Welcome
I am delighted to present the third edition of the Newsletter in relation to the Social Work Research Strategy. I am also pleased to report that since our December 2014 edition substantial progress has been made in relation to both the development and consultation on the Strategy (See page 2 for details).
Developing the Strategy has been an exciting and productive exercise involving a diverse range of stakeholders. From the outset there was agreement that this was very much a journey not a project. We have now reached an important milestone along this journey.

The next part of our journey is about making the Strategy real. “Moving On” - making sure that our Strategy is “More than Words” It is after all too easy to make the creation of a Strategy and its Implementation a rigid box ticking exercise. Appealing as a formula - driven approach might be it ignores the fact that strategy creation is a journey and an inherently messy one at that. This Newsletter is longer than the usual format because it provides updates on the Social Work Research and Continuous Improvement Strategy. It also includes a range of other snippets and information which I hope you find useful.
If you would like to share any information with others please forward to anne.mcglade@hscni.net for inclusion in the next edition - Issue 4.
Anne McGlade, Social Care Research Lead.

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“Looking beyond the horizon certain degrees of creativity and imagination will be required to ensure that we capitalise on opportunities to build research and evidence into other processes”:
Update on the Social Work Research and Continuous Improvement Strategy.

In December 2014 the Health and Social Care Board launched for consultation a *draft* Social Work Research Strategy 2015-2020 – *In Pursuit of Excellence: supporting the profession in relation to social work services in Northern Ireland*. This Strategy was developed in collaboration with a range of health and social care organisations. The consultation ended on the 18th March 2015.

A variety of opportunities were provided for feedback but in the main the consultation pro-forma was used.

We are delighted to report that responses were received from a diverse range of individuals and organisations. We appreciate that consultees are busy people therefore the time and commitment offered by everyone who responded with detailed responses is warmly acknowledged. We wish to capitalise on the positive attitudes that exist for the development of the final Strategy and the phased Implementation Plan to take this important work forward. An Implementation Framework is now being developed.

Page 3 of this newsletter provides some detail on the feedback received. All respondents will receive a feedback report which will in due course also be made available on the HSCB website along with a copy of the Strategy and Summary document.
What did you tell us?

Feedback received indicated an overwhelming high level of agreement, support and endorsement for the Strategy and its intent including views on the seven priority areas that were outlined in the Strategy. Based on views articulated about the link of evidence to improvement the Strategy is now entitled: “Social Work Research and Continuous Improvement Strategy”.

Your Views:

- Agreement extended to the vision, aims and objectives. Some useful suggestions by way of refinement and reinforcement were offered.
- The Strategy should encompass social care also.
- The Strategy should go beyond the statutory sector.
- Responses endorsed the partnership and collaborative approach that underpins the Strategy.
- Support for the Seven Strategic Priority areas was unanimous. Some caveats, suggestions and new ideas were provided.
- There was a call for a degree of realism, particularly around the financial and infrastructure requirements.

Our response:

- We acknowledge the wider social care Workforce – where there are over 35,000 staff employed but we are starting with the social work professional Staff. There are currently 5600 social workers plus 750 trainees. This Strategy represents a step change.
- Our focus at this stage remains on statutory Health and Social Care. The majority of staff, 70% are employed in the HSC sector where we have particular responsibilities.
- There are overlaps in training. Other organisations may wish to consider how the Strategy applies in their own setting.
“Moving on More than Words”
Report of engagement event held on June 3rd 2015 in NICVA.

Communications and visibility of the Social Work and Continuous Improvement Strategy are both important pillars as is good interpersonal engagement and debate from Senior Management and Directors.

Our event on 3rd June 2015 hosted at NICVA Belfast was successful in all of these areas. It brought together a diverse range of stakeholders interested in social work research, including social work managers and practitioners, service users and carers, academia, the voluntary sector and other interested parties.

In her opening address and welcome Fionnuala McAndrew, Director of Social Care and Children's Directorate in the HSCB reminded delegates that internally within our organisation “we have plenty of work to do but emphasised that the development of the Social Work Research & Continuous Improvement Strategy is very much a step change with no quick fixes”. “Cultural change” she argued “takes time so drawing on the seven strategic priorities identified we need to focus on those things which we believe give the greatest leverage”.

The event was also an opportunity for those present, many of whom had provided invaluable feedback to the “draft” Strategy to hear what people told us. Anne McGlade acknowledged the time and commitment and enthusiasm of all involved in this. Page 3 of this Newsletter has already provided brief details on the feedback.
Continued:
Roslyn Dougherty (South Eastern Trust) suggested, in good Social Worker form, that there is a tendency to draw on analogies when reflecting on our journey. Roslyn’s analogy was that of Planetary alignments and particularly the “gravitational force of the planets”.

In the world of social work Roslyn reminded delegates that this is an exciting time with a lot of things happening that are starting to link up, interconnect and align for the benefit of the Social Work profession. We often talk about all the challenges that we face, but Roslyn raised the bar and reminded delegates that Social Work is in a very fortunate position in terms of professional development and the opportunities that are offered to social workers at all stages throughout the career trajectory.

There are obligations on everyone to embrace these opportunities to the full, including both formal learning and the opportunities that exist within organisations outwith the professional mantle. The “Evidence Informed Practitioner” is not a new concept but the Social Work & Continuous Improvement Strategy provides the opportunity to build a framework for this in Social Work. The many opportunities that exist (see Figures 1 and 2) all make a contribution to increasing research mindedness of the Social Work profession.
The revision of the title to include “Continuous Improvement” is an important change. When we talk about “research” there is a presumed focus that this is an area where only 5% of all Social Workers are involved and that research is the domain of our partners in the world of academia or only relevant managers. The change reflects the need to make research and evidence real for the other 95% of Social Workers and to:

“make it clear that they are research minded. That they have a role in the creation of knowledge. That wanting to do the right thing for the people we provide a service to is the cornerstone of the evidence informed practitioner”.

Figure 1:
Marie Roulston, Director of Children’s Services in the Northern Health and Social Care Trust, on behalf of the Executive Directors of Social Work provided endorsement for the Strategy. She stated “as Directors of Social Work, we are here this afternoon to give that commitment, to our own staff and to the wider audience so that we move forward in making it real and meaningful”. I believe that developing research mindedness in the workforce is one of the best ways to improve outcomes for children and likewise for adults who use our services. To enable us to measure outcomes we require sound evidence based practice. Sometimes this requires us to draw on existing evidence, other times it requires us to look for new evidence. Social work research needs to provide us with evidence of ‘what works’ and equally important ‘what does not work’.

Figure 2:
Marie continued:

“This will also help us in our work with all of our service users who have a key part to play. Today is an opportunity for all of us in the room to help to do this. This will require the involvement of our carers and those who use our services to help inform the strategy, we need the engagement of all of the stakeholders here today to make the Strategy happen to meet that cultural challenge”.

“Learning and Innovation go hand in hand. The arrogance of success is to think that what you did yesterday will be sufficient for tomorrow” (William Pollard).

Christine Smyth Office of Social Services, DHSSPSNI added some final comments to close the event encouraging all present to build on the momentum that has been generated to date:

‘This Strategy has successfully captured the aspiration to build a strong research culture for social work. It represents another landmark in the professionalisation and professionalism of social work and provides us with a road map about the key areas we need to focus on in order to achieve our ambitions. The ambitions are simple. Primarily they are about improving outcomes for service users. To do that we need to build a body of social work research and knowledge that provides the evidence base about what works and what doesn't work. We need to build a culture among social workers where research mindedness and continuous improvement are established and integral parts of organisational, practice and learning activity. Underpinning the success of all of this is promoting an enabling culture of learning and continuous improvement and involving and engaging those closest to service delivery, those who are affected most by the quality and effectiveness of that service – front line.

“Congratulations to everyone who contributed to the development of this Strategy and to creating an energy and momentum behind it. Our challenge now is to build on that momentum”.

Our Social Work Research and Continuous Improvement Strategy set out an ambitious vision including the things we hope to achieve in the next five years. Our short term plan supports a longer term vision. A five year timeline may seem like a long time, but much of what we are setting out to do is to build a culture of research and evidence mindedness which cannot be achieved overnight. The implementation of the Strategy therefore will be kept under regular review in order to consolidate our activity, determine level of progress and identify if new actions are required.

Implementation frameworks incorporate many different types of variables but for the purposes of our implementation these are grouped into four categories: content, context, process and outcome. In a successful implementation process it is the combination of these variables working together that makes the transformation process possible. Process variables need to be used in synergy on an on-going basis. The internal context plays a key role in implementing strategic decisions but focussing on the implementation process alone and ignoring the wider context does not provide a clear holistic picture of the implementation process and challenges.

The internal context needs to be created to be receptive to change. Organisations are however complex and dynamic so a precise fit between strategy and implementation variables may not be possible.

The Implementation Plan addresses what we will do to move forward into the future. Our aim is to enable all stakeholders to come together to help contribute to the development and maintenance of a vibrant research and evidence and continuous improvement culture for Social Work, for the benefit of those who use our services, and for the credibility and professionalization of the profession, this requires us to do the following four things:

A. Focus our efforts in key areas;

B. Phased Implementation;

C. Review monitoring and review progress; and

D. What difference are we making?
A number of new schemes and awards are now open:

- Knowledge Exchange Award Scheme is now open until 16th September 2015 @ 2pm. Maximum award £100,000 to enable a two way exchange among researchers who have generated new knowledge and research users who require an evidence base [http://www.research.hscni.net/improving-impact-research-knowledge-exchange-scheme](http://www.research.hscni.net/improving-impact-research-knowledge-exchange-scheme)

- Doctoral Fellowship Scheme is now open to enable an individual to develop a research career in the HSC through undertaking training leading to a PhD. Deadline 14th October. 2015 at 2pm [http://www.research.hscni.net/health-social-care-rd-doctoral-fellowship-award-scheme](http://www.research.hscni.net/health-social-care-rd-doctoral-fellowship-award-scheme)

- Enabling Awards intended to support the completion of preparatory and or developmental work that will improve the outcomes of a subsequent grant application to the national Institute for Health Awards (NIHA), Evaluation Trials and studies (nets) research programmes. Maximum value is £40,000. Available from 6th July 2015 [http://www.research.hscni.net/enabling-research-awards](http://www.research.hscni.net/enabling-research-awards)

- Early Intervention Transformation Programmes. Commissioned Research on the current outcomes of the implementation of the Early Intervention Transformation Programmes (EITP) under Work Streams 1, 2 & 3. Applications are invited from research teams that demonstrate appropriate experience and expertise. Applications which include collaborations from other jurisdictions, including an all-island component, are welcome; however, the Chief Investigator must be based in Northern Ireland. The closing date for applications is **1.00pm on Wednesday 11 November 2015** [http://www.research.hscni.net/early-intervention-transformation-programme-eitp-call](http://www.research.hscni.net/early-intervention-transformation-programme-eitp-call)

*Check out further details on these and other initiatives on the website: [www.research.hscni.net](http://www.research.hscni.net)*
Operational Framework – Research, Evaluation and Audit
Approvals – Statutory Health and Social Care (HSC)
Organisations

Guidance on how to obtain initial approval for the conduct of social work research and related activity across health and social care in Northern Ireland:

Who does it apply to?
It applies to any individual or organisation(s) wishing to undertake social work research, evaluation or audit activity in the statutory health and social care sector in Northern Ireland which has a regional dimension.

What does it cover?
It covers both internal requests by staff within the Health and Social Care Board or within any of the five Health and Social Care Trusts and external requests from statutory, academic, voluntary or independent sector organisations or individuals.

So what happens after I submit my application?
Once your proposal is submitted it will be considered by the Social Care Governance and Training Group. Final approval will be provided by the Executive Directors of Social Work.

Check out the details on:
Operational framework for research evaluation and audit
Guideline for approval
Leaflet

These documents will be provided on the HSCB’s website in due course.
Date for Diary

As in previous years the Health and Social Care Board is delighted to support:

**DARE: Decisions, Assessment, Risk and Evidence in Social Work @ Ulster University.**

*What?*

The fourth DARE symposium builds on a very successful third symposium held in July 2014 which brought together 125 delegates from eleven countries including senior practitioner, managers, policy makers, researchers and those in education.

The HSCB will support attendance by HSCB and Trust Managers and Practitioners at the 2016 event. In due course your training section will issue further details. Nominations will be sought and handled on a coordinated basis.

**Plenary speakers:**

- **Professor Dr Gerd Gigerenzer,** Berlin, Germany where he leads world-leading research on heuristic models of decision making.
- **Dr John Fluke,** University of Colorado, USA. He is Internationally recognised as a researcher specializing in assessing and analysing decision-making.
- **Mandeep K. Dhami,** Middlesex University, London. She is an expert on decision-making, risk and uncertainty.

*When:*

Tue 5th and Wed 6th July 2016 Templeton Hotel, Temple Patrick, Northern Ireland.

A call for abstracts will be added to the Website: [www.socsci.ulster.ac.uk/irss/dare2016/](http://www.socsci.ulster.ac.uk/irss/dare2016/)

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