

# **The Development of a System of Social Services in the Russian Federation**

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## Abstract

The paper draws on field studies carried out by the author during the course of a Western-sponsored initiative to support curriculum development in the education of social workers for the Russian Federation. It presents a chronology of the development of Russian social welfare laws and institutions during the 1990s, focusing on the major legislation of 1995. Aspects of the 'welfare mix' are examined, to locate Russia on the model proposed by Abrahamson (1992). Within this context, the curriculum for social work education is critically reviewed. The paper concludes that, in current circumstances, there are few positive incentives for young graduates to remain in social work after graduation, and that Russia has experienced a shift in provision towards the Southern European type as expressed in Abrahamson's model, although expectations remain that the state should be the main provider of benefits and services.

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Principal Lecturer for Publications, Research and Staff Development, Kate is a member of the Human Resource Management Division of Wolverhampton Business School. In recent years her research has focused on the dynamics of cross-cultural management knowledge transfer, in the context of management development programmes, specifically in Russia and the Former Soviet Union. She is also interested in the development of public sector management and non-governmental organisations in the emerging social welfare system in Russia.

# The Development of a System of Social Services in the Russian Federation

## Introduction

This paper is based on work in which I was involved in 1997 and 1998, as a training consultant on a Tacis project based in the Ministry of Labour and Social Development in Russia (formerly the Ministry of Labour and Social Protection). The title of the project was “EU Tacis: Developing a system of social services for vulnerable groups, Russian Federation”, and it was administered by a consortium comprising the British Council and the Russian-European Trust, a charity specialising in social work development in the Former Soviet Union. Social services in the context of this project encompasses specialist care and support services to the elderly, people with disabilities, and families and children. In addition to a dedicated consultant team for each of these specialisms, the project also included a team of specialists in training, including curriculum development, and a legislative adviser to the Federal Government. As well as working with the Ministry and universities in Moscow, the project incorporated two pilot sites, Samara oblast and Penza oblast, for the development of demonstration centres and experimental training programmes.

The project thus allowed the consultant team to develop both an overview of the development of services for vulnerable groups in the population at a Federal level, and to see the reality of such developments at close quarters in the regions.

In some countries the concept of social services embraces both social care, i.e. the provision of specific services and facilities for people with special needs e.g. people with disabilities, vulnerable children, the homeless, etc. and social security i.e. a system of compensatory payments for people on low levels of income, such as pensioners. In the United Kingdom these two functions are separated. While there is not such a clear separation between these functions in Russia at the present time, this paper makes a distinction between social care and social security, and focuses on the former. Therefore, there is an overview of the state and civil institutions which provide social care, a review of key aspects of social care, and a discussion of the training and employment of social workers, who are responsible for the delivery of these services.

## Historical background

The first social security regulations in Soviet Union were enacted in December 1917, covering unemployment insurance (Wiktorow, 1992). There followed enactments on invalidity pensions, old age pensions, for factory workers and clerical staff, eventually (but not until 1964) embracing workers on collective farms. Allowances for people with disabilities, and family allowances were introduced after 1968. These major pieces of legislation were supplemented by numerous regulations governing social benefits particularly characteristic of the Soviet era, such as universal provision for nurseries and kindergartens, treatment in sanatoria, and holidays and recreation.

These benefits can be categorised as involving universal benefits triggered by particular life events, rather than special provision to meet special needs (except in the case of disability benefits). They fall broadly in line with social security services typical of the west. However, there are no services in the soviet era analogous to social work, and the services planned and delivered by professional social workers. These have come into being as a direct result of the breakdown of communism, which both uncovered a hitherto unrecognised and largely unacknowledged set of social problems and also ushered in cataclysmic collapse of the existing support systems. These twin forces created a double effect in which ‘new’ social problems were acknowledged and confronted at the very time at which society was least able, in material and legislative terms, to deal with them. These problems include:

- The deterioration in the quality of life
- Steep drop in the birth rate
- Serious structural shifts in human resources
- Changes in socio-economic behaviours
- Sharp income differentials with polarisation of rich and poor
- Deterioration in social infrastructure, including education, health and culture
- Growing levels of adolescent delinquency
- Problems of psychological adaptation
- Rising levels of crime
- Rising levels of alcohol and other forms of substance abuse

### Chronology of Russian social welfare law and institution

In a generally depressing and pessimistic context, one hopefully positive aspect is the introduction to Russia of professional social work. The profession of social worker was only created in the USSR in March-April 1991. At that point, a leading academic, Prof. Belicheva, estimated that Russia was some 70 years behind the rest of Europe in social work development. Prior to this, a concept had been developed of the *social pedagogue*, a concept spearheaded by a special project team based in the Academy of Pedagogical Studies and headed by V Bocharova. The social pedagogue was intended to work with children and families within established institutions such as schools, and was concerned with the general upbringing of the young. Social pedagogy could be interpreted as having its antecedents in Komsomol activities. Basic social welfare work with individuals and their families had long been carried out by Party workers and enterprise staff (Munday & Lane, 1998). In 1990, Bocharova's team held a major all-Union conference in Yaroslavl, attended by over 100 delegates from all republics in the USSR, and about 24 foreigners, mostly Westerners. It was apparent that the concept of the social pedagogue was causing some confusion in the interactions between Westerners, particularly those from the English-speaking countries. Discussion, and further contacts, revealed that the Soviet team was describing the activities commonly undertaken in the West by the social worker. From this point on, a bifurcation can be detected in development. Bocharova's team split, some to develop the concept of social work under the aegis of the Institute of Sociology, and the rest to carry on the social pedagogy banner in the Academy of Pedagogical Sciences (Bocharova, 1993).

The major period of legislation to create the foundations of a modern social services system at federal level was during the year of 1995, culminating in a major piece of legislation in November of that year. By 1996 some 2500 state social service institutions had been established throughout the country, and many NGOs established, although these are still at a fairly rudimentary level of development. In 1997 by decree, the Ministry of Social Protection was amalgamated with the Ministry of Labour to form the Ministry of Labour and Social Development. This heralded a change in focus with the emphasis now being on those fit for work, rather than those most at risk. The new Deputy Minister let it be known that social policy was now the policy driver, rather than social protection, and that he considered that he would have to make choices between pensions and services for children. At the same time, the Ministry of Education was merged with the Committee of Science and Higher Education, placing the emphasis firmly on the vocational preparation of young people, and lowering the priority given to the psychological and social support mechanisms formally given to children at risk through the school system.

**Table 1.** Chronology of Russian social welfare law

Date	Law
April	1991 'Social work specialist' instituted
September	1991 'Social work' instituted in higher education
January	1992 Constituent conference "Association of Employees of Social Services" , Moscow - 141 specialists
July	1992 Charter of AESS registered with Ministry of Justice. By June 1994, 28,000 members. Chair, Andrei Panov, Ministry of Labour
July	1992 Russian Government requests technical assistance from the EC to participate in a comprehensive reform of the social security system
Early	1993 Ministry of Social Protection provides the EC with a detailed Memorandum setting out needs.
End	1993 Action programme for Russian Federation approved, inc. ECU 4 million for reform of social protection system
	1993 Project on reform of pension system
December	1993 Constitution of Russian Federation - Article 7 declares Russia to be a 'social state'
February	1994 Institute of Social Work established.
January	1995 Federal Law on veterans
April	1995 Federal Law on Social Associations
July	1995 Procedure on the fixing and payment of fuel, transport etc
August	1995 Federal Law on Social Services for citizens of retirement age and invalids
November	1995 Federal Law on Foundations of Social services to the population of the Russian Federation
November	1995 Federal Law on social protection of disabled persons
November	1995 Federal list of social services guaranteed by the State, granted to citizens who are pensioners and invalids by states and municipal social service establishments
	1995 State Report "On the situation of Children in the Russian Federation"
April	1996 Presidential decree no 440 on transition of Russia to stable development
April	1996 Resolution no 473 "On the Order and Conditions of Payment for Social Services granted to citizens who are pensioners and invalids by state and municipal establishments"
June	1996 Resolution no 739 (Law on Foundations of Social Services) "On the granting of free of charge social services and paid social services by state social services"
	1996 New Family Code introduced.

### **Features of the 1995 law**

The client of social services is defined as: "a citizen, who has found himself in an emergency situation and in this connection receives social services". It will be apparent that this is a circular definition. An 'emergency situation' is further defined as "a situation which objectively upsets [the] normal vital activity of citizen (disability, incapable of self-care in connection with old age, sickness, orphanhood, the state of being neglected, poverty, joblessness, homelessness, intra-family conflicts, solitude, violence, etc.), which he cannot overcome himself". The law, at least in its intention if not in its implementation, guarantees to every citizen the right to access to social services, to accurate

information, and states that foreign citizens and stateless persons in Russian territory enjoy the same rights as Russian citizens. Material aid (Article 8) shall be: “targeted and granted to the citizens in emergency situation in the form of money, food, articles of personal consumption, medicine, sanitary and hygienic means, household and childcare articles, as well as means of transport and mobility, and special equipment for persons in need of care from others”.

Some domiciliary care may also be provided, along with more traditional residential institutions and “temporary asylum” for child-orphans, neglected children and teenagers, homeless people, victims of abuse, natural calamity, or armed or ethnic conflicts. Within the law, day care institutions are to be established for people able to serve themselves and move by themselves. “Socio-economic and socio-medical consultations” are to be provided (although the legislation is far from clear on what these are), and on psychological and socio-pedagogical issues. Article 5 says that priority should be given to adolescents in emergency situations. The law also provided a lengthy list of the kinds of establishments that could be set up within the law, their definitions being as specific as “Centres of social assistance to neglected children” and “Centres of emergency counselling rendered by phone”. State standards for social services are to be approved by the Federal Government.

Who is entitled to free social services? According to the legislation: people unable to take care of themselves and who have no relatives to take care of them, victims of natural disasters or war or minors in an emergency situation. This has been interpreted to mean:

- the absence of means for daily subsistence
- average income below established subsistence minimum
- isolation and ability to cope alone
- objective reasons for inability to work

Herein lies a typical ambiguity within the legislation. Right of access is enshrined in the law, but the legislators draw back from a universalist approach to the delivery of free services. There is a clear expectation that families will take responsibility for care and carry the burden of cost. Other principles enshrined in the law include accessibility, benevolence, humaneness, confidentiality and a preventative orientation. However, none of these terms are defined.

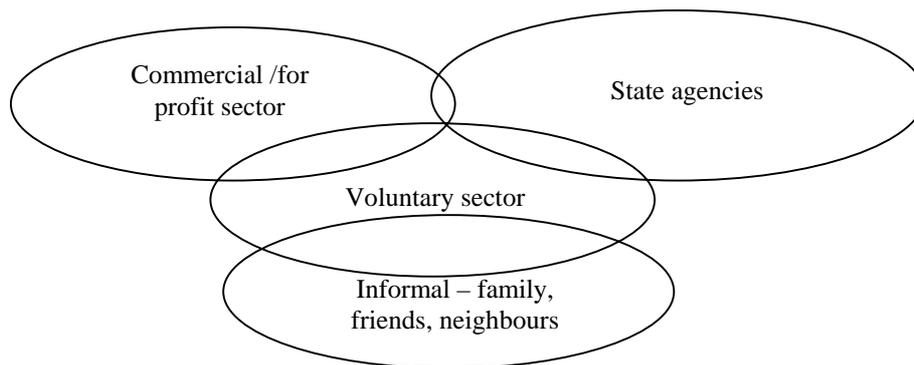
### **The welfare mix**

Generally speaking, the functions of social care systems are similar around the world. These include; provision of care and support, stimulation and care co-ordination, protection of the most vulnerable elements of the population, and regulation of services. Social care also carries out the more political functions at a societal level of integration into society of groups and individuals who would otherwise be excluded, and social control. This latter function of keeping economic and social marginalisation at a controlled level (i.e. at an equilibrium point at which needs are sufficiently met in order to keep the evidence of suffering and/or unsocial behaviour at a tolerable level at minimum public expense) is less frequently acknowledged by professionals in the field, or by politicians.

All countries have a combination of ways in which the needs of the most vulnerable members of society are met, a combination commonly known as the ‘welfare mix’. The welfare mix consists of:

- state provision met through general taxation
- the voluntary or independent sector, ranging from self-help groups and unpaid volunteers to often large not-for-profit organisations
- the commercial sector where care services are provided for profit which is distributed to members or owners
- the informal sector of family, friends and neighbours

The United Kingdom has shifted in recent years from a heavily State-supported system towards a 'liberal' market system, in which the bulk of the population meet their needs for care, for example for childcare or residential and nursing care in late old age, through market-oriented organisations and financial institutions. It is left to the State to pick up responsibility for residual means-tested provision for the most vulnerable. It could in fact be argued that the heyday of the Welfare State in Britain was an aberration, and that the UK has returned to a more 'normal' pattern consistent with its culture. The liberal model is contrasted with, on the one hand, the universalist state-dominated social democratic model of Scandinavia; and on the other, with the family care model of Mediterranean countries such as Spain, Portugal and Italy. Germanic countries display a subsidiarity model, with the family having a strong primary responsibility, supported by provision from the voluntary sector and limited services from the state (Abrahamson, 1992; Anttonen & Sipila, 1996). Abrahamson holds that, in post-war Europe, market and state have been emphasised at the expense of the solidarity principle central to civil society. His triangular models suggest a geographical division of emphasis in the welfare mix, including Central and Eastern Europe "The public sector dominated in Eastern Europe in accordance with the idea of 'real socialism'. The further one moves to the south of Europe, both in the east and west, institutions of civil society like the family, the church and other social networks become more dominant" (p.7). The dominance of the State in welfare provision in Russia has dramatically broken down to be replaced by a somewhat chaotic combination of reliance on local and family structures. However, the strains that most families and social institutions are under render it unlikely that this picture will quickly evolve into a mature functioning 'civil society' conforming to the British, Germanic, or even Mediterranean model.



**Figure A.** Model of the welfare mix

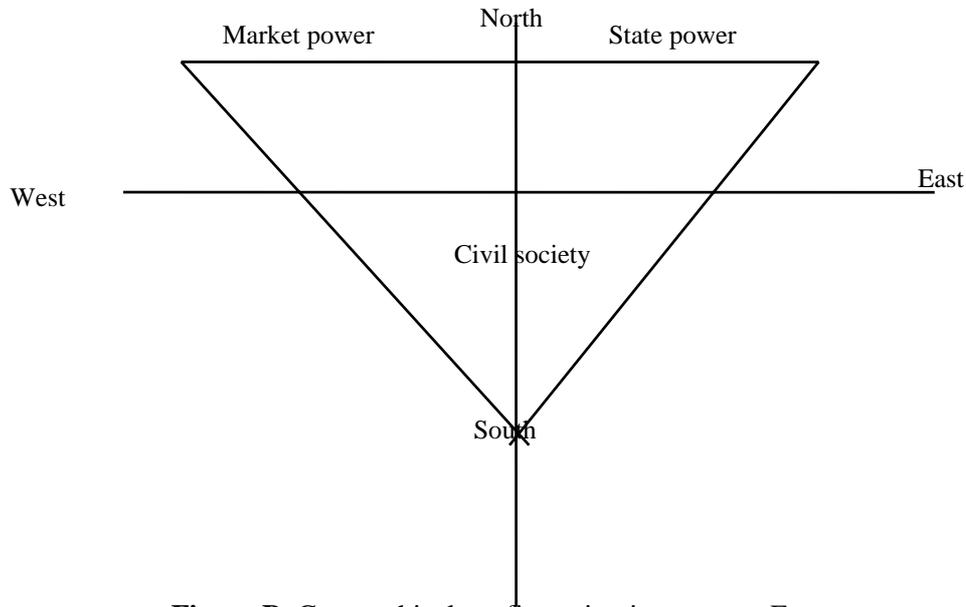


Figure B. Geographical configuration in post-war Europe

## The Welfare Mix in Russia

### Informal Sector

Much has been said and written in recent years about Russian communitarianism (see, for example, Hosking, 1992; Vlachoutsicos, 1998) as a long-term cultural dimension. This cultural tendency might give rise to an expectation that Russian culture will of its own volition favour a voluntarist response to social problems. However, since the break-up of the Soviet Union, and before, demographic and economic factors have been putting strain on families and neighbourhoods. There are acute levels of stress from psychological adjustments to societal change, and the ongoing struggle for survival in the short to medium term. A recent opinion survey indicated that 86% of Muscovites could not recall one single good thing that happened in 1998, suggesting that stress is taking its toll across the population, and people will tend to concentrate their efforts on looking after themselves and their immediate families. The burgeoning of the voluntary sector seen in Hungary post-1989 (Munday & Lane, 1998) has not been experienced in Russia, although more self-help and self-advocacy groups are developing. These have tended to operate as lobbying groups at federal and regional level, rather than providing services themselves. The religious revival, particularly the activities of philanthropic organisations linked to western evangelical movements, have had a marginal impact in some large cities.

### Commercial sector

Beyond the provision of primary health care in the form of exclusive private hospitals and clinics, there is very little evidence that a commercial social care system exists. Unlike the United States, where the social worker is an independent licensed practitioner who may advertise his or her services in the Yellow Pages, Russia has adopted the predominant European model of the social worker as employee of a governmental agency, managing a centre or caseload on behalf of that public body. It would seem highly unlikely that a significant commercial sector is set to develop in the foreseeable future, simply because the economy could not support it. In Penza city, for instance, in 1997 50% of the population was living on benefits. The long-term prospects for growth of commercial social care, such as residential homes for the aged, will depend on where Russia eventually falls on the liberal – social democratic care continuum.

### State sector

The State is still regarded by most of the population as the first port of call. Although strapped for cash and producing rather inadequate legislation, the federal government can take credit for having spearheaded the development of social work and social services on a national basis. In spring of 1997, the EU project found Ministry staff to be suffering from extremely low morale, due to lack of

funding for staff, lack of federal resources to develop and deliver services, and disappointment at statements coming from Ministers. Deputy Ministers responsible for formulating policy felt inadequate to the task and ill prepared. No support or education appeared to be available to them. A salary increase for staff, produced by decree, remained unpaid. The project also experienced lack of collaboration and rivalry between ministries. Access by EU representatives to Ministries such as Education, Health and Home Affairs proved extremely difficult. The attitude was “what’s in it for us?”, an attitude familiar to the author when working in the UK to establish integrated and inter-disciplinary approaches in social welfare during the 1980s.

### **The ‘clients’ of social services**

#### **Disability**

In Russia people with disabilities are treated primarily with a medical approach; i.e. their physical impairments are seen as a medical rather than a social issue. The Russian term ‘invalid’ is now not used in other countries in Europe because of its connotations of someone who is of no value to society. The Russian environment, urban and rural, remains unadapted to the needs of people with mobility or sensory problems, and people with learning disabilities are rarely seen in public places.

The process of dealing with a disabled person is generally a process of segregation from the mainstream. Classification of a person’s disability, including registration, is made without reference to the preference of the individual. Once made, the decision is not usually reviewed. People with a minimal level of disability are found residing in long-term institutions, although they do not require this level of care. Russian people with disabilities have not had, and continue without, the legislative assistance of equal opportunities policies at either federal or regional level.

There is some evidence that self-advocacy organisations are beginning to develop among groups of people with disabilities, particularly the young. Those few who have found ways to develop IT skills have found their way onto the Internet and are learning about disabled rights from organisations on the Web. It is arguable that the extent of a civil society can be measured by the extent to which people with special needs are integrated into mainstream life.

#### **Elderly**

The plight of the elderly is one of the most pitiful aspects of the demise of the Soviet Union. The problem with the level and payment of pensions is well known. Elderly people are seen as having little value to society and many are eking out their final years in despair and isolation. For many, the best option is to be admitted to a long-term institution because of homelessness or hunger. Thus there are many in residential care who do not need to be there because of their physical or mental incapacity.

#### **Children and families**

Like poverty, the maltreatment of children did not officially exist as a social problem in the Soviet Union. The discovery of physical, mental, sexual abuse and neglect, coupled with a massive increase in child homelessness, has been a major shock (Harwin, 1996). Such children tend to be labelled as vulnerable, and because of the established patterns of care being crisis intervention rather than prevention, intervention tends to mean institutionalisation. Short-term care solutions such as fostering are poorly developed.

## **The development of social work and social work education**

The profession of social worker has been introduced by statute across the federation in what has been virtually an ideological and philosophical vacuum. Practising social workers, generally dislocated by economic breakdown from their original professions, and those who are charged with educating a new generation of social workers in the universities, are struggling to define what social work is in the context of a society in the throes of cataclysmic change. The absence of a sound legislative

framework, the absence of a broad political consensus, and the breakdown of existing institutions presents the emerging profession with seemingly insurmountable obstacles. There is little clarity about the role and responsibilities of this new group of social care services staff. They are caught in a welter of expectations and contradictions; simultaneously expected to assess needy individuals for benefit payments and to ration those payments, simultaneously required to fulfil managerial roles of designing and delivering new services and systems, and to be the domiciliary carers, the counsellors and emergency youth workers.

### **The legislative and institutional framework for the curriculum**

During the late 80s and early 90s, social work education and curriculum was strongly driven by Moscow, and dominated by a handful of individuals who had already established senior ministerial academic positions, and were able to be first in making international contacts and learning about theory and practice of social work in the West (Panov & Kholostova, 1996). When the profession and its scientific basis (as a recognised qualification within higher education) were defined in 1991, this oligarchical control of the development of social work education was enshrined in law. This is directly opposite to the situation in the United Kingdom, for example, in which social work education and training grew out of practice in a pluralistic, mixed economy of care and intervention.

A major constraining issue is the relationship between the universities, the Ministry and other policy-making bodies (specifically the Regional Administrations) and the Ministry of Education in liberalising the legislative framework to allow more regional initiatives in curriculum development. Given the size and diversity of Russia, there is little clear rationale for imposing a legislative straitjacket on curriculum, particularly in a field such as social work which needs an experimental and innovative regime in which to develop and test new ideas. Social workers and academics should not feel under threat of sanctions should they agree at a regional level to experiment with a new curriculum model. There is now an urgent need to establish a national accrediting/quality assurance body for social work education, perhaps on the lines of CCETSW in the UK, to act as an inspecting and accrediting body for regional initiatives in social work education and training. Such a body would have the advantage of being independent of the Ministry of Labour and Social Development and of the Ministry of Education, while having representation from each, and would have no brief other than to defend and promote the development of the social work profession and meet the learning needs of its members.

In the regions Tacis consultants found that the knowledge base has moved on quickly in terms of building on simple information about what is done in other countries. There is evidence that Russian academics have used this information to explore the links between theory and practice, and are developing their own conceptual framework for integrating the curriculum. This has implications for the relations between the regions and Moscow and much thought needs to be given to ways of facilitating the information flow from the regions to the capital, rather than simply from Moscow to the regions. We saw evidence that academics have readily understood the enormous potential of the World Wide Web and email to free them from dependence on the printed word. Internet connections are currently more reliable than other telecommunications.

In spite of careful and thorough exposition of the UK approach to curriculum development, the UK consultant team were not sure that they fully succeeded in communicating satisfactorily the British approach to curriculum, which not only embraces content, i.e. what should be taught, but also process, particularly the way in which study is designed to develop appropriate skills and attitudes for social work as well as knowledge. This approach treats practice learning as an integral part of the curriculum. University teachers in both Samara and Penza remained adamant that they must conform to the national *Uchebny Plan*, which outlines in detail how many hours are to be spent on each subject, and within subjects, which topics are to be taught. Norms are provided for lectures, seminars (20 people) and smaller groups that might be described as tutorial groups. There is little acceptance of a 'bottom up' approach to developing the curriculum. However, teachers are only too aware of the low motivation of their students and their passive attitudes towards study. (This problem is all too

familiar to Western university teachers as well.) Information was received that students are poorly motivated and will simply do the minimum required to avoid being thrown off the course. This is hardly surprising, given the general lack of clarity, even within the profession, of the role and responsibilities of their future profession.

### The social work curriculum

Today there are over 70 Russian institutes offering social work education, following a total of more than a hundred course disciplines and specialisations identified by a Moscow working party headed by Belicheva. There are now approximately 3000 people studying to be social workers. School-leavers entering faculties of social work education at the age of 17 to 18 face a five year programme of study. The first year is a foundation year which is shared with students of 'social management' and social psychologists. The first two years are an introduction to a bewildering array of disciplines related to social work, including; theory and methods of social work, law, pedagogy, anatomy and physiology, paediatrics, gerontology, first aid, and family planning. This work is entirely classroom-based. In the second year, students are assigned to a specialisation, which may be one of:

- organisation of social work assistance (management/administration of social work)
- social work in the work-place
- medical and social assistance for the population
- social work with families and children at risk
- social work with young people

This means that, before the student has any practical experience inside a social care institution, the possibility of choosing a generic social work route has been eliminated.

At this point, students go on to study four groups of disciplines:

- general humanitarian and social and economic sciences
- general mathematics and natural sciences
- general professional disciplines
- specialisation disciplines, relating to their specific area of social work practice.

### Curriculum developments

In Samara, developments in the curriculum focus on the link between formal teaching in the university, and placement learning. The Samarans are particularly interested in the role of the practice learning co-ordinator in the University of Wolverhampton, and largely for that reason, established a twinning arrangement with Wolverhampton, funded from the project. They are also concerned with developing student research projects that have real and immediate relevance, and the development of new subject areas such as the Ethics of Social Work.

In Penza, the experience of a study tour to the UK had a major impact on the way in which the curriculum is viewed, and has given rise to a new perspective which aims to reconcile the key differences between the British and Russian approaches to professional higher education. They have developed a model of the Russian five year diploma programme which reflects the British structure in that:

Years 1 to 3 are viewed as a foundation (bachelor's level) in social science and social theory  
Years 4 and 5 are viewed as equivalent to the British 2 year Diploma in Social Work.

This model has led them to shift towards practice learning in the final two years to the limit allowed by the law. The structure of Years 4 and 5 is now as follows in Table 1.

**Table 1: Structure of professional social work curriculum (years 4 and 5)**

Professional subjects	Special subjects	Practice 20 weeks in all
Theory of social science	Social programming (IT)	Semester 1: 7 weeks
Technology of social science	Social innovation	Semester 2: 8 weeks
History of social work in Russia	Social ecology	Semester 3: 3 weeks
Social work abroad	Social gerontology	Semester 4: 2 weeks
Psychology	Employment and labour market regulation	
Practical psychology and diagnosis	Feminology (women's studies)	
Study of conflict	Family studies	
Medicosociology	Special aspects of psychology	
Medico-social elements of health	Social statistics	
Ethics	Social ethnography and demographics	
Economics of social services	Research methods	
Management of social work	Experience of social centres	
Introduction to speciality	Choice of psychology Options	
Theory and methods of rehabilitation		
Sociology		
Politics		

This revised syllabus is moving in the right direction. However, in the long term, and on a national level, consideration needs to be given to streamlining the curriculum to some extent, perhaps by making some of the more esoteric and peripheral subjects optional.

### The balance between theory and practice

In the curriculum as developed by Penza, which had gone as far as it can within the current legislative framework for curriculum design, the issue is now not so much the balance between learning in the university against learning in the practice setting. More to the point is the emphasis within the time spent on practice on the acquisition of skills and knowledge versus the exercise of those skills and knowledge. In effect, students still have almost exclusively traditional, theoretical, didactically presented teaching in the universities. The result is that practical knowledge, such as how social service centres are organised, and the range of services offered, and skills, have to be taught in field practice (usually by practitioners who are much nearer to the reality of social work and social work methods than the academics). This leaves precious little time for the student to actually carry out social work activities as such under the supervision of an experienced worker. For example, it is only in the final placement (5<sup>th</sup> year) that the student comes to be seen as an 'apprentice'.

Consideration needs to be given to finding ways to bring more of this practical teaching into the mainstream university curriculum, allowing more time for the sharpening and practice of skills in the placement.

### Support for practice teachers

In the west, the 'practice teacher' is the practitioner who acts as coach and mentor to students on professional practice periods in social work settings, and who thus acts as a link between the theoretical and practical components of social worker education. This model has been adopted in the

Russian system, although the practice periods are evidently more theoretical and hands on than would be required in the UK. In Penza it emerged that under current arrangements, practice teachers get no supplement to their salary for supervising students. As most of them are supervising groups of seven or more, it is difficult to see where the incentive or reward lies in their commitment to developing practice learning. However, that commitment exists to be built on. There was a strong consensus, however, that such commitment should be recognised in salary levels.

### The place of research in the development of the profession

Excellence in teaching is based on a foundation of sound research. While consultants on the Tacis project were able to establish that there is a good deal of social science research currently taking place, relevant to the development of social services, they did not have the opportunity to evaluate this research or to identify the process by which it is adopted within the teaching curriculum. It is apparent that most research is carried out by non-teaching staff, and that most teachers in the Universities have too heavy a timetable load to allow them to carry out their own studies in the field. A relaxation of legislation on numbers of classroom hours, especially in the first three years of university education, would possibly release more academic staff to carry out their own research. This would benefit teaching by expanding teachers' experience of the reality of social work and social work settings.

There is evidence that substantial research is based on Western theoretical 'borrowings' that may be out of date or of questionable validity. This raises the issue of Russian academic isolation from published research in other parts of the world. This is only partly a language issue. Consideration needs to be given to ways in which Information and Communications Technology may be used in a cost-effective way to improve access and dissemination of research, perhaps through the Internet and electronic journals. The level of training for social work students in research skills, and the fact that they are required to produce a major piece of independent research work as a dissertation, (50-60 pages plus appendices) is impressive. The emphasis in this work is on handling and interpreting data. It is fair to conclude that the level of training in research skills in Russia is superior to that in the UK.

### Resources for social work education and training

Publication in the field of social work studies is currently dominated by the Moscow Institute of Social Work (Guslyakova & Kholostova, 1997). Significant strides are being made by this institute in the production of textbooks, which are attractive and relatively inexpensively produced. It is difficult to see, however, how they can be expected to meet the enormous need for resources. Teachers need the resources, in terms of hardware, software and training, to begin to produce local materials themselves, based on local research and local experience, in order to fill some of the gaps in the absence of a well-developed publishing system for cheap social science learning materials. Some of this gap could be filled by making use of resources in the community. For example, in the Penza Centre for Rehabilitation of Young Disabled people, Tacis consultants met a number of young clients with highly-developed computer and desk-top publishing skills who are currently producing a newsletter. Given a modest increase in equipment, they could undertake publishing of teaching materials on a semi-commercial basis. This would meet the University's needs while simultaneously creating job opportunities for them. Every town in Russia has such young people who have advanced computer skills and are looking for an outlet for them.

### Observations on visits to centres

Although not a primary focus of the training consultancy, the Tacis group's visits to centres provided an essential means of placing practice learning into the context of the reality of life in the centres. They also afforded an opportunity to assess the impact of the Tacis project at the level of current social work practice (an important aspect of practice learning).

Centres visited included:

1. a day care centre in a rural area for the elderly

2. a day care centre which has been extensively refurbished and equipped as a 'state of the art' facility following principles of service design and delivery developed during the lifespan of the Tacis project
3. a residential home for the elderly (and veterans) of which the manager had attended Tacis training seminars
4. a rehabilitation centre for sick and convalescent elderly persons in Samara city, currently under major reconstruction and refurbishment under the directions of a French consultant team.

These centres are typically located in the premises of previously-existing health or residential institutions, and may represent a premium or showcase provision (occasionally partially-funded by commercial or private sponsorship) while the rest of the work housed in that building continues much as before. There are clearly tensions in the choices to be made between spending resources on the physical improvement of buildings (including access for the disabled) or on the improvement of services at the point of delivery.

### Veterans

This issue arose at several points during the visit and has considerable significance to the issue of the education of young social workers. It is apparent that the system of treating war veterans en masse as a population category, while culturally and historically understandable, is resulting in young disabled men, victims of the wars in Afghanistan and Chechnya, being cared for in centres which are basically geriatric institutions. This is likely to exacerbate their mental and emotional suffering and which, while possibly optimising their physical care, have a highly detrimental effect on their general quality of life. This is likely to be an issue which young students, entering practice settings, may have particular difficulties with, seeing young men not much older than themselves being confined to restricted lives among the old.

### Attitudes and awareness among students

A meeting took place in Samara with a number of students from the final year, and a whole group from the first year. It was not possible to probe very deeply about their attitudes and feelings about their chosen profession, especially in the context of the current financial crisis (the visit took place in September 1998). Consultants had an hour-long session with the full group of final year students in Penza. They were articulate and mature, for their age (average 21), and, notwithstanding their teachers' comments about their low motivation, stressed that they did value their education. In particular, they see their thorough grounding in theory as placing them at an intellectual advantage over practising social workers who have transferred from a former profession and who therefore depend on their experience of life and what learning they can accumulate for themselves. Some spoke of problems that they experience in the field, practising social workers seeing them as a threat. There is evidence among these students of a concern that they will be held back in their career, and may find it difficult to get a job in the first place, because of a log-jam in the system, there currently being no mobility in the profession.

The students were asked to discuss and comment on:

- the most positive things about their social work field practice;
- The most negative things about their practice;
- Any suggestions they had for improving the quality of their education and training.

Positive points:

- Communication with people
- Opportunity to link theory and practice
- Experiencing the co-operation between different social services
- A chance to understand what knowledge we lack

- A chance to learn the living conditions of clients
- A chance to get to know what the atmosphere is like in the workplace
- A chance to understand the real state of affairs in the social services.
- A chance to understand the structure of the practice Centre.
- Working with all layers of society.
- Everything was helpful: the practice prepares us for further professional activities.

### Negative

- We can't see how theory is implemented in practice, as the social system (social workers) works without theory.
- Specialists pay little attention to practising students, or don't take them seriously.
- The purposes of the practice aren't always clear.
- Social workers don't share 100% of their information and practical experience with students.
- There is no individual approach to students.
- It's the same routine every day.
- Social workers don't see the perspectives for development.
- Poor financing.

### Suggestions for improvement

- Increase the volume of theoretical knowledge
- Theory and methods are too separated - the course is too theoretical.
- Increase amount of programming
- Pay more attention to teaching practical communication skills.

It was striking that, despite the curriculum being already overwhelmingly theoretical, some students felt that their education needed a stronger injection of theory. They saw the pragmatic approach of the currently practising 'unqualified' social workers as inferior, and viewed their theoretical knowledge as their major contribution to the development of social services. Others, who considered their formal education to be too theoretical, viewed this as a shortcoming of the university academics, who had no experience or (in their perception) understanding of the reality of social care.

### Management development

The aspect of management development in the whole scheme of training and retraining in social services has not been fully addressed. The Training Component has, partly through necessity and partly through circumstance, focused on the education of professional social workers. The management development needs of those who must implement policy, plan and take responsibility for services, at the regional and city level, and manage centres, has taken a background role. General management seminars funded by Tacis and held in the regions in September 1997 were a very brief introduction (maximum 2 days) and were only able to introduce core concepts. This was unsatisfactory for the audience, who were senior service managers and heads of regional administration departments (incidentally, not the target audience for these seminars, which were designed for centre managers and team leaders). The Tacis project demonstrated that there are leaders in the regions of exceptional vision and leadership ability. Senior managers in the social sphere are nevertheless currently working under extreme pressure, exacerbated by rising expectations on the one hand and diminishing resources on the other. Tacis and the Ministry are recommended to investigate the specific management and professional development needs of these managers and leaders, and separate their needs from those of the junior and middle management level.

## Conclusion

This descriptive account has aimed to give some insights into the opportunities and constraints faced in the development of a system of social services for Russia. It is reasonable to be pessimistic in the short term. In the long term, in the absence of a stable political and economic environment, it is yet too early to say categorically which model of the welfare mix Russia will follow into the next century. In current practice, the British model of social work has been adopted, insofar as the social worker is seen as a professional employed, generally by the state and sometimes by voluntary sector organisations, to plan, design, and manage services provided for vulnerable individuals and groups. However, the UK system accommodates a two-tier occupational structure, in which professionally qualified social workers today rarely deliver, on a face-to-face basis, routine care. In addition, the delivery of social services is separated from the assessment and disbursement of financial benefits. These distinctions have not been fully-adopted in Russia, with the result that practising social workers find themselves means-testing clients for pensions, providing specialist services, and giving routine institutional and domiciliary care. Given that local and regional governmental officials responsible for these services have not come up through the social work route, and academics teaching social work in universities are in the same position; these social workers, overwhelmingly women displaced from other occupational groupings such as engineering, will be the only group which has an overview of the system as a whole. Poorly-paid and badly-resourced, to the extent that no family can survive on the salary of a social worker, while technically working within the state system, they represent a *de facto* voluntarist service. Lacking a clear framework for career development coupled with the prospects of a reasonable standard of living, it is difficult to see how social work as a profession will attract and retain its young graduates after five years of higher education. Thus, the welfare mix within Russia, while structurally dominated by state provision, appears to be moving closer to the Mediterranean model of southern Europe, according to Abrahamson's welfare mix triangle (Figure B) than to the western European liberal residual model.

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