Eppi-Centre Learning and Teaching Seminar,
Social Science Research Unit (SSRU), Institute of Education

"Evidence-informed Health Promotion and Public Health: encouraging the use of research in practice"

2.30 – 4.30pm Monday 30 October, 2006

Room 691, Institute of Education, University of London
20 Bedford Way London, WC1H 0AL

Summary

The aims of this seminar were threefold: to briefly highlight a range of ways in which research can be brought into practice, with a focus on educational methods; to illustrate using a case study of one training/education-based method recently evaluated in Australia; and to provide a forum for the exchange of ideas and experiences about the barriers to, and facilitators of, using research evidence in health promotion and public health practice and education. Insights gained from participants will be used to help develop educational materials in several programmes including: the Cochrane Health Promotion and Public Health Field, SSRU's newly launched MSc in Evidence for Public Policy and Practice; and the Methods for Research Synthesis node of the ESRC's National Centre for Research Methods.

Ginny Brunton and Rebecca Rees, Research Officers at the EPPI-Centre, began the programme with a welcome to participants, a brief discussion of the EPPI-Centre's role in evidence-informed practice, and a summary of some methods to encourage the use of research. Philip Baker was introduced, who described the development, implementation and evaluation of a series of workshops to teach health staff key skills needed to exercise evidence-informed practice.

Participants were asked to form discussion groups and talk about what helped and hindered them in the use of research evidence, in terms of the *content* of research evidence, the *skills* needed to use research effectively, and *other* factors.

Content
Participants discussed the need to be clear about what evidence informed practice is relevant to each practitioner's environment, and how systematic reviews relate to evidence informed practice. Careful attention must be paid to the language of evidence-informed practice. This is often a new set of terms which can take practitioners time to become familiar with.

Participants described a need for research that is directly relevant to people's work.

They also discussed the need for a hierarchy of evidence to help people decide how to use the evidence and how 'strong' a message was being given

by the evidence. Research must also differentiate between evidence of need for an intervention, evidence of an intervention's effectiveness and evidence of its appropriateness. There is also a need to be clear about how possible it is to transfer the interventions under study to individual situations, so that practitioners can evaluate the usefulness of the interventions.

Skills

Seminar participants identified specific skills which could help facilitate the use of research. These included the ability to be reflective and to use critical appraisal skills within and related to the practice environment. It was also considered useful to know how to read systematic reviews and guidelines, and to use systematic review methods to gather and appraise research (without necessarily conducting a full systematic review). It was noted that with any new skill, learning requires dedicated time and support. It was suggested that linking these skills into performance management responsibilities such as Personal Development Plans or Knowledge and Skills Frameworks might be helpful to encourage their uptake.

Other Factors

Several other factors which might help or hinder research use were identified. Some related to individual needs, such as time constraints and maintaining skills. Many wider organisational factors were also discussed. For example, it was agreed that targeting the whole organisation as well as key individuals or groups within the organisation was necessary to bring about large-scale change (i.e., individual attempts would not work alone). The need to have access to specialist skills on an ongoing basis, such as those provided by statisticians was identified. It was felt that during policy implementation, the context of the community under influence needed to be considered consistently. Finally, the impact of political priorities and the culture of 'a quick win' needed to be acknowledged within evidence-informed practice.