasing elderly population and personalisation. Making Research Count needs to ensure that it responds by providing topical events, that may sometimes be more policy-focused than in the past, and also events that will attract a diverse range of practitioners from subscribing agencies including more senior officers in local authorities.

Programme delivery

At the time of producing this annual report, there are a number of events already planned for the 2009-10 programme:

- Research briefing seminars on:
 - Targeted family support
 - Every Child Matters – policy and research based update
 - Families with children experiencing domestic violence
 - Special guardianship
 - Multi-dimensional treatment foster care
 - Models of service delivery to support continuity of care for people with long-term neurological conditions
- A research workshop looking at how to get published
- Regional adults conference focusing on the future of adult social care
- Senior officers masterclass focusing on the Social Work Taskforce

Other activities

In previous years, Making Research Count (York) had hosted and managed a regional Research Governance Framework (RGF) group for Yorkshire & Humberside. More recently, this group appeared to have lost some momentum and had fallen into abeyance. After conducting some

consultation with existing members, and through updating contacts details, the RGF group has now been re-established, and met in September 2009, with its next meeting planned for January 2010. The purpose of the group is to share experiences, discuss national and regional developments, and identify good practice in research governance activities.

The University of York's Centre for Applied Human Rights is holding a conference in November 2009, *Social Justice in Changing and Challenging Times*. Making Research Count has block purchased eight places at the conference and has invited practitioners from each subscribing agency to nominate a member of staff to attend at no cost.

5. CONCLUSIONS

Making Research Count, as a national initiative, continues to grow and develop – demonstrated particularly through the announcement of its newest member, Northumbria with Teesside, and the successful re-tendering for the CWDC's practitioner-led research programme.

At York, we believe that Making Research Count also continues to develop and improve, building on messages from feedback and meetings with key contacts – this can be seen through the planned senior officers masterclass, as well as through the emerging discussion with potential new subscribers, and introducing increased flexibility of event structure.

As quickly as the world of social work and social care changes, we will continue to remain a chosen provider of facilitating knowledge-based practice through effective research dissemination.

Stephanie Lacey
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