

Professional Services Researchers (PSR) in Higher Education – invisible researchers

Authors

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Notes

Research England, Enhancing Research Culture.
Ethical approval was received from the Faculty of Social Sciences



Project overview and Objectives

This project ran over two years. We did an exploratory research project to identify and understand the needs of professional services staff who engage in research. We found a small committed community having impact on their practice is a range of ways. The second phase was aimed at supporting, building and recognizing that community.

Internal objectives

- To make it easier for professional services staff who are doing research to be able to navigate UoB structures and make visible the support that is available (or make recommendations about what could be available)
- To identify and recognise professional services staff who have completed research, by seeking their views, providing a space for them to share their research and to connect with others

External objectives

- To make a contribution to knowledge about the experiences of professional services staff doing research within UKHE; including the challenges and opportunities that come from this part of the workforce, using UoB as a case study
- To make a contribution to practice, in higher education management, about establishing communities of practice, taking an inclusive approach to designing services and support

Methods

First phase – year 1

Key informant interviews with staff who support the research process

- Semi-structured and fact finding
- Participants identified using the UoB researchers route map

Survey/questionnaire for professional services staff doing research

- To identify professional services doing research
- Find out the nature of their research
- Understand their experiences of doing research at UoB

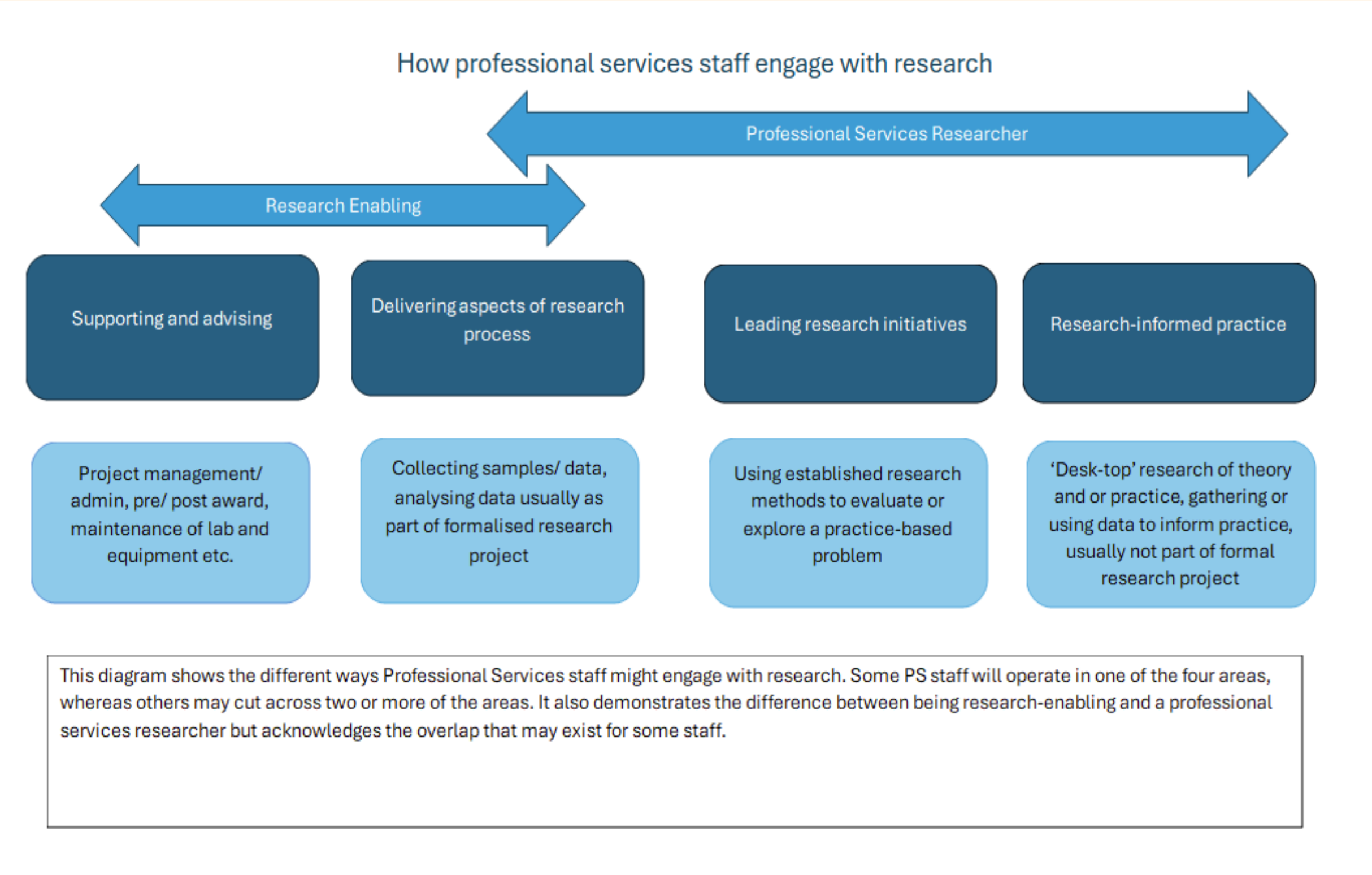
Second phase – year 2

- Setting up a community of practice for Professional Services Researchers
- Sharing work nationally at the International Research Cultures Conference
- Running a workshop at the Association of Higher Education Professionals (AHEP) – using a research informed approach to your research

Conceptual Framework

When conducting our project, we found that a substantial barrier was that stakeholders did not understand what we meant by 'professional services doing research' and even professional services who were researching were not sure if their work 'qualified'. To help overcome this barrier we proposed calling this community 'professional services researchers PSR' and we developed a conceptual framework to explain the different ways that a professional services member may engage in research. When we talked about professional services doing research, there was often an assumption that we were referring to project managers of research, we consequently included these as research enablers acknowledging that many are both enabling and doing research.

We have provided a framework (below) and some examples (right) from our survey of professional services researchers at Bristol.



Act	Examples from our project participants	Enabling or researching
Supporting & advising	A Research Project Manager who is managing project budgets, engaging with funders and other consortia. Responsible for gaining ethical approval for amendments to original agreements and about 100 other day to day tasks.	Enabling
Delivering research steps	A Clinical Trials Manager who is organising the trials and running interventions. A Marketing Manager who is doing desk-top research on competitors and statistical analysis on enrolment and application data.	Researching and enabling Researching
Leading research initiatives	A Faculty Professional Services member who led an internally funded mixed methods study to explore which communities Bristol students feel like they most belong to, and what conditions helps form these strong communities and enables them to thrive.	Researching
Research-informed practice	A School Professional Services member doing research into inclusive recruitment practice to improve their own practice.	Researching

Case profiles

To bring to life and showcase some of the work being done by Professional Services Researchers at Bristol we created four video case profiles, where staff talked about why they do research, what they have done and the impact on practice and how they did it, in terms of methods and approaches, to view videos please use the QR code.



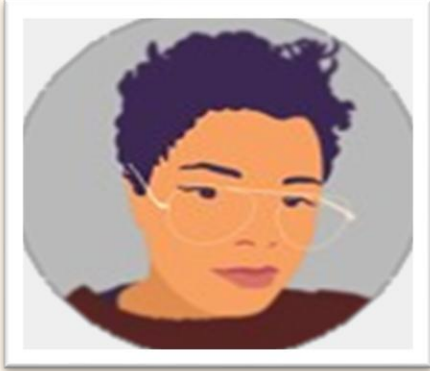
Chloe Anderson, Curriculum Review and Development Manager

Chloe's role is to inform and evaluate the Bristol Veterinary Programme curriculum, she works closely with students as key stakeholders. Chloe noticed a gap in their work as they had not considered the experiences of staff who were delivering the case-based learning teaching. Chloe consequently designed her Master's dissertation around better understanding staff experiences of delivering case-based learning, through interviews and focus groups. The findings from her project in part informed a change to the staffing delivery model of the programme.



Stephen Gray, Head of Research Support, Library Services

Stephen has led several AHRC funded projects including a fellowship to make special collections more accessible. This has included 3D scanning fragile collections that can be viewed by people all over the world to creating virtual museum environments to increase access for the public and support neurodivergent communities prepare for visiting collections. Through doing practice Stephen has found that research emerges.



Zosia Beckles, Research Information Analyst, Library Services

Zosia uses a range of approaches to improve her practice, sometimes doing formally funded projects other times taking a research informed approach. Zosia completes literature reviews and systematic reviews to ensure she is aware of best practice in her area. She has also run interviews and focus groups to improve guidance or to assess disclosure risk to enable more open access research, whilst protecting participants.



Peter Peasley, Senior Education Developer, Digital Education

Research approaches are embedded into Peter's work as he needs to understand both the sector trends on assessment and understand how students are engaging with assessment tools or advances such as AI. Peter uses a range of methods including desk-based research, interviews, focus groups and surveys to inform his work. Peter has recently produced recommendations to inform an organisational wide policy on AI usage in assessment and has published with colleagues to inform sector wide debates and challenge unevidenced assumptions on student usage of AI in assessment.

