

**A Social Work Research Strategy
in Higher Education**

2006 – 2020

**The Joint University Council
Social Work Education Committee
(JUC SWEC)**

MAY 2006

SOCIAL
CARE
WORKFORCE
RESEARCH
UNIT

Published in June 2006 by the Social Care Workforce Research Unit, The International Policy Institute, King's College London, Franklin Wilkins Building, 150 Stamford Street, London SE1 9NH

ISBN 0-9546481-4-5

Produced with financial support from the Subject Centre for Social Policy and Social Work, SWAP, and the Social Care Institute for Excellence (SCIE).

Copies can be obtained from Professor Paul Bywaters, Coventry University, Priory Street, Coventry, CV1 5FB; Tel: 02476 887688 or Email: hsx056@coventry.ac.uk

**A Social Work Research Strategy
in Higher Education
2006 – 2020**

**The Joint University Council
Social Work Education Committee
(JUC SWEC)**

MAY 2006

THE JOINT UNIVERSITY COUNCIL (JUC)

The JUC was founded in 1918 to promote the interests of universities in the fields of Public Administration and Social Policy. In the 1970s, Social Work Education was added to its brief. Today, the JUC represents the vast majority of British higher education institutions teaching and researching in these three fields.

The JUC is a federal body, and works mainly through its three standing committees:

- *The Public Administration Committee (PAC)*
- *The Social Policy Committee (SPC)*
- *The Social Work Education Committee (SWEC)*

Separately, and together through the JUC, the PAC, SPC and SWEC seek to promote their subjects, and the Universities in which they are taught and researched, by:

- *developing close relations with government departments, professional institutes and other policy-making bodies;*
- *providing a national forum for discussing matters of mutual concern; funding and underwriting activities, such as collaborative research, workshops, seminars and conferences;*
- *disseminating information to member institutions and their staff; promoting awareness of the applied social sciences amongst schools, careers services and employers;*
- *fostering contacts with international academic, professional and inter-governmental organisations, for example by co-sponsoring the UK Public Administration Consortium.*

A Social Work Research Strategy in Higher Education 2006 – 2020

Contents

Introduction	1
The Case for a Step Change	5
Key Dimensions of the Strategy	7
Aims and Objectives	15
Next Steps	24
References	25
Glossary	26
Consultation	27
Report Authors	28

A Social Work Research Strategy in Higher Education 2006 – 2020

Introduction

Purpose

This strategy is designed to promote a step change in the quality and quantity of social work research activity in UK higher education institutions (HEIs).

This is in order to

- maximise the HEI contribution to social work and social care service improvement
- develop a strong evidence base for social work and social care services
- build a workforce capable of using evidence critically and effectively.

JUC SWEC is seeking to change the social work constituency in HEIs and to work collaboratively with others inside and outside Universities because we think this is an important time to promote the future of social work research.

Why is this important now?

At its heart, our commitment to raise the quality and quantity of social work research is based on the difference that good research evidence can make to the lives and well-being of people who come into contact with social workers and with social care services. Social work and social care services also make a major contribution to the wider economy, with a workforce of around 1.5 million people in England alone, in a multi-billion pound industry. Both for social and for economic reasons, as well as because of the values which social care services represent, research has a vital contribution to make.

For example, social work research can address major contemporary social and economic challenges such as:

- how to respond to demographic changes such as the ageing of the population and migration
- how to promote personalisation and choice in service provision, alongside quality and equity
- how to secure public safety and security, community cohesion and social inclusion
- how to mix provision in such interacting areas as social care, health, education, criminal justice, social security and regeneration to maximise economic and social objectives
- how to manage damaging social phenomena, such as addictions or criminal violence, while respecting individual autonomy and human rights.

Those working in higher education have a responsibility to develop social work research. This strategy will contribute to developing work with a wide

range of stakeholders including service users and carers, service providers and employers, research funders and governments across the UK. It is intended to link with the major reviews of social work and social care, such as the 21st Century Social Work Review in Scotland and the Options for Excellence Review in England and with other initiatives including the recent seminar on Social Care Research Capacity hosted by the Department of Health and King's College London (2006).

Development of the strategy

This document has been developed by a core group of senior academics on behalf of JUC-SWEC. JUC-SWEC represents social work academics in higher education institutions, colleges and universities, from the four countries of the UK. We have consulted with stakeholders, including people using services, as well as colleagues in key organisations across the UK (See Appendix 1). The views represented here are those of JUC-SWEC alone but we will continue to liaise with other stakeholders with the aim of maximising the benefits for social work and social care research.

Three background papers that have informed our work were prepared by members of JUC SWEC. These covered:

- capacity issues (Orme and Powell, 2005)
- distinguishing features of the kinds and quality of social work research (Shaw 2005)
- particular issues of governance and ethics (Dominelli and Holloway, 2005).

In addition, JUC SWEC collaborated with SCIE in examining the resource base for social work and social care research and this formed part of a published report by Marsh and Fisher (2005).

The document begins with an outline of definitions and key positions, followed by the case for change, key dimensions of the strategy, and aims and actions.

Social work or social care?

Across the UK the relationship between social work and social care is described differently. In Scotland, the term 'social work services' is used to describe the full wide range of provision including child and adult care, criminal justice services and community work. In England, Wales and Northern Ireland, social work is usually seen as a central element within a broader range of provision described as 'social care'. In England, responsibility for social care is now divided between government departments, with services for children and adults being separated and integration with other services – education, crime, health, regeneration – a major driver. Internationally, the term 'social care' has less currency than in the UK.

In HEIs, social work is the recognised academic and research discipline not social care, although the research that social work academics undertake often examines and informs the wider field of social care services. In this document, therefore, when we describe *research* activity we will usually refer

to social work but when we refer to the wider field of *practice, service provision and policy* we use the term social work and social care services or just social care.

Social work research

Defining the precise boundaries and distinctive characteristics of any area of social science is complex and exclusive definitions will be contested. The focus of this strategy is not, therefore, the attempt to *define* social work research but to increase its *value*.

Social work research is identifiable through a set of features, none of which exclusively characterises it, but which can be seen to typify its scope and character. These general characteristics, considered to be worth sustaining, include:

- The use of a broad range of research methods and an acceptance of different linkages between research methods and research questions
- Underpinning by the quest for both usefulness *and* theoretical contributions so that research is not categorised as only 'pure' or 'applied'
- A concern with social inclusion and social justice
- A focus on social change
- Work with stakeholders in different aspects of the research process and managing the complex power relationships involved.

Social work research is diverse in scale, focus and method and draws on many contributory disciplines. Social work researchers often collaborate with colleagues with different backgrounds.

We take the following definition, derived from the definition adopted in the Research Assessment Exercise (RAE) 2008, as our starting point:

Research is understood as original investigation undertaken in order to gain knowledge and understanding. Social work is an applied policy and practice-oriented 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, professionals, 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 into international institutions, policy and practice.

Key Positions

The following propositions are fundamental to our approach to developing this strategy:

1. The impact and reach of social work research extend more widely than the practice of social workers alone. Social work research is relevant to the entire range of services sometimes described as social care and to other services, professions and disciplines.
2. In time, all social work academics in HEIs should be actively involved in both promoting research utilisation and the production of research and scholarship in order to model and advance evidence-informed practice and develop social work as an academic discipline.
3. We support *both* a general levelling up of research activity in all HEIs *and* the development of networks of specialisation and excellence.
4. Research priorities should be established by dialogue between service users, service providers, the wider public, government and researchers. Social work academics in HEIs are committed to such a partnership approach.
5. Social work academics should collaborate with each other and with colleagues from other disciplines as well as with other stakeholders to develop and spread research knowledge, understanding, expertise and experience across the sector.
6. This strategy should be developed on a UK-wide basis (taking account of and working with the circumstances of each of the four countries) and internationally.

The Case for a Step Change

The Importance of Social Work and Social Care Services

Social work and social care services are a vital component of public services in the UK. Adult care services alone were in contact with over three million people in England in 2003/4. Sometimes these services are essential to people's safety or well-being: for example, when social workers investigate the abuse or neglect of children; work with users of drugs and alcohol; support people with mental health problems; or assess, plan and monitor the social care needs of older people with disabilities. More commonly, social care services are crucial to the everyday lives of people amongst the most disadvantaged, vulnerable and stigmatised in society. They provide essential mechanisms for protecting people from harm, managing social tensions and interpersonal conflict, and for developing, sustaining and supporting people at different points of their lives. When this goes wrong, the public rightly expresses its concern. Social care services have substantial social and economic consequences and benefits for the whole of society.

The Size of Public Investment

Well over 1.5 million people work in social work and social care services in the UK and some £12 billion of public funds are spent on such services each year. Social care makes a very substantial contribution to the economic prosperity of the country both through the direct impact on employment and indirectly through its role in the management of social problems. Managing this sector efficiently and to maximum social benefit requires good knowledge of what is effective.

Impact on Other Public Services

Moreover, social care services are increasingly an integral part of other key public services, such as health, education, neighbourhood renewal and criminal justice. The effectiveness of social care services impacts on the ability of these other services to meet their objectives. Money spent on social care services may prevent the need for more expensive services. For example, social care services have a direct relationship with demands on NHS hospital care. Developing integrated services requires that the evidence base for social care services, derived substantially from the academic discipline of social work, achieves a greater degree of parity with that for health, education and other key partner services.

Insufficient Evidence

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. Moreover, there is currently no strategic framework for developing social work research in the UK.

The Role of HEIs

As the Department of Health (2006) recently asserted for health research, we believe that building the evidence base for social work and social care services depends on a partnership between social work academics, government, other service providers and users of services. It is now vital, if services are to continue to improve, that this social work evidence base is developed and improved.

Social work academics in the UK have worked hard in recent years to build the discipline and give it a higher research profile – albeit from a low base. The qualifying threshold for social workers across the UK is now set at honours degree level and the relevant Academic Benchmark Statement prepared by UK academics, which sets the standard for degree programmes, explicitly promotes the use of research and the development of critical enquiry skills (The Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA), 2000). In Scotland, the Standards in Social Work Education are underpinned by these requirements (Scottish Executive 2003). Social work academics have successfully argued for the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) to designate social work as a 'priority' area. This has led to both its recognition as a research discipline and resources for research training. Academics were also involved in securing capacity building funds from the Welsh Assembly Government and from the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) following the Research Assessment Exercise 2001. Funding from the ESRC was secured for research seminars on Theorising Social Work Research, on Social Work and Health Inequalities Research and for a series of national workshops for post-graduate research students. Social work researchers have led many of the knowledge reviews undertaken by SCIE that identify deficits in social work research and analyse the means by which improvements can be achieved. They have also pioneered developments, such as the knowledge research networks Making Research Count and Research in Practice, designed to ensure that research results in improved practice.

For reasons explored in greater detail below, however, a long-term strategy is needed; to secure adequate resources, to build research capacity and awareness, undertake targeted research programmes and ensure that research activity has maximum impact on policy and practice. This strategy requires action by the social work academic community itself, but its success also depends on external support, systems and partnerships to produce a step change in social work research activity by 2020.

Key Dimensions of the Strategy

A comprehensive strategy will involve changes in many dimensions affecting social work research. Each of these dimensions will be analysed in more detail.

DIMENSION	MEASURES
RESOURCES	SCOPE OF FUNDING
CAPACITY AND CAPABILITY	SIZE OF RESEARCH WORKFORCE QUALITY OF RESEARCH SKILLS
RECOGNITION AND GOVERNANCE	INSTITUTIONAL STATUS ACCEPTED SYSTEMS
VISIBILITY AND IMPACT	PUBLIC PROFILE USE IN POLICY AND PRACTICE

Resources

JUC SWEC and SCIE have brought together evidence (Marsh and Fisher, 2005) to indicate that the overall funding of social work research lags far behind key comparators. For example, assessed over a number of measures (see Table 1 below) it is estimated that social work research receives between one tenth and one twentieth of the funding available for health research. Investment per head of the workforce shows much greater inequalities. Notwithstanding the larger unit costs for biomedical research, there is a widespread recognition that social work and social care research has received substantially less funding in comparison. This relative difference has serious consequences for the modernisation of social work and social care services, a key government objective. A major plank of modernisation is research-informed policy and practice. **It is our argument that the current level of funding for social work and social care research cannot produce the quantity and quality of evidence that is required.**

The *Science and Innovation Investment Framework* sets out the Government's aspiration for the knowledge-based economy that 2.5% of GDP should be invested in R&D by 2014. This target is already more than met for health research but will require an eight-fold increase in research and development funding for social care, from the current base of 0.31% (Comparison 1 below; for more detail, see Fisher and Marsh 2005). More than half of health research funding comes from industrial sources rather than from government or charities (Comparisons 1 and 2 below). In social work and social care, the situation is reversed; central government is by far the largest source of research funds. Charities provide a limited amount, but the contribution made by local councils and the private sector, the largest employers, appears to be very small.

Table 1: Nine key measures of R&D expenditure

1. Overall R&D expenditure as % of total service expenditure	Health	Social services	Ratio: 1
	5.36%	0.31%	17.29
2. Government and charity R&D as % of total service expenditure	Health	Social services	
	2.52%	0.31%	8.13
3. Government direct R&D as % of total service expenditure	Health	Social services	Ratio
	0.64%	0.04%	16.25
4. Overall R&D per head (total staffing)	Health	Social services	Ratio
	£ 3,428.39	£ 25.42	134.87
5. Government and charity R&D per head (total staffing)	Health	Social services	Ratio
	£ 1,612.97	£ 25.42	63.45
6. Government direct R&D per head (total staffing)	Health	Social services	Ratio
	£ 408.72	£ 3.65	111.98
7. Government primary/social care R&D expenditures per GPs and social workers	GPs	Social workers	Ratio
	£ 1,465.73	£ 60.22	24.34
8. HEFCE QR as % of service expenditure	Health	Social services	Ratio
	0.22%	0.13%	1.69
9. HEFCE QR per head (academic community based clinical and social work)	Community based clinical	Social work	Ratio
	£ 26,343.14	£ 8,650.81	3.05

Source: Marsh and Fisher, 2005, Table 6, p 25.

Marsh and Fisher establish a strong case for examining the clear gains that have been secured for primary care research by establishing a strategic approach to developing research infrastructure. Both primary care and social care services:

- are practice-based frontline services, in which the relationship with service users is of key importance
- can be seen as the poor relation when compared with biomedical and broader social sciences respectively
- acknowledge the value of diverse approaches to building the knowledge and evidence base.

Following government recognition of the imbalance between primary care based research and hospital research in the Department of Health (DH) White

Paper *Primary Care: Delivering the future* (DH, 1996), an Inquiry was undertaken by Professor David Mant, which was published in 1997 as *R&D in primary care*. The strategy set out by the Mant Report included ways to increase the amount of research by enhancing capacity in terms of leadership and the involvement of clinical and non-clinical staff in research, as well as a focus on fostering an evidence based culture in primary care.

This has provided clear benefits in terms of research performance as assessed by the Research Assessment Exercise (RAE); the percentage of primary care University Departments rated highly, at '4 and over' rose from 31% in the 1996 RAE to 88% in the 2001 RAE. Furthermore, one of the key objectives in the recent strategy for health research in England, *Best Research for Best Health* (DH, 2006), is now for the development of a National School for Primary Care Research, 'to improve the evidence base for the practice of care by facilitating the conduct of clinical trials and other well-designed studies in primary care' (DH, 2006, p 13).

Such success brings with it increased funding from the Research Councils, as well as attracting high quality staff, thus creating a virtuous circle. There are different drivers in the current context in relation to the two fields, however, notably in the attitude of university management which is likely to place a greater value on biomedical research because of the increased unit income (per researcher and research projects) involved. Such considerations need to be addressed within the overall strategy. Because of the relative fragmentation of social care provision – provided by local authorities, charities and private sector providers rather than through a single national service like the NHS – research funding needs to be both directed at national priorities (through centrally resourced projects, programmes, units and centres) and responsive to local needs (through local and regional networks and partnerships).

A key issue for the strategy is how to achieve the eight-fold increase in funding implied in the Science and Innovation Investment Framework. Careful consideration will need to be given to building partnerships, based upon common interests across national and local governments, the charitable and commercial sectors, if a substantial increase in R &D funding is to be secured against a background of tight public expenditure control, and commercial operating margins.

Capacity and Capability

If a significant rise in R&D investment was achieved overnight, the deficit in capacity, in the availability of a trained and skilled research workforce both in HEIs and in service provider organisations, would be an immediate obstacle to increased research outputs. The current deficit and a number of interlocking factors impacting on capacity have been identified in the recent ESRC *Demographic Review of the UK Social Sciences* (2006).

For example:

- social work has a small academic base: around 800 full time equivalent academics (600 permanent) 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 RAE 2001
- social work has one of the oldest age profiles: 47% of staff are aged 50 or over
- social work has a high student-staff ratio relative to the fee-banding and unit costs of delivering social work education
- two-thirds of social work academic groupings are based in post-1992 institutions which receive only 5% of total ESRC funding across all disciplines
- social work has the lowest recruitment of non-UK national academics of any social science discipline.

Orme and Powell (2005) have identified what they term a 'circle of resistance' to developing social work research capacity. First, historically there has been little teaching of research methods on qualifying programmes, with curricula squeezed by the demands for learning practice skills particularly for those training through flexible employment-based or top-up routes (200 days in the new degree programmes have to be spent in practice). Even where students already possessed a first degree, possibly involving generic social science research methods, there was little opportunity to develop understanding and practice of research methods and ethics within a social work setting.

Second, the absence of research skills teaching during qualifying and post-registration courses, leads to practitioners and managers having little background in research issues. This significantly inhibits practitioners' capacities to read and critically apply research findings. It also contributes to a generally low value being placed on research in social work agencies. In turn, this limits opportunities to improve social work research skills through post-qualifying training. Consequently, many social work educators, recruited mainly from practice because of the practice-based nature of social work education, possess limited research background and skills, thus perpetuating the problem. The ESRC (2006, p 51) notes the difficulty HEIs have in appointing staff who 'are both practitioners and have a research track record'. Increasing the emphasis on social work research in qualifying programmes needs to link to investment in research methods training and education for social work academic staff, in order to increase the relevance and quality of research methods training available and to break the cycle.

Third, without specific capacity-building funds, there is little scope for providing increased opportunities for developing research skills through Continuing Professional Development (CPD)

Fourth, there are only restricted possibilities for developing joint research-practice career paths, as have been successful in the NHS, partly because of

the criteria of quality operating (or believed to be operating) in Research Assessment Exercises.

Furthermore, with the low level of actual research being funded, there are few research posts available for social workers and little motivation for staff to take up such posts because of the absence of recognised research career paths and poor job remuneration and security.

Another traditional route to developing a research workforce has been to recruit and train doctoral students. However, opportunities for doctoral studies in social work have been limited not only by the low historical base but also by ESRC funding practices in respect of part-time studentships. In addition, social work academics have sometimes prioritized teaching excellence at the expense of research excellence, contributing to a slow rate of bids for outside funding for post-graduate research. As social work was only awarded separate disciplinary status by the ESRC in late 2004, recognition for post-graduate research training and consequent funding are difficult to access. The sustained resistance of the General Social Care Council (in England) and its predecessor bodies to recognise a place for doctoral level post-qualifying work reflects on the wider image of social work as resistant to research.

While the public sector and HEIs are significant employers of researchers in social work, it is important also to recognise, that HEIs provide research training for those who go on to work in research bodies outside higher education, for example, in the voluntary and private sectors. Although research in social work is not the exclusive preserve of HEIs they nonetheless have a key role in helping those who are awarded research contracts to gain the capacity to fulfil them.

Notwithstanding the low starting point and the network of obstacles facing the development of social work as a research discipline, there are reasons for cautious optimism in the current situation. Setting Honours Degree status for the point of registration as a social worker and the accompanying continuing professional development (CPD) requirements attaching to re-registration could become levers for increasing the research skills of qualified social workers. The ESRC recognition already achieved provides an entrée to further capacity-building funding. The HEFCE Capability Funding received by a minority of social work research groups following RAE 2001 has been valuable and is being extended.

Despite these successes, there remains an urgent need for strategic action to raise the volume of university based social work research and to build a skilled research workforce. As a professional discipline training students for practice in the UK, social work has been slow to recruit academics or researchers either from overseas or from other academic disciplines. Benefits can also accrue from developing collaborative arrangements to build research skills and training opportunities between HEIs in which staff have

qualifications and expertise and those in which they are relatively lacking. However, even if these routes are examined, there will be a need to grow research skills from the ground up, and this will require both investment and a long time frame to bring to fruition.

Moreover, it is not only the **numbers** of skilled researchers that this strategy has to address, but the **quality** of the skills they possess: capacity and capability are closely linked. Hitherto, social work research has shown strengths in certain areas:

- basic qualitative research methods
- action research methods
- accessing hard-to-research groups
- involving research users in research processes
- incorporating a diversity of knowledge bases
- paying attention to impact: dissemination, application and implementation of findings.

However, weaknesses are also apparent, for example, in:

- basic and advanced quantitative research methods
- advanced qualitative research methods
- economic costing and
- theory building.

There is also a need to develop the application in social work research of skills from other fields such as epidemiology, statistical analysis, mapping and systematic reviews of qualitative studies incorporating user perspectives and experiences.

The social work research strategy needs to link into existing ESRC and other research methods initiatives including the National Centre for Research Methods, the Research Methods Programme, National Centre for eSocial Sciences and the Research Unit for Research Utilisation. Also other mechanisms need to be found through which HEIs can collaborate to spread research skills and build networks of expertise in the UK and internationally.

There is not a strong tradition of international research networks in social work research although valuable lessons could be learnt from comparative studies and the exchange of ideas and expertise. Social workers in the UK have been active in some of the networks and collaborations that exist and there are opportunities to enhance existing links and build new ones.

Recognition and Governance

As we have indicated, despite its long history of research output, social work has not been fully recognised as a separate academic research discipline in the UK, in common with other practice-oriented areas such as education (Shaw 2005). However there has been substantial progress on this front, with the ESRC, for example, recognising social work in terms of research training status in 2000 and formally agreeing its own subject guidelines in 2005. The lack of recognition has undoubtedly contributed to the fact that few ESRC research grants have been awarded for social work research (Shaw et al

2004). The ESRC has recognised in the Demographic Review (ESRC 2006) that capacity-building investment and practical measures are required in social work and other 'practice disciplines' such as education. In the RAE, social work, despite having its own subject guidelines, has still not achieved the status of a separate discipline. So there is progress, but still much to be done. Full institutional recognition would allow strengths and weaknesses to be analysed realistically, and open opportunities for funding and training.

In many HEIs social work research has not been clearly identified and it has often been linked as a junior partner to another social science discipline or health-related field of study. Without a clearly identifiable area and staff group, the impact of HEFCE Capability Funding on social work has been reduced. Building on recent recognition success would allow much more efficient and effective use of training, project and other funds in the future.

Since the late 1990s and particularly since the publication of the Research Governance Framework for Health and Social Care (DH 2001), there has been an increasing emphasis on regulating social work and social care research. The lack of infrastructure and investment, capacity issues and the complexities of social work research have all increased the risk of poor practice in terms of both ethics and methods. High levels of competition for research grants can produce an incentive to propose more ambitious studies than the level of funding allows. This may lead to situations where ethical practice (in terms of consent, and accessing and developing relationships with participants) is compromised. Capacity problems can also mean that relatively inexperienced researchers are sometimes responsible for sensitive and complex projects, again presenting particular problems for governance. Wider ethical issues, such as rights to involvement and the value of 'giving voice' to marginalised groups are sometimes neglected (Dominelli and Holloway, 2005).

Again, the social work academic community has actively engaged with these issues, for example, developing a Code of Ethics for Social Work Research (Butler 2002) and contributing to debates about service user involvement in research governance at the project and institutional levels. Accountability to a variety of stakeholders has been identified as important. Current decisions about the most suitable forms of ethical review (Pahl, 2003) and widespread dissatisfactions with the existing governance framework mean that social work academics will need to consider and contribute to such developments within their HEIs and more widely to a far greater extent than previously.

Visibility and Impact

In order to maximise the benefits of social work research, the strategy needs to focus on raising the visibility of research with a variety of audiences including service users and the wider public, other end users, such as practitioners, managers and policy makers, and researchers in other disciplines. Social work researchers have not been very effective at disseminating findings to a wide audience or at engaging in public debates

through the use of the print and electronic media. Social work research is rarely reported on television or radio, unlike medical or educational research, and social work academics have had a low profile even when social care services issues have been receiving substantial public attention. Increasing the visibility of social work research may have the effect of creating positive reinforcement within and outside the profession. To a significant extent this is within the hands of social work academics to achieve although, here again, investment is needed to ensure that skills are developed and time for this can be prioritised. One initiative that could be of value would be the development of a national database of expertise for the use of media outlets, backed by appropriate media training.

The purpose of growing the resource, capacity, capability and recognition of social work research is to improve the quality of people's lives through the provision of more effective services and systems and better social conditions. But the failure of research to address questions that are raised by service users and carers, policy makers and practitioners or to present evidence in ways that are useful has been an important criticism. Addressing the issues of dissemination, utilisation and impact is, therefore, central to the strategy.

Because there is not a one-to-one relationship between producing research and its impact on practice, social work researchers have paid close attention to this aspect of research, for example, through involvement in the SCIE, SIESWE, Research in Practice and Making Research Count. But these aspects of knowledge transfer, dissemination, and research literacy need to be taken much further in a comprehensive approach which links to the focus on research capacity. As throughout this strategy, this needs to be done in collaboration with other stakeholders including national bodies representing social services researchers and service providers and through locally and regionally based networks.

Building effective knowledge transfer into research activity requires a number of different mechanisms, as pointed out by models which have been developed and promoted by SCIE. It implies that the wider social care workforce needs skills in critically appraising and applying research evidence and integrating evidence with practice wisdom, and user and carer experiences and choices (Marsh and Fisher 2005). It also implies the development of practice awareness in researchers, the development of approaches to research which effectively incorporate dissemination, application and implementation strategies. This will require collaboration between academics and bodies such as SCIE and SIESWE, as well as close links with employer, user and carer organisations locally, regionally and nationally.

The next section of this document synthesises these arguments to develop a set of aims and objectives with specific targets and timescales.

Aims and Objectives

RESOURCES

Long Term Aim R1: to increase the spend on social work and social care R&D to 2.5% of the total social services budget by 2014 in line with the Science and Investment Innovation Framework

Initial Actions:

- R1.1 In concert with other stakeholder groups, engage with research related aspects of recent and ongoing policy reviews in various parts of the UK (e.g. development of an R&D strategy for Scotland following publication of the 21st Century Social Work Review; the AWARD alliance in Wales; the Options for Excellence review in England).
- R1.2 Identify areas of common interest and build collaborative and issue based relationships with other stakeholder groups from
- the research community (e.g. SSRG, SWRA)
 - service user and carer groups (e.g. BCODP)
 - professional bodies (Care Councils across the UK, BASW)
 - public and private sector employer organisations (e.g. child and adult care service organisations and other UK equivalents, including education and health interests)
 - governments across the UK and their key departments
 - other research funders (e.g. HE Funding Councils across the UK, ESRC, trusts and charities).
- R1.3 Ensure that key stakeholders discuss the 2.5% by 2014 target, and explore the variety of ways this could be achieved, in order to submit options to the next Comprehensive Spending Review.
- R1.4 Seek to secure an inquiry into existing and potential models of funding, with a view to medium and long term solutions, to provide a discussion paper for wide circulation and consultation in 2007.
- R1.5 Seek to agree with relevant stakeholders how research funding should be allocated to best promote evidence based policy and practice in social work and social care.
- R1.6 Seek to ensure that developing the capacity and capability of the social work research workforce is built into substantial research programmes for the period 2007 – 2012.
- R1.7 Encourage SCIE to host an annual meeting of funders, to develop an agreed funding methodology, and to review research spending in order to assess progress to the 2014 funding target.

R1.8 Seek resources for an enquiry into the social work academic research workforce, building on the recent ESRC social science enquiry, with an aim of assessing current resources available, and providing long term reliable statistical data.

Aims and Objectives

CAPACITY AND CAPABILITY

Long Term Aim C1: to secure the position of UK HEIs as world leaders in social work research and the contribution of social work research to methodological development in the social sciences

Initial Actions

- C1.1 Explore with the Department of Health and the Department for Education and Skills the establishment of a UK-wide research capacity development programme based on the example of the NHS
- C1.2 Seek to secure an early commitment from the Department of Health in England and cognate departments in other countries to National Schools for 'Social Care Practice and Delivery Research' based on collaborative Networks of HEIs, service providers and users (as suggested in *Best Research For Best Health*).
- C1.3 Review and build on the experience of existing local, national and international social work research Networks, including Making Research Count and Research in Practice, and promote the establishment of new Networks of research excellence giving priority to capacity-building based on collaborative relationships between HEIs and with service providers and users.
- C1.4 Establish an annual social work research conference.
- C1.5 Develop collaboratively with partners such as SCIE, SIESWE, HEA and SWAP a strategic framework and funding for access to a range of suitable electronic research materials to include archives and current resources.
- C1.6 Develop by the end of 2008 a programme of international exchange of research experience and skills.

Aims and Objectives

CAPACITY AND CAPABILITY

Long Term Aim C2: to increase the proportion of social work educators in HEIs with post-graduate research qualifications to a minimum of 80% by 2020

Initial Actions:

C2.1 Undertake an audit and analysis of:

- the research qualifications of current social work academic staff in HEIs
- the research skills and experience of social work academic staff in HEIs
- the take-up and outcomes of research training initiatives by social work academic staff in HEIs
- the support available to social work researchers in HEIs in terms of the availability of training, supervisors and research degree examiners, numbers of studentships
- the ways other disciplines (especially Education & Nursing) are addressing capacity and capability issues.

Produce proposals for the development of research qualifications of social work staff including through collaborative partnerships between HEIs and with other relevant disciplines.

C2.2 Develop a model for ensuring that the career development of social work academic staff prioritises research experience and interests by:

- drawing up an exemplar job description and template for the recruitment of academic staff
- designing a pattern of research support for new and existing staff with time allocated and resourced from university budgets
- building research-support responsibilities into senior social work academic job descriptions
- encouraging and monitoring the use of sabbatical leave for staff to undertake research skills updating.

C2.3 Stimulate interest in and keep colleagues informed about research training opportunities and access to existing resources by means of programmes of events, publications and e-resources, through agreeing a joint approach with a central coordinating body such as SWAP.

C2.4 Develop a common approach with Care Councils across the UK to embedding research skills in practice as an essential element of registration processes for social work academics.

- C2.5 Seek to ensure that CPD programmes and qualifications in social work and social care include research elements.
- C2.6 Continue work with ESRC, government bodies, employers, service users and carers, and the four regulatory councils to develop appropriate approaches to research training for social work academics and practitioners, including traditional and professional doctorates.

Aims and Objectives

CAPACITY AND CAPABILITY

Long Term Aim C3: to establish a minimum of 300 social work practice posts across the four countries of the UK with some responsibility for undertaking research included in contractual duties by 2012

Initial Actions

- C3.1 Identify and report on best practice models for research/practice posts from within social work and other disciplines.
- C3.2 Initiate discussions with employers, professional bodies and regulators about the resource, management, recruitment and other aspects of joint research/practice positions.
- C3.3 Seek to establish ring-fenced funding streams to support the development of such posts.
- C3.4 By the end of 2008, review progress and identify a strategy for achieving the long term aim for research/practice posts.

Aims and Objectives

RECOGNITION AND GOVERNANCE

Long Term Aim RG1: to secure for social work full institutional recognition as a research discipline from national funding and quality assurance bodies and individual universities

Initial Actions

RG1.1 Continue to work with the ESRC, higher education funding councils across UK countries and other institutional bodies to strengthen the recognition of social work research as a distinctive field of study with close links to policy and practice.

RG1.2 Encourage institutions and others to provide regular examples of social work as a research discipline, for example, in annual reports and quality assurance processes, and provide channels to disseminate these examples, for example via the annual research conference.

Long Term Aim RG2: the establishment of robust, appropriate and accountable systems of social work/social care research governance that are agreed and accepted by all stakeholders

Initial Actions

RG2.1 Lead a review and possible revision of the current code of social work research ethics by 2008.

RG2.2 Advocate for the acceptance of the social work code of ethics by research governance and ethics reviewing bodies.

RG2.3 Identify and extend the nature and level of social work academics' contributions to research governance in HEIs.

RG2.4 Identify and extend social work academics' contributions to local and national research governance systems.

Aims and Objectives

VISIBILITY AND IMPACT

Long Term Aim VI1: to ensure that social work research has a high positive public profile reflected in exposure through a variety of media

Initial Actions

- VI1.1 With partner organisations, for example SWAP, utilise existing HEI funding and if necessary seek further funding and other means to ensure that social work researchers have training in media strategies.
- VI1.2 Seek to ensure that social work research findings are publicised to public as well as professional audiences by establishing a variety of standard mechanisms for accessible dissemination.
- VI1.3 Plan and undertake specific projects (events, publications, publicity) alone and with others to promote the distinctive quality and benefits of social work research.
- VI1.4 Establish a directory of expertise and disseminate it widely to print and electronic media representatives.

Long Term Aim VI2: to ensure that all social work research builds in effective approaches to knowledge transfer

Initial Actions

- VI2.1 Identify ways of building practice-mindedness amongst social work researchers through methodological development, training, secondment, conference and other activities.
- VI2.2 Identify ways of enhancing research mindedness in management, practitioner and policy making staff in social care services organisations in conjunction with other stakeholders.
- VI2.3 Identify ways of maximising the public availability and accessibility of findings from social work research.
- VI2.4 Seek to ensure that research funders develop clear criteria for judging the strength of research proposals against knowledge transfer objectives and that these are applied in peer review processes.
- VI2.5 Develop and promote appropriate measures of impact as a key element in assessing the quality of social work research.

VI2.6 Identify by the end of 2008 a strategy for achieving the long-term aim of effective international knowledge transfer.

Next Steps

This strategy is a first consolidated step in realising the commitment of social work academics to improve the quality and quantity of social work research activity in the UK. Leading the strategy will be the responsibility of the JUC SWEC Research Sub-Committee which will report on progress annually to the JUC SWEC.

The goal is simple but the tasks are complex and interdependent. While some of the activities proposed are within the capacity of social work academics and researchers, others depend on the support of others.

We have outlined ways in which social work research can become consistently excellent, for users of social work services and the public deserve no less.

References

- Butler, I. (2002) A Code of Ethics for Social Work and Social Care Research. *British Journal of Social Work* 32, 239-248
- Department for Education and Skills, Department of Trade and Industry and HM Treasury (2004) Science and innovation investment framework 2004 – 2014. London: HMSO.
- Department of Health (2006) *Best Research for Best Health: a new national health research strategy*. London: Department of Health.
- Department of Health and King's College London (2006) *Proceedings of a National Seminar on Social Care Research Capacity*. London: Social Care Workforce Research Unit, King's College London.
- Dominelli, L. and Holloway, M. (2005) *Governance in Social Work Research*. Unpublished paper for JUC SWEC.
- ESRC (2006) *Demographic Review of the UK Social Sciences*. http://www.esrcsocietytoday.ac.uk/ESRCInfoCentre/Images/Demographic_Review_tcm6-13872.pdf accessed February 2006.
- Furlong, J. and Oancea, A. (2005) *Assessing Quality in Applied and Practice Based Educational Research*. Oxford: Oxford University, Department of Educational Studies. Available in pdf format at esrc.ac.uk.
- Marsh, P. and Fisher, M. (2005) *Developing the Evidence Base for Social Work and Social Care Practice*. London: Social Care Institute for Excellence.
- Orme, J. and Powell, J. (2005) *Research Strategy for JUC SWEC: Building Research Capacity: Student Training and Staff Development*. Unpublished Paper for JUC SWEC.
- Pahl, J. (2003), *Progress with the Implementation of the Research Governance Framework in the Field of Social Care*. London: Department of Health. http://www.dh.gov.uk/PolicyAndGuidance/ResearchAndDevelopment/ResearchAndDevelopmentAZ/ResearchEthics/fs/en?CONTENT_ID=4002063&chk=FTgf6k Accessed 17-01-06)
- Shaw, I. (2006) *Kinds and Quality of Social Work Research*. Unpublished Paper for JUC SWEC.
- Shaw, I., Arksey, H. and Mullender, A. (2004) *ESRC research, social work and social care*. London: Social Care Institute for Excellence.

Glossary

BASW – British Association of Social Workers

BCODP – British Council of Disabled People

CPD – Continuing Professional Development

DH – The Department of Health (www.dh.gov.uk)

ESRC – Economic and Social Research Council (www.esrc.ac.uk)

HEA - Higher Education Academy

HEFCE – Higher Education Funding Council (www.hefce.ac.uk)

HEIs – Higher education institutions (Universities and higher education colleges)

JUC SWEC – The Joint University Council Social Work Research Council Research Sub-Committee (www.york.ac.uk/depts/poli/juc)

NCRM – National Centre for Research Methods (www.ncrm.ac.uk)

PQ – Post Qualifying

QAA - The Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (www.qaa.ac.uk)

QR – Quality-related research

R&D – Research and Development

RAE – Research Assessment Exercise

SCIE – Social Care Institute for Excellence (www.scie.org.uk)

SIESWE – Scottish Institute for Excellence in Social Work Education (<http://www.sieswe.org/>)

SSRG - Social Services Research Group

SWAP - Social Policy and Social Work subject centre with the Higher Education Academy (www.swap.ac.uk)

SWRA – Social Work Research Association

Consultation

Stakeholders who we consulted are as follows. They have neither explicitly endorsed the strategy nor are they responsible for its content.

Sandra Creaser, Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC)

Andrew Dalton, Department for Education and Skills

Susan Denman, Welsh Assembly Government

Ronny Flynn, Race Equality Unit

Nigel Godfrey, Derbyshire County Council

Fiona Hodgkiss, Scottish Executive

Kathryn Hudson, Department of Health

Julie Jones, Association of Directors of Social Services (ADSS)

Richard Pugh, Making Research Count

Peter Sneddon, Department of Health

Maggie Tierney, Scottish Executive

Bernard Walker, Association of Directors of Social Services (ADSS)

Suzanne Wilson, Higher Education Funding Council for England

Sharon Witherspoon, Nuffield Foundation

Users and Carer representatives from a variety of organisations.

Report Authors

On behalf of the JUC SWEC Research Sub-Committee the following individuals constructed this strategy.

Paul Bywaters - Chair
Lena Dominelli
Margaret Holloway
Jill Manthorpe
Peter Marsh
Joan Orme
Jackie Powell
Ian Shaw
Martin Stevens

With support from:

Mike Fisher – SCIE
Jackie Rafferty - SWAP
Bryan Williams - SIESWE
Andy Pithouse and Sally Holland – University of Cardiff

JUC SWEC is grateful to them for their personal commitment and to their employers for enabling them to contribute to this development.

If you would like to comment on this document please contact Paul Bywaters.

Email: P.Bywaters@coventry.ac.uk

Address: Professor Paul Bywaters, Coventry University, Priory Street, Coventry CV1 5FB