On a relatively bright spring morning with splendid views across the Belfast hills, Belfast Castle once again provided an inviting setting for our 6th Annual Social Work and Social Care Research Conference. From the first conference hosted in 2014 the conference has gone from strength to strength. Maire Roulston Director of Social Care and Children, joint host of the event, with our colleagues in the Research and Development Division of the Public Health Agency welcomed 150 delegates and speakers drawn from management, practice, academia (tutors and students) research and service users and carers. The attendance of so many people was she suggested “a testimony to the increasing value and importance placed on the contribution of the research and evidence agenda”.

Picturesque scenes from Belfast Caste
Delegates enjoying the Conference
In her initial comments Marie recognised the work of Fionnuala McAndrew her predecessor for her commitment, enthusiasm, interest and support for research and evidence and in particular its contribution to helping to improve service user outcomes which has helped get us to a position of strength.

Commenting also on the Social Work Research and Continuous Improvement Strategy, launched four years ago, Marie indicated that “the vision that we set ourselves for developing a research minded culture remains as true today as it did in 2015. Four years on provides the opportunity for us to reflect and review on progress”. Marie also sought support and agreement from delegates to capture some of their views and perspectives for inclusion in the review.

In an exciting and varied programme inclusive of a range of keynote speeches, oral and poster presentations, drama and displays delegates had the privilege of listening, viewing and engaging in a variety of energetic and informative sessions.

*Colleagues from Probation Board Northern Ireland alongside Marie Roulston Director of Social Care and Children*
Some Comments from delegates

“It provided networking opportunities between service users, carers and researchers”.

“It is important always to step back and reflect on practice and listen to others and learn from other areas of practice”.

“It was a very stimulating day that provided the opportunity to engage with others who are interested in research and evidence”.

“I was able to meet a range of people and establish a number of contacts”.

Delegates viewing the many organisational displays on show on the day

Colleagues Dr John Canavan, Dr Carmel Devaney and Professor Caroline McGregor from National University Ireland Galway drew their presentation on their experiences of evaluating the Meitheal project (Prevention; Early Intervention; Family Support in Child Protection and Welfare Systems in Tulsa (ROI)). They explored the range of pluralistic approaches available in research evaluations and their applicability. In a frank and open dialogue the speakers outlined challenges and barriers and opportunities associated with
real world evaluations. The learning *from the doing* and the *overcoming of challenges* was also clearly articulated.

The day was interspersed with a creative variety of small group sessions where practitioners, service users and carers, academics and researchers shared a platform on a *parity of participation* basis where the overall objective was that of sharing the learning and outcomes from a range of service evaluations, research and audit projects.

*Oral presentations in action*
Professor Keith Brown from Bournemouth University in a highly energetic and creative presentation brought the stark reality of financial scamming and fraud to life. This is an issue that is pertinent to social work practice particularly in the context of the Mental Capacity legislation and something that does not just impact on older people.

Throughout the day and throughout the sessions inputs from service users and carers and social work practitioners were evident. A key note input from Barbara Norris and Aine Owens as peer researchers in a multi-agency approach alongside Paul Webb, Ashling McLoughlin and Rosalie Edge addressed issues of people’s experiences of mental ill health and intellectual disabilities. The presentation also explored the area of co-production in research and evaluation studies.
Aine and Barbara peer researchers who presented at the conference

Poster presentations took on a profile in their own right this year with an eclectic range of informative presentations. Providing delegates the opportunity to vote for the best poster proved successful and stimulated some additional dialogue and discussion. Whilst there can only be one winner well done to all who presented and were present on the day to discuss their poster.

Posters on display from researchers, social work practitioners and service users and carers
The winning poster entitled **Keeping Safe** as voted by delegates. Well done to Scott Fleming, Elizabeth Craig and Caroline McGonigle, Northern HSC Trust.

Scott Fleming receiving the certificate from Anne McGlade
As an event was aimed at supporting the capacity, capability, confidence of social work staff to engage in research related activity and continuous professional development it was an opportune time for delegates to find out about the work underway to create the framework of professional requirements at doctoral level leading to a doctoral level professional award. This was afforded to delegates through an input from Katherine Maguire (Northern Ireland Social Care Council (NISCC), Professor Brian Taylor Ulster University and Dr Karen Winter Queen’s University. Further details can be obtained from NISCC- https://niscc.info/

Despite the energetic nature of the conference and the dialogue taking place throughout the rest of the day, delegates could have heard a pin drop as Ruairi and Emily, drama students from Queen’s University, tackled the poignant and difficult subject of domestic violence. The strength of the drama was evidenced by the quietness in the room whereby delegates were almost transported to the pub where the drama was set. Paul Murphy and Lorna Montgomery (lecturers) supported the drama presentation.
In her introduction Marie Roulston had suggested that delegates would have the opportunity to make some suggestions that would inform the review of the Social Work Research and Continuous Improvement Strategy.

We were delighted to have the support from Ulster University. From Dr Campbell Killick, who via the use of Mentimeter, captured some initial views from those who were able to access the system on their mobile phones. A few extracts from the comments received are presented below.
In closing the event Anne McGlade Social Care Lead acknowledged the huge range of material presented in one day demonstrating the value of such local events to facilitate such networking and dialogue. She thanked all presenters for getting their messages out there and for taking the time to share the learning with others which is not always on the things that what worked but equally from what did not.

Our journey has not ended. Whilst opportunities may be created for greater dialogue with our colleagues in the ROI for engagement, collaboration and presentation of research in social work across Ireland our local annual event will continue.

On that basis – Note Date for your Diary

7th Annual social Work and Social Care Conference Northern Ireland

11th March 2020,
An Outcomes Report will be made available but please do check out the PowerPoint Presentations from the day available on the Social Work Research and Continuous Improvement Website.


Located under Conference Events Reports

6th Annual Social Work Research Conference