Co-producing evidence with public services: insights from What Works Scotland – *Nurturing the buffer zone*

Dr Hayley Bennett, University of Edinburgh, WWS

and

Dr Richard Brunner, University of Glasgow, WWS

15 November 2017

In order to effectively co-produce evidence with multi-agency partnerships, distinctive, significant and ongoing relational and political work is required when setting up, conducting, and withdrawing from the field.

Format

- Introduction to WWS and our work

- 10 min table discussion

- 20 min – In-depth example of collaborative action research 1

- 10 min discussion

- 20 min - In-depth example of collaborative action research 2

- 10 min discussion

Find out more:
Whatworksscotland. ac.uk

@wwscot

Collaborative context for WWS

WHAT WORKS SCOTLAND

Public policy context

- Public Service Reform in Scotland
- Christie Commission

"Public service providers must be required to work much more closely in partnership, to integrate service provision and thus improve the outcomes they achieve"

- Focus on Community Planning Partnerships

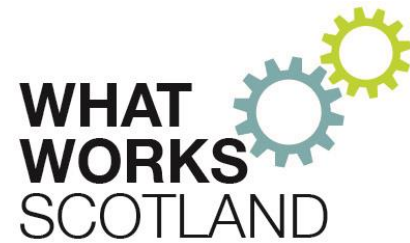## University collaborations

- Funding attached to collaborations
- Between Universities and non-academic organisations
- Across institutions
- Interdisciplinary and multi-disciplinary
- Rise of 'Knowledge exchange' culture
- Rise of impact agenda

Evidence Based Policy Making

ESRC ECONOMIC & SOCIAL RESEARCH COUNCIL

The Scottish Government

THE UNIVERSITY of EDINBURGH

University of Glasgow
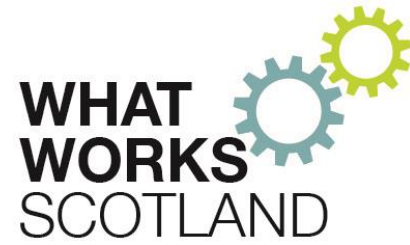
Collaborative Action Research – *a form of co-production*

- A research approach - not a research method
  - From 1940s Action Research (Lewin) to Collaborative Action Research
  - **Collaboration**: non-researchers, often with support from "professional researchers"
  - **Action**: involves practitioners/citizens following an action research cycle (plan, act, observe, reflect) on a topic of their concern
  - Adopts an inquiring stance; uses critical reflection skills
  - Disrupts the field (unlike ethnography, interviews etc).

Why use collaborative action research? Changing notions of:

a) **Context.** Public services' new demands, greater complexities, swifter change, different ways of working; requires research approaches embedded in changing service environments

b) **Research paradigms.** Can collaborative action research reach the parts that other research approaches can't? Beyond 'what works' into *how* reforms work; *why* they work. [Christie changed the hardware; CAR may reach the software]

c) **Impact & knowledge.** Break through hierarchical models of knowledge generation and transfer – co-produced, situated knowledge, cross-agency

WWS CAR workstream
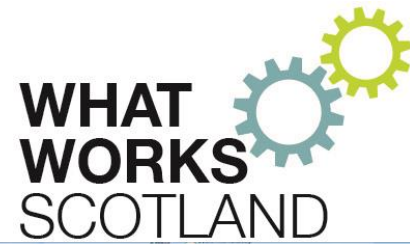
- In 2014 CPPs applied to work with WWS

- Four CPP partners selected (case sites)

- Multiple, co-produced CAR groups (PITs) in each CPP

Not a 'one-model' approach:

➢ Different CAR topics proposed by each CPP

➢ Different CPP partners in CAR groups

➢ Diversity of practitioner experience and seniority in CAR groups

WWS researchers in the field Jan 15-Dec 16(ish)
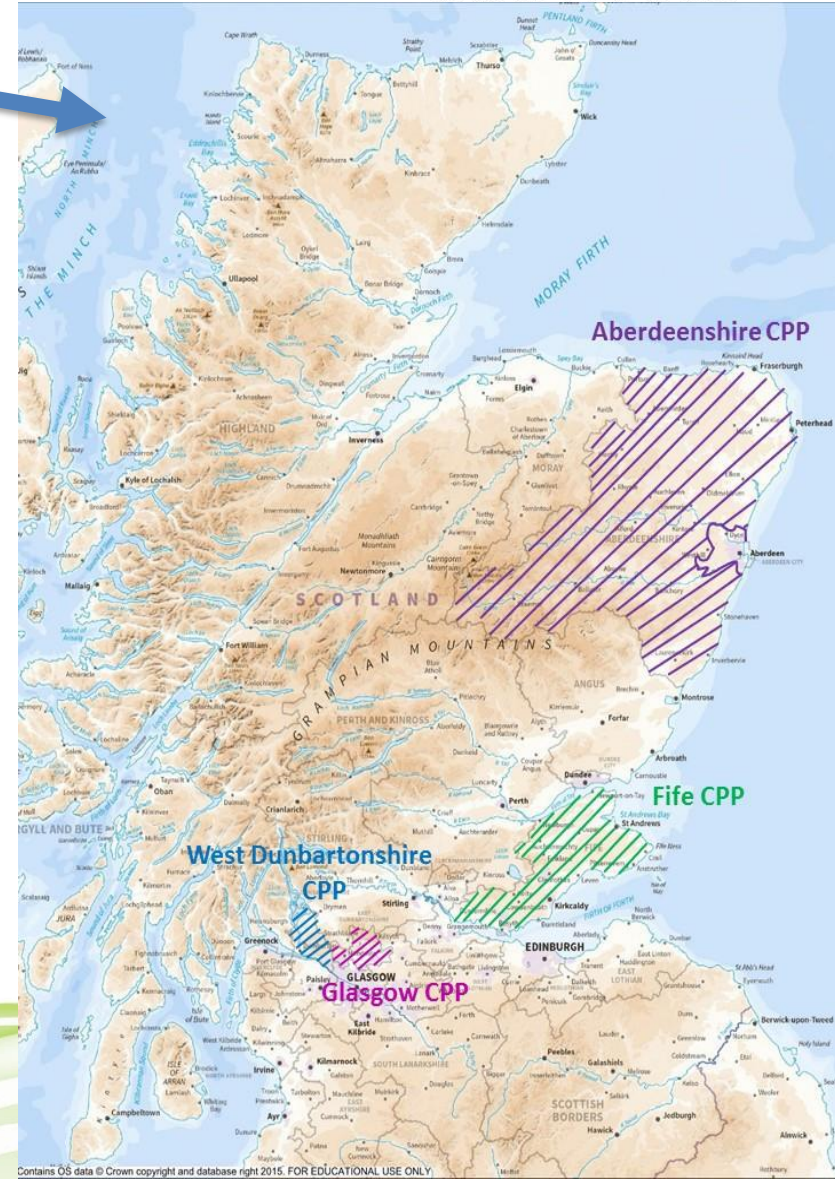
10 minute table discussion 1

Conversation at your table:

- What is your role?

- Why are you here?

- Are you working on a collaborative project or multi-agency issue?

CPP1 - Example of a single CAR group: Practitioner-produced area-based case study group

Health Improvement Worker (NHS)

Community Development Worker (Housing Association 1)

Analyst (Cultural Services)

Democratic Services worker (Council)

Community member/citizen

Researcher/ facilitator (WWS)

Community Development Worker (Housing Association 2)

FRONT STAGE: Case Study (CS) group: co-producing evidence

- **CPP**: want practitioners to gather ongoing qual evidence to complement large-scale evidence

- **WWS proposes CAR group** for six practitioners to produce individual CS (across 3 geog areas)

- **CPP leaders wanted/needed estimates** of group aims, officer time, expected outcomes

- WWS agreed **'contract'** with CPP – specify group aims, processes, outcomes: allowed CPP to recruit

- **5 public service workers, one community activist agreed to participate -** did not all know each other

- Ten 2-hour CAR group meetings (Oct 15 – Jan 17)

- **Mtg 1** co-produced groundrules (enabled challenging conversations, confidentiality)

- **CAR approach**: 'learning together' - researcher-led (e.g. tools to promote learning *e.g. What is a case study?* handout; *Case study design template)* & group critique/reflection on individual CS proposals

- **Throughout**: coproduced mtg locations/times to maximise participation (reflecting travel distances, childcare, shiftwork)

- **Dozens** of individual and group emails/calls between meetings - encouraging, supporting

- **Multiple CS iterations** - improving interpretation, analysis , writing style, politics of presenting findings

- **WWS updating CPP lead officers throughout cycle**

- **Outputs: two individual CS published**: A. asset mapping; B. community consultation processes

- **Housed on WWS website** with critical description of process. Practitioners disseminate separately

# Learning resource example 1: the case study cycle

Topic (selection of your 'case')

Data collection choices

Data storage and organisation

Interpretation and analysis of data

Publication of findings

Justify at each stage = robust case study
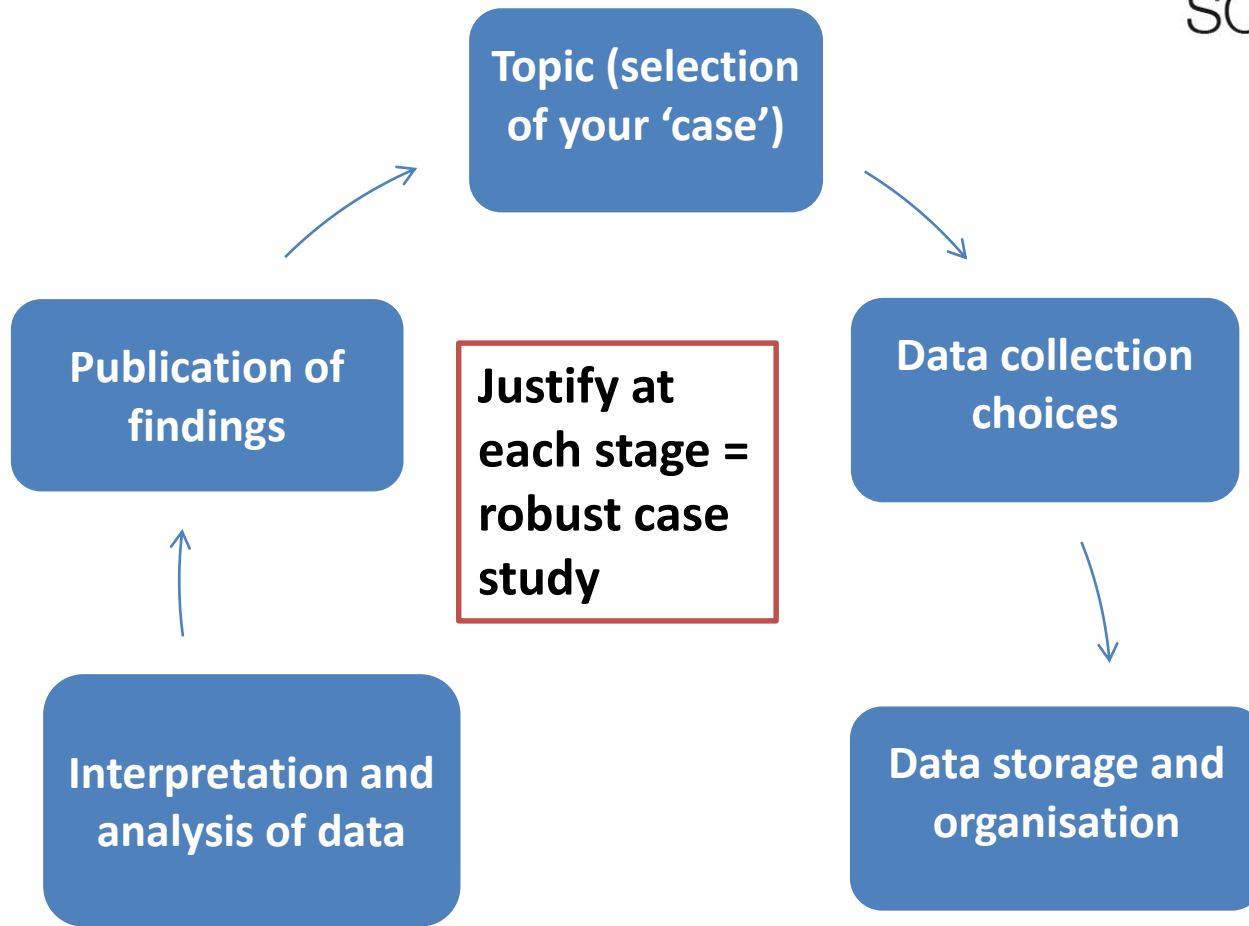
Learning resource example 2: Case study design template

Topic & research question	What is the topic or focus of your case study? (specify - e.g. a community activity, partnership working, new initiative, changed project)
	How does this topic relate to your area? (specify)
	What is the specific question your case study seeks to answer (e.g. What have been the benefits and costs for CPP partners of the are-based meetings as they have been structured in Year 1 of your area-based initiative? E.g. What happened as a result of a new partnership/relationship/ activity formed through area-based structures, and what can we understand or learn from that?)
	Why is this question important? (e.g. to your role; to your area as a whole)
Why use a CS?	What makes a case study a helpful way to answer this question? (e.g. to understand complexity, multiple perspectives to inform about what is actually happening, delving beneath the gloss)
Evidence	What evidence will help you to answer this question? (e.g. minutes of meetings, attendance sheets, monitoring documents, peoples' opinions)
	If any of this evidence already exists, where can you find it? (specify)
	Do you need to gather new evidence? If so, what & how? (e.g. conduct interviews, analyse data)
Ethics	Are there any ethical dilemmas to consider & how will you manage these? (e.g. confidentiality, anonymity of participants; conflicts of interest between your work role & your role as researcher)
Proj mgt	How long will this take you v. when would you like to complete it by? (be realistic & specify steps)
Allies	Who do you need to help you do this? (name people/ groups and what they need to do)
	Who else would you like to help you do it? (name people / groups and prospective roles)
Outputs	What will the final case study look like? (a short report, a blog, presentation, video etc.)
Outcomes	Who do you want to influence with the case study? (e.g. CPP/area partners, strategic decision-makers, line manager, community activists, citizens?)

… (why did I join this group again?)
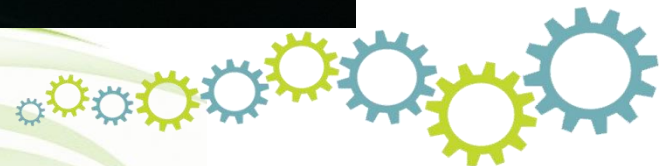
BACK STAGE co-production of evidence: tensions

|	
PSR & austerity contexts: limited my 'buffering' power	• Engagement challenges (one mbr in a persistently re-organised service; one missed meetings due to workload; comm activist a volunteer)
Voluntarism & saliency contexts: members participated on top of usual roles	• No usual work duties dropped to allow this work • sometimes had no time at all in a working month to progress their CS; low on work agenda
Research rigour: producing defensible, well-written research is not a minor commitment.	• Group had to learn in real time how to decide a CS topic; make topic focused enough to be achievable, but deep enough to critically engage; be ethical in the research process; use policy and academic literature where needed; 'own' their CS; accept that they are the expert in the data they collected, interpretation and analysis.
'Soft' skills: facility to take risks; skills in sensitive communication	• Requires ability to discuss draft ideas and draft writing, and to give and receive feedback.
Gatekeeping: central CPP leadership can be an obstacle to publication.	• Disliked qualitative writing style (and findings?) of a third completed CS – so not published (but local gatekeepers appreciated and used findings).

In retrospect, CPP talked the talk, but had minor commitment: little encouragement for the group; little enthusiasm for, advocacy of, or co-ord of qual evidence gathering (reflected in other contexts). A useful PSR finding in itself: CPP leads can find qual evidence challenging.

CPP1: four reflections on the dynamics of effective co-production

Buffering space: necessity of engaging a wide set of gatekeepers	a. CPP central gatekeeper; b. local gatekeepers (managers of participants); c. participants-as-gatekeepers (a participant recruited activist to group; the power of exit).
Buffering practices: necessity of using a range of relational skills with gatekeepers	Formal 'contract', informal conversations and lots of email updates with gatekeepers/participants at all levels (nurturing motivation & saliency)
Putting co-production of evidence into practice has implications for professionals with traditional policy and research roles	Examples: longer lead-in time; building relationships; explaining collaborative processes; positively conveying uncertain outcomes.
What is gained through the process for professionals with traditional policy and research roles?	Deeper relationships with practitioners / gatekeepers; witnessing and measuring actual change in practitioner knowledge, practices, relationships; enhancing own ability to be agile in field.

10 minute table discussion 2
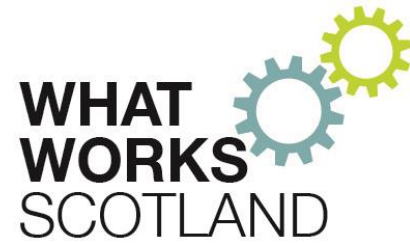
Conversation with your neighbour

- What are your thoughts on why Public Service professionals sign up to collaborate? Include yourselves…

- To what extent can co-produced projects exploring research and evidence be clearly understood by all parties at the outset?

- Who is responsible for managing the relational and political issues when research findings and evidence use conflicts with existing practices or decisions?

CPP2 - Large programme approach

- 1 strategy group
- 3 CAR inquiry groups
- 87 practitioners
- 2 x structured home retre
- Cross group working
- Multiple agencies
- Negotiating space with managers and individuals
- Mentoring policy officers
- Running concurrently
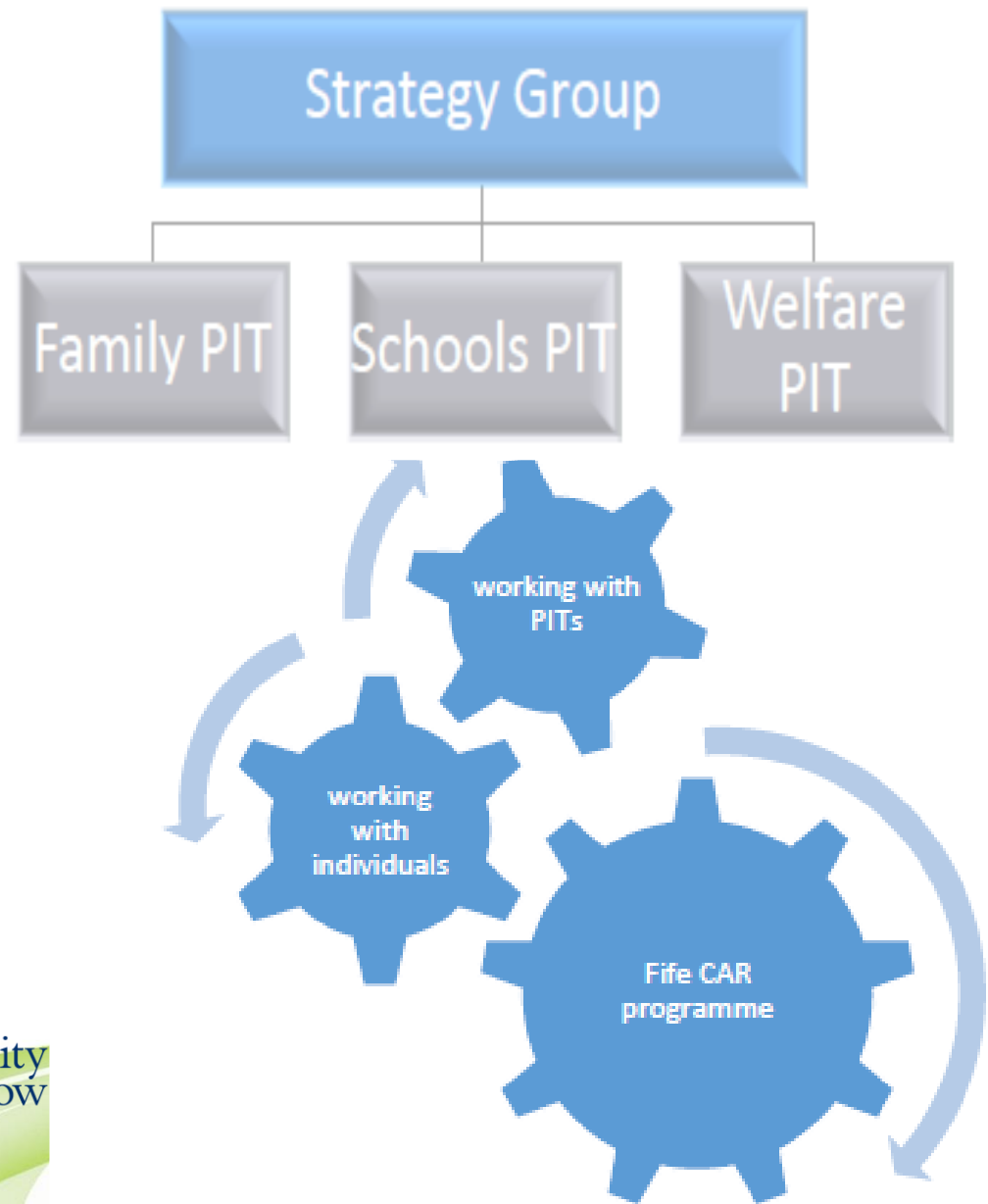
Overview of CAR inquiries – CPP 2

- **Welfare 'hub and spokes' model** (co-location, changed priorities)

- **Welfare reform and data sharing** (influence, data gathering, dialogue across professions, challenging assumptions)

- **Family 'hub and spokes' model** (tried to explore different agencies, couldn't agree a vision or create a team)

- **Family fun sessions** (Sharing learning across localities, critical reflections on operationalising, interviews with staff and users)

- **School intervention programme** (Couldn't agree a topic, clash with operational decisions)

- **School partnership** (focus groups, case study of one school, reflections on improved relationships, dialogue between professions)

```
┌─────────────┐     ┌─────────────┐     ┌─────────────┐     ┌─────────────┐
│ Activist for│ ──▶ │  Inquiring  │ ──▶ │ Individual  │ ──▶ │ Group work  │
│   change    │     │   stance    │     │  critical   │     │             │
│             │     │             │     │ reflection  │     │             │
└─────────────┘     └─────────────┘     └─────────────┘     └─────────────┘
```
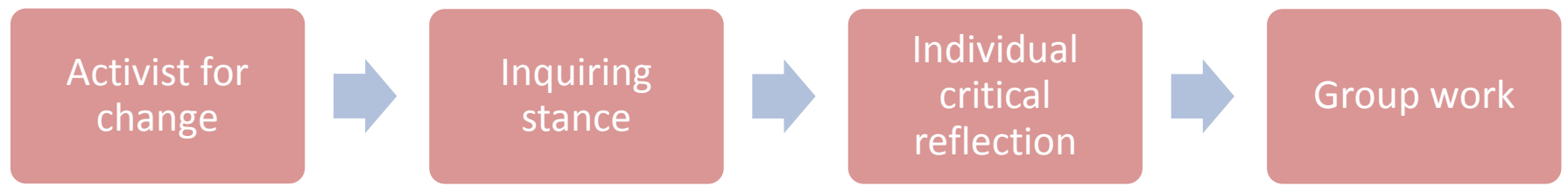
Establishing pre-conditions and creating space for inquiries

```
┌─────────────┐     ┌─────────────┐     ┌─────────────┐     ┌─────────────┐
│ Identifying │ ◀── │  Research   │ ◀── │   Problem   │ ◀── │ Dialogue and│
│evidence gaps│     │  problem    │     │identification│     │   shared    │
│             │     │             │     │             │     │understanding│
└─────────────┘     └─────────────┘     └─────────────┘     └─────────────┘

┌─────────────┐     ┌─────────────┐     ┌─────────────┐     ┌─────────────┐
│  Exploring  │ ──▶ │ Reflecting  │ ──▶ │ Identifying │ ──▶ │Implementing │
│  evidence   │     │  on the     │     │ actions and │     │  actions    │
│             │     │  evidence   │     │   change    │     │             │
└─────────────┘     └─────────────┘     └─────────────┘     └─────────────┘

                    ┌─────────────┐     ┌─────────────┐
                    │ Identifying &│ ◀── │Reflecting and│
                    │implementing │     │ evaluating  │
                    │further change│     │  actions    │
                    └─────────────┘     └─────────────┘
```
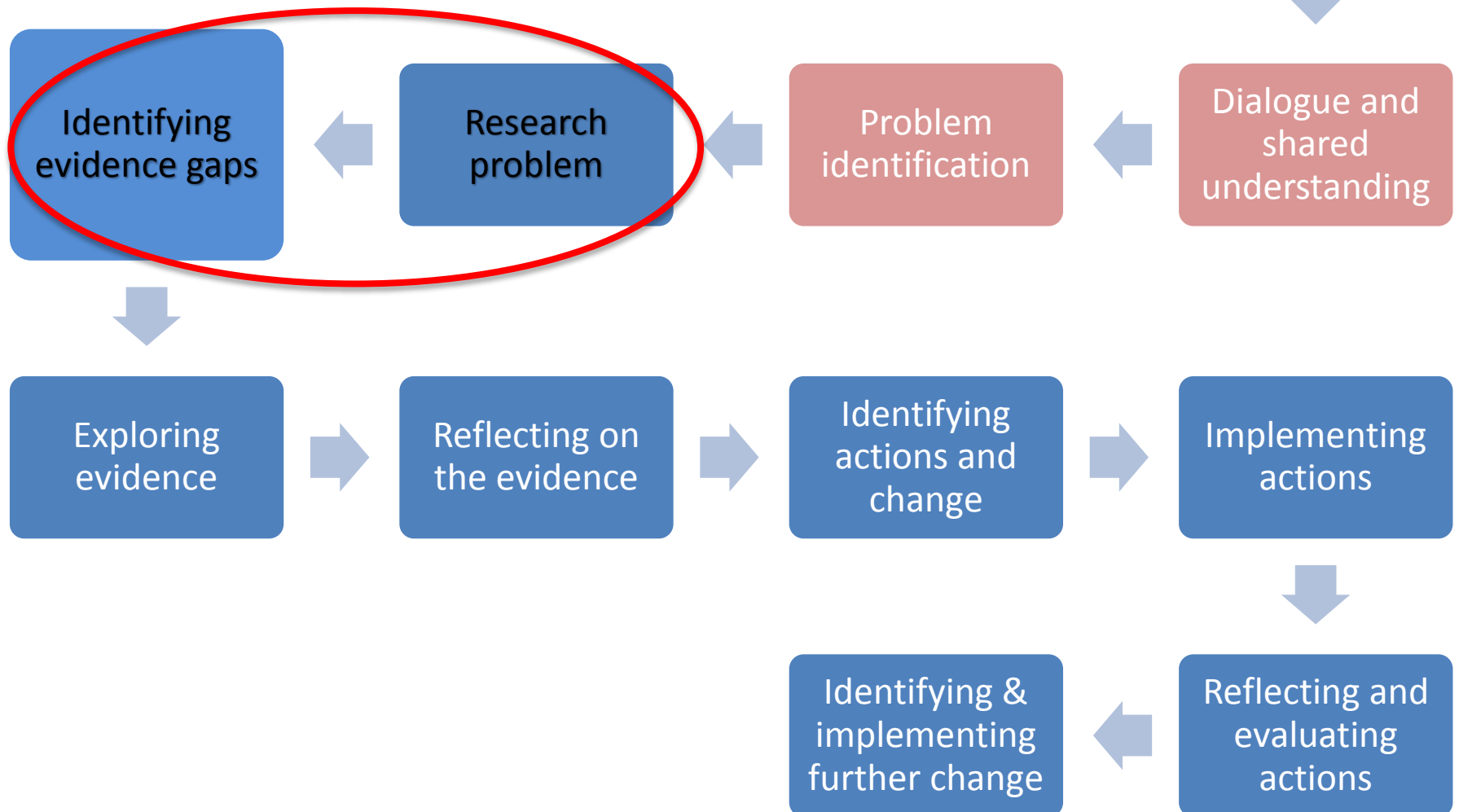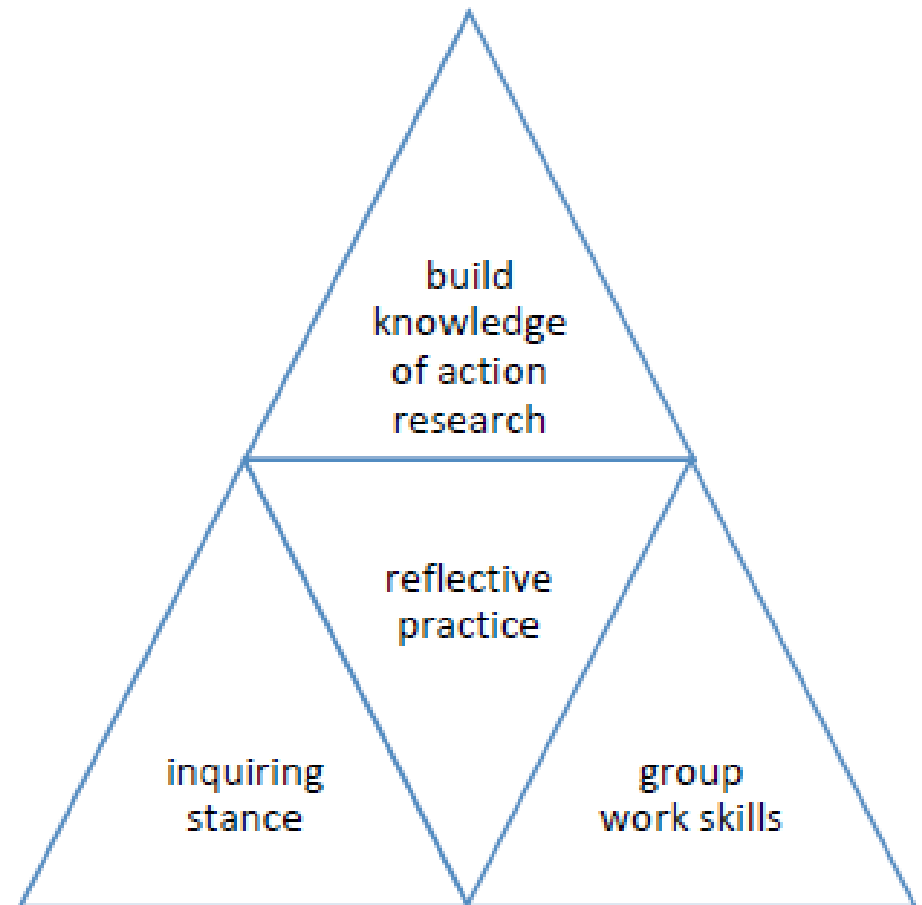
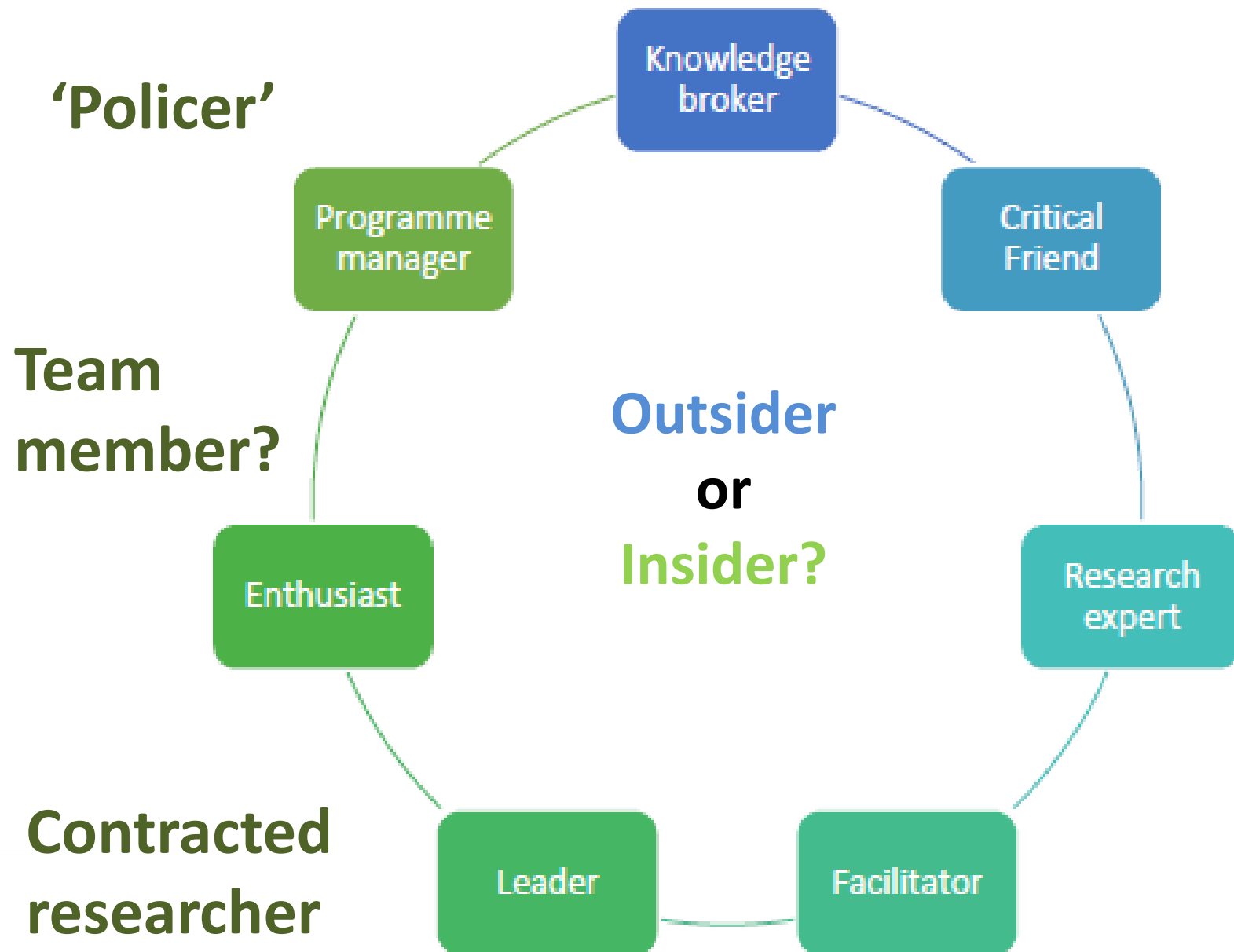# Establishing pre-conditions and creating space

Group:

- Nurturing dialogue
- Creating group: sanction and sanctuary
- Teaching research basics
- Steering but not being the group 'leader'
- Managing conflict

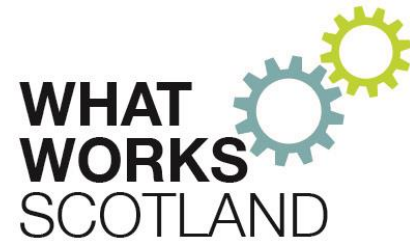*Individual:*

- Introducing new concepts
- Providing reassurance
- Mentoring individuals
- Encouraging inquiring stance
- Developing critical reflection

build
knowledge
of action
research

reflective
practice

inquiring
stance

group
work skills

90 weeks intensive engagement (+ 14 weeks post 'leaving the field' in 2017)

703 incoming emails (99.5% response)

87 practitioners directly worked with (to varying levels of intensity)

48 'core' practitioners- from **12** different occupation groups

68 phone calls received and made

10 strategy group meetings

51 PIT meetings in total

30 additional in-person meetings or events (+ pre and post event planning)

6 reports written or co-written

21 tools or resources provided

'Policer'

Team member?

Contracted researcher

Knowledge broker

Critical Friend

Research expert

Facilitator

Leader

Enthusiast

Programme manager

Outsider
or
Insider?
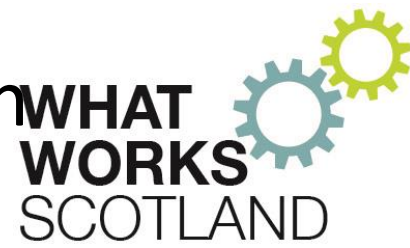
10 minute table discussion 3

Conversations at the table:

- What are the (unexpected) skills and activities required to co-produce a successful collaborative programme for evidence generation and/or use?

Conclusion: what is collaborative research in multi-agency partnerships giving us?

- Understanding of processes (not just an "output moment")

- Insights into how practitioners actually see, generate, comprehend, and work with evidence (in practice and in context - unsanitised)

- Outcomes of 1st order inquiries make sense to practitioners in their context (shift from hierarchical models of knowledge transfer)

- Potential for 'depth relationships' with practitioners (beyond instrumentalism)

- Trigger for renewed dialogues with policy-makers, researchers, practitioners, universities (a. about collaborative approaches, b. about public service reform)

- A complement to other research approaches

Significant and on-going relational and political work to engage, create space, develop pre-conditions, conduct research, nurture change.

Questions and reflections?

- http://whatworksscotland.ac.uk/

Contact us:

- Hayley Bennett: @haylesben Hayley.Bennett@ed.ac.uk

- Richard Brunner: @RichardBrunner8 Richard.Brunner@glasgow.ac.uk