



An Ghníomhaireacht um
Leanaí agus an Teaghlach
Child and Family Agency

**National Research Office Reference Paper
on the Development of a Research Skills
Programme located within Research Minded
Culture and Utilisation Structures**

June 2016

Contents

1. Introduction.....	4
1.1 Background to the Paper.....	4
1.2 Introduction to the Paper.....	4
 2. What does the Literature say?.....	 5
2.1 The Development of Organisational and Practitioner ‘Research Minded’ Cultures.....	5
2.2 Conceptual Frameworks of Organisational and Practitioner Research Utilization.....	6
 3. International Models of Promoting and Supporting Research Culture and Research Skills Training.....	 8
3.1 Institute for Research and Innovation in Social Services (IRISS).....	8
3.2 Research in Practice (RIP).....	8
3.3 Practice and Research Together (PART).....	9
3.4 What Works for Children (WWfc).....	9
3.5 Growing Research in Practice (GRIP).....	9
3.6 Supported Research Training Programme.....	10
3.7 Academic Practitioner Partnerships.....	10
 4. Practitioner Research in the Irish Context.....	 12
 5. Linking TUSLA into Research Skills Training and Continuing Professional Development.....	 13
5.1 Research Skills Training Availability in Ireland.....	13
5.2 Academic Qualifications.....	13
5.3 Ad hoc Training Availability.....	14
5.4 Research and Continuing Professional Development.....	14
5.5 TUSLA National Strategy for CPD.....	14
5.6 CORU Professional Registration and CPD.....	15

5.7 Professional Associations.....	15
5.8 Conclusion.....	16
 6. Proposed Models for Development of research skills though a ‘research minded’ Organisation: A Seven Step Strategy.....	17
6.1 Interdisciplinary Collaborative Approach.....	17
6.2 Strategy One: an Online Resource for becoming ‘Research Minded’	18
6.3 Strategy Two: Research and Information Star Skills Development Programme.....	19
6.4 Strategy Three and Four.....	21
6.5 Strategy Three: Practitioner Researcher Skills Development Programme (A).....	22
6.6 Strategy Four: Practitioner Researcher Skills Development Programme (B).....	24
6.7 Strategy Five: Developing a ‘Research Minded’ culture through a TUSLA Staff Induction Programme.....	26
6.8 Strategy Six: Student Research Placement Programme.....	27
6.9 Strategy Seven: Research Conference.....	27
 7. Reference List.....	28
8. Appendices.....	30

1. Introduction

1.1 Background to the Paper

This reference paper was sought by the Research Office of Tusla, The Child and Family Agency to explore and examine how three specific actions within Tusla's Research Strategy 2015-2017 can be prepared for implementation. The actions are as follows:

- A systematic improvement of research skills
- The establishment of research activities in compliance with CPD standards and requirements, and
- The establishment of research training modules through Workforce Development.

The three actions, taken together, refer to interrelated aspects of an approach to a research skills development programme for Tusla staff. In the preparatory stages for the paper, it became apparent that in order to examine and explore approaches to the development of a research skills development programme for Tusla, the author needed to locate the feasibility of implementing such a programme within the wider context and understanding of a 'research minded' organisational culture and effective research utilisation structures. Therefore the paper sits within a discussion of these wider concepts.

The main objectives of the paper are as follows:

- Establish what practices and models currently exist in Ireland for social workers, social care workers and other Tusla staff to avail of research-based skills training internal and external to the organization and the perceived efficacy of these approaches¹;
- Explore through desk research what practices and models are used in other jurisdictions to promote research-based skills training;
- Develop through a stand-alone survey or via Tusla's Research Needs Analysis² a set of questions that will establish an evidence-base for Tusla on the development of research-based skills and related matters;
- Utilising the information above, scope out an approach for Tusla Research Office to implement the three specific actions noted above.

The links between Tusla's Research Strategy 2015-2017, Corporate Strategy 2015-2017 and Tusla's National Strategy for CPD 2016 also highlight the linkages between research, learning and Tusla's corporate vision and mission.

¹ The perceived efficacy of approaches was not considered for this paper but should be considered for examination in the future

² In 2016, the National Research Office commissioned UNESCO Child and Family Research Centre to produce a Research Needs Analysis report for the purpose of responding to Tusla's Research Strategy specifically in terms of identifying and prioritising the research and development needs of the Agency's functions for the period 2015 – 2017 in line with Corporate objectives (report forthcoming). A staff survey was included in the design, which was disseminated to all staff within Tusla. The author has drawn on relevant preliminary data from this survey for this paper, with kind permission of NUIG.

Tusla's Research Strategy 2015-2017 identifies five specific objectives and a number of actions to realise the vision of TUSLA as a learning organisation committed to evidence-informed decision-making and high quality service delivery.

Tusla's Corporate Plan 2015-2017 states Tusla's commitment to delivering evidence informed and outcomes focused service for children and families. The corporate plan includes research as a strategic objective, Objective 7, *'Build on our research strategy to develop policy and enable evidence-based decision making and high quality service delivery'*.

TUSLA launched the National Strategy for CPD otherwise known as the CPD strategy in May 2016. The TUSLA Corporate Plan 2015-2017 outlines a number of strategic objectives for the agency. Strategic Objective 5 refers specifically to workforce development:

'Develop a workforce which is valued and supported within a learning organisation' (Strategic Objective 5, Tusla Corporate Plan 2015-2017).

One of the actions underpinning this strategic objective is for Tusla to:

'Develop a learning culture by supporting participation of staff in a broad range of applied learning and development activities, including formal training courses, mentoring, e-learning and research opportunities'. (Tusla Corporate Plan 2015-2017)

1.2 Introduction to the Paper

The paper presented draws from literature, models of best practice for the development of research skills programmes, details on research skills training availability and the link between research and CPD.

The paper is presented as follows:

Chapter 1: Background and Introduction to paper

Chapter 2: Select Literature Review

Chapter 3: Exploration of international models of research skills development programmes within a research minded culture and research utilisation context

Chapter 4: Research skills development within the Irish context

Chapter 5: Research skills development and Continuous Professional Development

Chapter 6: Proposed models for a research skills development programme located within Tusla's research minded culture

References

Appendices

2. What does the Literature say?

As referred in Chapter 1, the exploration and examination of a research skills development programme for Tusla staff is located within a selected review of relevant literature. While the direct focus of the paper, as scoped out by the National Research Office, is the examination of approaches to the development of a research skills development programme, a review of the existing literature related to the development of such programmes clearly points to the requirement to ‘nest’ such programmes within wider organisational vision and culture.

A review of the literature identified notes reoccurring themes in relation to the development of ‘research minded’ organisations and the conceptual frameworks of organisational and practitioner research utilisation, both of which will be described further in this document. Other emerging themes, though not selected for discussion in this paper, include: collaborative research (Fleming, Beresford, Bewley, Croft, Branfield, Postle and Turner, 2014), research capacity (Owen and Cooke, 2004) and the challenges of research capacity development brought about by the diverse understandings of disciplinary and interdisciplinary research practices in social work and social care (Sharland, 2012). Data from two Irish training needs scoping surveys will also be considered: The Health Social Care Professionals (HSCP) 2011 survey (McHugh & Byrne, 2011) (n=373) and some preliminary data extracted from Tusla’s forthcoming Research Needs Analysis (RNA) 2016 staff survey (n=59³) (see footnote 1).

2.1 The Development of Organisational and Practitioner ‘Research Minded’ Cultures

The literature search identified reoccurring themes in relation to the development of ‘research minded’ organisations.

A definition of research mindedness is taken from a project sponsored by the former Central Council for Education and Training in Social Work (CCETSW) London and South East (Barn and Harrison, 1995).

Formed through the consultation with social work practitioners, social work educators, external assessors and students the following elements were identified.

Research mindedness is:

- ‘A faculty for critical reflection informed by knowledge and research
- An ability to use research to inform practice which counters unfair discrimination, racism, poverty, disadvantage and injustice, consistent with core social work values
- An understanding of the process of research, and the use of research to theorise from practice’.

Drawing on the most prominent themes the literature is discussed as follows, for example: leadership in cultivating ‘research minded’ organisations, learning organisational frameworks, communities of practice and how they support the ‘research minded’ employees.

³ Given that the sample of the TUSLA RNA is not representative of the overall workforce, these results cannot be generalised to represent the wider workforce population.

Firstly, the development of a formalised ‘research minded’ culture requires leadership and organisational governance and support, this occurs at a corporate level. A management ethos and message that supports research practices prioritises service delivery goals, emphasises the value of information about service users and their interactions with the organisation and also appreciates the value of purposeful data reporting (Austin et al 2012, McBeath and Austin 2015).

Secondly, at a managerial level, the development of a ‘research minded’ culture is dependent on the alignment and integration of such culture within a learning structure. Learning organisational frameworks facilitate knowledge development and sharing specifically where there are managerial commitments to critical inquiry and innovative approaches to service delivery (Senge, 1990). These contexts allow practitioner researchers⁴ to contribute to and benefit from organisational engagement in research (McBeath and Austin, 2015). Data extracted from the Tusla RNA staff survey found that 36% (18) of respondents viewed Tusla as a learning organisation and 40% (21) did not.

And third, at local levels, not only are practitioner researchers supported from a framework that prioritises learning, they are supported from communities of practice for example local or team based opportunities that involve teamwork, shared learning and local or organisational goals that enhance learning from practice (Beddoe, 2009; Orme and Powell, 2007; Wenger, 1998) cited in McBeath and Austin (2015). This in turn can act as a social support network for like-minded practitioners and improve a sense of solidarity in research practices. In practical terms and at a local level, Buckley and Whelan (2009) identify the importance of training practitioners in self-reflection, critical thinking and evaluation skills as part of developing research cultures among practitioners.

A ‘research minded practitioner’; has, for example:

‘a capacity to critically reflect on practice to develop researchable question, a capacity to be informed by knowledge and research...and a capacity to understand research designs and related methodologies in order to theorize about practice’ (Austin, Dal Santo, & Lee, 2012, p.176) cited in McBeath and Austin (2015).

The ‘research minded practitioner’ is situated within a ‘research minded’ organisation where the vision of a research culture is embraced by its leaders, instilled by its managers and supported by its ‘communities’. Once established, questions arise in relation to research utilisation, for example the type, nature and quality of research and the way in which research is utilised by an organisation requires significant consideration and this is discussed in the next paragraph.

2.2 Conceptual Frameworks of Organisational and Research Utilisation

Extensive literature exists on research utilisation, its location within various settings and the mechanisms through which research is accessed and subsequently utilised. Research utilisation involves an interrelated process of research, policy and practice and frames how participants, contexts and outcomes are conceptualised and modelled (Gray et al 2014). For the purpose of this paper, four main conceptual frameworks for the utilisation of research

⁴ The term ‘practitioner researcher’ does not exclude other staff within Tusla from engaging in research activities related to their service area or function.

are discussed. Starting with Evidenced Based Practice (**EBP**), Evidence Informed Practice (**EIP**), Knowledge Production/Utilisation (**KPU**) and Implementation Science (**IS**).

Evidence based practice is typically predicated on a 'push' model of research use, in other words a top down approach, where formal structures facilitate a linear transfer of information to practitioners who need to be informed by credible evidence to support and strengthen their practice related decisions. EBP is less often interactive and dynamic compared to other approaches of knowledge utilisation (Gray, Sharland, Heinsch and Schubert, 2014). Research data is subjected to rigorous analysis and scientific claims as to what works and what is effective is then disseminated in a planned programmatic structure. Data extracted from the Tusla RNA staff survey found that 88% (40) respondents replied yes to the question 'do you look for research that is based on evidence?' with 2% (1) stating 'no' and 6% (3) were unsure, 15 did not respond to the question.

Evidence Informed Practice is a model that promotes knowledge application where practitioners draw from and integrate knowledge in practice and decision making processes from a variety of sources including service user experiences, professional practices and scientific data on intervention effectiveness (Mullen, Bledsoe & Bellamy 2008) cited in McBeath and Austin (2015). This is aligned with the 'user pull' approach of EIP where practitioners use research as and when needed to inform practice related issues (Brown, 2012, Stevens et al 2009).

Knowledge Production/Utilisation is concerned with broader issues related to utilisation for example articulating existing levels of available useful knowledge, the relevance of and the value of such knowledge to the communities and practices it is intended for. Furthermore, KPU considers the uptake and implementation of knowledge as mechanisms for change in the worlds of policy and practice (Gray et al 2014). More importantly KPU discourse identifies the use of knowledge in contexts of sustained engagement between the knowledge producers and its users. Frameworks for the integration of knowledge translation, transfer and utilisation require interaction between networks, partnerships and knowledge brokers in order to make research accessible, understandable and useable (Moore et al 2011, cited in Gray et al 2014).

Implementation Science is of interest to organisations that produce knowledge and are concerned with using this knowledge for service improvement. An 'implementation gap' occurs whereby much is known by way of research outputs on what works and how it works, however the gap occurs where there is a difference between what is known to work in theory and what is delivered in practice. Traditionally research has focused on improving innovations however the science of how to implement this knowledge has been neglected Burke, Morris, McGarrigle (2012). IS can involve the delivery of a particular programme or policy where policy implementation engages a 'policy cycle' processing design, delivery and review. EBP is increasingly engaging in the domain of implementation science (Gray et al 2014).

Overall, these four conceptual frameworks for research utilisation can identify definite pathways for the dissemination and /or transfer of research based knowledge throughout organisations. Corporate decision making and managerial leadership can establish what frameworks to employ dependent on the nature of what is envisioned as effective use of particular learning from research. The following international models of promoting and

supporting best practice in research utilisation and skills development encounter a range of the frameworks discussed above.

3. International Models of Promoting and Supporting Research Culture, Research Utilisation and Research Skills Training

As set out in the introduction, this paper has sought to identify international models of best practice specific to research skills training and development. It is apparent from the selected literature discussed that research skills development can only exist within a research minded organisation focused on developing a strong research culture and effective research utilisation processes, and one which provides leadership, managerial direction and supportive strategies to develop and enhance the research practices of its workforce.

Several models have been identified representing practices in Scotland, Canada, New Zealand, Australia and the United Kingdom. The purpose of presenting the following selected models is to illustrate a variety of innovations, which include a number of supportive features and mechanisms, most of which are common to the literature already discussed. The rationale for describing these particular models is to present what is available and furthermore what is potentially achievable should the Tusla Research Office wish to develop a similar function. As the features of the models reviewed are framed and defined within contextual variations, the author has used a colour scheme to show how the prominent features of the models reviewed have been incorporated into the section on proposed strategies.

3.1. Institute for Research and Innovation in Social Services (IRISS, Scotland)

The Institute develops and promotes the use of tools and techniques for embedding knowledge, evidence and innovation in practice across social service organisations and agencies in Scotland. Their vision is to develop high standards of practice in social services as expressed through their mission statement:

‘...promote positive outcomes for the people who use Scotland’s social services by enhancing the capacity and capability of the social services workforce to access and make use of knowledge and research for service innovation and improvement’.

The website provides extensive resources for practitioners and policy makers which include online access to research, video links and podcasts. There are three strands to their programme: **evidence informed practice**, innovation and improvement and knowledge media. Partnerships with social service agencies facilitate training and development strategies. The Institute operates a ‘**Champion Network**’, locating research champions throughout organisations with the role identified as to embed knowledge, develop ‘learning for outcomes’, **dissemination, information sharing**, information sessions and joint workshops.

3.2. Research in Practice (RIP, UK)

RIP is a UK organisation with the aim to:

‘...enable safer decision making, more effective resource allocation and robust child centred practice.’

RIP brings together **academic research, practice expertise** and evidence of child and family experiences engagement with services in order for professionals at all levels to have the access to correct knowledge and skills to provide effective services. This practice development model provides **online access to resources**, tools, online and face to face learning events, **network and exchange forums**, evaluation services and tailored supports. Individual and organisational membership applies.

3.3. Practice and Research Together (PART, Ontario, Canada)

PART is an organisation first established on the learning from the RIP model of evidence informed practice. The overall mission of PART is to:

‘promote the understanding and use of evidence-informed practice (EIP) at all levels of the child welfare system in Ontario to ensure the best possible services and outcomes for vulnerable children and families’.

The goals of the organisation include: identifying and packaging evidence in **user friendly formats** for dissemination to child welfare practitioners, to promote the use of EIP through PARTicles (literature reviews), webinars, **learning events** and access to electronic journals (SocIndex), to create organisational learning environments to promote critical thinking and use of evidence in practice. The organisation hold conferences, webinars, provide **literature reviews**, guidebooks, an e-library and an informative website. Link PARTners (LPs) are representatives from member organisations who, by working in partnership with the program promote practice change through EIP. These LPs bring new information and research back to their teams via **email updates** and staff and team based discussions. Incentives for continued engagement of the LPs are: an annual retreat based on developing organisational and systemic change and Zone based meetings which are networking events (Shera and Dill, 2012).

3.4. What Works for Children (WWfc), Research Information Service for Practitioners (UK)

The What Works for Children, Research Information Services works with staff of six ‘Children’s Fund Programmes’ in Yorkshire through an identified implementation officer. The research information service was established to assist practitioners to access information identified by themselves. An **‘Implementation Officer’** identifies with practitioners **where research would be useful**, the officer formulates answerable research questions and also takes questions from practitioners, then translates research into user friendly formats and **relates research to practice problems**. In terms of passing on the information, a summary is provided including a **critical appraisal** of the research identifying strengths and shortcomings and the overall messages from the research. Further references and online resources are provided (Stevens, Liabot, Frost and Roberts, 2005).

3.5. Growing Research in Practice Project (GRIP) ‘Nested Mentoring’ (New Zealand)

The GRIP is a **collaborative mentorship** programme between academics, practitioners and agencies to develop research culture in social service agencies with the realisation that:

‘the expertise contained in the personal experience of practitioners and service users is becoming more relevant to the actual delivery of services and comprehension of the

constantly changing social context than that of ‘experts’ (academics, policy makers and advisors)’ (Kirk and Reid 2002) cited in Fouche and Lunt (2010).

An analysis of the GRIP team found that they worked with 43 practitioners from eight social service agencies, a practitioner advisor, four academics, academic mentors, peer mentors within teams and cultural advisors where required. Mentorship and **mentoring** relationships were core to the GRIP’s quest to cultivate research and practitioner **cultures of enquiry**. Teams of practitioners were supported through mentorship to conceptualise, design, implement and disseminate their own **practice related projects** within their own agencies. Projects were mentored by members of the academic and support team at the practitioner’s place of work at various intervals of the project duration (Fouche and Lunt (2010).

3.6. Supported Research Training Programme, Joint Initiative, Trent Focus Research Support Unit, UK. (Collaboration between Primary care and social care/work)

Following on from scoping study carried out within a primary care network by the Trent Focus research support unit a **skills development** training programme in research skills was identified to address research skills deficits in the primary care and social care contexts researched. A 10 day Supported Research Training Programme was designed and delivered over the course of a year in conjunction with the research unit, a local coordinator, academic supervisor and supported by **local management**. Projects were small scale and mainly took a qualitative approach.

The scoping study also identified a need for a Designated Research Team, which allocates funding to designated **interdisciplinary** research teams for small scale research carried out over the course of a year or two, time is protected for such research.

The study also identified a lack of coordinated, accessible information system. Subsequently, a New library and Knowledge management system was developed and introduced, Social Care Access to Research Evidence, SCARE) Owen and Cooke (2004).

3.7. Academic Practitioner Partnerships, (Peter Mac Social Work Department and University of Melbourne, Australia)

This Academic Practitioner Partnership model of research skills development was grounded in a systemic mentoring approach which involved the Promotion of Practice Based Research (PBR) which encouraged the development of a **practice research culture** and opportunities for social workers to participate in research at multiple levels. Within an Academic practice partnership, social workers in clinical settings were encouraged to be producers as well as consumers and disseminators of knowledge. The model involved seconding a senior research fellow as an academic mentor to the clinical department one day per week for two years. The academic mentor worked in **collaboration with practitioners** in the areas of project consultation, development of research projects and collaborative research projects (Joubert and Hocking, 2015).

Overall, there are a number of salient features presented and described within the models listed above. Functions of these models include: embedding knowledge and promoting high standards of practice (IRISS), enabling for safer decision making and robust child centered practices (RIP) and promoting the understanding of evidence based practices (PART).

Facilitative research and information infrastructures include; the role of a LinkPARTner (PART) or 'Research Champion' (IRISS) in disseminating research at a local level, an Implementation Officer in supporting research use in practice (WWfc). Collaborative approaches include; 'nested mentoring' through academic, practitioner and agency research mentorship (GRIP), supported research skills training programmes (Trent Focus) and Academic Practitioner Partnerships (University of Melbourne).

These functions and approaches may be utilised and replicated in some way in the Irish context in the design and delivery of an innovative approach to developing a 'research minded' culture and a set of 'research minded practitioners'. Proposed approaches for the development of a skills development programme will be included later in the paper.

4. Practitioner research in the Irish Context- What is happening on the ground?

While the Tusla RNA staff survey examined research activity for all staff, the following sections refer more specifically to the links between frontline practitioner research skills utilisation.

Data extracted from the Tusla RNA staff survey found that 64% (30) of respondents replied 'never' when asked 'do you have opportunities to undertake research through the course of your work?' and 4% (2) replied 'daily' and 'weekly' to the same question. When asked 'do you use research in your day to day work?' 69% (33) agreed 'yes' that they use research in their day to day work with 27% (13) replying to 'no' and 4% (2) were 'unsure'. Buckley and Whelan (2009) identified in their paper, 'Putting Research Evidence to Work' based on utilisation of research in the Irish context, several barriers and facilitators to research utilisation in practice. Practitioners cited a lack of time, prioritisation, motivation and poor access to research. Lack of time was also identified by the HSCP survey, 39% (114) citing 'lack of time' as a barrier to undertaking research. Organisational level issues emerged such as an absence of a research culture and the lack of value recognition of research. Data extracted from the Tusla RNA staff survey found that 20% (10) of respondents agreed that Tusla promotes the use of research in day to day work, 61% (31) disagreed with this statement. Buckley and Whelan (2009) stated that facilitators of research utilisation included personal motivations, informal sharing within the workplace and user friendly materials and summaries. Organisations where there was a culture of reflective questioning, appointment of Research Officers and the commissioning and conducting of research along with working with research centres were all contributors to the uptake of research as an information tool.

There has been a systematic attempt to address evidence-informed practice at practitioner level. Tusla has commissioned the Centre for Effective Services (CES) to undertake the following programme described. The Empowering Practitioners and Practice Initiative (EPPI) programme is an existing model of evidence informed practice in the Irish context with the following components: the development of a Professional Development Plan (Empowering Practitioners) for social workers; an outcomes focused Therapeutic Intervention Toolkit (Empowering Practice); and an Evidence Informed Practitioner Programme delivered to social workers in all four regions. To date 67 social workers have participated in the programme. The programme takes a collaborative approach between CES, Tusla Workforce Development personnel and mentors who are working as principal social workers. A four part module programme focuses on outcomes, complex case studies and the development of a literature review. Dissemination is planned for by way of an EPPI conference and online access to literature reviews produced by participants on an EPPI section on the Tusla hub. A further train the trainer manual and programme is being devised so as to enable continuation of the programme.

5. Linking Tusla into Research Skills Training and Continuing Professional Development

5.1. Research Skills Training Availability in Ireland

The HSCP survey found that 82% (145) of 'research active' respondents and 71% (140) of 'research inactive' respondents indicated that they would like to engage in more research, this indicates a positive attitude towards research engagement. Notwithstanding the presence of all of these facilitative structural and personal attributes, formalised learning opportunities may indeed be required to improve the technical skills in the areas of research design, methodological approaches and dissemination strategies. In relation to existing confidence levels of practitioners, 72% (34) replied 'yes' that they have the confidence to undertake research, 6% (3) replied 'no', 11% (3) replied 'unsure' and 6% (3) stated they would 'be rusty', 'require revision' and 'with support and guidance'. Data extracted from the Tusla RNA staff survey also found that 85% (41) stated that they would like to develop their research skills, and 6% (3) stating they would not, 4% (2) were unsure. In relation to the modes of training preferences the HSCP survey found that preferences varied, the largest response categories include: 35% (130) indicated 'one to one mentorship', 28% (105) indicated 'collaborative research clusters/networks', 24% (88) indicated 'practice based workshops'.

In order to further explore wider activities in practitioner researcher development, an online search was carried out to establish what training is available specific to research skills throughout the country. Formalised academic programmes along with some ad hoc training availability was identified.

5.2. Academic Qualifications

It is important to note here that the majority of social work and social care practitioners may have received some research skills training as they typically will have completed an undergraduate qualification to level 7 or level 8 (Quality and Qualifications) and in some cases may have postgraduate level 9 qualifications with those holding a level 10 in the minority. In academic settings (colleges and universities) research methods modules are typically delivered at level 8 and 9 with graduates required to complete a research based dissertation to fulfil course requirements. Data extracted from the Tusla RNA staff survey found that 74% (44) respondents held an undergraduate degree and 58% (34) held a Master's degree. That aside, there are a small number of postgraduate courses specialising in research methods. Trinity College Dublin offer a M.Sc. programme in Applied Social Research, University of Limerick offer a MA in Sociology (Applied Social Research) and the University of Ulster provides a Postgraduate Diploma/M.Sc. in Social Research Skills (which can be taken online). There are plans to run a MA programme in Social Research in Dublin Institute of Technology in 2017 (subject to validation, this programme aims to connect students with organisations by undertaking a direct piece of research related to the organisation rather than the standard dissertation method).

5.3. Less Structured Training Availability

Apart from the formal academic qualifications listed above there is little on offer in the way of short courses. A two day Introduction to Research (social care) workshop has been run in 2015 (Dublin Institute of Technology) aimed at social care graduate researchers. The Social Research Association will hold a half day training event in Dublin on 'Programme Evaluation in Practice'. There are plans for the Social Research Association to host a two day event in Belfast on Evaluation in September 2016. The Health Research Institute University of Limerick and the University of Limerick Hospitals Clinical Research Unit (CRU) are currently running a 10 week Foundation Series in Clinical Research lunchtime seminars on social research methods. The Psychological Society of Ireland has scheduled an event in Participatory Action Research (PAR) for health promotion in University College Cork for May 2016. HSEland, an online learning resource for health and social care professionals have two research related online modules; 'Introduction to Writing for Publication', 'Abstract Writing and Poster Presentation' of one hour duration each.

As identified, there is a sparse selection of research skills training availability on offer, the training that is available is located in larger cities for example: Dublin, Limerick, Cork and Belfast and the online opportunities for learning are at a minimum.

5.4. Research and Continuing Professional Development (CPD)

The CPD frameworks for both Tusla and the professional registration boards established under CORU incorporate and account for research related activities as a component of ongoing professional development.

5.5. CORU, Professional Registration and Continuing Professional Development

CORU is the body responsible for the regulation of health and social care professionals. Twelve registration boards have been established under the Health and Social Care Professionals Act 2005, three of which pertain to professions included in the workforce of Tusla namely psychologists, social workers and social care workers. To date social workers are the first profession to enter into formalised registration, it is expected that registration of social care practitioners will commence in 2017.

'Coru's role is to protect the public by promoting high standards of professional conduct, professional education, training and competence' Framework for Registration Boards Continuing Professional Development and Requirements (2013).

The Health and Social Care Professionals Act 2005 empowers a registration board to adopt a Continuing Professional Development (**CPD**) function. The Code of Professional Conduct and Ethics adopted by each registration board states that:

'...it is the responsibility of each registrant to keep their knowledge, skills and performance up to date, of a high standard and relevant to their practice' Framework for Registration Boards Continuing Professional Development and Requirements (2013).

Engagement in research or research related activities for the purpose of accumulating **CPD** points is not compulsory however there are a broad range of research activities that may be engaged in, in order to inform practice and subsequently accrue **CPD** points.

For example in the social work **CPD** cycle 100 points should be accumulated over a two year cycle. Reading a professional publication/journal article is rewarded by 1 point, 5 points are rewarded for reviewing a journal article for publication, 10 points are allocated for writing or publishing a journal article and 20 points is allocated per practice-based research project carried out by the registrant. Also, the attendance of a conference, information session or academic study programme is rewarded 1 point per hour of attendance (Irish Association of Social Workers Continuing Professional Development Policy (IASW) (2012)).

Social Care Ireland (SCI) in preparation for registration has established a suite of **CPD** resources (portfolios, course endorsements application criteria and has begun an initial trial audit of portfolios of its members in preparation for registration). The **CPD** programme under Social Care Ireland requires for 30 points to be accrued each year. It is the member's responsibility to determine the number of points to assign to each activity that elicits new learning. Guidelines on points allocation to research related activities are as follows: 1 point for the reading of a professional publication (journal article), reviewing a journal article for publication can be allocated 1 point per hour, writing or publishing a journal article can be awarded up to 4 points, active engagement in research in a professional field can be allocated up to 12 points. Also the attendance of a conference, seminar or undertaking an accredited course can be awarded 1 point per hour of attendance.

5.7 Professional Associations

There are other avenues for existing members of professional groups such as the IASW and SCI to develop their research interests and knowledge, these initiatives come in the form of special interest groups and conferences held by professional associations.

The IASW has an established a special interest group titled the 'Practitioner Researcher Group' and a 'Research Connect' facility, details of which can be found on the IASW website. The Practitioner Researcher Group meet on a monthly basis in Dublin and new groups have recently commenced in Cork and Galway. The IASW website, for its members, provides links to research organisations, useful presentations on publication and dissemination, poster presentations, a subject guide for social work (HSE Library) and records of various minutes of AGM's and annual reports on the group's activity. Also there is a link provided to 'Practice Links' (Compiled in University College Cork) which is a bi-monthly online resource providing information on a broad range of social work practice related training and research throughout the country and internationally. The 'Irish Social Worker' Journal is an avenue for which social work research outputs can be directed. The IASW has also had a recent conference where research presentations were delivered.

SCI are seeking to establish a special interest group for research, this has had little uptake to date however, the Irish Association of Social Care Workers Executive have nominated an academic representative to lead the research group. In terms of avenues for practitioner research outputs, Social Care Ireland holds an annual conference where practitioners can deliver presentations or display research posters. The Journal of Applied Social Studies and a newly formed Journal of Social Care (awaiting first publication) are available to researchers wishing to seek publication in the Irish context.

There is much to consider in regard to linking Tusla with research related **CPD** activities. The recent launch of the Tulsa **CPD** strategy will serve as a supporting mechanism not only for professional development but for the development of research opportunities for

practitioners wishing to engage in same. Under professional registration, CORU stipulates for registrants to keep their knowledge, skills and performance up to date and of a high standard and identifies that research related activities account for elements of skills and knowledge development through the recognition of these activities for the purpose of compiling **CPD** portfolios. Professional associations such as the IASW and SCI too recognise the relevance of research to their members by providing special interest groups and conferences where research is disseminated. In short, Tusla, as a learning organisation should account for all mechanisms for **CPD** and promote the inclusivity of all disciplines within the workforce and their respective associations in the strategic planning, promotion and delivery of training that encompass research and research related skills development.

5.8. Conclusion

This paper has represented a range of theoretical, structural and practical mechanisms. At present, the National Research Office is evolving, further proposals are included here to support the skills development aspect of the Research strategy. These proposed strategies bring opportunities for continuing professional development, supporting the 'learning organisation', incorporating staff engagement in research activities and the potential development of an Agency that is based on concrete, evidence informed and evidence based practice where knowledge production and utilisation is commonplace and so too is the implementation of learning that serves to improve experiences and outcomes for service users.

6. Proposed Models for the development of research skills through a ‘research minded’ Organisation: A Seven Step Strategy

The proposed models have been informed and devised through the literature review presented and the descriptions of the international models included earlier in this report. It is paramount to establish coordinated and collaborative foundations to support the proposals put forward.

6.1. Interdisciplinary Collaborative Approach

Prior to the formation of the proposed strategies, a formalised **interdisciplinary** collaboration framework is required. This is essential to the efficiency, productivity and longevity of any new infrastructure developed. As evident in the international models outlined earlier in the document, **research skills development** takes a **collaborative** approach (drawing on a number of contributors offering a range of specialised skills with a commitment to producing quality research for its users and by its producers). As seen in Figure 1 below, The Research Office (including Research Manager and three Research Officers, assisted by the Research and Information Specialist) is placed at the centre surrounded by infrastructural supporting disciplines and departments. The specialised skills offered by Workforce Learning and Development (WFLD) include training design and delivery, the HSE library offers information accessibility, Academic links provide guidance and education, finally, communications and IT provide the expertise on developing accessible online resources.

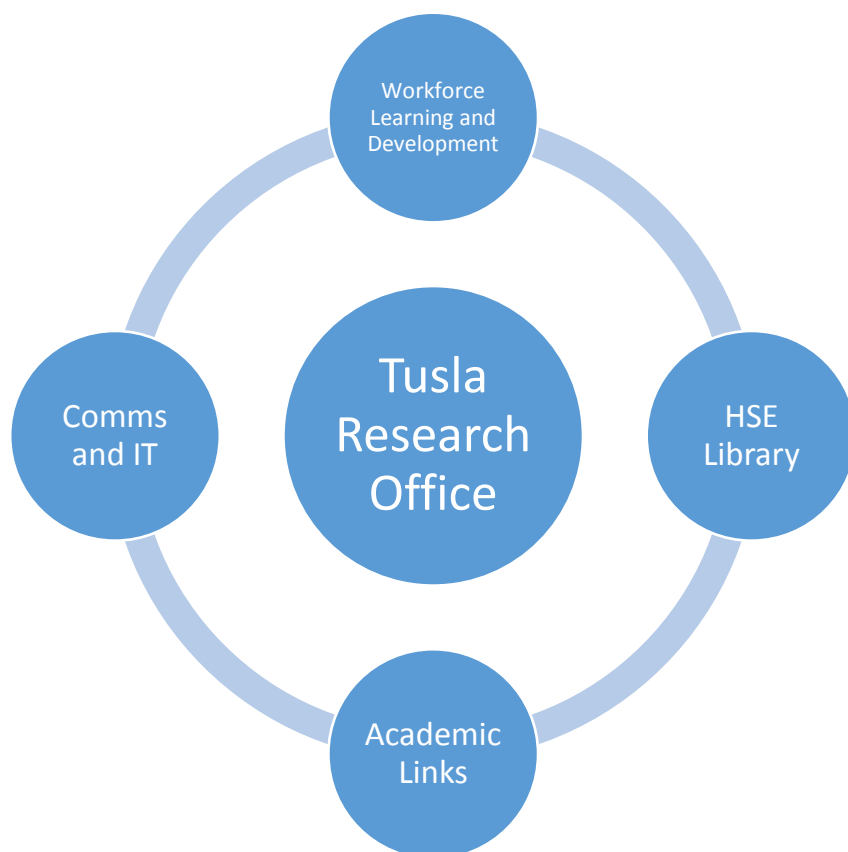


Figure 1. Interdisciplinary Collaboration

6.2. Strategy One: An Online Resource for becoming ‘Research Minded’.

A useful starting point for becoming ‘research minded’ is the understanding of what research is, what is **evidence informed practice** and more importantly how to go about accessing and informing oneself with good quality, robust evidence from relevant research sources. A skills specific resource could be designed, developed and implemented within Tusla.

Through the establishment of the Research and Information Specialist and taking a **collaborative** approach, this should see the design and delivery of an online research resource made available to all those working in Tusla. This **online resource** will act as a centralised hub of research related material, tools and learning resources. These materials can be presented in topical categories in the form of various sections for example: reports (**user friendly formats**), case studies, **network and exchange forums**, research reviews and summaries, service innovation (Innovative **practice expertise**), students link (research themes, Tusla ethics applications, work placement opportunities), Video Links (conferences), Podcasts (topical broadcasts), Blogs (research updates), **Learning Events** (conferences), News (Research Office activity, **academic research**, policy developments, E-Bulletin), Continuing Professional Development (Tusla CPD tools) Information Request email and Contacts (Research Manager and Research Officers).

This online resource will also facilitate e-learning modules initially focused on basic research skills for example: How to conduct a simple literature search using Google, Google scholar, Athens search engine, How to write a **Literature review**, using evidence to support practice in written reports and decision making processes and Research Proposal Design. Online or face to face library tutorials provided in collaboration from WFLD and HSE library will equip workforce with search skills. Online access to EPPI resources will also be made available here. **Email updates** can be sent in relation to what’s new online.

Please see Sample Online Resource Map in Figure2 below



Figure 2. Online Resource Map.

As can be seen above, the personnel required are: Research Manager, Research Officers, Research and Information Specialist, Workforce Learning and Development, Communications/ IT and the Research and Information Champions⁵. It is envisaged that once established, that the Research and Information Specialist will be the administrator of this online resource.

6.3. Strategy Two: Research and Information Stars Skills Development Programme

Tusla's Research Strategy includes an action to support the 'Information Stars', a concept identified by Flanagan (2013) as a mechanism to support and promote the **information sharing** in social work practice. This too, is advocated for by Buckley et al (2013) in the Irish and Canadian context by way of a 'champion', somebody who could act as 'an agency knowledge broker by identifying, appraising and distributing research evidence' which would promote skills development. The IRISS operate a **Champions Network** where it is acknowledged there is a mutual benefit for the 'champion' and the workforce it supports. The establishment of research champions or knowledge brokers '*requires the cultivation of new professional roles and the development of collaborative mechanisms working across research and policy-practice boundaries*' (Grimshaw et al 2004 cited in Gray et al 2014). It could be worthwhile for the proposed position of Information Star going forward to add 'Research' to the title so that the position and role is recognised in its most accessible format: 'Research and Information Star', which would also serve to align it with the Research and Information Specialist title as both are connected to the Research Office.

Governed by the Tusla Research Office and guided by the research priorities emerging from Tusla's forthcoming Research Needs Analysis (RNA), Tusla's Research Advisory Group (RAG) and Tusla's Research Ethics Committee (REC) when established, research and information will flow through to the Research and Information Stars at a local level and vice versa. Negotiations with **local management** will be a central to the recruitment and retention of these Research and Information Stars. Incentives for engaging as a Research and Information Star could be that these activities would be recognised as **CPD** activities. Also, activities created by the Research and Information Star could be used as opportunities of reflective learning which can be accounted for as **CPD** activities. Please see the Research and Information Star cycle of **Dissemination** in Figure 3 below.

Another role that could be considered here is that of the **Implementation Officer**, which would directly inform and be informed by national policy developments. This is drawn from the WWfc model and the conceptual frameworks of **KPU** and **Implementation Science** in that the role of the **Implementation Officer** is to solely seek out particular practices **where incorporating research would be useful**. The Implementation Officer would work specifically to **relate research to practice problems**. And where research is provided for consideration, would provide a **critical appraisal** of the material ensuring the use of good quality research at all times for the implementation in casework interventions,

⁵ The role of Tusla's Research and Information Champions (formerly 'Information Stars' as referred to in this paper) has been set out in the Research and Information Champions Strategy (forthcoming), as part of Tusla's overall Research Strategy. The central role of the Research and Information Champion is to work with staffs to enable them to access and promote good quality research and information within and across Tusla, and to share research knowledge and information with colleagues locally, regionally and nationally in order to support evidence informed policy and service development and to support the development of Tusla as a learning organisation.

processes and decision making. This role is distinctly different to that of the Research and Information Star in that it seeks to produce evidence based practice. This approach to practice development would need to negotiate various structures for example local management would need to be involved as stakeholders in the development and maintenance of such approach.

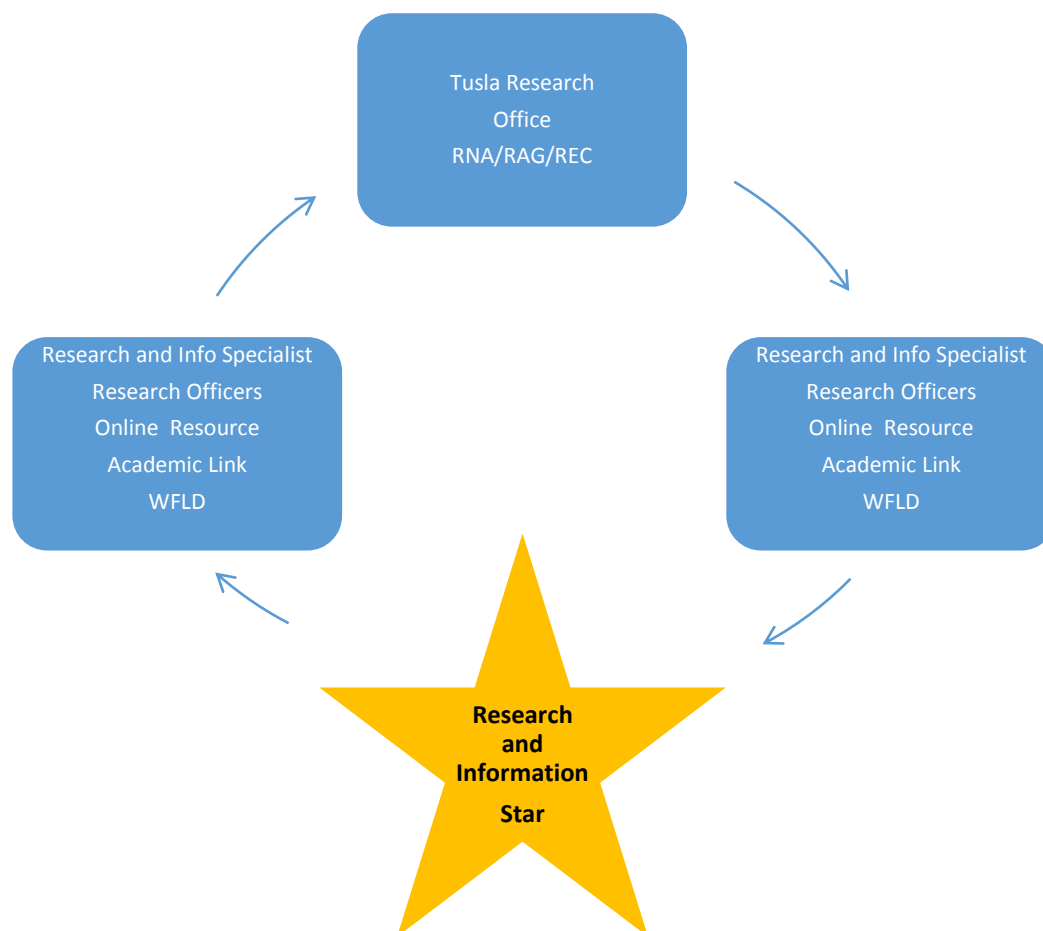


Figure 3. Research and Information Star Cycle of Information Dissemination.

While the role of the Research and Information Star continues to be scoped out by the National Research Office there is more detail required as to the recruitment, training and retention plans for the effective utilisation of this resource in order for it to meet the ambitions of the strategic plan for research. The role as presently scoped requires a number of skills: coordination of information and support, **mentoring**, facilitating liaisons between the research priorities emerging from the forthcoming Research Needs Analysis, the Research Advisory Group and the Research Ethics Committee and staff, provision of research methodology advice and maintaining formal links with universities. These skills and activities, to be carried out in conjunction with and/or on behalf of the Research Office will need to be further explored, developed and formatted. Working from a foundation of knowledge of **EBP**, **EIP**, **KPU** and **IS** formal training in the skills and facilitation mentioned above will need to be provided to the Research and Information Stars. This can be a combined programme delivered by a Research Officer, WFLD and the Research and Information Specialist. Subsequent to initial recruitment, this programme can be delivered

in a one day modularised format, key modules to include the role requirements of: coordination, mentorship, facilitation, provision of methodology advice and maintenance of formal university links.

This proposed Skills Development Training Programme will be informed by the Research Office, the Research Advisory Group and the Research Ethics Committee. It will be designed and delivered by the Research Officers, WFLD with the agreement of local management to release Research and Information Stars to attend this programme. Please see Figure 4 below for the flow of this process.

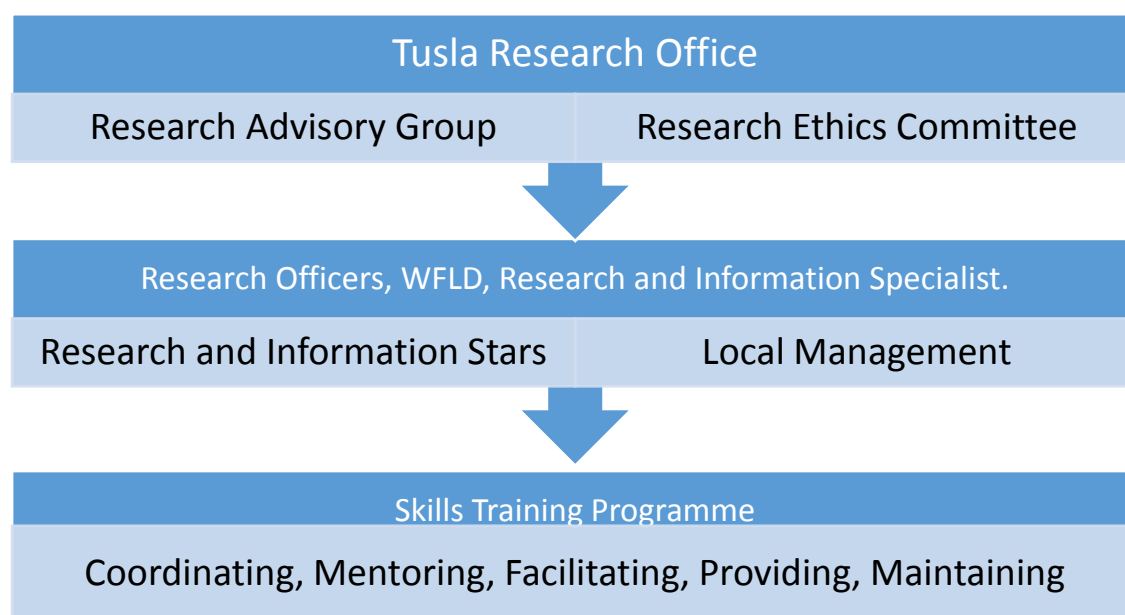


Figure 4. Research and Information Star Skills Training Development Programme

In addition to what has been presented above, the Research and Information Star role is also required to further support the **implementation** of the EPPI programme. Currently this programme is delivered and maintained by the mentors (Principal Social Workers) and TUSLA WFLD and is monitored by the Centre for Effective Services. It is planned for this programme in its current format to conclude mid 2017 at such point, the Research and Information Star role will need to be sufficiently established in order to provide a suitable infrastructure for the continuation of the EIP programme. The required supporting infrastructure will include the **collaborative** approach of WFLD, Mentors, Research Officer and Research and Information Star.

6.4. Strategy Three and Strategy Four

Strategy Three and Strategy Four will present proposed **Skills Development** Programmes for Practitioner (and staff) Researchers. The Practitioner Researcher Skills Development Programme (A) is proposed for the 'bottom up' scenario, where practitioners identify and carry out research which needs to be guided and mentored by the Research Office. The Practitioner Researcher Skills Development Programme (B) is proposed for the 'top down' scenario, where the research priorities from the Research Needs Analysis has identified

potential research questions and themes that may facilitate staff to carry out research that should also be guided and mentored by the Research Office. The proposed programmes are described below.

6.5. Strategy Three: Practitioner Researcher Skills Development Programme (A)

It is envisaged that through the sustained engagement of staff with their local Research and Information Star and Research and Information Specialist working within a 'community of practice' and where there is a developed **culture of enquiry**, that clear researchable practice questions will emerge. This is a 'bottom up' manner of emerging research questions. The range of questions will vary in type and will employ a variety of approaches for example, an evaluative process may be required to evaluate service or intervention design, action and participatory research may be used to develop service user and practitioner interaction within an information gathering framework to develop participative strategies. Subject to the prior approval, guidance and direction of the Research Ethics Committee, practitioner research projects will be identified. These **practice related projects** will require the direction, support and monitoring of the Research Office. The proposed model of infrastructure includes the **collaborative mentorship** by the Research Officers, WFLD, Research and Information Star and Research and Information Specialist. At the core of this programme is skills development through a 5 part module training programme with the research study being supported through a mentoring process to ensure good quality research, which is linked to organisational research needs that can be disseminated throughout the organisation with a view to informing organisational policy, where appropriate and most relevant (please see Figure 5 below: Practice to Policy, Policy to Practice Process).

This process is governed and informed by the Research Office, research themes arising out of the RNA, the RAG and the REC. The process is supported by the Research Officers, Research and Information Specialist and WFLD and at a local level the research practitioner is supported by the Research and Information Star and Community of Practice where the initial research question emerges. This approach draws initially from the 'Evidence Informed Practitioner Programme' (CES) and furthermore on the 'Growing Research in Practice' (GRIP).



Figure 5. Practice to Policy, Policy to Practice Process.

Figure 6 below presents the structure of the Practitioner Researcher Skills Development Programme, it takes a similar structure to that of the Research and Information Star Skills Development Programme however the modules are different. Suitable modules for inclusion here are: research design, literature reviews, methodology, analysis and dissemination strategies.



Figure 6. Practitioner Researcher Skills Development Programme (A)

It is unpredictable at present to estimate how often the need or demand for this type of training programme will arise, this will depend on the development of the **practice research culture**. This is a programme that would run best if spread out throughout the course of a year considering that the process of practitioner research may be slow in nature given that practitioner researchers will need to balance the demands of their job along with any additional research responsibilities they may have in respect of a particular research project. The modules could be delivered over five days throughout the year, for example one module per day. This would offer continuous support, guidance and monitoring to the study and practitioner researchers involved. Participation in practice based research and the Practitioner Researcher Skills Development Programme can be accounted for as **CPD** activities.

6.6. Strategy Four: Practitioner Researcher Skills Development Programme (B)

In this strategy, research is directed in a 'top down' manner in order to meet specific service needs around particular practice gaps or questions. In other words the research starts with question/gap identified by the National Research Office, potentially through research priorities and themes arising from the RNA, through utilising the resources and skills of practitioners within the organisation to assist with the research process. Again this research process will need to be of robust quality and adherence to all ethical practices and requirements as set out by the Research Ethics Committee. These projects will require working in **collaboration with practitioners** and the direction, support and monitoring of the Research Office. The proposed model of infrastructure includes the collaboration between Research Officers, WFLD, Research and Information Stars and Research and Information Specialist. Figure 7 below illustrates the RNA Research Question/Research Study Process.

This approach draws initially from the 'Evidence Informed Practitioner Programme' (CES) and furthermore on the 'Growing Research in Practice' (GRIP) Lunt et al (2008) based New Zealand.

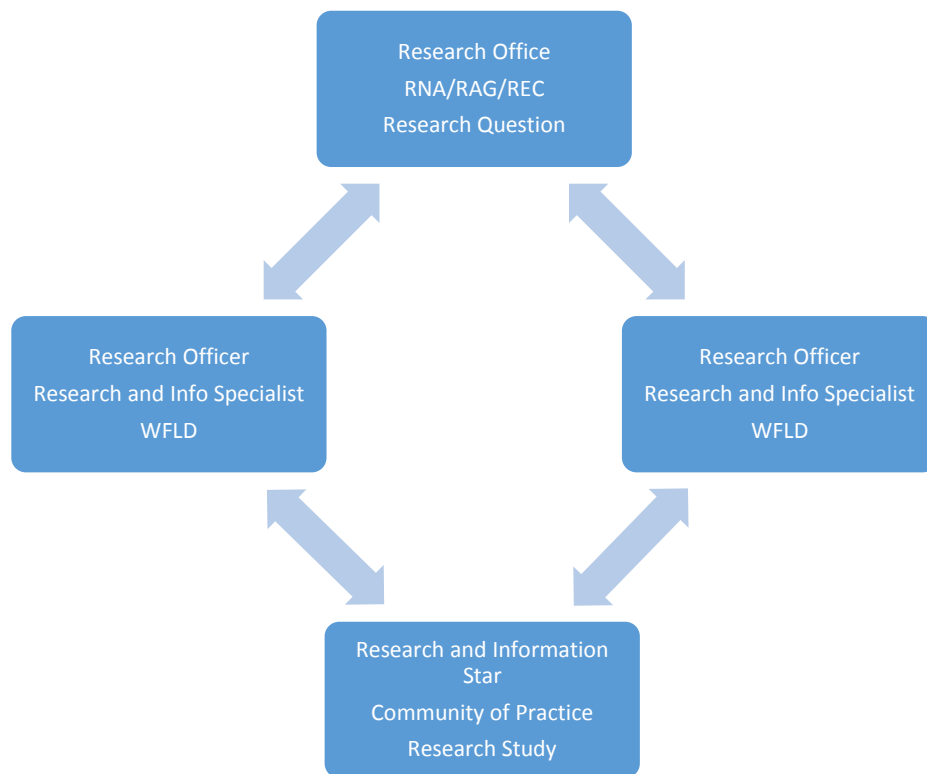


Figure 7. RNA Research Question/ Research Study Process

Similar to the programme in Figure 6, The Practitioner Researcher Skills Development Programme (A), this programme offers a 5 part module training programme (Research Design, Literature Review, Methodology, Analysis, Dissemination) with the research study being supported through a mentoring process to ensure good quality research that is directly linked to organisational research needs and which can be disseminated throughout the organisation with a view to informing organisational policy where appropriate and most relevant. Please see Figure 8 below.



Figure 8. Practitioner Researcher Skills Development Programme (B)

Unlike Practitioner Researcher Skills Development Programme (A), this type of programme (B) may be planned for and incorporated into the strategic functions of the Research Office. Should a number of research gaps emerge from the RNA of which a practitioner researcher approach is best suited, this proposed programme would need to be developed and planned for in order to support the research process. Again, in terms of professional development and linking Tusla in with **CPD**, participation in this type of research and skills programme could account as **CPD** activities. This a programme that would run best if spread out throughout the course of a year considering that the process of practitioner research may be slow in nature given that practitioner researchers will need to balance the demands of their job along with any additional research responsibilities they may have in respect of a particular research project. The modules could be delivered over five days throughout the year, for example one module per day. This would offer continuous support, guidance and monitoring to the study and practitioner researchers involved.

Further Recommendations for Research Skills Development

6.7. Strategy Five: Developing a ‘Research Minded’ culture through a TUSLA Staff Induction Programme.

Through consultation with WFLD, the inclusion of information about the Research Office and its function could be considered for Tusla’s Induction Programme. The rationale for this is to inform new entrants to Tusla about what is available to them from the Research Office such as how they can access research resources, the roles of the Research Office, the Research and Information Specialist, the Research Officers. Their local Research and Information Star would need to be identified and an explanation of the range of activities at local level should be described. The concept of a ‘research minded’ organisation along with the vision of how and why practitioners should inform their practice through research evidence. This information could be presented and included in induction packs. This is an

initial idea, which would require further discussions at senior management level to ensure that the correct message is imparted at staff induction.

6.8. Strategy Six: Student Research Placement Programme

It is recommended that the Research Office engage with academic institutions. The RNA may identify some short pieces of exploratory research that would be suitable for a student to carry out within a work placement arrangement in the Research Office. Trinity College Dublin (TCD) run a M.Sc. in Applied Social Research and have an intake of part time and full time students every year. The course includes a work experience element which takes the form of an eight week placement. TCD have established links with a number of researchers and agencies who offer placement opportunities for students on the course each year. One TCD student has been supported by the Research Office in 2016, this student was a Tusla employee undertaking the course part time. Future students may already be working for Tusla could be encouraged to undertake a placement in the Research Office and this could be made available through agreement with TCD. Information about the placement opportunity could be made available on the Tusla Research 'Online Resource Map'.

As mentioned earlier in the document, Dublin Institute of Technology (DIT) are proposing to establish a MA in Research Skills in 2017, this will offer an opportunity for students to undertake research projects within organisations as part of their coursework requirements. Again, this could be considered should suitable exploratory research be identified through the RNA.

6.9. Strategy 7: Research Conference

As a longer term strategy or objective, a Tusla Research Conference could be planned for. This could serve as an opportunity to showcase the work of the Research Office, practitioner researchers and the Research and Information Stars. This could act as a forum for the dissemination of all research produced by and commissioned by the Research Office. Participation of all statutory and voluntary services, professionals, researchers, students and academics involved in the wide ranging activities of the Research office would be encouraged and promoted at this conference.

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Websites

CORU www.coru.ie/

Irish Association of Social Workers (IASW) www.iasw.ie/

Institute for Research and Innovation in Social Services (IRISS) www.iriss.org.uk/

Practice and Research Together (PART) www.partcanada.org/

Research in Practice (RIP) www.rip.org.uk/

Social Care Ireland (SCI) www.socialcareireland.ie/

8. APPENDICES

Appendix 1

The Author

Angela Feeney has authored this paper. Angela is an employee of Tusla, working as Deputy Manager in Oars Family Services, Assessment and Intervention, Ballymun, Dublin North City. Angela is at present, a second year student on the M.S.c in Applied Social Research in Trinity College Dublin and has completed her work placement component within the Tusla National Research Office. Angela holds a BA in Applied Social Studies (AIT) and MA in Child Family and Community studies (DIT). Angela's practice background includes working in children's residential care and more recently in family assessment and intervention. Angela is involved in the working group for Continuing Professional Development with Social Care Ireland. Angela is also undertaking a research dissertation on the knowledge needs of social care practitioners. Angela was tasked with the development of this scoping paper as the main purpose of her work placement which took place from 11th April to 1st of June 2016.

Appendix 2: Work Programme

Introduction

Tusla's Research Strategy 2015-2017 identifies five specific objectives and a number of actions to realise the vision of Tusla as a learning organization committed to evidence-informed decision-making and high quality service delivery.

A number of actions in the Research Strategy have been progressed. As the Strategy is implemented, the symbiotic nature of the objectives emerges.

Three specific actions in the Strategy focus on developing Tusla as a learning organization through the development of:

- A systematic improvement of research skills
- The establishment of research activities in compliance with CPD standards and requirements, and
- The establishment of research training modules through Workforce Development.

To date, the Research Office has not been able to progress these actions due to capacity issues at national level.

Work Programme

To progress the National Research Office's understanding of how best to progress these actions, we are asking Angela Feeney, who will be on work placement in Tusla HQ for 8 weeks (providing the Research Office with 3 days a week), to do the following:

- Establish what practices and models currently exist in Ireland for social workers, social care workers and other Tusla staff to avail of research-based skills training internal and external to the organization and the perceived efficacy of these approaches;
- Explore through desk research what practices and models are used in other jurisdictions to promote research-based skills training
- Develop through a stand-alone survey or via Tusla's Research Needs Analysis a set of questions that will establish an evidence-base for Tusla on the development of research-based skills and related matters.
- Utilising the information above, scope out an approach for Tusla Research Office to implement the three specific actions noted above through the development of a research paper.

Oversight

During the placement, Angela will work in Brunel HQ and will be supported by the Research Manager and National Manager to implement this work programme.