



Towards a Research and Development Strategy for Social Services in Scotland

**This Document Reviews the Evidence for a
Research and Development Strategy**

Revised April 2008

Preface

Towards a Research and Development (R&D) Strategy for Scottish Social Services has been produced in partnership between the Scottish Institute for Excellence in Social Work Education (now The Institute for Research and Innovation in Social Services, IRISS) and Scottish Government and has been led by the Institute. It arises from the Changing Lives report (Scottish Executive, 2006a), which recommended that such an R&D Strategy should be developed and the Strategy underpins the work of all five associated Change Programmes (Performance Improvement; Service Development; Practice Governance; Workforce Development; and Leadership and Management).

This document has been developed since January 2007 by a national Steering Group and three Working Groups, supplemented by a range of other short-life working groups, surveys and demonstration projects involving a great number of people from all aspects of social services organisations and educational institutions.

This document sets out the rationale and evidence for an R&D Strategy and explains how the steps suggested have been arrived at. It will firstly be seen by the national Steering Group and will then go to the Working Groups for comment and amendment. Following that, it will be circulated widely to all stakeholders. There will be a series of events which will give an opportunity for a wider group to participate in shaping the final document.

Once the document has been finalised, work will begin on the implementation of the Strategy, and a participative approach will again be used to engage a wide range of people in determining how the work is taken forward.

I should like to give my sincere thanks to all those who have helped with this work – it could not have been achieved without the contribution of so many able and committed people.

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1. Introduction

Our overall aim is to improve the outcomes for service users in Scotland by having the design, development and delivery of social services based on sound research & strong evidence and the purpose agreed for the Research and Development Strategy by the national Steering Group (Appendix 1) is:

To increase the quantity and quality of research activity, its dissemination and integration into practice, in order to improve and develop social services.

2. Definitions

There is a debate about how the field of social services is defined. In some circles the term social work and social care is used, with social work being the academic discipline. This seems to us to be unnecessarily divisive so we have settled on the term **social services** to describe activity across the field. This is consistent with the term used in Scottish legislation¹.

For the purposes of producing this Strategy research and development activity is defined widely as including the whole range of intelligent, structured inquiry likely to lead to improvement of services. At its simplest this may be two practitioners sharing experiences of work in a particular area and at its most complex, to a three year multi-site, multi-method comparative study.

3. The Strategy Itself

According to Coyle² (p. 10) a strategy is 'a particular long-term plan for success.' Coyle goes on to suggest that a strategy will need to focus on:

Why is a strategy necessary?
What is to be achieved?
When is it to be achieved?
How can the strategy be achieved?

In producing a Research and Development Strategy for Social Services in Scotland it is important that these questions are addressed.

3.1 Why is a Research and Development Strategy Necessary?

The 21st Century Review of Social Work³ and its Implementation Plan⁴ aim to build:

¹ Regulation of Care (Scotland) Act, 2001

² Coyle, G. (2004) *Practical Strategy*, Harlow: Prentice Hall

³ Scottish Executive (2006a), *Changing Lives: 21st Century Review of Social Work*, Edinburgh: Scottish Executive

⁴ Scottish Executive (2006b) *Changing Lives Implementation Plan*, Edinburgh: Scottish Executive

- The capacity to deliver personalised services
- The capacity of the workforce
- The capacity for sustainable change

Changing Lives makes recommendations (13), of which three in particular are most obviously relevant to research and development. These are (pp. 92-93):

- 6 Social work services must develop a new organisational approach to managing risk, which ensures the delivery of safe, effective and innovative practice
- 7 Employers must make sure that social workers are enabled and supported to practise accountably and exercise their professional autonomy
- 8 Social work services must develop a learning culture that commits all individuals and organisations to lifelong learning and development

In Chapter Two, Changing Lives argues that we need to:

- Use information gathered
- Learn from mistakes
- Base decisions on evidence
- Support innovation
- Use technology
- Learn from good practice

Scottish Executive, (2006a) *Changing Lives*

However, other recommendations are also relevant to improving the research base for Scottish social services. The Implementation Plan (Scottish Executive, 2006b) proposed five change programmes: Performance Improvement, Service Development, Leadership and Management, Workforce Development and Practice Governance Programme in which the research and development (R&D) strategy is located (p8).

R & D activity clearly underpins all five of the Change Programmes:

- Performance Improvement: both research and evaluation need to take place in order that we know what *works* best in which circumstances. We need to know what *counts* as improvement and how to *measure* it. Currently there is a great deal of data collecting activity linked to processes both internal and external to social services agencies. Regulation and Inspection by the Care Commission, the Social Work Inspection Agency (SWIA) and by related bodies such as the Audit Commission and Her Majesty's Inspection of Education (HMIE) require the

collection of workforce and service performance data. The Crerar Report⁵ argues for the reduction in the number of inspections and greater sharing of data. This would reduce the burden of preparation of inspection that currently falls on agencies, but agreement about the sharing and posting of data to allow secondary analysis would be needed. Crerar also argued for a movement away from a deficit model of inspection towards one linked more closely to improvement, innovation and excellence.

The embedding of research into everyday practice in social services is much more likely to be achieved if it becomes a criterion against which agencies are measured through internal monitoring and external inspection. Equally, sound research methods can enhance and strengthen inspection processes.

- Service Development: service developments need to be based on evidenced best practice, an understanding of local and individual service user need and accumulated practice wisdom. Work undertaken in this Change Programme has centred on achieving workable definitions of personalisation and examining their implications. Additional work needed to give practical expression of such definitions are research on risk assessment and management; service and resource prioritisation; conflicts between rights and safety; and so on. There is research in all of these areas that will help to flesh out the meaning of personalisation in practice. Social policy and philosophical analysis of related concepts will help to shape consistent and defensible designs to underpin personalised services for the future.

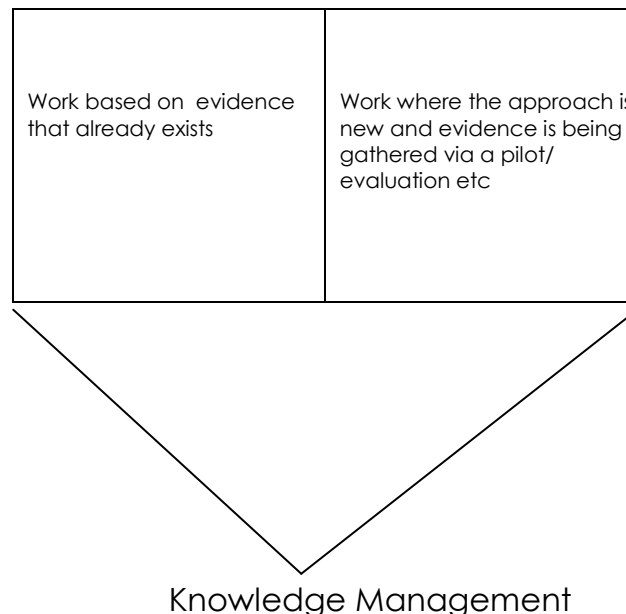
Once the personalisation agenda is ready to be implemented, pilots of new initiatives and new models of practice will need to be rigorously evaluated so that services improve in a consistent and sustainable manner.

- Workforce Development: to be competent, confident and valued, staff need to be able to link their practice to theory and knowledge-based guidelines. Strategies to develop the workforce, therefore, should be based on evidenced best practice. Workforce development is both a means and an end: better education and training need to be linked to what we know about what is needed (gathered as a result of robust analytical methods) and what we know about what works (extracted from the emerging theory about how people learn and retain their learning best).

⁵ Crerar, L. (2007) *Crerar Review: The Report of the Independent Review of Regulation, Audit, Inspection and Complaints Handling of Public Services in Scotland*, Edinburgh: Scottish Government

There is also a clear need for more and better research training, and for career paths that permit staff to undertake research within their practitioner or management roles. Staff who are experienced in developing research proposals, undertaking data collection etc can help in engaging others in the use of research and can contribute to the pool of staff from which future consultant-level practitioners and emerging academics can be recruited. Opportunities created through implementation of the R&D Strategy, such as a systematic approach to developing professional doctorates, will offer a strong framework which will support those who know that research is essential for the future of social services and who see their own careers as being enhanced by successfully achieving high level qualifications.

- Practice Governance: safe and effective practice should be based on knowledge, both created in practice agencies and derived from research evidence. Accountable practice must, by definition, be linked to a sound evidence base. Decision-making in public services needs to have a strong and clear rationale which can be articulated when required. To be genuinely accountable, therefore, all social services work should fall into one of two categories: firstly where the approach is based on evidence already gathered or secondly where the approach is innovative but is being pursued in order to gather evidence through routine evaluation. Together these processes contribute to the generation of a firm knowledge base for social services.



The emergence of what is sometimes described as a risk-averse culture has led to proliferation of guidance and proceduralised approaches which have diluted the autonomy previously experienced by staff in many services. There is evidence from the 21st Century Review that staff

supervision has shifted towards a workload management-style process, where compliance with procedures is uppermost, leaving behind the tradition of a supportive and developmental professional practice approach. However, staff supervision is the process through which managers and practitioners can examine and challenge the evidence base underpinning practice in order to arrive at the best plan for a service user, family or group.

Thus the systematic creation of a reliable evidence base is an essential first step in ensuring that information which practitioners and managers need is available. To complement this, ready access to databases and the skills necessary to locate and interpret evidence are also necessary.

- Leadership and Management: Managers need to be well-informed, research-aware and research literate. Changes in Scottish social services following local government reorganisation in 1996 led to smaller authorities with a wider scope of management responsibility for most managers. Leaders and managers are role models for staff and they need to demonstrate ethical and accountable practice rooted in theory, research and accumulated practice wisdom based on systematic evaluation. A leadership and management framework is, inevitably, both the result of strong evidence and the method through which achieving evidence-based decision-making becomes rooted in social services service design, planning and delivery. The content of the framework needs to be based on accumulated wisdom from research into management practice. The framework's implementation will need to be supported by arguments and empirical evidence so that those expected to use it can have confidence in its rigour and relevance.

Further, to reach a position where services are routinely evaluated and decisions based on evidence, clear leadership will be necessary to instil a culture of curiosity about what works and why amongst all staff. Introducing any change into work practices requires commitment and energy and for these to be generated within busy work environments it will be necessary for managers and leaders to take a prominent role in both stimulating, supporting and modelling the new way of working.

3.2 What is to be achieved by a Research and Development Strategy?

The vision embraced by the national Steering Group for the Research and Development (R&D) Strategy is that social services are guided by research-based policy, practice and management. The Strategy will support evidence-based decision-making in policy, practice, planning and management by ensuring that there is sufficient investment in research, building capacity and transferring knowledge.

This R&D Strategy sets out the rationale for oversight of co-ordinated activity, carried out across a wide range of organisations, towards the ultimate aim of securing evidence-led social services. It makes reference to a wide ranging programme of activities necessary to reach that objective, with the ultimate aim of improving services.

The low financial investment in research in social services, especially in comparison with other services such as health and education, must be addressed. The argument for securing additional investment is made, but needs to be fleshed out. Achievable proposals for the various types of investment, and linked plans for the most effective ways of using these, will be drawn up as part of the implementation process.

Currently there is no explicit social services policy on research in Scotland. This leaves us without an overall direction of travel and without clear priorities for research, resulting in research which is led by the interests of research producers, commissioners and funders. For research to be relevant, useful and used, there needs to be a better system for determining priorities and linking these to funding. The role of service users, carers and other key stakeholders in these processes needs to be enhanced.

Knowledge creation and use are vital if services are to be effective and efficient. The structured generation of practice wisdom through reflection and the accumulation of information gathered through monitoring, evaluation and inspection need to be systematically analysed to make sure that they are used to improve services. In turn, this will require widespread integration of evaluation methods into service delivery, along with the use of more rigorous and robust research methods for specific areas needing deeper examination.

If, as suggested by Handyman⁶, staff in social services are not equipped to digest research, there is clearly an urgent need to ensure that this situation is remedied. Additional resources for training and support of both practitioners and managers in all services will be needed. It will also be important to generate a culture where research is valued and seen as relevant to everyday service delivery work. Given the pressures on social services staff and managers, changes will be needed to accommodate differences in ways of working. Decision-making processes in social services do not routinely include evidence from research, so, again, changes in work processes will be necessary.

Currently there are inconsistent arrangements for checks on the use of sound methodology and good science in undertaking research and for guidance on ethical conduct of research that takes place outside universities. It is vital that guidelines on all of these important aspects of research are developed and implemented across all research projects.

⁶ Handyman in Walter, I Nutley, S., Percy-Smith, J., McNeish, D., and Frost, S. (2004) *Improving the Use of Research in Social Care Practice*, London: Social Care Institute for Excellence

High quality research is carried out in Scotland by researchers in academic departments and by others such as independent researchers and students on academic programmes. Some research is also undertaken by practitioners and others 'in-house'. Unfortunately much of this research fails to reach mainstream staff in social services, and that which is disseminated to practitioners and managers is often not considered, far less implemented. The Strategy, therefore, addresses the issue of knowledge transfer and exchange and the need for an accessible register and database of past, current and future research activity.

In discussing the particular nature of social services research, commentators often differentiate it from other kinds of social research by referring to the active involvement of service users in roles other than as subjects and respondents. Research that is genuinely user-led is still relatively uncommon and there is much work to be done under the Strategy before we can claim that this is regularly undertaken.

3.3 When is it to be achieved?

The overall timing in producing the Strategy is linked to the Implementation Plan for Changing Lives which included in its work plan for the Practice Governance Change Programme production of an R&D Strategy.

The Strategy will need to be 'owned' by all stakeholder groups: Scottish Government and Ministers, employers, managers, practitioners, academics in further and higher education, centres of excellence, professional and regulatory bodies, service users and their carers etc. A great many people from all the stakeholder groups have been involved in the process so far. The national Steering Group and three Working Groups and their sub-groups (Appendix 2) have generated material for the Strategy. This has begun to create interest and has started the debate about how best to work towards an evidence-informed culture. There will need to be a further engagement process once this draft has been circulated. A series of events will be arranged, and the process will be augmented by items placed on relevant newsletters, weblogs, podcasts etc.

In her introduction to Walter et al's Knowledge Review on Improving the Use of Research in Social Care Practice⁷, Handyman says:

'... there is little point in simply turning up the rate at which research flows to the social care workforce – little research in fact has direct applicability, many practitioners are not equipped to digest research and appropriate support systems are lacking. What we need is a better understanding of the relationship between social care research and the

⁷ Handyman in Walter, I Nutley, S., Percy-Smith, J., McNeish, D., and Frost, S. (2004) *Improving the Use of Research in Social Care Practice*, London: Social Care Institute for Excellence

work of social care practitioners, including what organisational structures are needed to realise the aim of using research to improve practice.'

These aims will clearly take time to achieve.

Walter et al investigated how best to approach the task of understanding the relationship between research and practitioners and the organisational structures that best assist the transfer of knowledge from research into practice. Their work highlighted the complexity of the task and underscored the view that to achieve the ultimate goal of using research to improve practice, a very wide range of arrangements needs to be put into place: there is no simple, quick or easy solution. The range of organisations, groups and individuals involved in making progress towards improving practice is substantial so that coordination and oversight of engagement and implementation processes will be needed.

Some aspects of the Strategy can be implemented more quickly than others, and it is important to remember that a strategy is essentially a long-term plan. However, one way to tackle this is to set different timescales for different aspects of the Strategy. These recommendations are intended to be a foundation for a discussion with all of the bodies concerned and it is anticipated that the order and timing of developments will need to change to take account of their priorities.

3.4 How will it be achieved?

Achieving successful implementation of the Strategy will require a complex plan involving a range of stakeholders and their organisations as there are many layers to the Strategy. It will involve the embedding of research in practice, creating a sound infrastructure for funding, coordination of research activity, integration of research into practice and increasing research investment capacity and capability.

The Strategy will have implications for the whole workforce in social services, and social service educators in Scotland's Colleges and Universities, as well as in the many other important organisations associated with the quality of service delivery and learning for practice, such as: the Scottish Funding Council, other research funding bodies, Scottish Social Services Council, Convention of Scottish Local Authorities, Care Commission, user groups, professional associations, Centres of Excellence etc. As evidence-informed practice is the ultimate goal, the efforts of all of these bodies and groups of people will need to be directed towards the integration of research into social services planning and delivery.

3.4.1 What does Evidence-informed Practice look like?

Hodson and Cooke⁸ (p 15) propose that evidence-informed practice means that:

'... decisions about how to meet the needs of vulnerable children, young people and adults are informed by an understanding of:

- the best available evidence about what is effective
- practice wisdom (the fruits of operational experience)
- the views of service users (e.g. about expectations, preferences or the impact of their problems and our interventions)

Evidence about what is effective comes from research – from large-scale academic studies, as well as from data gathered systematically by social care agencies (e.g. from local user consultations or service evaluations).'

In the day-to-day life of social services, evidence-informed practice means:

- Routinely using reflection as a tool in staff supervision and development
- Regularly evaluating the impact of interventions and services
- Creating opportunities for service users and carers to give feedback on their experiences
- Listening to service users and carers and responding constructively
- Asking challenging questions about 'received wisdom' and local practice
- Locating and using relevant research
- Being able to understand messages from research
- Making explicit the links between research, users' views, practice wisdom and decision-making
- Sharing knowledge and best practice as a matter of course

(Adapted from Hodson and Cooke, 2007)

⁸ Hodson, R. and Cooke, E. (2007) *Leading Evidence-informed Practice, A Handbook*, Dartington: Research in Practice,

Within the last ten years there has been an upsurge of interest in creating and using an evidence-base in social services, and a great deal has been written about it. Walter et al (2004 p. 25-26) identified three models of research use in social care:-

'1) The Research-base practitioner model, where:

It is the role and responsibility of the individual practitioner to keep abreast of research and ensure that it is used to inform day-to-day practice

The use of research is a linear process of accessing, appraising and applying research

Practitioners have high levels of professional autonomy to change practice based on research

Professional education and training are important in enabling research use

2) The embedded model, where:

Research use is achieved by embedding research in the systems and processes of social care, such as standards, policies, procedures and tools

Responsibility for ensuring research use lies with policy makers and service delivery managers

The use of research is both a linear and instrumental process: research is translated directly into practice change

Funding performance management and regulatory regimes are used to encourage the use of research-based guidance and tools

3) The organisational excellence model where:

The key to successful research use rests with social care delivery organisations: their leadership, management and organisation

Research use is supported by developing an organisational culture that is 'research-minded'

There is local adaptation of research findings and ongoing learning within organisations

Partnerships with local universities and intermediary organisations are used to facilitate both the creation and use of research knowledge'

The authors are at pains to point out that these models represent a simplification of reality and that in real life, combinations of these three models often operate together. Each model has its own strengths and weaknesses.

The *research-based practitioner* model relies on practitioners being research-aware, being able to find relevant research and staff having a high degree of autonomy. Findings from Walter et al's (2004) work suggest that few social staff read research routinely and often perceive it as irrelevant to their work. Problems with accessing research were reported, due to lack of materials or lack of materials that are 'user-friendly'; absence of the necessary skills; lack of time; and competing priorities.

In the *embedded research* model, Walter et al found that practitioners rarely engage directly with research findings themselves. More often research enters 'via policy community knowledge' (p. 31) or from its incorporation into guidance, practice tools and procedures, or through the tacit knowledge held by practitioners and service users. Responsibility for integrating research into practice lies with policy makers and service delivery managers, which in turn is likely to lead to a situation where, although policy is linked to research, the linkages are not explicit and practitioners are less likely to understand the reasoning behind the guidance or procedures to which they work. This will inevitably reduce the ownership of knowledge and evidence by practitioners.

In the *organisational excellence* model, development of a research-informed approach to practice lies with the whole organisation: practitioners, policy makers, learning and development staff, service planners and commissioners and managers. The systems and processes used within the organisation are shaped by adapting and learning from research to suit local needs and priorities.

'Organisational learning is to the fore, through local experimentation, evaluation and practice development based on research. Research knowledge thus becomes integrated with organisational knowledge ...Partnerships are forged with local universities and other intermediary organisations.....Practitioner knowledge becomes integrated with research knowledge in a much more dynamic and interactive process, though testing out research findings and shaping them to local contexts and experience.'

Walter et al⁹ (p. 34-35)

⁹ Handyman in Walter, I Nutley, S., Percy-Smith, J., McNeish, D., and Frost, S. (2004) *Improving the Use of Research in Social Care Practice*, London: Social Care Institute for Excellence

If our ambition is that, in the longer term, these are the kinds of organisation we want to deliver social services in Scotland, all stakeholders will need to be influenced; investment will need to be increased; and organisational and individual changes will need to be made.

The role for the R & D Strategy is to articulate the necessary requirements and the steps that need to be taken and make proposals for achieving them. The wide range of stakeholders and organisations involved and the variety of issues needing to be addressed will inevitably mean that the Strategy itself is complex.

4. So, where are we now?

The Joint University Council Social Work Education Committee's (JUC SWEC) Social Work Research Strategy in Higher Education¹⁰ (p. 5) states:

'The knowledge base to underpin existing social care services, to support their improvement and to make judgements about cost-effectiveness in their delivery is currently inadequate. Despite some notable exceptions, social work and social care policy and practice have developed largely without an adequate, closely connected research evidence base.'

According to Hodgkiss¹¹, writing about the current situation in Scotland, (2006, p 1)

- 'The research base is fragmented: evidence simply does not exist in many areas of social care practice
- Research priorities do not necessarily reflect the concerns of practitioners
- Academic research is only a minor contributor to the development of practice
- The social work academic workforce is ageing (47% over the age of 50)
- There has been little articulation of social services research needs and priorities (until recently social work research was not recognised as a research discipline in its own right by the Economic and Social Research Council [ESRC])

¹⁰ Joint University Council Social Work Education Committee, (2006) *Social Work Research Strategy in Higher Education*, London: Social Care Workforce Research Unit

¹¹ Hodgkiss, F. (2006) (Unpublished) *Background Information on the Research and Development Strategy for Social Services in Scotland*, Paper for the National Steering Group

- There is little capacity on the ground to interpret, use and undertake research
- Compared to other disciplines such as health, there is little investment in social care research (at best one fifth)
- It is currently no-one's job to develop and maintain an infrastructure for social care research'

Talking more widely about public services, Nutley and Davies¹² (2000) refer to 'an upsurge of interest in using research evidence to inform public sector policy and practice' (p.35).

There are strongly held opinions about the impact that research currently makes on practice – some saying that in some organisations research is routinely used to influence agency policy, planning and practice at all levels, others saying that this is rarely the case. As Nutley and Davies (p. 35) argue, there is a large gap between

'rhetoric and reality. Evidence on what works remains under-used and many practice interventions have weak evidence bases.'

In addressing the reasons for research appearing to have so little influence on practice, Nutley and Davies go on to look at the gap between researchers and practitioners (and managers, policy makers, trainers etc). Researchers have different interests from these other groups and this difference often leads to difficulties in communication. In addition to this, research-based knowledge is often 'imprecise, complex and contingent'; which is less than useful for policy makers, practitioners, managers etc who would prefer precision and clear guidance for direct application to practice.

Attempts to improve communication between researchers and practitioners (such as improved dissemination methods) have not significantly increased implementation of research findings (Bero et al, 1998 in Nutley and Davies, 2000). A multi-modal approach seems to be the most likely to work; and this works best when linked to organisational structures and processes. This suggests that one area needing to be closely examined, in relation to how best to ensure that research findings are integrated in to service policy, design and delivery, is that of *organisational learning*. This process requires us to:

- improve the quantity and quality of research in the field of social services;
- disseminate the outcomes of this research systematically; and

¹² Nutley, S. and Davies, H.T.O. (2000) Making a reality of Evidence-Based Practice: Some Lessons from the Diffusion of Innovations, *Public Money and Management* Oct – Dec pp 35 – 42.

- ensure the transfer of knowledge from research activity into the day to day practice of social services staff.

When it comes to evaluation, whether on an individual or service-wide basis, many practitioners are fearful on three grounds:

1. that close examination of their work and its outcomes may show that they have not done good work.
2. that perhaps they are not capable of good work, and
3. that perhaps nothing works in social services.

It is only by shifting away from the prevalence of blame within organisations and placing an emphasis on the potential for deriving affirmation and learning that practitioners can accept that scrutiny may produce positive outcomes for them.

5. Increasing capacity and capability

Increasing capacity and capability are about more people producing more and higher quality research outputs (including single case evaluations, internal reports, journal articles and books). To achieve this we will need to make it more possible for a wider range of staff in the workforce to learn about and practise use of evaluation and research skills. The key players in creating this possibility are universities, further education colleges, employers, research funders and Scottish Government.

5.1 The role of Universities and the Centres of Excellence

While universities are not the only places where research is carried out, their staff do make a very significant contribution to the research enterprise. JUC SWEC¹³ identified the following as critical factors influencing the amount of social care research carried out in Universities:

- Social work has a UK small academic base: around 800 full-time equivalent academics compared to over 5000 in education (which shares some of the same obstacles to research as social work)
- Only 44% of social work academics were research active in the 2001 Research Assessment Exercise (RAE) (where funding for universities is based on the quality of their research output)
- Social work has one of the oldest academic age profiles: 47% of staff are aged 50 or over

¹³ Joint University Council Social Work Education Committee, (2006) *Social Work Research Strategy in Higher Education*, London: Social Care Workforce Research Unit

- Social work has a high student: staff ratio relative to the fee-banding and unit costs of delivering social work education in comparison with other disciplines
- Two thirds of social work academics are based in post-1992 institutions which only receive 5% of total Economic and Social Research Council funding across all disciplines (ESRC is an important funder of quality social research)
- Social work has the lowest recruitment of non-UK national academics of any social science discipline'

Orme and Powell¹⁴, in a paper on building research capacity, identify a 'circle of resistance' to developing social services research capacity stemming from the small amount of research teaching on qualifying programmes and post-qualifying programmes. They argue that this results in students having poor ability to critically appraise research done by others and a lack of appreciation of the value of research for practice. There is currently little imperative in social services for continuing professional development (CPD) funding to be available for developing research skills and the tiny number of research posts in social services will give very few research career opportunities outside academic settings.

The authors go on to state that, when recruited subsequently as academics, some practitioners are inexperienced at both using and undertaking research and are unlikely therefore to prioritise it in their new academic environment. This causes problems in relation to ensuring that teaching is based on research evidence, that learning strategies are evidence-based and, as a result, in many universities the contribution of social work academics to the RAE is seriously weakened.

Social work research has shown considerable strength in some areas¹⁵

- 'Basic qualitative research methods
- Action research methods
- Accessing hard-to-research groups
- Involving service users in research processes
- Incorporating a diversity of knowledge bases
- Paying attention to impact, dissemination, application and implementation of findings

¹⁴ Orme, J. and Powell, J. (Unpublished) *Building Research Capacity: Student Training and Staff development, Draft Paper for JUCSWEC*

¹⁵ Joint University Council Social Work Education Committee, (2006) *Social Work Research Strategy in Higher Education*, London: Social Care Workforce Research Unit

There are, however, weaknesses, e.g:

- Basic and advanced quantitative research methods
- Advanced qualitative research methods
- Economic costing
- Theory building
- International links'

Some of these areas can be addressed through training but first there will need to be work done on convincing key stakeholders that this is necessary and valuable.

Orme and Powell summarise the areas that need to be addressed as:

- qualifying programmes;
- post-qualifying training;
- research training for social work academics; and
- support and training for research and development in social work agencies.

Feedback from staff working in social services is unequivocal about their lack of awareness of what goes on in universities by way of research; that what does emerge is not relevant to their needs, does not address their priorities and leaves them unclear about how to implement the findings.

It is, then, very likely that there is a large body of research locked up inside Universities, in the form of staff and student research activity, that does not reach the most appropriate audience.

The Centres of Excellence in Scotland (the Dementia Services Development Centre, STRADA, Criminal Justice Social Work Development Centre, Scottish Institute for Residential Child Care and the Scottish Consortium for Learning Disabilities) are contributing to the evidence base in their fields and to the dissemination of research and its integration into practice. Their success will, to a large extent, be dependent upon their ability to build relationships with social services agencies in order to ensure implementation of knowledge into practice. It would be helpful to know, from an independent evaluation, the extent to which this is currently being achieved and what steps might be taken to improve it.

There is emerging evidence on how best to maximise learning transfer from learning and development activity and this needs to be more systematically built into social service programmes to support best practice in education design and delivery.

These points can be summarised as:

- *producing high quality and relevant research;*
- *embedding research in university-based programmes for social services staff*
- *working with others to develop research policy and priorities for the sector*
- *working with employers to stimulate and support research in practice and its use to inform practice*
- *building evidence on learning transfer into programme design and delivery*

5.2 Issues that need to be addressed

Strategic issues

Producing high quality and relevant research by:

1. Debating within universities about how to address succession planning
2. Discussing how best to create more joint appointments between social services organisations and Universities
3. Developing partnerships between universities and social services organisations to examine how exchanges of staff between might be facilitated
4. Improving training opportunities for social work academics on research methods, especially quantitative methods
5. HEIs and Centres of Excellence working together to ascertain what additional measures might be employed to increase knowledge transfer.
6. Boosting doctoral and post-doctoral research programmes to widen availability to both academics and those in advanced practice positions.

Working with others, including service users and carers, to develop research policy and priorities for the sector

7. Strengthening academic leadership in Scotland so that academics contribute fully to the development of evidence-based policy, practice innovation and routine service evaluation
8. Creating a university research agenda that takes account of the priorities of social services agencies, is accessible, timely and available

Operational issues

Embedding research in university-based programmes for social services staff

9. Linking teaching to research and including teaching on research methods within university programmes
10. Building a range of post-qualifying research masters programmes relevant to social services with flexible delivery to ensure greater accessibility for social service workers
11. Creating more courses on practitioner research, run by Universities, which include critical appraisal skills

Working with employers to stimulate and support research in practice and its use to inform practice

12. Creating closer links between agencies and Universities to improve communication, quality, quantity and relevance of research and research opportunities
13. Including within university research proposals time for researchers to engage with agencies, beyond dissemination, on the implementation of findings
14. Promoting and publicising the research work of students (projects, dissertations, theses) either in collections of their own or through routes generated by employers

Building evidence on learning transfer into programme design and delivery

15. Building research on effective learning into curriculum and course design

6. The Role of Scotland's colleges

Colleges of further education have not traditionally been seen as places where staff are research-active and their learning programmes are often not research-based. However, the greatest majority of the social services workforce of 136,000+ are likely to attend a college for their qualifications. If we are serious about wanting to have a research-aware workforce it is imperative that colleges are included as a central part of the R&D Strategy.

Opportunities need to be taken to make students aware of the relevance of research appropriate to their stage of development, their work and their workplace.

In addition to ensuring that college staff are familiar with research, through learning about research methods and, where appropriate, undertaking research in their own field, the many developments in educational and learning

research apply in great measure to working with all students and should, therefore, be part of the staff development arrangements for college staff.

These points can be summarised as:

- *basing teaching and learning methods on evidence from research*
- *introducing students to research*
- *encouraging students to base their work on best practice*
- *facilitating the adoption of knowledge creation as a role for all staff in social services*

6.1 Issues that need to be addressed

Strategic issues

Basing teaching and learning methods on evidence from research:

1. Making available staff development opportunities to embed research in learning and teaching in FE
2. Giving staff in FE colleges time to undertake research as part of their work
3. Weaving research into the curricula of FE programmes
4. Building research on effective learning into curriculum and course design

Operational issues

Introducing students to research and encouraging them to base their work on best practice

5. Making training in research methods available to staff in FE colleges
6. Encouraging modest research activity by students as part of FE programmes
7. Facilitating the adoption of knowledge creation as a role for all staff in social services
8. Including knowledge creation in preparation for job roles within social services

7. Embedding Research in Social Services Organisations

The Role of Employers

Daphne Statham, writing in the foreword to a book¹⁶ on reflective practice, comments that:

'The skills secured in qualifying training can easily be degraded into what passes muster in the employing agency. Where standards are high, learning on the job will be a major source for improvement... Equally, organisations that promote excellence will assume that this alone will not be enough. External expertise is a resource that needs to supplement, but not replace, learning from and alongside colleagues.'

The bringing together of practice wisdom and research into a system that is continually refreshed and that disseminates relevant knowledge from elsewhere is what social services should be aiming for.

Social services staff 'cover a diverse field of activity' and the 'purview of social care is extremely wide'¹⁷. The Social Care Institute for Excellence (SCIE) has developed a typology¹⁸ for the knowledge used in social care.

- 1 Organisational knowledge: gained from organising social care, through governance and regulation activities
- 2 Practitioner knowledge: gained from doing social care, which tends to be tacit, personal and context-specific
- 3 User knowledge: gained from experience of and reflection on using social care services
- 4 Research knowledge: gathered systematically, mostly explicit and provided in reports, evaluations etc.
- 5 Policy community knowledge: gained from the wider policy context, residing in the civil service, think tanks and agencies'

These types of knowledge are drawn from a wide range of sources but what seems evident is that very little of it is drawn from research (Walter et al, 2004). In Sheldon and Chilvers'¹⁹ survey of social services staff, 5% of staff claimed that regular discussion of research findings and their application was a regular feature of staff supervision sessions. While the quality and nature of data

¹⁶ Martyn, H. (ed) (2000) *Developing reflective practice*, Bristol: Policy Press

¹⁷ Wilkinson, D. (Unpublished) *Developing a Research Strategy for Social Work/Care in Scotland*

¹⁸ Walter, I., Nutley, S., Percy-Smith, J, McNeish, D. and Frost, S. (2004) *Improving the Use of Research in Social Care Practice*, London: SCIE (p.viii)

¹⁹ Sheldon, B. and Chilvers, R. (2000) *Evidence-based Social Care*, Lyme Regis: Russell House Publishing

collected by social services may be arguable, there can be little doubt that a great deal of information is collected. Beyond this point however, things are much less clear. For evidence or research to be useful it needs to be carefully considered and compared with the local and current situation. This is the true meaning of reflective practice.

Data, including those shared by other agencies, need to be tested for authenticity, reliability and validity and their congruence with the local picture either confirmed or disconfirmed. Prior to using them as the basis for decision-making, they need to be interrogated against other useful and relevant frameworks such as the vulnerability/resilience matrix²⁰ a risk analysis, the assessment triangle²¹, all of which are service-related, or another more generic framework such as a SWOT or Force Field Analysis. These give practitioners and managers an opportunity to stand back from the evidence and analyse it in the light of their own knowledge and understanding of local or individual service user need. It would appear that little of this activity takes place just now, which may indicate a learning need and/or a need to change agency processes and procedures.

Figures for attendance at training courses on interpreting research findings²² are interesting: 68% said that they had never attended such a course; and 63% said they had not attended a training course on using research findings at work. When asked about departmental encouragement to keep abreast of research 28% said that there was no such encouragement; 38% that there was a little; and 28% said that there was some. Interestingly, 1% of respondents said that there was *discouragement* from keeping abreast of research.

The high percentage (66%) of staff in this study who said that there was little or no encouragement gives an indication that there is still some distance to travel in relation to turning social services workplaces into settings where research is of interest to all.

Wilkinson argued²³ '*practitioners are more likely to regard research in a utilitarian way and are less concerned with the intellectually defensible.*'

Walter et al²⁴ suggest that research evidence is used to:

²⁰ Daniel, B. and Wassell, S. (2002) *The Early Years*, London: Jessica Kingsley

²¹ Department of Health, (2000) *Framework for the Assessment of Children In Need and Their Families*, London: HMSO

²² Sheldon, B. and Chilvers, R. (2000) *Evidence-based Social Care*, Lyme Regis: Russell House Publishing

²³ Wilkinson, D. (Unpublished) *Developing a Research Strategy for Social Work/Care in Scotland*

²⁴ Walter, I., Nutley, S., Percy-Smith, J, McNeish, D. and Frost, S. (2004) *Improving the Use of Research in Social Care Practice*, London: SCIE (p.viii)

- *Provide a foundation for restructuring services*
- *Inform policy and practice reviews*
- *Address specific issues*
- *Support a policy stance or argument*
- *Promote reasoned debate*
- *Assist with service monitoring and review*
- *Provide quality assurance*
- *Safeguard or justify funding*

and to inform:

- *Care Standards*
- *Occupational standards*
- *Educational and training requirements*

In their review of the links between research and practice, Hughes et al²⁵ suggest that there are very weak links between the two. Dedicated resources for dissemination were rare, and many research proposals and projects included little or no reference to how this would be done. The role of leaders in social services is stressed in the review: managers need to demonstrate the value of research as a source of new ideas and model the integration of research into their management practice. The influence of organisational culture is central to the likelihood of staff integrating research into their work, and this is an area where managers can have a significant impact.

The future success of organisations will depend on their ability to create industry-relevant knowledge and ensure that it is disseminated to staff and then embedded in their daily work²⁶. This assumes that attention is focused on the active generation of new knowledge and a programme of CPD that encourages and supports staff to learn from their own practice and that of others. Garvin²⁷ (in Harvard Business Review, 1998, p 51) talks of a learning organisation as one that is:

'skilled at creating, acquiring and transferring knowledge, and at modifying its behaviour to reflect new knowledge and insights'

These organisations actively manage the learning process to ensure that it 'occurs by design rather than by chance' (p52).

²⁵ Hughes, M., McNeish, D., Newman, T, Roberts, H. and Sachev, D. (2000) *Making Connections: Linking Research and Practice*, Basildon: Barnardo's

²⁶ Wilson, J.P. (2004) *Human Resource Development*, London: Kogan Page

²⁷ Garvin in Harvard Business Review on Knowledge Management (1998) Boston: Harvard Business School Press

Viewing staff as repositories of knowledge or know-how may encourage employers to value what they bring to their roles and to pay attention to activities which lend themselves to both learning and putting learning into practice. Handy (2001), talking about organisations as elephants and staff members as fleas, suggests (p87) that:

'More of that elusive intellectual property will then belong to the fleas and be only on loan to the elephants'

While operational and resource concerns may limit or direct the amount and type of research that can be undertaken by practitioners there is plenty of scope within all workloads for selected pieces of evaluation to be conducted by practitioners so that data on the impact of interventions are gathered and fed into the wider system for inclusion in service review and planning processes.

Practitioners, managers, planners and policy makers access research in a range of ways and Walter et al found that a large number of studies were in use in social care. It is clear, though, that much of this use is derived from individual interest and pursuit rather than as a consequence of a strategic or policy-driven approach. They recommended that:

'- The social care field should use this review as a starting point to take stock of current initiatives to promote research use

- A whole systems approach offers a useful framework for promoting and developing research use in social care

- A research and development agenda needs to be articulated and pursued to ensure initiatives to promote research use are based on good evidence'

SIESWE undertook a survey of social services to find out what research activity is currently undertaken and discovered that knowledge about research activity inside social services is extremely patchy. Data from the survey revealed that in a number of agencies our questionnaire was not completed because there was no identifiable individual or group who had responsibility for research. Other agency respondents commented that they did not know what research activity is carried out in their organisation. Some agencies, however, were able to give a very full account of a wide range of size and type of research underway and in use. In these organisations there were individuals who had specific responsibility for research.

Another Institute survey on Knowledge for Practice among a convenience sample of social services staff showed that by far the greatest majority of respondents sought to develop their practice or solve a practice problem by consulting a colleague. This is a pragmatic and useful approach but, over time,

has the effect simply of recycling the same knowledge, rather than bringing fresh ideas to bear.

In addition to knowing what research has been undertaken and recorded within and outwith their organisations, it is important that social services staff become intelligent consumers of research and skilled in the dissemination and utilisation of research outcomes.

In Scotland, there is currently no research conduct framework for social services (outwith the well-established ethical frameworks in place in Universities) which guides researchers on ethical conduct of research, achieving informed consent from respondents etc. This is clearly necessary to ensure that all research participants (respondents, staff and service users) are fully informed of their rights to refuse to participate and are fully aware of the implications of their involvement, their right to, and limits on, confidentiality etc.

Further, an important feature of ethical scrutiny of research proposals as executed in universities and in the health service is that of ensuring that the science involved in research studies is good science: that is that methods are robust, appropriate for the subject matter and respondents, and are likely to be carried out with integrity. Such a framework for social services research needs to be developed to protect service use and staff respondents, and located where researchers such as social services staff and independent researchers can readily access it.

A relatively new arrival into the field of social research is the Data Protection Act (2002), which has led some social services to refuse access by researchers to service users and their files. Since outcome measures are so important to service and intervention evaluation it is vital that this matter is examined and guidance given to agencies so that research activity is not unnecessarily hampered.

A further and related issue is the implementation of the regulation and inspection frameworks. The workload generated for social services in preparation for inspection has led some managers to refuse access by researchers to staff, records and service users. Again this is a most undesirable consequence of regulation and needs to be given attention or essential research and development activity will be seriously harmed, albeit unintentionally.

An increasingly significant aspect of social services management is the commissioning of services, and its importance appropriately stems from a range of imperatives such as the need to ensure that relevant services of high quality are made available to service users. It is also vital that the financial aspects of securing services are managed responsibly. However, this requires that commissioners are able to use research and evidence to check what kind of services best meet service users' needs, and that particular local and individual needs are met. Ability to critically examine data such as complaints or

feedback from service users and carers is a central aspect of the role of commissioners, so ability to check for authenticity, validity and reliability are essential core skills for these staff members.

In the work leading up to the drafting of this document we have found among social services in the statutory, voluntary and private sector, a range of excellent activities which have stimulated and supported the integration of research into social services. Some of these activities were developed entirely by social services staff without additional support, while others have been developed as demonstration projects contributing to the development of the R&D Strategy. These include:

- a journal club
- a writing-for-publication group
- a local research register
- a group of practice teachers seeking to undertake modest research projects
- communities of practice around specific practice issues
- a seminar on evidence-based practice
- a performance improvement system based on case evaluations
- an ethical framework developed by one local authority
- partnerships between universities and a local authority
- lunchtime research lectures
- research methods learning programmes
- access to data banks (IDOX) and use of Athens passwords for staff
- work with local public libraries to stock relevant text books
- collections of MSc dissertations

These and similar activities should be given greater prominence and priority to underscore their significance and make their outcomes more widely available.

Data gathering for the Strategy has shown that there is a considerable communication gap between the worlds of research, practice and management. Arrangements that will facilitate the transfer of relevant knowledge across this gap are essential and need to form a central part of the Strategy.

Given that most social services agencies do not currently have a research-aware culture, it will be necessary for a range of initiatives to be in place for some time before there is a noticeable shift, but the above list demonstrates what can be done once the decision about the direction of travel is taken.

These points can be summarised as:

- *creating structures and processes based on research evidence*
- *building a culture that supports and facilitates research in the workplace*

- *ensuring that decisions on service design, development and delivery are evidence-based*

7.2 Issues that need to be addressed

Strategic issues

Creating structures and processes based on research evidence:

1. Linking policies and procedures to their evidence-base and making this explicit so that staff are able see the relevance of the evidence for their work
2. Making decisions on commissioning of services based on evidence so commissioners are research-aware and research-literate. Ability to design and commission service evaluations would be of great benefit

Building a culture that supports and facilitates research in the workplace

3. Canvassing service users' views on research priorities
4. Developing a framework for approval of research proposals and for oversight of ethical conduct by researchers by and for employers and other researchers, independent of universities
5. Examining ways of creating and sustaining research awareness in workplaces
6. Initiating a register of research which includes that undertaken by and in social services to ensure that findings from research are disseminated, that gaps and duplication in areas of research are eliminated
7. Using the Learning Networks as a focus for short courses on research methods, co-ordinating knowledge-sharing events etc
8. Creating practitioner research schemes which enable and support a number of practitioners to relinquish half of their workload for 6-9 months while they undertake a piece of research of interest to them and their service, to implement the findings, returning to their full-time substantive posts at the end of the period.
9. Arranging staff exchanges between agencies and Universities for agency staff to work in an HEI and benefit from working in a learning- and research-centred environment while the academic would benefit from closer contact with the field

10. Including in social services staff workloads the time to focus on and undertake modest research projects
11. Encouraging, training and supporting service users to undertake research
12. Working with others to develop incentives for staff to become interested in research
13. Strengthening and developing the role of the Association of Directors of Social Work (ADSW) in research, perhaps in seeking and monitoring research access to staff, records and service users.
14. Ensuring that managers are enabled to undertake data analysis, make good use of data, and routinely understand, use and support research.

Operational issues

Ensuring that decisions on service design, development and delivery are evidence-based:

15. Nominating a person or persons in each agency to take responsibility for co-ordinating research in the agency
16. Support given by a central body who can add resources, knowledge and skills to social services staff to generate and sustain research awareness and research activity.
17. Locating research-literate individuals at a local level who can articulate agencies' research needs and interests and bridge into the research world to find and interpret the results of research in journals etc.
18. Using local practitioner fora as points where local research activity is stimulated, supported and shared
19. Agencies using support to develop better systems for analysing and promulgating data currently collected (from routine monitoring, complaints, user feedback etc) in service evaluations
20. Supporting social services to use evaluation methods to examine selected aspects of their work in order to accumulate and disseminate practice wisdom on interventions and services
21. Including research evidence in staff supervision arrangements in all services routinely - managers may need some help with this.
22. Helping social services staff to identify useful research and interpret and apply findings to their own work

23. Using an approach to service delivery which systematically uses intelligence from successful practice, near-misses and situations where things go wrong delivered via staff seminars, staff supervision, staff development and management processes.
24. Developing models of communities of practice to progress thinking and working in selected areas
25. Clarifying the relationship between evaluation, research, CPD and Post-Registration Training and Learning (PRTL)
26. Staff development professionals using research on retention of learning to ensure that the most is made of learning opportunities
27. Using a team approach to practice learning will enable students to bring their learning and questioning approach to bear on service development
28. Developing guidance for agency commissioners of research on best practice in commissioning research
29. Including research awareness in appropriate job descriptions
30. Making best use of research undertaken by staff on learning programmes.

8. Creating an Effective Research Infrastructure

8.1 The Role of Funders

Marsh and Fisher²⁸ argue that the overall funding of social work research is disproportionately low when compared with health (a ratio of 1:17.29). Comparing the percentage of government and charity research expenditure as a percentage of total service expenditure, in health 2.52% is spent, whereas in social services only 0.31% (ratio of 16.25:1). The figure quoted in the Science and Innovation Investment Framework²⁹ as the government's aspiration for the knowledge-based economy is 2.5% of GDP invested in research and development by 2014. JUC SWEC³⁰ argues that this figure is already met in health services but 'would require an eight-fold increase' in social care (p7). More than half of research funding in health comes from industrial sources. In

²⁸ Marsh, P and Fisher, M. (2005) *Developing the Evidence Base for Social Work and Social Care Practice*, London: Social Care Institute for Excellence

²⁹ Department for Education and Skills, Department of Trade and Industry and HM Treasury (2004) *Science and innovation investment framework 2004 -2010*, London: HMSO

³⁰ Joint University Council Social Work Education Committee, (2006) *Social Work Research Strategy in Higher Education*, London: Social Care Workforce Research Unit

social care central government is the largest funder. Local authorities and the private sector contribute very little, while charities do provide some funding.

Marsh and Fisher highlight the benefits to health care of a strategic approach to research. They also propose that the positive impact of the support for the research infrastructure in health has delivered a significantly increased rating in the RAE and that this has had a positive knock-on with the funding councils, creating a 'virtuous circle'. Discussions about increasing capacity in social service research continue to be held with the ESRC³¹ and funding forms a significant element of this.

In this paper Orme (p. 1) writes:

'Social Work is a 'practice oriented discipline' and as such has been identified by the ESRC (together with Education and Socio-legal studies and Business and Management) as being a special case. The evidence for this 'special case' comes in part from the demographic review of the social sciences (Mills et al, 2005) and in part from the performance of Social Work in the various measures of research performance (e.g. the RAE). As a result of this designation there have been a number of activities to improve the performance of social work as a research active academic discipline. These include:

- Knowledge reviews by the Social Care Institute for Excellence (SCIE) on research utilisation³²
- An overview of the relationship between the ESRC and the social work academic sector funded by the ESRC and SCIE³³
- Evaluation of the kinds and quality of social work research funded by the ESRC, SCIE and SIESWE³⁴
- Publication of a research strategy by the Joint University Council Social Work Education Committee³⁵

³¹ Orme, J. (Unpublished) Consultation with the ESRC on Developing a Strategy for Research Capacity Building in Social Work

³² ³² Walter, I., Nutley, S., Percy-Smith, J, McNeish, D. and Frost, S. (2004) *Improving the Use of Research in Social Care Practice*, London: SCIE

³³ Shaw, I and Mullender, A. (2004) *ESRC Research, Social Work and Social Care*, London: SCIE

³⁴ Shaw, I and Norton, M. (2006) *The Kinds and Quality of Social Work Research in UK Universities*, York: University of York

³⁵ Joint University Council Social Work Education Committee, (2006) *Social Work Research Strategy in Higher Education*, London: Social Care Workforce Research Unit

- Successful bid to ESRC Research Development Initiative (RDI) to increase the confidence and competence of academic social work.

These initiatives indicate that the social work academic community is already working to improve the capacity and capability of social work researchers'

Much of the literature on social services research draws attention to the cross-cutting nature of social services (e.g. Social Care Workforce Research Unit, 2006) which means that there is a range of funding bodies with an interest in promoting and supporting social services research. Given this shared interest and in order to maximise the pot of funding available, encouragement and support to these bodies to form strategic partnerships is an essential component of an effective R&D strategy (JUCSWEC p9).

At the time of writing (Nov 07) there is no dedicated stream within the Scottish Funding Council's (SFC) strategic research funding arrangements for social services research. A review of research capacity in Scotland is being undertaken to establish the case for such an initiative to parallel developments in nursing and allied health professions, applied education, crime and justice and policing research. This review will be completed later in 2008.

The Chief Scientist's Office runs a number of initiatives which stimulate and support research. These include Capacity Building in Health Service Research which offers, via competitive processes, postgraduate studentships for higher degrees, visiting fellowships and clinical academic fellowships (medical and dental). In addition, there is the Scottish Practices and Professionals Involved in Research (SPPIRe) scheme which funds the Primary Research Networks administered by the Scottish School of Primary Care, through four regional research nodes. These provide a national resource for research in the community and primary care, a data base of potential research hosts, recruitment of practitioners to liaise with Principal Investigators, a contact point etc. There are Research Career Awards which allow staff to be bought out of their roles for 10 – 25% of their time for 2 – 5 years to conduct research. There are also Research Training Fellowships awarded full- or part-time for 1 – 3 years to enable staff to further develop their research skills within a host institution and under academic supervisions. Clinical Academic Training Fellowships are awarded in areas where there is an identified shortage of expertise. There are also Research Grants (under £40k) given to projects across mental health, public health and cancer care.

A recent report³⁶ recommended the development of four levels of awards for nurses: at M level (100 p.a), doctoral level (50 p.a), post-doctoral (20 p.a), senior clinical academic fellowship level (10 p.a). The responses to the consultation on this document (2007) indicated that, given the size of the nursing workforce (700,000 in the UK) these proposed numbers were too small. For a Scottish social

³⁶ UKCRC (2007) *Developing the Best Research Professionals*, London: UKCRC

services workforce of 136,000 it might be that these should be reduced by a factor of 5, although it must be recognised that all 7000,000 nurses in the workforce are qualified, whereas this is not the case for the social services workforce. However, given that the baseline for research in the social services is so low, it might be appropriate to aim for a similar proportion of staff funded to undertake similar wards. An appropriate framework for social services might be (figures per annum):

Level 1: Graduate certificate - 20 awards

Level 2: Masters - 10 awards

Level 3: Doctoral – 4 awards

Level 4: Post-doctoral – 2 awards

Health services have a longer and better established tradition of incorporating research into the workplace and careers of staff, but even so practitioners and managers are well aware that there is still a long way to go. This kind of systematic investment is a crucial first step, but it is important to note the long lead-time before results are evident so that unrealistic expectations are not created.

Creating a research-aware culture and an increase in capacity and capability in social services will not happen unless there is considerable investment for a suite of activities across many organisations. It is also very unlikely to be achieved by incremental and organic change since the shifts required are too large and need to be made across a wide range of organisations. This can only be achieved with an injection of substantial sums of money, supported by a robust infrastructure covering activity on a number of fronts.

Valuable and significant research collaborations already exist in fields such as health, education, child protection, policing and criminal justice. There is clearly a need for more effective linking between social service research bodies and attention has been directed towards this during the development of this document.

These points can be summarised as:

- *significantly increasing investment by both government and funding bodies (such as the Scottish Funding Council, The Economic and Social Research Council)*
- *co-ordinating and overseeing the implementation of the research strategy through a central grouping comprising relevant research stakeholder interests, including those of service users and carers*
- *working with others to develop research policy and priorities*

8.2 Issues that need to be addressed

Strategic issues

Significantly increasing investment in social services research by funders (the Scottish Funding Council, social services agencies, funding bodies such as the ESRC, Joseph Rowntree Foundation, Scottish Government etc) as an urgent priority

1. Creating a dedicated funding stream for social services research across universities and FE colleges
2. Taking a strategic approach to funding developed, building on the expertise of stakeholders

Co-ordinating and overseeing the implementation of the research strategy through a central grouping comprising relevant research stakeholder interests, including those of service users and carers

3. Creating closer partnerships between universities, colleges and social services developed around allocation of funds
4. Building a suite of research awards to stimulate and encourage social services research
5. Developing research collaborations across social services and related disciplines (e.g. police, health, housing, education)

Operational issues

6. Knowledge Reviews across a range of topics funded to ensure that research activity is properly directed

8.3 The Role of Regulatory bodies

Regulation and inspection in social services are conducted by the Social Work Inspection Agency (SWIA) and the Care Commission among others. Both organisations gather a great deal of information from questionnaires, reports, internal documents and interviews with staff, service users and carers. Crerar³⁷, reviewing national inspection processes with a view to rationalising them, recommended that the number of regulatory bodies be reduced so it may be

³⁷ Crerar, L. (2007) *Crerar Review: The Report of the Independent Review of Regulation, Audit, Inspection and Complaints Handling of Public Services in Scotland*, Edinburgh: Scottish Government

that future monitoring inspection regimes change but, whatever happens, there is clearly a need for the maximum use to be made of information collected.

In preparation for this Strategy discussions have been held with both SWIA and the Care Commission. SWIA plans to post some of the data it collects on a web site in the future and this will make valuable demographic information about the workforce available for secondary analysis.

It would be very useful, in the cause of supporting and developing research-mindedness and evidence-based practice, if research-awareness and the integration of research in practice (including within commissioned services) could be incorporated into performance standards against which social services are inspected.

The Scottish Social Services Council (SSSC) registers individual practitioners and it would be a further step forward if research-awareness was made a requirement for continued registration and included in arrangements for continuing professional development (CPD) and post-registration training and learning (PRTL).

These points can be summarised as ensuring that:

- *regulatory bodies make explicit their commitment to the significance of research in all aspects of social services*
- *regulations include expectations that staff are research-aware and research-literate*
- *requirements that service design, development and delivery are based on sound research evidence*
- *knowledge creation and exchange as routine functions of service delivery organisations*

8.4 Issues that need to be addressed

Strategic issues

Regulatory bodies making explicit their commitment to the significance of research in all aspects of social services and creating expectations that staff are research-aware and research-literate

Requiring that service design, development and delivery are based on sound research evidence

1. Better sharing of data between regulatory bodies examined as a matter of urgency
2. The Learning Networks and the SSSC working with others to agree how best to support the integration of research into practice

3. Incorporating research use into criteria for monitoring and inspection

Operational issues

Knowledge creation and exchange as routine functions of service delivery organisations:

4. Requiring the integration of research-mindedness in the rules for CPD and PRTL
5. Making data that can be shared available for secondary analysis

9 The role of Scottish Government and the Establishment of a National Research Centre

Scottish Government will need to be proactive in promoting the R&D Strategy and working with partners to develop the research agenda. A Strategy without funding and without strong support inside government will not be effective either in having an impact on the field or having an influence on government policy.

The absence of a consistent and co-ordinated approach to social services research has contributed in no small measure to the current situation. There is a clear need for oversight of the Strategy, research policy and priorities and an infrastructure which stimulates and supports an increase in research activity across social services agencies, universities, centres of excellence, colleges etc.

Currently there is no clear mechanism for the determination of research priorities either at national or local level, resulting in a research agenda disproportionately influenced by research producers. This has led to ad hoc development of activity; an unsystematic approach to the dissemination of findings; poor implementation into practice; and an absence of explicit linkage between evidence and national and local policy. It is important to develop priorities for research in conjunction with managers and practitioners in social services to ensure that studies are relevant to the interests of service users and carers and the concerns of those who work in the front line.

There is a need to better understand the barriers and facilitators of research within social services. Received wisdom is that the biggest barrier is time³⁸ but it would be useful to test this in a more contemporary Scottish environment.

One way to remedy the situation would be to establish a national social services research centre charged with the task of implementing the R&D

³⁸ Sheldon, B. and Chilvers, R. (2002) An Empirical Study of the Obstacles to Evidence-Based Practice, *Social Work and Social Sciences Review*, 10(1) 2002 pp. 6-26.

Strategy. It would include co-ordinating, stimulating and supporting research activity in social services in Scotland. This would require a small number of staff whose roles would be to work alongside the universities, colleges, employers, centres of excellence, research collaborations in related disciplines etc to achieve the vision of increasing the quality and quantity of research undertaken in Scotland and ensuring that decisions on service design, policy and practice are evidence-based. Evidence from elsewhere suggests that this centre should not be located in a single institution.

Work on developing research priorities could be led by staff employed within this body, calling on the views of service users and carers, staff in social services agencies and academics, so that a research agenda could be developed and linked to the research award structure and to any funding investment.

This centre would have responsibility for keeping databases of research and researchers. Experience of the research register in England is that without dedicated staff time to collect and post the information from social services, the register is not kept up to date by agencies. The centre could also host the ethical approval mechanism for research carried out outwith the universities. The link between these two aspects of the Strategy is important to ensure that each informs the other. The central research body could develop and possibly deliver training, materials, advice and support on the research process.

To help deal with the perceived and actual separation between research and practice it is essential to foster better communication between the people who produce research and those who could use it to inform what they do. A useful development might be to locate employees of a national research centre within the four SSSC Learning Network areas where employers, colleges and universities come together to promote development of the workforce. The task of these employees would be to work across the divide by interpreting practice concerns so that researchers can develop proposals and methods to investigate live issues that can influence practice and to monitor research outputs locally, nationally and internationally, interpreting these so that they can be more readily applied in social services settings.

These staff members could work closely with learning and development staff to support the integration of evidence into practice, locating and providing useful learning materials, facilitating initiatives such as journal clubs, practitioner research groups etc.

One important way in which Scottish Government can encourage and support practice-based research is to allocate pump-priming funding for research projects where practitioners and academics to work in partnership.

Integrated working is now widely accepted as an important way forward in the public sector, yet in relation to research it remains a relatively undeveloped area. Research in this area is urgently needed.

Work needs to be done on establishing a map of the research collaborations already established and active in the field of social services and the other disciplines with connected areas of interest (such as the Centre for Integrated Health Care Research, Applied Educational Research Scheme [AERS], Centre for Policing Research) and to support beginning developments (such as the proposal for University of Strathclyde to host research in social services learning technology) to maximise the benefits of their activities.

These points can be summarised as:

- *significantly increasing investment by both government and funding bodies (such as the Scottish Funding Council, The Economic and Social Research Council)*
- *creating an infrastructure for co-ordinating and overseeing the implementation of the research strategy through a central grouping comprising relevant research stakeholder interests, including those of service users and carers*
- *working with others to develop research policy and priorities*

9.1 Issues that need to be addressed

Strategic issues

Significantly increasing investment by both government and funding bodies (such as the Scottish Funding Council, The Economic and Social Research Council):

1. Identifying and securing appropriate additional funding
2. Making funding available for collaborative projects between universities and social services staff

Creating an infrastructure for co-ordinating and overseeing the implementation of the research strategy through a central grouping comprising relevant research stakeholder interests, including those of service users and carers

3. Creating and supporting the design and implementing of a national social services research centre for Scotland to support the implementation and ongoing updating of the R&D Strategy
4. Planning a co-ordinated approach, involving all stakeholders, to setting up and maintaining a research infrastructure progressed

Working with others to develop research policy and priorities

5. Undertaking to establish the readiness of stakeholders to implement the Strategy and to identify how best to facilitate progress
6. Developing a mechanism for determining research priorities
7. Ensuring that effective integrated working is given attention and funding.
8. Determining the best way to develop and implement a comprehensive social services research register

10. Conclusion

Achieving a research-aware culture in which evidence-informed practice is the norm will require commitment and a concerted effort on the part of all the stakeholders involved: service users and carers, funders, social services, universities and colleges, centres of excellence etc. New structures, procedures and processes will be needed to both raise the profile of research and evidence and to develop and sustain new ways of working. Organisational excellence will not be achieved overnight, so we all need to be 'in it for the long haul'. Committed people need to be placed in key roles to ensure that initial enthusiasm is maintained and directed towards the critical points. None of it will be possible without additional investment targeted in ways that make most impact.

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November 2007

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Detailed discussion of definitions of research

JUC SWEC's Social Work Research Strategy in Higher Education (2006, p3) uses the Research Assessment Exercise (RAE) definition of research and social work research (for 2009). This says that:

'Research is understood as original investigation undertaken in order to gain knowledge and understanding Social work is an applied policy and practice-orientated discipline, which is strongly theoretically informed and can generate further developments in theory, policy and practice. Research in social work covers:

- a) *Theory, methodology, ethics and values, and pedagogy as they apply to social work and social care and to substantive issues in these areas of study.*
- b) *Relevant links with other disciplines – most importantly anthropology, criminology, demography, development studies, economics, education, gerontology, health studies, history, law, penology, philosophy, politics, psychology, social policy and sociology*
- c) *Relevant links with other stakeholders, professional, service users and carers*
- d) *Policy-making processes, practice, governance, and management, service design, delivery and use, and inter-professional relationships*
- e) *Comparative research and research in to international institutions, policy and practice.'*

While this definition may be suitable for staff and students in higher education, there will be many staff members in the social services workforce for whom it will be a deterrent. Staff are often put off by what they see as complex, academic and potentially irrelevant to their work. As our ultimate ambition is to widen the range of people who are research-aware we will need to be more inclusive in our definitions.

Alston and Bowles (2003) suggest that social research is:

'the systematic observation and/or collection of information to find or impose a pattern, to make a decision or take some action.'

Fuller and Petch (1995, p3) call it *'systematic intellectual inquiry'*. Chambers Dictionary adds a further dimension by calling it *'systematic investigation towards increasing the sum of knowledge'*. In another

book on research for practitioners Abbott and Sapsford (1998), the lower key definition of

'finding out about things, looking for information about them and trying to make sense of them in the light of evidence'

is used in an argument to persuade practitioners that research is something they can do every day. The notion of 'everydayness' is crucial if we are to convince social services staff that research is something to do with them. Using exclusive language will further convince them that this is an activity for specially-commissioned 'outside' people some of whom may have as their main interest giving them negative feedback on their work.

List of Issues that need to be addressed

Issues for Universities and Centres for Excellence

Strategic issues

Producing high quality and relevant research by:

1. Debating within universities about how to address succession planning
2. Discussing how best to create more joint appointments between social services organisations and Universities
3. Developing partnerships between universities and social services organisations to examine how exchanges of staff between might be facilitated
4. Improving training opportunities for social work academics on research methods, especially quantitative methods
5. HEIs and Centres of Excellence working together to ascertain what additional measures might be employed to increase knowledge transfer.
6. Boosting doctoral and post-doctoral research programmes to widen availability to both academics and those in advanced practice positions.

Working with other, including service users and carers, to develop research policy and priorities for the sector

7. Strengthening academic leadership in Scotland so that academics contribute fully to the development of evidence-based policy, practice innovation and routine service evaluation
8. Creating a university research agenda that takes account of the priorities of service user and carer concerns and social services agencies, is accessible, timely and available

Operational issues

Embedding research in university-based programmes for social services staff

9. Linking teaching to research and including teaching on research methods within university programmes

10. Building a range of post-qualifying research masters programmes relevant to social services with flexible delivery to ensure greater accessibility for social service workers

11. Creating more courses on practitioner research, run by Universities, which include critical appraisal skills

Working with employers to stimulate and support research in practice and its use to inform practice

12. Creating closer links between agencies and Universities to improve communication, quality, quantity and relevance of research and research opportunities

13. Including within university research proposals time for researchers to engage with agencies, beyond dissemination, on the implementation of findings

14. Promoting and publicising the research work of students (projects, dissertations, theses) either in collections of their own or through routes generated by employers

Building evidence on learning transfer into programme design and delivery

15. Building research on effective learning into curriculum and course design

Issues for Scotland's Colleges

Strategic issues

Basing teaching and learning methods on evidence from research:

1. Making available staff development opportunities available to embed research in learning and teaching in FE
2. Giving staff in FE colleges time to undertake research as part of their work
3. Weaving research woven into the curricula of FE programmes
4. Building research on effective learning into curriculum and course design

5. Operational issues

Introducing students to research and encouraging them to base their work on best practice

6. Making training in research methods available to staff in FE colleges
7. Encouraging modest research activity by students as part of FE programmes

Facilitating the adoption of knowledge creation as a role for all staff in social services

8. Including knowledge creation in preparation for job roles within social services

Issues for Social Services Employers

Strategic issues

Creating structures and processes based on research evidence:

1. Linking policies and procedures to their evidence-base and making this explicit so that staff are able see the relevance of the evidence for their work
2. Making decisions on commissioning of services based on evidence so commissioners are research-aware and research-literate. Ability to design and commission service evaluations would be of great benefit

Building a culture that supports and facilitates research in the workplace

3. Canvassing service users' views on research priorities
4. Developing a framework for approval of research proposals and for oversight of ethical conduct by researchers by and for employers and other researchers, independent of universities
5. Examining ways of creating and sustaining research awareness in workplaces
6. Initiating a register of research which includes that undertaken by and in social services to ensure that findings from research are disseminated, that gaps and duplication in areas of research are eliminated
7. Using the Learning Networks as a focus for short courses on research methods, co-ordinating knowledge-sharing events etc

8. Creating practitioner research schemes which enable and support a number of practitioners to relinquish half of their workload for 6-9 months while they undertake a piece of research of interest to them and their service, to implement the findings, returning to their full-time substantive posts at the end of the period.
9. Arranging staff exchanges between agencies and Universities for agency staff to work in an HEI and benefit from working in a learning- and research-centred environment while the academic would benefit from closer contact with the field
10. Including in social services staff workloads the time to focus on and undertake modest research projects
11. Encouraging, training and supporting service users to undertake research
12. Working with others to develop incentives for staff to become interested in research
13. Strengthening and developing the role of the Association of Directors of Social Work (ADSW) in research, perhaps in seeking and monitoring research access to staff, records and service users.
14. Ensuring that managers are enabled to undertake data analysis, make good use of data, and routinely understand, use and support research.

15. Operational issues

Ensuring that decisions on service design, development and delivery are evidence-based:

16. Nominating a person in each agency to take responsibility for co-ordinating research in the agency
17. Support given by a central body who can add resources, knowledge and skills to social services staff to generate and sustain research awareness and research activity.
18. Locating research-literate individuals at a local level who can articulate agencies' research needs and interests and bridge into the research world to find and interpret the results of research in journals etc.
19. Using local practitioner fora as points where local research activity is stimulated, supported and shared

20. Agencies using support to develop better systems for analysing and promulgating data currently collected (from routine monitoring, complaints, user feedback etc) in service evaluations
21. Supporting social services to use evaluation methods to examine selected aspects of their work in order to accumulate and disseminate practice wisdom on interventions and services
22. Including research evidence in staff supervision arrangements in all services routinely - managers may need some help with this.
23. Helping social services staff to identify useful research and interpret and apply findings to their own work
24. Using an approach to service delivery which systematically uses intelligence from successful practice, near-misses and situations where things go wrong delivered via staff seminars, staff supervision, staff development and management processes.
25. Developing models of communities of practice to progress thinking and working in selected areas
26. Clarifying the relationship between evaluation, research, CPD and Post-Registration Training and Learning (PRTL)
27. Staff development professionals using research on retention of learning to ensure that the most is made of learning opportunities
28. Using a team approach to practice learning will enable students to bring their learning and questioning approach to bear on service development
29. Developing guidance for agency commissioners of research on best practice in commissioning research
30. Including research awareness in appropriate job descriptions
31. Making best use of research undertaken by staff on learning programmes.

Issues for Funding Bodies

Strategic issues

Significantly increasing investment in social services research by funders (the Scottish Funding Council, social services agencies, funding bodies such

as the ESRC, Joseph Rowntree Foundation, Scottish Government etc) as an urgent priority

1. Creating a dedicated funding stream for social services research across universities and FE colleges is needed
2. Taking a strategic approach to funding developed, building on the expertise of stakeholders

Co-ordinating and overseeing the implementation of the research strategy through a central grouping comprising relevant research stakeholder interests, including those of service users and carers

3. Creating closer partnerships between universities, colleges and social services developed around allocation of funds
4. Building a suite of research awards to stimulate and encourage social services research
5. Developing research collaborations across social services and related disciplines (e.g. police, health, housing, education)
6. **Operational issues**
7. Initiating knowledge Reviews across a range of topics funded to ensure that research activity is properly directed

Issues for Regulatory Bodies

Strategic issues

Regulatory bodies making explicit their commitment to the significance of research in all aspects of social services and creating expectations that staff are research-aware and research-literate

Requiring that service design, development and delivery are based on sound research evidence

1. Better sharing of data between regulatory bodies examined as a matter of urgency
2. The Learning Networks and the SSSC working with others to agree how best to support the integration of research into practice
3. Incorporating research use into criteria for monitoring and inspection
4. **Operational issues**

Knowledge creation and exchange as routine functions of service delivery organisations:

5. Requiring the integration of research-mindedness in the rules for CPD and PRTL
6. Making data that can be shared available for secondary analysis