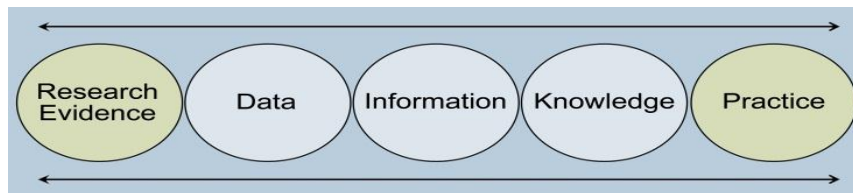


Conference heralds a new direction for social work and social care research



Over fifty managers and practitioners from across the health and social care sector, academia and the voluntary sector recently participated in a conference hosted on 6th February 2014 in the splendid and beautifully restored building at Riddel Hall, Queen's University. The common interest was the future direction of social work and social care research in Northern Ireland. It stimulated an energetic and enthusiastic dialogue and discussion and provided an invaluable networking opportunity.

The first event of its kind, organised by the Health and Social Care Board (HSCB) and the Research and Development Division (HSC R&D) of the Public Health Agency, 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 robust research evidence.

In her opening address Fionnuala McAndrew, Director of Social Care and Children (HSCB) acknowledged her delight in co-hosting this event with colleagues in HSC R&D Division. In welcoming participants she also acknowledged the commitment and energy already evident amongst delegates to contribute to the debate. 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; build capacity and capability amongst staff; integrate research evidence into practice; develop and maintain linkages and set out key research priorities”*. At the conference event she introduced Anne McGlade Social Care Research Lead who has been appointed to progress this important work through active engagement and involvement with a diverse range of stakeholders.



Fionnuala McAndrew and Dr Janice Baillie



Delegates participating in group work at the event

Dr Janice Baillie of HSC R&D Division 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 HSC R and D Division will continue to work collaboratively with the HSCB.

Janice highlighted a wide range of funding opportunities available within the HSC R & D Division and encouraged delegates to seek out further advice. *“The recent appointment of Dr Ruth Carroll, Programme Manager demonstrates our commitment in this area and I encourage you to engage with the HSC R & D Division for advice on funding opportunities and advice on making funding applications”.*

Delegates and presenters engaged enthusiastically and diligently on the day. A report from the conference will be disseminated and will be made available via web link in due course. In the meantime the HSCB and HSC R & D Division would like to acknowledge the wide range of creative and informative inputs provided by local and national speakers, all with

an interest in the generation of better research and evidence to support better service user and carer outcomes.



Further connecting and engagement by delegates.

Carmel Rooney and Suzanne Mooney, both of whom had undertaken PhD research studies as practitioner researchers shared their personal experiences of their research studies and the outcomes. Dr Louise Brown Bath University and a National Institute of Clinical Evidence (NICE) Fellow explored the many challenges and opportunities of introducing Evidence Based Practice. Dr Kathryn Higgins (Queen's University, Belfast) provided a local focus preferring to use the term Evidence Informed Practice, a blend of sources of information, of which research is one source. She also explored the advantages and limits of some models currently in place for Knowledge Exchange. Finally delegates at the event heard from Professor Frank Kee, QUB and National Institute of Public Health Research Network (NIPHRN) who outlined the importance of the multiple dimensions of the research network and explained the continuum of increasing evidence that builds into more complex interventions. Professor Kee also offered some very sound advice on the need to "*crawl before we walk*" before embarking on complex interventions.

Reflections from delegates

The last word goes to delegates with a few comments selected from a variety of very positive and constructive reflections.

- *A great event that helped to kick start the development of the strategy.*
- *Very good start to an important agenda. Looking forward to the follow up.*
- *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*
- *Stimulating Presentations.*
- *Very motivational*

The way ahead

Following this initial event it is our intention to keep the momentum going through on going networking, more events and conference and forums as necessary. We will be seeking further engagement from participants and other interested parties and we will be actively seeking out service user engagement for engagement in this work.

If you would like to discuss anything in relation to the developmental aspects of the work in relation to this event, or about the proposed Social Work Research Strategy or find out more details on funding opportunities we would very much like to hear from you.

Please do not hesitate to contact:

Anne McGlade Social Care Research Lead, HSCB
anne.mcglade@hscni.net Telephone: 028 90321313 Ext 2187.

Or

Ruth Carroll Programme Manager, HSC Research and Development Division, PHA ruth.carroll@hscni.net Telephone: 028 90 553617.

Ruth can advise about funding streams or you can have a look at the link below -

<http://www.publichealth.hscni.net/directorate-public-health/hsc-research-and-development/funding-opportunities>