

- A partnership of public health researchers across the five universities in North East England
- Working with policy makers and practice partners to improve health and wellbeing and tackle inequalities
- A founding member of the NIHR School for Public Health Research (SPHR)

# 10 principles to translate national physical activity policy into local practice

Translating national physical activity policy into local practice is challenging. Here we present 10 guiding principles to support transferable knowledge exchange activities for implementing national policy. These are based on input and experiences of practitioners, researchers and policy makers from North East England collected during workshops run by the Fuse Physical Activity Network.

Increased national policy attention has not translated into effective physical activity (PA) programmes that can be delivered locally, or to a substantial increase in people being physically active. Giving insufficient attention to local context when implementing policy, and limited interactions between local policy makers, practitioners and researchers might be responsible for this.

Fuse Physical Activity Workshops help to facilitate this discussion in North East England. They allow for inclusive communication of views and knowledge types, networking and dissemination of research evidence gathered from across sector boundaries, and joint activity to support new research and implementation of PA strategies. Using work by the Fuse Physical Activity Network (PAN) and the new PA guidelines from the UK Chief Medical Officers as a case study, we explored how local stakeholders may best support the implementation of national policy.

We collected data from policy makers, practitioners and researchers at two Fuse Physical Activity Workshops in April and December 2018. During the first workshop, five focus groups (totalling 59 participants) discussed regional priorities for PA research and practice, and how barriers to implementing this may be overcome. During the second workshop, focus group findings were fed-back to a similar stakeholder group of 57 people, along with national policy makers, to stimulate discussion about how the local implementation of UK PA guidelines could be supported. This focused on specific conditions for research, evidence and knowledge exchange.

Following workshop one, we identified three overarching themes related to implementing PA guidelines: (1) understanding complexity and context; (2) addressing the knowledge and skills gap; and (3) mismatched timescales and processes between academia and practice. Participant implementation plans from workshop two covered: (1) exploring a systems approach to implementation; (2) adapting policy to context; and (3) local prioritising.

Overall, these workshops demonstrated that it is possible to generate timely, practical and easily implemented solutions to common issues faced by local physical activity stakeholders, as well as address enduring tensions between these groups.

## Key Findings

- **Understanding complexity and context**  
Researchers, practitioners and policy makers understand the complexities of implementing physical activity (PA) strategies, and the challenges of knowledge exchange.
- **Mismatched timescales and practices**  
Traditional research approaches may not always be fit for purpose, or map onto the practices or pace of the current 'real-world' PA context.
- **Addressing the knowledge and skills gap**  
New skills are required by all professions and sectors, particularly in communicating and translating research through simple and focused messaging, in continuously changing local contexts.
- **Exploring a systems approach to implementation**  
A broader culture shift that embraces complexity and a more integrated approach to research alongside practice in participatory and action-oriented approaches, which redefines PA stakeholders' roles, may be necessary.
- **Adapting policy to context**  
The update of UK physical activity guidelines presented an opportunity for multiple agencies to consider context-specific implementation strategies.
- **Local prioritising**  
Organically derived implementation plans could prioritise PA, map links to relevant local policies and support context-appropriate communication strategies within local policy, practice and research networks.
- **Inclusive networks**  
Centres such as Fuse, are useful for bringing diverse groups together, disrupting traditional ways of working, coming to terms with different perspectives, and learning to cope with local and regional complexities.

## 10 guiding principles for implementing national physical activity policy at a local level

1. Accept and understand the complexity of implementing national policies.
2. Recognise that different perspectives about evidence use exist across sectors and places.
3. Create space to bring different viewpoints together, challenge the status quo and debate the value and use of national policy and evidence.
4. Accept different perspectives and think outside of the box to create multidisciplinary spaces.
5. Be pragmatic: follow the energy and ideas created by informal networks, as well as recent national developments.
6. Do not be deterred by limited resources – harness organic development.
7. Frame messages in simple, easily accessible language that is tailored for different stakeholder groups.
8. Foster inclusive leadership: every member can play their part and have a voice in decision-making.
9. Have a clear vision and look beyond targeted interventions to wider systems approaches and determinants of health.
10. Ensure structural engagement between partners beyond formal meetings to sustain timely and proactive knowledge exchange activities.

*“How are we now going to make sure that this is as useful as possible for practitioners?”*

## BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE RESEARCH

This Fuse brief presents key findings from a paper published in BMC Public Health, which was a collaboration between researchers from Durham, Teesside, Newcastle, Huddersfield and King’s College London universities. The case study is based on a mixed-qualitative research project, carried out with participants at Fuse Physical Activity Network workshops in April and December 2018, to identify local-level challenges and opportunities for implementing physical activity policies.

Rigby et al. 2020. *Challenges, opportunities and solutions for local physical activity stakeholders: an implementation case study from a cross-sectoral physical activity network in Northeast England*. BMC Public Health.

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Fuse Physical Activity Network

Web: [www.fuse.ac.uk/events/physicalactivityworkshops](http://www.fuse.ac.uk/events/physicalactivityworkshops)

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Fuse, the Centre for Translational Research in Public Health, is a collaboration of the five North East Universities of Durham, Newcastle, Northumbria, Sunderland & Teesside.

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