

Welcome to the 3<sup>rd</sup> edition of volume 30 of *Research, Policy and Planning*. As with previous editions of the Journal we have an interesting range of topics which we hope will be of interest to our readers.

Our first paper focuses on an important issue in relation to inter-agency collaboration. *Baginsky* considers the perceptions of other professionals of the social work role in relation to work with families and children. This exploratory study, based on two surveys conducted at different times with a wide range of other professionals, found that many respondents were aware of the poor image of social work as a profession and many also had only a partial grasp of the full potential range of the social work role, often associating it predominantly with safeguarding. *Baginsky* suggests that this limited grasp of the social work role can contribute to poor communication or even communication breakdowns that prevent effective interprofessional working, and she calls for clear arrangements at local level to develop an infrastructure that supports effective mutual understanding of roles and responsibilities.

The second paper, by *Cornes and Manthorpe*, is based on an evaluation of the Alcohol Learning Centre: research commissioned by the then Department of Health's Policy Research Programme. Though the findings of the study were positive – in that most participants felt that the Alcohol Learning Centre had met its primary goal of providing effective information to alcohol services as a 'one-stop shop', to support the local implementation of the Department of Health Alcohol Improvement Programme the authors also draw attention to the need for online information resources to be 'accurate, responsive and user-friendly' and have a practical focus for practitioners and managers to have sufficient confidence in the information not to 'see for oneself' – trying to find other internet based information.

The third paper, written by *Parveen, Giles and Din*, considers barriers and enablers to effective patient involvement in health research. Though the paper is based on work carried out in NHS settings, it reports on a detailed and thoughtful approach to collaboration between researchers and patients which should be of considerable interest to local authority researchers or consultation staff keen to ensure that their work avoids tokenism. Challenges – ensuring proper representation in patient recruitment, the conduct of meetings, communication issues, costs of consultation and enablers – for example, early involvement of participants, clinical involvement, flexibility of approach – are discussed and the authors offer practical advice and a clear set of recommendations arising from the evidence presented.

Over the last few years, an increasing number of our contributors have come from academic settings. This seems to have become more pronounced as the present government's austerity policies meant that local authorities focused on core services at the expense of local research and management information. It is therefore especially welcome to be able to publish a paper written by two managers working for Cumbria County Council, *Johnstone and Page*. Their paper is an evaluation of attempts to use the Adult Social Care Outcomes Toolkit<sup>i</sup> (ASCOT) to support the development of an outcomes focused assessment process in Cumbria. The authors provide a clear account of the way in which different potential assessment tools were considered before ASCOT was chosen, and an evidence based description of the change management process leading to the introduction of the tool which should be of interest to any social care managers wanting to know how to introduce properly validated assessment tools to support social work practice, and the strengths and limitations of so doing.

Johnstone and Page's paper is also one outcome of the School for Social Care Research (SSCR) Evidence into Practice Initiative (SCEIP) which offered small grants and support to people working in social care and who were interested in conducting research or evaluation into an innovative new local initiative, service or form of support. Research, Policy and Planning are collaborating with SSCR on a future themed edition of the Journal devoted to publishing the best studies from this initiative, which we think will be of great interest to many readers.

Readers may be aware that *Slasberg and Beresford* have previously published two thought provoking and interesting papers on the effectiveness of Resource Assessment Systems, or RAS, developed originally by the In Control organisation and widely used by local authority social services departments in England. This drew a thoughtful and respectful critique by Clifford *et al.*, to which Slasberg and Beresford have responded here.

Research, Policy and Planning also has a book reviews section towards the end of each edition. We like to think that the busy reader will find the time to look at these as they are invariably well written by reviewers who are well qualified for the task: this edition's reviews are no exception. There are views from different perspectives (Warren and Glasby *et al.*) on integration and the evidence in social care and public health. Axford reviews a collection of the writings of a committed social policy analyst. Netten gauges the strengths and limitations of an examination of existing reviews on the important topic of adult social care outcomes.

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<sup>i</sup> Netten, A., Beadle-Brown, J., Caiels, J., Malley, J., Smith, N., Trukeschitz, B., Towers, A., Walche, E. & Windle, K. (2011) *Adult Social Care Outcomes Toolkit V2.1: Main Guidance, PSSRU Discussion Paper 2716/3*, Personal Social Services Research Unit, University of Kent, Canterbury.