

Editorial

It is a great privilege to be given the opportunity to edit this special Scottish edition of the Journal and to be able to showcase the creative and innovative work being undertaken across Scotland in the arena of practice education. Although still part of the UK, Scotland has always had its own legal system, education system and indeed its own particular approach to the provision of social work and health services. Devolution in 1998 brought greater powers to Scotland across a number of policy areas and it has, in some respects, brought Government closer to the people. Practitioners in both healthcare and social work have played their part in the development of service delivery and in 2003, the Scottish Institute for Excellence in Social Work Education was created 'with the aim of transforming the education and training of Scotland's future social workers'. This organisation, later renamed the Institute for Research and Innovation in the Social Services, or IRISS (www.iriss.org.uk), has had a major influence on the development of new directions for practice education in social work.

Since the new honours degree in social work was developed in 2003 (Scottish Executive, 2003), there has been an ongoing process of research and innovation in the area of practice learning. In January 2004, a document (Social Work Services Inspectorate, 2004) was produced to set out the framework for a new practice learning environment for Scottish social work. This document explored both the drivers for change and also began to explore a strategic response to the needs of this changing context. The partnerships created by the Scottish Practice Learning Project, established in January 2004 (see www.splp.uk.com) are a source of some of the articles contained in this edition.

Across the same timeframe, healthcare in Scotland was also developing its educational context with the expansion of NHS Education for Scotland (NES) (see www.nes.scot.nhs.uk/default.asp) and the ongoing developments in Nursing and Allied Health Professionals training. It is a vibrant time to be in the care sector in Scotland and hopefully some sense of that will be conveyed across the pages of this edition.

In working to develop this special edition, it has been particularly interesting to be able to highlight the work of new writers as well as those from a more established writing tradition. In the call for papers for this edition, a particular emphasis was placed on supporting new writers, particularly those in practice settings to write about their work. Equally, new reviewers were supported through the process of reviewing alongside more established colleagues. I hope that this has started a process that will be continued and that more Scots will be encouraged to write about their work for this Journal and elsewhere. I have also been encouraged by the response of colleagues from Nursing Education who also have demonstrated their creative responses to practice learning and have provided some of the content for this volume.

The articles selected for publication examine a range of different aspects of the practice learning context. Some focus on the academic preparation for practice while others concentrate on issues related to the creative development of practice learning opportunities. There are also articles more focused on the use of new technologies in the practice learning domain. It is also encouraging to be able to include articles that have a strong research focus.

What I hope all of the contents of this volume illustrate is that the practice learning environment across Scotland – in both Health and Social Work contexts – is vibrant and facing the future with confidence. At a time of financial constraint, it remains possible to provide effective and efficient learning opportunities for students and I hope that all readers will find something to inform and inspire.

Janice West
Guest Editor

References

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Edinburgh: Scottish Executive
- Social Work Services Inspectorate (2004) *Confidence in Practice Learning*,
Scottish Executive: Edinburgh