Research in Social Work and Social Care
A Way Forward?

Sharing Outcomes from Research Conference
6th February 2014
### Some interesting Research and Evaluation Quotes

<table>
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<tr>
<td>“The fact that an opinion has been widely held is no evidence whatever that it is not utterly absurd; indeed in view of the silliness of the majority of mankind, a widely spread belief is more likely to be foolish than sensible.”</td>
<td>Bertrand Russell</td>
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<td>It is wrong always, everywhere, and for everyone, to believe anything upon insufficient evidence.</td>
<td>William James</td>
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<td>“Claims that cannot be tested, assertions immune to disproof are virtually worthless, whatever value the may have in inspiring us or in exciting our sense of wonder.”</td>
<td>Carl Sagan</td>
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<td>Facts are stubborn things; and whatever may be our wishes, our inclinations, or the dictates of our passions, they cannot alter the state of facts and evidence.</td>
<td>John Adams</td>
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<td>“What can be asserted without evidence can also be dismissed without evidence!”</td>
<td>Christopher Hitchens</td>
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<td>Plagiarize! Let no one else’s work evade your eyes! But plagiarize, plagiarize, plagiarize Only be sure always to call it please 'research'.”</td>
<td>Tom Lehrer</td>
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<td>In the same vein “Steal with pride” but always acknowledge your source”</td>
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Presenters and delegates participating at the event on 6th February 2014
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### Section 1

#### Quick guide to the resource

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  • Anne McGlade, Social Care Research Lead, Health and Social Care Board  
  • Dr Janice Baillie, Assistant Director, R & D Office, Public Health Agency | Go to | Section 3 |

**Research experiences**
• 1 Carmel Rooney  
• 2 Suzanne Mooney

**Sharing knowledge**
• Dr Louise Brown, Bath University  
• Dr Kathryn Higgins, Queens University  
• Professor Frank Kee, Queens University and National Institute of Public Health Research Network (NIPHRN)
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<td>3. What examples of good practice are there in Social Care/Social Work research of involving service users and their carers? How do we embed this in research?</td>
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Section 2

Context

How did this come about?

This outcomes resource emerged as a result of a conference event hosted on 6th February 2014 entitled “The Way Forward for Social Work Social Care Research”. Dr Ruth Carroll welcomed delegates to the splendid and beautifully restored building at Riddel Hall Queen’s University. She explained that this event, the first of its kind was organised by the Health and Social Care Board (HSCB) and the Research and Development Office of the Public Health Agency. It put the spotlight on policy makers, commissioners and practitioners and encouraged them to reflect on their current practice and consider how they might provide services to individuals, families and communities that are based on best available research and robust evidence.

Over fifty managers, and practitioners from across the health and social care sector, academia and the voluntary sector participated in the conference. The common interest was the future direction of social work and social care research in Northern Ireland. The conference stimulated an energetic and enthusiastic dialogue and discussion and provided an invaluable networking opportunity.

Participants expectations of the event

In anticipation of the event participants shared some of their expectations. Some of these are included here by way of illustration and reflect both strategic and personal needs.

- To gain a better knowledge and awareness of the vision for social work research in Northern Ireland.
- To learn more about the research strategy and to gain an understanding of research already undertaken in Health and Social Care.
To hear the address on developmental aspects relating to the strategy and in particular the mechanism for identifying priorities linked to policy and practice requirements.

- Capacity infrastructure within health and social care trusts.
- Interfaces with academic sectors.
- Facilitation of opportunities for practitioners and service delivery staff to develop and engage directly in research.

- Raise personal awareness of the challenges in leading social work research.

- Create energy in research.

- To provide an opportunity to think about and develop sustainable networks and collaborative working and gather momentum to promote social worker research and identify like-minded social worker professionals.

- Find ways of supporting a research and evidence based culture within a busy agency.

- Very interested in learning how research will be introduced into commissioning and policy in the area of adults and older people.

- To help me to better understand how social workers’ research can be integrated into practice and the wider supportive structures that are in place to support social workers to become researchers.

- To find out how research can influence good practice.

- To look at practical ways to collate and disseminate current research to practitioners.

- To ensure there is a strategy for taking forward social care research in Northern Ireland.

- To consider the selection of research topics to be agreed between all agencies: HSCB, Trusts; Academic Universities; Office of First and Deputy First Minister and the Department of Health and Social Services and Public Safety.
➢ To gather a better understanding of the role of the R & D office in supporting research in social work and social care.

➢ To identify any available funding streams.

In one of the comments received by way of feedback a delegate indicated that it should be a worldwide event and that organisers should follow up with the provision of power-points and information via email.

Through sharing the outcomes from the conference event, including the PowerPoint presentations and outcomes from the group work discussions, it is intended that this report can become a resource in its own right from which others can learn. It is also available to facilitate further engagement by others in the debate as we move forward on the development of a research strategy for social work and social care in Northern Ireland. There are models in place locally and elsewhere on how to better utilise and disseminate research and evidence and exchange knowledge to inform our day to day practice of policy, commissioning and practice. We need to explore what works.

In order to keep the resource concise but informative the PowerPoint presentations are available in Section 7 including presenters’ contact details. Summary comments only are included in Section 2. In providing contact details of presenters we hope that any individual with an interest in a particular initiative or idea can make direct contact and explore further.

In this way we trust that we are responding positively to the feedback from delegates about sharing information and, who knows, as we progress our work locally we can consider the opportunities for the wider exchange of information including the worldwide stage!
Key messages from keynote address - presentations and personal experiences

1. Fionnuala McAndrew

In her opening address Fionnuala McAndrew, Director of Social Care and Children (HSCB) acknowledged her delight in co-hosting this event with colleagues in the Research and Development Office. In welcoming participants she also acknowledged the commitment and energy already evident amongst delegates to contribute to the debate.

In highlighting the various economic, workforce and social changes that have inevitably influenced expectations of professional practice she outlined how professional knowledge and accountability must also change accordingly. Increased competition coupled with the use of more technology and structured assessments within workplaces can, if managed poorly, lead to more marginalisation and decreasing professionalization. However the ability to practice in inter-disciplinary or multi-disciplinary she argued “also requires the development of whole new skill sets”.

Consequently for professions such as social work, which are value based, to remain competitive she reinforced the need for them to measurable and marketable even if such are concepts have not always sat comfortably within social work. We also need to make use of more objective methodological approaches and methods within a social science base for the production of relevant and practice related knowledge for social care. It is helpful, she argued, “to see that the uniqueness of research in social work and social care research lies in the contribution that the knowledge base makes to the understanding of social issues. To make a difference we need to concentrate on the focus of the knowledge generated and the usability of it”.

Whilst paying tribute to the many good examples of research, evaluation, training and publications already developed within the profession she also stressed that these activities were taking place in somewhat of a vacuum.
Continuing her address she expressed her optimism at the steps being taken to fill this vacuum stating “I am delighted to be in the position to publically inform you that the Department, through the Office of Social Services and the Health and Social Care Board have taken the first steps with the commitment for the development of a Social Work - Social Care Research Strategy”.

This strategy, she continued “sets out our vision for enhancing research and development in our daily work and heralds a whole new approach to how we: increase research investment, capacity and capability amongst staff; integrate research evidence into practice; develop and maintain linkages and set out key research priorities and improve service user and carer outcomes.”

2. Anne McGlade

Anne McGlade recently appointed Social Care Research Lead (HSCB) highlighted her commitment and enthusiasm to helping drive forward the new agenda for social work and social care. She also indicated her commitment to working collaboratively and in partnership with others in the process.

A number of drivers that have stimulated the need for a renewed emphasis to be placed on research and evidence to inform policy, commissioning and practice were identified including for example:

- The Social Work Strategy 2012-2022;
- Workforce development and training requirements;
- The ever changing demands for continuous professional development which aim to enhance credibility;
- The need for evidence based commissioning which is even more important in times of financial constraints; and;
- Generally a greater emphasis on service user and carer outcomes through agendas such as personalisation and self-directed support.

She suggested that with all these drivers “the time feels right for the development of a research strategy at this stage”.
In the context of this, whilst the thinking about the development of the strategy is still in its initial stages, Anne suggested that a number of other interrelated strands are also integral to developing the vision into tangible components. These include for example:

- Generation of an understanding of the current research activity
- Establishing a mechanism to determine and review research priorities.
- Developing mechanisms to embed and integrate research in practice.
- Create a sound infrastructure including a better ways to influence funding opportunities available for social work research and the development of skills to secure external funding awards.
- Increasing research investment, capacity and capability to develop a research competent workforce with skills to critically appraise and integrate evidence from elsewhere.
- Developing and maintaining linkages and partnerships with other organizations including academia
- Supporting the exchange, dissemination and utilization of research evidence
- Developing the mechanisms for the engagement and involvement of service users and carers to enhance personal and public involvement in social work research.

In terms of the latter she also reminded delegates of the connectivity of research and evaluation activity to the equality and human rights agendas not least because we touch the lives of so many people in society. Consequently she argued “we have a duty to ensure that our services; our interventions; and, our communication and engagement methods are informed by robust research and evidence of what works and are inclusive”.

3. Dr Janice Bailie

Dr Janice Baillie Assistant Director of the R&D Office in her presentation confirmed her support for the development of a more proactive approach to social work and social care research and assured delegates that the R & D office will continue to work collaboratively with the HSCB. Janice highlighted a wide range of funding opportunities available within the R & D Office and encouraged delegates to seek out further advice.
With the recent appointment of Dr Ruth Carroll as Programme Manager she encouraged delegates to engage with the HSC R & D Division for advice on funding opportunities and advice on making funding applications. She also invited delegates to spread the message to others within their organisations who might also be interested in pursuing research particularly at doctoral or post-doctoral level.

The detailed presentation on funding opportunities is attached in Section 7.

See also web link http://www.publichealth.hscni.net/directorate-public-health/hsc-research-and-development/funding-opportunities

4. Personal experiences

Delegates were privileged to hear from Suzanne Mooney (QUB) and Dr Carmel Rooney (Southern Health and Social Care Trust) their inspirational real life accounts of conducting research studies. These accounts, included the many inevitable peaks and troughs associated with developing and refining a research proposal, from its starting point as a bright idea looking at element of social work practice, into a study that was feasible and manageable and one that could be fully implemented. This included: securing ethical and governance agreement; gaining access to data; undertaking analysis and interpretation and presenting the findings and, personally for both presenters, securing academic accreditation at PhD level.

Suzanne and Carmel respectively shared their experiences of their studies into “Promoting a Sense of Coherence and Wellbeing in Teenagers with Cancer Receiving Hospital Care” (Suzanne) and into “Care Leavers’ Experiences of Transition: a biographical narrative study of care leavers’ stories in one Trust area of Northern Ireland (Carmel)

5. Dr Louise Brown

Dr Louise Brown, Bath University, and a National Institute of Clinical Evidence (Nice) Fellow, reinforced the importance of undertaking approaches to ensure that we have Evidence Based Practice. She explored the many challenges and opportunities of introducing Evidence Based Practice. In doing so she dispelled any myth that generating research evidence is easy or that it is the only form of evidence that we need be concerned about albeit that it is vitally important.
She outlined the many barriers inherent in generating research evidence and provided a range of these, a few of which are included here. For example barriers and difficulties in identifying the precise research question; identifying funding opportunities; keeping things constant enough to research; having the time to ensure that we have meaningful and effective service user and carer involvement and having the political will to hear the conclusions.

6. Dr Kathryn Higgins

Dr Kathryn Higgins from the Institute of Child Care Research (ICCR) Queen’s University provided a local focus to how we are progressing with the evidence; research and policy, and particularly, practice relationships here in Northern Ireland.

She took as her starting point a focus on Evidence Informed Practice as distinct from Evidence Based Practice. This distinction, she argued, stems from the Evidence Informed Practice community who do not adopt the purist approach that only research evidence is valuable. Evidence Informed Practice she argued is an approach that triangulates research evidence with ‘practice expertise’ or ‘tacit wisdom’, with research evidence and service user experiences.

Unfortunately she argued “the resultant approach sometimes looks tokenistic and misguided which consequently makes it imperative that we build skills around using evidence such as appraising research and self-evaluation rather than just providing people with research evidence that can be misused”.

The sector needs practitioners and managers who are research-literate, critically curious, can exercise judgement, autonomy, be analytical and be thirsty for knowledge of what works. Simply providing leaflets which summarise research does not do this. Three models were explored:

- Research based practitioner model;
- Embedded research model; and,
- Organisational excellence.

The advantages and disadvantages of these and what we need to do to get organisational excellence were highlighted.
In acknowledging and applauding our local strengths and the level of good work already in place in Northern Ireland she identified for example, the local Universities, Campbell and Cochrane experts, the work of SCIE (Social Care Institute of Excellence) and expertise in the Community and Voluntary. She also acknowledged however the fact that we are not yet at a place where the evidence is being addressed in a comprehensive or all-encompassing way. She concluded that “the time seems right to do this now so that research supports organisational needs”. In her presentation she also explored a number of models including IRISS (Institute for Research and Innovation for Social Services) which is a Scottish, model and considered its potential locally.

### 7. Professor Frank Higgins

Professor Frank Kee QUB and the National Institute of Public Health Research Network (NIPHRN) outlined the importance of the multiple dimensions of the Public Health Research Network which is a network essentially about the need to develop robust evidence (particularly on interventions).

Whilst still clinical in nature the Network clearly recognises the need to bridge the translational chasm; the need for multiple perspectives and skill sets and the need to cross sectorial boundaries. He explained that the other organisations represented on the Network include: University of Ulster; other government departments; local authorities and the Third Sector.

Ultimately the Network’s role is to develop the Public Health Research Evidence. Professor McKee explained the continuum of increasing evidence that builds into more complex levels of interventions and advised that this was “not for the faint hearted”. He further cautioned on these levels and advised delegates of the need to “crawl before you walk” before embarking on complex intervention activity. Using the Guidance, produced in 2008 from the Medical Research Council, he explained the key elements that make a research intervention “complex”. The presentation is included in Section 7.
A key part of the day was the opportunity for delegates to engage in discussion and dialogue around a number of key areas.

1. What issues need to be addressed which will assist Social Care Research in your field of work?

2. How do you use research to influence policy and practice in your area?

3. What examples of good practice are there in Social Care and Social Work research of involving service users and their carers? How do we embed this in research?

The wealth of material collated reflects the high level of energy and enthusiasm that exists in the current climate in support of the research agenda for social work and social care. Some brief comments are reflected in Section 2 (expectations) and Section 6 (reflections). Given the time and energy committed by individuals in these discussions it is important that we reflect the feedback as openly thoroughly.

The feedback incorporating a more thorough analysis of expectations, and reflections and suggestions on the way forward was considered under four key themes. These included:

- policy and commissioning;
- personal and practice development;
- service improvement and personal and public involvement; and,
- research led.

See Section 7 for full details.
Conclusions and the way forward

In closing the event Anne McGlade Social Care Lead (HSCB) acknowledged the commitment and enthusiasm of all delegates whose participation made the event a lively, enthusiastic and vibrant one. She indicated that the day helped to lay the necessary foundations required for moving forward in the weeks and months ahead when we commence work on the development of a research strategy for social work and social care.

In planning the event the HSCB and the HSC R & D Division had a few simple objectives:

- To send a positive message from the two organisations that they were working together to support research in social work and social care at policy, commissioning and practice levels;
- To provide an opportunity for managers, practitioners, policy makers and academics to begin the dialogue; and,
- To provide a networking opportunity

She thanked all the speakers and acknowledged the time and commitment required in preparation for such event. She also acknowledged that all the inputs by each of the presenters provided plenty of food for thought. “Speakers have enlightened us with their vision and their views on the way forward and shared with us their practical experiences of undertaking research at different levels”.

The group work activity provided an ideal opportunity for cross sectorial networking between managers, practitioners and academia and the outcomes from the group work, presented in Section 6 and Section 7 provides invaluable information for the development of the Social Work and Social Care Research Strategy.

In stressing that the event was not intended as a one off exercise Anne highlighted a few things intended for the future which include:

1. To seek further engagement from the participants now you know what we are trying to achieve;
2. To allow further opportunity for further comments and priorities for the Social Work Research Strategy;

3. To actively seek out service user and carer engagement for social work and social care research; and,

4. To keep the momentum going through on going networking, more events and conference and forums as necessary.
The last word from the delegates as to whether the thought the day met their expectations

We invited comment in respect of views on whether expectations were met whilst also offering a wider opportunity for comments on any issue that delegates thought any future Social Work Social and Care Research Strategy should be concerned about.

A few of these are presented below, looking firstly at whether delegates considered their expectations were met.

Were expectations met?

Feedback from delegates has been overwhelmingly positive. Some of these included:

- I found the conference interesting and helpful engaging with other like-minded people.
- Great event an excellent day. Inspirational, forward looking, please do develop a collaborative network to take this forward.
- The day was a very good mix – my expectation around practitioners who are around in research was met – also there was good information on different means of undertaking research and good discussion on strategies for organisations to move things forward.
- The presentations by the researchers were very enthusiastic and would make me think about progressing.
- It was good to meet other professionals and share experiences. The Social Care Lead’s socialising approach was welcome.
- The presentations by the researchers were very enthusiastic and made me think about progressing.
- Stimulating presentations overall.
It motivated, as a Principal Practitioner, to take the research agenda on as an important element to promote to professionals that is Social Work Practitioners.

Very pleased Social Care Lead is in a new position to develop and promote the Agenda.

Kathryn Higgins’ input was at a good level of sensitivity.

Frank Kee’s input was good at lifting our sights higher and starting to think about complete steps towards sustainable research.

One person reminded us that we now we need to plan and take forward

Another delegate would have liked to learn more of the detail on the detail of the strategy.

Another left us with the message that time will tell.

Suggestions of issues to be considered within the Social Work Research Strategy

Need to develop the infrastructure in trusts to support researchers.

The research strategy should not be a stand-alone strategy – it must be linked to quality improvement and evidence based practice.

Would like the strategy to take a broad view of research and Reflect Evidence Informed Practice and Quality Improvement Initiatives.

Reflect steps where people can engage from practice, to academia to ensure engagement rather than practice via academic.

It must address the need to ensure the visibility of social work within the regional and strategic groups for research. Need a Social Work Champion.
- Personal and public Involvement infrastructure to be developed to support grant applications.

- Networks need to be created between Health and Social Care Organisations and Universities to create synergy, grant applications.

- Consider a Northern Ireland version of the IRISS (Institute for Innovation and Research in Social Services) model.

- Review existing training and quality and governance issues across the 5 trusts and review if we can do things differently.

- Funding to support those who are involved in research PhD’s – to give them some workload ‘relief’?

- The need to bring together a mixture of professions and non-professionals to help to help is on a research, quality agenda – not social work alone.

- Introduce an E-zine on recent on-going Social Care Research in Northern Ireland.
## Access to resources

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<tr>
<th>Title and Name of presenter</th>
<th>Copies of presentations (double click on images for slide show)</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Welcome and Opening Remarks</strong></td>
<td><img src="#" alt="Input FMcA Research Event 6th F" /> Open in acrobat reader</td>
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<tr>
<td>Fionnuala McAndrew, Director Social Care and Children, Health and Social Care Board</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Social Work Research Strategy</strong></td>
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<td>Anne McGlade, Social Care Research Lead, Health and Social Care Board</td>
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Overview of R & D Funding and opportunities

Dr Janice Baillie, Assistant Director, R & D Office, Public Health Agency

Research Opportunities in Social Work and Social Care

Dr Janice Bailie
Assistant Director
HSC R&D Division, Public Health Agency
6 February 2014

Experiences of Researchers

Suzanne Mooney
Queen’s University

From Social Work practice to R&D Fellowship... and beyond!

Suzanne Mooney
R&D Research Fellow (2009-2014)
s.mooney@qub.ac.uk
Experiences of Researchers

Carmel Rooney
Southern Health and Social Care Trust

My Research Experience!

Carmel Rooney
(Carmel.Rooney@southerntrust.hscni.net)

Research in Social Work & Social Care
A Way Forward?
6 February 2014

Social Care Research – what works in NICE and SCIE

Dr Louise Brown
Bath University

Research in Social Work and Social Care: A Way Forward?

Belfast: February 2014

Dr Louise Brown
Reader in Social Work
Department of Social and Policy Sciences
# How research can influence policy and practice?

Dr Kathryn Higgins  
Queen's University

## Northern Ireland Public Health Research Network (NIPHRN)

**What is it? How can it help?**

Professor Frank Kee  
Queen's University and (NIPHRN)

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## So why do we need a PH Research Network?

- The need for robust evidence  
  - (particularly on interventions)
- The need to bridge the translational chasm
- The need for multiple perspectives and skill sets
- The need to cross sectoral boundaries

Additional organisations represented: University of Ulster; other government departments  
local authorities; Third Sector

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## Feedback from Workshops.

(inorporating expectations, the, reflections and the way forward)

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[Analysis of outcomes from 6th February 2020](#)  
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<th><strong>SCIE Resource</strong></th>
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<td><a href="http://www.publichealth.hscni.net/directorate-public-health/hsc-research-and-development/funding-opportunities">http://www.publichealth.hscni.net/directorate-public-health/hsc-research-and-development/funding-opportunities</a></td>
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<tr>
<td>If you are interested in getting in touch with the HSCB or PHA in respect of the research agenda contact details are:</td>
</tr>
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| Anne McGlade  
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Pre fix prefix with 18001 if using Text Relay  
ruth.carroll@hscni.net |
Date: April 2014