Research Dissemination, Knowledge Translation, and Impact Guidance – Survey Results

Introduction

The HSE is in the process of developing a guidance framework for staff conducting research. The framework will provide practical guidance for staff on how to disseminate, and translate, their research in order for their research findings to have maximum impact. To inform the development of the guidance framework, HSE staff who have completed a piece of research in the past five years were invited to participate in a survey. The aim of the survey was to:

- help the team developing the guidance to understand the challenges researchers have when disseminating their research and implementing the findings into practice and/or policy.
- understand the types of impact/ benefits researchers hope to achieve from their research
- understand the challenges researchers might have in engaging with stakeholders and influencing policy and practice
- find out what types of guidance on knowledge translation and achieving impact from research that researchers would like to see included in the framework.

The survey was distributed electronically, in July 2020, to 1137 HSE staff known to have been research active. Participants were identified via a database formed in 2019, by the R & D team, for the purposes of an audit of research activity. The survey was also sent electronically to 44 psychologists with an interest in research and likely to be research active. Notices were received that the communication could not be delivered to 77 members of staff on the database due to their e mail address no longer being active. The survey was therefore delivered to 1104 staff.
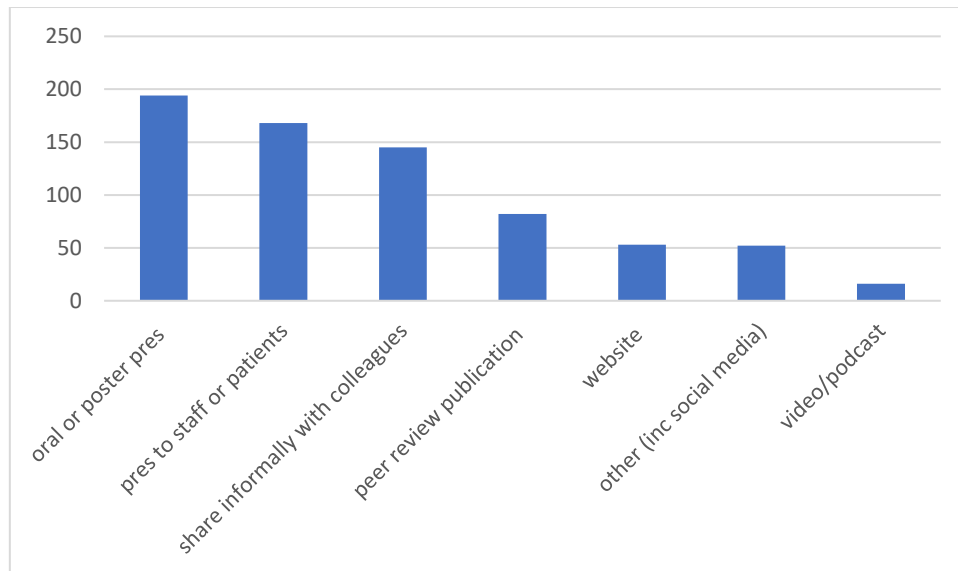
Dissemination of research

356 responses were received. However, 89 responses were removed from the data as they were incomplete, therefore the sample comprised of 267 (24.2%) people who completed a full response to the survey. 261 (97.8%) of those respondents had undertaken a research project in the last five years and completed the full survey. The remaining 6 respondents had completed a recent piece of research but completed the survey based on their experience.

238 (89.1%) respondents had disseminated their research findings. The most popular forms of dissemination were making oral or poster presentations (194 respondents, 72.7%), presentations to staff and patients (168 respondents, 62.9%), and sharing informally with colleagues (145 respondents, 54.3%). 82 (30.7%) respondents had published in a peer reviewed publication (see chart 1). The least popular methods of dissemination were newer forms of information sharing such as the use of social media including video, podcast, website, Twitter, Facebook and LinkedIn. However, 53 (19.9%) people had put information about their study on a website and 52 (19.5%) had posted messages on Twitter.

Where respondents reported that they had made an impact with their research they outlined their use of a range of strategies for disseminating their work. The most frequently used, as before, were the more traditional methods such as conference presentations and posters, publication in a peer reviewed journal, engagement with stakeholders, and meetings and networking. Other strategies included reports, education, and training sessions, use of social media, engaging with patient and community groups, holding workshops.

Of those who had not disseminated their research, the most frequently reported problems were time constraints, lack of a budget, not having a dissemination plan, insufficient links with stakeholders including policy makers, and insufficient knowledge of communications.

Chart 1 – the main forms of dissemination by researchers

Respondents considered the main enablers to dissemination as contemplating it at the planning stage of a research project (123 respondents, 46.1%), time and resources and sufficient time for knowledge translation (117 respondents, 43.8%), having an organisational culture where research is valued (104 respondents, 39%), having leadership and organisational support (103 respondents, 38.6%), having a relevant research question that was an organisational priority (100 respondents, 37.5%), having stakeholder engagement throughout the project (101 respondents, 37.8%) and having clearly identified messages from the research (94 respondents, 35.2%) (see chart 2). Respondents also identified a number of other factors that enabled successful dissemination. These included:

- Self-motivation:
  o working in, and presenting in, their own time outside work.
  o determination.
  o commitment to share results.
- Leadership:
  o leaders connecting to senior management.
  o leaders involving stakeholders across the EU.

'*An exceptionally committed, tenacious, unwavering leader who was dedicated to connecting with the right people/leaders at HSE Senior Management Level to seek buy-in.*'

- Support:
  o from the hospital and hospital group.
  o institutional and management.
  o from individuals with experience.
  o from a strong team.
  o from supervision.
  o to publish in open access journals.
- Academic partnerships, links, and guidance.
- Dedicated funding.

- Having a patient and public involvement officer.

Chart 2 – the main enablers to dissemination
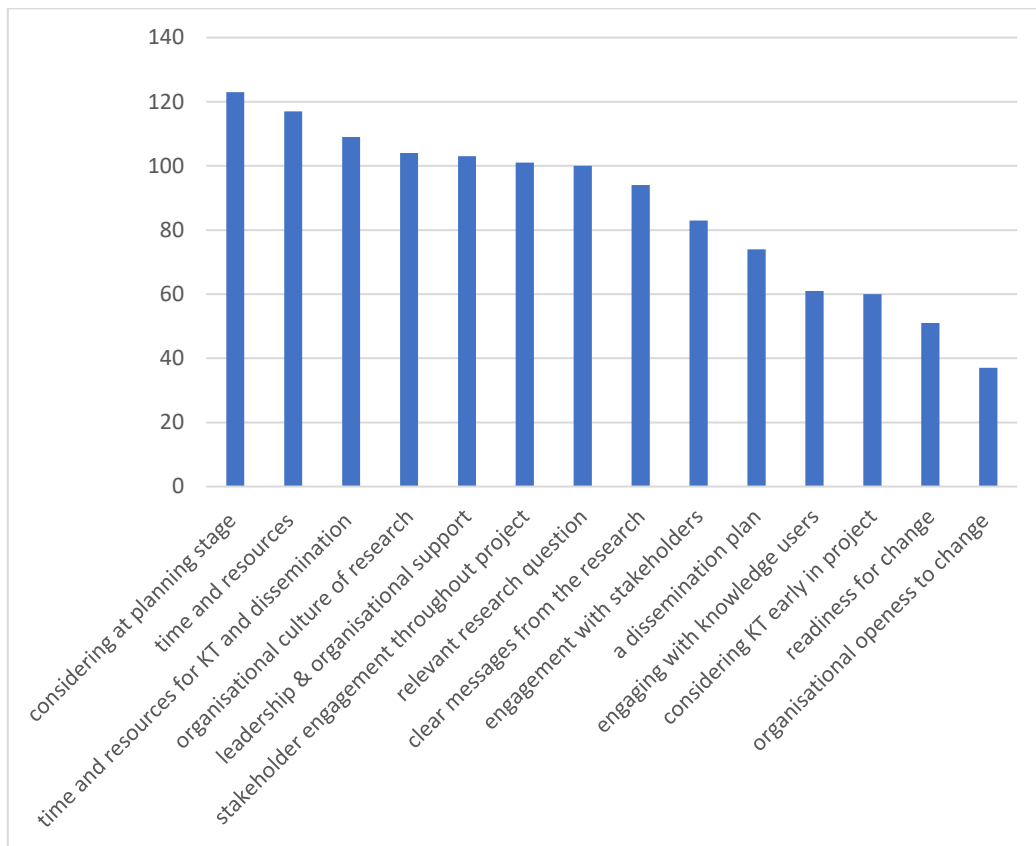
Impact of research

Respondents were asked to describe the impact of their research. Slightly under 80% of respondents were able to identify some impact from their research. The most frequently reported impacts were that they had added to knowledge (159 respondents, 59.6%), had contributed to education and training (141 respondents, 52.8%), had improved services (96 respondents, 36%), or had influenced policy (64 respondents, 24%) (see chart 3). Respondents also reported other impacts including:
- Receipt of funding.
- The research being the basis for other funding applications.
- The research methods being used by others and being used to inform the design of a clinical trial.
- An increase in the staffing resource.
- Supporting improved decision making and informing practice.
- The research being adopted in guidelines.
- Improved patient outcomes and increased access to care.
- Reduced waiting lists.

Few respondents had generated income or cost savings or developed a new product. Forty nine respondents (18.4%) did not know if their research had an impact and 5 (1.9%) said their research had no impact.

There were some clearly identified challenges to making an impact with research and they were primarily time constraints which were highlighted by 184 respondents (69%), the organisation not supporting research (106 respondents, 39.7%), and not having links with policy makers to enable impact (101 respondents, 37.8%) (see chart 4).

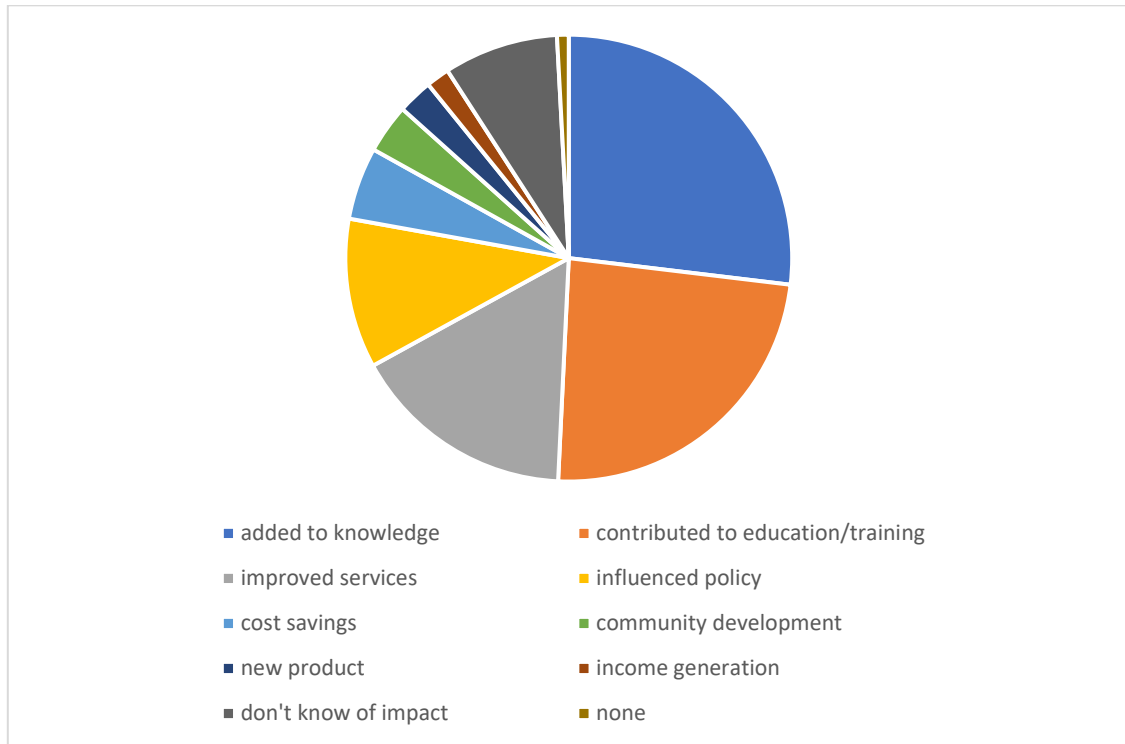Chart 3 – the impact of research as reported by researchers

- added to knowledge
- contributed to education/training
- improved services
- influenced policy
- cost savings
- community development
- new product
- income generation
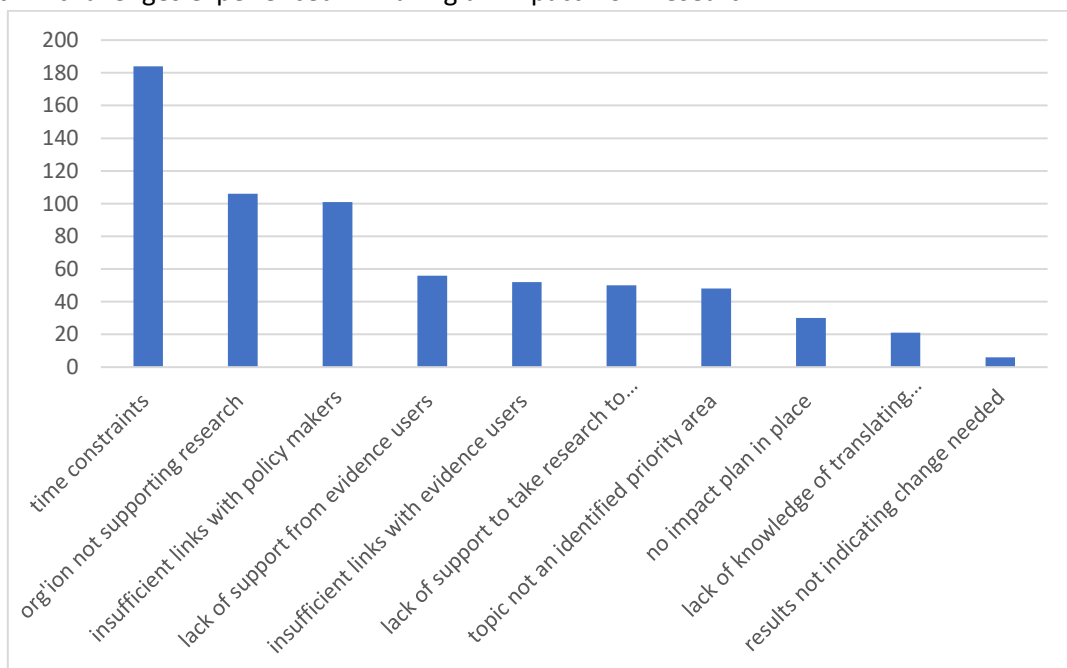- don't know of impact
- none

Chart 4 – challenges experienced in making an impact from research

Developing guidance

The HSE R & D team is in the process of developing guidance for the dissemination, knowledge translation, and impact of research. Respondents to the survey were asked for their views about what should be included in the guidance (see table 1). There was support for a range of information that had been proposed as being included within the guidance. However, there were also a number of suggestions for other information as well as comments on a number of issues such as reiterating the importance of research, guidance for managers on supporting researchers, engagement of policy makers, and funding sources. Some of these issues are likely to be beyond the scope of the proposed guidance but are important in the context of the developing research infrastructure.

'HSE systems and structures can be very complex to navigate in terms of guidance so make tools user friendly and encourage service user engagement in all aspect as relevant.'

Table 1 – items for inclusion in dissemination, knowledge translation and impact guidance

Item for inclusion in guidance	No of participants	% of participants
Tools for dissemination	204	76.4
Dissemination planning	183	68.5
Involving patients and the public	163	61.0
A knowledge translation framework	160	59.9
Impact planning	158	59.2
How to engage stakeholders	150	56.2
Stakeholder engagement planning tool	148	55.4
Impact tools	141	52.8
Sources of support for knowledge translation	140	52.4
Sources of information on knowledge translation	116	43.4
Definitions of key terminology	93	34.8
Other: • acknowledgement of the importance of research • involvement of front line service deliverers • ethical approval • mentorship • guidance for managers on how to support researchers • policy maker engagement • sources of support in HSE • getting clinical buy-in • funding sources • use of social media • guidance on publication • clarity on GDPR	71	26.6

Support needs

Respondents were asked to identify any other support needs they had in relation to the dissemination and translation of research. 167 (62.5%) respondents commented with some clear themes emerging

from the comments. The themes are presented according to the number of respondents who highlighted the support need (see table 2). Having protected time for research (38 respondents, 14.2%) and research support (37 respondents, 13.9%) were the most requested forms of assistance. The request for research support covered many different forms of help including having a research hub, a research lead at local sites or in the regions, research assistant roles, administrative support, research mentorship, research fairs, workshops, and training.

> *'A visible and easily accessible function or unit with the expertise on research dissemination within the organisation that could support staff in research planning and dissemination, and knowledge translation. The support should be readily available throughout all key stages from the outset at the research planning stage right through to dissemination stage.'*
>
> *'Access to mentors in relevant departments or access to individuals who have had success publishing.'*
>
> *'Senior management support and a guidance person that you could link in with in order to faciliatate dissemination as so much work goes into carrying out the research.'*

Financial support and funding were areas where many respondents felt support was needed and this included funding for dissemination and funding open access publication (24 respondents, 9%), and financial support for research (19 respondents, 7.1%).

Table 2 – Support needs in disseminating research

Support need	No of participants	% of participants
Protected time for research	38	14.2
Research support	37	13.9
Funding for dissemination and open access publication	24	9.0
Financial support for research	19	7.1
Developing a research culture in HSE	18	6.7
Management commitment to research in HSE	17	6.4
Support for dissemination and KT	17	6.4
Network/community of practice for researchers	9	3.4
Engaging with stakeholders particularly policy makers	9	3.4
A HSE repository or website for research, communication support	9	3.4
Preparation for publication	8	3
Closer links with academia	7	2.6
Other support needs: • knowledge sharing events • support to attend conferences and present • clarify expectations in relation to dissemination and publication • ethics committees (access to) • linking to HSE research priorities and national plan; align with local priorities • HSE policy or framework for promoting research • How to engage patients and the public • Access for HSE staff to research funding e.g. HRB • Data sharing and overcoming barriers		

Creating a research culture within the organisation and a visible management commitment to research in HSE were also themes that emerged with 35 (13.1%) respondents highlighting one or both of these issues. Training for managers to demonstrate the value of research and researchers was suggested as a method of increasing support for the use of knowledge and recognition of the need for researchers to have dedicated research time.

'Training for line managers in what is research and the importance of research. A lot of managers in the HSE have very little academic qualifications and often do not understand research. This is particularly evident in mgmt admin'.

Conclusion

The majority of respondents (89.1%) to the survey had disseminated their research in some form. The most popular methods of dissemination were the conventional means of making oral and poster presentations at conferences. However, the reach and impact from conferences is generally limited to professional groups who can secure funding to attend and may limit access to some stakeholders. Over 60% respondents presented to staff and/or patients and over half had shared their work informally. The impact of this is unclear although it does involve a sharing of knowledge and information. Other methods of dissemination, particularly social media, are less widely used but are increasingly becoming part of the approach. Considering dissemination at an early stage of research was an enabler to making it happen as was having the time and resources, leadership and organisational support for research activity, and an organisational culture that values research.

It is reassuring that the majority of respondents (80%) reported that their research had an impact. It is clear that the major impacts are in adding to knowledge and in the contribution to training and education. To achieve impact in other areas then the challenges researchers experience will have to be addressed. The challenges are specifically in terms of the time constraints, organisational support for research, and links with policy makers. Links with practice and with evidence users also need to be stronger and a clearer part of the dissemination process.

> *'Access to a panel of policy stakeholders that could bridge between research and policy/practice'.*

The survey demonstrated that there is a high degree of support for research from the respondents who have achieved some important impacts with their work. However, there are some recurring themes running through the responses to the survey i.e.

- the lack of protected time and resources for research activity,
- an organisational culture that is not supportive of research,
- a management culture that does not value and support research activity,
- the need to understand stakeholder engagement and, in particular, make links with policy makers.

The proposed dissemination, knowledge translation, and impact guidance is broadly welcomed by the respondents to the survey who want to have information, tools and support for dissemination and knowledge translation. This is in the broader context of a stated need for protected time for research and research support systems.

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