Blogging… a piece of cake… isn't it?
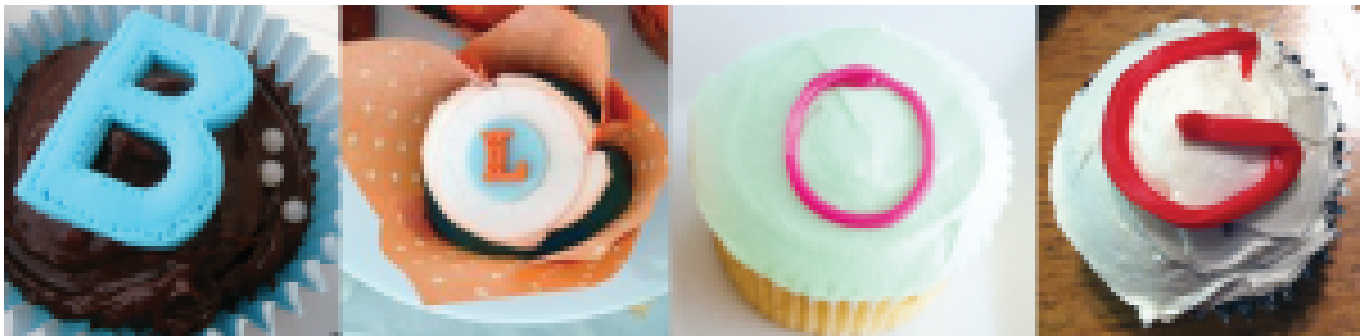
(http://socialcareresearchimpact.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2015/08/Blog-cake.png) I've been meaning to blog since April… I have 5 or 6 drafts of different blogs exploring some of the findings and themes emerging from the SCEiP project (http://socialcareresearchimpact.org.uk/the-sceip-project-and-six-lessons-to-date/), and another few post-it notes with thoughts for other blogs…

It's now August and I haven't quite managed to finish those drafts and post the blogs (probably much to the annoyance of two colleagues who dedicate a lot of their time to this website and the aim behind it, although they're too kind to say so!). But blogging is easy. Takes a couple of hours to draft a blog (for me and I'm not saying it's any good), a few more to come back to it later and see if it makes any sense, work on it further, login to WordPress and post it. And there's excellent encouragement on this site (http://socialcareresearchimpact.org.uk/impact-tools/blogging/)

too! Yet somehow I haven't managed to find the time to do this in about 4 months (more if you consider our project ended before then).

In the meantime I've been in meetings where some of the themes from those draft blogs have been discussed, and some of those meetings I've left frustrated that the discussion hasn't moved forward (not for the lack of trying!) and I'm making points that everyone should already know… until I realise that I'm expecting others to know what our findings were and how they answered some of the points being raised without ever having put all of them down somewhere publicly. It's not that we haven't discussed the findings (we held a conference in November (http://socialcareresearchimpact.org.uk/event/creating-an-impact-social-care-research-in-practice/) for example) or that there won't be reports and papers from our project and the various subprojects and activities since then (I'm almost done on those!), but they were not necessarily out there for those participating in the meetings to know about or consider before we met. It's worse if they didn't know that information even existed (albeit in my head for some of it).

We've spent a lot of time in the SCEiP project encouraging researchers to share their findings openly with blogs being one method, not just 8-9 months after a study ends and the journal paper is published (a minimum guestimate assuming the paper was written before the project ended or the day after…) but regularly and throughout the research process. And no doubt there must be instances when they themselves go to conferences or meetings and feel their research has already provided the answers to some discussion points… but the journal paper hasn't quite been published or circulated or they didn't have time (or think to) write a blog on their initial findings (or couldn't in case it affected

whether a journal would accept the paper if findings had already been shared elsewhere). So they raise their findings at those meetings and aim to schedule a further meeting, or hope to find ways to link back with those they networked with, to take the discussion further.

Yet if we don't get the information out there and – more importantly – to the people who could use it, we're effectively not helping to move discussions forward – perhaps going as far as stalling them – which in turn means we can't collectively create a positive impact (be it on wider discussions on knowledge exchange or impact for social care research, or evidence use in practice, or the evidence that commissioners and providers can use for the care and support they manage, or policymakers could use for policy developments). At the end of the day then we're still discussing things and not implementing actions to address issues, and potentially just going around in circles. Academic researchers do need those journal papers for their own career progression of course but they do need to find ways of sharing their work *before* and alongside that in an accessible ways. We all do.

We probably all agree with that… doesn't quite address my problem of not having finished and posted those blogs…

But that's then in the planning and – to some extent – the value we place on our activities. I appreciate many a researcher finishes one research project and then has to move on to the next one the following day or not receive their salary, which in turn means they submitted the report to the funder but have to find a way to balance writing their journal paper or public output while working fully on another study (or a multitude). We've addressed this before – by putting in funded time to proposals to allow for these outputs to be produced (which most funders will not raise

concerns with) funded time could effectively be made available, and by building them into the full research process they are not getting stacked up for the last day of the project – but perhaps the day-to-day isn't something we fully control and other priorities come up, or saying this that doesn't help after the fact when a project is already underway.

At the same time I know of one example of a researcher whose findings were shared with a key external organisation who wanted to include them in a seminal report which may have led to policy impact. The findings paper was going through the journal submission process so wouldn't be published for a (long) while and there was no output to cite. The organisation wanted to include the information in some way anyway. So the researcher wrote a blog post and the organisation referenced that in the report and the evidence clearly tied back to the researcher and their study. The blog post in itself was widely cited and picked up in a large number of media outlets with clear references back to the researcher; there has been policy impact and the journal paper has subsequently been well cited.

I'm not saying that that one researcher placed more importance on the impact of their research or the need to share it with others and so spent the time writing the blog post rather than any other priority on the same day(s) – and it was important to make sure the evidence included in the organisation's report was clearly tied back to research – than any other researcher does. In the last 4 months I've tried to come back to the blog drafts I have but there's always been another pressing deadline to work on first, and then another (and that's probably the case for other outputs too). But for me it is important that those blogs do go up, we share our findings (and wider thoughts), and we have the opportunity to have your comments and thoughts on them. Not

least so that when we get to the next meeting or the next event we've moved the discussion forward, and hopefully have actions happening not just discussion of what action should be taken.

I've now revisited the drafts and worked on them further. They'll start posting on this site over the next couple of weeks and I look forward to the discussions they generate. Similarly the final papers from our work too. Progress!

This blog was not in any way intended to explain myself or the large gap since the last blog we posted here (!!), but did get me thinking that somewhere along the line we need to balance what is shared, how and when to support progress, and to avoid those conversations with comments like "but my work addresses this very issue, let me give you a summary and we can meet up again to discuss" or "that's great you're starting this new project, did you know of this interesting overlap (in that it's the same) with my own work?" with other priorities on our time. At some point surely the time spent revisiting the same discussions could be better spent on getting the outputs out and then discussing them for those who can (decision makers, policy makers, people who use services, carers) to take positive actions. Perhaps that's me talking to myself – a key lesson in looking back at the last few months!

Next post early next week!

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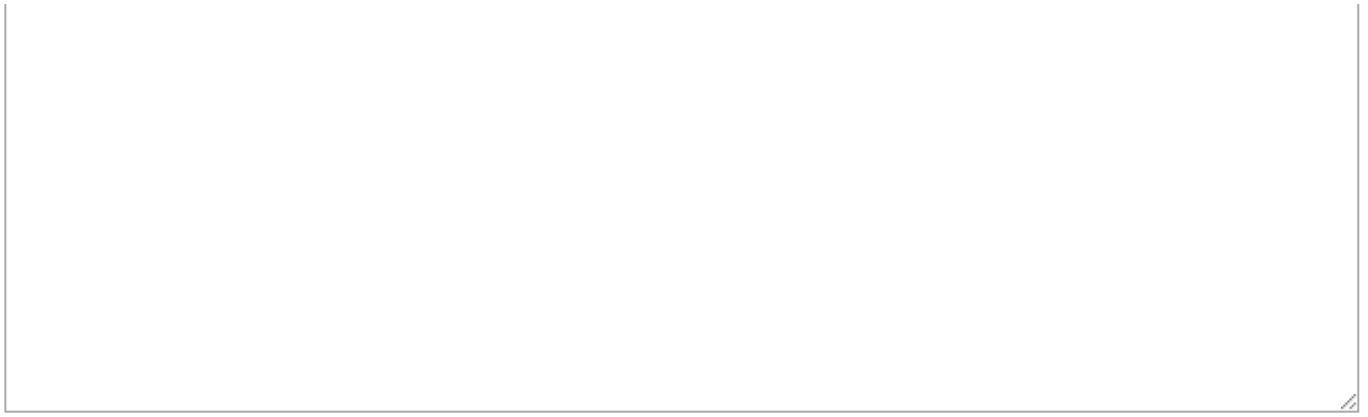
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