

Fuse Early Life and Adolescence research Programme (ELAP) Strategy

Web: www.fuse.ac.uk/research/earlylifeandadolescence

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Fuse, the Centre for Translational Research in Public Health, brings together the five North East Universities of Durham, Newcastle, Northumbria, Sunderland and Teesside in a unique collaboration to share Fuse's mission to transform health and well-being and reduce health inequalities through the conduct of world-class public health research and its translation into value-for-money policy and practice.

In achieving our vision, we focus on three broad aims:

1. To deliver world-class public health research that focuses on generating and translating evidence for cost effective public health policy and practice
2. To build sustainable capacity for translational public health research, both in academia and in policy and practice
3. To build effective and lasting partnerships with policy and practice for collaborative co-production of public health research.

As part of our core mission of translation of research evidence into policy and practice we launched Fuse's responsive research and evaluation facility 'AskFuse' in June 2013. With the support of Fuse researchers, we help our partners to access existing knowledge or to work in collaboration to develop new research evidence that is relevant, timely and tailored to their needs and enabled them to find answers to issues that matter. This innovative model has attracted considerable national interest.

Fuse continues to build international partnerships to share research with leading scientists and organisations across the globe. In April 2011 Fuse was the founder of the first International Knowledge Exchange in Public Health Conference. The 2021 conference is being held in Newcastle in collaboration with Cornell University, Erasmus University Rotterdam, the Michael Smith Foundation for Health Research, and Tilburg University. Plans are in place to further develop international secondment opportunities.

Fuse Communications aim to maximise the impact and effectiveness of Fuse work, to raise the profile of Fuse as a Centre for excellence in Research and Knowledge Exchange and to build a unity of purpose within Fuse, and between Fuse and our partners. This is achieved by:

1. Examining and recommending action on all issues relating to internal communications, and communications with our partners and funders
2. Having responsibility for external relations with the public and with practice & policy partners by managing the various media through which we present our message and research findings
3. Developing forms of communication which will share learning and help build research capacity.

Fuse has identified the need to develop its strategy for Public Involvement and Engagement (PIE) in research and to give members of the public an influence in the decision-making processes. Work has started to collate the PIE activity within Fuse, this will help to identify any gaps and achieve a more cohesive approach, to ensure Fuse is in a strong position when applying for continued membership of the NIHR School for Public Health Research (SPHR) and future funding opportunities.

Fuse is integral to a number of newly funded public health research infrastructures both regionally and nationally, some with similar research agendas. Fuse will work in synergy with infrastructures such as the NIHR Applied Research Collaboration (ARC) North East and North Cumbria (NENC) and the NIHR Policy Research Unit (PRU) by organising co-badged research meetings with shared agendas. Collaboration opportunities will also be identified within the Fuse research programmes. Work has started to capture the use of Fuse learning and any reference to the success of the Fuse model.

Our six research programmes make substantive contributions to the realisation of Fuse's mission. They also play an important role in achieving our vision. The programmes of research are complementary and collaborative, and explicitly linked together. Some projects draw on skills and expertise from two or more research programmes. The research strategies for each of the six programmes are set out below. They share common deliverables including:

1. Organising engagement events which are a key activity in delivering the Fuse strategy. In particular, Fuse Quarterly Research Meetings which are a key opportunity for research dissemination, dialogue about the implications for policy and practice, making new and strengthening existing contacts, and building a dialogue around research results and potential future projects. All Fuse meetings are free to attend making them available to all of our members.
2. Ensuring research sections on the Fuse website are kept up to date, providing material for research case studies.
3. Highlighting research which has been initiated through AskFuse and showcasing on the Fuse website.
4. Disseminating work through the Fuse blog, research briefs and social media.
5. Developing a strategy for communication with members and maintaining regular contact.
6. Encouraging members to share their relevant existing work and update on a quarterly basis, reporting back to Fuse Research Strategy Group (RSG).
7. Supporting the career development of members through the provision of training, networking, and events to showcase work specifically of early career researchers, practitioner, policy makers, and experts by experience.
8. Meeting regularly with the Fuse Manager to review programme progress and plan for future activity.

Vision

To undertake and promote public health research of the highest quality and to seek to translate findings into policy and practice wherever possible and so improve the health and wellbeing of children, young people and their families.

Objectives

We will achieve this by drawing together and supporting those researchers with interests in the health of children and young people and the public health measures which might be taken to sustain or improve health and wellbeing to work together and in partnership with public health policy makers and practitioners.

In coming together we hope to achieve a range of secondary objectives:

- To share knowledge and findings from existing projects.
- To discuss and develop collaboration with potential to lead to new research studies.
- To foster career development for early career researchers and post graduate researchers.
- To identify the translational possibilities of our work and to work with other programmes across Fuse to realise these possibilities wherever possible.

ELAP covers a range of issues stemming from public health concerns that are researched within three key phases in early life and adolescence, namely pre-conception, pregnancy and post-natal life, childhood and adolescence. The programme takes a cross-cutting approach and will develop synergies between our programme and the other five Fuse research programmes, particularly behaviour change and complex systems programmes.

- **Pre-conception, pregnancy and post-natal life stage** has been recognised as critical for maternal and child health wellbeing. Research within ELAP seeks to develop a broad grasp of public health concerns affecting this stage of life looking at issues such as smoking in pregnancy, teenage pregnancy, breastfeeding, parental mental health, obesity, nutrition and inequalities, such as defining what a preconception population is, and different interventions required for different target populations (e.g. teenagers versus adults, those not planning pregnancy versus those actively preparing for pregnancy). We will build on previous research that has been delivered within Fuse over the last 11 years, including babyClear, FeedFinder, PROMOTE, MapMe and many more, to address knowledge gaps and support implementation and scaling up of developed interventions. In addition, research members evaluate public health interventions that have been designed to address concerns affecting health at this stage of life. Further research highlights socio-economic circumstances that impact upon health and wellbeing in pre and post pregnancy, among which are issues of food security related to access to nutrition and cost, provision of vitamin supplements and effects of marginalisation on health. Research recognises aspects of health economics that

affect the decisions when planning interventions, such as the cost of interventions and who bears its burden. It also recognises that, while pre-conception stage is considered an ideal stage to target public health interventions to improve maternal and child health, there are recognised challenges with targeting public health interventions to preconception populations, such as those outlined above.

- **Childhood** looks at concern related to child health in nursery, preschool and early school years with a view of monitoring and promoting change in debilitating health behaviours. Fuse ELAP is well positioned to lead research into and influence policy and practice in this regard. ELAP members are involved in a wide range of research. Obesity prevention in early life is one of the key themes researched within the programme, which takes into consideration factors such as understanding and provision of nutrition, social and technological developments that abet sedentary behaviours, and measures of physical activity and fitness in childhood. Mental wellbeing in childhood and understanding and promotion of healthy sleep behaviours are key other themes researched in relation to childhood health. These programmes take into account the impact of social media and cultural beliefs on parent and child behaviour in relation to sleep behaviours and mental health. Social and health inequality sits across the stage as a key determinant affecting access and availability to health behaviours in childhood.
- **Adolescence** is seen as a critical stage when risk factors for health can rise sharply, and is thus regarded as a period when interventions should aim to promote resilience and reduce risk taking behaviours. It is also recognised that the later years of adolescence are particularly important as a child transitions to adulthood, but there is a dearth of research in this period. ELAP research on adolescent health contributes to understanding broad issues affecting this age such as drugs and alcohol, self-harm and teenage pregnancy. They have also highlighted the need to engage multiple supporting structures, among which the roles of parents and schools figure prominently. The research points out that early involvement with parents and schools needs to be restorative and that mechanisms need to be established to transmit a clear public health message to these supportive structures.

Meetings

ELAP will convene regular quarterly meetings, timed to follow on from other Fuse meetings wherever possible. This group will contain representation from practice partners who hold early years and adolescence health briefs from across North East England. These individuals have participated in early meetings and discussion on strategy.

Meetings will rotate around the region.

Deliverables in addition to common deliverables (as listed above)

- We will invite ELAP members to send a list of all their relevant existing work, and plan to update this on an annual basis.
- We will continue to maintain a list of policy and practice partners with specific interests in pregnancy, child and adolescent health prepared to take an active role in our work.
- We will work together along with policy and practice partners to identify existing key strengths but also potential opportunities for new collaborations. Our work will follow the Fuse Knowledge Exchange model, applying four steps to support the use of research evidence in policy and practice: i) awareness raising, ii) sharing knowledge; iii) making evidence fit for purpose (localising and tailoring); and iv) supporting uptake and implementation.
- We will encourage all researchers at all stages of their career to plan for impact and translation within their projects, for example by promoting the SPHR six knowledge sharing principles in all our research projects.
- We will encourage ELAP members to look at synergies and potential collaborations through a series of events designed around 'problems needing solutions' and 'finding a friend/collaborator' in this field.
- We will work in collaboration with the SPHR Children Young People and Families programme and ensure that Fuse has good representation within the SPHR programmes of work.