

# Partnership working across UK Public Services

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### **Overview**



- Why review the evidence on partnership?
- Aims and approach
- Findings
  - Evidence landscape
  - Features of effective partnership
  - Factors influencing partnerships
  - Improvement



















# Why review the evidence on partnership?



- Central strand of Scottish Approach to public service reform
  - Community Empowerment Act (2015)
  - Public Bodies (Joint Working) Act (2014)
- Identified as key challenge by WWS community planning partners and research











### Aims of the review



- Present evidence on partnership working in an accessible way so it can be used to inform policy and practice
- Develop a framework to help partnerships put evidence into practice











### **Approach**



- Evidence Bank Review Approach
  - Developed by Centre for Research on Families and Relationships
  - Focus on accessibility, relevance and timeliness
  - Peer reviews by academic and user experts
- Systematic approach to searching
  - 31 rounds of systematic searches
  - 5813 articles screened











### Inclusion criteria



- Empirical research in UK public services
- January 2000 July 2015
- Included partnerships between public, third and private sectors
- Excluded
  - public / private sector partnerships
  - Local communities and people using services
- 71 research studies included (peer review and grey literature)











### Questions



- How is partnership working conceptualised and defined across UK Public Services?
- 2. How is the effectiveness of partnership working evaluated?
- 3. What are the features of an effective partnership?
- 4. What factors influence partnership effectiveness?
- 5. How can partnerships be improved?







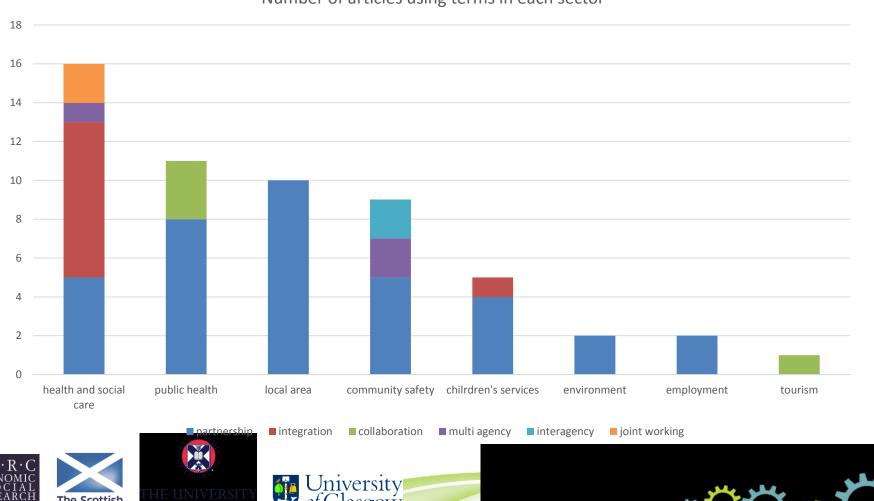




# Language of partnership



Number of articles using terms in each sector



## **Understanding partnership**



- Partnership working is a messy phenomenon
- Range of overlapping definitions
- Partnerships conceptualised in relation to:
  - Organisational forms
  - Features
  - Social processes











### **Outcomes of Partnership**



- There is little evidence linking partnership working in UK public services to improved outcomes
  - One study linked partnership working as an organisational form to improved outcomes
  - Research linked partnership working with improved processes
  - Research linked partnership process to final outcomes
- Lack of evidence attributed to at least in part to methodological challenges











### **Evaluation challenges**



- Complexity of partnership initiatives
- Time taken to realise benefits
- Understanding contribution of partnership vs single agencies
- Invisibility of partnerships to end users of services











### Partnership features



- A wide range of features have been identified in research as associated with partnership effectiveness
- There is strong agreement about the features of effective partnership, across UK public services
- The contribution of specific features to outcomes is shaped by the way they are operationalised.
- This is shaped by context, structure and social factors
- People across partnerships have different views of what is important for effective partnership working









### Linking process to outcome



- To help partnerships use this evidence we
  - Identified features for which there was strongest evidence
  - Grouped them according to whether they are inputs, processes or different levels of outcome
  - Created a results chain to show relationships between features.
- Approach informed by contribution analysis











#### Diagram 1: Effective Partnership Processes: Evidence Overview

#### Inputs / Resources for partnership:

- · Adequate and secure funding
- · Effective IT systems that enable information sharing
- Partnership specific management structure

#### Sufficient staff

· Previous experience of joint working



#### Partnership activities:

- · Develop and articulate shared aims and objectives
- Clarify roles, responsibilities and lines of accountability at operational and strategic levels
- Establish performance management systems that reflect complexity of partnership, capture range of activity and have focus on outcomes

#### Engagement / involvement / reach:

- Key staff working at operational and strategic levels are included
- Local communities and voluntary and community sector organisations are meaningfully involved
- Relevant private sector organisations relate to the partnership in appropriate ways

#### Stakeholder reactions / awareness:

- · The need for the partnership is recognised
- There is commitment to the partnership at operational and strategic levels
- Strategic managers and funders/ central government are realistic about what partnership can achieve

#### Knowledge, attitudes, skills and aspirations for effective partnership:

- · Different professional approaches and expertise are valued
- · Partners are trusted and respected
- · Partners feel that relationships are mutually beneficial
- Partners take time to understand the contexts in which each other are working
- There is expertise in project and change management within the partnership
- Staff believe other partners and the partnership as a whole will deliver on objectives

#### Practices and behaviours for effective partnerships:

- A flexible approach to developing the work, using resources and determining roles and accountability.
- Regular and effective communication and information sharing between partners at operational and strategic levels
- Regular opportunities for joint working, including meetings, joint training and co-location
- Effective and visible leadership at strategic and operational levels
- Involvement of wider partners and staff in development of procedures and policies
- Services / interventions are holistic and responsive, meeting broad needs of populations / clients
- Services provide specialist support where required
- There are appropriate ways of achieving conflict resolution and consensus building
- The partnership engages in continual reassessment of processes and procedures





#### Final outcomes of effective partnerships:

- · Improved health and wellbeing
- · Reduction in inequalities
- · Reduction in offending
- · Equitable access to services

- · Avoid inappropriate service use
- Reduction in costs
- Responsive service meeting needs and preferences of clients



### **Influencing Factors**



- Motivation for establishing the partnership
  - Partnerships that develop organically more robust and broader connections
  - Establishing a partnership because it is expected is linked to failure
- Involvement of Central Government
  - Major funder of partnerships
  - Short term time scales and small budgets to deliver on complex problems and rigid performance management requirements act as barriers to success











### **Influencing Factors**



- Hierarchical vs collaborative form
  - Partnership structures found to privilege more powerful partners
  - Hierarchical mechanisms lead to disenfranchisement of less powerful partners
- Links between strategic and operational levels
  - Third sector and operational staff excluded from strategic decision making
  - Leads to inappropriate commissioning, reducing outcomes for people using services











### **Influencing Factors**



- Engagement of the third sector
  - Brings efficiency, information, ability to deliver
  - Reduced by hierarchies, funding issues, negative perceptions and short term performance targets
  - Challenge of representativeness
- Power
  - Overarching factor running across all research
  - Major structural impediments to equitable distribution and use of power within partnerships











### **Conditions for efficacy**



#### **Assumptions**

- This is a partnership
- Partnership is the appropriate form of organisation to address this issue
- There is a clear need and rationale for the partnership
- There are shared understandings of final outcomes
- The partnership has sufficient autonomy and authority to make decisions
- All partners are involved in clarifying direction and decision making
- There is effective power sharing across the partnership
- There are sufficient resources to deliver on objectives
- · Timeframes are realistic

#### **Risks**

- Term 'partnership' used cynically to mask hierarchical arrangements
- Partnership formed naively as it seems the right thing to do
- No clear sense of purpose and outcomes
- Programme of work complex and unwieldy
- Not all partners involved in decision making and agreeing direction of partnership
- Voluntary and community sector excluded and marginalised
- Operational staff excluded from strategic decision making
- Work of the partnership dominated by performance management reporting requirements
- Lack of ownership amongst partners











## Partnership improvement



- Very little empirical research addresses this issue
- Research has examined action research and interprofessional education and training
- Successful approaches:
  - Engage with complexity
  - Support staff to reflect critically on policies and practice
  - Support staff to work together to develop understanding of the contributions and cultures of different partners











### **Conclusions**



- Given methodological diversity and challenges, findings surprisingly clear
- Effective partnerships are transparent, inclusive, flexible and responsive.
- Unequal distribution of power and ongoing tensions between hierarchical and collaborative governance makes partnership working difficult
- 'One size fits all' approaches to improvement will not work
- Effective partnerships need leaders who can understand and engage with pressures and staff who are supported to work in challenging contexts











# To improve your partnership



- Be clear partnership is the right approach
- Share and make explicit aims, objectives, roles and responsibilities
- Have a dedicated management structure
- Meaningful and tailored performance management
- Ensure staff are supported and skilled for partnership
- Involve all partners in decision making
- Maintain links between strategic and operational functions
- Be mindful of power strive for equality and transparency
- Engage with complexity tailored solutions to local issues









