Editorial

In the United Kingdom social work should soon be reaping the benefits of extended training, or will we? Having moved from a two-year diploma to a three-year degree qualification the length of practice learning placements has also been extended by 40 per cent.

However, are all our students been given the equal opportunity to demonstrate that they are 'ready for practice' in their final placement? This may be debatable, as there appears to be considerable variation in the practice assessment frameworks of the training programmes as suggested by Doel et al (2004). For instance, one programme, the University of Northampton's (2006) requires students to evidence all of the 77 elements of the six key roles (in essence competencies), whilst in another, Anglia Ruskin University's (2006), just 11 modular practice learning outcome need to be evidenced! Given this scenario are some of our students 'ready *to evidence* practice' rather than 'ready *for* practice?'

Is our relatively new degree (despite having what could be termed as a 'national practice syllabus' via the key roles) proving to be too flexible, resulting in inconsistent and unequal opportunities for students to demonstrate that they are ready for practice? Maybe we could adopt the Slovenian approach where students undertook an internship year after their course. In this system 'readiness' is assessed when they are actually doing the job, this is similar to the post- qualifying confirmation year that UK probation officers had to serve. Or, is the answer simply to ensure that our learners are not over assessed? Letters to the editor please!

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We have four papers in this current issue as well as Lynda Deacon's report on the International Conference on Practice teaching held in July 2006 in York.

Parker explores the concepts of self-assessment and self-efficacy in the practice learning process. He comprehensively discusses the complexities involved in social work practice assessment and then examines the issues, practicalities and ethical dimensions of student-self- assessment. There is a strong emphasis on evidenced-based practice and assessment, his model also provides a practical tool by way of a self-efficacy questionnaire that can be used to encourage students to identify their personal strengths and areas for development.

Griffiths et al undertook an action research project that explored the usefulness and effectiveness of ' Personal Development Planning' (PDP) with community health students. The core concepts of PDP are; Self-regulated learning allowing students to identify personal goals, choice in planning, implementing and achieving them, encouragement of reflective practice and the evaluation of professional progress and development. Their model appears to be eminently transferable to other professions and disciplines in the health and social care sector. They have also successfully demonstrated the value of using IT/Web-based resources, particularly when 'end users' were involved in its development. A very helpful 'Tips for Best Practice' is also included in their paper.

Douglas and Byrne using recent research and their own *experience* review the development of Northern Ireland's new Degree in Social Work. The emphasis of their paper is change and ensuring that quality is central in this process. They also provide some interesting and insightful comparisons with the similar developments in the other United Kingdom nations. The authors also discuss a creative and comprehensive model for the delivery of practice learning across Northern Ireland.

Walton's paper addresses the very topical issue of preparing social work students for their placement learning. Their study involving practice assessors (practice teachers) highlighted three main themes; Communication, the ability of students to relate their prior learning to current learning and understanding the roles and tasks of social work. They also provide a very comprehensive literature review on the subject that should prove helpful to those who are in the process of developing or reviewing their ideas in this vital domain of practice learning. They conclude with a list of recommendations to ensure that students are more comprehensively prepared.

Steve Ambler

References

Doel, M., Deacon, L., and Sawdon,C. (2004) *Audit of Models of Practice Learning in the New Social Work Award*. NOPT, Practice Learning Task Force & Sheffield Hallam University

University of Northampton (2006) *Placement Guidance & Practice Learning Portfolio Proforma*

Anglia Ruskin University (2006) *Practice Curriculum Guide, Stage Two*