



Social Work

A 21st Century Profession



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SOCIAL WORK – A 21st CENTURY PROFESSION

Background

In February 2006 the report and recommendations of the *21st Century Social Work Review*¹ were published. The report represents a watershed in social work services in Scotland setting out a compelling agenda for change. To take forward the recommendations from the review a number of key priorities have been identified. These include:

- strengthening the social work profession;
- developing the capacity and capability of the workforce, including social workers;
- new approaches to social work governance;
- developing an outcome-driven performance improvement framework;
- developing leadership at all levels, including professional, practice and academic leadership;
- engaging users and carers in the design and delivery of services; and
- developing the capacity to transform the way services are delivered.

These will have significant implications for what we expect of social workers now and for the foreseeable future. It is critical that the honours degree in social work, introduced in 2004, takes account of the Review and ensures that the skills, knowledge and understanding of social workers is equal to the task being asked of them.

In January 2003, Ministers indicated their intention to set the minimum professional qualification for social work at honours degree level, significantly raising previous expectations. *The Framework for Social Work Education*² set out the expectations of the new degree, the requirements that programme providers must meet and the standards to be achieved by graduates. In bringing together national occupational standards and academic definitions of social work, the *Standards in Social Work Education (SiSWE)* strongly emphasised the focus of the new degree on learning for effective and ethical practice. This was reinforced in the paper *Confidence in Practice Learning*³ which set out the vision for practice learning as part of the new honours degree in social work.

The SiSWE emphasises professional accountability and leadership, evidence-based practice, partnership with service users and carers, harnessing technology, effective working across agency boundaries to deliver integrated services and commitment to continuous learning. This vision for the new honours degree accords well with the findings of the *21st Century Social Work Review* and the vision of a confident,

¹ *Changing Lives – Report of the 21st Century Social Work Review*, Scottish Executive, February 2006.

² *Framework for Social Work Education*, Scottish Executive, January 2003.

³ *Confidence in Practice Learning*, Scottish Executive, January 2004.

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competent and valued social service workforce set out in the *National Strategy for Development of the Social Service Workforce: A Plan for Action 2005-2010*.⁴ Meeting expectations and achieving the objectives associated with the honours degree will make a significant contribution to ensuring that Scotland's public services continuously improve and adapt to meet the challenges of the 21st century.

Purpose

The principal objectives of the new honours degree are re-stated below, in summary form, to serve as a clear guide to all those involved in its implementation. They will form the basis of its quality assurance by the Scottish Social Services Council (SSSC) and subsequent evaluation by the Scottish Executive.

Widening participation

- Removing barriers to participation through improved flexibility and collaboration in programme delivery
- Achieving intake diversity in respect of age, gender, ethnicity and background
- Maximising use of Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) processes
- Achieving good articulation with other relevant qualifications within Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF) arrangements
- Achieving efficiency and consistency in screening, selection and intake procedures, linked to SSSC student registration.

Meeting programme provider requirements

- Maximising active participation of key stakeholders (service users, carers, employers, other professionals) in all aspects of programme design, delivery and evaluation
- Ensuring that graduates are prepared for practice in an appropriate range of service delivery settings within the statutory, voluntary and private sectors
- Ensuring that students are assessed appropriately against all the learning outcomes set out in the *Standards in Social Work Education*
- Designing and implementing programmes that support the objectives of *Confidence in Practice Learning* in respect of the quantity, quality and diversity of practice learning opportunities
- Developing, employing and evaluating new approaches to learning and teaching that remove barriers and promote effective learning
- Achieving good levels of literacy and communication skills appropriate to all stages of the programme
- Improving numeracy and information technology skills at all programme levels.

⁴ *National Strategy for Development of the Social Service Workforce: A Plan for Action 2005-2010*, Scottish Executive, November 2005

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Meeting the Standards (SiSWE)

- Promoting and embedding evidence-based learning for effective and ethical practice in all aspects of the programme
- Designing curricula and learning activities that result in clear learning progression towards overall aims, in line with the SCQF
- Ensuring that curricula and learning activities are up to date and grounded in contemporary legislation, policy and practice and challenge students to consider critically the options for future service delivery
- Continuing to develop undergraduate and postgraduate education that contributes positively to future service re-design and to the associated change management processes
- Adopting educational methods that promote the development of professional leadership within both staff and student bodies.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

Working in partnership

- Ensuring that students learn to practise in ways that promote the active engagement of service users, based on well-being rather than welfare models
- Assisting students to learn to work in direct partnership with family and informal carers towards sustainable solutions
- Promoting learning that gives proper recognition to the value of working with specially formed, community and interest groups to improve well-being
- Ensuring that students can practise effectively across agency and service boundaries and enhance the contribution of social work to integrated, multi-disciplinary service delivery.

Assessing and managing risk

- Ensuring that students learn how to: investigate systematically and collect relevant information; check facts; analyse and interpret data/information and use this to underpin decisions and judgements; and seek relevant assistance and support in handling difficult or complex situations
- Promoting learning that helps students to manage complex, uncertain and anxiety-promoting practice situations in ways which maintain sound professional judgement and reasoning
- Ensuring that students can manage cases and other practice situations in line with recorded plans, based on a thorough assessment, reviewing and revising plans and actions in light of changing circumstances.

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Improving communication

- Ensuring that students learn how to communicate successfully with a wide range of service users (including children), carers, related professionals and other stakeholders by an appropriate range of methods
- Ensuring that students learn how to keep accurate, clear and relevant records of their practice and to share these appropriately with others involved in service delivery, in accordance with accepted norms and procedures
- Ensuring that students can compile accurate, analytic, relevant and easily understood reports for hearings, tribunals and other inter-disciplinary fora.

Enhancing professionalism

- Assisting students to learn how to make effective use of professional consultancy and other professional support, remaining open and explicit about the contribution these sources make to professional decision-making and judgement-forming
- Ensuring that students become critically-reflective practitioners, regularly reviewing their practice as circumstances change, and able to operate within clear accountability frameworks
- Promoting and supporting commitment to self-evaluation and practice monitoring and the identification of ongoing and future learning needs
- Assisting students to acquire the necessary resilience and self-management skills to sustain practice over time in stressful and demanding circumstances
- Promoting learning that supports and encourages the exercise of professional leadership rooted in evidence-based knowledge and skills acquired through enquiry, scholarship and research
- Ensuring that students understand and comply fully with the SSSC *Code of Practice for Social Service Workers*.

Embedding enhancement-led quality assurance procedures and processes

- Working in partnership with the SSSC to develop programme approval, monitoring and review processes that lead to sustainable high-quality social work education, adapted to changes in services and delivery modes
- Ensuring that all internal quality assurance procedures comply with the Quality Assurance Agency's precepts, guidelines and requirements and draw appropriately on other best practice models.

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