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SOCIAL RESEARCH INSTITUTE

UCL

How do embedded researchers bridge the research-implementation gap in public health?

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EPPI Centre
Evidence for
Policy & Practice

How research active do you consider yourself?

a) Research is my life!
b) I dabble
c) If only I had time
d) Research is someone else's job
e) I avoid it at all costs!

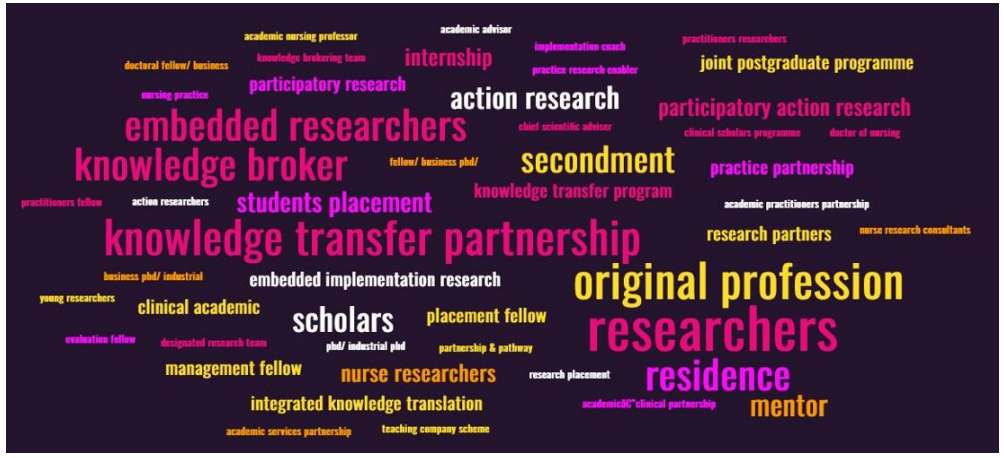
Use QR code

What are embedded researchers?

We used a set of principles to **define** embedded researcher activity.

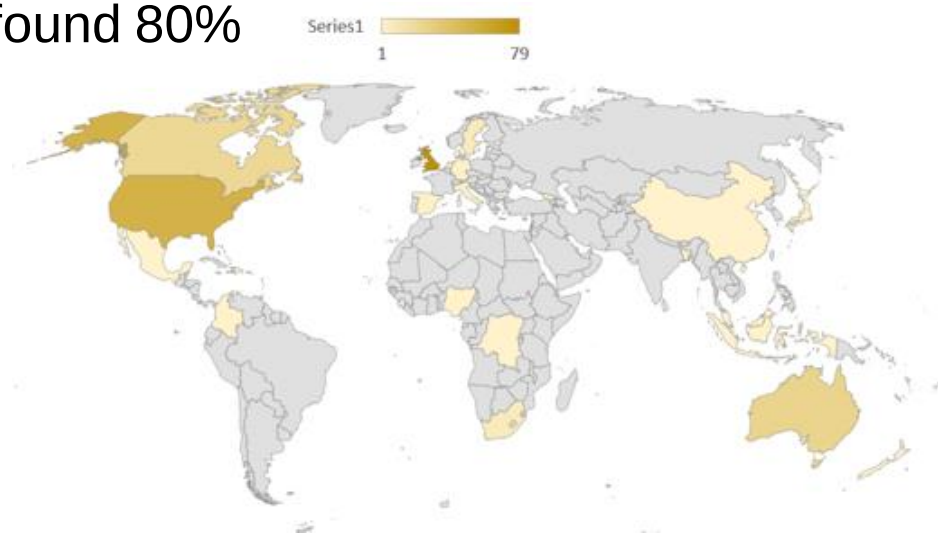
Embedded researchers:

- **enable research activity**
- have **dual affiliation** across policy/practice and research organisations
- develop a **two-way**, mutually beneficial **relationship**.



Our **systematic map** found 80% of studies were from:

- UK
- USA
- Australia
- Canada



Studies focussed on a range of disciplines:

Clinical Health & Primary Care	39%
Public Health	14%
Social Care	7%
Education	7%

Case study and methods

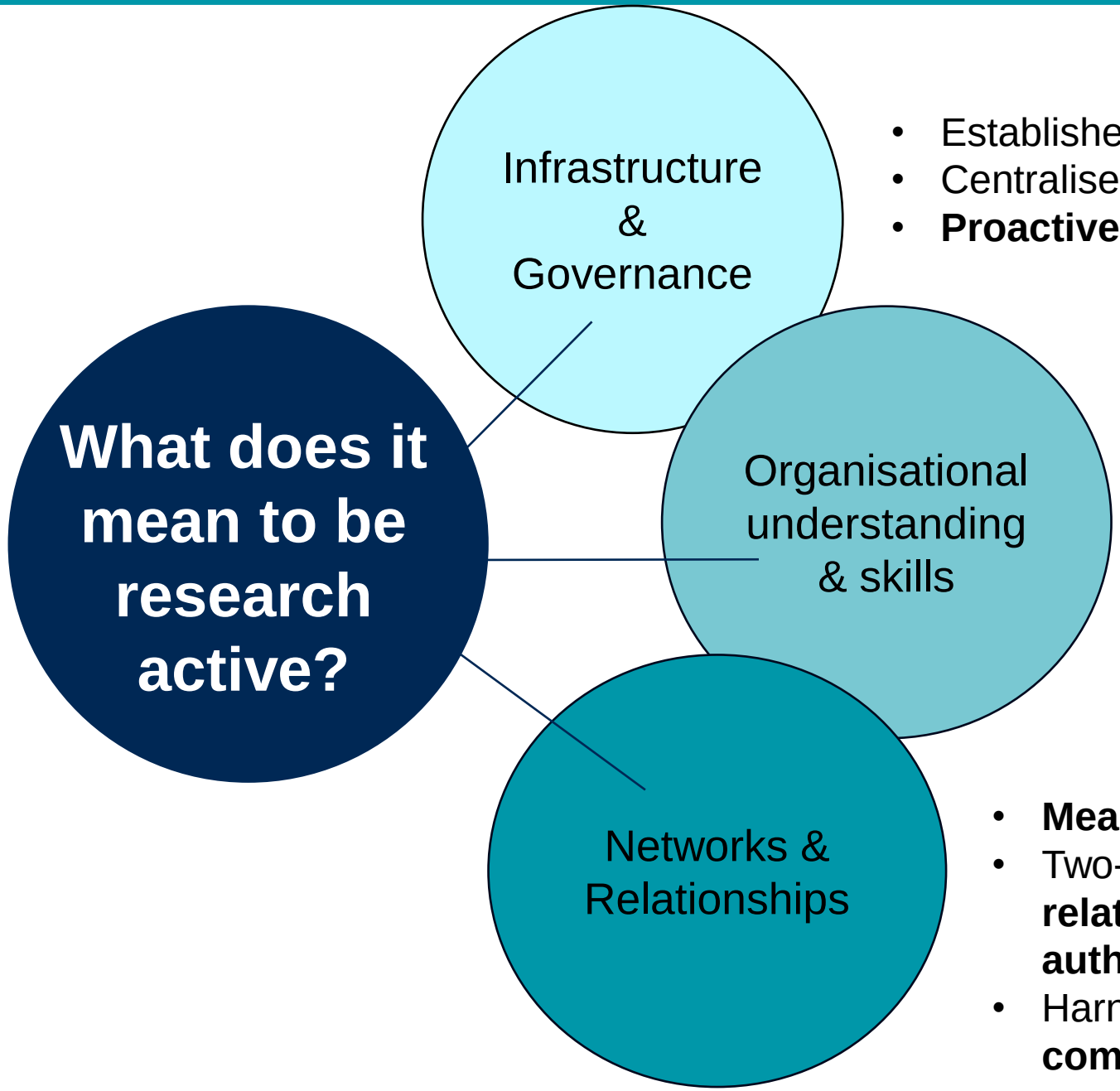
- 24 embedded researchers based across 15 English **local authority public health teams**
- 16 public health leaders with time bought out for research
- Public health leaders and embedded researchers often paired
- Aim: **Enhance research activity** in local government public health settings

- Interviews with embedded researchers (N=17)
- Interviews with public health leaders (N=12) and collaborators (N=7)

What does "research active" mean in policy/practice settings?

Choose up to 3 words or phrases.

Use QR code



- Established **ethics processes**
- Centralised research project management team
- **Proactive research strategy**

- **Cross directorate understanding** of why research matters
- **Critical thinking** skills
- **Emotional & intellectual commitment**

- **Meaningful resident engagement**
- Two-way, mutually beneficial, **respectful relationships** between **academia & local authorities**
- Harnessing existing links (e.g., **voluntary and community sector groups**)

Starting point and barriers to research activity

- **Research cultures ranged** widely from being a '*very receptive local authority which really values research*' to '*research naïve*' to '*very inactive*'
- Insufficient research infrastructure
- Varied research skills
- Varied levels of senior endorsement

Unfortunately, there are some people that get a nosebleed if you use the term research.

-Public health leader

Barriers to research activity

- Lack of capacity (time/funding)
- Adverse response to the word "research"
- Lack of trust in academia

And it's not that they don't want to do [research], it's just that they don't have the capacity to do it.

-Embedded researcher

Opportunity: Strong appetite for evidence informed decision making

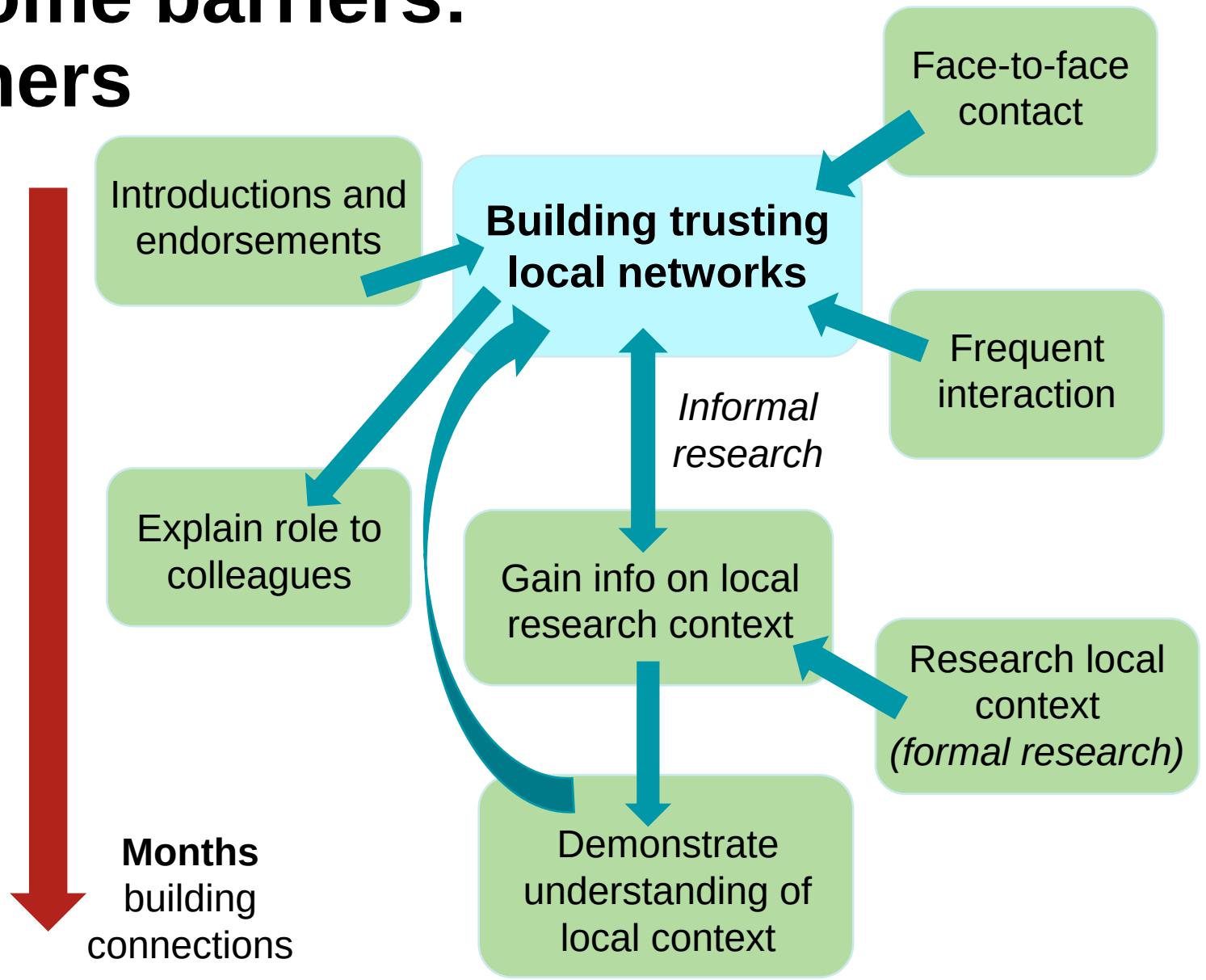
Strategies to overcome barriers: Embedded researchers

You need that physical presence, and that repeated physical presence for people to get to know you and trust you.

-Embedded researcher

it was quite a lot of effort required to hammer home the message about who we are, what we're doing, what the point is.

-Embedded researcher



Activities to enable research activity

Facilitating research connections and opportunities → e.g., institutional bridges

Supporting research → e.g., advising on methods and research Qs, supporting funding applications

Applying for funding → e.g., HDRC

Conducting research → e.g., academic and internal research **but...**

My job is to enable the research, not to do it for them.

-Embedded researcher

Organising training opportunities → e.g., journal clubs, workshops

Creating research networks → e.g., regional networks of public health leaders, online networks

Strategies to overcome barriers: Public Health Leaders

Sending signals and making research roles visible

- Changing e-mail signatures to make colleagues aware
- Providing training, workshops and events across the council
- Demonstrating research projects across the council

Adapting language to make space for more fertile conversations

- Public health leaders adapted their language (e.g., replacing the word research with innovation)

...to avoid closing doors before people have absorbed what I have to say
-Public health leader

Translation work

- Demystifying application forms & processes to open up opportunities

Strategies could feel transgressive

You're feeling, am I allowed to do that? Am I not allowed to? You know, how far can I push? Do my colleagues around me understand what I'm doing?
-Collaborator

Early signs of changes in research activity

- Enhanced **profile of research**
  - evidenced through:
    - an increasing number of **research queries**,
    - **broader conversations** relating to research
- **Changes** in ***how*** **questions were being asked**
- Increased use of **theories of change & logic models**
- **Alignment** of research with **strategies/ corporate plans**

That people are able to have a slightly wider conversation about, you know, not only 'How much does something cost and how many people are using it?' But 'are the right people using it?'.
-Public Health Leader

I don't walk on water. My name's not Jesus!
-Embedded Researcher

Changing a research culture is a **long-term** and **incremental** process

Connect with us!

@EmbedResearch

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Complete our 10min survey on the design of embedded researcher roles