



NIHR ARC Academic Career Development (ACD) leads and Local Authorities Research Capacity Workshop

Thursday 27 April 2023, 10.00-2.15pm

Notes from the session



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1. Overview and executive summary of the session:

- On Thursday 27 April 2023, ARC Academic Career Development leads (ACD) and invited leads in Local Authorities (LA) across the 15 NIHR Applied Research Collaborations (ARC) came together to listen to presentations from ARCs, Health Determinants Research Collaborations (HDRCs) and active local authority researchers to explore how ARCs can support research in local government.

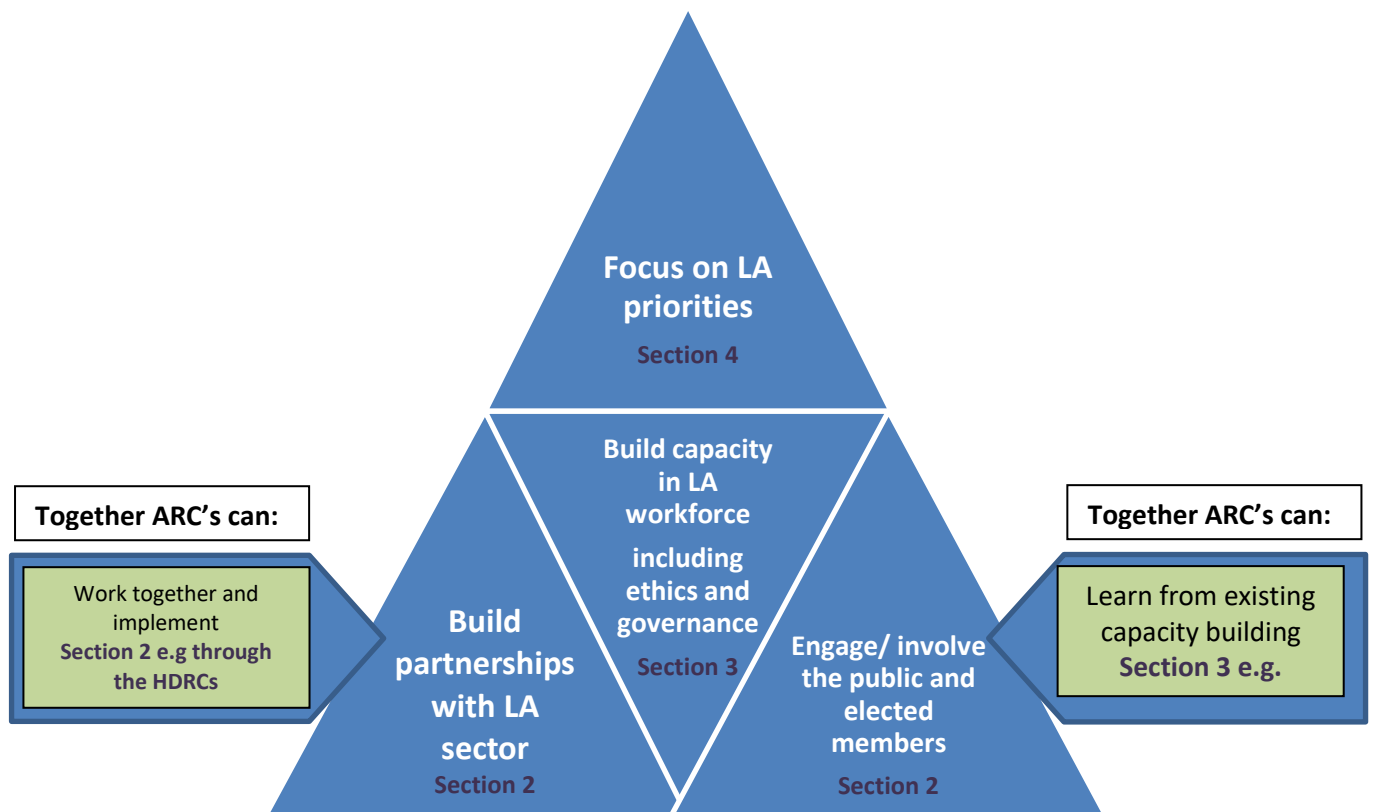
NIHR ARCs (15 nationally) support applied research responding to the needs of local populations and local health and care systems e.g.

- Research funding schemes
- Networks and communities of practice
- Capacity development.

The ARC Kent, Surrey and Sussex (KSS) Academy recognises the need to engage more with local government regarding research.

The session was attended by more than 70 participants across the breadth of the country. A summary of key messages from the workshop is below:

Key messages



2. Building sustainable partnerships with Local Authorities

The session began with short presentations on building sustainable partnerships with Local Authorities with a focus on what ARCs should be aiming for and how.

- **HDRC awarded funding – plans and how they will build the partnership with ARCs.**
Sue Frossell, Director, Coventry HDRC
[Click here](#) to view this presentation.
- **Public Health Research (PHR) Local Research System funding.**
Dr Jane West, Director of Public Health Research and the ActEarly Consultant in Public Health at Bradford Institute for Health Research and Rob Shore, Data Manager for Bradford HDRC
[Click here](#) to view this presentation.
- **Implementing the HDRC across the ARC region.**
Susan Hampshaw, Director, Doncaster HDRC - Yorkshire and Humber ARC
[Click here](#) to view this presentation.
- **Sector-led improvement: considering communication pathways with councils**
Dr Anusree Biswas Sasidharan, ARC KSS Public Advisor
[Click here](#) to view this presentation.

Suggestions on what ARCs should be aiming for included:

- Ensuring LA elective members are engaged and participate including attending research training.
- Continued collaboration to grow expertise through increasing scholarships – Masters /PhDs.
- Grow expertise/ capability in local government through shared training opportunities – MSc modules.
- Mentorship - for large research bids, Research Champions/Ambassadors, ARC members could be coaching/mentoring local government colleagues.
- Share information, sharing platforms, learning and expertise.
- Provision of Ethics Committee infrastructure.
- NIHR to accelerate its pace of change so that it can support research in local authorities more.
- Work is needed to extend funding and support to local government settings.
- Better local government support from NIHR (including local authority based CRN and RDS support, CED local government research register) is important

3. Workforce development – how can ARCs best support local authority workforce to be research active

The second section of the meeting aimed to discuss how NIHR ARCs can best support local authority workforce to be research active. Presentations were given by researchers involved in local authority research with some focusing on how their research career is progressing with NIHR awards. The presentations of each speaker are embedded below:

- **Social Care Research in LAs**
Dr Rasa Mikelyte, Research Fellow, University of Kent and Lilly Trapp, Research Facilitator, Kent County Council
[Click here](#) to view presentation
- **Pre-doctoral Local Authority Fellowship (PLAF)/Doctoral Local Authority Fellowship (DLAF) award**
Kate Birrell, Public Health Lead, West Sussex County Council
[Click here](#) to view presentation
- **Experience of research in the LA**
Janette Parr, PhD student Warwick University
[Click here](#) to view presentation
- **NIHR Short Placement Award for Research Collaboration (SPARC) holder**
Fay Blyth, Head Teacher, Virtual School, Waltham Forest Council
[Click here](#) to view presentation

The presenters shared ways in which capacity is being built (including that funded by NIHR) and how this can also draw in local authority practitioners into research.

The workshop was presented with a good practice example for learning around capacity building in Social Care Research in LAs - Kent Research Partnership in LAs– refer to [presentation](#) by Dr Rasa Mikelyte and Lilly Trapp,

4. What are the priorities for the next steps for research capacity in LAs

Workshop participants formed six breakout groups to discuss the following questions:-

- How can ARC's best support the Local Authority workforce to develop research?
- How can we develop the research culture and values in Local Authorities?
- How can we support governance and ethics in Local Authorities?
- What do ARC's need to consider to create a shared language and for early careers in this sector?

5. Feedback and consensus

Breakout group facilitators fed-back the following:

How can ARC's best support the Local Authority workforce to develop research?

- ARCs need to be flexible – LAs are different in different areas.
- Central research capacity rather than very separate research teams eg. working with public health / social care helps with infrastructure/access to databases are helped by central capacity for research, but that's not how all LAs are organised. So, being a bit flexible
- Make sure the ARCs are supporting the LA leaders and ensure ARCs are pushing to the LAs the research culture.
- If the ARC could support with leadership and influence of LAs,
- If the ARC could facilitate sharing data sets in any way would be helpful - aware LA sit on lots of population data, which we are aware of, and data could be cleaned and used in research. Data sharing is complicated, and we would like to see data set sharing improving.
- Challenges that are faced and possible solutions that ARC can provide such as Senior Leadership buy in from LAs.
- Giving an annual event bringing LAs, HDRCs, Clinical Research Networks (CRNs) and ARCs together – making connections, sharing and understandings.
- As ARCs to build relations with senior leaderships
- Workforce – to engage the workforce, the ARCs really need to go out and listen and communicate across all levels of LA and need to understand what tiers and parts of the organisation the ARC is reaching into.
- Raise the awareness of the ARC, launch events address people's perceptions that research is for everyone, raise different people getting involved.
- What things the ARCs support well already – signposting, introductions, networking, collaboration, COP, enthusiasm, support, believing in people and helping them to succeed.
- ARC Internships, PhDs / Fellowships – win win for LAs. Get personal skills and development and organisation gets that learning, service change as a result of that investment. Has value for them.
- The whole model of the Embedded Researcher is coming out as a very positive way to use that role to network, broker, and build communication networks– something we could think about more.
- Joining up across organisations and picking up on opportunities and being able to use those opportunities well.
- ARC members mentoring people with organisations to raise awareness and build that skill set. Crucially, building that community of practitioners of peer support and building networks.
- Work on doing things that are bespoke for LAs.
- Problem encountered in the LA is how to show the value of research to other departments – awareness of support the ARC can provide eg. advertising.
- Matching academics with LA researchers.

How can we develop the research culture and values in Local Authorities?

- The need to encourage culture of LAs as an attractive place to work - realities of LAs finding problems retaining staff.
- Recognising in some LAs there's a very strong governance framework for undertaking research. We don't want to reinvent the wheel.
- Comes from the bottom up with people who want to do research.

- Showing value and convincing others to invest in evaluation and research is important but really challenging.
- About understanding and using existing skills that may not appear as research skills – understanding and valuing what people already do and build a better understanding of culture and language around research.
- Leadership – try and influence the councils to do more research.
- Research Champions.
- Not just building the capacity, it's safeguarding that capacity in the long-term with cash-strapped LAs.
- There is huge expertise in LAs eg. people with PhDs and research qualifications and concern people are being de-skilled.
- Access to raw data
- Not just talking about LAs in isolation, talking about LAs working with Integrated Care Systems (ICSs).
- Leadership culture issue and the need for LAs to buy in and be that learning organisation.
- Training leads within the NIHR infrastructure that the LAs are now aware of.
- One LA was doing a needs assessment and auditing research skills that exist already and was going to have a conversation with their HDRC and academics.
- Need to make sure the ICBs recognise the importance of wider determinants research and the ICBs see the leadership of research and see it as a high priority.

How can we support governance and ethics in Local Authorities?

- Not reinventing the wheel. Observation about the processes you have to follow.
- Ethics Approval Process across the whole ARC footprint, using all that knowledge and experience across the ARC and CRN to provide that ethics support which includes some training as well as approvals.

What do ARCs need to consider to create a shared language and for early careers in this sector?

- Cognisant that we are not over complicating the system. Share some common language and not overcomplicate things.
- Assisting with publications where we feel LAs maybe don't do enough of that, despite all the good work that goes on already as some are quite research active.
- Complicated landscape – acronyms for different things. NIHR landscape needs explaining to people.
- Leadership is key in terms of support and development of common languages.

Barriers were highlighted as follows:-

- LAs wanting quick results.
- Organisational pressures.
- Feeling of a silo mentality.
- Huge variation in how LAs are organised.
- Buying out of time, ensure supported by Senior Managers.

We hope to organise a follow up to this event in about 12 months' time, through the Academic Career Development Leads group (ACDLs) and the ARCs nationally, in the hope and expectation that we can share further developments in research capacity in Local Authorities.