

Intsoceval Workshop 2005 Call for papers

social care
institute for excellence



Stakeholder participation in delivering evidence-based policy and practice

In our 2004 meeting in Switzerland, several participants touched on the issues in ensuring that evidence-based policy and practice is constructed with stakeholder participation. We have decided to make this the theme of the 2005 conference, and to ask participants to make it a central focus of their contributions.

Welfare democracies throughout the developed world are ageing, and are facing searching questions about whether welfare has delivered what politicians and the public expect. Increasing costs and increasing demands sharpen these questions and focus attention on whether those who pay the bills for welfare will continue to be prepared to underwrite the common good. Some commentators are calling for welfare to be based on the concept of 'co-production', where users both shape services but also have responsibility for helping to deliver them: the call is for more involved, but also more responsible users (Leadbetter, 2004).

One response has been increased attention to the way different stakeholders are involved in producing the knowledge base and in deciding whether the costs of evidence-based policy and practice are justified by the returns in delivering more appropriate and more effective services.

Of course, different stakeholders have different agendas. Policymakers and politicians may have relatively short-term goals linked to electoral cycles, and these may conflict with the kind of long-term, cumulative knowledge building required by the science of evidence-based policy and practice. They are also sensitive to the demands of the public, whose taxes pay for services from which they may not immediately or directly benefit.

Those delivering services have increasing pressure in terms of targets and performance management that may both increase the incentive to use evidence but also distort priorities so that these targets are achieved whether or not they match good practice. Both these constituencies have a requirement for certainty about 'what works' that the results of evidence-based inquiry can rarely deliver.

Those who use services, and those who support service users, have expectations of increasing control over what service is offered and how it is offered. People who use services may want evidence-based policy and practice to deliver a better fit between their needs and what is offered, and to equip practitioners to be clearer about the effectiveness of what is on offer. In order to achieve this, people who use services have often argued for greater involvement in knowledge production so it can be directed at the outcomes they want.

Those who produce knowledge are thus faced with different and sometimes contradictory demands. Working with these different stakeholders requires knowledge producers to address questions such as:

- how should different stakeholders be involved and how should the power issues be handled?
- What criteria should be used to measure the effectiveness of services?
- Whose views count when it comes to deciding outcomes that matter?

How can the results of evidence-based policy and practice be used to underpin progress without falling into the trap of prescribing practice and deprofessionalising practitioners?

Conference papers should thus address one or more of these questions. Papers should be based on empirical or conceptual work that attempts to clarify the issues in involving different stakeholders, and should show how the perspectives of different stakeholders have been reflected in the work.

We are looking for up to ten papers, and for presentations of about 20-30 minutes in length with about 15 minutes for discussion. We will try to pair papers with related themes in order to increase the coherence of each session.

We are discussing the possibility of a SCIE publication of conference papers, with an external refereeing and editorial process.

Abstracts of papers should reach Sheila (sheila.fish@scie.org.uk) by June 1st 2005.

Please feel free to contact Sheila if you have any questions or require assistance.

References:

Leadbetter, C. (2004) *Personalisation through participation: A new script for public services*, London: Demos.