



Research in Social Care

Professor Robert Stout, Director of Research & Development for the HPSS

Northern Ireland is unique in the United Kingdom and Ireland in having integrated health & social services. This came about at the last major administrative reorganisation which took place in 1974. Until that time, like other parts of the UK and Ireland, health was delivered by Government agencies and funded by taxation, while social services were a local government function and funded by the rates. Arising out of the McCrory review of local administration in Northern Ireland, the responsibilities of local government were decreased and the Northern Ireland Housing Executive, five Education and Library Boards and four Health & Social Services Boards were established. It was often said that local government was left only with refuse collection and cemeteries. The reasons for the change were as much political as administrative but the change pre-supposed the continuing existence of a devolved government in Northern Ireland. This of course has not been in place for most of the time since 1974 and as a result major services have been run by appointed bodies with little democratic accountability. Tribute must be paid to the Boards, their agencies and employees for the way that high quality services have been delivered to the population of Northern Ireland over the years of civil unrest and political instability. We are soon to have another major reorganisation of local government and related functions. It is

encouraging that it is not proposed to disaggregate health & social services.

Many who work in the HPSS feel that integration of health & social services is beneficial and ought to be retained, although it does mean that unlike local authorities in Great Britain, housing and social services are the responsibility of separate bodies. However, there has been no research carried out on the advantages and disadvantages of integrated health & social services compared with the separated model elsewhere in the UK. Thus we can only give our impressions and anecdotal evidence when we are asked to discuss the advantages of the Northern Ireland system.

Because of the integrated health & social services in Northern Ireland, the R&D Office has explicit responsibility for research in health & social services as illustrated in our Strategy, "Research for Health & Wellbeing". I am therefore delighted that this issue of R&D Today is devoted to Social Care Research. Many of the papers come from the Institute of Child Care Research which is the only research unit which receives core funding from the R&D Office. The article by Professor Dorota Iwaniec on the 10-year history of the Institute is particularly opportune as Dorota retired as the Director of the Institute on 30 September 2005. I would like to take this opportunity of thanking Dorota on behalf, not only of the R&D Office but of the whole

health & social care research community in Northern Ireland for her major contribution to research and to the care of children, and to wish her a long happy and healthy retirement.

The R&D Office is keen to support both health and social care research, which is of high quality and is directly relevant to the HPSS. While the Office currently supports much social care research, there is a

desire to increase this support. The R&D Office would particularly welcome social care research projects which include a multi-disciplinary aspect, and which have a Northern Ireland focus. I hope that this issue of R&D Today may stimulate some more social care researchers to consider putting forward research proposals for our funding schemes.

Celebrating ten years of the Institute of Child Care Research

Profressor Dorota Iwaniec, Director, Institute of Child Care Research

The Institute of Child Care Research (ICCR) celebrates its tenth birthday this year! It is with great warmth and a sense of pride that I reflect upon the first decade of the life, of what I consider to be 'my baby'. The ICCR story began back in 1994. Since moving from Leicester it had been my ambition to set up a unit with the expressed purpose of researching child care issues here in Northern Ireland. After a feasibility study in 1994 confirmed both the need and support for such an enterprise we set to work in negotiating the funding, staffing and structures for what was to become the Centre for Child Care Research at Queens University Belfast. With the bureaucracy dealt with, the morning of 6th November 1995 saw it all come to life when our small group of staff reported for their first day of work in our retrofit 1970's chalet bungalow at 14a Lennoxvale. A funding partnership between the four Health and Social Services Boards, the Department of Health and Social Services and Queens University supported the Centre for Child Care research in its first very happy and successful three years of life. The creation of the Centre was extremely timely in that it coincided with the launch of the Children (NI) Order in 1995. Indeed, the Centre's inaugural programme focused on three core projects, all a response to the challenges and opportunities presented by this new and exciting child care legislation for Northern Ireland.

The Centre for Child Care Research was rigorously assessed in 1999 and based on the success of its work was funded for a further five years. As a result of the former Centre for Child Care Research's achievements and expansion, the status of the Centre was raised in 2002 to that of an Institute of Child Care Research.



Professor Dorota Iwaniec

This status meant the Institute became a wholly independent unit at the University, and, as a consequence, was able to play a more active role in Faculty and University life. The appointment of the Deputy Director strengthened the senior management and scientific rigour of the Institute's work. Since changes in the HPSS funding structures were implemented in 1998, the unit has been core-funded by the R&D Office in Northern Ireland on a 5-year cycle. Core funded units are created to play an important role in the development of research expertise in critical or orphan areas (i.e. areas where there is a less developed culture and history of quality research) and the Institute is currently the only core-funded unit supported by the R&D Office. In addition to this, funding is acquired from Research Councils, local government and charities for further research programmes.

Today the Institute aims to play a key role in influencing the development of child care policy and practice through:

- Identifying and conducting original research into child care needs and services,
- Offering training and consultation on undertaking and applying child care research,
- Providing postgraduate research supervision.

The following five major studies currently underway within the Institute reflect the diversity and impact of our programme of work: the Belfast Youth Development Study (BYDS) is a longitudinal survey of adolescent development focusing on the onset and resistance of adolescent drug use; the Growth, Learning & Development (GLAD) study examines a broad range of factors that may contribute to children's development; Pathways to Permanency is an extension of the Multiple Placements study which examined the placements of younger Looked After Children under the age of 5. However, this study now focuses upon pathways to permanency, which are understood as being represented either by long-term foster care, a return home to the birth family, or adoption; the Ladybird Study aims to evaluate the process and outcomes of Lifestart which is a parent education programme aimed at parents with children aged between 0 and 5; and finally, the Out of the Box study examines alternative education provision in Northern Ireland. Details on all of these studies and

indeed the wide range of Institutes activities can be accessed from our website www.qub.ac.uk/ss/cccr/.

The Institute underwent its second review in October 2004, by a panel of external experts, who recommended that the R&D Office continue to provide core funding for the ICCR for a further five years. The projects which have been recommended for further development under the core programme include the following: a large-scale longitudinal survey of adolescent drug use; a longitudinal study examining risk and protective factors which influence child growth (both growth faltering and obesity) during the first five years of life; a longitudinal study of children under 5 who are living in state care (foster care) or who have been adopted and a study examining the mental health needs of children living in state care (residential care).

So as I retire as Director of the Institute this autumn I leave with great confidence that the ICCR will continue to develop and become a leading force in NI, UK and International child care research. The new Director will join the Institute at an exciting time, with a new cycle of funding and new projects due to commence. As with any proud parent I will be following the progress of the Institute over the coming years. With the potent mix of research projects and activities planned, I am convinced that this forthcoming decade will be every bit as successful as the last!

Blue SCIE for Northern Ireland

Margaret Lynch, Public Relations and Media Manager, Social Care Institute for Excellence

It's not often that you get a good weather forecast north of Dublin. Fortunately, the Social Care Institute for Excellence (SCIE) is bringing a brighter outlook to social care in Northern Ireland. For the first time, the social care sector has an organisation it can turn to for evidence-based support and guidance.

And not before time. Despite its small population, Northern Ireland has more than 41,000 social care workers and nearly 34,000 people are in contact with social services.

Additionally, Northern Ireland experiences unique social care issues. In addition to demography, these

include the structure of the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety (DHSSPS), the level of socio-economic deprivation, the legacy of the 'Troubles', the extent of rurality, and the provision of regional services.

As a UK-wide organisation, one of the challenges for SCIE is to recognise that although there are social care issues which are common, there are also issues which are specific to each country.

Earlier this year, SCIE signed a service level agreement with the (DHSSPS) and appointed John Fenton, Principal Social Worker (Children's Services) as its new



Jane Campbell, Chair of SCIE and Bill Kilgallon, SCIE Chief Executive

Northern Ireland board member. The agreement cements the Department's support of SCIE's work in the provision of good practice guidance and the development of an evidence base of what works in social care. In practice it will enable SCIE to work with the social care sector in Northern Ireland to listen to people's views, establish priority areas and to reflect those in its work programme.

SCIE has been established since 2001 and aims to improve the experience of people who use social care services by developing and promoting knowledge about good practice – that is, practice that helps to create good outcomes for service users and carers. Using information it gathers from many sources – including research and literature, practice examples, and the views of social care practitioners, managers, and service users and carers – SCIE produce free resources which draw out key messages for good practice.

SCIE's work covers the breadth of social care including services for adults, children and families; stakeholder participation; people management; social work education; e-learning; and the use of research and practice knowledge in social care.

In May SCIE visited Northern Ireland en masse from its base in London to meet the sector and spread its

message. The theme of the visit, 'Working with you in Northern Ireland' examined stakeholder expectations of SCIE's activities. SCIE talked about its role and worked with delegates to look at topics such as managing risks in social care, supporting carers and the enhanced role of service users.

SCIE also visited in July to showcase its key resource, Social Care Online (www.scie-socialcareonline.org.uk). Social Care Online offers around 80,000 referenced abstracts, full text articles, research reviews, research briefings and more. And each piece of information is referenced, abstracted and indexed by SCIE's experienced information professionals.

SCIE also held an event in Belfast on 31 October to talk about its popular online fostering practice guide. The Looked After Children's Taskforce from England's Department for Education and Skills, and Research in Practice co-hosted the event.

SCIE intends that all of its work will have a Northern Ireland perspective. One of the ways it can do this is through its Practice Partners' Network, which plays an important role in developing and testing SCIE materials.

If you want to know more about SCIE's work, visit www.scie.org.uk, call 020 7089 6840 or 020 7089 6893 (textphone) or email info@scie.org.uk. SCIE is also happy to visit you in Northern Ireland to run in-house workshops. Please contact us for further details.

"We are very pleased to be working closely with the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety and with the wider social care sector in Northern Ireland.

SCIE has a lot it can learn from the way social care is practised in Northern Ireland – there is much good practice and examples of integrated working. On the other hand, there are many issues that are unique to Northern Ireland that I hope SCIE can, over time, assist with."

Chair of SCIE, Jane Campbell



R&D Office Workshop and Conference Support

Dissemination of new knowledge is an essential prerequisite for an evidence-based and research-led Health and Personal Social Services (HPSS) in Northern Ireland. The R&D Office offers support for workshops and conferences, which can provide an effective method of dissemination of research findings. Workshop and Conference support may be applied for throughout the year, and an application form is available on the R&D Office website: www.rdo.centralservicesagency.n-i.nhs.uk.

The following reports are from two conferences, which took place in September 2005, and received support from the R&D Office.

Youth Development Study Conference

Andrew Percy, Research Fellow, Institute of Child Care Research

A major five-year study of adolescent drug use, funded by the R&D Office, has revealed that a minority of young people have experimented with ecstasy and cocaine by age 15.

Over 150 delegates from schools and youth agencies across Northern Ireland attended a conference in Belfast on 15 September 2005 to hear the findings of the Institute of Child Care Research's Youth Development Study.

The study has been tracking over 3,500 young people in Northern Ireland from their first year of

secondary school (aged 11) through to fifth form (aged 16). The research team collected information on key aspects of adolescent life including their smoking, alcohol and drug use, their friendship networks, relationships with their parents and friends, personality, leisure activities, behaviour problems, attitudes to education and behaviour in school, and the neighbourhood in which they live.

While drug use is very limited among young people in their first year of secondary school (aged 11/12), by the time they are aged 15 almost half have used an illicit drug and over one in ten have made the transition to more regular drug use. Risk factors identified for regular drug use at age 15 included: having a risk-taking personality profile, getting into trouble at school, and being involved in delinquent behaviours.

At age 11 a clear gender divide existed in smoking, alcohol and drug use, with more boys than girls using. However, as young people grow older this gap narrows. By age 15, more girls smoke than boys (50% versus 42%), and girls are as likely as boys to get drunk or use illicit substances.

It is possible to identify subgroups of young people who are at high risk of developing drug related problems. One such group is young people who are excluded from school. There is also evidence of a potentially 'hidden' group of young people within schools who report regular and frequent drug use.



Andrew Percy, Dr Patrick McCrystal, Kathy Kiggins, Dr Rosemary Kilpatrick, Professor Sir Michael Rutter, Dr Eilish Gilvarry, Mr Rob Phipps, Professor Dorota Iwaniec

Delegates also heard a number of international experts speak on the development of problem behaviour in young people and on the services provided to meet the needs of these young people. Key conference speakers included: Professor Sir Michael Rutter (Social, Genetic and Developmental Psychiatry Centre, Institute of Psychiatry, King's College London); Dr Eilish Gilvarry (Clinical Director, Northern Regional Drug and Alcohol Service); and Mr Rob Phipps (Northern Ireland Regional Alcohol and Drugs Coordinator, Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety).

For further information, contact: Andrew Percy, Patrick McCrystal or Kathy Higgins at the Institute of Child Care Research, 028 9097 5401.

Youth Development Study web site:
<http://www.qub.ac.uk/ss/cccr/projects/youth.html>

Multidisciplinary Addictions Conference

Victor Robinson, Research Lecturer Practitioner, University of Ulster and Down Lisburn Trust and Chair of the Conference



Victor P Robinson

The history of attitudes towards the use of substances and the extent to which the misuse of these substances including alcohol may compromise otherwise healthy lifestyles is an interesting case study in the evolution of change relating to what in effect has become a major issue within society. As is the case in many other geographical regions, it seems that the level of disruption caused by addiction in Northern Ireland (NI) is well known but yet by comparison relatively difficult to measure, and it is also very much influenced by what is regarded as culturally acceptable behaviour within our socio-political context. In any



Professor Martin Plant, University of the West of England, Victor P Robinson, Research Lecturer Practitioner, University of Ulster and Down Lisburn Trust, Professor Ruth Barrington, Chief Executive Health Research Board, Dublin and Professor Moira Plant, University of the West of England

case, it would be a fairly reasonable assertion that whatever form addiction takes, challenges borne out of substance use have a tendency to disturb society's view of patients/clients as 'deserving'.

Between the 7th and 9th of September 2005 an International Multidisciplinary Addictions Conference was held at the Jordanstown Campus of the University of Ulster in NI in an attempt to give expression to this societal addiction interface. Over the 3 days more than 150 delegates from various regions of the United Kingdom and Ireland attended the conference as well as delegates from other European Countries and from the United States of America. The conference entitled 'Exploring Research, Policy and Practice Issues', was a high profile collaborative venture organised by the Nursing Council on Alcohol (NCA) and the Addictions Forum (AF) and hosted by the University of Ulster (UU).

The keynote address was fervently delivered by Fergal Keane, who as one of the BBC's most distinguished correspondents and an award-winning journalist in his own right, required little introduction. His speech was an impassioned exposition of human dignity relating to his personal struggle with alcoholism throughout his life. This clearly set the tone of the conference event and from a social and spiritual perspective reinforced with us all in many ways that addiction is an enemy best fought by the people closest to the victim.

Amongst several other important competing reasons, the conference specifically aimed to provide a framework for constructive dialogue and an opportunity for networking amongst a wider range of service providers, carers, academic leads and services users. Consequently, conference themes were designed with the intention to foster an exchange of

information on contemporary research, policy and practice issues of concern related to alcohol, tobacco, illicit and prescribed drugs within NI, as well as other topics such as hepatitis and Human Immuno-deficiency Virus (HIV).

Many of these issues have greater socio-political implications for the province in terms of how they may affect our young people for example, not least of which is the likely introduction of a total ban on smoking in NI as well as the potential extension and relaxation of alcohol licensing laws, influenced no doubt by 24 hour opening hours that are proposed for England and Wales in November this year. Such themes were organised around a series of symposia that brought together various experts in their chosen fields of addiction either and/or as the symposium Chairs or the presenters.

Delegates were able to 'touch the spirit and feel the welcome' as they enjoyed the convivial atmosphere of the province of NI, a now vibrant and modern European region re-inventing itself as it emerges and develops from its very unique culture.

The organising committee would like to extend their appreciation to all of the organisations without whose support the conference would not have been so successful. These include the University of Ulster, the R&D Office, the Eastern Health and Social Services Board, Link Pharmaceuticals, Pavillion Publishers, the Northern Ireland Community Addiction Teams Forum, Down Lisburn Health and Social Services Trust and the Alcohol Education and Research Council in London.

The Child Care Research Forum

Kathryn Higgins, Institute of Child Care Research and Chair of the Child Care Research Forum

Intersectoral, interagency, multidisciplinary – not just a list of buzzwords but a fitting description of the recently established Child Care Research Forum (CCRF), which is funded by the R&D Office. This exciting initiative seeks to bring service commissioners and providers from agencies such as Health and Social Services Boards through to NSPCC, Barnardos and Playboard – together with academics from Queens University Belfast (QUB) and University of Ulster in an attempt to develop a crosscutting child care research culture in Northern Ireland. The CCRF is both innovative and timely given the explicit need identified in the forthcoming Children's strategy to address gaps in information about children and young people here in Northern Ireland. Chaired and facilitated by the ICCR in QUB, the forum meets quarterly and membership is open to all organisations and/or individuals with an interest in childcare. The CCRF encourages membership of young people through organisations such as Voices of Young People in Care (VOYPIC), Northern Ireland Commissioner for Children and Young People (NICCY) and the Children's Law Centre.

The forum's objectives reflect its pivotal position in the child care research field to:

- Act as a launch pad for developing research initiatives and ideas across researchers, child care policy makers and practitioners;
- Operate as a vehicle to facilitate development of interdisciplinary research proposals which will be used to inform both policy and practice;
- Develop a plan to maximise the potential that research in the area of child care is disseminated and transferred into practice.

Evidence that the CCRF is making an impact can be seen from the exciting developments already set in motion. A major success is the children's research database which provides the latest research relating to the children's sector in Northern Ireland in one easy to use and comprehensive website. Within reach of individuals and organisations across the children's sector research on all aspects of children's lives can now be retrieved. This exciting new development by the Child Care Research Forum is sponsored by the Children and Young People's Unit in the Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister. Not only will you now be able to access a bibliography of key research studies focused on children in Northern Ireland, but you will also be able to access, in many

cases, a summary of that work. The database is hosted by ARK (the Northern Ireland Social and Political Archive). Researchers are encouraged to contribute to the database website and to inform ARK of any new research they have conducted. You can find the database and information on how to submit research on <http://www.ark.ac.uk/orb/childabout.html>.

Forthcoming CCRF activities planned for 2006 include a series of seminars on various research methodologies including innovative approaches to involving children in research. Such a programme is only made possible by sponsorship from the R&D Office.

To celebrate the success of the CCRF in Northern Ireland and to formally introduce the CCRF database

an official launch took place on 13 December 2005 in QUB. For further Information on the CCRF contact Kathryn Higgins, Institute of Child Care Research (02890 975401).



R&D Office Doctoral Fellowship

Working with people with mental health problems who are difficult to engage

Gavin Davidson, Research Fellow, School of Social Work, Queen's University Belfast

It seems a clear and general principle that you should have the right to refuse health and social services if you have the capacity to do so. What should services do, however, if your capacity to decide seems to fluctuate because of mental health problems and there is a risk that you might harm yourself and, much more unusually, others?

This research project is comparing how three Trusts in Northern Ireland are responding to people who have severe and enduring mental health problems, present a high level of risk, often have difficulties with alcohol and drugs but who are difficult to engage with mental health services.

In North and West Belfast, the existing Community Mental Health Teams try to respond along with their many other competing demands. In Causeway three specialist community psychiatric nurses focus on this group and in Homefirst two multi-disciplinary Assertive Outreach teams were set up in 2002. Assertive Outreach is an approach which was devised in Madison, Wisconsin specifically to try and engage this group and the teams in Homefirst are the first in Northern Ireland. This therefore presented an ideal opportunity to try and find out which approach works best.



Gavin Davidson, Research Fellow, School of Social Work

Initially 76 people were identified across the three Trusts who met the criteria for the study and, of those, 61 agreed to be involved. The research involves interviewing the person and their key worker at baseline then at nine months and eighteen months on a range of areas including their mental health, social functioning, how empowered they feel, their quality of life and, of particular interest, given the ethical issues involved, how coerced they feel. The nine month interviews are being completed at present.

Given that one of the main criteria for inclusion in this study was a previous history of reluctance/unwillingness to engage with mental health services, I had initial concerns as to how many people would agree to be involved and whether they would

remain for all three interviews and follow-up. Fortunately, so far, only three people from the original group have been unable to be followed up, for various reasons.

This research is funded through an R&D Office Fellowship which enabled me to be seconded from my previous post as a Team Leader in Homefirst. I'm now based in the School of Social Work at Queens and would strongly urge more social workers to consider this route into incorporating research into practice. Unfortunately, it does seem that in social work there has been less of an emphasis on research than in other

disciplines, and the Fellowship Scheme is one method by which this can be rectified.

The application process is demanding, and it took me a couple of attempts to be successful, but there was plenty of help available from tolerant colleagues with more research experience, from Jim Campbell my supervisor at Queens and from the R&D Office itself. In preparation, I had also completed research methods training and finally grasped the very basics of statistics. I'm now about half way through the research and I'm simply enjoying the process.

The Institute of Child Care Research and Childwatch International

Dr Helga Sneddon, Research Fellow, Institute of Child Care Research

The Institute of Child Care Research (ICCR) has been recently awarded Key Institution status by Childwatch International. Childwatch International is a network of institutions and associations involved in interdisciplinary research on issues relating to children's rights, development and well-being across the world. The Network seeks to strengthen child-centred research to contribute towards real improvement in children's well-being. Its activities are based on the comparative advantage of networking and on the common interests in research efforts with a global scope.

The Childwatch International network was founded in 1993 as a response from the research community to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. The Convention serves as a common agenda for research aimed at improving children's living conditions, well-being and participation. The members of Childwatch International are the Key Institutions. They are committed to child research with an interdisciplinary approach, and within the framework of international cooperation. Key Institutions carry out research on and with children, and are committed to a common agenda for promotion of children's rights, development and well-being. Other key institutions are drawn from places such as Canada, Jamaica, Spain, Scotland, China, Israel, England, Russia, Brazil, Venezuela, Australia, Japan, Austria, New Zealand, USA, Ireland, Colombia, Africa, Costa Rica, Uruguay, Thailand, Norway, Italy and India.



Dr Helga Sneddon and colleagues from Key Institutions at Childwatch Summit in Norway

Representatives of the Key Institutions convene a summit meeting every three years to discuss issues connected to network activities and to develop strategies to pursue application of research to policy and practice and mutual capacity building through collaboration. Myself and my colleague from the ICCR, Dr Sarah Allen, attended the most recent meeting of Key Institutions in Hurdal, Norway in June 2005. In total, 37 of the 45 Key Institutions were represented at this meeting and it provided an opportunity for lively debate on a number of key international issues and information exchange. Discussions included the global scenario for child research for the next decade, experiences of networks, partnerships and committees supported by Childwatch, current international issues including violence against children, different countries'

responses to the Tsunami, and implementation of children's rights. It was clear from the meeting that this group provides opportunities to learn directly from the diversity of each other's countries and cultures (some very similar to ourselves, some very different), promote capacity building and highlight alternative ways of using knowledge and resources to address local, national and international issues.

Childwatch International, in collaboration with a group of Norwegian researchers from the University of Oslo (UiO), the Norwegian Social Research (NOVA) helped to organise the Childhoods 2005 conference which took place at the University of Oslo 29 June - 3 July 2005. A total of 1200 child and youth researchers, practitioners and policy makers from 95 different

countries met for 5 days to present research, debate and exchange knowledge about modern childhood and youth. Professor Dorota Iwaniec and Dr Rosemary Kilpatrick represented the ICCR at this conference. A post-conference website is currently being developed on <http://childhoods2005.uio.no>.

The ICCR feels privileged to have gained membership of the Childwatch International network and looks forward to information exchange and future collaboration with the other members. We believe that participation should be beneficial in many ways for driving the agenda for children and young people forward in both a local and global context. More information on Childwatch can be obtained on the website <http://www.childwatch.uio.no>.

R&D Office Budget

Dr Michael Neely, Operational Director, R&D Office

The R&D Office has not escaped the severe financial pressures facing the HPSS over recent months. Despite the additional £450 million directed to Health in the draft budget over the next two years, inescapable clinical demands have led to a Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety (DHSSPS) plan to redirect more of the existing budget towards front line services. The Department does not regard HPSS R&D as a frontline service and has asked the R&D Office to put contingency measures in place to plan for a £1 million budget cut in the HPSS R&D Fund allocations for 2006-2007 onwards.

Coming at a time when the UK Clinical Research Collaboration (UKCRC see R&D Today Issue 4) is bringing additional R&D Funding to the rest of the UK and when full economic costing of university based research is set to increase the cost of academic research, a £1 million budget cut will have significant impacts on HPSS R&D. Over and above the size of the budget cut, it is disappointing that the Department still does not regard R&D as part of the HPSS's frontline services. HPSS R&D has a profound and sometimes immediate impact on patient and client care – this is the driving force behind the additional investment being made through the UKCRC in England, Scotland and Wales.

Funding from the R&D Office has direct benefits on health and social care outcomes, the following are some examples:

- Research using the SPECT brain imaging system has resulted in the establishment of a brain SPECT service at Belfast City Hospital, which is used for diagnosis of dementia.
- The Northern Ireland Cancer Clinical Trials Unit, funded primarily by the R&D Office, allows patients to access national and international clinical trials in which the quality standards of care are universally higher and the patient outcomes better. This has contributed to the development of a high quality cancer service in Northern Ireland, which is internationally recognised. Currently 50 clinical trials are open at the Unit.
- A research project identifying index members of familial groups with elevated cholesterol levels (a risk factor for coronary heart disease) has resulted in the detection of large numbers of previously unrecognised individuals with genetic lipid disorders.
- Research analysing the Northern Ireland Retinitis Pigmentosa population, which is pioneering the use of microarray genetic screening technology in the field of Ophthalmology, has the potential to form the basis of a commercial screening programme for this genetic cause of blindness.
- A research team has developed an innovative methodology for establishing drug-dosing schedules for very small, very sick children.

Currently around 70 per cent of drugs given to seriously ill neonates are not licenced which means the correct dosing schedule is unknown.

- Research carried out by the Child Health and Welfare RRG has led to the development of a simple non-invasive test for meningococcal meningitis.

HPSS R&D has a real and central role to play in the delivery of effective health & social services. As well as improving the health of Northern Ireland, HPSS R&D can improve the wealth of the region and the R&D Office is working with various partners to help ensure

HPSS innovations can be taken forward and developed commercially.

The R&D Office has yet to receive formal notification of its forward allocation. In the interim, the R&D Office has to put in place contingency measures to reduce its spending over the next two years. As an immediate consequence the award of the current Health & Social Care Research Studentships will be delayed and the R&D Office 2006 MPhil Fellowship Scheme will not be advertised until the position clarifies.

Noticeboard

Bursary Scheme 2005

The Bursary Evaluation Panel met and evaluated applications for round one of the 2005 Bursary Scheme in August. Two awards were made.

Successful Applicants	Course Title
Dr Derek Fairley	MSc in Bioinformatics
Mrs Loreena Hill	Masters Degree in Nursing

A total of 12 applications were received for Round Two of the Bursary Scheme, and evaluation is currently underway.

Cochrane Fellowships 2005

Three applicants from Northern Ireland were successful in the latest round of Cochrane Fellowships. Successful applicants are provided with protected time to undertake a systematic review.

Candidate	Supervisor	Review Title
Mrs Bernadette Lyons	Dr Sheila Lennon	<i>Botulinum toxin A for treatment of spasticity after stroke or non progressive brain lesion.</i>
Professor Carmel Hughes	Dr Michael Smith	<i>Infection control measures and isolation policies for preventing transmission of MRSA</i>
Professor Deirdre Walsh	Professor Suzanne McDonough	<i>Transcutaneous Electrical Nerve Stimulation (TENS) for Acute Pain</i>

Recognised Research Group Call

The call for new projects under the Recognised Research Group Strand closed on 11 November 2005. A total of 61 applications were received. These are now undergoing evaluation.

Health & Social Care Services Research Studentships 2006

The call for new projects under this scheme closed on 14 October 2005. This award assists the successful individual to develop a career in HCSR by undertaking one year of general research training and by following a three-year programme leading to a PhD. Six applications were received and are currently undergoing evaluation.

Small Grants Scheme 2005

The small grants offered under this scheme are intended to provide opportunities for inexperienced researchers to begin to acquire a track record in the acquisition of grants. It is targeted at those professions starting from a low R&D base and is in recognition of the funding gap that exists for this group at post-doctoral level. The Evaluation Panel met on 6 October 2005. The following applicants were successful:

Successful Applicant	Title
Dr Dale Spence	Identifying intrauterine growth restriction in a low risk population: experience and attitudes of midwives, obstetricians and ultrasonographers
Dr Laurence Taggart	Developing a mental health checklist for use by teachers with pupils who have special needs

Doctoral Fellowships 2006

A total of 38 applications were received for the current round of the Doctoral Fellowship scheme, which closed on 14 October 2005. These applications are currently undergoing peer review.

Medical Physics Studentship

The R&D Office, in partnership with NIRMPA, is now supporting Christina Agnew to complete this combined programme of Clinical Scientist and part-time PhD training.

R&D Office/ Health Foundation/ Medical Research Council Research Award

The R&D Office has been joined by the Health Foundation and the Medical Research Council to provide this unique opportunity for researchers in nursing and the allied health professions. A consortium of researchers submitted a proposal in August 2005, which is currently undergoing peer review, and it is anticipated that a final decision on the award will be made by a Panel convened in December 2005. A number of opportunities for pre- and post-doctoral Fellowships in nursing and AHP research are built into this proposal.

National Personal Awards

The National Co-ordinating Centre for Research Capacity Development (NCCRC) recently advertised its second call for applications to its National Personal Awards Scheme, with a closing date of 11 January 2006. The programme funds research awards at three levels - researcher development, post-doctoral and career scientist. This scheme is also open to applicants from higher education institutions. The advertisement, more details and a link to the application form can be found on the R&D Office web site.

Research & Development Office

12-22 Linenhall Street

Belfast, BT2 8BS

Tel: 028 90 553617

Email: enquiry@rdo.n-i.nhs.uk

Website: www.rdo.centralservicesagency.n-i.nhs.uk