

## **SPA Paper – July 2010: *‘Teaching Social Work in Times of Change’***

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### **Placing professional social work education in context**

In considering the concept of good practice in teaching and learning in relation to social work education it is important to both identify and recognise the significance of the duality of the social work degree. The Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education, in the 2008 revision of the 'Social Work: Subject benchmark statement' identifies that:

'...social work degree programmes are now coterminous with professional training and the acquisition of a protected title.'

(Quality Assurance Agency, 2008: iv)

In addition to the range of regulations governing the granting of academic awards a range of additional requirements are imposed upon universities from the social work professional regulatory body. The General Social Care Council (GSCC) , grants approval to universities to deliver the social work degree in accordance with a set of national occupational standards (Training Organisation for Personal Social Services (Topss), 2004).

While the social work degree, as an applied academic subject, shares common aims with other degrees, in terms of approaches and methods of teaching and learning, it also presents a range of unique opportunities for innovation, challenges for students and academics and potential tensions in practice.

The GSCC makes it a requirement of approval that approaches to teaching and learning on the degree should involve the active engagement of a range of stakeholders in the design, delivery and assessment of both the taught and practice elements of the programme (General Social Care Council (GSCC), 2002). The requirement to engage service users and carers as active partners in all aspects of the social work degree is discussed by Levin (2004). who argues that in meeting the requirements of the GSCC programme providers should secure the participation of both service users and carers in: Student selection, the design of the degree programme, the provision of teaching and learning, preparation for practice learning (that is the direct practice element of the degree undertaken by the student in an agency setting), the provision of agency based practice placements, the development of learning agreements, the assessment of students and the quality assurance of the degree programme.

This active participation in teaching and learning presents vital opportunities for social work students to access and interrogate the knowledge base of service users and carers who are considered to hold 'expertise by virtue of their experience'.

### **Background to the research**

Over the last two years innovative research at the University of Lincoln, jointly undertaken by a team of academic researchers and former social work students, has been analysing the efficacy of teaching methods and university support systems and in particular, the effectiveness of the social work undergraduate degree programme in equipping graduates for the demands of front line practice is being evaluated.

In this paper we will:

- Explore the overall context and background to the research
- Analyse key themes emerging from our research
- Share findings relating to good practice in teaching and learning which are generalisable across university programmes

- Introduce the concept of research engaged teaching & the idea of students as co-producers of knowledge

Social work has a lengthy history which can be traced back to the work of faith and charitable groups in the nineteenth century who sought to alleviate the living conditions of the poor and address the problems created by social processes such as urbanisation and industrialization (Horner, 2009). As a profession, however, it has been slow to evolve and historically it has been possible to qualify as a social worker in a number of different ways. Many routes to qualification were positioned at Diploma in Higher Education level whilst some were at graduate or even postgraduate level. These variations, it could be argued, led to variability in practitioner quality and a measure of confusion in the mind of employers. Additionally, the title of social worker was not protected and in common usage covered a wide range of tasks and responsibilities.

In 2003 the Department of Health introduced a number of changes intended to modernise social work and enhance its image. These included the creation of a professional body ('The General Social Care Council'), protection of the occupational title 'social worker', and the introduction of a three year degree programme which became the sole route to social work qualification. It was envisaged that the new degree would increase the credibility and status of the social work profession as well as addressing identified deficits in previous qualifications (McNay, 2008). However, recent child deaths such as Baby Peter (Connelly) and Lord Laming's review of safeguarding practice (Lord Laming, 2009) have raised serious doubts about the validity of social work training, in particular the preparedness of students who enter children's services (Lord Laming, 2009). Similar doubts about the efficacy of the social work degree in preparing workers for practice were also repeated in the recent report of the Social Work Task Force which highlighted newly qualified workers' lack of readiness to undertake core social work tasks (Social Work Task Force, 2009).

These well publicised concerns, however, are not entirely supported by other research such as that undertaken by the 'Evaluation of the social work degree

qualification in England team 2008' (Evaluation of the Social Work Degree Qualification in England Team, 2008b) which highlighted a number of benefits deriving from the degree programme. Whilst these contrasting views are helpful in identifying the weaknesses and strengths of professional training they rarely used opinion from social work students as to what makes for good teaching and learning, or what students themselves say about the characteristics of effective educators.

Consequently, the team felt that the views of students should form an integral component of the research, especially as the degree programme at Lincoln was producing its' first cohort of graduates from the new degree programme. For a number of reasons it felt timely to evaluate the extent to which the degree prepared graduates for social work practice; to identify the strengths of the social work degree in preparing students for practice; and to identify areas of improvement and gaps in the curriculum.

## **Methodology**

Social work at the University of Lincoln is taught across two sites (Lincoln and Hull) and graduates from both campuses were given the opportunity to take part in the study. During phase 1 of the project, a questionnaire was distributed to all graduates (n = 118; constituting 39 graduates at the Lincoln Campus and 79 graduates at the Hull Campus). A total of 25 questionnaires were received from students at Lincoln campus (a response rate of 64.1%). Nine questionnaires were returned from Hull campus (a response rate of 11.4%).

Semi-structured interviews were then conducted with graduates who indicated on the questionnaire their willingness to be interviewed. This mixed methods approach enabled the research team to capture both qualitative and quantitative data as well as facilitating triangulation of data, thus enhancing reliability (Punch, 2008). The questionnaire explored factors regarding university learning and placements that

may have been important in equipping students for practice. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 9 graduates (6 from Lincoln campus and 3 from Hull campus) all of whom were female (no males volunteered for interview). The semi-structured interviews provided rich and detailed data (Bryman, 2008) about student perceptions of the social work degree.

Phase 2 of the project consisted of further semi-structured interviews with social work graduates within the first 18 months of qualified practice. The plan was to interview the same participants who took part in phase 1 but the attrition rate was such that only one of the participants was re-interviewed. However, four other graduates from the same year, all Lincoln campus graduates, agreed to be interviewed for phase 2.

### **Research engaged teaching and learning**

A decision was made that interviews would be conducted by level 2 student researchers recruited from the Lincoln campus in order to address potential power imbalances that may have been evident if staff who had taught and assessed the students had conducted the interviews. It was uncertain what the response would be to recruitment as there was not a tradition of student involvement in research at the university. The opportunity to be involved was advertised to the whole cohort and two white female students volunteered. In order to prepare them for the role, a one day training event was provided by two members of academic staff who had previous experience of research.

The recruitment and active involvement of students in the research clearly sits within the university's aspiration to encourage research engaged teaching and learning. Traditionally, teaching within universities has been research informed where students learn from their lecturers about research findings and the curricula is

designed by lecturers with information transmission being the main teaching mode. Research engaged teaching, however, occurs when students learn about research processes and jointly engage with academic staff in the production of new knowledge. The curricula then purposefully reflects ways in which knowledge is produced, rather than considering knowledge that has been produced by others. This represents a significant shift in the way in which teaching is delivered and it would be disingenuous to imply that the academic staff had a full understanding of the implications of involving students as co-producers of knowledge. Supervision and ongoing support was provided to the student researchers and it is envisaged that the school will build on this initial engagement and develop further opportunities for joint work/research.

## **Key Themes of the research**

### ***Theme 1: The Curriculum***

#### *Most Beneficial Modules:*

The questionnaire and both interview phases indicated that modules that have direct application to social work practice were seen as most beneficial to students' professional development.

In particular, the modules on Law, Social Work Theories, Children and Families, Child Development and Values and Ethics were seen as useful. The Theories modules were regarded as important on two levels: giving a macro view of the nature of social work and also providing specific knowledge that can be integrated with practice. Law was seen as central to equipping students for practice, presumably because of the legislative context of practice. Similarly, the modules on working with Children and Families and also Child Development were identified because of their direct application to daily social work practice and one phase 2 participant also spoke about the 'challenging' nature of these modules in relation to personal and professional values.

Interestingly, phase 2 interview participants identified some of the level 1 modules as important for their professional development. These had not been identified in phase 1 or significantly in the questionnaires, which perhaps suggests the importance of experience in practice to provide a basis to reflect on the degree curriculum and identify what modules were seen as useful after a year in practice.

Additionally, the service user and carer participation module was seen as crucial in enabling the practitioner to advocate for the service user and also challenge managers. The Contemporary Social Issues module (a social policy based module) was identified by two of the phase 2 interview participants as important for practice because of the knowledge base this provided regarding problems and difficulties that are commonly faced by social work practitioners.

The responses from the questionnaires and both sets of interviews showed a good level of consistency in respect of the modules that were perceived by students to be most beneficial to their professional development. A consistent theme is that the modules identified are those which are directly relevant and clearly linked to the daily practice of social work or which provide an underpinning value or knowledge base. This finding is coherent with adult learning theory that suggests learners require teaching to be specific to their identified learning needs, goals and future plans (Knowles, 1996; Rogers, 2003 reprint). Whilst we would not argue against the need for the curriculum to be relevant to the realities of social work practice, a point already raised by Lord Laming's (2009) Progress Report on the Protection of Children in England and the Social Work Task Force final report (2009), the issue of relevance does raise a dilemma about the fundamental nature of social work degree programmes. Is this purely a vocational course that should only teach skills and knowledge that practitioners will use, or do we want graduates to become independent critical thinkers who can make connections between knowledge and extract relevant learning?

### *Least Beneficial Modules:*

The questionnaires did not identify the least beneficial modules which is a limitation of this study. However, the semi-structured interviews at phase 1 and 2 produced a wealth of data about which modules were not seen to be helpful in the journey to become a qualified social work practitioner.

Phase 1 interviews identified two particular modules as least helpful for professional development. First, Comparing Social Welfare Systems (n = 4) which is a level 3 social policy based module, and the level 1 unit Practice and Communication (n = 3). For Comparing Social Welfare Systems, participants unanimously made comments about the lack of relevance of this unit; they could not envisage when or how they would use knowledge from this unit again.

For Practice and Communication, reasons were varied; one participant identified conflict as a reason for this not being helpful; another mentioned lack of relevance and a third stated there were problems with the inter-disciplinary learning (this was a joint module between social work and nursing students). Interestingly, one of the participants at phase 1 identified this as being a 'horrible' module which had caused a lot of discomfort and stress, but which had actually been the one they had learnt most from because they had become more aware of interpersonal communication. Indeed, one of the phase 2 participants spoke about the personal insight and self awareness gained from this module and how this had enhanced their communication skills. Again, this suggests that benefits derived from learning may not always be instantly obvious.

An interesting discussion point from the modules seen as least and most beneficial is the status of social policy modules which feature in most (e.g. Law; Children and Families) and least beneficial (Comparing Social Welfare Systems), creating something of a paradox. However, the determining factor in students' perceptions of the usefulness of modules studied appears to be whether the content is deemed to be relevant and applicable to social work practice.

This presents a challenge for social work educators in terms of how content can be enlivened to make it engaging for students and ensuring relevance of materials is clear to students. However, there is also a challenge and responsibility for students in terms of making links between theory and practice, remaining open minded about learning and transferring learning into social work with service users.

### *Gaps in the Curriculum:*

A number of themes emerged from the questionnaire and interview responses regarding students' perception about gaps or deficiencies in the social work programme.

#### *1. Practical Skills*

Responses from the questionnaires and interviews indicated an overwhelming request to develop practical skills and in particular how to undertake assessments. The salience of adequately preparing students to undertake assessments is emphasised by the findings of the phase 2 interviews that students did not feel well equipped in meeting the practice standards for key role 4 of the social work national occupational standards which relates to managing risk. This was the only one of the 6 key roles where students were either ambivalent about the suitability of the degree or actually felt the degree had not prepared them. Other skills requested included direct work with children, interviewing techniques, skills in chairing meetings, dealing with conflict and aggression (both verbal and physical), challenging managers and report writing.

The lack of skills in risk assessment and management is of particular importance given the national debates about the efficacy of social work training in preparing social workers for practice highlighted by high profile

child death enquiries such as Baby P and fears that newly qualified social workers were not equipped for practice (Evaluation of the Social Work Degree Qualification in England Team, 2008; Lord Laming, 2009). Ironically, the issues identified by the participants in this study mirror those identified nationally in the final report by the Social Work Task Force (Social Work Task Force, 2009) suggesting that the deficits identified by our participants are representative of the country as a whole. However, a balance has to be found between what could be reasonably expected of graduates from the social work degree and what falls within the responsibility of post qualifying development supported by employers. There is currently a drive towards higher standards and consistency within the curriculum to address these gaps (Social Work Task Force, 2009) and no doubt the landscape of social work will receive further scrutiny given the Social Work Task Force's (2009: 22) call for both an 'overhaul' of the teaching and content of social work programmes and additional regulation of HEIs providing social work degrees. Additionally, the deficits in the curriculum and the national policy recommendations (Lord Laming, 2009; Social Work Task Force, 2009) reinforce the recurring theme of relevance, whilst emphasising the vocational nature of the social work degree.

## *2. Gaps in knowledge/depth of knowledge*

Specific knowledge gaps were also identified within the curriculum. These included attachment, Youth Offending, care proceedings, disability, child protection, adoption and fostering, reflective practice, cycle of offending, sexual abuse, ASBOs and substance misuse. Participants at phase 2 commented on insufficient depth within topics taught and the detachment of academic modules from the realities of social work practice. Some of the topics identified are covered within the curriculum but respondents appear to be identifying a need for specialist and in depth knowledge beyond what is already taught which echoes the findings of the Social Work Task Force (2009).

Additionally, many of the gaps relate to skills and knowledge required for practice within Children's Services, perhaps reflecting operational demands on new staff and chosen career pathways of respondents.

### *3. Time spent in placement*

During social work training, all students are required by the GSCC to spend 200 days in practice throughout their course. At the University of Lincoln, this is configured as two 100 day placements in years 2 and 3. A number of the interview respondents suggested that there should be more placements, possibly including a short placement at level 1 to act as a 'tester' regarding social work and to accumulate more practice experience. Indeed, the students spoke within interviews at considerable length of the benefits of placement to their professional development. Of particular pertinence is the centrality of placements in bringing meaning to academic modules, transferring theory and values into practice, developing professional and personal confidence and building new knowledge. Often, it was the placement experience that facilitated the student's understanding of the relevance of modules taught, suggesting that practical experience and reflection act as catalysts to learning. As discussed in our forthcoming publication (Simpson et al., 2010), these findings are entirely compatible with adult learning theory (Kolb, 1984).

Our study therefore outlines the evident usefulness and importance of placements in students' professional development and the belief by students that time in placement should be increased. However, the current climate makes this unlikely and indeed a recommendation has been made to reduce the number of placement days in an effort to ensure that the curriculum is comprehensive and that placements are high quality and provide at least one statutory learning opportunity (Social Work Task Force, 2009). The rationale for the reduction of placement days (Social Work Task Force, 2009) is that practice experience can be consolidated during an assessed first year in practice during which time the graduate has a provisional social work licence.

## ***Theme 2 – Establishing and sustaining interpersonal relationships with students***

Our study identified a number of core messages for the effective teaching of social work. These have been discussed in some depth in a forthcoming publication (Simpson et al., 2010), but salient points are summarised here.

### *1. Tutor Attributes*

Students valued academic staff who were lively, engaging, enthusiastic and inspiring. This not only engaged students with the content of modules but it also acted as a catalyst for the students to undertake independent research and learning. Additionally, staff with these qualities were able to emphasise the relevance of academic modules to practice, thus bridging the interface between theory and practice. Such qualities are known to be applicable to all teachers, irrespective of the programme content (Conn, 2002; Helterbran, 2008). These characteristics appear to stand the test of time as an earlier evaluation of the social work qualification (Marsh and Triseliotis, 1996) when it changed from the CQSW (Certificate of Qualification in Social Work) to the DipSW (Diploma in Social Work) concurred about the importance of these traits for social work educators.

### *2. Establishing supportive working alliances*

Both the questionnaire and phase 1 interview responses identified the importance for students of establishing a working relationship with members of staff during their studies (Simpson et al., 2010). Many of the interview participants spoke about having a 'link' with staff members although not all relationships with staff were comfortable as some students spoke about being 'challenged' or 'pushed' by staff members which served to scaffold or enhance the student's development. These findings about discomfort are compatible with Piagetian theory about learners reaching a stage of

disequilibrium prior to achieving competence (Piaget, 1977; Piaget in collaboration with Amann, M. et al., 1978).

Overall, our findings are commensurate with research about establishing productive working relationships with students and also a social constructivist approach to cognitive development which emphasises the social context of learning (Vygotsky, 1978). Opportunities exist for staff to establish positive working relationships with students in a variety of fora, including lectures, seminars and personal tutor groups. However, the nurturing of such relationships can be time-consuming which can be prohibitive for busy academic staff particularly in the current economic climate within HEIs of cuts and the concomitant need to increase external income sources. However, respondents in our study also identified that practical support (answering emails, responding to telephone calls) is also important in supporting students' progress.

### ***Theme 3 - Skills in teaching***

Perhaps unsurprisingly, our study identified the need for social work educators to be proficient in teaching students. Whilst this is probably true for any academic, there were some issues that were specific to teaching social work. For example, the possession of technical skills, the ability to integrate theory and practice and the recurring, concept of relevance

#### *1. Technical skills*

Participants valued staff who did not solely rely on notes and Powerpoint presentations and who were able to deviate from the topic of the formal presentation and provide additional material. Whilst this does demand some level of technical skill in the formulation of Powerpoint presentations, this also requires staff to be able to have skills in verbal delivery as well as being attuned to the needs of the student group. In this sense, teaching demands a

complex recipe of skills as well as knowledge. Conversely, students were unimpressed by staff who solely read from books or powerpoint presentations or did not have either the confidence or knowledge base to teach students.

There are a number of challenges for academic staff. First, having acquired a teaching post, how can teaching skills be developed and honed? Usually, these are through peer appraisal mechanisms and opportunities to study for the PGCE. Secondly, there is the challenge faced by social work practitioners who wish to make the transition to social work educator. From our practice experience, there are typically very few opportunities for frontline practitioners to develop skills in teaching. Solutions to this dilemma may not be easily found although the current recommendations from the Social Work Task Force (2009) to involve external partners in the curriculum to ensure relevance and currency of knowledge may inadvertently address this issue.

## *2. The Ability to Integrate Theory and Practice*

Interview respondents at phase 1 spoke about the importance of academic staff being able to apply theory to practice, ideally giving examples of this from practice experience to illuminate specific points. Not only did this enhance students' interest in the teaching, but providing examples increased the relevance of the teaching to direct practice. Other educational research has stressed the need for educators, particularly on vocational courses, to have current knowledge and experience (Kassab et al., 2006; Helterbran, 2008; Kinchin et al., 2008). Further, an earlier review of social work training (Marsh and Triseliotis, 1996) and the more recent Social Work Task Force report (2009) identified that academics' application of theory to practice can be problematic. However, the large scale recent national evaluation of the social work degree (Evaluation of the Social Work Degree Qualification in England Team, 2008) found that application of theory to practice by teaching staff was actually better than anticipated. The challenge then for social work academics is how to maintain an up to date knowledge and practice base and

we offered some solutions to this dilemma in relation to external partnerships and secondments to practice (Simpson et al., 2010).

### 3. *Relevance*

A repeating theme of our research has been the challenge of ensuring that the social work degree has relevance to vocational practice whilst not undermining the importance of producing graduates who can learn independently, think in a critical manner, and transfer learning across settings. As mentioned above, this requires academic staff to ensure their knowledge is up to date and to demonstrate skill in showing students the application of theory to practice. Beyond this, it is crucial for staff to highlight issues of relevance to practice within teaching, particularly when the connections are not immediately evident to students (i.e. in the least beneficial modules). This has been easily addressed by including slides in powerpoint presentations about 'implications for practice.' Secondly, it is important to help students reflect on learning in our interactions within seminars and lectures. Creating such reflective spaces builds upon an understanding of adult learning theory which outlines the centrality of reflection for learning (Kolb, 1984). This is especially pertinent as the comments from students was that the relevance of information often did not occur to them until they undertook placements or engaged in post qualifying employment.

### **Students as producers of knowledge**

As has been previously indicated, students were an integral part of the research team. The decision to broaden the team to include students was undertaken for a number of reasons – not least as an attempt to lessen the power differential that could have inhibited students talking to members of staff about the course.

On a more philosophical level, however, the team wanted to explore the developing notion of students as active participants in research and as producers of knowledge. In recent years the University has sought to encourage teaching and learning based

on a collaborative approach where lecturers are seen as collaborators and facilitators, and students are actively involved in producing knowledge through inquiry based and problem solving activities (Brew, 2006). There is an increasing recognition that such approaches can assist with student retention, improve degree results and increase applications to study at postgraduate level (Pacarella and Terenzini, 2005).

As part of this collaborative process students are encouraged to produce and share their own knowledge and expertise. A significant proportion of students on the social work degree programme are mature students with significant life experience, whilst many more work in social care settings. An ongoing task for the academic team is how to appropriately harness this wealth of experience and encourage students to see themselves as producers and sharers of knowledge as opposed to being purely recipients of teaching and learning.

The decision to recruit students onto the research team was in response to this agenda but was not without risk. In particular, relationships between academics and the students involved in the research needed to be re-configured and ways of working collaboratively needed to be established. In passing it was interesting that students reported that the way they were perceived by the rest of their cohort altered following their recruitment and that they did not feel comfortable talking about their research with the rest of the group. Involving students in the production of knowledge explicitly means that academics have to consider issues of power and may need to relinquish part of their role as experts and adopt a far more democratic view of knowledge. It is interesting that contemporary social work mirrors this process as it increasingly views the social worker as a facilitator and the service user as being an expert in their own life.

The academic team continues to explore the pitfalls and possibilities of engaging students as co-producers and co-researchers and it is envisaged that further research streams will actively involve students.

## **The changing landscape of social work education and practice**

Social work is currently preparing for significant changes to the way in which social work education is structured and delivered (Social Work Task Force, 2009). The Task Force recommends:

'A reformed system of education and training should:

- begin with clear, consistent criteria for entry to social work courses – with a new regime for testing and interviewing candidates that balances academic and personal skills – so that all students are of a high calibre
- provide courses where the content, teaching, placement opportunities and assessment are of a high standard across all providers – we are, for instance, proposing advanced teaching organisation status for agencies providing high quality practice placements to social work students
- culminate in a new supported and assessed first year in employment, which would act as the final stage in becoming a full, practising social worker.'

(Social Work Task Force, 2009: 7)

As recently as the 10<sup>th</sup> June 2010 the Government invited Professor Eileen Munro to undertake an independent review of the state of child protection practice and children's services more broadly. Collectively these developments will impact upon how universities develop and deliver social work education into the future. The ways in which the curriculum is developed will result from greater stakeholder participation and their direct engagement in aspects of the professional award.

## **Opportunities, challenges and tensions for teaching and learning in social work education**

Social work is a profession with a history of working within constraints of finite resources and in response it embraces opportunities for innovation and creativity.

Drawing on the key themes identified through this research a range of opportunities and challenges are highlighted for social work education in general and more specifically for the social work academic. Through our research we have identified a range of factors considered by social work students and employers as significant in the developing professional competence of future social work practitioners.

The role of the social work academic in preparing social work students for practice is a rewarding and creative process and yet it is not without its challenges. Within social work education the academic must mediate the inherent tensions which arise in developing practitioners who are competent and confident in their professional role and who are able to meet the demands of social care employers in the public, voluntary and independent sectors.

Lymbery (2009) presents a critical consideration of a growing concern among social work academics and social work practitioners alike that the role of social worker is in danger of being reduced to a functional model of practice which moves away from the holistic emancipatory aspirations of the profession to a narrowly focussed approach toward protective measures, significant though these are.

In response to these concerns, social work academics need to be responsive to the demands of employers while at the same time remaining focussed on the broader aspirations of the profession. Social work students must be supported through teaching and learning to both recognise and appreciate the relevance of all input to

their developing knowledge and skills. Students can become preoccupied with prioritising only that knowledge that will assist them in the practicalities of the social work task and consider the development of critical appraisal skills which draw on comparative studies as somehow peripheral to the knowledge they see as informing practice skills.

It is essential that the ongoing development and delivery of social work programmes is responsive to the demands of students and the range of other stakeholder views while at the same time satisfying the requirements of the institutions in which they are seated and the external academic and professional regulatory bodies.

The content and approaches to teaching and learning must be made explicit to the students and wherever possible grounded in direct practice. Students also need to be supported to recognise and value that the direct relevance of some taught modules may not become fully apparent until they are able to apply the learning in a direct practice context. Recognition must be given to the challenges of examining every service user group and the unique challenges they encounter through the degree programme.

In ensuring good practice in the develop of effective research based teaching and learning strategies the social work academic must take responsibility for their own continuing professional development both in terms of teaching skills and in respect of remaining current in their 'practice wisdom'. Active and meaningful engagement with the broad stakeholder base must be encouraged and nurtured to enhance all aspects of the social work degree and its direct relevance to contemporary social work practice.

Ultimately we must ensure that the recipients of the social work student's education and professional development, that is the service users, experience professional practice in ways that supports the service user's own definitions of their 'problem'

and their sought after solutions. Social work students must be prepared to work in ways that not only meet organisational demands but also enables service users to become self determining in the major life decisions they face.

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