

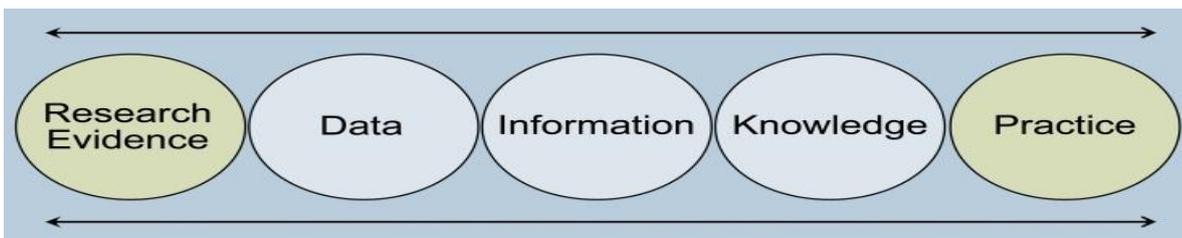
Social Work Research Strategy

2015-2020

In Pursuit of Excellence

Supporting the profession in relation to social work
services in Northern Ireland

SUMMARY



December 2014

Accessibility statement

Any request for the document in another format or language will be considered.

Equality, Human Rights and Personal and Public Involvement

In the development of the Social Work Research Strategy, equality and human rights were integral to the process. Key sections in the strategy reflect consideration of these issues which are also reflected in the specific priorities identified. The strategy has also been screened in accordance with the HSCB's statutory equality duties. The screening outcomes are available as part of our requirement to publish quarterly equality screening reports

<http://www.hscbusiness.hscni.net/services/2587.htm> In the roll out of the strategy, and in the conduct of any future research activity, account will be taken of the specific needs of groups marginalised in society where inclusive research activity can provide positive equality outcomes.

The full strategy and response forms are available at:

<http://www.hscboard.hscni.net/consult/index.html>

Telephone: 028 95 363017 or Text phone: 028 95 363017 with prefix 18001 if you wish to speak to someone about the strategy.

Email swresearchconsultation@hscni.net if you need a paper copy.

This summary outlines a five year Research Strategy for Social Work in Northern Ireland from 2015-2020. It reflects the joint leadership shown by the Office of Social Services (OSS), (Department of Health and Social Services) and the Director of Social Care and Children of the Health and Social Care Board (HSCB) and Executive Directors of Social Work in the five Health and Social Care trusts (Trusts) who requested and supported its development .

This framework is one that supports a research minded culture with better linkages and accessibility of ‘research to practice and of practice to research’ each linked to agreed research needs and priorities, inclusive of evaluation and audit, and has been endorsed by the Association of Executive Directors of Social Work.

From the outset it is recognised that changing the culture will not happen overnight. We believe that setting a number of strategic priorities will contribute to building a strong foundation that allows research, planning, audit and knowledge exchange for future generations. A number of incremental steps are necessary to build on this foundation. By necessity the strategy retains a degree of flexibility to respond to rapid changes in the world of social work and social care service provision.

The principle behind the strategy is that the development and use of research and evidence should increasingly be driven and owned by the Health and Social Care sector itself in partnership with others. The approach proposed is one that encourages the fostering of reciprocal relationships between the producers of research and evidence, and those who need to use it by applying it to practice. The users of research and evidence include: policy makers, managers at commissioning and provider levels, practitioners, other researchers and service users and carers. The premise is that to be successful the strategy needs to support the creation of opportunities for all, relevant to needs to build confidence to proactively engage with and influence the research activity.

Our vision

Our vision for the future is that the social work profession in Northern Ireland becomes a confident player in the areas of research, evidence and knowledge transfer. We will know our strengths and unique contribution in the pursuit of excellence in service user and carer outcomes.

Aim

The aim is to build an organisational culture. This culture recognises the important and necessary contribution that undertaking, understanding, critically appraising and applying research evidence, makes to the knowledge transfer process in making sense of “what is best practice” in services. This Research Strategy will support work to help understand and tackle barriers to evidence informed practice, and make research evidence more accessible.

Ultimately it is about increasing the quantity and quality of research relevant to Northern Ireland, to inform policy and practice in the delivery of services and so support both the visibility of the profession and better outcomes for service users and carers.

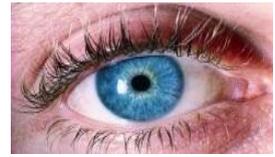
Purpose

The purpose of the Research Strategy is to demonstrate, both internally and externally, organisational commitment for the co ordination of social work related research activity across the wider context of social care service provision. In debates about what works or what does not work, research provides a logical approach to how observations are made through demonstrating the need for robustness and reliability (Nutley, 2010). The Research Strategy will provide confidence that decisions taken at policy, commissioning, service development and practice are evidence based, with research evidence worthy of particular attention in the generation of new knowledge.

Who is the target audience?

The immediate impact will be on social work professionals, the majority of whom are employed in the statutory sector, who have responsibility for designing, commissioning managing or providing services and empowering service users and carers. In view of the multi-dimensional nature of social work and social care the outworking of this Research Strategy will also have wide reaching impact on a range of other statutory, academic and research organisations, voluntary and community sectors and service users and carers.

At a glance



What we wish to see from the Research Strategy:

- The development of a regional research active culture that builds a body of robust research evidence and knowledge relevant to Northern Ireland;
- The establishment of a mechanism, in partnership with others, to determine and review research priorities linked to funding that are driven and owned by the Health and Social Care sector;
- Greater collaboration between academic, other research and evidence providers and practice settings in order to identify and respond to existing evidence gaps;
- A better understanding of the barriers to evidence informed practice and a means to tackle these;
- An increase in the exchange, dissemination and use of research and evidence that is accessible to the end user;
- Better engagement and involvement of service users in the whole research process including research, evaluation and audit;
- Greater attention to how we define and measure outcomes of social work interventions and services;
- The development of improved quality services.

Where we want to get to?



This section outlines a range of strategic priorities with an outline of what we hope to achieve. The 'At a Glance' section summarises the expected outcomes. A more detailed action plan with timescales and responsibilities and monitoring arrangements will be developed to support the implementation of the Social Work Research Strategy during the period 2015-2020. Some measures will be easy to implement, others will take longer.

Strategic Priority 1

To improve outcomes for service users and carers through attention to research and evidence informed decision making at policy, commissioning, service development and practice levels.

What we hope to achieve

- Senior managers will support a whole system approach that promotes a culture of research mindedness and evidence informed practice;
- Decisions about policy, commissioning, service developments and practice will be informed by evidence from research, evaluation and audit;
- Research and evidence will be embedded into and aligned with other mainstream accountability processes related to planning, decision making, governance and supervision;
- A continuum of training including critical appraisal skills, research methodology and processes will be in place at qualifying and post qualifying masters and doctorate levels;
- A continuous learning culture will be fostered whereby managers recognise the importance of social workers seeking out, critically appraising and applying the best available evidence as an integral part of their role in planning and decision making.

Strategic Priority 2

To ensure the body of research and evidence is easily available and relevant to social work in Northern Ireland supporting an overall model of research excellence in commissioning, planning and practice.

What we hope to achieve

- A mechanism will be established, in partnership with others, to determine review and manage research and evidence priorities on an annual basis including identifying the need for new empirical research, systematic reviews of evidence and better utilisation of existing data sets;
- Social work representation on strategic research decision making bodies, including the HSC R&D Division will be strengthened ;
- Greater influence in decisions regarding funding calls will be exerted to better reflect and target social work research priorities;
- Linkages and partnerships with Higher Education Institutes and other Centres of Excellence will be developed and maintained to foster mutually beneficial alliances and collaborative working in research related activity;
- The capability of social work staff will be strengthened in the procurement and commissioning of research related activity ensuring clarity ownership, intellectual property and publication rights.

Strategic Priority 3

To increase investment in research, evaluation and audit activity.

What we hope to achieve

- The current level of investment in research, evaluation and audit activity in Northern Ireland will be identified and monitored in order to capitalise on its impact on decision making and its contribution to identifying research priorities;
- The quantity and quality of research applications will be increased to secure funding from HSC R&D Division and from other funders for research related activity to be undertaken by social workers;
- Funders will be lobbied to influence funding decisions about investment in high quality research relevant to Northern Ireland.

Strategic Priority 4

To increase the engagement, participation and visibility of social work practitioners, in partnership with other professionals, in research, evaluation and audit activities.

What we hope to achieve

- Senior managers will support and facilitate a culture of organisational research whereby social workers will be encouraged to be research active;
- A local research champion infrastructure will be established to support and drive the research agenda across the range of social work services;
- Targets will be established for investment in the education and development of social workers (policy, commissioner and practice levels) in research methods and critical appraisal skills;
- Organisations will build the capacity, capability and confidence of social work staff to engage in research and evidence related activity and education and learning;
- A variety of supports will be in place to encourage and facilitate practitioner based research activity in the workplace including technical support and partnerships with Higher Education Institutes and other Centres of Excellence and engagement with other professions;
- Opportunities will be created to explore with Higher Education Institutes the lessons learned from other disciplines that have created split academic and clinical posts and consider the feasibility of this for social work;
- Opportunities will be created to recognise, value and maintain the skill base of those practitioners who have acquired academic credit for research by utilising these skills in the mentoring, the supervision and provision of teaching inputs on recognised courses, for the benefit of other practitioners wishing to engage in research activity;
- Organisations will build the capacity of staff for greater dissemination of research locally (including within organisations), nationally and internationally using a range of innovative technologies;
- Dialogue between and within organisations to consider the best approach to implementation and knowledge transfer responsive to local needs will begin.

Strategic Priority 5

To promote and support a research infrastructure within Northern Ireland which recognises the distinct features of the Social Work Profession whilst ensuring any research related activity complies with research ethics and governance standards.

What we hope to achieve

- Engagement with the HSC R&D Division will ensure that the regional research infrastructure is proportionate for the different types of research activity;
- Work with existing HSC R&D Governance and Ethics Committees will ensure there is both practical assistance and accessible information to support social work staff in negotiating and navigating the research and governance infrastructure.

Strategic Priority 6

To ensure the experience, practice wisdom and knowledge of frontline staff, service users and carers is used to inform proposals for commissioning and investment in research, evaluation and audit activity.

What we hope to achieve

- Social workers in partnership with service users and carers will engage in activity that continually ensures that research, evaluation and audit activity is a regular mainstream feature of their work;
- Routine and systematic collection and analysis of service users views and experiences of service interventions will be undertaken;
- Greater involvement of service users and carers will be facilitated in identifying and measuring outcomes.

Priority 7

To ensure that any research, evaluation or audit activity promotes the principles and practice of personal and public involvement and equality and human rights.

What we hope to achieve

- Appropriate structures will be identified for creative networking and engagement with service users and carers, including those from marginalised communities, to provide opportunities for influencing the research agenda;
- Mechanisms, including the provision of training will be in place for the engagement and involvement of service users and carers to enhance Personal and Public Involvement in the outworking of the Social Work Research Strategy.
- Engagement will take place with researchers to develop ways to overcome challenges in Personal and Public Involvement. This will encourage and support more co - research activity whereby service users and carers play a partnership role in research activity rather than being perceived as passive recipients;
- Research related activity will demonstrate consideration of equality and human rights issues in respect of the outworkings of the Social Work Research Strategy.



- The establishment of a mechanism to determine and review research priorities, in partnership with others, that are driven and owned by the sector itself and linked to funding;
- The development of a regional active research culture that promotes the importance of robust research evidence;
- Greater collaboration between academic and other research providers and practice settings in order to foster reciprocal relationships and partnerships working to identify and fill existing evidence gaps;
- Work that helps understand and tackle the barriers to evidence informed practice;
- An increase in the exchange, dissemination and use of research and evidence that is accessible to those who need to use it;
- Better engagement and involvement of service users in the whole research processes;
- Greater attention to how we define and measure outcomes of social work interventions and services.

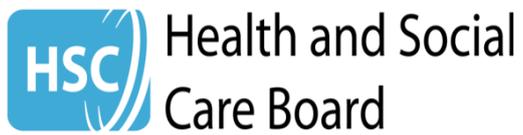
Conclusion

Social Work Research Strategy

The Social Work Research Strategy has set out the vision and the priorities of the social work sector in order to build an organisational culture that recognises the importance and contribution of research and evidence. It reflects a commitment from the Social Work leadership in Northern Ireland who have requested and supported its development. Ultimately it is about increasing the quantity and quality of research relevant to Northern Ireland which will inform policy and practice decisions. It will support professionals in responding to the diversity of needs in the population to provide social work and social care services based on the best available evidence of what works and what does not work. Increasing the confidence and competence in the area of research mindedness the use of evidence will support both the visibility of the Social Work Profession and better outcomes for service users and carers.

The strategic priorities and the framework for practice set out an exciting but equally challenging agenda. An implementation plan with timescales will be developed. These will be reviewed and updated annually with a focus on achieving outcomes and monitoring impact. A Steering Group reflective of stakeholders will be established to oversee its implementation.

Sustained effort and drive over the forthcoming years will be necessary in order to realise its full potential in building a body of research and evidence relevant to Northern Ireland and in supporting better linkages and accessibility of “research to practice and of practice to research.”



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Date: December 2014