

HSC R&D Division, Public Health Agency, Northern Ireland

It doesn't seem like 12 months since we embarked on this journey in March 2022. Since then HSC R&D Division has been working hard to consolidate the Personal and Public Involvement (PPI) initiatives it had already begun but with the added momentum gained from signing up to the Shared Statement of Commitment to Public Involvement. There is no doubt that being part of this collaborative and its spider's web of contacts has helped drive our desire to build on what we've already achieved in PPI over the last several years while learning from others about what we might do better or differently.

Before COVID-19, we had been planning an evaluation of PPI, having been implementing it in our processes in HSC R&D Division since 2010 when we published our first [PPI Strategy](#) and introduced PPI as a prerequisite in our funding schemes, co-producing criteria for its evaluation with members of [PIER](#) (Public Involvement Enhancing Research) NI, our public panel, also established in 2010. This year, we resurrected this plan by conducting a short survey of our awardees using the [UK Public Involvement Standards](#) as a Framework. The results, which are hot off the press, have shown that while we are meeting the Standards, there are areas where we could improve. Encouragingly, the majority of respondents reported that PPI had greatly enhanced and enriched their studies and improved the quality of the research HSC R&D Division funds. These [findings](#) will inform our new R&D Strategy which will continue to include PPI as a priority.

PIER continue to provide much needed support for our work, participating in our funding panels, delivering training, presenting at conferences and taking part in research advisory groups within the universities, as well as having many other important PPI roles outside of HSC R&D Division. However, with some members still shielding and longstanding members retiring, there have been challenges in keeping the group together online and growing it further to meet the current demands for increased inclusion and diversity. This is another area for development.

During the summer, we conducted an [analysis](#) of feedback from our popular Building Research Partnerships training programme, originally designed by

Macmillan Cancer Support, which we had adapted from a face-to-face workshop to an online programme during the pandemic. So far, over 400 participants including academic researchers, clinicians, service users, carers and members of the public have taken part in the training since it was first delivered in 2012. It is ably led by our public contributor and a member of PIER NI, Margaret Grayson, and involves a series of pre-recorded sessions followed by an online webinar. A recent addition includes a [presentation](#) from one of our doctoral fellows, Carla McClintock, a critical care staff nurse who is virtually involving a national PPI group in her study of a voice recognition device in patients who have had a tracheostomy. While we are all grappling with demonstrating best practice, this has been a valuable way to share an example of what good looks like for our early career researchers embarking on their PPI journey.

We continue to enjoy the benefits of being involved in several other UK working groups as one of the devolved nations, including the 5 Nations PPI Group, the UK Standards sub group, UK Payments for Public Contributors sub group and the [Be Part of Research](#) Advisory, Governance and Communications groups! At times, though it does seem that it is a case of the same faces in different places, particularly when it comes to our Celtic colleagues, the opportunities that membership of these groups brings, to learn from and network with our partners ‘across the water’ and ‘over the border’ as they say here, has only been to our advantage and wanting to do more.

With lots of other exciting PPI initiatives happening at the moment across the island, including [PPI Ignite](#), the potential for joining up and creating a stronger, more vibrant and more dynamic environment for PPI in Research in Northern Ireland has never been better. This was demonstrated only yesterday (9th March 2023) when around 100 people registered to join a virtual PIER event with Simon Denegri entitled, ‘[Looking Back, Forging Forward](#)’. With the Shared Commitment driving us on, we look forward to the next phase of this exciting journey!