![HSC Health and Social Care logo]

Gaining Initial Support for the conduct of Social Work and Social Care Research Evaluation or Audit activity in two or more Trusts in Northern Ireland

July 2019

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Feedback from a consultation exercise

Introduction

During 2018-2019 a consultation inclusive of relevant stakeholders was undertaken to discuss the Protocol and associated Application Form for securing initial agreement and support for the conduct of social work and social care research activity in two or more health and social care trusts in Northern Ireland.

This short paper reflects the feedback received from respondents on both the protocol and application form.

The revised Protocol and Application Form are attached as appendices

Process for consultation

Two initial face to face meetings were hosted to facilitate engagement between health and social care representatives and academia. The outcome from these discussions was that securing initial support remained necessary. Revisions to the protocol and application were discussed and agreed as a result of these meetings. It was these revisions that framed the detail of the consultation exercise undertaken in mid-June 2019.

Fifty six individuals and organisations were issued with the consultation papers. Fifteen responses were received and whilst moderate in numbers each response received reflected a thorough consideration of the protocol and the application form.

Comments on the Protocol

Overwhelmingly responses indicated that clarity was provided as to why the approach was being adopted for social work and social care research and associated activity. A few more detailed comments were also provided whereby there was acknowledgement that the "*protocol has considered preliminary feedback about the funding pressures and time lines in the context of academics applying for grants*".

"Pleased to see that the protocol does not preclude conversations taking place with heads of service or professional leads to discuss research priorities in service areas"

"Good to see that initial support reflects a view that the topic, if conducted, would be relevant rather than a decision taken based on methodology or funding. This helps to clarify the status of this element of the process".

"The agreed streamlined approval process is very positive and much more accessible".

For another organisation *"it was good to see recognition of the need to encourage and support staff involved in any research on evidence path ways via a streamlined system".*

One response was however at a divergence to the majority of views expressed. Some concern was expressed at the perceived *"legitimacy of having initial support and what status this would give a project over other ethical approval processes? What are the implications for staff not getting support? Can, for example, multi trust applications not go through the IRAS (Integrated Research Application Process without this support".*

Additional clarity about this in the protocol was requested.

Some additional general comments were also articulated within responses.

For those with more working and experiential knowledge of the protocol and application process there was an acknowledgement of improvement in the revised process. In particular *"the removal of hurdles to research, streamlining the process, reducing timelines and having a more succinct application."* These were welcome changes and acknowledged in a number of responses.

Some minor wording to the protocol was suggested in two of the responses. The precise changes suggested will be given some further consideration.

Cognizance was taken within the protocol of other changes introduced within the wider NHS/HSC Research in the United Kingdom. Within the consultation we were therefore interested in establishing if consultees considered that the detail required in the protocol and application form

were in excess of these other requirements. None of the respondents indicated that they were or that they considered this an issue given the rationale for having the protocol. Discussions will continue with the HSC R and D Division of the PHA in relation to this.

All responses indicated that there was a level of agreement that the new process was intended to avoid duplication. A few more detailed comments were provided which reiterated the views that the application, when compared with the original, was "*more succinct, streamlined and appropriate*".

A respondent from one English University who had experience of the previous process indicated that the new version was less confusing. There was a suggestion that a "*flowchart detailing the steps may helpful for these outside Northern Ireland who are less familiar with the outworking of the process*".

Timeliness on the decision making process and in particular timely feedback to researchers on the outcome of their application was one of the hurdles associated with the previous application form and process. The consultation exercise invited comments on the agreement of a reduced timeframe of 15 working days for a decision with feedback to researchers within 5 working days. Timelines is an issue for all researchers but academics were <u>more</u> vociferous in their views and in their comments about the implication of delays that were inherent in the previous process.

In the main responses were supportive of the new time lines suggested. Two responses whilst acknowledging that the new timeline was an improvement on the previous process, which was reliant on the scheduling of HSC Assistant Director Governance meetings, the changes potentially still, had some limitations especially when research grant applications were being made. Concerns expressed reflected the fact that the turnaround time for such applications is extremely tight. Consequently there was a view that a delay in any preliminary initial approval may impact on one's competitive advantage here in Northern Ireland when compared with UK wide researchers.

Acknowledgement was made in one response to an additional improvement in that the revised protocol included a new element that offered researchers *"an explanation for any decline of support and a potential alternative suggestion."*

From the outset there was agreement that the protocol would apply to applications proposed within <u>two</u> or <u>more</u> Trusts. This was to allow for some flexibility within Trusts for smaller studies. Generally respondents were in agreement with this approach with an acknowledgement from one academic of the additional option to still engage with one Trust to avoid delays especially for a pilot study that might have wider potential for building the evidence base regionally.

In two responses however queries were raised about the level of monitoring of individual Trust research, evaluation or audit activity with the suggestion that *"some notification by Trusts of ongoing activity may resolve this."* In one other response there was a concern raised on the potential for researchers to select one trust only in order to "*avoid using the protocol".* It was perceived that this could "*discourage researchers from carrying out regional research initiatives".*

These responses all need some further consideration and clarification as ultimately the objective of the requirement for initial support is to improve the quantity of relevant research related activity in Northern Ireland.

Some of the inherent difficulties of the previous arrangement for obtaining support were confounded by the lack of agreement on agreed research priorities. The new arrangements allow for a revised process (workshop and discussions) to facilitate discussions across a range of relevant stakeholders. All respondents were in agreement with such an approval albeit that one response added *"in principle yes but more detail on the practical implication of this would be required".*

Comments on the application form

Additional questions were invited on the wording and word count within the actual application form. Overwhelmingly responses indicated that people were content with the scope, details requested and the word length of various sections. Given that the *"word counts"* were reduced to support greater brevity and streamlining most respondents were satisfied with the revisions suggested preferring *"this abbreviated application form."* Some precise comments were suggested on the detail of the form which will receive further consideration. For two respondents there was concern that the reduced word count may impact on the decision if sufficient detail was not provided. This will be tested in the pilot phase.

Conclusion

The review was undertaken by the Health and Social Care Board in relation to creating a more streamlined process for securing initial support from the Association of Executive Directors of Social Work for the conduct of social work research, evaluation and audit activity across two or more HSC Trusts in Northern Ireland. This was a useful and productive process which was also an invaluable networking opportunity. It helped re-establish relationships and contributed to a greater mutual understanding of research and the respective positions and competing demands of researchers, academia and the wider social work profession. The engagement activity has also contributed towards a better shared vision for the way forward. With this greater understanding we do not anticipate that the process will discourage activity but rather encourage it.

We are grateful to all who took the time to meet, discuss and provide feedback. The outcome is a more streamlined process for gaining initial support for the conduct of research related activity. Ultimately this and the process for agreeing research priorities should help ensure that prospective studies agreed for Northern Ireland are those that will have more meaningful impact for social work and social care and help secure belter outcomes for those who use our services.

The revised protocol and application will be piloted over the forth coming months.

Respondents

1) Paula McFadden (UU)
2) Frances Nicholson(DoH)
3) Brenda Horgan (NISCC)
4) Alison Wheatley (A University academic in England)
5) Paul McCusker (Probation Board N.I)
6) Martin Quinn (Social Care and Children's Directorate – Children's)
7) Colm Burns (Patient and Client Council)
8) Brian Taylor (UU)
9) Lisa Bunting (QUB)
10) Gavin Davidson (QUB)
11) Danielle Turney (QUB)
12) Lorna Montgomery (QUB)
13) Caroline Brogan (Belfast Trust and A D Governance in Trust)
14) Marian Hall   (HSCB)
15) John Sheldon (NIGALA)

This feedback document, revised protocol and application form will also be made available on the website at:

http://www.hscboard.hscni.net/our-work/social-care-and-children/swresearch

Protocol

Gaining Initial Support <u>before</u> more formal and detailed applications are commenced for the Conduct of <u>Social Work</u> and <u>Social Care</u> Research, Evaluation or Audit Activity within the Statutory Health and Social Care Sector

Where two or more HSC Trusts are involved

Support required from Association of Executive Directors of Social Work

Foreword

As Executive Directors of Social Work we are committed to advocating Evidence Based Decision-Making within the complexity of social work and social care at program, practice and policy levels in order to support better outcomes for service users and carers. This provides the confidence that decisions taken are grounded in the best available research evidence that also take account of experiential evidence and relevant contextual evidence. We remain committed to supporting the conduct and dissemination of robust research and evidence within our sector. This vision, as reflected, within the Social Work Research and Continuous Improvement Strategy launched in 2015 remains as relevant today.

A protocol and associated application form has been in place since 2014. The revised documents reflect a more streamlined approach and are based on a consultation exercise conducted with stakeholders in 2018-2019. It is intended to support researchers and staff wishing to undertake research, evaluation or audit activity by ensuring initial support is in place before more formal and detailed applications are commenced.

The coordination of the activity also remains an important factor and will help ensure that prospective studies are those that make most meaningful impact on social work and social care research in Northern Ireland. Closer alignment to research needs and priorities is also our ambition reflected in the establishment of a more inclusive stakeholder process for the identification of these priorities in the future. This work will be refined as we implement this activity over the years.

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Paul Morgan

Chair of the Association of Executive Directors of Social Work

2019

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Introduction

In August 2015 a Protocol and associated Application Form was introduced to ensure initial support from two or more HSC Trusts in Northern Ireland before more formal and detailed applications were commenced. It related to research, evaluation or audit that involved the inclusion of social work staff within HSC Trusts in Northern Ireland or where the HSC Trust was required to identify or contact service users and carers for their inclusion in a study. Its aim was to assist in the coordination of activity and help contribute to a robust evidence base within social work in Northern Ireland. This commitment is enshrined in the Social Work Research and Continuous Improvement Strategy (2015-2020)[1] and remains as relevant today. In 2018-2019 a review was undertaken by the Health and Social Care Board (HSCB) with a view to creating a more streamlined process. This review involved engagement with representation of health and social care and academia from the two local universities, Queen's University and Ulster University. The result of the review was an agreement that a protocol was still necessary but that the content of the application form should be revised to reflect a more streamlined process.

Within this engagement process cognisance was also taken of other challenges that impede the conduct of prospective studies that have the most meaningful impact on the quality and quantity of relevant research in Northern Ireland, namely the absence of priorities for social work and social care research. Consequently in parallel to the revision of the protocol it was agreed that a region wide consensus based approach involving multiple stakeholders would be established to begin to identify research needs and priorities. It is anticipated that the greater interdependence approach between agreed research priorities and the provision of initial support for the conduct of research should create an environment more conducive to the conduct of research that has the most impact.

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[1] Social Work Research and Continuous Improvement Strategy 2015-2020 available at:
http://www.hscboard.hscni.net/our-work/social-care-and-children/swresearch

This document contains the Protocol and associated Application Form (Appendix 1) on **"Gaining <u>initial</u> support from Executive Directors of Social Work"**.

The application form for completion is available on
<u>http://www.hscboard.hscni.net/swreserach</u>

To whom it applies.

This Protocol and application form applies to any individuals, teams or organisation(s) wishing to undertake <u>social work or social care research activity within two or more of the five health and social care Trusts in Northern Ireland</u> that involves, as noted previously, the inclusion of social work staff within HSCT Trusts in Northern Ireland or where the HSC Trust will be required to identify or contact service users and carers for their inclusion in a study. It applies to both <u>internal</u> requests by staff <u>within the HSC Sector</u> including the Department of Health (DoH), Health and Social Care Board (HSCB), any of the five Health and Social Care Trusts), the Public Health Agency, the Patient and Client Council and <u>external</u> requests from statutory, academic, voluntary or independent sector organisations or individuals. A range of Stakeholders provided feedback and comment to the 2018-2019 review exercise.

Initial support

When provided initial support for the research idea or topic <u>reflects an early view from within the social work profession that the topic is relevant and if conducted should make a contribution to building the necessary evidence base</u>. We want to increase both the quantity and quality of research relevant to Northern Ireland to support both the visibility of social work and social care and better outcomes for service users and carers. It is intended to also assist researchers in decisions about which funding or grant applications to pursue and in decisions about potential post graduate academic study by students pursuing Masters or PhD academic level study.

In due course all the other formal arrangements for **governance, ethical approval and gaining consents processes will need to be adhered to by researchers**. These include:

A. Research governance approval within the health and social care organisation that you plan undertake the study within. (Note each Health and Social Care Trust has a separate Committee and some have separate processes if it is an evaluation);
B. If it is research, approval from an appropriate ethics committee (which depends on who your participants will be, the scale and the funder of the research). The Integrated Research Application form is used by Trusts in Northern Ireland. This is available at: https://www.myresearchproject.org.uk/ A Gateway Committee administers multi-site applications;
C. Informed consent from your participants and where appropriate, their carers.

Cognisance has been taken of changes in the wider arena of NHS/HSC Research in the United Kingdom with the introduction of Local Information Packs in June 2019 required as part of the Integrated Research Application (IRAS).
https://www.myresearchproject.org.uk/help/hlpsitespecific.aspx#UK-Local-Information-Pack

https://www.nihr.ac.uk/about-us/CCF/policy-and-standards/framework-for-research-support-services.htm

The streamlined initial support application form does not require any additional detail to that in the NHS process but is required at an even earlier stage than a full blown IRAS application form. The local initial support application forms relates **also** to evaluation and audit activity not covered by the IRAS application process and the emphasis remains on social work and social care.

Process for priority setting

As previously noted there is an interdependent relationship between the identification of research priorities and the application for initial support. It is intended that over time with greater discussion, agreement and communications about research priorities that requests for initial support will better reflect the research needs within social work and social care in Northern Ireland. A degree of flexibility will however be retained to reflect novel and creative ideas. This reflects the fact that we want to be able to retain an ability to be competitive with others when funding opportunities arise with minimum timescales for initial expressions of interest.

A region wide inclusive event will be hosted annually to engage key stakeholders (health and social care, and other statutory organisations, voluntary sector, academia, and service users and carers) to begin the process of identifying research themes and research priorities for social work and social care research. An autumn timeline, where feasible, may be facilitated for such an event, following advice from academic colleagues that this would also support dates when research topics for Post Graduate PhD Applications are agreed. A degree of flexibility will however be retained to reflect potential opportunities that may arise for engagement in more global research initiatives.

How to gain initial support

Applications to be sent electronically to the following email address:

swevidproposal@hscni.net

For queries contact: Social Care Research Lead, HSCB, Social Care and Children Directorate, Belfast BT2 8BS, Telephone 028 95363017.

Please note **do not send** this initial application for support to the Trusts' Research Ethics Committees. This will result in a delay in the process.

This single point of entry is provided to streamline the process.

The Social Care Research Lead within the HSCB will take responsibility for coordinating requests for support and approval from HSC Trust personnel. Staff from within HSC Trusts, with the appropriate level of seniority to take decisions on both research needs and capability and capacity within their respective organisations have been charged by the Executive Directors of Social Work to facilitate research activity that relates to social work and social care **within two or more HSC Trusts.** This supports the commitment to building an evidence base in Northern Ireland that will have greatest impact. The regional dimension also increases the opportunities for Northern Ireland to be involved in larger scale funded research initiatives.

Given the impracticalities of hosting regular face to face meetings a process for virtual decision making meetings will be adopted. This will be

coordinated by the Social Care Research Lead. A mechanism to keep this support approach under review and discuss any problems has been built into the process to facilitate face to face dialogue between the nominated Trust staff and the Social Care Research Lead.

Following receipt of the application consideration will first be given to its completeness as per the application form components. It may also require necessary discussions with relevant staff, including operational staff, within Health & Social Care Trusts.

The protocol **does not** preclude informal conversations taking place between researchers and relevant programme managers within HSC organisations to explore where researcher interests fit with service research needs. Such conversations are viewed as important.

To support a timely response it has been agreed that decisions on providing initial support will be made within 15 working days of receipt. Researchers will be informed of the decisions within 5 working days of this date.

If a request for initial support is declined it is important that the reason for do so is clearly articulated, and if possible options for any alternative suggestion are also articulated.

N.B The final decision to support the proposal rests with the Executive Directors of Social Work who take the advice from the nominated Trust leads.

Application to secure initial support for the conduct of social work research, evaluation or audit activity -

WITHIN TWO OR MORE HSC Trusts

Form available at http://www.hscboard.hscni.net/swreserach

(Note: where the term research is used this also applies to an evaluation or audit study).

Please complete using Arial font 14pt

Full Title of study:

Please identify main research or evaluation, audit question:

Contact details for the link person in respect of this application (for the purposes of research this is the Chief Investigator)

Title:

Name:

Employer's name and address:

Telephone:

Email:

For others with key involvement (please add details as appropriate)

Title	Name	Employing Organisation

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Is this application from:

An individual ☐   A consortium of organisations ☐

If a consortium of organisations please list name of each organisation involved:

Please provide a brief outline of relevant research experience including any other previous work that is relevant to this application

Maximum words 75:

Background and relevance of this study to Health and Social Care and in particular to Social Work

Within this section please indicate the level of discussion that has taken place with key social work and social care staff and with whom.
Maximum words 50:

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Brief proposal outline (this should be written so it is easily understood by someone with limited knowledge of the topic)

Maximum words 150:

Please provide an indicative timetable (start and completion dates)

Start date: Completion date:

Funding

Please indicate the funding source and anticipated budget

Funding source: Anticipated budget:

Please include any costs to Health and Social Care Organisations in

facilitating the research:

Additional Support

Please indicate what anticipated local capabilities and capacity will be required from with Health and Social Care Trusts in order to deliver the study (for example focus groups, record retrieval, interviews or questionnaire completion).

Maximum words 50

Signed:

Name in block capitals:

Date:

Forward completed application by email to :
swevidproposal@hscni.net

For queries contact: Social Care Research Lead, HSCB, Social Care and
Children Directorate, Belfast, BT2 8BS, Telephone 02895363017

Please do not send this initial application for support to the Trusts Research
Ethics Committees. This will result in a delay in the process.

Application form Revised 2019.