

NEW DEVELOPMENTS IN SCOTTISH SOCIAL WORK EDUCATION CAMBIOS EN LA EDUCACIÓN PARA EL TRABAJO SOCIAL EN ESCOCIA

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ABSTRACT

This paper explores the problems and possibilities of the changing world of Scottish Social Work education as it responds to the requirements of new legislation to regulate standards of social care in Scotland. Changes throughout social care and social work education are being pursued against a background of tension between professional and public demand and the current practical realities of a recruitment and retention crisis in social work services. The article is written within an exciting, but charged context of change where much is still both uncertain and unclear.

RESUMEN

Este artículo explora las oportunidades y problemas asociados con los cambios en la educación para los servicios sociales en Escocia, cambios que son el resultado de la nueva legislación sobre el “cuidado social” y que se están realizando contra un marco de tensión profesional, demanda pública y una crisis de retención de trabajadores en ese ámbito. Como consecuencia, este artículo refleja un ambiente de cambio energético pero con tensión alta, en el que existen todavía muchas dudas.

KEY WORDS: Social Work Scotland; social care; unified services; specialist services; Regulation of Care Scotland Act (2001); CCETSW.

PALABRAS CLAVES: Trabajo Social en Escocia; cuidado social; servicios unificados; servicios especializados; Acta de Regulación de Servicios, Escocia (2001); CCETSW.

Developments in Scottish Social Work education, in progress since the mid 1990s, form part of a UK-wide drive to push up standards in social care and social work services. In 2001, in Scotland, this drive was expressed in legislation to regulate social services and the social services workforce (The Regulation of Care (Scotland) Act, 2001) (RC(S)A, 2001). The legislation also paved the way for changes in social work education. These changes are best understood against the background of developments in social services and social work education in the latter part of the twentieth century.

FROM SPECIALIST DOMAINS TO UNIFIED SERVICES

Throughout the first half of the twentieth century social work education reflected the specialised nature of professional organisation and social work service delivery. Professional social workers trained and qualified as medical social workers, probation officers, psychiatric social workers and children's officers. However, in 1954, led by a mid-century shift towards the recognition that specialised practice and specialised training in social work shared a significant core of knowledge, skills and values, the London School of Economics established new generic training. This same understanding took hold through the 1960s at the end of which the Seebohm report (Great Britain, 1968) successfully argued for social services to be delivered on a basis of generic area teams, asserting that:

'[a unified department] should be more effective in detecting need and encouraging people to seek help; it should attract more resources and use them more efficiently and it will be possible to plan more systematically for the future.' (paragraph 140).

Alongside these changes in social work education and social services, the separate professional associations (e.g. the Association of Medical Social Workers, the Association of Child Care Officers) were preparing to unite – a process that was completed in 1971 with the formation of the British Association of Social Workers.

MARKETS IN HEALTH AND WELFARE

The Conservative government, in power from 1979-97, introduced internal markets in health and welfare services, including social services. Though never comprehensively applied, market principles were established in health and welfare and their influence persisted through the change of government to New Labour in 1997, apparently with tacit approval of the new regime. The original rationale for this radical shift in the organisation of welfare was that it would achieve better value for money and increase transparency and accountability (Great Britain, Department of Health, 1989, paragraph 1.11). In particular, services for vulnerable adults were based on the notion of the 'purchaser-provider split'. The intention was that, in a new, mixed economy of welfare, local authorities would cease to both assess individual need and provide services in response. Instead, as purchasers, they would commission services from voluntary and private sector organisations to meet the needs of individuals. They would retain responsibility for assessment of need, but act as enablers of service provision and development rather than providing the services themselves. More clearly than ever before the social worker's task was either as purchaser - assessing need and negotiating provision - or, as provider, working with individuals according to the service contract negotiated. The established pattern of through-care, from assessment to intervention, in social work practice was dramatically challenged. The long term consequence has been that the task of local authority social work, where most newly qualified social workers are employed, has focussed on assessment of need and contracting for appropriate services. Contact is usually limited to initial assessment of need and subsequent reviews. Sustained intervention for support, change or ongoing care is delivered by the service provider according to contract. The consequent potential for professional discontinuity concerns many social workers. These changes have increased emphasis on budgetary issues in social work practice, including in direct work with service users (see, for example, Corby 2003). An emphasis on assessment of risk has also been encouraged in an increasingly risk averse society.

To ease both the introduction of the market model in social work services and the

implementation of new legislation on Child Care and Community Care, local authorities reorganised their pattern of service delivery (see, for example, Whipp, Kirkpatrick, Kitchener & Owen, 1999). Post-Seebohm unified services, typically based on area teams making a wide range of help available for everyone in a particular neighbourhood, were replaced with specialist teams, each team providing services only to either children in need or vulnerable adults or, in Scotland only, Courts and offenders. Through the 1990s these three divisions of social work – Children and Families, Community Care and Criminal Justice Social Work came to define current perceptions of social work service and practice.

As major employers of social workers – particularly those who are newly qualified – local authorities exerted pressure on social work course providers to adapt social work education to the changed requirements of their social work services. It became important, therefore, to prepare students for specialised practice with a particular emphasis on assessment. Despite these external changes, however, course providers have tried to steer a path that balances their responsibility to provide workers able to meet the demands of current services with steadfast insistence that social work education should sustain the generic approach introduced in the 1950s (see below). The prevailing view amongst social work educators has been that professionally acceptable practice in any specialised field requires at least basic understanding and skills for all areas of social work practice and across sustained intervention as well as initial assessment processes. The maintenance of this stance has depended particularly on effective partnerships between training institution staff and agency based practice teachers.

SOCIAL WORK EDUCATION AND ITS REGULATION

The legislation that laid down the provisions for unified local authority social services in England in 1970 included provision for the establishment of the Central Council for Education and Training in Social Work (CCETSW). CCETSW was remitted to prepare and ‘regulate’ the delivery of unified social work education across the UK (including Scotland) to support the implementation of unified services. The Certificate of Qualification in Social Work (CQSW), introduced in 1972, was delivered through a variety of routes: postgraduate programmes of one or two years’ length, non-graduate programmes of two or three years’ length and, latterly, first degrees of three or four years’ length. Institutions in both Further and Higher Education sectors offered courses adopted through both the internal validating procedures of their institution and external validation as required by CCETSW (Central Council for Education and Training in Social Work [CCETSW], 1977). This external validation took the form of initial vetting procedures and regular reviews by representatives of CCETSW. At a time of expansion of professional social work services the range of course provision was designed to draw on the available variety of sources of suitable recruits to the profession, explicitly planning to attract candidates from across the spectrums of social class and educational opportunity. Soon, however, there were calls for a minimum period of three years training to be recognised and funded: calls that were informed by awareness of developments elsewhere in Europe and the UK’s strengthening links with Europe.

The CQSW, although recognised for practice in all social care settings, invariably drew professionally qualified workers into field social work: case work delivered from community

based area offices and hospitals or, less frequently, from voluntary organisations. CCETSW responded to the subsequent identification of training need in residential and day care settings with the development of the Certificate in Social Service (CSS). Introduced in 1980, CSS courses were required to be planned and delivered through partnerships between agencies and training institutions. Unqualified workers were sponsored as CSS students by their employers. They were released for study while still employed and were supposed to be replaced at the work base to protect their study time. CSS was contentiously focussed on training specific to the needs of each student's job (CCETSW, 1980).

The Certificate in Social Service was an attempt not only to dramatically increase the proportion of qualified residential staff but also, implicitly, to eradicate the status difference between residential and field social work. Despite the fact that the CSS was popular (Pierce & Weinstein, 2000, p.12) and was recognised as equivalent to the CQSW both by CCETSW and, eventually, by the British Association of Social Workers (BASW), this double track pattern of social work education (CQSW/CSS) did not fulfil expectations. Demands for a minimum three year training period and for increased opportunity for specialisation led, eventually but indirectly in 1991, to the replacement of both CQSW and CSS with the Diploma in Social Work (CCETSW, 1989) which drew heavily on the planning processes and competence based regulations of CSS as well as the demands of the CQSW for knowledge, values and skills for the breadth of social work service and practice. The Dip SW embraced the principle of one qualification via many routes.

The demand for three year training was not accepted by the government of the day although the minimum accepted length was raised as one year courses were abolished. In Scotland a different strategy to lengthen training was adopted. As universities began to introduce first degrees in social work, it was clear that the minimum three year training desired could be attained under routine funding of university first degrees rather than seeking new funding to lengthen social work education. (British Association of Social Workers [BASW], 1994) The government was encouraged to do nothing to hinder this development within universities. By the end of the 1990s most providers of social work education in Scotland were offering first degrees in social work and non-graduate courses were disappearing. Fears that this change would deter mature entrants with family and financial commitments were not realised despite the burdens that such students carry through their studies. Recent drives to encourage wider participation across all university education should increase the support that these students receive as well as facilitate recruitment of suitable candidates with non-standard educational entrance qualifications. However, this development has to be set against a slowdown of applicants to courses and, in agency settings, a spiralling shortage of workers, low morale and difficulty retaining experienced staff.

RECRUITMENT PROBLEMS, THE IMAGE OF SOCIAL WORK AND THE CONTEXT FOR CHANGE

There has been a gathering recruitment crisis in social work education in Scotland and the UK generally since the mid 1990s. The number of applicants to training programmes fell by almost a half from a peak of 15,132 in 1995 to 7958 in 2000 (Perry & Cree, 2003). There has also been a concurrent decline in the proportion of men applicants. In 1993 men represented approximately 30 percent of applications. By 2000 the figure had fallen to 20 per cent of non-graduate and postgraduate applicants and 14 per cent

of undergraduates. The decline in applications is across all age groups, the most marked being amongst candidates over 25. The overall decline has been somewhat reversed in 2003-2004 following a recruitment drive initiated by the Scottish Executive in 2002, but there is still a serious shortfall in the output numbers of qualified social workers.

In common with the situation in the rest of the UK, social work in Scotland suffers from a poor public image. A series of child abuse scandals and child protection failures (Reder, Duncan & Gray, 1993; O'Brien, 2003) and the characterisation of child protection work in some parts of the UK as conflictual rather than cooperative (Ayre, 2001) means that social workers are often the focus of public animosity, either as people who fail to protect children, or, in the case of the high profile residential child care enquiries (see, for example, House of Commons, 2000 and Colton, 2002), as the actual perpetrators of abuse. Even in community care, as Moon (2000) suggests, there has been public concern about policy, including the role of social work services, highlighted by violent offences committed by people with mental health problems.

Possibly linked to these problems, the long campaign for registration of social workers seemed realisable during the 1990s as reactions to tragic and fatal harm to children and other vulnerable people increased the political and public demand for clear and effective standard setting in social care. Earlier calls for registration of professional social workers, led by the British Association of Social Workers, broadened into plans for standard setting and registration across all social care services and the social care workforce. The prime purpose of the broadened drive was the protection of vulnerable citizens, a goal which encouraged the necessary support of politicians and of agencies delivering care services.

Given the breadth and variety of social care services and the fact that work force levels of qualification ran from significant numbers with no qualification to significant numbers professionally qualified, the task of planning the introduction of workable standards and monitoring procedures was enormous. Extensive consultation was led by social work civil servants in the Scottish Executive, both face-to face in seminars and working groups and through consultation papers (Scottish Office, 1998; Scottish Office, 1999; Scottish Executive, 2000) followed up with decisions, always open to further comment.

SCOTLAND IN THE UK - THE CONTEXT OF DEVOLVED GOVERNMENT

The 1990s heralded an exciting, if stressful, period in Scottish social services not only because of developments afoot that might raise standards and improve the standing of social care and social work, but also because of the simultaneous campaign for a devolved Scottish Parliament. The early part of the planning for the introduction of the regulation of care took place in the Scottish Office of the UK Government. Final plans and the drafting of legislation for the regulation of care were conducted under the procedures of the new Scottish Parliament that had been inaugurated in July 1999. The Regulation of Care (Scotland) Act, 2001 (Scottish Parliament, 2001) was one of the Scottish Parliament's first statutes.

The pattern of devolution introduced by the Scotland Act, 1998 set out areas of parliamentary decision making that would fall within the province of the Scottish Parliament (devolved powers) and those which would be within the jurisdiction of the UK Parliament at Westminster (reserved powers). Social Work, Local Government, Education and Higher Education are some of the devolved powers. Employment and the state income

maintenance systems are two of the reserved powers. Thus Scotland's parliament operates with delineated autonomy within the whole system of UK government. It is not a separate and fully independent government.

Reflecting this devolved relationship, Scottish social work education is both embedded in the UK system for education of social workers and insistent on special features that reflect the distinct nature of Scotland's legal and educational systems. Despite the authority of devolved powers in social work and higher education, the pattern of relationships across the four nations of the UK since 1999 has, in social work education, encouraged attention to the need both to reflect differences and to sustain a UK thread. The Scottish discussions preparatory to the Regulation of Care (Scotland) Act 2001 were paralleled by discussion in England, Wales and Northern Ireland as well as permeated with discussions across the four nations in which essential alignments could be agreed as well as differences shared and respected.

In key respects the character of social work in Scotland is different from its counterparts in other countries of the UK - reflected in the inclusion of criminal justice social work as a key constituent social work service and of basic generic training. The ambition for the new generation of Scottish qualifying programmes is the development of knowledge and understanding, skills and abilities, and the ethical and personal commitment of social work students (Scottish Executive, 2003). The emphasis is on these practitioner characteristics as transferable across all areas of practice: to children and families work, including child care and child protection; to community care, attending to the needs of adults with a range of special needs, disabilities or mental health problems or older people seeking support in their own homes and specialist accommodation and; to work in criminal and youth justice - responding to the needs and addressing the troubled and troubling behaviour of young or adult offenders.

NEW LEGISLATION FOR THE REGULATION OF CARE

In the revision of social services in Scotland care was taken to ensure that all aspects were considered together – standards of services, standards of workers' practice and standards set for education and training. As in each of the other UK nations the Scottish legislation provided for the establishment of a Care Commission which has responsibility for setting and monitoring standards of care delivered by care-providing agencies and a Care Council with responsibility for regulation of the social care workforce. Care providers (e.g. residential care homes) must register with the Commission and are inspected regularly. Care workers, will be required to register with the Care Council – in Scotland known as the Scottish Social Services Council (SSSC).

Registration with the SSSC is being phased in, starting with professionally qualified social workers in April 1st 2003. Eventually it is anticipated that the whole social care workforce will be registered and that employment in social care will be dependent on registration with the Council. There will be a designated section of the register for professionally qualified social workers enabling implementation of Section 52 of the 2001 statute that makes it an offence for anyone not registered as a social worker to make intentional false use of the title 'Social Worker'. (RC(S)A, 2001, Section 52)

The four UK Care Councils are intended to 'provide protection to those who use services, promote high standards of conduct and practice amongst social service workers,

strengthen and support the professionalism of the workforce and promote confidence in the sector' (Scottish Social Services Council [SSSC], 2003). As well as establishing systems for registration of care workers they were required to establish Codes of Practice for employees and (uniquely) employers, which they have done (Scottish Social Services Council, 2002). Councils were also given responsibility for establishing and overseeing standards in social work education, including the continuing professional development on which regular renewal of registration with the Council will depend.

A significant change in accountability has been introduced with workforce registration. The onus is on workers to register directly with the Council, potentially being called to account individually by the Council for their standard of practice. Registration does not remove workers' normal accountability within the line management of their agencies, but clearly introduces a parallel demand for workers to take responsibility for their own standards of practice appraised directly against the Council's Code of Practice and independent of any employer instructions. Although the Code of Practice for Employers requires them to enable their staff to meet the requirements of the Code of Practice for Employees, workers will be expected to take responsibility for the standards of their own professional practice. It is therefore significant that BASW launched its revised Code of Ethics for Social Work in April 2002 (BASW, 2002) as a compatible but more extensive source of practice guidance than the Councils' Codes of Practice for employees.

THE NEW FRAMEWORK FOR SOCIAL WORK EDUCATION IN SCOTLAND

In April 2002 the Scottish Executive Minister responsible for social work laid before the Scottish Parliament an Action Plan for the Social Services Workforce. (Scottish Executive, 2002) The plan contained her announcement of a new Honours degree level qualification for social workers commencing 2004, but it was made clear that postgraduate routes to qualification would be also maintained. By January 2003 a new set of standards had been articulated to underpin development of all these programmes. Issued from the Scottish Executive as 'The Framework for Social Work Education in Scotland', it laid down the Standards in Social Work Education (SiSWE) for Scotland. (Scottish Executive, 2003) It was endorsed jointly by the Scottish Social Services Council, (the validating body for social work education programmes) the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (responsible for standards throughout Scottish Higher Education) and the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities (representing Statutory sector agencies responsible for commissioning care services and some care provision). This spread of ownership signified the locus of the reform of social work education as but a part of the wider drive to raise standards throughout social services.

Referring to the challenging and changing environment of social work practice, The Framework for Social Work Education in Scotland (Scottish Executive, 2003) envisages the new social work programmes as designed to produce social workers who are competent, confident, clear about their professional identity, flexible, positively responsive to change, committed to continuous improvement and able to contribute to the development of the profession. (p.20) Social work education programmes, it is stated, (p.22) need to promote *knowledge and understanding, skills and abilities, and ethical and personal commitment* as the three, interlinked, main aspects of professional development.

Consistent with the framework's emphasis on outcome standards, (and also, incidentally,

with ongoing emphasis on anti-discriminatory practice) the entrance requirements, although requiring applicants to have the capacity to understand course materials, emphasise their *potential to achieve* skills in literacy, numeracy and information technology as set out in the statement of standards and within the timeframe of the programmes. (p.14)

The learning requirements set out in the framework reflect the principles expressed in the Code of Practice for Social Service workers issued by the SSSC, but add demands specific to social work. The identified key roles for social workers are assessment, planning, undertaking and reviewing social work practice with individuals, families, carers, groups and communities as well as assessing and managing risk and supporting people to represent themselves. Additionally the roles require workers to be accountable for their own practice and to demonstrate professional competence. Each role is broken down into learning focus points, underpinning knowledge, high level transferable skills and learning outcomes to have been achieved by the end of the course. (pp. 26-43) For example the document presents the third key role and its learning requirements as follows:

STANDARDS IN SOCIAL WORK EDUCATION

3: Assess and manage risk to individuals, families, carers, groups, communities, self and colleagues

Nine universities provide social work education in Scotland. One is the UK-wide Open University; the remainder is a mix of old and new universities including some of which acquired university status in the 1990s. At the time of writing (March 2004), the eight Scottish universities are finalising and adopting course programmes for Honours degrees specialising in Social Work which will require validation and formal recognition by the SSSC. All are planning 4 year courses. The Open University is planning to offer a three year BA (Honours) degree in Social Work to start in England in 2005, with the intention of offering equivalent programmes throughout the UK at a later date. Although the individual universities have considerable autonomy in designing the detail of the degree programmes, the programmes will have to comply with the standards set out in the SiSWE framework in order to be validated by the Scottish Social Services Council. Indeed variation across universities is welcomed in the Framework:

‘Institutions that provide social work education programmes may structure their courses to take account of their particular academic strengths or professional expertise as long as the programme fully covers the necessary learning outcomes of the SiSWE. This means that students can choose a programme which best meets their interests and, at the same time know that it will prepare them for registration as social workers so they can work in any setting once they have graduated.’ (SiSWE Framework, p. 21)

CHANGES AND CONTINUITIES

All programme providers, in accordance with regulations governing current social work courses, work in partnership with agencies engaged in direct social work service delivery in the planning and delivery of their programmes, though the intensity of the partnership may vary. It is assumed that this pattern will continue.

Core elements of social work education remain. The central triangulation of knowledge, skills and values/ethics that underpins the SiSWE framework was part of the CCETSW model it replaced. Appreciative understanding of diversity, disadvantage, marginalisation

and their implications for effective and sensitive practice with service users is also carried forward from the past. Regulations are brought up to date, as is to be expected, with requirements relating to the potential of new technology.

Aspects of the proposed curriculum are familiar – social sciences, social policy, law, models and methods of social work - but there is a new emphasis on research mindedness, attention to evidence, and the complexities arising from the various interfaces of information, knowledge, and implications for ethical practice.

Skills required are similarly familiar but there is a sharper focus than before on logical thinking, purposeful planning and intervention, analysis, weighing up evidence etc. Although we are told that assessment within the Framework is no longer to be competency based, patterns of assessment will require the presentation of evidence of attainment measured against the Framework's learning outcomes. Detailed regulations are awaited.

More significant changes relate to a pressure for service-user involvement and a more forceful attention to the integration of learning across academic studies and practice experiences. The Consultation papers and discussions that led to the enactment of the RC(S)A 2001 emphasised user involvement. It has been clear throughout that the principle of service-user involvement would apply to all aspects of social service operation and development including the preparation of workers for practice and their continuing professional development. The principle of service-user involvement is widely accepted and expressed in the social work community. The challenge is how to adopt this principle in ways that will exemplify best practice, avoid tokenism, ensure that a valid range of voices is heard and confront positively the likely tensions between service-user and worker perspectives and goals.

Integrating learning from practice and academic settings has been a goal of those involved in social work education probably since its inception. Claims for success are rare. The SiSWE framework engenders the hope that new initiatives on the interface between practice and academic settings will emerge.

'Practice is seen as an essential element of the new qualification. Development of the students' skills and abilities in practice is based on the fact that practice is a *setting* for learning, a *way* of learning and an *essential part* of the learning that students must complete.' (Scottish Executive, 2003, p.19, italics original)

Not only do the SiSWE increase the minimum number of practice days from 140 to 200, but learning through practice is being reconceived as Practice Learning with a recognition that direct work with service users and within service delivery settings is but one location in which learning for professional practice takes place. This opens the way for development of practice to be treated as a totality of practical and intellectual skills, to be fostered in a range of learning environments from classroom to practice work-base and in between. There is some evidence that this shift is encouraging new initiatives with some potential for more fluidity between universities and agencies and consequent reduction in barriers between different aspects of learning. (e.g, a new project providing students in practice learning settings with teaching/learning opportunities provided by staff relocated from the university to practice base for one day a week)

PUBLIC OPINION, POLITICS, PROFESSIONAL DILEMMA AND NEW SOCIAL WORK EDUCATION

As in the rest of the UK, Scottish social work is shaped to a considerable degree by

<p>Learning focus</p>	<p>To achieve the honours degree, social work students need to understand the following <i>(Underpinning knowledge)</i></p>	<p>Honours graduates in social work will acquire the transferable skills to do the following <i>(Transferable skills)</i></p>	<p>On successfully completing the honours degree, newly qualified social workers must demonstrate competence to do the following</p>
<p>Assessing and managing risks to individuals, families, carers, groups and communities</p>	<p>The concepts of rights, responsibility, freedom, authority and power associated with the practice of social workers as moral and statutory agents. Social workers' roles as statutory agents with duties and responsibilities to protect the public and uphold the law. Up-to-date legislation defining the rights of people, especially measures designed to tackle all forms of discrimination. The nature of risks and harm associated</p>	<p>Analyse the nature of risks and potential for harm associated with the circumstances and nature of planned interventions. Undertake practice in a way that tries to protect the safety of everyone involved</p>	<p>Identify, assess and record the nature of risk, its seriousness and the harm that it may cause. Balance the rights and responsibilities of individuals, families, carers, groups and communities with the associated risks to them or the wider public. Manage risk to individuals, families, carers, groups and communities and the wider public over time, regularly monitoring and</p>
<p>Assessing and managing risks to self and</p>	<p>The complex relationships between justice, care and control in social welfare and community justice and the practical and ethical effects of these. The nature of risks and harm associated with intervention in the lives of vulnerable or socially excluded individuals and</p>	<p>Practise in ways that maximise safety and effectiveness, especially in situations of uncertainty or if there is incomplete information. Review intentions and actions in the light of expected and unintended consequences.</p>	<p>Assess, analyse and record potential risk to themselves and colleagues. Work within the risk assessment and management procedures of their own and other relevant organisations and professions. Plan, monitor, review and record outcomes and actions taken to</p>

legislation as well as ethical imperatives and sometimes the tension between the two. Political direction is influenced by pressure of public opinion that seeks to avoid risk and limit diversity. For example, the agenda of social control and containment running alongside the social work profession's promotion of the dignity of individuals and the equal treatment of all whilst, at the same time, valuing distinctiveness and diversity (Scottish Executive, 2003). Not only does this present dilemma for workers directly confronted by these tensions in the course of their everyday practice with clients (such as simultaneously supporting sex offenders released into often hostile communities and protecting the public through work to minimise the risk of their re-offending), but also decisions must be made by providers of social work education about how policy that challenges social workers' adherence to their professional Code of Ethics will be presented and dealt with in the process of student learning. It is most appropriate that the SiSWE framework is permeated with demands for development of understanding and skill in relation to complexity and uncertainty. Social workers must be ready for practice in the 'swampy lowland of messy, confusing problems that defy technical solution, rather than on 'high ground [where] manageable problems lend themselves to solution through the application of research-based theory and technique.' (Schön, 1987, p.3).

When we examine the learning outcomes on which students are to be assessed for graduation into the social work profession, we find that the SiSWE do require the understanding and skill to engage with the complexities referred to above and the profile of the Social Work graduate does indeed fit the model of the 'competent, confident qualified social worker', that has been referred to throughout the consultations and planning for the regulation of Scottish social services. Take the following three examples from the Standards in Social Work Education [SiSWE], (2003) learning outcomes:

- *'Apply and justify social work methods to achieve change, maintain stability, promote independence and improve life opportunities'*
- *'Use appropriate assertiveness in justifying professional decisions and upholding social work practice values'*
- *'Use supervision, together with other organisational and professional systems, to influence courses of action where practice falls below the standards required.'*

Reference to confidence as well as competence has been stressed throughout the reform of social work education in Scotland (Scottish Executive, 1999). It implies more than a social worker who can undertake the professional task effectively. The expectation is of workers who will believe in their capability and use their professional authority not only in day-to-day practice with service users and colleagues but also in critical, constructive evaluation and comment on policies, practice and services.

The demands of the SiSWE suggest that it may not be sufficient for programme providers to focus narrowly on the content of the framework and the tasks implied. The educational process and the processes of the learning environments – including the impact of relationships between all the parties (staff – academic, practice and administrative - and students) are potentially at least as significant as syllabus. Moving forward with this agenda is presenting a challenge to programme providers to which they are responding in a co-operative rather than competitive mode.

THE SCOTTISH INSTITUTE FOR EXCELLENCE IN SOCIAL WORK EDUCATION

In July 2003, The Scottish Higher Education Funding Council (SHEFC), a publicly funded body through which the Scottish Executive finances higher education, was persuaded by 'a collaborative initiative of the nine Scottish universities involved in teaching social work higher education programmes' (Scottish Institute for Excellence in Social Work Education [SIESWE], 2003) to sponsor the establishment of a Scottish Institute for Excellence in Social Work Education (SIESWE). With additional financial support from the Scottish Executive, the Institute is funding projects intended to support three key aspects of the new Scottish social work qualifying programmes: practice learning, knowledge transfer/ eLearning and assessment. The aims of the three initial projects of the Institute are as follows:

1. Learning for ethical and effective practice:

'to improve radically the quality, quantity, range, relevance, inter-professionality and management of practice learning opportunities for the new social work honours degree';

2. Knowledge Transfer:

'to promote knowledge transfer between Higher Education Institutions through the collaborative development of a repository of digital learning resources for social work education' and

3. Integrated Assessment:

'to develop innovative flexible and aligned assessment methods to promote deep learning for ethical and effective practice.

(SIESWE, 2003)

As these initiatives work towards their conclusion and final reports to be published in 2005, they are contributing literature reviews and practice audits to a mapping of current understanding and provision. Demonstration projects are exploring the value of new initiatives and ideas. The projects are expected to shape the new social work degree programmes as they emerge in 2004 as well as subsequently - identifying best practice without imposing conformity or inhibiting diversity in the provision of education and training.

The Knowledge Transfer project is particularly significant. It is indicative of the Scottish Executive's ambitions for e-learning generally as well as for social work education in particular. It seeks to create a prototype subject taxonomy, or vocabulary, for the social work curriculum and a user friendly digital repository to store and allow for the retrieval of learning objects. The project is intended to offer support and advice to social work educators on e-learning; fostering the development and use of learning objects throughout Scotland. With Scotland having a diverse and dispersed population, e-learning represents an important plank in its commitment to accessible lifelong learning. There may be useful lessons to be learned about the delivery of learning in professional education for social work with application in other European countries.

CONCLUSION

Current developments in Scottish social work education (March 2004) are embedded within broader policies designed to secure high standards of practice and service throughout social care and social work in the United Kingdom. From 2004, the minimum

level of professional qualification will be a first degree with Honours and only those with recognised qualifications will be able to call themselves social workers. It is intended that the new qualification, which is set in the context of efforts to widen participation in Higher Education, should not reduce the social range of entrants. A range of routes to qualification will be sustained but, with the demise of non-graduate programmes and the development of e-learning opportunities, this range will change, perhaps encouraging more varied modes of delivery and new routes.

Though one expects that social workers will continue to be employed in statutory, voluntary and private organisations, there is some uncertainty about the tasks for which a social work qualification will be required. There is some concern that the restriction of the title 'Social Worker' may provoke negative actions. Given critical problems of recruitment and retention there is a fear that professional qualification may not be regarded as essential for some current social work tasks. Dilution of the social work role may already have occurred with some tasks being undertaken by Community Care Assistants working as ancillaries to qualified social workers coupled with the redefinition of social workers as Care Managers

Procedures governing the regulation of professional practice through newly instituted conduct hearings of the SSSC have been published but may well need adjustment on the basis of case experiences yet to come. It is apparent that regulatory bodies throughout the UK are committed both to protecting the public through the eradication of misconduct and to establishing disciplinary procedures that are just, transparent and attentive to human rights. The need for fine tuning of the new systems is to be expected. The approval of social work education programmes on the other hand is, in principle, a continuation of established practice.

Developments in Scottish social work education embrace a widespread willingness to accept the challenge of change for the benefit of service users and, hopefully the enhanced reality and image of the social work profession.

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