

RESEARCHING TOGETHER 2018

CONFERENCE REPORT



PART 1: INTRODUCTION

This report provides an overview of the Scottish Third Sector Research Forum (TSRF) conference *Researching Together* which took place on 1st February 2018 at the John McIntyre Conference Centre, Edinburgh. A plenary activity opened the conference followed by parallel sessions in the morning and afternoon. The event closed with a call to action during which participants identified action points to take back to their organisations, for the TSRF and for other relevant bodies. For brevity, only key messages from each breakout session are summarised in Part 2. Presentation slides and other additional documents (where available) are published on the Evaluation Support Scotland website on the *Researching Together* event page. Messages to the TSRF and others from delegates are found in Part 3 and event evaluation in Part 4. For a quick read about what happened on the day framed by tweets using **#rtconf18** there is a Storify published at: <https://storify.com/Evaluationg/researching-together>.

GETTING STARTED WITH COLLABORATION

The conference aimed to:

- Share examples of current or recent research collaboration between the third sector and universities
- Provide a forum for third sector, academic and other interested parties (such as funders) to engage together in learning about collaborative research
- Offer opportunities for participants to network and make new contacts.

At the start of the conference, participants were asked what they hoped to gain from the day's activities...

Participants then worked with each other at their tables to create a poster that outlined a collaborative research solution to a research question! We drew on the principles of research collaboration and coproduction from publications by the TSRF (Evidencing genuine co-production in the third sector, May 2017) and Knowledge Translation Network (Collaborating with academics, March 2016).



Third sector and academic collaborative thinking in action!



Main messages from morning and afternoon sessions are captured in this section. Where available, presentation slides or additional resources will be uploaded to the event page on the Evaluation Support Scotland website.

MORNING



Who funds the third sector to undertake collaborative research with academics? Jane Marryat, Evaluation Support Scotland (jane@evaluationsupportscotland.org.uk); Jane Cullingworth, Voluntary Sector Studies Network/ TSRF (j.cullingworth.1@research.gla.ac.uk)

In autumn 2017 the Scottish Third Sector Research Forum (TSRF) undertook a small scale research project to explore what funding is currently available to third sector organisations for engaging in research with academics. This session highlights key messages from the research followed by discussion:

- What is your most challenging issue with regard to funding collaborative research? What would help?
- Should the TSRF do more to investigate this question- what could the TSRF do to help Third Sector Organisations looking for funding to take part in collaborative research?

Summary of messages from the session

Barriers include:

- Lack of funding generally
- Limitations of funders' funding criteria and bureaucratic application processes
- Funders' lack of understanding of value of third sector research
- No paid for time for applying for funding
- Mismatch of expectations and agenda between third sector and academics
- A challenge is how "impact" is being taken up by academics – it needs to be more than sitting on a committee and relevant to the third sector
- Academics need to be mindful that they don't replicate social inequalities through their collaborative work
- Successful example given of strong patient-led research undertaken through Macmillan Cancer UK in a research partnership- in this case a large third sector organisation is also a research funder.



Research 'by' the community: what can we learn from community-led action research? Andrew Paterson, Scottish Community Development Centre (Andrew.Paterson@scdc.org.uk)

Community-led action research is a way of doing research where the community being researched decides the issue to be researched, how the research is carried out and how the research results are used. This round table discussion will introduce community-led action research and explore the following:

- How do we recognise the voice of the community being researched?
- How does community-led action research relate to other forms of research involving the third sector, communities and service users?
- Power relations within research more generally.

<http://www.scdc.org.uk/what/community-led-action-research/ARC/>

Summary of messages from the session

- It's important, but not always easy, to get views from all sections of the community and not just those who are easier to reach. But we don't have to be purists and you need to start with the willing and where there is motivation for change. We need to impress upon/ support 'champions' to listen to a broad range of people to reach the 'seldom heard'

Quote from workshop post-it: *Recognising the voice of the community in research can have different starting points – doesn't need to be 'pure'*

- Impact and follow through in community-led research is very important as, if ignored, it will be difficult to build trust and create change.
- The role of resources to support community participation, e.g. 'the importance of participatory "officers" and similar postholders who can help open up systems'

Quote from workshop post-it: *"Building capacity in community-led organisations – a legacy to create resilient bodies not reliant on individual effort, structured to survive"*

- *Notes from each table are in a separate document on the conference event page*



The UWS-Oxfam Partnership: Reflections on some experiences of collaborative research and advocacy, Professor Chik Collins, University of the West of Scotland.

The UWS-Oxfam Partnership, officially established in 2012, is a long-term and ongoing collaboration between the University of the West of Scotland and Oxfam Scotland, which developed on the basis of prior research and policy development collaborations between the two organisations. This presentation will outline the origins and development of the Partnership, describe some of the key collaborations and their outputs, and provide some reflection on the experience of 'partnership working' over the years.

<http://uwsoxfampartnership.org.uk/>

The Research for Change Programme: Martin McKee, Social Value Lab; Gillian Kirkwood & Lyndsey Coleman, Y Sort-it Youth Service

The developmental phase of the Research for Change Programme (2017-20):

Social Value Lab and Life Changes Trust partnership model of quality-assured, participatory research. The Programme gives under/postgraduates or recent graduates the opportunity to gain paid practical experience working on short-term, small-scale research and evaluation support projects to voluntary and community organisations that focus on care experienced young people and people affected by dementia. We expect the programme will support approximately 60 research projects, 50 organisations and 40 aspiring researchers. The researchers gain valuable practical experience, the organisations receive additional capacity and expertise, and it furthers the aims of the Life Changes Trust.

<http://www.socialvaluelab.org.uk/2017/08/introducing-research-for-change/>

Common messages from both presentations:

- **Planning** - before researching together, plan together. This includes thinking together how it might be used and shared. UWS/Oxfam has policy fora and events in which to share findings and get feedback. Timescales can be a barrier: think about quick(er) wins for the third sector organisation as well as longer term research outputs.
- **People** – it's vital for the people who are researching together to understand each other's skills and perspectives. Brokerage like *Research for Change* helps. When someone in the collaboration moves rebuild relationships to keep on track. But good partnerships can survive change of personnel.
- **Prestige** – are you doing enough to promote successful collaborations and celebrate? Remember to take **photos** of the partnership and its work!



Coproducing Research With Disabled People: Disability research into independent living and learning (DRILL) Dr Jim Elder-Woodward, Glasgow Centre for Inclusive Living, and Dr Elaine Douglas, University of Stirling

How can we do the best research with disabled people? This presentation will draw on current theories of best practice in coproduced research to outline how we can undertake research that empowers disabled people rather than reproduces and reinforces inequality. It is based on over twenty years of theory and practice experience in this area from a disabled researchers and activists, and draws examples from current research in the UK funded by the Disability Research Into Independent Living and Learning (Big Lottery) fund.

<http://www.drilluk.org.uk/> <http://disability-studies.leeds.ac.uk/>

<https://www.gla.ac.uk/schools/socialpolitical/research/sociology/strathclydecentrefordisabilityresearch/>

- Benefits of emancipatory research methodology
 - Increased transparency and critical approach to otherwise taken-for-granted assumptions
 - Researcher integrity: emancipatory research is more than a process, it is context-specific and the researcher going into that context needs to be the right person for the job - not a one size fits all approach
- Message for funders: Emancipatory research is highly collaborative and has a very open ended starting point to allow for collaboration and participation to develop over time and home the focus of the research. Funders need to have application forms and processes that allow for this.
- Challenges still to address: equitable distribution of funding between partners e.g. funds shared appropriately between third sector organisation and university at the outset of the work.



When Town met Gown: Fathers Network Scotland partnership with the University of Edinburgh – what makes collaboration work: Sam Pringle, Fathers Network Scotland, Dr. Gary Clapton and Dr. Gitit Kadar-Sadat, University of Edinburgh

Fathers Network Scotland works to create a truly father friendly world. As a micro charity it relies heavily on working with partners to create and disseminate knowledge. In 2012 it set out to find out to uncover the facts about dads living in Scotland. Since then it has published 10 reports and hosted two research conferences for over 250 academics and practitioners on a research budget of less than £20,000 a year. This workshop is an interactive discussion sharing the story of how Fathers Network Scotland works with the University of Edinburgh. How it came about, what happened and what difference this makes. How can collaborative working make a positive difference for you and your organisation?

<http://www.fathersnetwork.org.uk/research>

- Challenges
 - Final products can take too long to share with stakeholders, e.g. produce an accessible 3 page summary of a longer document.
 - Publishing cycle driven by academic requirements, not by policy cycle or needs of the organisation
 - Need time on both sides to keep relationships going (or finding connections in the first place)
 - Need more opportunities for TS orgs to showcase what they do
- What should academics do more of?
 - Share findings widely- not only in academic publications
 - Be open and flexible about ways of working
 - Teach students about how to approach third sector organisations
- What should the third sector do more of?
 - Be proactive and make connections
 - Be more confident about the opportunities they are offering
 - Set a clear agenda
 - Be realistic and strategic



The long-term legacy of third-sector – university collaborations: Allan Farmer, Whale Arts; Dr Peter Matthews, University of Stirling; Caroline Richards, Prospect Community Housing

The workshop will be a discussion between two representatives of third-sector organisations, and an academic. The group worked very closely until around 2015 delivering a number of outputs and outcomes, supported by the Arts and Humanities Research Council's Connected Communities programme. The workshop will reflect back on these experiences, and the lasting legacy and learning from this coproduction of research.

<http://hdl.handle.net/1893/22080>

- Benefits of the partnership included:
 - Flexibility – community and academic partners test things out, otherwise things are not funded
 - Time to evolve – 7 projects, changed the balance of relationships over time.
 - For the academic: access to community, ways of working differently, approaches research questions differently e.g. using big Local Authority data for different types of questions
 - The funding for community researcher was not rigidly defined – this allowed to recruit for a community development worker not a PHD student.

- Useful outputs included:
 - Evaluation beneficial for developing future work – delivery of activities and community involvement, additional funding for new work
 - A closer stronger community partnership since research, ease of partnership – built trust and positivity, now – a consortium including statutory services.

- Challenges included:
 - Learning to work with a different sector: different timescales and use of language, third sector often mediatory approach while academics very direct **but co-production brought the academic/ community cultures together and built mutual respect.**



Can we accelerate our impact through better use of evidence? Learning from the Centre for Homelessness Impact : Dr Ligia Teixeira and Karoline Kirchhübel Andersen, Centre for Homelessness Impact

Join Dr Ligia Teixeira from the Centre for Homelessness Impact as she discusses the untapped power of evidence as a way to achieve step-change in the effort to end homelessness. Ligia is joined by IDEO designer Karoline Kirchhübel who will share lessons from the private sector, where human-centred, iterative approaches are increasingly used to solve complex issues.

<https://www.homelessnessimpact.org/>

Some insights about evidence use and evidence analysis

- Don't just make decisions on the data and evidence you have – think about the missing data and evidence.
- The presentation gave examples of – and Ligia and Karoline are themselves an example of - creative combinations. Combining different types of evidence, questioning each other's assumptions.
- Too much descriptive evidence but not enough actionable insights. We need to get better at testing possible assumptions based on good enough evidence and using that to improve the 'what works' evidence base. Testing can be about desirability, viability and feasibility.



Propagate: sharing tools for co-production and collaboration: Josie Vallely and Stuart Muirhead, Iriss

Are you interested in implementing a co-production project, or in co-production methodology more generally? Come along to Propagate, an Iriss workshop focussed on our new co-production project planner. The session will be all about the implementation of co-production projects within social services and using co-production to shift power. Participants will receive a copy of the resource to work through together. Come prepared to share your ideas and leave with lots of new ones! Before developing the resource, Josie Vallely, who will lead the workshop, worked on the Iriss led Pilotlight project. Pilotlight applied co-production principles in the context of self-directed support.

www.iriss.org.uk

www.pilotlight.iriss.org.uk

- Coproduction is, in its truest sense, making things together. Keep that in mind when you're starting to plan...what methods will best help you and your partner/s be creative together?
- Remember that co-produced projects need more time than working using traditional methods - all partners need to plan in the extra time for discussion and negotiation. Not everyone gets that yet - it's a cultural shift that's happening slowly - but it is happening!
- **From discussion:** third sector organisations generally have fewer bureaucratic layers than universities, so they can be quite responsive and often can move quickly to get an activity or piece of work up and running.

The final session of the afternoon brought participants together to identify action related to collaborative research that they themselves would take back to their organisations as a result of the conference, as well as flag up actions that they would like to see from the Third Sector Research Forum or others.

MESSAGES TO THE SCOTTISH THIRD SECTOR RESEARCH FORUM FROM CONFERENCE PARTICIPANTS

The messages below are a combination of summarized and verbatim messages from conference participants regarding the work they would like the TSRF to consider taking forward.

- Promote TSRF resources and activity more widely- raise the profile of the TSRF!
- Offer more events or networking opportunities
 - a half-day event every 6 months
 - quarterly informal meet-up sessions for third sector and academics
 - a programme of smaller- scale themed events over the year
 - regular ' learning showcases' of collaborative work
 - contribute to a 2019 peer research event
- Increased brokering role
 - online database, forum or 'virtual matchmaking' for academics/ TSOs to register availability/ research partner needed
 - provide a means of connecting smaller grassroots TSOs and academics
 - actively promote TSO/academic collaboration
 - connecting with university research offices to help universities establish connections with third sector
 - TSRF could identify themes and trends in research council funding and share this with TSOs and academics
- More work with or about funders
 - Create an online list of funding source
 - Work with Research Councils to make pots of funding more accessible for TSO/ university collaboration
- Develop resources
 - Good practice in research collaboration
 - Examples of good practice in third sector research
- Lobbying Research Councils on behalf of third sector for more effective engagement with third sector partners- fully supporting during research process rather than perceiving them as 'leveraged' partners'

At the March 2018 TSRF meeting members discussed the messages from the conference and identified the following action points:

- **Raising the TSRF profile and running events:** Being mindful of capacity of the TSRF to fund and run events, and not replicating what others are doing, the TSRF will explore how it could support light touch events that showcase collaborative research and its impacts. The TSRF could work on refreshing its identity to distinguish it from Evaluation Support Scotland. Refreshed newsletter and web pages could be used to signpost to TSRF members' work as well as TSRF publications and promote other third sector research events.
- **Brokering third sector & academic collaborations:** Overall this goes beyond the scope and capacity of the TSRF. Creating and maintaining an online database would be too resource intensive to be realistic. The TSRF will however engage with Knowledge Exchange & Research Officers to bridge networks between the third sector and universities, and will undertake work to provide sign posting to organisations who are already brokering collaborations.
- **Funders and resources about research funding:** The TSRF will: explore opportunities to make more formal links with UK Research and Innovation (the new higher education research funding body that replaces the seven Research Councils); seek to include 'research' as a search term in the Funding Scotland database; compile a list of existing resources and signpost and scope resources about research funding.
- **Lobbying:** The TSRF does **not** lobby. Its role is to make links with relevant people and institutions in order to: to showcase good case study examples; highlight good practice; and draw attention to barriers and challenges related to third sector research in a constructive way. This conference report will also be distributed so that learning and messages from the event are shared more widely through networks- although it cannot be guaranteed that messages directed to other organisations will be acted on.

MESSAGES FROM CONFERENCE PARTICIPANTS TO OTHERS

To the Scottish Government

- Find out what are the institutional and governmental facilitators and barriers to coproduction research?
- Offer opportunities for organisations and researchers to work together. Share ideas and find suitable partners
- Allocate pump-priming money for supporting research in third sector
- Qualitative research being taken on board by government/parliament - voices of that lived experience
- Need Scottish Government to invest in long term research with communities, separated from short term funding discussions. More co-production of evidence. Less participatory budgeting

To universities

- How about doing an event on third sector, academia and private sector organisations? (University of Edinburgh)
- More opportunities for graduates/very early career researchers to get involved in research for the third sector (see R4C model)
- Share outputs, especially those that go firstly into academic journals that aren't easily available to third sector
- Academics - don't use third sector orgs as just gatekeepers to 'real people'- be realistic about how, and how much, data to collect
- Research doesn't have to be expensive. Small can make an impact too!

To funders

- Invest in pre-grant relationships
- Research funders - please make your rules and procedures as open and accessible as possible!
- Research councils UK - change funding rules to make collaborative research easier
- Funders recognise that co-production is necessary and requires up-front investment – make more small funds available to support development of initial ideas which are less defined.

MESSAGES TO OTHERS CONTINUED

To others (not-specified)

- Work to ensure collaboration and co-production is at the heart of all research in communities
- Ask questions & make links
- Pick up the phone/email/tweet sector bodies like Social Enterprise Scotland - here to help!
- Want to have a listening ear re: coproduction? Email me: josie.vallely@iriss.org.uk
- Continue to share innovative approaches. Continue to collaborate with different sectors and do even more
- Don't always look to someone else to change... change practice yourself!
- Share, share, share!
- Third sector needs to be more confident and assertive
- Let's keep picking up the phone or emailing - remove the barriers - the conversations are the beginning!
- Maybe more on the big picture and methods, less on details and specific knowledge?
- Perseverance needed to effect cultural shift. Let's do more peer to peer support

'NOTES TO SELF' FROM CONFERENCE PARTICIPANTS

- Be more confident in what I do know about collaborations... and shape that
- Make community led action research happen in my institute/college
- Keep learning
- Insights are valuable pieces of evidence, but aren't the whole picture
- Need to find better ways to get the voice of disadvantaged young people heard in the co-design at youth work services (beyond consultation and evaluation)
- Use Mentimeter for using at conferences and events. Particularly enjoyed the talk from social value lab
- Take forward proposal for co-production in providing supportive and holistic services for people with lung conditions in Glasgow City
- Identify and articulate my own organisations' research needs
- Promote collaboration and co-production in communities and third sector (and statutory sector)
- Ask for help - use their experience to help solve problems
- Explore potential academic collaborations
- Include coproduction in research proposals
- Turn those facts into insights! With help from others - fresh eyes

'NOTES TO SELF' FROM PARTICIPANTS- CONTINUED

- Coproduce a research project with people with lived experience
- Pass IRISS toolkit on to Bridgend Inspiring Growth, they will make good use of it!
- I liked the distinction between observation and insight
- Coproduction partners may have different end results (therefore not necessarily one cake but different kinds of cake)
- Share the IRISS coproduction toolkit with colleagues
- I am going to... organise an action research workshop (participatory, collaborative, community led) to bring together researchers who are engaged in this approach (across sectors) to create peer support
- Follow up some connections made today and some ideas learned from others
- Follow up on suggestions from fellow participant that we explore options to facilitate shared learning for community organisations doing research
- Summarise co-pro challenges and write a blog
- Use insights as well as evidence
- Read more on evidence debate, coproduction...
- Just do it! As third sector org. engage more strategically with academia
- Networking isn't as scary as you think ;)
- I'm always impressed by the collegiality in both the academic and third sectors
- We are doing great work working collaboratively (FNS)
- I will talk to a third sector partner I am currently working with and check in on how they feel about our collaboration
- Inspire more academics to work with VSOs and vice versa
- Learning from successful 3rd sector collaboration I can apply, focused on developing collaborative culture
- As an academic: engage more actively with third sector organisations
- Join up with contacts that I've made today
- Consider co-production in all areas of work. Look into design - thinking more!

FEEDBACK FROM EVALUATION SURVEY

As a follow-on from evaluation on the day, participants were invited to complete a short online survey through which they could give more detailed comments on their conference experience.

Around a third of participants (31) responded, with satisfaction levels reflecting the positive feedback gathered at the conference.

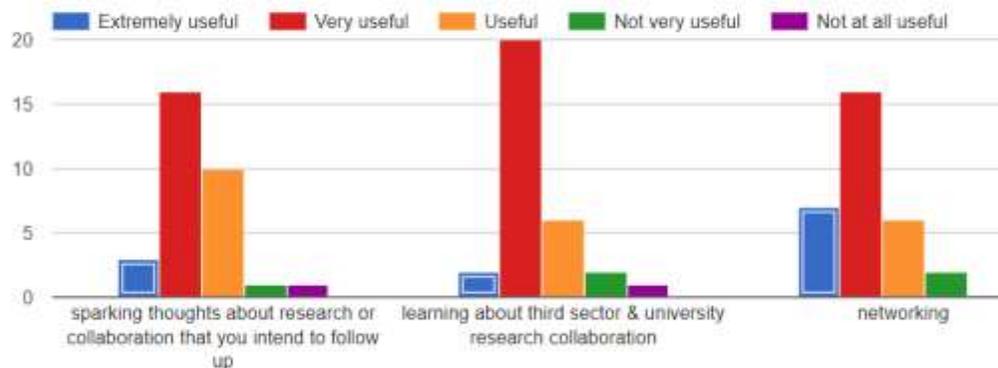
Overall, how satisfied were you with the conference?

31 responses



Furthermore, the majority of respondents to the survey found the conference to be useful, very useful or extremely useful for networking, learning, and sparking thoughts about research that could be followed up.

How did you find the conference for...



Summarising the qualitative feedback from respondents, we learned that:

- ☺ Conference participants liked that there was plenty of opportunity for discussion and interaction
- ☺ Space to network, learn from examples and disseminate third sector research knowledge were the most valuable aspects of the day
- ☺ The inputs on coproduction were popular amongst participants and there was appetite to explore this topic more however....
- ☹ Having to choose between parallel sessions was disappointing

- ⊖ The poster exercise had mixed reactions – many participants loved it, but many found it overly complicated as an icebreaking activity
- ⊖ Noise levels were challenging in the main room during busier sessions

A six month follow up survey will also be circulated to find out if there have been longer term impacts (e.g. engaging in research collaborations or taking forward other learning) for conference participants.

Louise Bowen

Evaluation Support Scotland

April 2018