

Cumberland Council Research, Evidence, Evaluation and Learning (REEL) Training Programme

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Background

Cumberland Council received a grant of £4.8 million from the National Institute of Health and Care Research (NIHR) to establish a new Health Determinants Research Collaboration (HDRC). The Cumberland HDRC is a collaboration between Cumberland Council, the University of Cumbria (UoC), the University of Central Lancashire (UCLAN), Cumbria Council for Voluntary Services and community organisations. The HDRC aims to enhance the research capacity and capability of Cumberland Council, particularly in addressing health inequalities. This collaborative will strive to instill an evidence-informed culture within local government and to undertake research in situations where evidence is not already available. A part of this funding is used to design and deliver training to council staff, elected members and community organisations in order to increase the REEL skills across Cumberland.

Purpose

The REEL training programme delivers the skills and knowledge set out in the REEL capability framework. This document sets out the training available in order to increase your skills and knowledge in each of the eight REEL domains of capability. The training is mostly provided by the HDRC team, but we do also signpost training delivered by other providers.

Scope

The REEL Training Programme is designed to generate learning about evidence and how to create it. It is open to all staff, elected members and community organisations as continuous professional development and career advancement. The training will be voluntary, staff will be encouraged to participate and will be supported to attend training as part of their professional development. The training provided by the HDRC team is funded by the National Institute of Health Research. Training signposted from other providers may incur a cost.

About the REEL Capability Framework

The REEL Capabilities Framework has set out and defined eight domains of capability necessary for comprehensive research training and knowledge acquisition for

Cumberland Council staff who would like to develop their evidence gathering and research skills. The REEL capability framework is organized into eight interconnected, non-hierarchical domains that can be considered collectively, as well as individually. They are as follows: Health Inequalities and Determinants of Health, Theory of Change Methodology, Using Evidence, Performing Service Evaluations, Planning and Delivering Research, Ensuring Continuous Quality Improvement, Strategic Research Leadership, and; Co-Production and Co-Research (see figure 1).

Understanding what health inequalities and the factors that determine them is a key starting point for everyone in the Council if we are to truly embed health and wellbeing at the heart of everything we do. This course is for everyone.

Once these key concepts have been acquired the training progresses to cover the theory of change method for planning services and interventions. This is a core planning tool for Cumberland Council and advised for anyone delivering, designing or evaluating front line services.

The 'using evidence' domain will hone your understanding of what evidence is, how to discern 'good' evidence from 'weak' evidence, how to find evidence appropriate to your task - and how to present it in a balanced way. Evidence is used to underpin theories of change which is why it follows this domain in our training programme.

Evaluation is the collection of evidence to prove the worth of service, project or intervention. Performing service evaluations therefore follows the evidence domain as it is a very common application of evidence.

Having explored evaluation, you will hopefully have gained an appetite for the wider field of research. This is where the next domain, planning and delivering research, comes in. This will help you to understand when and how to use different types of research for different purposes.

In our Council setting we use evidence, evaluations and research to help us to understand how to make services better. Understanding continuous quality improvement is therefore the next domain in the programme and is most suitable for team, service or directorate leaders.

The strategic research leadership domain is for senior leaders who need to consider how to have an evidence-informed approach to leading their areas of responsibility and how to create evidence-informed cultures in their teams.

The last domain in the training programme, co-production and co-research, thread through all the other domains as a core approach we take to work at Cumberland

Council, working with our residents rather than doing things to them. This is appropriate for any member of staff.

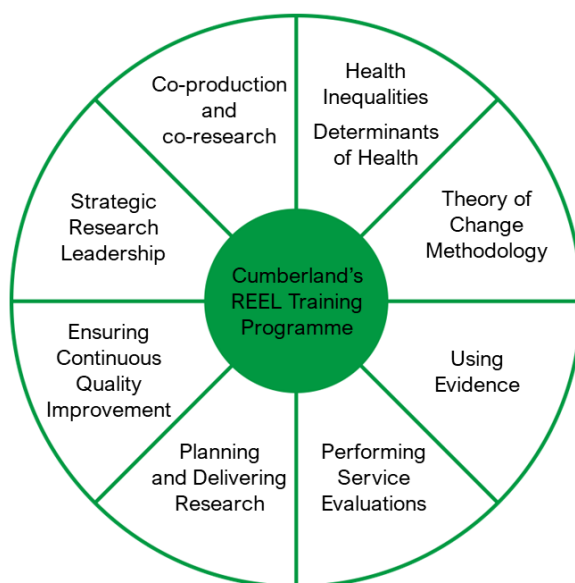


Figure 1 Domains of REEL capabilities.

Training for each domain is offered at three levels of proficiency (entry-level, intermediate and advanced). Each level builds upon and expands the capabilities of the previous whereby advancing to the next level requires mastery of the capabilities outlined at the previous level. It is recognized that staff might already possess research credentials or may choose to enhance their REEL capabilities beyond those outlined at a certain level of practice. This could correspond to colleagues holding leadership roles or those currently in a particular career pathway.

We also have some bite-sized taster sessions for those of you who want to dip your toe in to see what it is all about.

Each domain in the framework is an area of capabilities. These are described in terms of the knowledge and skills you would demonstrate to be competent at each level of each domain.

Our REEL Training plan is shown at Figure 2.

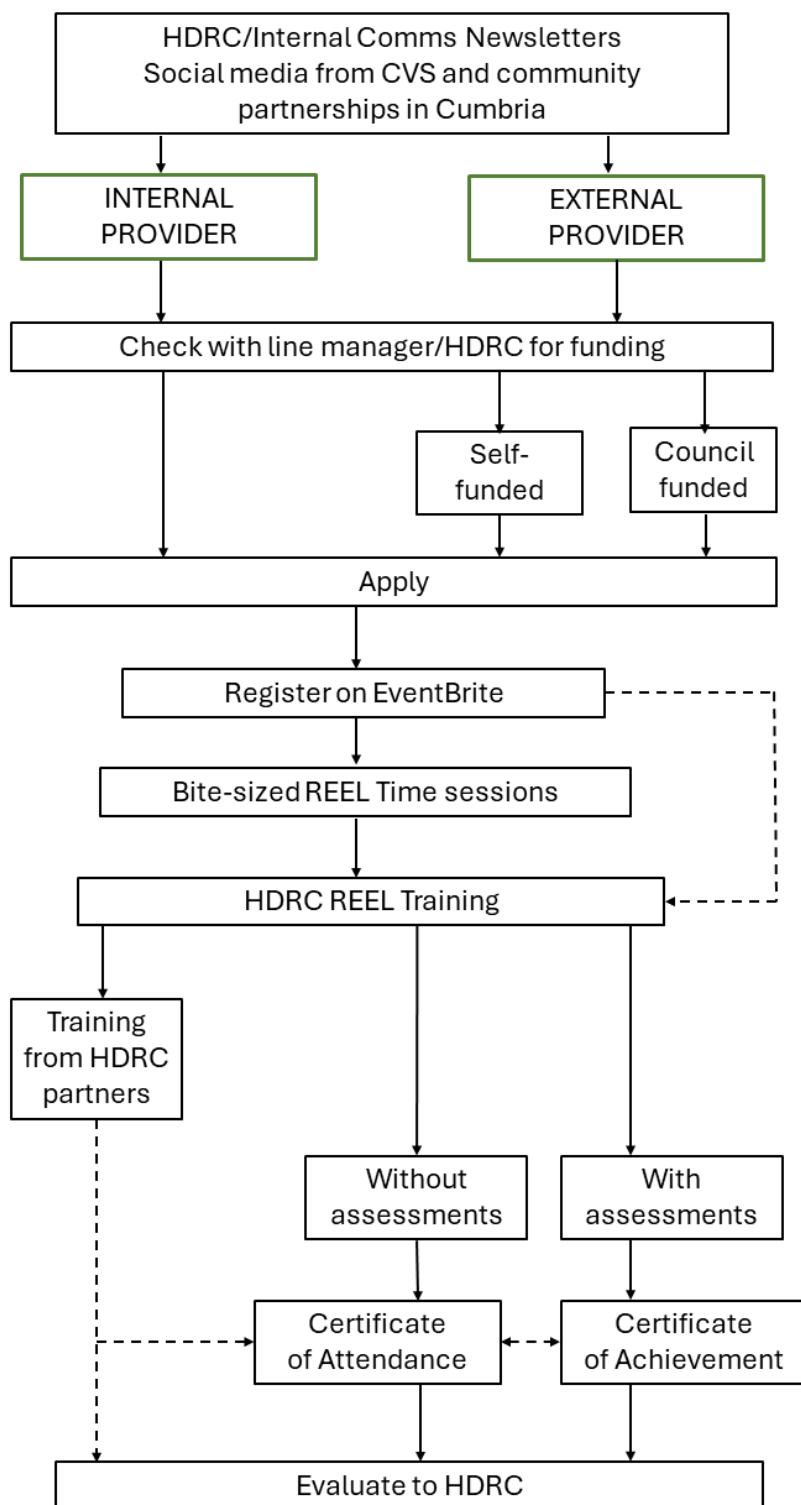


Figure 2 REEL Training flow chart.

Learning with the HDRC

We don't really 'teach' in the typical sense of the word. Our sessions are designed to facilitate your learning from some input we provide, from applying this knowledge to your every day work context and from working with other people from across our geography.

As such we do not call the people who take part 'students', rather we choose the term 'participant' as you will be active participants in your own and other people's learning.

The HDRC seeks to ensure we connect, learn and grow.

These sessions will connect you to new knowledge and skills, they will allow you to connect theory to practice and vice versa, and to connect with new colleagues from across Cumberland.

The sessions enable learning about research, evidence and evaluation from the person delivering the session, from one another, from theory and from practice.

As a result of these new connections and learning you grow your skills and knowledge and you increase the research capacity in Cumberland. Hopefully you will also grow the evidence base that the Council uses to make decisions with your new skills and knowledge.

These three areas are shown in figure two below.

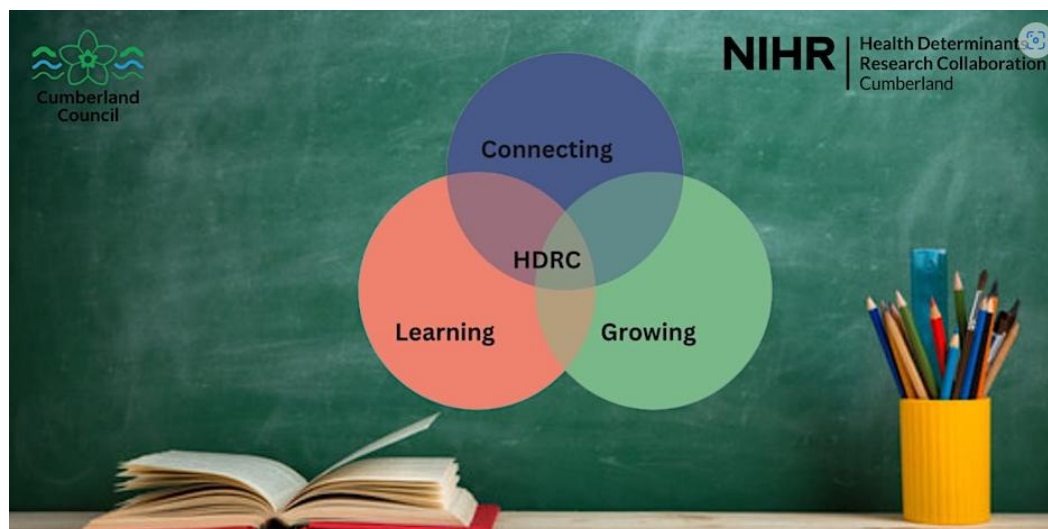


Figure 3 Connecting, Growing and Learning with the HDRC.

Our Learning Principles

We are committed to:

Voluntary: This training is optional and open to anyone who wishes to develop their research skills and knowledge, build their curriculum vitae and advance their career through research.

Respectful: We respect every participant as a unique individual with valuable skills, knowledge and experience prior to arriving in a training session.

Person-Centered: In our modules we focus on the needs, interests, and learning styles of students. A variety of teaching methods, including active learning, collaborative learning, and digital resources, should be used to engage participants.

Inclusivity: We strive to create an inclusive learning environment where all participants, regardless of their backgrounds, abilities, or identities, can succeed. This includes accommodating diverse learning needs and providing equitable access to educational resources.

Active and Collaborative: Participants are expected to engage in active learning through discussions, problem-solving, group projects, and practical experiences. Collaboration with peers, elected members, and people from community organisations is vital to enrich the learning process.

Assessment for Learning: Everyone attending a learning module delivered by the HDRC team will receive a certificate of attendance. We also offer certificates of achievement for anyone who would like to do a short piece of applied work after the module which we will assess. Assessments are aligned with learning outcomes in order to provide meaningful feedback to participants. This is entirely optional. We are also exploring the possibility of offering some University of Cumbria credits for some learning modules, but this is work in progress at the moment.

Continuous Improvement: We promote a culture of reflection and continuous improvement. The HDRC team delivering the sessions will always ask for your feedback in order to improve their facilitation skills, they seek professional development opportunities, participate in pedagogical research, and adopt innovative teaching strategies.

The REEL Training Programme

REEL Bite-sized Training

These sessions are bite sized in order to give you a flavour of this area of research, evidence, evaluation and learning. We will also be publishing dates for an introductory, intermediate and advanced training workshops for each of the eight capabilities in the new year. You may want to wait for those to be advertised so you can jump right in, or you might prefer to test the water with these bite sized sessions first!

In our upcoming BRT sessions, we will have external colleagues joining us to present. They will also collaborate with us on running their research webinar in alignment with our BRT series.

BRT sessions are held on Wednesdays on Microsoft Teams from 12 to 1 pm. These dates are subject to change. You will be informed of changes, if any.

How is a BRT conducted?

These sessions are delivered using Microsoft Teams where sessions are conducted in a friendly and informal manner. BRTs will comprise of a short introduction, followed by a presentation by the speaker (usually 20 minutes), with 10 minutes allocated for Q&As, and with interactive engagement between the speaker and attendees. Attendees will be invited to complete a feedback questionnaire at the end of the session.

What to expect from a BRT session

Our BRT sessions are designed to help participants understand the core principles of research, evidence, evaluation and learning, starting with one capability at a time. Sessions are informal and interactive, and intended to familiarise participants with each capability, and inspire them to pursue further training with us in this area.

For example, a BRT session on Ensuring Continuous Quality Improvement will introduce colleagues to the fundamentals of continuous quality improvement and how it benefits staff, communities and the Council.

Attending a BRT session will provide participants with a clear understanding of what to expect from the full REEL capability training programme. By offering a preview of the content, attendees will get a better idea of the REEL capability training.

What follows a BRT session: REEL Capability Training

Full training workshops at an introductory, intermediate and advanced level for each capability will be advertised in the new year.

Who can attend?

The REEL training sessions are open to all council staff, elected members and community organisations that serve residents in the Cumberland Council footprint.

Jan 15 2025 - Introduction to REEL training and The Theory of Change by Professor Kaz Stuart

Join us for our first BRT session where Kaz introduces you to our REEL Capabilities Framework and the REEL training. Explore the Theory of Change with Kaz. Theory of Change is a tool that is used to explain and illustrate why a project, intervention or service is expected to achieve outcomes. It also has a wide range of possible uses in developing, managing and evaluating interventions. Get ready to dip into the Theory of Change and learn how to use it in your projects!

Book here:

[15th January 2025 - Introduction to REEL and Theory of Change by Prof Kaz Stuart](#)

Feb 5th 2025 - Using Evidence by Dr Jae-Llane Ditchburn

This session will introduce you to the fundamentals of working with evidence, providing insights on how to effectively manage, collect and utilise evidence in various contexts, including decision-making. During the session, we will look at examples of research evidence from studies together and discuss how we can use evidence for ourselves in Cumberland Council.

Book here:

[5th February 2025 - Using Evidence by Dr Jae-Llane Ditchburn](#)

March 19th 2025 - Performing Service Evaluations by Dr Jae-Llane Ditchburn

Evaluation is a fundamental part of service delivery. There are different types of evaluation that serve different purposes. This taster session will provide you with an overview of the different types of evaluation possible and what they are useful for, and will familiarise you with the typical structure of an evaluation.

Book here:

[19th March 2025 - Performing Service Evaluations by Dr Jae-Llane Ditchburn](#)

2nd April by - Planning and Delivering Research by Dr Becky Clarke

We welcome you to this exciting session on planning and delivering research with Becky. Discover the stages of the research process and why they are all important. Becky will also bust the myths about how “impossible” research is – spoiler alert: it’s not rocket science! But it may absolutely enrich your life!

Book here:

[2nd April 2025 - Planning and Delivering Research by Dr Becky Clarke](#)

May 7th 2025 – Performing Service Evaluations by Dr Jae-Llane Ditchburn

We are pleased to bring this session to you on performing service evaluations. This session will look at types of services, and what a service evaluation is. Get to know the six steps to carry out a service evaluation and we will also discuss how we would go about evaluating a service.

Book here:

[7th May 2025 – Performing Service Evaluations by Dr Jae-Llane Ditchburn](#)

14th May 2025 - Ensuring Continuous Quality Improvement by Dr Jae-Llane Ditchburn

Gathering evidence and research findings is only useful if it is applied in practice. The best use of this evidence is in the continuous improvement of services. This session will introduce you to the continuous improvement cycle and some examples of how small improvements have led to significant outcomes for service users.

Book here:

[14th May 2025 - Ensuring Continuous Quality Improvement by Dr Jae-Llane Ditchburn](#)

11th June 2025 - Strategic Research Leadership by Dr Jae-Llane Ditchburn

This taster session is for staff who have a responsibility for research or who are leading research projects. The session will ensure you’re aware of how to ensure research projects are led effectively and delivered successfully.

Book here:

[11th June 2025 - Strategic Research Leadership by Dr Jae-Llane Ditchburn](#)

16th July - Co-production and co-research by Dan Gibbons

In this session we will unpack the terminology of involvement, engagement, co-production and co-research. We'll explore the law pertaining to involvement, some models of participation and some of the key principles of meaningful co-production and co-research.

Book here:

[16th July 2025 – Co-Production and Co-Research by Daniel Gibbons](#)

HDRC Webinars

We are also proud to present Bite Sized Webinars which are open to the public.

They are:

[Unlocking NIHR fellowships with Prof Joy Duxbury OBE](#) on 9th April 2025, Wed 12-1 pm online

[Top tips on designing and developing a Research Project](#) by Becky Clarke on 23rd April 12-1pm online

[Community research using quantitative and qualitative methods by Dr Mark Christie and Dr Dave Elliot](#) on 30th April, Wed 12-1 pm online

[When health and justice intersect by Dr Lula Mecinska](#) on Wed 21st May 12-1pm online

[Understanding the Health System in Cumberland by Clare Edwards from CVS](#) on 18th June 2025, 12-1pm online.

[Finding my voice and empowering you within research by Lina Mookerjee](#) on 25th Jun 2025, Wed 12-1 pm online

[Mastering Research Funding Applications with Prof Joy Duxbury](#) on 3rd Sept 2024, 12-1pm online

[Menopause & minority women: Breaking the silence with Lina Mookerjee](#) on 15th Oct 2025, Wed 12-1pm online.

REEL Capabilities Domain 1: Health Inequalities and the Determinants of Health



Health inequalities are systematic and unjust differences in health status observed across the population and among different groups in society. These differences are potentially avoidable and caused by the conditions in which people are born, live, work and grow. Determinants of health are factors encompassing the physical, social and economic environment, and a person's individual characteristics and behaviours. Knowing and understanding what health inequalities and the determinants of health are about, at both local and national level, will help us to identify health issues

and disparities and find solutions through evidence-based research. Every directorate in the Council delivers a service that has an impact on the health and wellbeing of residents, and this domain will help staff in all directorates understand what this means for them.

Learning Modules:

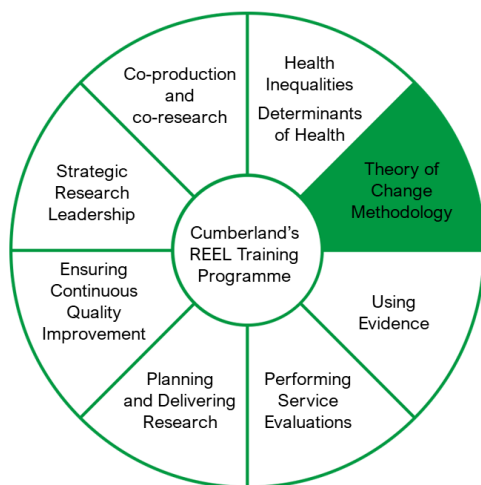
Introductory level - 13th February 11-12 and 1-2 online by Dr Jae-Llane Ditchburn
<https://www.eventbrite.co.uk/e/1223153778879>

Intermediate level – 20th February 11-12 and 1-2 online by Dr Jae-Llane Ditchburn
<https://www.eventbrite.co.uk/e/1223154470949>

Advanced level – 20th February 3-5pm and 27th February 3-5pm by Dr Jae-Llane Ditchburn <https://www.eventbrite.co.uk/e/1223159195079>

New dates coming soon!

REEL Capabilities Domain 2: Theory of Change Methodology



A Theory of Change¹² is a tool used to explain and illustrate how and why a desired change is expected to happen in a particular context. This method is a process of thinking through and documenting how an intervention, strategy or intervention is expected to lead to change, why it will work, how it will benefit, who will benefit from it, and what the conditions required for success will be. Theories of change express the logic of service design and each step of the process is underpinned by evidence. Each element of a theory of change is a blueprint for evaluation, and

training on designing a monitoring and evaluation plan to complement your theory of change is included in this domain.

Introductory Learning Modules:

Designed to support council staff, elected members and community organisations, this session covers:

- Understand what a theory of change is, its benefits and how it can be used
- Understand what each component of a theory of change is and how they logically connect
- Understand how a theory of change links to monitoring and evaluation
- Be able to read and critique a theory of change
- Be able to read and critique a monitoring and evaluation plan

¹ <https://www.ncvo.org.uk/help-and-guidance/strategy-and-impact/strategy-and-business-planning/theory-of-change/> , or if you prefer a published paper try https://www.researchgate.net/publication/279533296_Useful_Theory_of_Change_Models

² Weiss, C. H. (1995). Nothing as practical as good theory: Exploring theory-based evaluation for comprehensive community initiatives for children and families. In J. Connell, A. Kubisch, L. Schorr & C. Weiss (Eds.), *New approaches to evaluating comprehensive community initiatives* (pp. 65-92). New York: The Aspen Roundtable Institute.

Book your space on any of the available dates and learn more about the theory of change, how it can benefit you and how to develop one yourself.

Introduction sessions also available at [Cumbria House](#) and [Carlisle Civic Centre](#).

This training is funded by the National Institute for Health and Care Research (NIHR) and free to participants. There will be a certificate of attendance for everyone who joins us and an optional certificate of achievement for anyone who wants to submit work after the training.

Book here for Introductory level training (from 10 am to 12 pm):

[Wednesday, February 5 Introduction to the Theory of Change - Allerdale House, Workington](#)

[Carlisle Civic Centre on March 5th 2025](#)

[Maryport Town Council on April 9th 2025](#)

[Carlisle Civic Centre on May 7th 2025](#)

[Allerdale House on June 4th 2025](#)

[Thwaites Village Hall, Millom on June 4th 2025 2-4pm.](#)

[Carlisle Civic Centre on July 9, 2025](#)

[Allerdale House on August 13th 2025](#)

[Cumbria House, 10th September 2025.](#)

[Allerdale House on October 8th 2025](#)

[Allerdale House on December 3rd 2025](#)

Intermediate Learning Modules:

Created for council staff, elected members and community organisations, the workshop aims to support you draft a theory of change and monitoring and evaluation plan for an area of your work.

- Understand the role of assumptions and evidence in a theory of change
- Understand how to apply a theory of change to a range of different settings
- Gain a working knowledge of ways to measure the short-term impact of change
- Understand how to co-produce theories of change with residents
- Write a theory of change for an area of work
- Write a monitoring and evaluation plan for an area of work.

Entry level knowledge and skills required. If you are new to the theory of change, why not sign up for one of our Introduction sessions at either [Allerdale House, Workington](#) or [Cumbria House, Carlisle](#).

Sessions also available at [Allerdale House, Workington](#) and [Carlisle Civic Centre](#).

This training is funded by the National Institute for Health and Care Research (NIHR) and free to participants. There will be a certificate of attendance for everyone who joins us and an optional certificate of achievement for anyone who wants to submit work after the training.

Book here for Intermediate level training (from 9 am to 12 pm)

[Civic Centre for March 19th 2025](#)

[Inspira Workington on March 20th, 2025](#)

[Maryport Town Council on April 16th, 2025](#)

[Civic Centre on May 14th 2025](#)

[Allerdale House on June 18th 2025.](#)

[Thwaites Village Hall, Millom on July 16th 2025](#)

[Cumbria House, 23rd July 2025](#)

[Allerdale House on August 20th 2025.](#)

[Allerdale House on October 22nd 2025.](#)

Advanced Learning Modules:

Created for council staff, elected members and community organisations, the workshop aims to support you to lead and promote the use Theory of Change and Monitoring and Evaluation Plans, as part of boosting the research capacity of the Council.

By the end of the course you will:

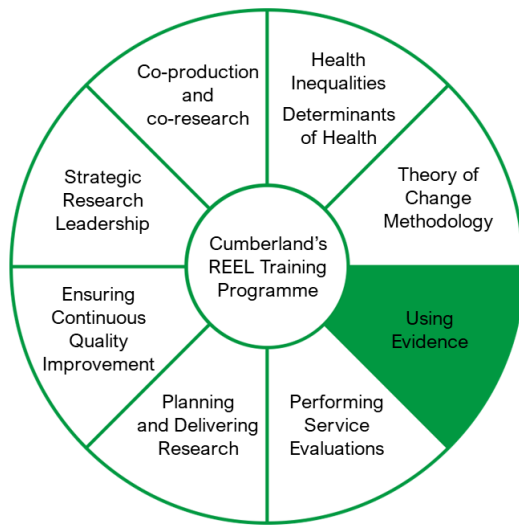
- Understand how to review and revise a theory of change
- Understand how to use a theory of change and monitoring, evaluation and learning plan for fundraising, staff development, marketing, service design and strategy
- Gain a working knowledge of ways to measure the strategic impact of change at organisational level
- Support a team to develop a theory of change and monitoring and evaluation plan.

ADVANCED LEVEL TRAINING 9 am to 12 pm

[Cumbria House on Oct 1, 2025](#)

[Allerdale House on Nov 12, 2025](#)

REEL Capabilities Domain 3: Using Evidence



Evidence is any information or data that supports or disproves a claim, hypothesis or argument. It is the basis for making decisions, drawing conclusions, and establishing the truth or validity of a statement. Understanding what evidence means or shows is essential for us as a Council to make informed decisions and policies that will affect the community.

Introductory Modules:

[Cumbria House Training Room B on 19th June 2025 10 am to 12 pm](#)

Intermediate Modules:

[Allerdale House on 24th June 2025 9 am to 12 pm](#)

Advanced Modules:

[Cumbria House Training Room B on 3rd July 2025 9 am to 12 pm](#)

REEL Capabilities Domain 4: Performing Service Evaluations



Service evaluation is a process to understand how a service was delivered by examining its implementation, delivery, impact and intended outcomes. It is important to evaluate services to ensure that service providers offer best quality service and are using their resources efficiently. Conducting service evaluations, with input from service users as well as service providers, provides us with evidence to support decision-making as a Council and helps us to identify areas for improvement.

Introductory Modules:

[Allerdale House on 15th May 2025 from 10 am to 1 pm](#)

Intermediate Modules:

[Maryport Town Council on 22nd May 2025 from 10 am to 1 pm](#)

Advanced Modules:

[Allerdale House on 29th May 2025 from 10 am to 1 pm](#)

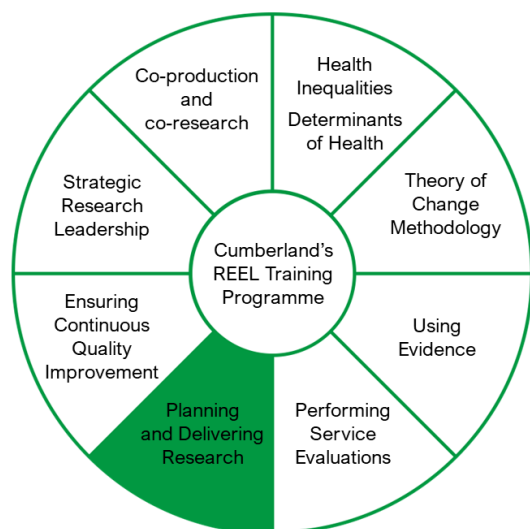
Online modules:

[Introductory session on 7th August 2025 from 9 am to 12 pm](#)

[Intermediate session on 14th August 2025 from 9 am to 12 pm](#)

[Advanced session on 19th August 2025 from 9 am to 12 pm](#)

REEL Capabilities Domain 5: Planning and Delivering Research



Planning and Delivering Research is about using research to gather evidence through a planned project, study or intervention, and making informed decisions from the obtained evidence. Alternatively, we can conduct research to find evidence that is not readily available. Planning Research requires us to identify a research question or problem, carry out a literature review on a particular topic or topics, define research objectives, and develop or adopt a protocol that is appropriate. Delivering Research requires comprehensive knowledge of methodologies to collect data and produce evidence. REEL Training

on Research Ethics and Governance will also be provided to complement this domain.

Introductory Modules:

[Allerdale House on 21st August 2025 from 11am to 2 pm](#)

Intermediate Modules:

[Allerdale House on 28th August 2025 from 11 am to 2 pm](#)

Advanced Modules:

[Allerdale House on 4th September 2025 from 11 am to 2 pm](#)

We also recommend:

The Masters of Research at the University of Cumbria. There course runs for two years part time every January. More information can be found here: [MRes - Master of Research Degree - University of Cumbria](#)

The Reflexive Practice Research course at Sunderland University. This is a one year part time course which runs every January. More information can be found here: <https://www.sunderland.ac.uk/study/short-courses-cpd/reflexive-practice-research/>

REEL Capabilities Domain 6: Ensuring Continuous Quality Improvement



Continuous Quality Improvement (CQI) is a model by which organisations can build quality improvement into their services. As a Council, we are highly committed to the satisfaction of our residents and communities through the provision of excellent, efficient and enterprising public services. Ensuring Continuous Quality Improvement as a REEL capability will equip staff with new knowledge and levels of enquiry that will lead to changes in practice. Continuous improvement in service quality will yield long-term benefits for residents helping us to improve the health and

wellbeing of residents.

Introductory Modules:

[Online 16th Oct 2025 from 11 am to 1 pm](#)

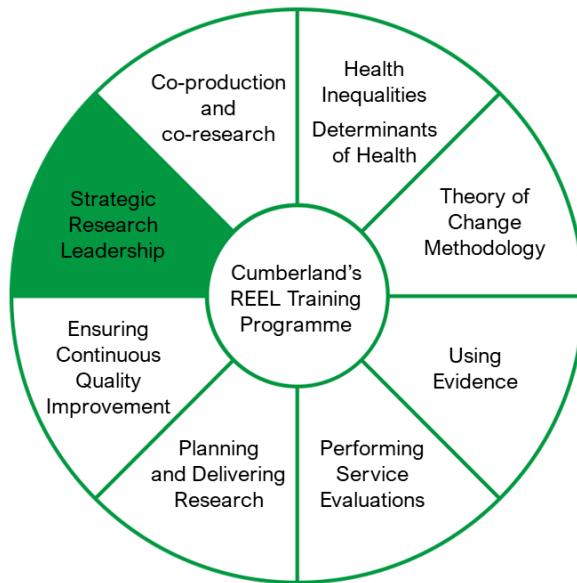
Intermediate Modules:

[Online 23rd October 2025 from 11 am to 1 pm](#)

Advanced Modules:

[Online 30th October 2025 from 11am to 1 pm](#)

REEL Capabilities Domain 7: Strategic Research Leadership



Strategic Research Leadership is a skillset that hones in on the skills and knowledge required to lead research teams and research projects. The Strategic Research Leadership training is intended to complement more general leadership training that Council staff have already received or will receive.

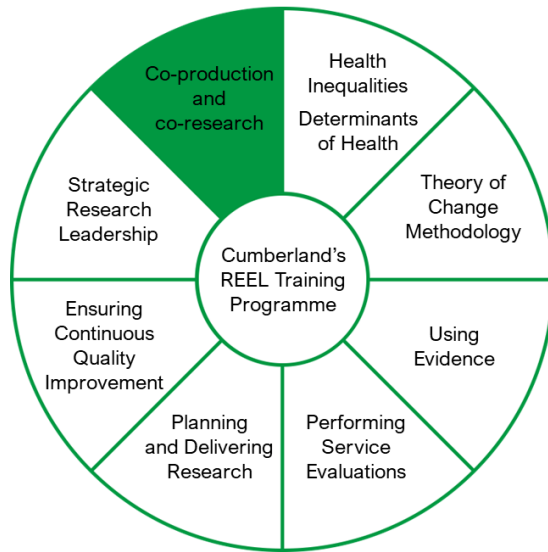
Intermediate Modules:

[Allerdale House on 4th Dec 2025 from 11 am to 2 pm](#)

Advanced Modules:

[Allerdale House on 11th Dec 2025 from 11 am to 2 pm](#)

REEL Capabilities Domain 8: Co-production and co-research



Co-production and co-research ensure that residents' lived experience contribute to the design and delivery of research and or services protecting the Council from unconscious bias and assumptive thinking. Co-production refers to residents working with practitioners to design a service, evaluation or piece of research. -Co-research refers to residents working alongside researchers to design, deliver and disseminate research. Both approaches are designed to enhance the quality and relevance of service design and research by incorporating diverse viewpoints and expertise.

Introductory Modules:

Online [17th July 2025 from 11am to 1 pm](#)

Intermediate Modules:

Online [24th July 2025 from 11am to 1 pm](#)

Advanced Modules:

Online [31st July 2025 from 11am to 1 pm](#)

Appendix – Glossary of terms

Term	Description
CQI	Continuous Quality Improvement
DoH	Determinants of Health
HI	Health Inequalities
HDRC	Health Determinants Research Collaboration
MEL	Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning
NIHR	National Institute of Health and Care Research
PICE	Public Involvement and Community Engagement
REEL	Research Evidence, Evaluation and Learning
REEL capability	The ability to carry out research, work with evidence, evaluate research and take part in learning
ToC	Theory of Change
UCLAN	University of Central Lancashire
UoC	University of Cumbria