

Benchmarking data in commissioning PhD research and beyond

KM Team Members involved	James Rooney (MF), Becca Robinson (MF)
Aim	Supporting researchers in their networking and research with commissioners
Collaborators	University of Bristol, Management Fellows, Clinical Commissioning Groups, Commissioning Support Unit
Lead organisation	University of Bristol (John Busby PhD student)

What happened?

A University of Bristol PhD researcher was studying how commissioners use benchmarking data and the tools used. One of his supervisors, who had previously worked with the KM Team manager and a round one Management Fellow, suggested that the PhD student contact the KM Team.

A Management Fellow tested out the survey questions and suggested changes to make them more commissioner-friendly. This included making changes to the language, assessing the most relevant items, editing less useful questions and suggesting improvements. The revised questionnaire was then piloted by another Management Fellow. The Management Fellows were particularly helpful in talking the researcher through commissioning structures and processes, identifying potential commissioning stakeholders and “opening the doors” to be able to talk with some senior people within commissioning.

The initial outcome of this activity was that the study got off the ground, because commissioner interviews increased from 3-4 to 10 and the researcher gained insight into how commissioning works and what commissioners think and do. Before the intervention of the Management Fellows, the project was in danger of discontinuation, due to poor commissioner recruitment.

A second important outcome was that a further project was co-produced between the researcher and commissioners that directly addressed an area of concern for commissioners. After the PhD was submitted, the researcher and previously interviewed commissioner “got talking”, found some shared ground of research interests and this resulted in a bid to CLARHC West (Collaborations for Leadership and Applied Research in Health Care) with a wider team of researchers. So the circle of researchers who had a better understanding of commissioning and took part in creating commissioner-researcher collaborations was extended. The CLARHC bid focussed on modifying the business cycle and the evidence underpinning commissioning decisions, with the aim of improving the quality of business cases. Case study written May 2016 with data from the 3rd KM team evaluation (April 2016).

with cost effectiveness evidence. If the bid and this new project are successful, this may lead to commissioners drawing on cost effectiveness data more easily in their commissioning processes. Commissioners have repeatedly commented that they wanted more access to economists and cost effectiveness research, and through the intervention of the Management Fellows, this may have been facilitated.

What helped?	What didn't help?
Researchers benefit from having commissioners (NHS MFs) on an informal basis to talk to within the University buildings.	Both groups (commissioners and researchers) are very busy so "getting round the table" can be very difficult.
The PhD student's supervisor's previous knowledge and relationships with the KM Team manager and a round 1 Management Fellow.	
Being pointed in the right direction to specific commissioners. Giving specific contact details and information about commissioners that is not available on websites.	
Management Fellows' openness and helpfulness.	
Management Fellows' own networks were key to networking the PhD researcher, which has led to the furthering of the researcher's own networks.	
<i>"My experience was solely positive... I've not much negative to say"</i>	

What can we learn from this?

- **Relational activities** can have **tangible outcomes**.
- **Relational activities** can result in **creating collaborations between hard to reach groups**, commissioners and economists.
- **Outcomes** that can develop from relational activities are **not easy to predict** and **may happen a long time after initial collaborations**.