

Editorial

The four papers in this edition all reflect something of the concerns of social work at this time, ranging through policy, practice and research. In their paper *Transitions to adulthood: Some critical observations of the Children (Leaving Care) Act, 2000*, Chris Grover, John Stewart and Karen Broadhurst are critical of government's seeming to feel that they can bring about improvements in the circumstances of children leaving care by 'announcing policy'. Greg Mantle, and Rhidian Hughes and Meg Huby all develop work they have written about previously in this journal in *The nature and significance of agreement in family court mediation* and *The construction and interpretation of vignettes in social research* respectively. John Lawler and Andy Bilson contribute to the debate on evidence based practice in *Towards a more reflexive research aware practice: The influence and potential of professional and team culture*. This follows on from the two excellent issues of *Social Work and Social Science Review* which Andy edited on this topic. Each paper demonstrates, in its own way, the importance of retaining an intellectual element to social work.

For many involved in social work education, this is a significant time as the final new degree schemes get started and those already begun reach the end of their first year. The Diploma in Social Work is on the way out with many universities entering their final year of these schemes. This needs to be a time of reflection on what has been happening. Are we moving forward in meaningful ways, or are we managing these changes to our own convenience, ensuring that little changes for social work clients?

Probably the most significant change with the new degree in social work has been the expansion of the practice element, both the increase in the numbers of days spent in agencies and the emphasis on all learning being assessed in relation to National Occupational Standards. On the one hand this would seem logical as people are learning to become social work *practitioners*, but it also opens up the potential for higher education institutions to dumb-down social work from an educational to a training experience. And given that so much of that experience is gained within agencies rather than the university, such training could potentially reinforce an uncritical social work practice.

Although postgraduate routes to social work have been retained following strong representations from a number of universities, the General Social Care Council have begun to discuss ways of providing fast track degrees to students with relevant degrees. This would be achieved by accrediting their prior learning in many areas, but not in practice. Hence fast track students may be exempted from much of the university elements of degrees, but would still undertake at least 200 days of practice, giving

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even further potential for a degree in social work to be little more than an in-house training course.

Social work educators have a responsibility beyond the training regulations laid down by the Department of Health and the General Social Care Council, a responsibility to educate students to be reflexive and to think critically about the relationship between state welfare providers and recipients. Social workers need to be able to think and act independently of the current managerial procedures, which will never be sufficient to cover all the eventualities they will face within their work. The alternative is to mould their clients into the procedures and to deny them individualised intervention for individual problems.

This is not to say that we should not consider accrediting prior learning, but we should question why the full 200 days of learning in agencies is sacrosanct while university learning is not.

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