Welcome
Since the launch of the Social Work Research and Continuous Improvement Strategy in 2015 a number of initiatives have taken place to keep the research and evidence agenda profiled. These initiatives have included engagement and networking events, conferences, workshops, presentations, roadshows, training and communications and the conduct of reviews of evidence. Support for the conduct of research activity and studies has also been provided. Details of some of the initiatives are available on the Health and Social Care website. http://www.hscboard.hscni.net/swresearch/

These initiatives all contribute to a culture of evidence informed practice, continuous quality service outcomes and the delivery of research and evaluation activity.

Forward Planning
A date for your diary:
5th Annual Social Work and Social Care Research Conference
Date: 7th March 2018

This will provide the opportunity for researchers and practitioners to showcase and share their practice with others. More details will follow.

“Often we are too slow to recognise how much, and in what ways we can assist each other through sharing expertise and knowledge”.

Owen Arthur

Please share information for next publication, of this Newsletter, (Issue 6). Please forward to: anne.mcgirr@hscni.net. Anne McGlade, Social Care Research Lead.
Research and Continuous Improvement Implementation

A strategic plan is key to providing the roadmap to pursue a strategic direction but that is what it is. It is just a plan it doesn’t guarantee outcomes are reached anymore than having a roadmap guarantee’s that the traveller reaches the desired destination.

“There are two types of leaders; there are thinkers and there are doers. Some are idea generators and others are implementers”

Gary Rohrmayer

“However beautiful the strategy you should occasionally look at the results”

Winston Churchill

As articulated throughout the engagement and networking associated with the development of the Social Work Research and Continuous Improvement Strategy implementation was referred to as the “process that turns the strategy into actions not action plans”.

It remains our commitment to keep implementation under review albeit that we are doing so in the context of a challenging organisational landscape not envisaged at the time of the Strategy launch in November 2015.
Proposed Leadership, Accountability and Governance Arrangements for Implementation

Building on the commitment already started by the social work leadership in Northern Ireland an inaugural meeting of the Research and Continuous Improvement Implementation Board was held on 5th June 2017. This group is chaired by the Director of Social Care and Children in the Health and Social Care Board. It includes representation from Trusts, DoH, Probation, NIGALA and Youth Justice. At this meeting members discussed and agreed a process for taking forward the research, evidence and continuous improvement agenda in Northern Ireland. In particular it considered the most appropriate and necessary arrangements for Governance and accountability were considered.

![Diagram](image)

**Membership of Social Work Research and Continuous Improvement Agenda**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Position</th>
<th>Organisation</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Fionnuala McAndrew Chair</td>
<td>Executive Director of Social Care and Children</td>
<td>HSCB</td>
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<tr>
<td>Anne McGlade</td>
<td>Social Work Research Lead</td>
<td>HSCB</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jackie McIlroy</td>
<td>Deputy Social Services Officer</td>
<td>Department of Health</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cecil Worthington</td>
<td>Executive Director</td>
<td>Belfast HSC Trust</td>
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<td>Kieran Downey</td>
<td>Executive Director</td>
<td>Western HSC Trust</td>
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<tr>
<td>Marie Roulston</td>
<td>Executive Director</td>
<td>Northern HSC Trust</td>
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<tr>
<td>Paul Morgan</td>
<td>Executive Director</td>
<td>Southern HSC Trust</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brendan Whittle</td>
<td>Executive Director</td>
<td>South Eastern HSC Trust</td>
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<tr>
<td>Paul McStravick</td>
<td>Deputy Director</td>
<td>Youth Justice Agency</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Janice Ballie (representative tbc)</td>
<td>Research and Development</td>
<td>Public Health Agency</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paul Doran</td>
<td>Director of Rehabilitation</td>
<td>Probation Board of Northern Ireland</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peter Reynolds</td>
<td>Chief Executive</td>
<td>NIGALA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clare Mangan (TBC)</td>
<td>Chief Executive</td>
<td>Belfast Education Library Board</td>
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Other arrangements are being put into place to capture what is happening at the local level.
Moving Forward

As we move forward with this work we want to ensure that we enhance the skill and capacity of staff and service users to engage in the diverse range of research, evidence and quality improvement initiatives in line with the original strategic priorities of the Social Work Research and Continuous Improvement Strategy. These are reflected in figure 2.

Table 2: Strategic Priorities

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<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>To improve outcomes and experiences for service users, carers and society through attention to research and evidence informed approaches to enhance individual and societal wellbeing at policy, commissioning and practice levels.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>To ensure the body of research and evidence is easily available and relevant to social work in Northern Ireland supporting an overall model of continuous improvement and excellence in commissioning, planning and practice.</td>
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<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>To increase investment in research, evaluation and audit activity.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>To increase the engagement, participation and visibility of social work practitioners, in partnership with other professionals, in research, evaluation and audit activities.</td>
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<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>To promote and support a research infrastructure within Northern Ireland which recognises the professional integrity and organisational arrangement for the social work profession whilst ensuring any research related activity complies with research ethics.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>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.</td>
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<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>To ensure that any research, evaluation or audit activity promotes the principles and practice of personal and public involvement and equality and human rights.</td>
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“There is nothing so useless as doing efficiently what should not have been done at all”

Peter Druches
Fourth Annual Social Work and Social Care Research Conference 1st March 2017

For those who were unable to attend our 4th annual Social Work and Social Care Research conference do check out the outcomes which are available on: http://www.hscboard.hscni.net/swresearch/

“Knowledge is embodied in people, gathered in communities and networks. Access to knowledge is by connecting to people that know, or know who to contact”

Denham Grey

The event was entitled “Implementing to Strengthen Families and Communities to keep safe”. It explored how do we best measure the impact of our interventions.

The conference attracted a large audience across health and social care, service users, carers, academics and the voluntary sector. Delegates had the pleasure of listening to and engaging in a varied mix of national and local initiatives including input from service users, carers and youth drama.
Your opportunity to become involved in Post Qualifying Social Work Research Methods Programme

This course is designed to help build your skills in searching, quality appraising and apply evidence to practice. Opportunities are also provided to progress to year 2 and engage in a research or evaluation study.

Post Qualifying Social Work Research Methods Programme
provided by Ulster University and employer organisations

The Research Methods Programme provides two postgraduate post qualifying modules approved by the Northern Ireland Social Care Council:

- The Evidence Informed Professional and Organisation
- Research and Evaluation Methods in Social Work

From 2017 a parallel service user module for the Evidence Informed Practitioner and Organisation Module and the Research and Evaluation in Social Work Module will be in place.

The Evidence-Informed Professional and Organisation module is designed for senior practitioners and other experienced social workers to gain knowledge and develop skills in using evidence to inform their own practice and service development in their organisation.

The Research and Evaluation Methods in Social Work module requires the Evidence-Informed Professional and Organisation module (or equivalent) as a pre-requisite for entry. Candidates build on the! literature review undertaken during that module (or equivalent) to undertake a work-based research, service evaluation or professional audit project agreed with line management.

The contribution of research to knowledge for practice

If you are interested in applying to this course
Publicity for recruitment is sent to employers annually in early February and an information session held annually.
Further information
For further information please contact your employer’s social work training department, or else the University post qualifying social work office at: pqsocialwork@ulster.ac.uk

Check out completed reviews conducted in 2015-2016 on:
http://www.ulster.ac.uk/dare
Keeping it Real: Service User and Carer Involvement in Professional Education: A National Conference—Stirling University

Delegates from Northern Ireland got the appointment to showcase innovative and creative good practice initiatives in service users and carer involvement in professional education at Stirling University. The conference hosted by the University was a collaborative initiative with a UNITY national service user involvement group in Scotland. David Bickerstaff and Anne McGlade from the Social Care and Children’s Directorate in the HSCB (in collaboration with Professor Brian Taylor at Ulster University) were invited to share the experience from Northern Ireland. This resulted in a workshop presentations entitled:

“Challenges and opportunities in involving service user and carers at advanced post qualifying training – changing the climate”

David and Anne described our post qualifying social work research programme at Ulster University. This initiative built upon a post qualifying training programme aimed at promoting research mindedness amongst social work practitioners in line with our Social Work Strategy and Social Work Research and Continuous Improvement Strategy. Evidence Informed Practitioner and Organisation was launched in 2016. This is a parallel programme based on the principle of “parity of participation” whereby service users and carers are trained alongside social work practitioners ultimately this leads to a post qualifying academic award.
Stirling Conference Continued
Co-Production and Quality Implementation Belfast Trust

Eileen McKay (South Eastern Trust and Maria Somerville, Service Users and Carer) delivered a useful workshop on co production and quality improvement. This is the first quality improvement in social work programme in Northern Ireland. It was launched in 2016. One of the key strengths was that the programme was co designed and co delivered with service users.

The key message shared with delegates at the Conference was how carer and service users inputs on the training sessions assist social workers to see the value of *Improvement Methodology*. The workshop which was well received by delegates reinforced the importance of measuring quality through the perspective of the service user.

Maria Summerville and Eileen McKay with delegates at the conference
Research Summary: Adoptive Parents’ Experiences of Post Adoption Contact and their Support Needs

This study was funded by the Health and Social Care Board and carried out by Dr Mandi MacDonald at Queen’s University Belfast in partnership with Adoption UK in Northern Ireland. Data was gathered between May and September 2016. This research summary presents a brief outline of the study, key findings and messages for policy and practice. It is based on the full report of the study which is available from Adoption UK and from the Queen’s University website. For comments or queries please contact the author2.

The purpose of the study
This study aimed to find out more about the extent of post-adoption contact in Northern Ireland, what form that contact takes, and to understand the associated challenges and benefits for adoptive families. The findings are intended to inform the ongoing development of post-adoption support services and to provide a foundation for further research on the experience of post-adoption contact for birth and adoptive families.

What we wanted to find out
We had three main questions that we hoped to answer:
- What is the nature and extent of post-adoption birth family contact experienced by adoptive families in Northern Ireland?
- What are the challenges and benefits for adoptive families associated with contact?
- What types of support for contact do adoptive parents use and how helpful do they find these?

Key messages
- Adoptive parents considered birth family contact to be important, but not always easy.
- Most were committed to continuing with contact, even if it was stressful, and to finding ways of making the experience comfortable and meaningful for the children.

Contact was mostly with birth mothers and siblings who were fostered or adopted.
- Some families had very intensive schedules of contact.
- Adoptive parents were clearly concerned about the emotional impact of contact on the children.
- Children’s reactions suggest that contact plans and support services need to be well-informed by an understanding of attachment and of the long-term impact of trauma and adversity.
- There was a need for more access to therapeutic services.
- Overall, the majority of the children (81%; n=73) had face-to-face meetings with birth relatives.
- Over a third of the children (38%; n=35) had multiple arrangements for both ‘direct’.
- Most of the contact, both direct and indirect, was with birth siblings who lived elsewhere.
- There was less contact of any kind with birth brothers or sisters who were living with birth parents or other birth relatives.
- The second most prevalent contact was with birth mothers rather than birth fathers.
- More birth fathers were involved in postal, phone or internet contact than in face-to-face meetings.
- Many families were managing arrangements for contact that were particularly complex.

The challenges and benefits of contact for adoptive families
- Most adoptive parents expressed some positive views about birth family contact. They broadly agreed that, in theory, contact could be beneficial, but in practice it was fraught with challenges.
- Contact visits worked best when birth relatives clearly accepted the adoption, respected the adopters’ parental role, and demonstrated care and concern for the child.
- More than half of survey participants agreed that contact encouraged the family to talk about birth relatives more often (n=53). It could also help children to come to a more realistic understanding of birth parents’ situation and their own life story.

Further details on the key messages from this study can be obtained from m.macdonald@qub.ac.uk

Mandi MacDonald, February 2017
An evaluation framework is being developed to monitor, evaluate and measure the progress and impact of Stage 2 delivery of the Social Work Strategy against agreed outcomes in respect of both service users and social work.

Our aim is to agree with key stakeholders the outcomes, measures and sources of evidence we will use to measure and demonstrate the difference the Strategy has made for social workers and, in turn, the difference social workers make in people’s lives.

Our approach to the design of the evaluation framework has been informed by Mark Friedman’s Outcomes Based Accountability approach. We will, as far as possible, build on existing data collection and reporting mechanisms so as not to add to people’s workloads and to secure buy-in and ownership.

A workshop ‘Begin with the End in Mind’ was held in March 2017 with key stakeholders; the raw data has now been collated and work is ongoing to simplify and streamline the information into a draft framework. Following this, we plan to have further engagement with key stakeholders commencing in July with the aim of discussing and refining the draft framework and agreeing next steps in terms of implementation.
Where are we on the Social Work Strategy Research and Continuous Improvement Agenda

In your experience where do you think practitioners place themselves from Newly Qualified Worker to an Evidence Informed Practitioner?

I could teach this course if you asked me…..politely!

I can apply skills in critical appraisal and synthesising literature

I have the skills to seek out and employ appropriate databases

I am not sure about the quality of all the material available on the web

I have done some reading but do not know how to apply this

I don’t even know where I would start

The first step towards getting somewhere is to decide that you are not going to stay where you are.

John Pierpont Morgan
Dates for Your Diary 2018
Early Notice for forthcoming Events

DARE: International Conference on Decisions, Assessment, Risk and Evidence

Date: Monday 2nd July 2018 & Tuesday 3rd July 2018
Venue: Templetown Hotel, Templepatrick
Plenary Speakers:
Professor Haluk Soydan, University of Southern California
Professor Rami Benbenishty, Bar iLan University Israel
Professor Brian Littlechild, University of Hertfordshire
Check out the DARE website www.ulster.ac.uk/dare

5th Annual Social and Social Care Research Conference
7th March 2018

“If you have knowledge let others light their candle in it”
Margaret Fuller

Social Work and Social Research
We will be calling for abstracts of the 2018 Research Conference on 7th March 2018. So keep this date in your diary and look out for a call for abstracts.
Contact Anne McGlade - anne.mcglade@hscni.net.
Anne McGlade, Social Care, Research Lead.