

2nd Research Strategy Stakeholder Workshop

18 September 2025



Generating conversations on the strategic direction
of research and evidence for social work and social
care

Capturing views and perspectives through an
inclusive collaborative process

Introduction and purpose

The Research and Evidence partnership as a Committee of the NI Social Care Council is responsible for driving this work forward to develop the next phase of a social care research strategy.

As part of our ongoing engagement work it was agreed from the outset that two externally facilitated stakeholder workshops would be arranged. We hosted the first of these in May 2025 and are delighted that the second of these was held on 18th September attended by 33 people. Like the first workshop it was facilitated by Professor Robbie Gilligan, Trinity College Dublin, recognised for his research background. It was designed to build upon the conversations commenced in May to help bring us a step closer to co-producing the new strategy.

The attendees brought a diverse range of perspectives. As usual, the workshop provided an opportunity for dialogue and an energetic exchange of ideas, exploring areas relevant to the strategy.

Invitations were extended to members of the Research and Evidence Partnership and the Building Research Community (for more information click [here](#))

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Strength is derived from unity. The range of our collective vision is far greater when individual insights become one.

Andrew Carnegie

Alone we can do so little; together we can do so much.

Helen Keller

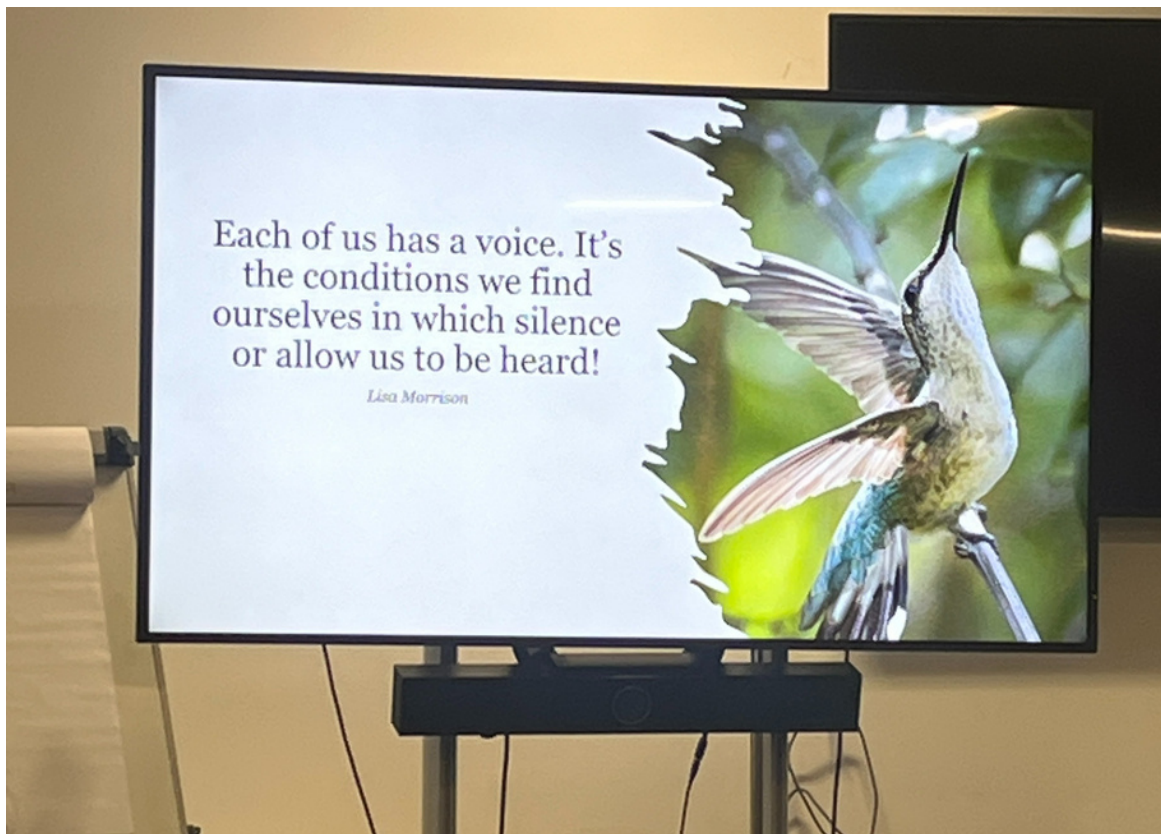
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What we did?

Professor Davy Hayes, Chair of Research and Evidence Partnership, welcomed delegates to the workshop which was hosted in James House (NISCC's Offices Belfast). He reiterated his appreciation and thanks to people who continue to show a huge enthusiasm and commitment to the ongoing success of this work. Those in attendance were drawn from a diverse range of roles spanning policy, practice, lived experience, academia, research and from across the statutory, community and voluntary and independent sectors.

He reiterated a welcome to Lisa Morrison, Training Consultant and Professor Robbie Gilligan, facilitator.

Lisa brings her perspective and experience of using services, as well as her acquired research training and skills. Lisa's input was invaluable as it commenced the dialogue amongst the group on how do we all move this work forward in ensuring that issues of diversity, inclusion and belonging are the integral part.



Following the success of the previous event in May, we retained the focus to stimulate discussions and new ideas, facilitated by round table conversations. At this event the questions related to the following six areas:

- How do we explore new research opportunities for social work/social care staff?
- How do we engage new people in research and evidence activity? How can the strategy support this?
- How do we explore new research opportunities for social work/social care staff?
- Equality, Equity, Diversity and Inclusion – why is it important in research?
- Who is currently excluded? How can the strategy address this?

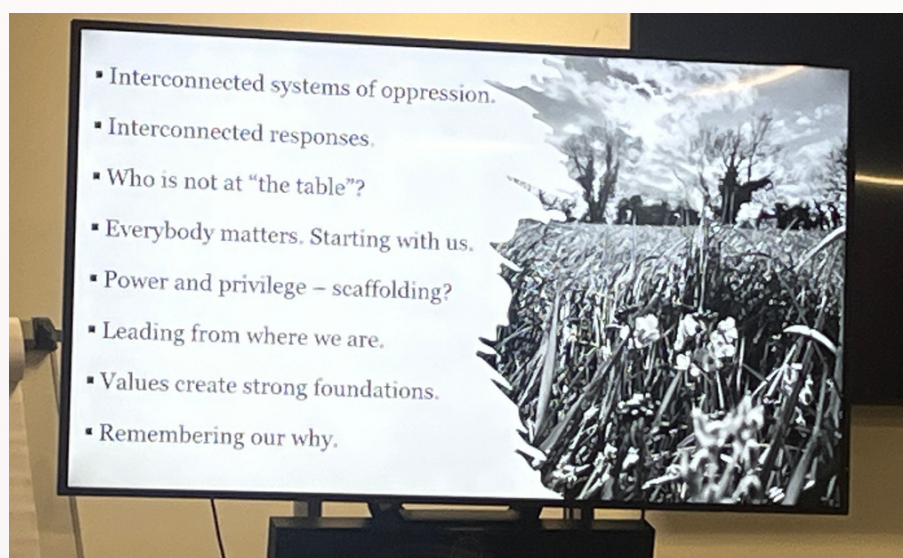
In the design of the event it was considered that exploring views and perspectives in these six areas would build on the previous discussions and feedback that centred on the overall desired direction of what needs to be offered, exploring opportunities, challenges and the identification of priorities for going forward.

What did we discover?

The group discussions stimulated a wealth of dialogue, material and feedback. This feedback is currently being considered by members of a small working group who are working diligently to capture the essence of the key messages. This feedback will help inform and formulate the detail of the new strategy. In pulling the conversation to a close, the facilitator reflected on the key messages emerging across the afternoon's discussion as follows:

- The need for a shared understanding of what evidence-based practice really is – breaking down some of the mystery, making it more understood.
- Greater attention to authentic inclusion in research. To uphold the values of diversity and inclusion we need more realistic and grounded approaches where more creative outreach work is needed. All the parts need equal consideration – frontline staff voices, service users, managers and wider society.

- Working with wider professionals help breaks the silo mentality and address professional diversity.
- Balancing ambition with realism is important as we go forward whereby maybe we need to simplify our aspirations.
- We need to encourage a wider life course belief in the importance of curiosity in social work and social care. Safety in services is the overriding factor. Needs a more discerning use of evidence. Why are we doing things in a certain way remains a very necessary question?
- Within Assessed Year in Practice for Social Work there is scope to build on the necessary evidence gained employment at undergraduate level.
- Need to look at creative ways to engage with more front-line social work and social care staff.
- Student research projects and initiatives are an important part of building the necessary evidence- there needs to better link with the new strategy. Need to also better mobilise the skills students gain on particular training courses.
- Specially related to social care – in Care Homes, elsewhere in the UK there are ENRICH Research Ready Care homes- this needs greater exploration of this in NI.
- Demands and pressures of work cannot be underestimated as this deflects from a focus on research but to perhaps counteract there is a need for consideration of research as part of job descriptions and in conversations in supervision and offering more reflective spaces.
- In the new strategy there needs to a recognition of the use of secondary data in research to inform decisions and services.
- Workforce and time pressures- staff need accessible evidence.



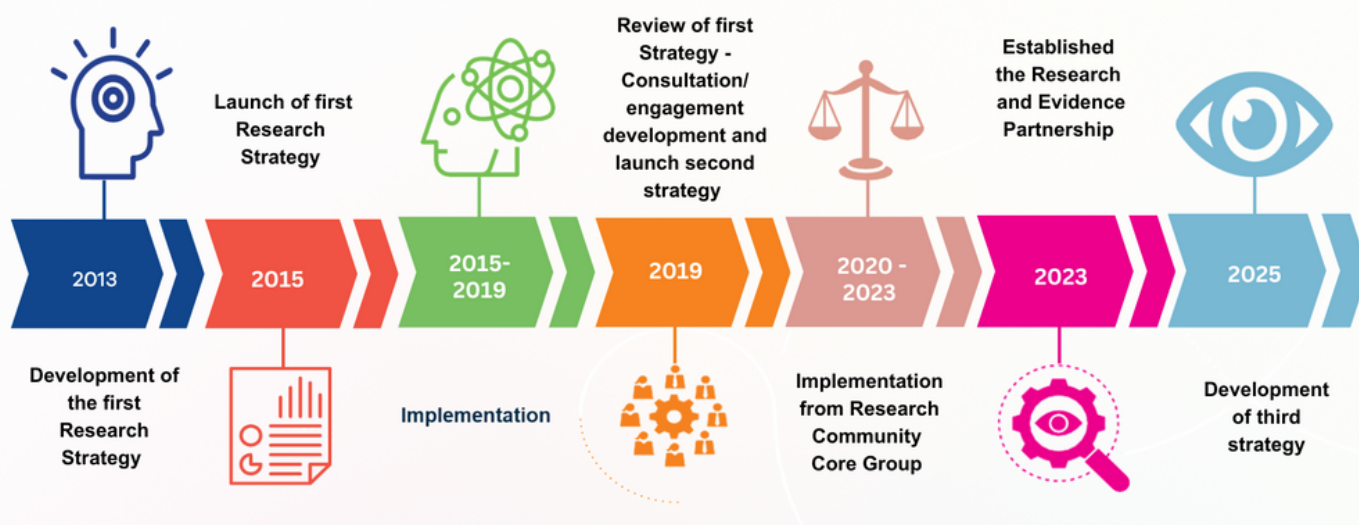
Next steps

Acknowledging people's commitment and contribution to the discussions, Helen McVicker, Interim Director in NISCC thanked participants for attending and in particular those people who were able to attend both events. The work of the Social Care Council is built on the premise of the importance of engagement, partnership and co-production. Helen expressed her delight that our research networks and community continue to reflect this approach which has resulted in such vibrancy and enthusiasm.

Referring to the proposed timeline she noted that we still have a lot to do before our plans for launch of the new strategy in 2026. But reiterating the message that was clearly articulated at this event, and elsewhere, that upholding the values of diversity and inclusion requires authentic inclusion. Our work at the strategy development stage and implementation stage therefore needs realistic and grounded but also creative outreach approaches. All the parts need equal consideration – frontline staff voices, service users, managers and wider society.

Further engagements will be arranged prior to and as part of the public consultation in late Autumn 2025 and early spring 2026 with a plan to launch the final strategy in June 2026.

Timeline of the Research Strategy



A small working group based on an invitation already issued will help develop the early drafts and ensure that the strategy is reflective of all the conversations to date. If anyone is interested in hearing more about this group contact Anne.McGlade@niscc.hscni.net

The full feedback (comments only as collated) from this Stakeholder event will be disseminated to all those who attended and shared with the Research and Evidence Partnership Group Members.

October 2025

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Great discoveries and improvements invariably
involve the cooperation of many minds.
Alexander Graham Bell — ”



*Photographs used in this report were taken at the May 2025 Stakeholder event.