

Statement on the quality of knowledge and the development of the SCIE/Keele Protocol for the Assessment of Social Care Research

The SCIE Knowledge Review No. 3, *Types and Quality of Knowledge in Social Care* (2003), sets out a basic approach for the assessment of knowledge, the TAPUPAS framework. This consists of seven questions that should be asked of any knowledge, including research reports. The questions are:

Transparency – are the reasons for it clear?

Accuracy – is it honestly based on relevant evidence?

Purposivity – is the method used suitable for the aims of the work?

Utility – does it provide answers to the questions it sets?

Propriety – is it legal and ethical?

Accessibility – can you understand it?

Specificity – does it meet the quality standards already used for this type of Knowledge

These seven questions embody statements of good principles in research and its reportage. Accordingly, all the knowledge reviews carried out at Keele will assess the research reports cited in the reviews against these principles of good practice. The protocol that has been developed for the assessment of research reports in the SCIE/Keele project has consolidated the key questions posed in the Critical Appraisal Skills Programme (CASP) protocols that were used in earlier knowledge reviews and has extended the range of critical questions to better reflect the TAPUPAS framework. For example, an important distinction is raised between the purpose of a study and the specific research questions it seeks to answer. This distinction is now explicitly recognised in the first two questions.

There are some other significant developments too. The CASP protocols, which were developed by the Public Health Resource Unit (PHRU, 2005), are primarily addressed to medical and health issues, and unsurprisingly, not all the questions are relevant to the assessment of social care knowledge. Furthermore, the various CASP protocols do not consistently address ethical questions, nor consider equality and diversity issues. In contrast, this protocol poses the same questions of every piece of research in terms of the most significant concerns from a social care perspective. That is, questions of consent, risk, professional

standards, legality, and of course, the implications of the research for the diverse populations that are served by social care services. This new protocol also asks whether service users' and carers' views have been considered in the research and its reportage.

Finally, the TAPUPAS principles will be adhered to in the knowledge reviews themselves. Thus, the briefings will be written in an accessible style providing readers with clear explanations, explicit evaluations, and justified judgements of utility. The research reviews will be conducted in accordance with stage model set out in the Briefing Process Schedule and the briefings will conform to the principle of transparency by detailing how they were developed. For example, any departures from the minimum search criteria will be noted and explained.

Draft Keele Protocol for the Assessment of Social Care Research

1. What is the purpose of the study? Is it made explicit in the paper?
2. What is/are the research question/s addressed in this study?
3. Is the conceptual framework for the study explained satisfactorily?
4. What research methods are used in the study?
5. Are the research design and methods appropriate for the research purpose and research questions? Please refer to the appendix for detailed question prompts according to the method/s utilised.
6. Are the analytical procedures used for the analysis of the results satisfactorily described and are they appropriate for the type of data?
 - how is the data reported and presented?
 - is it detailed enough to allow the reader to assess the validity of the conclusions?
 - what procedures are used to promote the reliability of the analysis?
7. What are the findings of the study, are they clearly stated, and are they supported by the data analysis?
 - what support is offered for any generalisations?

- are the conclusions adequately supported by the data?

8. Does the research and discussion:

- take account of prior work in the field?
- offer explanation of confounding variables or conflicting results?
- note any other important considerations?
- provide a critical review of the research design, the results, and the researcher's own role in terms of potential bias?

9. Ethical questions:

- is the source of funding for the study made explicit?
- was the study subjected to ethical and professional review?
- how was access to data or subjects obtained?
- how were subjects recruited?
- were potential risks identified and avoided?
- were the methods and their utilisation ethically sound?

10. How useful is the research?

- does it meet its stated goals?
- what account is taken of service users' and carers' views?
- what are its merits and relevance for practice?
- does it provide directions for new/further research?

11. Any other observations about the validity, reliability, representativeness, and generalisability of the design, methods, and findings?

12. Any comments about issues of equality and diversity that arise within the research or that may stem from it?

References

PHRU (2005) *Critical Appraisal Tools*, Public Health Resource Unit, Oxford,
www.phru.nhs.uk/casp/critical_appraisal_tools.htm

SCIE (2003) *Types and Quality of Knowledge in Social Care*, Social Care Institute for Excellence, London,
www.scie.org.uk/publications/knowledgereviews/kr03-summary.pdf

Appendix

These questions are possible prompts for assessing the methods used in research. They are not intended as an exhaustive list of possible questions.

a) Survey methods

General questions

Who participated in the survey?
What was the response rate?
If sampling was used, how was the sample selected?
What is the relationship between the sample and the wider population?
Was the research instrument (e.g. questionnaire, interview) piloted?

Specific prompts about questionnaires

How was the questionnaire distributed and completed?
Are the questions closed or open-ended?
Are the questions relevant for the research question under study?
Has the researcher considered problems of reliability and validity in regard to how respondents will understand and respond to the focus of the survey?
Are the questions ambiguous or biased in any way?
Is the ordering of the questions logical and effective?
Are the responses structured by pre-existing options or open 'write-in' style? Are these satisfactory for the purpose of the study?
Have any efforts been made to check the internal validity and consistency of the responses?

Specific prompts about interviews

What format do the interviews use (if structured is this satisfactorily explained, if unstructured is the rationale persuasive)?
Is the interview schedule provided?
How, when and where were the interviews conducted?
How were responses recorded?
Who undertook the interviewing and was there any consideration of problems of bias, interviewer influence, and respondent's reaction?

b) Qualitative studies

How were participants recruited?

How was the data obtained and recorded?

How is the data presented?

Does the researcher consider issues of standpoint, bias and influence?

Is the reliability of the findings enhanced by the use of any other procedures such as triangulation, review by participants, etc?

What claims, if any, are made about validity and representativeness?

c) Case, cohort and panel studies

How were the cases, cohorts or panels selected, what selection criteria were used?

Were these criteria relevant to the research question?

Was the duration of follow up/observation satisfactory for the purposes of the study?

Were 'participants' aware of their inclusion in the study? Are potential biases noted? How were they managed?

Were 'drop outs' noted and explained? Were they replaced?

Was any baseline data obtained at the outset of the study?

Are the key factors, experiences or interventions satisfactorily described?

Was it possible to control exposure to these things?

How were effects and outcomes measured?

What relationships are proposed between 'exposure' and effects?

d) Observation studies

Were the methods and procedures satisfactorily described?

Who and what were under observation? How were the places, people, and events selected?

How were observations recorded?

If observational instruments, such as log sheets, scales, were used, has their utility and reliability been demonstrated in other studies?

What consideration was given to problems of bias, subjectivity and subject awareness?

e) Analyses of secondary data

Are the data sources accurately identified?

Are they available to other researchers?

Have all the relevant data sources been included in the study?
Has the researcher explicitly considered problems of representativeness, reliability and generalisability?
Where more than one data source is used are they compatible? If not how are they made compatible?
What analytical tools and methods are used to sort, summarise and represent the original data and report the results?
Are they appropriate for the purpose?

f) Systematic reviews

What search criteria were used to identify relevant studies?
Were the search procedures satisfactorily described, (e.g. which data bases were searched to identify relevant studies, how and who made the assessments of relevance, etc.)?
Is sufficient information provided to permit this review be repeated by another reviewer?
Were all the studies in the review relevant to the research question?
Were all relevant studies included in the review?
If not, is any further explanation given for the selection or omission of studies?
How are the results of the studies summarised and reported?
What statistical procedures have been used in reporting and combining results? Were they suitable for the purpose?