

## Mixed methods in health sciences research: a practical primer

Leslie Curry and Marcella Nunez-Smith

SAGE Publishing, 2015

Reviewed by David Nelson, Macmillan research fellow, University of Lincoln



Written by internationally-recognised health research experts, Leslie Curry and Marcella Nunez-Smith, this book aims to show researchers and students in the health sciences how to design, conduct, review and use mixed methods. Given the increased use of mixed methods in the health sciences, this text is timely and unique in that it offers a discipline-specific focus that is both relevant and practical.

The book has a logical structure and is broken down into four parts: (1) an overview of mixed methods designs, their application and appropriate use (2) getting mixed methods research funded (3) design and implementation and (4) disseminating findings.

It is written so that it can be read from beginning to end, or the reader can select the part they want to read. Each part is

broken down into smaller chapters filled with excellent resources, tables and figures which accompany cases and real-life examples. Each chapter finishes with a short summary, exercises to encourage the reader to apply their learning and a useful reference list. The authors' clear and concise writing style make it accessible to different audiences.

Of particular interest was the chapter on managing mixed methods teams, which explores the challenges of team working and the factors contributing to their success. The final section on getting mixed methods research published provides useful recommendations about what to include in manuscripts and strategies for identifying journals and working with editors.

In summary, an excellent and valuable resource for all health researchers using mixed methods, regardless of experience.

## Using research evidence: a practice guide

Jonathan Breckon

NESTA/Alliance of Useful Evidence, no date

Reviewed by William Solesbury, visiting senior research fellow, Kings College London



The Alliance for Useful Evidence is an initiative of NESTA (the National Endowment for Science, Technology and the Arts).

This guide is one of a series of practice guides developed by its Innovation Skills team and is available online at [www.nesta.org.uk/publications/using-research-evidence-practice-guide](http://www.nesta.org.uk/publications/using-research-evidence-practice-guide). It runs to 55 pages organised round five questions: what is evidence-informed decision-making, and why focus on research? When can evidence help you? What evidence should you choose? Where should you look for evidence? How should you communicate your findings?

Each question gets a section in the guide, drawing on relevant research, experience and opinion (of which there is now much: the guide has 123 references given at the end), with diagrams and case studies used to illustrate its arguments and key messages restated at the end of each section. So far, so good.

But detailed reading reveals some of the limitations of its approach. In the context of the ongoing debates about evidence, policy and practice, the guide takes up some very particular positions. In the first line of the introduction, it states: 'Research evidence can help you understand what works, where, why and for whom. It can also tell you what doesn't work...' Well, yes, but it can also help you to understand the nature of the problem that policy might address.

In the section on the strengths of research as a source of evidence, the guide recognises that other sources, notably professional judgement, can play a role but it asserts that research has 'the advantages of greater rigour, relevance and independence when compared with other types of evidence'. Greater rigour perhaps (though it depends on sources and methods), but always greater relevance or greater independence?

In addressing the question of how to judge the quality of research, it puts most stress on peer review and chosen methods, giving support to our old friend, the hierarchy of evidence, with randomised control trials and systematic reviews in privileged positions. These are examples of the guide's limitations.

However, it does introduce the reader to some interesting recent contributions by others to thinking about research and policy. For example, a table of common 'cognitive biases' in judging the value of evidence or an overview of the pros and cons of alternative research methods or a DEFRA analysis of types of evidence helpful to different policy actions. So, the document can serve as a source book for some (not all) ways of relating research to decision making. But it is not the definitive practice guide that it aims to be.