

## Special Session – #EIE2023

How to choreograph a dance between policymakers and academic researchers?  
Examples of successes (and failures) in knowledge exchange in public health in  
the North East of England.

*Backstage dating, the power of cookies, hiding destructive information and developing new armour.*

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Dancing is a key move in public health, particularly if you want to make an impact with your research. Knowledge exchange is not just a science or even an art but very much a dance: a dance between researchers and policy makers about the use of research evidence. To complete this dance successfully and get evidence used in decision making, both partners need to follow certain steps. However, learning the steps (science) or performing them perfectly (art) is not sufficient: it requires instinct and feel for where you are in the dance and why you are doing it.

### *Key highlights*

This session will explore challenges that we identified (moving too slow, bad timing, outfit malfunctions and unsynchronised performances), and solutions (our dance moves and their backstage rehearsals, role and boundary changes and being deviant) that we developed in response to these challenges, over the last 15 years Fuse, the Centre for Translational Research in Public Health in the North East of England. Fuse's mission is to increase the use of research evidence in policy and practice and communities, and we have developed various routines to achieve successful collaborations between policy makers, health practitioners, community members and academic researchers that have developed and implemented new interventions in public health.

### *Overall discussion*

In this session, we reflect on the knowledge-doing gap in implementation science and particularly the role of universities in addressing structural barriers to implementation. We will highlight three examples of research collaborations: AskFuse, our dating service; embedded researchers as advocates; and creative communication to set the scene for a discussion about what makes a successful dance between policy makers, health practitioners and academic researchers, inviting participants to share their own reflections of dance routines/ collaborative research partnerships they have developed to support knowledge exchange and implementation of research evidence in practice and policy making.

### *Implications for research and practice*

- Go with the music: as the context and process in which evidence is useful changes constantly it is an important skill for researchers to be able “to go with the music” based on ongoing relationships with policy and practice partners.
- Emotional engagement between researchers and policy makers is essential to get a better feel for the music. A heart-to-heart/ moaning about bad performances helps you to improve dance routines and hide missteps. Don’t forget the power of cookies!
- A deviant knowledge broker can help to facilitate backstage conversation and protect policy makers and academic researchers from missteps when backstages turn into frontstages.
- Embedded research allows you to be part of solutions, developed with the communities affected, not just report on the effect on interventions and their implementations. Public health is political; lobbying and advocacy are a core part of these roles.
- 4 basic steps to learn: raising awareness, knowledge sharing, making evidence fit for purpose (localising and tailoring), supporting uptake and implementation (structural approaches).

### *Challenges*

- Lack of structural incentives in academia to support knowledge exchange (how to make it a viable career option/ pathway?)
- Lack of training in the craft of knowledge exchange (how to embed in academic curricula and provide time-out for policy makers and practitioners?)
- Lack of leadership to support and resource knowledge exchange (embedding a knowledge exchange infrastructure and culture).
- Lack of mentoring for embedded researchers and a community of practice to share failures and learning.
- Lack of research on practices of KE: how to do it instead of how it could be done or what it should look like.