Descent or Dissent? A future of social work education in the UK post-Brexit

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Abstract

This conceptual paper explores the potential crises arising for social work and social work education following the 2016 'Brexit' referendum in the UK. After exploring the complex political terrain of Brexit voting, the political and moral complications arising, this paper attempts to dispel some of the myths associated with the voter types. Subsequently, the uncertain and possibly dangerous futures of social care and welfare are examined before moving to consider the implications for social work education in the UK, as part of the European Union, and beyond. The need for the UK to continue to pursue its relationships and links with other EU colleagues if social work is not to become parochial and somewhat removed from the international stage is highlighted.

Keywords

Social work education, UK and Europe, Brexit

Introduction

On the 23rd June 2016 a referendum was held on the UK membership of the European Union. This referendum had been promised by the then Prime Minister David Cameron in the Conservative Party manifesto (Conservative Party, 2015). Leaving the European Union was not something he wanted nor

does it seem that he believed this was a possibility. Rather the referendum

may be interpreted as a cynical means of hanging on to power as the

'Eurosceptics' in the Tory Party and the populist-nationalist right wing party

UKIP (United Kingdom Independence Party) seemed to be vying for the

balance of power amongst the political right. The result, announced on Friday

24th June, rocked the nation. The UK had voted to leave the European Union.

This paper outlines some of the repercussions resulting from the vote,

some possible reasons for it and explores what this might mean for social care

and social work and social work education in the UK. Brexit has consequences

for social work education throughout Europe and beyond and further embeds

a trajectory, in English social work in particular, towards homogenisation in

statutory tasks, safeguarding and social regulation. At the time of writing the

process was in disarray. However, whatever the end result moves towards

insularity, restriction and regulation will have potentially long-lasting effects

on social work education.

What is Brexit and Why the Vote?

Understanding Brexit is much more complex than Theresa May's

incomprehensible, circuitous statement 'Brexit means Brexit', made at her

leadership campaign launch in July 2016. Ramifications continually unfurl

and the lines under which the UK will leave the EU remain fluid.

The turnout for the vote was high at 72.2% and over 33 million votes. Results indicated that 51.9% (17,410,742) of voters voted Leave and 48.1% (16,141,241) voted Remain. This can be broken down further showing that Scotland, Northern Ireland and London clearly voted to Remain, whilst England and Wales reflected the Leave vote. Despite the results, the mantra 'the will of the people' has been used in respect of the 17.4 million Leave votes with the 16.1 million voting to Remain been ignored or dismissed (Seidler, 2018).

Political turmoil resulted in the aftermath. Cameron resigned, the Labour Party were accused of a lack lustre campaign and having a Eurosceptic leader in Jeremy Corbyn. UKIP had secured its aim. The Liberal Democrats, confused and discredited after their involvement in the Coalition from 2010 to 2015, were alone in uniting behind a desire not to leave the EU. The Scottish Nationalist Party took the result as a mandate for considering a second referendum on independence from the UK. Whilst these political rumblings continue, there is no clear view of what the UK post-Brexit future will look like; ideologues promote the hackneyed adage of 'taking back control' of borders, immigration, legislation, trade; daily reports abound of business, industry, public body anxieties and individual feelings of loss and being unwelcome, and concerns grow for the failure to take into account ramifications for the Irish border.

Victor Seidler (2018), a refugee from the Nazi regime via the *Kindertransport*, has written a poignant (auto)ethnographic account of how the referendum result came about and what meanings we may now make from it. Seidler (2018) captures the reverberations throughout the UK when the referendum results were announced. He recognised the dangers presented by what he saw as the expression of anger, rage and resistance to neoliberal globalisation that has benefited the perceived elite and met the conditions for the rise of right-wing authoritarian parties masquerading behind populist veneer, likening this to 1930s nationalism in history. He bemoaned the campaign of Remainers that had failed to highlight the moral vision of a Europe that had maintained peace and brought prosperity, which had begun to face the painful memories of the Holocaust and histories of colonial rule and oppression.

Hate crime, something the UK has legislated against, increased rapidly after the referendum. Home Office statistics indicate a 29% increase on reported hate crimes to over 80,000 in 2016/17 (O'Neill, 2017). Whilst the report indicates better knowledge, reporting and spikes following terrorist actions, it acknowledges that this is considered to be related to the referendum vote, especially since over 60,000 reports had a racial element. Seidler (2018) provides us with examples of unleashed hatred following the

vote that seems intimately bound to the discourses of 'controlling our borders' and the dangerous 'other' who is here 'taking our jobs' or 'coming to do harm'.

Powell (2017) argues that the referendum exposed raw political and social divisions in society that had been intensified by the austerity measures adopted after the 2007 financial crisis. Austerity has most effect on the working class, those disadvantaged and excluded from society, and immigrants. For Powell, austerity and its child, Brexit, have lent credence to Far Right ideologies that fuel blame, hostility and grievances against the political elite. Optimistically, Powell considers this may lead to a dialectic, which could result in renewed left-wing thinking and political action.

McKenzie (2017) protests that class politics and cultural class distinction had the biggest impact on the working class in voting Leave at the referendum. Through ethnographic narratives from working class communities in East London and some of the former mining towns of Nottinghamshire she explored the anger and apathy of working class people feeling excluded and left behind and believing they no longer 'existed' in the minds of political parties and society, a concern that has intensified since the Thatcher years and New Labour's attempt to move beyond class politics. The

vote is explored as a 'howl of anger' (McKenzie, 2017, p. S278), something

visceral not political.

Bhambra (2017) believes the focus on the white working class reaction

legitimatises a racist perspective in presenting white people feeling as though

they are 'strangers in their own lands' as Hochschild (2016) would put it. She

draws on Dorling's (2016) deeper analysis of voting in the referendum that

indicates 52% of Leave voters were in the South of England, 59% were middle

class, and the proportion of Leave voters in the two lowest socio-economic

classes amounted to just 24%. Becker et al. (2017) agree that the typical Leave

voter was white, middle class and lived in the South of England. Overall,

Leave voters comprised affluent Eurosceptics, older working class people and

a small group of economically disadvantaged anti-immigrationists (Swales,

2016).

Bhambra (2017) notes that British history is 'whitewashed' when such

emphasis is placed upon white working class interests being ignored, it

privileges the majority and fails to recognise Britain's place as an empire and

colonial power. Minorities are subsequently scapegoated for the inequalities

in material conditions shared by all groups, a view disputed in survey

evidence (Rutter and Carter, 2018). According to Bhambra, this class analysis,

focusing on the white working classes, simply presents an argument for the resumption of racial privileges.

Goodwin and Heath (2016) examine the importance of education, age, immigration and ethnic diversity in the referendum vote finding that voter turn-out was higher in pro-Leave areas, that public support could be closely mapped onto UKIP support, and that support for a Leave vote was more polarised by education than support for UKIP, indicating that social division was heavily implicated in the vote. Whilst this represents a class-based analysis it removes some of the racialised element. The Leave campaign predominantly targeted urban, densely-populated and younger, diverse areas but many of these areas were lower in voting numbers. Political apathy may have resulted in a smaller turnout of registered voters aged 18-24 (64%), although those who did vote were 64% in favour of remaining (Helm, 2016). High turn-out for voting occurred in areas that were showing support for UKIP, had large numbers of pensioners but also areas where people were highly qualified (Goodwin and Heath, 2016).

Impacts on welfare and care

The immediate implications of the vote were to remove over three trillion dollars from the value of financial markets in the first few days after it had been held (Goodwin and Heath, 2016). The continuing cost implications of

Brexit remain contested. Farnsworth (2017) believes the UK's funding base for its welfare state policies is made precarious by removing low-cost access to the markets of the EU and creating conflict between a post-Brexit UK and the EU. This may lead to reduced protections and entitlements for workers and the empowerment of businesses rather than people - running counter to the maxim of 'taking back control'. Taylor-Gooby (2017) concurs recognising that the only certainties currently are that the Brexit vote has led to a fall in the pound against the Euro, slow economic growth and rising inflation. These factors may lead to increased export opportunities but also to reduced earnings and domestic consumption and 'intensify the impact of the benefit freeze on the working age welfare state' (Taylor-Gooby, 2017, p. 829). Given continuing austerity, it looks likely that sharp social divisions will arise with a focus on short-term objectives which will lead concomitantly to a fall in living standards, especially on those in more disadvantaged positions – a trajectory into poverty and social need (Mendoza, 2015; Varoufakis, 2017).

Social work, social care and the NHS reliance on EU workers

Even before the referendum social care managers expressed concern about the potentially damaging ramifications of a vote to leave. James Churchill, CEO of Social Care Training Ltd, indicated that the impact of leaving on the less well off in society would be profound, with savings from EU payments exaggerated and more than offset by a smaller economy (Churchill, 2016). A

vote to leave would also reduce the numbers of workers migrating to work in health and social care, about one in five of the workforce, with 28% from the EU and the rest born outside, leading to a reduced workforce unable to cope with increased demands. The winter NHS crisis in early 2018 offers beginning evidence of such a scenario (Ham, 2018). These changes are likely to have a deleterious effect on recruitment of social workers from the EU whose numbers have risen in recent years (Lyons and Hanna, 2011). From a human resources perspective, Churchill also surmised that working conditions could well be less attractive if the UK left the EU and damaging the workforce even further. If the UK were no longer bound to EU work directives employer organisations would be able to reduce workers' rights and working conditions (Open Britain, n.d.; Montero, 2017).

Montero (2017) acknowledged that the social care workforce debate was overshadowed by negative debates concerning immigration. The recognition that EU citizens contribute about a 0.6 per cent growth in the UK economy each year and that one in five social care workers were non-UK nationals had been pushed to one side. Mulholland (2017) reinforced the warning using Official National Statistics explaining that there were 209,000 EU nationals in health and social are in 2016, a rise of 72 per cent from 2009, but since the referendum this was under threat.

On 15th July 2016 a House of Lords Library Note was prepared to consider the implications for the health and social care sector of leaving the EU. The note recognised that 4.95 per cent NHS staff and five per cent of the social care and social work workforce were EU nationals. Following the referendum the continued status of these individuals was made uncertain. However, the note claimed that assessing the impact of the referendum result was hard and considered to be damaging or simple scaremongering depending on political perspective and positioning. Clarity on the eligibility to remain and job security for EU nationals was required to offset concerns that had been raised. Unfortunately, this uncertainty continued with EU nationals used as a 'bargaining chip' in the negotiations.

A House of Commons Health Report (2017) acknowledged there were over 90,000 people in social care from the EU and that such numbers would continue to be necessary post-Brexit. The referendum has damaged confidence and a pragmatic response to recruitment and retention of staff was recommended. Key questions concerned future rights and entitlements of non-UK staff, professional education and regulation, EU work time directives and conditions. These are multifarious and complex and all have a bearing on the future of social work education.

A number of so-called 'red lines' underscore what is and what is not acceptable as an outcome to negotiations. One which exercises many Eurosceptics concerns the Court of Justice which is particularly important in matters of equality, social justice and human rights - central concerns for social welfare and the qualifying education of practitioners.

Developments and risks in social work education

Higher education in the UK represents a huge contribution to the economy and has gained respect for research, innovation and education across the world. However, the *Higher Education Risk Analysis Register 2017* (RSM, 2017) recognises the complexities of an uncertain post-Brexit future in terms of student numbers, opportunities for overseas students and staff in the context of freedom of movement, and research funding.

There is very little written yet concerning Brexit and social work education, although Baron and McLaughlin (2017) acknowledge the shift to the right reflected in the referendum vote and Ferguson (2017) and Lorenz (2017) locate contemporary social work education, especially in the UK, in the context of austerity, the neoliberal project and globalisation. These perspectives emphasise the importance of the voice of marginalised and disadvantaged people and add a political focus to social work education.

In a similar profession, Power (2018) argues cogently for the maintenance of international and European qualification standards in midwifery education to ensure parity and potential equivalence. This is something that relates also to social work education given our agreed global values and education standards (IFSW, 2014), and our relationships with European professional bodies and schools of social work, which help to challenge attempts to impose greater political and employer-based control over education.

Tunstill (2016) critiques Governmental attempts to define UK social work, especially in England, in political terms arguing that it is important, that UK social work education actively promotes our shared global definition, tasks, commitment to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and common values (IFSW, 2014; United Nations, 2018). Some of the potential implications of Brexit for UK social work education have been presaged in its history which we will briefly review.

The Local Authority and Social Services Act 1971 and formation of the Central Council for Education and Training in Social Work (CCETSW) introduced a more standardised and regulated qualifying education (Jones, 2006). The first UK-wide qualification, the Certificate of Qualification in Social Work (CQSW), a sub-degree award, could be taken alongside academic degrees at

bachelor, and master's level. In the late 1980s, CCETSW attempted reform by raising the level of qualification to Diploma level (DipSW), although bachelor and master routes remained (CCETSW, 1989). The DipSW promoted anti-oppressive practice within education, which led to a political backlash, revisions and a shift in focus onto employer needs, increased surveillance and control, which further instrumentalised social work education. Employer needs were privileged over educating students to think critically, to challenge, learn, or put the service user first as a human being. This prescription prevented universities from offering many of their specialist courses that made each of them different and allowed students to take a course catering for student needs. This move led social work to be defined increasingly as a 'state-sponsored' activity, located within local authority services and focused on safeguarding whilst relegating the wide community based, third sector campaigning and enabling organisations that traditionally made up a wider social work and aligned well with international approaches to social work. CCETSW was disbanded in 2001 and replaced by country specific care councils acknowledging devolution; in England the General Social Care Council (GSCC).

Overall, these changes allowed the blame of social workers and organisations rather than attributing responsibility to the social actors involved in high profile tragedies – the thought being 'if only the social workers had been

appropriately qualified or trained or had acted appropriately the tragedy would not have happened'. Thus creating the conditions for control and continued reform.

The pace of reform, increased prescription and monitoring grew under New Labour, with professionalisation being understood from a New Public Management perspective. Since 2003, UK social work education and fieldwork learning restriction and regulation has increased further (Parker, 2005), although responsibility for social work education was devolved to each of the four devolved UK administrations. The introduction of a minimum bachelor degree qualifying level, which brought UK social work in line with the majority of other European countries, allowed policy makers to introduce still greater prescription into the curriculum and its underpinning pedagogy. However, some employer groups suggested, even before the first cohort of students taking the 2003 programme in England had graduated, that student social workers were being failed by universities and not fully prepared for practice (see Evaluation of Social Work Degree Qualification in England Team, 2008, which itself was more equivocal on the matter). This was not surprising given the metamorphosis of social work from a person-centred, social justice and human rights based entity to one concerned almost exclusively with social regulation and protective function (Parker, 2017; Parker and Ashencaen Crabtree, 2018a, b). This parochialism has increased

and Brexit aids this by potentially disrupting ties with other European social work schools by changing the available opportunities for students and for funding them.

In 2008, the publication of the inquiry into the death of Peter Connelly led to a surge in surveillance and scrutiny of social workers; education in England was again targeted. The politicised release of the inquiry report (Baby P) in 2008 (Jones, 2014; Shoesmith, 2016), permitted the Government of the day to attack universities and social work education alongside demanding changes in practice (Balls, 2008; Social Work Task Force, 2009; Jones, 2014). The media storm resulted in creating a Social Work Reform Board that scrutinised practices in student selection, education, practice learning; partnerships with practice (meaning local authorities in the main); practice, performance and continuing development amongst other matters (Department for Education, 2010, 2012; Jones, 2014). Unfortunately, the results yielded yet more prescription and mandatory reform for social work education (Higgins & Goodyer, 2015; Higgins, 2016).

The Social Work Reform Board envisaged social work as a career-long learning process that developed in breadth and depth of knowledge, skills and practice. This was known as the Professional Capabilities Framework (PCF), a nine-domain overview of what were considered to represent the

central characteristics of English social work (BASW, 2015, Higgins, 2016).

Underpinning this conception was the capability approach (see Sen 1999;

Nussbaum, 2011). However, it remains predominantly descriptive of

contemporary social work and draws on facets described nationally and

internationally, but it does not fully address the demands of practice

purportedly required by employers and government. Rather, the PCF

describes professionalising convergences in social work education and

practice; which instrumentalise. The criticality it espouses appears to be lost

within a fusion of assumptions concerning education and practice.

Another key change, in 2012, was to relocate social work regulation with

health care agencies in the Health Care Professions Council (HCPC) and to

disband the GSCC. This led to social work education requiring students to

meet key professional standards (Standards of Proficiency) (HCPC, 2012;

HCPC, 2016). Standards are important and reflect the responsibilities of the

job and the calibre of degree level learning but they also tend to homogenise

and replicate neoliberal concerns of performance measurement, targets and

outputs as well as an attempt to enhance the quality of the work. The reforms

have led to the development of core subject areas in qualifying social work

education that create a discourse defining contemporary social work. The

increasing focus on protection or 'safeguarding' and the legislative, regulatory

aspects of social work are privileged whilst the campaigning, political, social

justice and relational elements are minimised however much lip-service is paid to them. At the time of writing, yet another new regulatory body has been initiated - Social Work England - which would realign social work in England with the other three countries in the UK in having a separate regulatory body. It also suggests that further changes in standards and requirements may also be coming.

The reform process continued with reviews of children's social work and adult social work (Narey, 2014; Croisdale-Appleby, 2014). These reviews were augmented by the introduction of 'fast track' education routes into social work practice (Step-Up to Social Work and Frontline in respect of child and family social work; Think First in respect of mental health work). These were introduced despite the warnings of the academy and others that no firm evidence has been presented to support these changes and that the UK's commitments under the EU Bologna agreement in 1999 and in respect of appropriate education were being disregarded (EASSW, 2014; Parker and Ashencaen Crabtree, 2018a, b). Smith et al.'s (2018) review of the first five years of 'Step-up' remains equivocal, with questions remaining, as does the more positive independent review of 'Frontline' (Maxwell et al., 2016). Questions relating to the place of UK social work education in relation to the rest of Europe have not been addressed and concern may be raised at increased divergence post-Brexit.

The introduction of Knowledge and Skills statements in adult and children and families social work (Department for Education, 2014; Department of Health, 2015) have on-going implications for social work education, and its continued location within the university system is challenged with moves towards an apprenticeship route into social work, something which again runs counter to the Bologna agreement (Institute for Apprenticeships, 2018).

Field education has been a central part of social work education in many countries for many decades and remains so in the UK. The processes involved in learning through and in practice settings are still not well understood (Parker, 2006; 2010). However, all social work educational reforms have accepted taken-for-granted assumptions about field education's efficacy. Currently in England there are 30 skills days which are designed to address the kind of skills needed in contemporary practice. These days offer universities and practice partners a degree of freedom in designing, developing and delivering these days, although, of course, they align employer and educator in the pursuit of training for a job rather than educating for practice. Before engaging in field education directly students must satisfy programmes of their fitness for learning in practice settings. One practice experience demands the undertaking of statutory social work. This

suggests social work is increasingly defined as a statutory service, as part of the state's organisational systems for the regulation of social and family life; instrumental training rather than critically-informed education becomes taken-for-granted (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992). This is not new; local authority social workers have formed the majority for many years (Wallis-Jones and Lyons, 2001). However, a privileging of statutory social work favours the potential removal of social work education from the universities and redistributing the power base towards employer organisations which have political as well as professional mandates as seen in the development of new pathways to qualification and the influence of the employer voice in social work education and student selection. When removed from the Bologna agreement, the need for UK, and no doubt English social work in particular, to conform to European educational standards will be removed and non-traditional, non-university pathways which are cheaper and necessarily vocational may thrive to the detriment of a solid theoretically informed social work degree.

The PCF permits students to challenge but the systems remain focused on the instrumental and functional bureaucracy of social life rather than fluid, personal and relational aspects, social justice and wellbeing (Parker and Ashencaen Crabtree, 2018b). Social work education in the UK has become increasingly insular, instrumental and prescribed. However, this perhaps

demands a passionate, rather than dispassionate, response that is critical of,

challenges and 'troubles' education with a view to educating thinking, critical

and analytic people who are able to negotiate a difficult political and social

world to work best alongside the people who use their services. This must

remain a key responsibility of social work educators.

Social work practice and education, in England especially, is

problematic, contested and politicised. Of course, social work as an

international entity is also contested (Midgely, 1981; Hutchings & Taylor,

2007; Hugman, 2010). Indeed, its social-historical-political construction leads

to different morphologies and practices across the world. However, in an

attempt to interlink social work across the globe there has been excellent work

undertaken by the International Federation of Social Workers and the

International Association of Schools of Social Work to reach agreement on a

global definition (IFSW/IASSW, 2014). This has promoted the development of

non-binding, yet important, global educational standards for social work

(IASSW/IFSW, 2012). It provides a set of standards that social work educators

in all countries can aspire to and can campaign to achieve within their

universities, professional bodies and policy-making bodies. It also has the

potential to homogenise social work education around global isomorphs that

may privilege certain countries more than others requiring a critical eye be

kept on the meanings that these standards create for social work within each

country. However, if we approach these standards reflexively and critically, we can avoid their coercive and normative power and use these to campaign for an internationalised approach post-Brexit that preserves the central characteristics of social work and education. These characteristics maintain a focus on human wellbeing and social justice, combining the social, interpersonal and intrapsychic elements of being human, which is something to grasp when the forces of instrumentalism are rife.

Two scenarios: descent or dissent?

The word play is important in this paper. Descent can refer to one's lineage and ancestry, the peoples and places from whence one came, as well as to imply deterioration and decline. Dissent relates to disagreement and active opposition. We need a sense of history and to acknowledge where we have come from in terms of our social work education, but equally we have a moral imperative to avoid decline and deterioration. The subsequent discussion considers descent from what we have gained and achieved through membership of the EU, contemporary political turmoil and the need for dissent in education to halt potential decline.

Social work education in the UK has enjoyed a long association within universities. It has also been a model that has, along with the US, influenced and lent much to other countries. This impact has been for both good and ill

and caution needs to be applied recognising the potential for neo-colonial manipulation through the assumptions made about the quality and efficacy of UK social work education.

Bologna, Erasmus and internationalising the university experience

The post-Brexit future of the higher education sector in the UK is unclear. Most UK academics, it seems, wanted to remain in the EU; not surprising given valuable research connections with other European universities and scholars and access to funding through the European Research Council. Also the result of thirty years of Erasmus experiences available to students has enhanced personal education and professional mobility making students citizen's of 'anywhere' rather than 'somewhere' and facilitating mobility through equivalence of qualifications. Whilst there is a wish there is no certainty that either European research or exchanges will continue in post-Brexit UK. However, there is within UK universities a drive to internationalise curricula, no less in social work education (Ashencaen Crabtree et al., 2012).

Social work students in the UK have experienced barriers in undertaking Erasmus exchanges given the many revisions to social work education and, also owing to language competences, the outward flow of students has been less than the inward flow (European Commission, 2015).

However, those benefitting from exchange and intensive programmes have expanded their minds and developed life skills that would have been more difficult to gain elsewhere. Of course, it has not just been Erasmus exchanges that student social workers have undertaken. A concern arises from the greater focus placed on wider internationalisation given that is driven by the desire for global experience, often with Anglophone countries, rather than creating shared understandings with other European country partners that can be strengthened through increased European cooperation and deployed to tackle major social concerns such as the plight of refugees and asylum seekers, global migration, climate change, the dangers posed by populist nationalism, and campaigning against the deleterious effects of austerity measures on the public.

If a radical departure from Europe is undertaken then we can envisage a situation in which Bologna, however much she is honoured solely in the breach, begins to carve out a gulf between UK HEIs and those of the rest of Europe. This will reduce social workers' potential mobility and further separate the UK from other European, especially EU countries.

Austerity and residualism

Working with marginalised people, the voiceless, and treading the uncomfortable path with those who are excluded or reject the values

espoused by social work is central to social work. Indeed, conflict

transformation work and community building forms an important part of the

repertoire of social workers and social work education. In the UK, this has

already been diminished by the singular focus on statutory social work and

safeguarding from those who increasingly control social work practice and

education. In effect this makes social workers the instruments of austerity

creating blame through the individualisation of problems rather than walking

in solidarity alongside those who are marginalised and challenging austerity,

the residualisation of social work, and the instrumentalisation of education

for it.

Deprofessionalisation, control and the New Public Management

Despite excellent social work academics, practitioners and students, social

work education increasingly represents a training course operating a political

mandate on behalf of government. Performance measures, reporting and

monitoring against bald standards reflects both a desire to control and

standardise and a New Public Management approach. This is likely to be

reinforced following Brexit as new standards and criteria are developed

without the need for keeping an eye on what others are doing or requiring.

Social work academics have been effectively prevented from resisting

external and politically-motivated reform. Regulation of courses and the need

for student numbers means that universities are increasingly keen to conform rather than rebel or assert their knowledge, wisdom and expertise. Certainly, gains have come from involvement in the Reform Board, in consultation with government and this has resisted the privatisation of children's social work amongst other matters. However, the need for solid assertion of the role of social work educator remains. Further separation from other European colleague will further weaken that voice (EASSW, 2014).

A new radicalism

In order to challenge a pessimistic view of social work education post-Brexit we can take heart from some of the underlying principles of radical social work – solidarity with those who use services; recognition of the political tensions in social work; a focus on empowerment and relational autonomy. However, how can one be radical in social work education for practice when:

- We have increased employer involvement through Teaching Partnerships, workforce planning, field education provision and when we recognise that student social workers will become employees – many within local government?

- Professional and disciplinary body control, regulation and surveillance – seen clearly in the consultation on Social Work England - suggests something is wrong with education and needs close monitoring, and also seen within the other care councils across UK?

Given the current concerns over the political manipulation of (social) media, social work's alleged failings, and those of education, are more likely to be promulgated by those with vested interests in exerting control and reducing expenditure. However, social work, despite the protected legal title in the UK, is an amorphous and contested phenomenon as it is across the world. New radicalism stems from a converged focus on relational social work and political awareness, something which enjoys increased attention (Parker and Ashencaen Crabtree, 2018b). However, this also requires the commitment of social work educators in an increasingly restricted environment if it is to work (Parker and Ashencaen Crabtree, 2018a, b).

Conclusions

If Brexit is, to some extent, about a 'howl of anger' of marginalised and displaced people (McKenzie, 2017, p.278), social work education must remain firm in preparing students to work directly with people who are excluded and oppressed. It must challenge the suffocating effects of global neoliberalism, and must do so across Europe and in the EU. However, it must do so without rejecting the vision of solidarity encompassed within social Europe and the peace which has lasted within the EU since the 1940s. It must also critically question the implications of this and recognise wider diversity and intersectional challenges (Bhambra, 2017). Social workers stand between

establishment, government and control on the one hand and marginalised and disadvantaged people and communities on the other. It is necessary to stand alongside those made vulnerable if UK social work is to meet the demands for social justice and human rights espoused by the IFSW and IASSW. Therefore, social work education must maintain a radical stance. It must resist the very forces which legislate for it, mandate it and employ its members.

If UK social work education is to have a future in the global arena it needs to assert itself and its expertise. Not by declaring exclusivity but by promoting a relational autonomy that seeks to work alongside service users and carers in an equal, mutually developing relationship, and by speaking 'truth to power'. The future is uncharted and unforeseen consequences are always possible, indeed, likely. A dialectic based on global values, drawing from professional base, recognising and critiquing political context gives us hope for the future in recognising competing claims, diversity and synthesising authentic approaches to education.

To date, social work education has engaged in an exchange relationship with Government and policymakers rationally weighing the need to survive against acceptance of reduced pedagogical control and increased prescription in the curriculum. Strongly putting forward evidence and

experience, a connected European-wide body and a social work education

based on global standards and values would allow the dialectic to develop

and offer an alternative to the insularity posed by Brexit.

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