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‘The Times They Are A Changing’— Post Qualifying Training Needs of Social Work Managers

Joan E. R. Watson

The article will focus on the changing role of social work managers in the light of recent legislation and policy; the integration agenda; the changing relationship between statutory and voluntary agencies; and the rising expectations of service users and carers. It will link these changes to the ongoing political and societal context in which social work is practised. The importance of effective social work management will be emphasised in the context of the recent enquiries into the deaths and long-term abuse of service users. It will consider the issues for training and development of social work managers and will conclude by considering the issues for providers of training and development, with particular reference to post qualifying academic social work management courses. It will highlight the types of learning experiences social work managers require, outline consultations with students and agencies, and suggest issues for the future.

Keywords: Post Qualifying Management Training; Legislation; Policy Context; Integration Agenda

Introduction

The beginning of the twenty-first century has been an interesting and challenging time for social work. Key legislative and policy changes in the last 15 years have transformed the environment in which social work services are delivered. Recent enquiry reports commissioned to investigate the deaths of Victoria Climbié and Caleb Ness, and the long-term abuse of the young woman with learning difficulties in the Scottish Borders, have raised uncomfortable questions about the responsibilities of management for the effectiveness of front line practice (Laming, 2003; O’Brien, 2003; Scottish Executive, 2004a).

This article will consider the role of social work managers in managing and leading social work in a time of considerable change. It will consider the legislative and policy dimension, the changing environment, and the importance of agency goals, as it reviews the education and development needs of social work managers.

The focus on the education and development needs of social work managers will concentrate on the role of post qualifying academic social work management courses; with specific reference to the MSc in Social Work Management offered by the Glasgow School of Social Work. This course offers post qualifying academic study on a modular, part-time basis for practising social work managers.

The article will provide a literature review of the context for social work management and consider the current profile of academic social work management courses in the UK. The main aim will be to consider the changing context of social work practice and the need for training for social work managers to reflect the interagency approach and the change agenda which characterises the role of modern social work managers.

Current Legislation, Policy and Environmental Aspects

In Scotland, modern statutory social work agencies have their roots in the Social Work (Scotland) Act 1968 (Scottish Office, 1968). Prior to this Act social work had been practised under the auspices of three different organisations—probation, health and welfare, and childcare—as well as a plethora of voluntary organisations. The 1968 Act brought the statutory agencies together into generic social work departments, with a view to dealing more effectively with the full range of people’s social problems from within one agency.

From the 1980s onwards the focus has been on integration with other agencies (Griffiths, 1988; HMSO, 1990). Since the late 1990s legislation and policy papers have sought to clarify the joint working agenda, particularly between health and social work agencies, with a concentration on better and faster decision making, more intensive home care packages and local joint working arrangements (Scottish Executive, 1998).

Legislation and policy papers for all care groups have stressed the need to improve outcomes for service users and carers, through shared assessments, joint resourcing and joint financing, and appropriate targeting of services at the most vulnerable (Scottish Executive, 1995, 2001a, 2001b, 2002a, 2002b, 2004b, 2005a).

Similar legislative changes have been taking place in the NHS in Scotland focused on the promotion of health through joint participation between patients, carers, local authorities and health boards (NHS Scotland, 2003, 2004).

All these legislative changes and policy guidance have emphasised the expectation of government for improvements in the quality of services, targets for service improvements, and the monitoring and evaluation of these targets. This level of accountability for the outcomes of social work services was underlined by the best value approach to all service provision, where accountability, ownership, continuous improvement and transparency were key principles. In England and Wales this was implemented through primary legislation (HMSO, 1999). In Scotland it was introduced initially via policy guidance, and later by legislation (Scottish Executive, 2003).

Independent regulation of care services by the Scottish Commission for the Regulation of Care and regulation of the social work workforce by the Scottish Social Services Council, have seen targets and timescales set for managers of residential and day care services to be suitably qualified; standards for the profession being reviewed and targets for continuous professional development established (Scottish Executive, 2001c; SSSC, 2004).

At the same time, and possibly as a result of the emergence of the mixed economy of care, there has been a rise in managerialism in human services, with business solutions and effective managers being viewed as the answer to all problems within the public sector (Tsui & Cheung, 2004). This romantic, and largely untested, notion that ‘a brilliant manager is the answer to almost all the problems within, and outside of, the organisational context’ is clearly an over-simplification of the social work agenda, overlooking the societal issues of discrimination, oppression and inequality (Tsui & Cheung, 2004, p. 441). Harris points out that managerialism was originally part of the Conservative government’s agenda to limit the autonomy and discretion of professionals working with the public sector (Harris, 2003).

That is not to say that social work agencies would not benefit from more effective leadership and management, but that it should recognise the professional nature of the work, the role of service users and carers in the planning and delivery of services, and the relevance of the knowledge base of social work managers (Rees, 1999). A review of the managerialist approach to social work organisations is particularly pertinent at a time when the role of social workers is being reconsidered as part of the 21st Century Review Group of Social Work in Scotland (Scottish Executive, 2006a).

It is accepted that the need for appropriately joined up approaches to service delivery, targets for service delivery, performance management and more contracting of services from private and voluntary agencies

have changed the environment social work is practised in. All of these require to be undertaken in conjunction with service users and carers and all of these have implications for managers in social care. What is needed is a way of recognising these changes without losing the professional nature of the work and the values inherent to social work practice.

Research in Scotland by the Scottish Leadership Foundation, commissioned by the Scottish Executive, to investigate leadership and management development in social services, and the work undertaken by TOPSS England, the strategic body for workforce development in social care, have identified key themes for managers (Van Zwanenberg, 2003; TOPSS England, 2000, 2004). These include:

- the need for clarity of roles and responsibilities (and articulation of same);
- recognition of the continuous change agenda and increased partnership working;
- consideration of the impact of current and emergent policy on service design and service management;
- the need to improve workforce planning;
- the need to modernise quality assurance of training outcomes; and
- the lack of a coherent and consistent approach to management training within social care.

Research carried out by the Performance and Innovation Unit in 2000 into the effectiveness of central government and public services in general, including social work, highlighted the demands to modernise public services and orient them more closely with the needs of customers, highlighting higher expectations on the part of the general public. It identified as key issues for public sector managers the increased opportunities and requirements for partnership working across the public sector and with the independent sector, and the pressures to make appropriate use of new technology (PIU, 2000). The PIU report acknowledged the many leadership initiatives, including leadership colleges, but found little evidence of the effectiveness of these measures in improving public services.

In 2003 the Chief Social Work Inspector's report for Scotland raised the issue of the rising expectations of service users and carers, and focused specifically on the wider organisational and environmental context for social work in the twenty-first century (Scottish Executive, 2004b). The title of the paper, 'Progress with complexity', set the scene for the multi-faceted nature of modern social work:

- demographic change (most significantly the growth in the older population);
- pockets of serious and persistent poverty;
- unemployment and deprivation;
- increasing problems for individuals, families and communities as a result of drug and alcohol misuse;
- the rising expectations of the range and quality of services; and
- questions over the sustainability of some policy directives, specifically care in the community

A further, crucial element affecting the management of social services, and other public services, was raised by the Performance and Innovation Unit report, in the shape of the political dimension of the work (PIU, 2000). The PIU report highlighted the challenge for managers of coping with local government, central government, devolved administrations, such as the Scottish parliament, and, the European Union. The report raised the political dimension to illustrate the lack of freedom for, and support given to, managers in public services to enable them to manage effectively.

A final point worthy of note for the practice of social work managers was highlighted by Learner & Statham in an article considering the new challenges for first line managers in social care (Learner & Statham, 2005). They identified the changing status of service users and carers, from recipients of 'professional wisdom and judgements' to one of 'co-producers' or 'co-providers' of care (Learner & Statham, 2005, p. 38). The emergence of Direct Payments, carers as key partners in care legislation (Scottish Executive, 2002a) and service user and carer led organisations have changed the relationship between service users, carers and social work staff. This has seen a significant shift in terms of power and

status, and requires social work managers to assist other staff to understand this changing relationship and to be able to use appropriate engagement and negotiating skills in work with service users and carers.

While the documents studied do not all agree on the key themes for social work, and social work management, what does come across is the complexity of managing in the public sector in general, and in social work in particular. To understand the position of managers in social care one has to be aware of the legislative/policy framework; the organisational context; societal changes, including increased expectations of service users and carers; and poverty and oppression.

The 21st Century Review Group set up by the Scottish Executive in 2004 promised to take the most fundamental review of social work services since the Social Work (Scotland) Act 1968 (Scottish Executive, 2004d). It involved social work staff, providers of service, service users and carers and training organisations. It examined the role and purpose of social work; considered improvements in the organisation and delivery of services; set out a framework and culture of improvements through robust inspection; considered modernising legislation; how to achieve a competent, confident workforce; and, last but not least, considered the requirements for strong leadership and management to underpin these developments.

The interim report stressed the challenge of interagency working and ensuring quality in service provision, at the same time as protecting social work values and clarifying the role and function of social work (Scottish Executive, 2005b). Further research commissioned from the Scottish Leadership Foundation in January 2005, to inform the work of the 21st Century Review Group's work on leadership and management, built on the original 2003 study (Van Zwanenberg, 2005). It reiterates the recommendation in the initial study of 2003 for a comprehensive approach to training and development for social work managers, although again recommending continued funding for the Leading to Deliver programme. Additional issues raised in this report were the need for consideration of e-government approaches to training and development; the development of programmes specifically aimed at supporting partnership working; and a call for a forum for leadership and management to be established which brings together the academic institutions, the employing agencies and centres of excellence.

Interestingly this report seems to stop short of calling for an exclusively partnership approach to training and development of social work managers. The Scottish Leadership Foundation and TOPSS England both highlighted the lack of clarity of roles and responsibilities, and articulation of same, when investigating leadership and management development in the social services. At this stage in the development of the social work profession it is questionable whether educating social work managers in a wholly integrated, inter-professional arena would allow adequate development of these fundamental issues.

The 21st Century Review of Social Work report (Scottish Executive, 2006a), published in February 2006, calls for an approach to leadership and management development which acknowledges the role of social work values. Although outlining the partnership approach to service delivery and the need for more effective joint working, it also highlights the unique contribution of social work. The report clarifies the role of the social worker and emphasises the need for 'enabling' leadership and management which facilitates the work of autonomous, reflective practitioners.

What is clear is that the policy and legislative framework for social work managers is changing. The need for a strategic approach to workforce planning and the impact of independent regulation of services and the workforce have been stressed. This needs to be set alongside the role of social work managers in partnership working with other professionals and agencies and, the rising expectation of the public for quality services. All of these areas highlight the complexity of leading and managing in social care. The absence of a comprehensive approach with academic institutions, employing agencies and managers has led to piecemeal development of training and development for managers. The lack of a comprehensive approach, which acknowledges the environment managers are working in, has been further compounded by the rise of the managerial agenda, suggesting that managers should be able to solve all the problems of social care.

Why Effective Leadership and Management is Important

The importance of the role played by leaders and managers in social care is perhaps articulated most succinctly in the recent reports commissioned to investigate the deaths of Victoria Climbié, Caleb Ness, and the long-term abuse of the young woman with learning difficulties in the Scottish Borders (Laming, 2003; O'Brien, 2003; Scottish Executive, 2004a).

Lord Laming placed the circumstances of direct practice within a wider organisational context and raised uncomfortable questions about the responsibilities of senior managers for the effectiveness of front line practice; the role of professional supervision and development of practice; continuing systematic failures of communication and accountability and the need to develop a 'whole system' approach to work with children and adults who were vulnerable (Laming, 2003). All of these are responsibilities which should be discharged by effective leaders and managers in social care.

The Caleb Ness enquiry into the death of an 11-week-old baby in Edinburgh, made 35 recommendations, 16 of these involved more than one agency, and hence highlighted issues regarding the management of the interface between health and social work. The report catalogued difficulties with the lack of co-ordination between services; poor administrative systems; poor chairing of meetings; lack of proactive senior social worker involvement in assessment, decision making and supervision; variation in expectations of managers in different agencies and lack of coherent use of terminology; lack of understanding of their professional role by some staff; the need for better training of staff; and, finally, problems in sharing information across agencies (O'Brien, 2003). Each of the areas outlined demonstrated the catastrophic impact when leadership and management was not carried out in an effective manner, both within social work agencies and across agency boundaries.

Similarly the report from the Scottish Borders Council into the abuse over a number of years of a young woman with learning difficulties highlighted management failings contributing to her death (Scottish Executive, 2004a). The report outlined the uncoordinated approach to service provision and monitoring; lack of information sharing; an inconsistent approach to risk management; poor quality assessments; lack of understanding of key legislation in place to protect vulnerable individuals; infrequent, unstructured and poorly recorded supervision; lack of clarity of roles; responsibilities being misunderstood and ineffectively discharged; and ineffective management of poor practice.

The report was unequivocal in its condemnation of management failings at every level (not just in social work, but all agencies). Its recommendations included the need for clearer management accountability and quality assurance systems and more effective joint working across agencies (Scottish Executive, 2004a).

An interesting point raised by the Scottish Borders report, not picked up on by the other two reports into the deaths of service users, was the issue of personal accountability of managers and staff members. In both cases the report linked this issue of personal accountability to what it viewed as an 'essential' or 'integral' element of the profession (Scottish Executive, 2004a).

Much of the criticism of management practices outlined in these major enquiries related to: the joint working environment which managers were working in; gaps in key management skills; gaps in knowledge of legislation and policy; and lack of skills in assessment and risk management.

A contributing factor to these perceived failures by management may be related to the lack of management qualifications held by social work managers (PIU, 2000; TOPSS England, 2000). Both the Performance and Innovation Unit and TOPSS England highlighted social work as a profession where managers were more likely to hold a vocational or professional qualification than a management qualification. Although these reports both date back to 2000, the Scottish Social Services Council in 2004 indicated that many managers and front line workers in residential and day care had no relevant qualifications, including management qualifications necessary to register as fit persons under the Regulation of Care (Scotland) Act 2001 (SSSC, 2004; Scottish Executive, 2001c).

What should not be in doubt is the imperative to have effective leaders and managers in social work. The issues highlighted by the major enquiries emphasise the crucial role of managers in the care of vulnerable

individuals and the delivery of quality services, in conjunction with partners, to meet the needs of these individuals. The professional nature of the work has been stressed, particularly the individual responsibilities for the exercise of judgement and decision making. The reports have suggested shortcomings in the performance of managers, and identified gaps in their knowledge and skills. The latter, it is suggested, has not been helped by the level of management qualifications held by key managers in social care.

Broader workforce or succession planning will be required, according to the Chief Social Work Inspector, as Scottish care agencies face losing a substantial number of experienced managers within the next 10 years or so through retirement (Scottish Executive, 2004c).

The Social Services Inspectorate for Wales, in a report considering basic grade social worker training and development needs, stressed similar linkages between workforce planning and recruitment, and the need for employers to be central to the planning and delivery of training (SSIW, 2004).

Key Factors in the Provision of Training and Development for Managers

The role expected of social work managers is changing with the evolving legislative and policy framework. This section will consider the key factors influencing the effective provision of training and development for managers.

A number of reports have highlighted the lack of a coherent and consistent approach to leadership and management training and development (TOPSS England, 2004; PIU, 2000; Van Zwanenberg, 2003, 2005). The TOPSS England report went further by suggesting the lack of congruence between individual needs, organisational requirements and training and development for managers (TOPSS England, 2004). It suggested training and development was provider rather than employer led.

The Council for Excellence in Management and Leadership, appointed by the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry to develop a strategy to ensure that the UK had 'the managers and leaders of the future to match the best in the world', highlighted the range of management qualifications and training options (CEML, 2002, p. 1). The problem, as they described it, was not one of quantity but one of quality, with training not sufficiently customised to meet the specific needs of the individual and their organisation.

In a text reviewing the leadership development programmes in a number of global international companies Giber *et al.* demonstrated how the customised approach was effective, how a number of companies emphasised the need for the training to be consistent with the organisation's goals and that the organisation's commitment, particularly at senior management level, was crucial to the success of the training programmes (Giber *et al.*, 2000). The need for a supportive organisational climate was promoted by Reynolds, based on research by the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development, to underpin the learning for individuals and for organisations (Reynolds, 2004). The latter was also highlighted by Van Zwanenberg in her review of training and development requirements for social work managers for the 21st Century Review Group (Van Zwanenberg, 2005).

This would suggest that a partnership approach between educational institutions and employing organisations is required. Van Zwanenberg suggested this partnership should not only involve social work agencies but should be a multi-agency approach bringing together managers from social work and other related professional groups at key stages in the education process (Van Zwanenberg, 2003). The focus, according to Van Zwanenberg, should be on the core values of social work, linked to professional standards, building skills in multi-professional/multi-agency working and contributing to both individual and organisational learning. Van Zwanenberg's 2005 report seems to clarify that partnership training aimed at social work managers should not be the only style of training on offer, with specific training for social work managers still being appropriate (Van Zwanenberg, 2005).

The joint working agenda and ongoing recruitment and retention issues in social work have led to changes in organisational structures, with new organisational forms being developed to meet the challenges of partnership working (Scottish Executive, 2004c). This has led to the demise of the old department with

managers now leading, at times without the line manager mandate, in multi-disciplinary, multi-professional teams (Van Zwanenberg, 2003).

The debate in social work regarding the current interagency nature of the work is echoed in the way health agencies are being encouraged to look at leadership and management. The NHS Leadership Centre concentrates on the range of internal and external stakeholders that health and social work has to deal with, and the imperative for leaders and managers to be able to 'understand that truly collaborative working is therefore essential' (NHS, 2003, p. 9).

Interestingly, although social work and health reports dealing with management training and educational needs emphasised that collaborative working abilities were essential for managers, the equivalent education document focusing on leadership and management in schools made little mention of partnership working (Scottish Executive, 2004d). This would suggest that thinking about joint working and partnership arrangements were less well developed in education.

Perhaps the most crucial issue for organisations is whether there is a demonstrable link between training and development and organisational performance? The Council for Excellence in Management and Leadership report, entitled *Raising Our Game*, informed by an extensive literature review and research, concluded that 'there was a strong relationship between the systematic implementation of leadership development, and organisational performance' (CEML, 2002, p. 19). A similar conclusion was reached by the Audit Commission from seven years of Joint Reviews (Audit Commission, 2004). It emphasised that quality leadership and management in social care were key factors in providing quality services.

The Department of Health report, *A Quality Strategy for Social Work*, assumed an inter-relationship between leaders' and managers' development and the quality of services, when it identified a crucial element of a manager's role was the ability to deal with poor performance. It suggested the need for appropriate training and development to be available to managers prior to taking up supervisory or management positions (DOH, 2000). The recent reports commissioned following the deaths and long-term abuse of service users stressed the necessity for managers to be able to challenge poor performance (Laming, 2003; O'Brien, 2003; Scottish Executive, 2004a).

The whole thrust of the NHS Leadership Centre's report on leadership qualities was to ensure a direct correlation between leadership qualities and agency performance (NHS, 2003).

Using analysis from research carried out focusing on health, education and local government, the Performance and Innovation Unit report recommended an inclusive approach which included a group to oversee leadership development; appropriate development models designed to 'nurture' the qualities of leadership; and the establishment of a scheme to promote secondments of staff to allow them to experience new settings (PIU, 2000). Much of this work has now been commenced by TOPSS England as part of its leadership and management strategy (TOPSS England, 2004).

The 'National Strategy for the Development of the Social Service Workplace in Scotland 2005–2010' considered the current context and future direction for social work agencies and suggested that leadership and management skills were key factors in determining the quality of services delivered to users and carers (Scottish Executive, 2005c). This report drew heavily on the work of the Scottish Leadership Foundation as evidence for this view (Van Zwanenberg, 2003, 2005).

Van Zwanenberg, reporting on the research carried out with social work managers in Scotland, called for a comprehensive programme of training opportunities for first line and middle managers. However, the report's recommendation for a specially commissioned programme for first line and middle managers in social work across the statutory and voluntary sector culminated in a piecemeal rather than an integrated approach to the problems (Van Zwanenberg, 2003).

The literature reviewed so far would seem to point to the need for greater account to be taken by training and educational establishments of the legislative, environmental and organisational changes that have affected the role of the manager in social work agencies. Emphasis has been placed on the need for greater partnerships between employing organisations and training and educational establishments, recognising the

benefits for all of considering the organisational goals of social work agencies and the need for a comprehensive training and development strategy for managers linked to the wider workforce plan.

It would appear that a comprehensive approach, not just across the statutory and independent sector in social work, but including partner agencies and related professions, is required. If all of the necessary connections can be achieved, and effective training and development for managers can be realised, then it has been suggested, improved organisational performance should follow.

So far the emphasis has been on the interagency context of the work and the recommendations from the literature of the need for an interagency approach to training and development for managers. The main difficulties for social work as a profession in subscribing to such an approach would be how to ensure managers were supported to be able to clarify and articulate the role of social work in an integrated training model, and how well they were able to demonstrate commitment to the values of social work when faced with interagency training and education opportunities. TOPSS England and Van Zwanenberg both identified an issue for managers in clarifying and articulating the role of social work, particularly as part of interagency work (TOPSS England, 2004; Van Zwanenberg, 2003). Would managers' grasp of their own professional identity be strong enough to withstand the pressures from other professions? A comprehensive, interagency approach alone will not necessarily guarantee an effective learning experience for social work (or other agencies) managers unless the environmental conditions facing managers are taken into account.

It is not only the structure of training and development for social work managers which needs to change but also the teaching methods employed. Orphen, in an article considering the evaluation of management training in all sectors, emphasised the impact of the changing environment on managers (Orphen, 1999). As a result he concluded that the teaching of management training needed to be responsive to this changing environment and saw the need to

move away from prescriptive teaching—that is the provision of knowledge in the form of generally applicable rules or neat models of perceived reality—and much more of a need to demand of managers that they evolve their own models of reality and approaches to problem solving. (Orphen, 1999, pp. 13–14)

There also requires to be a recognition that taught courses are not the 'only or best way for adults to learn' and that a number of approaches, including practical experience, will be required (PIU, 2000, p. 59).

The limitations of some of the proposals put forward to meet the training and development needs of managers in social care, centre on their prescriptive teaching, linked to competency based approaches to management (Van Zwanenberg, 2003; TOPSS England, 2004). The modular, competency based approach, with teaching methods such as case studies, simulation, scenario planning, action learning and, 'just in time' training, should effectively link theory and practice, and have much to commend them. However the role of critical theory and critical reflection requires equal status if individuals are to make sense of their practice and continue the focus of social work as a profession focusing on anti-discriminatory and anti-oppressive practice (Baldwin, 2004; Sullivan & Johns, 2002; Morley, 2003).

This section has highlighted the lack of a comprehensive approach to training and development of social work managers, both within organisations and at university post qualifying level. The interagency context of the role of social work managers would suggest an inter-disciplinary approach to training and development of managers in social care and related professions. The big question would be whether this type of approach would be an effective way of training social work managers in terms of their ability to clarify and articulate the role of social work and social work values within this setting. In addition the emphasis on competency based models of leadership and management make little reference to the role of critical theory, critical reflection and personal accountability as key aspects of a social work professional's work.

Current Position of Post Qualifying Social Work Management Courses

Currently social work management training courses come in a variety of guises. There are the broad based business management courses, such as MBA courses, which cater for a variety of private and public sector managers. The generic public sector management courses offer a core curriculum aimed at a variety of disciplines within the public sector. Then there are the more specialist social work management courses ranging from those offering a broad course for managers working in differing locations, to very specialist ones focused on residential child care or voluntary sector work. In addition, some courses offer a curriculum aimed at particular groups of managers in the public sector, such as health and social work managers, engaged in interagency teams.

The question would be how does this array of current academic provision for social work managers meet the growing integration agenda, link effectively with agency goals and allow social work managers to explore their roles and responsibilities?

In Scotland 'The Framework for Social Work Education in Scotland' articulated what the Scottish Executive and organisations employing social work staff wanted to achieve:

Social workers need to be able to act effectively in these demanding circumstances and, to achieve this, students must learn to reflect critically on, and take responsibility for, their own actions. (Scottish Executive, 2003, p. 19)

Although this report was specifically looking at basic grade practitioner staff, achieving the goal of the Scottish Executive and employer agencies for the effective practice of basic grade staff is facilitated by social work managers.

One of the areas specifically targeted by the 21st Century Review of Social Work (Scottish Executive, 2006a) report was leadership and management development. The review stresses the multi-agency nature of social care, and the need for enabling leadership and effective management at all levels.

The report highlights the role of managers in leading change, improving performance and supporting staff. The sub-group report on leadership and management recommended the establishment of leadership and management fora, and the development of a national framework for leadership and management development (Scottish Executive, 2006b). The implementation plan for the report published in June 2006 (Scottish Executive, 2006b) confirmed the setting up of a national leadership and management forum.

Management structures are changing with social work managers often working across agency boundaries. Higham & Rotheram (2005) suggest that many first line managers feel ill-equipped to fulfil the demands of their changing role and are often encouraged to pursue management education.

The challenge of interagency working is well documented (Scottish Executive, 2005b, 2006a). A key issue arising from this study would be how educational programmes ensure that social work managers are equipped to manage joint working across agencies (Van Zwanenberg, 2003), whilst at the same time, providing them with the chance to explore their roles and responsibilities in a setting which is sympathetic to the values and principles of social work (Scottish Executive, 2005b).

Research examining student and funding agencies' views on the effectiveness of social work management education was undertaken using the Certificate/Diploma programmes of the MSc in Social Work Management run by the Glasgow School of Social Work as a case study (Watson, 2006). This course, based at the University of Strathclyde, at present offers a post qualifying course to managers working within social care exclusively. Although originally set up by the former regional social work authority, integration with the employing agencies of students is now limited to biannual course committees and the use of visiting lecturers from local health and social care agencies. As a social work manager with a number of years experience, now seconded using 80% of my time to lead the Glasgow School of Social Work management course, the importance of adequate support and development for managers is more than just an academic exercise. The current research sought to evaluate the effectiveness of the Certificate and

Diploma programmes of the MSc programme. The main findings from this research indicated the lack of a strategic approach to management education by the majority of funding agencies. The responses by students and funding agencies demonstrated that the changing environment was having an effect on the role of social work managers. Students found the 'knowledge' gained on the social work management course helpful in dealing with their changing role. Participation in the course, according to the statements from students, improved their confidence in coping with the change agenda. The study provided evidence of the need for a range of management educational opportunities. The views of students and funding agencies ranged from those who felt that social work managers needed to embrace the integration agenda and be educated alongside managers from other professions; those who favoured opportunities for managers from different disciplines to come together at key points in their respective academic management training; to those who still felt there was a place for separate management education programmes for social work managers, sympathetic to the value base of social work.

Summary

The legislative framework in social care and health has, in recent years, emphasised the need for joined up solutions to service users' and carers' social, health and educational needs. The drive for local and central government to modernise and become more accountable has led to a rise in responsibilities of managers for performance management and transparency in decision making. The increasing expectations of service users and carers, and their changing status as partners in care, has changed the relationship between the agencies and service users and carers. These issues, along with the continuing political context of public services, and the ongoing poverty and oppression within society, serve to highlight the complexity of managing in social work and social care.

The importance of effective leaders and management has been outlined. The need for a comprehensive framework of management educational opportunities to prepare managers for their changing role was argued. The link between an effective training and development strategy and organisational performance has been suggested by research across the UK. The requirement for education and development, not just for managers, to be linked to the broader workforce planning in organisations has been demonstrated.

The challenge for social work, and social work managers in particular, is how to ensure that, within this integrated, multi-agency approach, the employer organisations and academic institutions offering post qualifying courses can support social work managers in understanding, and articulating the unique role of social work, including the protection of the value base of social work.

It was indicated that academic post qualifying courses offered to social work managers required the development of a partnership with social work employer organisations, and other related organisations employing allied professionals. The challenge for courses aimed at social work managers will be to develop learning and education programmes which link more directly with the changing environment, and the needs of agencies and their staff.

This article has outlined the current context for social work management education and has highlighted emerging issues for the next 5–10 years in the training and development of social work managers at the post qualifying academic level:

- acknowledgement of the complexity of leading and managing in social care;
- the need for comprehensive training plans within organisations, linked to organisational goals;
- the need for a coherent, consistent approach involving the academic institutions, employer organisations and managers; and
- the need to acknowledge the multi-agency, partnership agenda, at the same time as safeguarding the role and values of social work.

In the light of the 21st Century Review of Social Work (Scottish Executive, 2006a) it is perhaps pertinent to leave the final word to Peter Peacock, Minister for Education and Young People, who summed up the expectations of education programmes, now and in the future:

We will ... expect our universities and colleagues to work together and with stakeholders to review current programmes of education and training to ensure they equip our next generation of workers with the skills they will need to meet the demands of modernised practice and that our universities and colleges are active participants in the change process. (Scottish Executive, 2006c, p. 3)

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