**Webisode 9 – Research Use Toolkit**

**Building a Resource to enable Researchers to Plan, Capture and Evaluate the Non-Academic Impact of Research**

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Presenter: Sarah Lester (EPPI-Centre, UCL)

YouTube: <https://youtu.be/zAmBdDs2vxk>

JOANN STARKS: Welcome to another session from EPPI-Centre Evidence Tools, Products, and Projects. This series of brief webisodes will introduce the audience to several tool products and projects of the Evidence for Policy and Practice Information and Co-ordinating Centre or EPPI-Centre. Based at University College London's Institute of Education, the EPPI-Centre focuses on the development of systematic reviews and studies the use of research evidence.

I'm Joann Starks from the Center on Knowledge Translation for Disability and Rehabilitation Research or KTDRR at American Institutes for Research. The center on KTDRR is sponsoring these webisodes, with support received from the National Institute on Disability, Independent Living, and Rehabilitation Research, NIDLIRR, in the US Department of Health and Human Services.

This session introduces the Research Use Toolkit, Building a Resource to enable Researchers to Plan, Capture, and Evaluate the Non-Academic Impact of Research. Our presenter is Sarah Lester, a research officer with the EPPI-Centre. Sarah's interests include participatory research method in health and social care research, synthesis of different types of research evidence, and research use and evidence informed decision making. Welcome Sarah, I'll now hand things over to you.

SARAH LESTER: Thank you, Joann. So I will be talking, as Joann explained, about the Research Use Toolkit. This is a digital resource which we've been developing at the EPPI-Centre to help-- something that will help guide academics and researchers through the process of planning and hopefully capturing and evaluating the non-academic reach of research.

So, looking at the broader picture of the role of research and policy in practice, it's hardly a controversial claim to say that public decision-making should be informed by rigorous research evidence. This is a given. Looking at the other side of this relationship, it's also true to say academics want to demonstrate the influence of their work on policy in society. That they want to show the effect that research has in the real world. And this has perhaps become more readily apparent in the last few years, as a higher education assessment and funding has placed new emphasis on the reach of research beyond academia.

So despite this huge potential for a mutually beneficial relationship between researchers: the producers of research on one hand, and decision makers the potential use of research evidence on the other, there is still a distinct lack of engagement. And academic research is still underused in policy processes. And to illustrate this problem, here are some findings from a recent report on the role of research in UK Parliament. We can see from the graphs here that the higher education sector is very poorly represented as a source of evidence and here, the example is the evidence provided to communities and local government select committees. We can see that higher education, as a sector, is dwindling very far behind a not-for-profit, for example.

And in addition the report revealed parliamentary staff are more likely to use expert opinion or stakeholder groups to keep themselves informed of issues. And whilst the channels can bring valuable perspective, the findings from the report do confirm a lack of engagement with the higher education sector and the robust research which is being produced by them.

Another aspect of the problem is that there's little shared understanding about research-to-use processes. So there are lots of guides and resources for academics, but these can be quite difficult to navigate and at times overwhelming.

Perhaps one other issue is even down to the language. The use of the word "impact" is used very often but without much shared understanding of what the word actually means in terms of research use and the effects on society.

So, what can we do to address this problem? We set out to build a digital toolkit to guide academics through the process of optimizing research use. And we felt that we were uniquely placed to do this because of EPPI-Centre's expertise in the area of research and research use. And specifically, the research report which was produced in 2016, which looked at what works to increase decision makers use of evidence. We wanted to base the toolkit on the findings of this particular piece of work. And this is the science of using science.

So we also wanted to draw together these desperate resources and guides, to put them in one place, which would make the process easier for researchers. And ultimately, we wanted to enable further use of research in real world decision-making.

So moving onto the toolkit. Our experience tells us academics may have a bit of a haphazard approach as to how they will make their research have influence. And they might always say write a blog post, or they might think about the stakeholders who would be interested in the research. They don't necessarily think through all of the logical steps they might need to take to get the real world impact they want to achieve. Really this does need a lot of thought, it's not a one size fits all approach.

How you might get the research used, depends on the type of research you're dealing with, the evidence claim you're making once the research is completed, and the policy context at the time that the findings are produced. So that's why we produced the toolkit in the way that we did.

You can see the six gray circles, symbolizing the six different sections which we built. And you can populate each of these sections with information. You can come back and revise them at any point as your thinking develops. And it may take months or even years for the research to have influence or impact, and we designed the toolkit with this in mind, so that it could be temporally fluid.

But each of these sections, we also added resources which are symbolized here. To make it a little easier to navigate, we put relevant resources, and we put descriptions in a more conversational language in order to guide them through the process and really think for each of these steps.

One approach we used, which should help to clarify thinking around research-to-use processes, was presenting the 'Research use' Aims as three different but related types. Firstly we had type 1, which was informed of research. This was just to ensure people or organizations knew that the research was there. Type 2 affects use in debates and decisions, was the second type. And type 3 is the impact of research on society.

The researchers might not always plan to have an effect on all of these kinds of Aims or effects, but the Aims are presented in sequence. So without achieving a type 1 effect, the people being informed of the research, you're far less likely to achieve the type 3 impact on society effect.

So looking at this-- looking at the 'Research use' Aims in this way, help to move thinking beyond what kind of stakeholders are interested to more involved thinking about how the research will have influence or impact at different points in the process. It's not that we aren't interested in the stakeholders, but we wanted to develop thinking around it in a more rounded-- in a more meaningful and thorough way.

And of course, influence or impact can be planned or unplanned, it can often come down to serendipity. It's not always possible to control all of the factors that influence how decisions are made, and those consequences of the decisions. But we did want to show that there are steps that you can take to maximize the likelihood that your research is used.

So the toolkit encourages the user to think consistently through the various ways in which the research could have influence or impact. From the potentially interested parties or stakeholders, the Aims they have for research use, as I've already mentioned, the barriers or challenges that they may need to overcome in order to achieve them.

And in its own section we have activities that will help them to achieve that stated Aim. Following through in the next section, on evaluation later on, the user is prompted to think through how they will capture the data to prove the success of their stated Aim. So you can see the toolkit follows a consistent logic throughout the six different sections.

Rather than leaving it to chance, we hope that the toolkit encourages researchers to change the way they think about research-to-use processes. And that it will encourage greater uptake of research. It should empower researchers to plan their researches more carefully and considerately.

The final section, evidence claim, urges researchers to reflect critically on the suitability of research findings to inform policy and practice.

So if the research is used across departments or universities or even more broadly than at this institutional level, the toolkit could change the way that research is produced by strengthening shared understanding of research-to-use processes.

The toolkit is still very much a work in progress. It's in development. We have had different iterations, and we are in a piloting stage still. So if you are interested in any more information or if you want to get involved with the policy, then please do contact me. My email address is Sarah.Lester@ucl.ac.uk. I'd be very pleased to hear from you.

I would also like to thank David Gough, Jan Tripney, and Laurenz Langer for their work on the toolkit and also for their work on the science of using science, which was so instrumental for the building of the toolkit. And I'd like to thank Zak Ghouze for IT assistance and direction with the toolkit.

JOANN STARKS: Well thank you very much Sarah, for this presentation about the development of, and the resources available in the research use toolkit. We also want to thank our funding agency, NIDILRR, for supporting this and other webcast activities. Please look for the other sessions in this series on the EPPI-Centre Evidence Tools, Products, and Projects.