Handout 18: Reporting the Findings of the Research

Influencing Policy and Practice
There is no point in conducting research if you do not ensure that the results are made public and decision makers, policy people, funding bodies or the people involved in the study get to know about them. There is a range of avenues through which you can publish the results of your research. The most prestigious journals are called ‘refereed journals’. The editors of these journals such as national journals of social work send your article out to readers, or referees before they decide whether to publish your work. The readers in turn send in their comments and may suggest changes you should make before your paper is published.

It is particularly important that tables, graphs and other presentations of the results stand out and grab the readers’ attention. They may then want to read about your study in more detail. Similarly the title of your report should be catchy and readable, something that will grab the reader.

Whatever the context for your publication most reports have a similar structure, which is outlined below:

Abstract
The abstract is written last and appears first. It is the brief summary, which heads your report. It should be about 3300 – 500 words. It must be written in clear concise terms so that people will want to read your whole report. The abstract should include key word that you expect other researchers to use if they are doing research in your area. This will help librarians classify your research correctly when they enter your abstract on a database.

The research report itself consists of five main elements. These are:

- Introduction/statement of the problem
- Methodology
- Findings
- Discussion/conclusions
- Recommendations.

Introduction/Statement of the Problem
Most of the work for this section will have been done at the time you completed your original research proposal. It should include:

- Statement of topic, aims, research questions
- Link it to theory, policy or social issues
- Set out the broad aims of the study
- Define research questions and concepts
- Demonstrate through the literature search how and why you made the decisions that you did
- Describe your own position in relation to the research.

Methodology
- Here a researcher needs to include:
• How the study was designed
• Sampling techniques and sample description, design, pilot studies reliability and validity
• Data collection
• Ethical Issues
• Methods of data analysis.

Findings
This is usually one of the largest sections of the report. When planning how to present your results, it is a good idea to think of a series of subheadings, which relate to the major themes in your findings, or to the research questions themselves, or to some other logical sequence.

• Present all findings relevant to the research, issues or questions, including contradictory or unexpected results
• Not all results have to be included
• Arrange the findings in a sequence
• Present a description of the sample of people involved in the research
• Start with simple descriptive findings and move on to the more complex results
• Use tables and graphs interspersed with small amounts of text.

Discussion
• Summarise, explain and interpret your findings
• Link your findings to your literature review
• Discuss the implications of your findings for current practice, policy and/or theory
• Acknowledge limitations of the study
• Point to areas for future research.

Summary, Conclusions and Recommendations
• Summarise key findings
• Make conclusions by firstly linking them to original research question then justify your conclusions in the light of your research design and then discuss the limitations of your study
• Include your recommendations.