

Audit Commission

Presentation



Getting more impact from your research

Roger Sykes, Head of Studies

Overview...

- What the Audit Commission does and the research we undertake
- What is effective research?
- Our work with OPM on increasing impact
- Some lessons and ideas for the future

About the Audit Commission

- Independent body
- Ensure public money is spent economically, efficiently and effectively
- 11,000 local bodies in England
- Spend more than £180 billion of public money each year
- local government, health, housing, community safety and fire and rescue

Our work

- Audit
 - Inspection
 - Research
-
- Different methodologies and approaches
 - All contribute to helping improve local public services

Our national studies

Provide independent, authoritative analysis of national evidence and local practice, identifying the practical changes needed to improve public services

LGA/LARIA say effective research is

- Relevant
- Purposeful
- Timely
- Rigorous
- **Actionable**
- **Owned and used**
- Adequately resourced
- Joined up
- **Effectively presented and disseminated**

Thinking about knowledge transfer

- Context
- Messenger
- Message
- Process of transfer
- Audience

Factors affecting impact of research

- Relevance and timing of the research
- Perceptions of the research producer
- The content and style of written research
- Ways in which research findings are distributed and communicated
- Recipient factors

Evidence needs and use

- Public sector managers place great organisational importance on access to and use of **range of evidence strands** most value comparative data, in-depth case studies, analysis of good practice
- Public sector managers struggle to cope with **volume of publications** targeted at them – information, guidance, reports
- But **few local public bodies** have good internal **knowledge management** and extraction processes
- Particular hard to assimilate evidence when it **cuts across services** – children’s services, community safety

Improvements most valued by users

- Evidence providers need to be more **customer-focused** and to increase **usability** of products
- Public sector managers want a different approach to the production of evidence which **involves them more actively at all stages**
- **Our own staff** (audit and performance), and particularly relationship managers, can help us **improve impact of national studies programme**

OPM recommendations – improving our products

- Strengthen **understanding of audience needs** – segment our target audiences on each study
- **Variety of methods** – face to face, electronic, etc.
- Move away from single national report to **chunks of knowledge and information** can be releases in a knowledge stream throughout project's life
- Widen and improve the **range of products** to support communication and implementation of findings – tools and products
- Our **front line staff** should be involved, informed about studies – drip feed information

Play to our strengths and use variety

- **Promote our perceived strengths**
 - Evidence from audit and inspection
 - Evidence of improved outcomes
 - Case studies – in-depth insights
 - New comparators
 - Access to and interpretation of wider range of evidence sources
 - Processes to connect managers to evidence
- **Dissemination and product variations**
 - More sophisticated view of audiences
 - Pick and mix model dissemination
 - Personalise and target
 - Print, electronic, interactive, more continuous

Improvement areas recommended by OPM

- **Understand the forces and drivers and customers needs**
 - Usable outputs; range of outputs and tools; segment audiences; knowledge brokering
- **Clear purpose**
 - Balance challenge and reassurance
 - What is going well, where improvement needed; how to achieve it
 - How our studies used:
 - Does it have diagnostic intent – questions I should ask myself
 - Analytical intent – how do we compare to others?
 - Change management intent – if this works, how we implement it in my area?

OPM recommendations – working with partners

- More partnership on our national studies
- Strategic partnerships with other evidence providers
- Thematic dissemination events with partners
- Jointly funded peer learning and review with other partners – action learning, conferences, e-forums
- More partnership on dissemination, promotion work
- Move to knowledge facilitator and networker

So for us good research will have impact if it is...

Timely

Speaks to key concerns when it is published (up to 2 years from now)

Based on hard evidence

Draws practical conclusions from analysis of evidence (financial, quantitative, qualitative, ours & others')

Focused on improvement

Presents knowledge to policy makers and managers in a form they can easily use, and is reflected in what we do locally

One we can do well

Builds on our strengths; uses evidence from our local work; complements others' work; may cross sector boundaries

Lessons and ideas for the future

- External audiences
- Working with our own staff
- National v local
- Research time v communication time

External audiences

- Stakeholders
 - National opinion formers and decision-makers
 - Senior public sector managers and leaders
 - All staff in local public bodies and councillors
- Challenges on how we reach these people

Working with our own staff

- Who needs to know messages from a national study?
 - What information do they need to know?
 - When do they need the information?
 - How do we get the information to the right people?
 - How can it inform out operational work with local public bodies?
-
- Need to make sure our staff see national reports, digest main findings before it goes public – they can have local impact with local public bodies

National vs local

- We produce national reports
-but we want local public bodies to take our findings on board
- Some national reports will more of a national or local focus
- How can we try and make our research more useful to both?
- Regional stakeholders – Govt. Offices

Research time and communication time

- We now focus on a smaller number of national studies (around 12)
- 90% time on research, 10% on communication for impact
- Increase our resource on impact in the future – 70%:30%
- Investing time to develop communication skills for research staff

Questions?

Contact: r-sykes@audit-commission.gov.uk
0844 798 1157

A copy of the summary of the OPM report *Improving our impact* is available on national studies pages at www.audit-commission.gov.uk along with a literature review on the subject