The SCEiP project …. And six lessons (to date…)

About 29 months ago we set out to revolutionise the way in which knowledge was exchanged in social care, particularly between researchers and professionals… OK not quite what we were officially intending; we just wanted to explore what worked and how to remove the barriers that seemed to exist (or where believed by some to exist perhaps), and – with any luck – move from talking to action.

Why? We've had a long standing interest in how research, practice and policy work together to improve adult social care within the Personal Social Services Research Unit (http://www.pssru.ac.uk/index-kent-lse.php) (PSSRU) at LSE, and various pieces of work have been undertaken exploring knowledge exchange (KE) in social care. Then along came HEFCE's Research Excellence Framework (http://www.ref.ac.uk/) with a view to putting impact firmly within its research assessment process, and the NIHR School for Social Care Research (http://www.sscr.nihr.ac.uk/) (which PSSRU is involved in) where the aim was to improve the evidence base for adult social care practice and to ensure that evidence was feeding into policy and practice developments. We knew of the barriers and it seemed that research and practice were moving along on parallel tracks to the same destination. So in 2012 we sought funding from the

LSE's Higher Education Innovation Fund and the SCEiP (Creating an Impact: Social Care Research in Action) project was established to test what could work and how, and provide tools to support greater KE.

Have we improved KE between researchers and practitioners in social care (as well as others)? Do we now know the best methods to use? SCEiP tested out a number of activities involving a large number of people, and we were lucky enough to have the scope to do that. There have been numerous times when we've stopped, reflected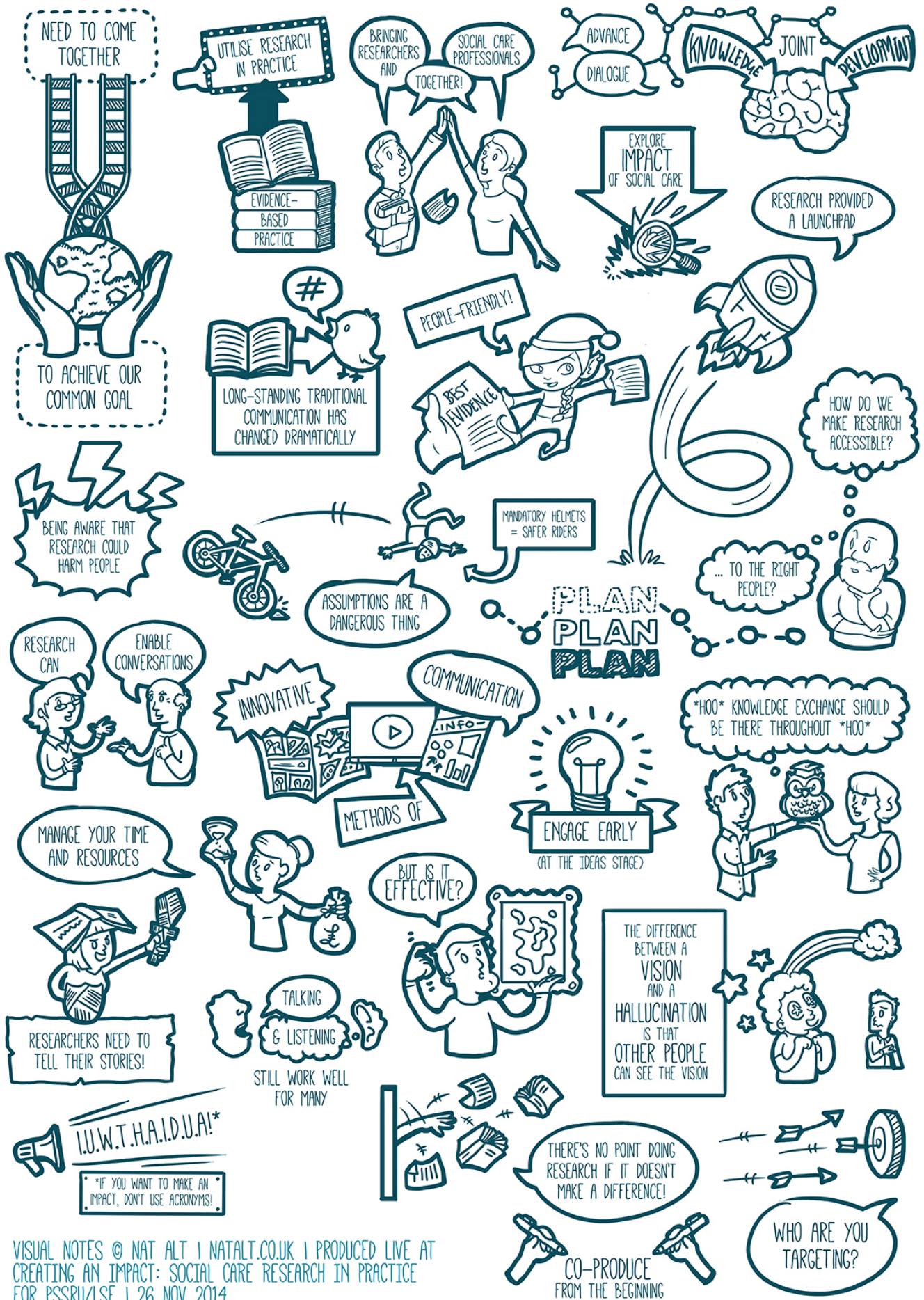 and realised that we've barely scratched the surface. That's partly because improving the way knowledge is exchanged is not something we can do alone. At our final conference on 26 November (http://socialcareresearchimpact.org.uk/event/creating-an-impact-social-care-research-in-practice/) it was great to see a very engaged room of 120+ people from a range of backgrounds all very enthusiastic to … well make sure research "makes a difference", and hopefully each of those people will have gone back and made some (however small) improvement in the way they approach KE or more importantly how they approach their research or their practice. Perhaps that alone is not enough and one of the key lessons we came away from the project with is the need for reestablishing the foundations of research and practice rather than perhaps just trying to patch the knowledge exchange cracks… in an ideal world of course!

We did learn a lot and have a number of recommendations – on evidence into practice (and vice versa), building research capacity, impact assessment. Some of these were drawn out in the excellent visual note from Nat Al-Tahan at our final conference, while others we will share in papers and blogs over the coming weeks. Here we share our current top six lessons.

CREATING AN IMPACT: SOCIAL CARE RESEARCH IN PRACTICE

VISUAL NOTES | #SCEIPIMPACT

NEED TO COME TOGETHER

UTILISE RESEARCH IN PRACTICE

EVIDENCE-BASED PRACTICE

BRINGING RESEARCHERS AND SOCIAL CARE PROFESSIONALS TOGETHER!

ADVANCE DIALOGUE

KNOWLEDGE JOINT DEVELOPMENT

EXPLORE IMPACT OF SOCIAL CARE

RESEARCH PROVIDED A LAUNCHPAD

TO ACHIEVE OUR COMMON GOAL

LONG-STANDING TRADITIONAL COMMUNICATION HAS CHANGED DRAMATICALLY

PEOPLE-FRIENDLY!

BEST EVIDENCE

HOW DO WE MAKE RESEARCH ACCESSIBLE?

BEING AWARE THAT RESEARCH COULD HARM PEOPLE

MANDATORY HELMETS = SAFER RIDERS

ASSUMPTIONS ARE A DANGEROUS THING

PLAN PLAN PLAN

... TO THE RIGHT PEOPLE?

RESEARCH CAN

ENABLE CONVERSATIONS

INNOVATIVE

COMMUNICATION

.INFO.

METHODS OF

ENGAGE EARLY (AT THE IDEAS STAGE)

HOO KNOWLEDGE EXCHANGE SHOULD BE THERE THROUGHOUT *HOO*

MANAGE YOUR TIME AND RESOURCES

BUT IS IT EFFECTIVE?

THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN A VISION AND A HALLUCINATION IS THAT OTHER PEOPLE CAN SEE THE VISION

RESEARCHERS NEED TO TELL THEIR STORIES!

TALKING & LISTENING

STILL WORK WELL FOR MANY

I.U.W.T.H.A.I.D.U.A!*

*IF YOU WANT TO MAKE AN IMPACT, DON'T USE ACRONYMS!

THERE'S NO POINT DOING RESEARCH IF IT DOESN'T MAKE A DIFFERENCE!

CO-PRODUCE FROM THE BEGINNING

WHO ARE YOU TARGETING?

VISUAL NOTES © NAT ALT | NATALT.CO.UK | PRODUCED LIVE AT CREATING AN IMPACT: SOCIAL CARE RESEARCH IN PRACTICE FOR PSSRU/LSE | 26 NOV 2014

So what would be the top six lessons we would put forward now? There are probably quite a few… but to briefly limit to six:

Plan:

Somehow KE seems to be something that gets tagged on after a research project has been fully planned out. Maybe because it's something research funders insist on but it's still not clear how to do it or what actually works. Ensuring that KE activities are planned within research processes – as part of each core research activity and as part of the timeline for the proposed study – is very important and places research in a better position to have impact.

Knowing that research does not end with KE:

It seems the approach taken to KE is still that it's something that happens at the end of a study when findings are available, as dissemination. It isn't. It can – and should – take place throughout a research study from the development of the research question/proposal, telling the world the study is starting, sharing updates throughout, discussing interim findings, and so on. If target audiences do not know a study is happening, by the time the results come out the topic or area may not be relevant to them anymore and most practice decisions will already have been made. The more engaging the research process, the more likely it is that target audiences will stay engaged and use findings.

Knowledge exchange needs time and resources: A common barrier put forward is the lack of time and resources for KE activities. Yet funders want the research they fund to have impact and will fund clearly thought through KE activities relevant to the proposed project to support that. So why not ask them for the funding and build in time for integrated KE activities in research funding proposals?

Know your audience and target knowledge exchange methods to them:

KE activities will not work if they are not targeted. Proposing to use social media for professionals without addressing the issue that some face with lack of access to social media within work settings, or writing policy briefs when a decision maker will only read 2-4 pages maximum and will want to focus on the implications of those findings for them, may look good on paper but do not work in practice. Ideally planning of the research – and integrated KE activities – will take place with those audiences.

Innovative knowledge exchange methods and traditional methods are not mutually exclusive:

A KE activity targeted to professionals – such as a workshop or findings summary – does not have to replace the production of a journal paper. Arguments about not being able to do both are incorrect; academic and non-academic impact are not mutually exclusive. If planned appropriately with the right resources (time and funding) both can be done and any research project will be the better for that.

Evaluate:

It is very important to evaluate the activities as they take place and build in an evaluation process/framework in planning stages. Not knowing that an activity did or did not work – and why – until after a research project ends will not allow for learning to support tweaks in forthcoming activities.

These are all interlinked and doing one will lead to the others quite easily. Putting the time in to think through the proposed study (what the aim is, who the target audiences are, what would work best for those audiences, and resource implications) at the research proposal development stage will require some time, as

does developing a research proposal anyway, but will ensure that any proposed study has the best possible start on its impact pathway, and then … its just a case of making it happen!

3 thoughts on "The SCEiP project …. And six lessons (to date…)"

1. Pingback: Consider impact early | Social Care Research Impact (http://socialcareresearchimpact.org.uk/consider-impact-early/)
2. Pingback: Blogging… a piece of cake… isn't it? | Social Care Research Impact (http://socialcareresearchimpact.org.uk/blogging-a-piece-of-cake-isnt-it/)
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(http://www.pssru.ac.uk/index-kent-lse.php)

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