



Third Sector Research Forum: impact case study

Fathers Network Scotland

Louise Bowen (Evaluation Support Scotland) caught up with Sam Pringle (pictured) Head of Research at Fathers Network Scotland, to learn more about how they approached impact and knowledge exchange for their recent research on shared parental leave.



About Fathers Network Scotland

FNS work with a wide range of organisations to help them support dads. They might be a service provider striving to be more father-friendly and inclusive, an employer exploring family-friendly working practices, or a policy-maker seeking consultation on parenting practices for dads as well as mums. In all cases, we help find the win-win for mum and dads, therefore children thrive. Our research activities started in 2012 with our partners at University of Edinburgh Social Sciences. Since then we have published over 10 reports and hosted international events to promote father friendly policy & practices.

Overview of the research collaboration

In order to find the right research partner, Sam explored which academics in the UK had an interest in parental leave, in particular dads' parental leave. She then discovered that the Chair of the International Parental Leave Network is based in Scotland. This brought further new contacts who she emailed or phoned to ask for advice, ultimately making the connection with Professor Alison Koslowski at the University of Edinburgh.

The research set out to understand what impacts on the decision for dads to take leave when working and living in Scotland. This resulted in two published papers with Professor Koslowski and one of her researchers and an MSc student. The research explores how fathers could feel supported by their work environment to take a more active caregiving role in the lives of their children, and why fathers in Scotland are unlikely to use the full range of leave benefits available to them.

Community, Work and Family (2017) [Fathers at work: explaining the gaps between entitlement to work and uptake of policies](#)

Community, Work and Family (2018) [Making use of work–family balance entitlements: how to support fathers with combining](#)

Planning for impact

To make an impact on both policy and practice within different contexts FNS wanted government policy makers, MSPs and decision makers in workplaces to be aware of their research. **To do this they took a multi-strand approach.**

Who are our audiences how will they benefit from our research?

There will be more than one audience for your research so tailor your engagement method to their requirements. **Once you know why your research might be useful to a person or organisation, you have a hook to make them more interested** in reading your research paper or agreeing to meet you.

Research published in an academic journal is an excellent output, but even so this has limited reach beyond the academic sector. Even if the article is Open Access and not behind a paywall, few people in Third Sector Organisations (TSOs) are unlikely to have time to regularly scan journals for articles that might be useful for their work.

Time is crucial for policy makers in government or other sectors, and that goes hand in hand with the vast quantities of information they are presented with. Your research needs to be actively brought to the attention of these different audiences in an accessible way.

Make spaces for conversations then invite others in

The uptake of parental leave is a gender equality issue which is growing in media interest. Choosing to share research on International Women's Day 2019 meant it could be **tied into a high profile date** that already had a buzz around it.

To highlight the link between employers, workplace policies, politics and practices Fathers Network Scotland found a business that was supportive of shared parental leave and willing to host the event, rather than launching at the university in an academic space.

Invitations to the event hosted at Morton Fraser in Edinburgh went out across public, third and private sectors so that people who might not usually cross paths were brought together with an opportunity to connect and share their diverse perspectives. The event was also run in collaboration with Scottish Business in the Community so that helped to extend audience reach. Over 40 people attended the event which struck a balance between exploring the academic research and the real-life context for people taking shared parental leave.

International expert researchers provided inputs on leave policy (including the FNS research findings and a book they launched) and a dad was invited to speak about his positive experience of taking parental leave from his workplace, Aviva

This helped to make the research recommendations come alive.



[A blog and videos from the event](#) were then made public for wider distribution and further engagement.



From right to left:
Sam Pringle, Head of Research FNS

Alison Koslowski (University of Edinburgh) Professor of Social Policy and Research Methods. Co-editor of the International Review on Leave Policies and Related Research.

Ann-Zofie Duvanderis (Stockholm University) Professor of Demography. One of the coordinators of the International Network on Leave Policies and Research

Peter Moss (University College London) Emeritus Professor of Early Childhood Provision at UCL Institute of Education. Co-founder of the International Network on Leave Policies and Research

Cast your net wide and also focus on individual influencers

FNS wanted their research to be on the radar of MSPs, but where to start? Which MSP to contact - and how? The starting point was searching through [parliament debate archives](#) with keywords related to the research topic, such as 'fair work', 'parental leave', 'dads taking parental leave'. This led them to Fulton MacGregor MSP who was already active in this area of work.

Identify who is talking about your research topic in parliament, and the context in which they're talking about it. Think about what the definite or possible links are to your research and flag these up in your introductory email to the MSP/MP/MEP's office.

Provide a summary or briefing paper of the research findings to make it easy for them to see why it's important to know about the research. Are you holding a launch event? **Send an invite.**

Be confident and take a learning approach

Think about **your organisation as an entrepreneur would**. As Sam says “some things we try don’t work, but we’ll see what does and figure out why it worked. We’ll share the tensions of when things don’t go to plan and learn from this.”

Be curious about what your research tells you. **Be confident** to take the first steps to contact MSPs or other decision makers in local government or other organisations. This is particularly important if you come from a small third sector organisation; **don’t be discouraged** by a sense of ‘not being important enough’. Knowledge is power and your research findings could make a difference.

Acknowledgements & further information

Many thanks to Sam Pringle for sharing this insight from Fathers’ Network Scotland. Find out more about their research at:

<http://www.fathersnetwork.org.uk/research>

Guidance on developing a third sector and academic research partnership is available in the Knowledge Translation Network publication [Collaborating with Academics](#) (free to download)

<http://evaluationsupportscotland.org.uk/resources/340/>

More information and resources from the [Third Sector Research Forum](#)

<http://www.evaluationsupportscotland.org.uk/our-work-partners/scottish-third-sector-research-forum/tsrf-evidence-papers-and-resources-copy/>

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