

Background

The Covid-19 pandemic has led to a renewed focus on health inequalities and its drivers. Health Determinants Research Collaborations (HDRCs) are funded by the NIHR to boost research capacity and capability within local government. Their aim is to create and embed an evidence-informed culture within local authorities such that evidence is used more systematically as part of the policy-making process, particularly where those policies impact on health and health inequalities.

Manchester City Council was successful in being awarded ‘full’ HDRC status from 1 January 2025 and is one of 30 HDRCs across England, Scotland and Wales.

Given the stated aim of HDRCs, there is a need to objectively measure the extent to which they have been successful in improving research culture as a step towards more evidence-informed policy making.

What do we mean by evidence-informed policy making (EIPM)?

The evidence-based medicine movement has encouraged us to see policymaking as a rational, structured technocratic problem-solving process in which research evidence is gathered on a policy problem and used to develop recommendations for action, which are then implemented and subsequently evaluated to inform the next policy. This is reflected in the idea of the ‘policy cycle’.

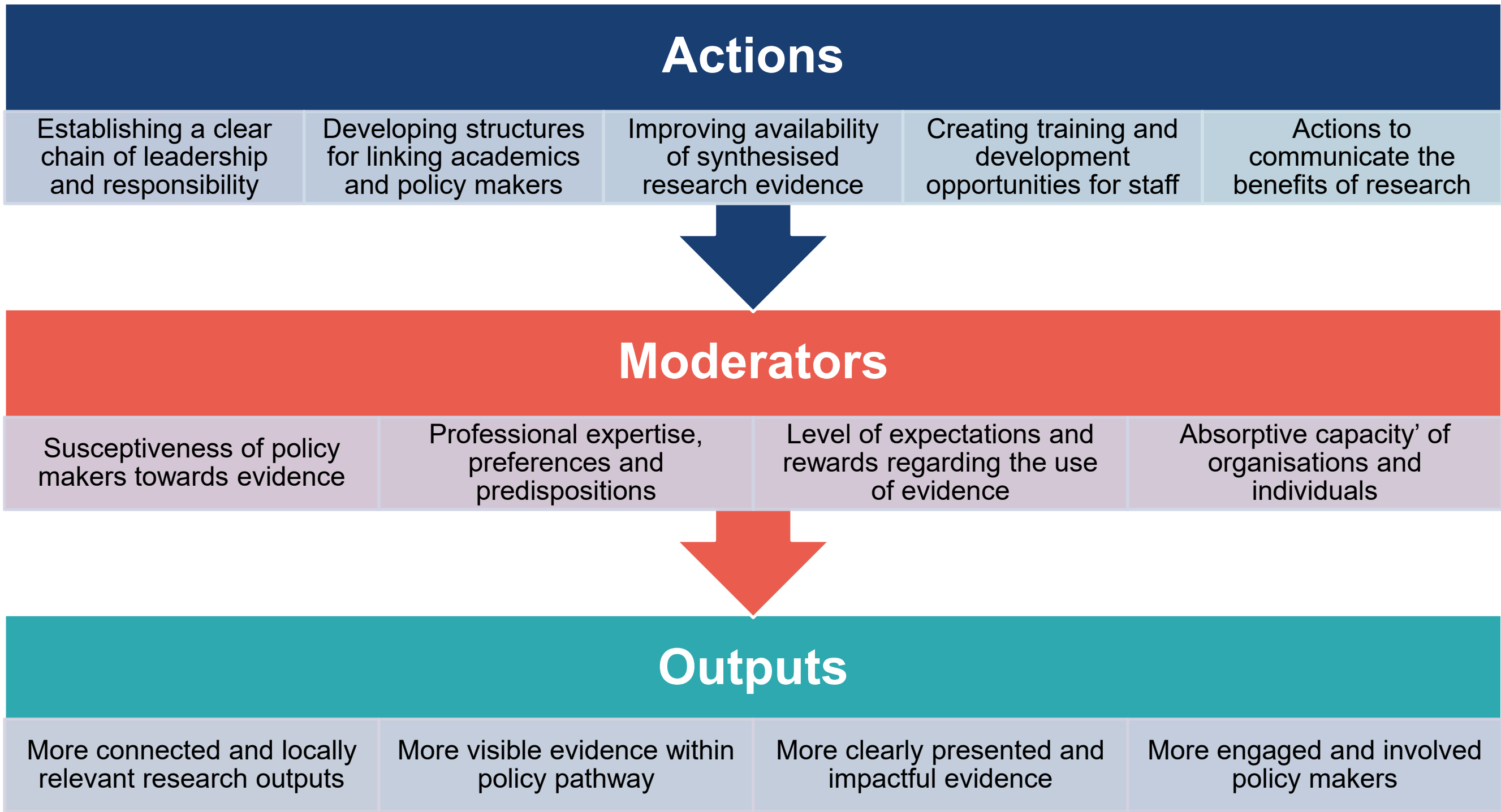
In practice, research evidence is seldom the primary driver of policy making and decision making involves a trade-off between research evidence and other competing factors and preferences. As such, it is more appropriate to think of policy making as being **evidence-informed** rather than **evidence-based**.

Policymakers seldom have the time to consider all the evidence relevant to a policy problem and may base their judgements on their established beliefs, emotions and familiarity with certain types of information. The adoption of evidence-based interventions is inextricably linked with existing governance arrangements i.e. how the rules of organisations encourage policymakers to ‘frame’ the problem and whether established operating procedures favour some sources of evidence and participants over others.

Research objectives

- 1. To undertake a literature review to identify and critically assess validated tools and frameworks that have been developed to measure dimensions of research culture and evidence-informed policy making in different settings
- 2. To develop a typology to compare and categorise these tools and frameworks.
- 3. To explore the relevance and potential application of these tools in the context of the work of Health Determinant Research Collaborations (HDRCs) across the UK.

Drivers of EIPM



Examples of tools reviewed

- Wessex Research Network (WReN) Spider
- R&D Culture Index (RDCI)
- Canadian Foundation for Healthcare Improvement (CFHI) self-assessment tool
- Research Capacity and Culture Tool (RCC)
- Evidence-based decision making (EBDM) capacity tool
- Implementation of administrative evidence-based practices (A-EBPs) tool
- Seeking, Engaging with and Evaluating Research (SEER)
- Organisational Research Access Culture and Learning (ORACLE)
- Staff Assessment of enGagement with Evidence (SAGE)
- pragmatic Context Assessment Tool (pCAT)
- Self-assessment of Organisational Readiness Tool (SORT)

Typology

Name	WReN Spider	RDCI	CFHI self-assessment tool	RCC	EBDM capacity tool	Implementation of A-EBPs	ORACLE	SEER	SAGE	pCAT	SORT
Authors	Smith et al.	Whitford et al.	Kothari et al.	Holden et al.	Jacobs et al.	Reis et al.	Makkar et al.	Brennan et al.	Makkar et al. (2)	Robinson et al.	University of Salford
Year	2002	2005	2009	2011	2012	2014	2016	2017	2017	2023	2024
Theme	Skills	Capacity	Capacity	Capacity	Capacity	Implementation	Engagement	Engagement	Utilisation	Implementation	Readiness
Focus	Individuals	Individuals / organisations	Organisations	Organisations, Teams & Individuals	Organisations / Depts	Teams / Depts	Organisations	Individuals	Organisations	Individuals / Teams	Organisations
Framework	Derived	Derived	Derived	Derived (Lit Review)	Derived (rating exercise)	Derived (Lit Review)	Existing (SPIRIT)	Existing (SPIRIT)	Existing (SPIRIT)	Existing (CFIR)	Derived
Output	Survey tool	Survey tool	Survey tool	Survey tool	Survey tool	Survey tool	Interview schedule and scoring system	Survey tool	Interview schedule and scoring system	Survey tool	Survey tool
Country	UK	UK	Canada	Australia	USA	USA	Australia	Australia	Australia	USA	UK
Level	Regional	Local	Various	National	National & subnational	Local	Various	National	Various	Local	Local
Setting	Research Network	PCT	Health services mgt. & policy orgs.	Government bodies	States		Policy agencies	Government bodies	Policy agencies	Medical centre-based learning programme	Healthcare providers

Table 1: Typology of EIPM-measurement tools.

Exploring approaches to Baseline Assessment: A qualitative study of tool adaptation and implementation across UK HDRCs

Building on the work undertaken as part of my Pre-doctoral Fellowship, I have co-designed a research study in collaboration with the University of Manchester. This study seeks to explore the practicalities of how HDRCs across the UK have developed and implemented baseline assessments of research capacity, capability and culture within their local authority, with a particular focus on how existing validated tools have been adapted to fit local contexts and how stakeholders were engaged in the process.

Specific areas of investigation include:

- The tool(s) or framework(s) that were considered and/or used as part of the baseline assessment and what informed the choice of these tools.
- How these tools were adapted for local use and why.
- How baseline assessments were implemented, what worked well and what challenges HDRCs faced when rolling them out.
- The specific elements (questions, methods, formats) of the baseline assessment process that HDRCs found most helpful or problematic.
- The extent to which the results of the baseline assessment led to any changes to the work of individual HDRCs (e.g. the establishment of new programmes of work or reprioritisation of existing programmes).

It is hoped that this study will yield some useful, transferable learning to inform the work of HDRCs and other local authorities on this subject.

Learning from Pre-doctoral Fellowship

- Literature searching and critical appraisal
- Research ethics
- Qualitative data collection, analysis and writing

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