**Protocol for Gaining Initial Support for the Conduct of Social Work and Social Care Research, Evaluation or Audit Activity within the**

**Statutory Health and Social Care Sector where two or more HSC Trusts are involved.**

**Foreword**

As Executive Directors of Social Work, we are committed to supporting Evidence Based Decision Making in order to support better outcomes for service users and carers. This provides the confidence that decisions taken are grounded in the best available research evidence that also take account of experiential evidence and relevant contextual evidence. We remain committed to supporting the conduct and dissemination of robust research and evidence within our sector. This vision, as outlined in the strategy for Social Work and Social Care Research Evidence: Supporting Continuous Improvement in Service Outcomes (2020-2025), continues to be a key priority.

This protocol and associated application form are intended to support researchers and staff wishing to undertake research, evaluation or audit activity by ensuring initial support is in place before more formal and detailed applications are commenced.

The coordination of the activity will help ensure that prospective studies are relevant to social work and social care research in Northern Ireland and will have greatest impact.

Tom Cassidy,

**Chair of the Association of Executive Directors of Social Work**

**2024**

**Introduction**

This Protocol outlines the process for seeking initial support from two or more HSC Trusts in Northern Ireland for proposed research, evaluation or audit, before more formal and detailed applications are commenced. It relates to research, evaluation or audit that involves the inclusion of social work staff within HSC Trusts in Northern Ireland, or where the HSC Trust is required to identify or contact service users and carers for their inclusion in a study. The aim is to assist in the coordination of activity and help contribute to a robust evidence base within social work in Northern Ireland. This commitment is enshrined in the strategy for *Social Work and Social Care Research Evidence: Supporting Continuous Improvement in Service Outcomes (2020-2025)*

**Who does the protocol apply to?**

This Protocol applies to any individuals, teams or organisations wishing to undertake social work or social care research activity within two or more of the five Health and Social Care Trusts in Northern Ireland, which involves engaging with social work staff within the Trusts or where the HSC Trust will be required to identify or contact service users and carers for their inclusion in a study.

It applies to both internal requests by staff within the HSC Sector, including the Department of Health (DoH), SPPG, any of the five Health and Social Care Trusts, the Public Health Agency, Arm’s length Bodies and external requests from statutory, academic, voluntary or independent sector organisations or individuals.

**Initial support**

The concept of ‘initial support’ refers to provision of an early view from within the social work profession that the topic is relevant and if conducted should contribute to building the necessary evidence base. It is intended to also assist researchers in decisions about which funding or grant applications to pursue and in decisions about potential post graduate academic study by students pursuing Masters or PhD academic level study.

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

These include:

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

The initial support application form is required prior to the IRAS application stage. The initial support application form relates **also** to evaluation and audit activity not covered by the IRAS application process.

**How to gain initial support**

1. Applications to be sent electronically to the following email address:

swevidproposal@hscni.net. This single point of entry is provided to streamline the process.

1. The Social Care Research Lead within NISCC will take responsibility for coordinating requests for support and approval from HSC Trust personnel. The Research Lead will review the application, clarify queries but will not be accountable for the final decision. This remains with the HSC Trusts. The protocol **does not** preclude informal conversations taking place between researchers and relevant programme managers within HSC organisations to explore where researcher interests fit with service research needs. Such conversations are viewed as important.
2. The decision re initial support will be made within 15 working days of receipt of the application. Researchers will be informed of the decisions within 5 working days of this date.

If a request for initial support is declined, the reason for doing so will be clearly articulated, and if possible, alternative suggestions will be proposed.

1. The decision to provide initial support will be ratified by the Assistant

Executive Directors of Social Work on behalf of the Executive Directors of Social Work.

**Application to secure initial support for the conduct of social work research, evaluation or audit activity - within two or more HSC trusts**

Form available at [Our research publications - NISCC](https://niscc.info/our-research-publications/) ( Health and Social Care Trusts)

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

Please complete using Arial font,14pt

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| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  **Full Title of study**:  Please identify main research or evaluation, audit question:  **Contact details for the link person in respect of this application** (for the purposes of research this is the Chief Investigator)  Title: Name: Employer’s name and address: Telephone: Email: **For others with key involvement** (please add details as appropriate)

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Title  | Name  | Employing Organisation  |
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**Is this application from:**

An individual ☐ A consortium of organisations ☐

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

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

*Maximum words 75:*

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

Where relevant any preliminary discussion that has taken place with key social work and social care staff (and with whom) can be referenced here.

*Maximum words 50:*

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

Maximum words 150:

**Please provide an indicative timetable (start and completion dates)**

**Start date: Completion date:**

# Funding

Please indicate the funding source and anticipated budget

Funding source: Anticipated budget:

Please include any costs to Health and Social Care Organisations in facilitating the research:

**Additional Support**

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

*Maximum words 50:*

Signed:

Name in block capitals:

Date:

**Forward completed application by email to:**

# swevidproposal@hscni.net

For queries contact:

Social Care Research Lead,

Social Care Council,

4th Floor

James House

2 Cromac Avenue

Belfast BT17 2JA

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