

Stakeholder Workshop

27 May 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

On 27th May 2025 the Northern Ireland Social Care Council (the Social Care Council) was delighted to host the first stakeholders' workshop at The Pavilion in Stormont Estate, Belfast. This was designed to begin the conversation on developing the next Strategic Research and Evidence Strategy for Social Work and Social Care.

Invitations were extended to members of the Research and Evidence Partnership and the Building Research Community (details of both group are available on the NISCC website [Building our research capacity - Introduction](https://www.niscc.info) ([niscc.info](https://www.niscc.info)). The latter is a subgroup of the Partnership and the workshop provided an excellent opportunity for engagement and building connection of members within these groups.

In establishing the Research and Evidence Partnership, as a Committee of the Social Care Council in 2023, cognisance was taken of the barrier and gap that often exist between research, policy and practice across disciplines and across sectors. In particular the implications of a silo *mentality* whereby there is often limited information exchange between stakeholders about various knowledge of problems and solutions.



What we did?

In welcoming stakeholders to this event Professor Davy Hayes, Chair of the Research and Evidence Partnership, explained the purpose of the workshop and expressed his delight both at the level of interest and commitment shown by attendees to work together and commence this valuable dialogue. Thirty-four people attended with roles spanning policy, practice, lived experience, academia, research from across the statutory, community and the independent sectors. He also welcomed Professor Robbie Gilligan, Trinity College Dublin, who comes with an extensive academic and research background but for the purposes of the stakeholder event carried the role of independent external facilitator.

The focus of the event was that of dialogue, facilitated by round table conversations providing the opportunity to hear participants' views on a number of questions posed. These questions related to the overall desired direction of what needs to be done; exploring opportunities, challenges and identification of priorities for going forward.

To set the context however the opportunity was taken to provide first an overview of the achievements to date emerging from the previous strategies (HSCB 2015 and HSCB 2020). Both strategies are available at [Our research publications - Introduction \(niscc.info\)](#). Secondly, workshop attenders got the opportunity to hear of the key messages emerging from a number of policy drivers including;

- NI Programme for Government (2025);
- NISCC's (Social Care Council's) Strategic Plan (2023-2027);
- HSC Research & Development Strategic Plan (In development);
- Current Reform Agenda (Children's and Adult Services and Workforce).

Whilst recognising that a myriad of strategic documents, policy and legislation drivers exist it was recognised that it was necessary to narrow these to what was considered most relevant. An option for stakeholder attendees to identify anything that was missing also provided to provide reassurance on inclusiveness.

What did we discover?

Overall there was a view that there was good synergy between the presented strategies and policies. The future research strategy links well to Programme for Government (PFG) Priorities – but within PFG it was suggested that ‘social work and social care should be more explicitly highlighted alongside health’.

Other big societal and policy issues of poverty, race migration will also need to be considered as the new research strategy moves forward in development.

Overarchingly it was suggested that the strategy should be built on the principles of equity, diversity, inclusion and belonging.

In pulling the conversation to a close the facilitator invited groups to highlight one key priority for going forward. A few areas were summarised as:

- Cultivating research leadership remains;
- The Strategy needs to set direction for research;
- There is ongoing need to embed research minded-ness;
- The inclusion of social care and social work is important;
- Being clear on what needs to change and how to achieve this;
- Research needs to be genuinely person centered aimed at reducing inequalities and tackling the gaps between power and privilege;
- Inclusive terminology is important.



Next steps

Acknowledging the wealth of material collated at the event Anne McGlade, Social Work and Social Care Research Lead, NISCC thanked participants for their thoroughness and commitment. She reiterated that this was just the first of our engagements aimed at creating a conversation to inform the development of the Research Strategy for Social Work and Social Care for 2025 onwards. Material from the event will be collated and disseminated to quality assure. It will then be analysed to help structure and inform the first draft of the strategy in accordance with the time line overleaf.

A small working group based on an invitation already issued will help develop the drafts and ensure that the strategy is reflective of all the conversations to date. Further engagements and collaborative engagements will be formulated prior to public consultation in late Autumn 2025 and early Spring 2026 with a plan to launch the final strategy in June 2026.

Feedback will be disseminated to all those who attended and shared with the Research and Evidence Partnership Group Members at the June 2025 meeting.

Some comments from stakeholder attenders

‘It was great event with enthusiastic people who really respect everyone's contribution’.

‘Everyone was made feel welcomed’.

‘Having the articulate and reflective view of individuals people with lived experience is so powerful’.

‘It was a great opportunity to meet one another from the research community and the research and evidence partnership respectively’.

Timeline of the Research Strategy

