Scottish Social Services Council – Review of Social Work Education

Area of inquiry 2: How can we maximise the impact of the collective experience of people who use social work services, and their carers, in the design, development and delivery of social work programmes?

Executive Summary

Introduction and context

The current framework for social work education at higher education institutions (HEIs) in Scotland is now over ten years old. As such, and as part of their broader work to 'develop a new and different approach to professional learning in Scotland', the Scottish Social Services Council (SSSC; 2015, p.3) has undertaken a review of social work qualifying education. While this review has determined that social work education in Scotland is 'fit for purpose', it has also brought to light a number of issues and questions that require further exploration to ensure social work education in Scotland remains robust and at the forefront in a dynamic and evolving environment.

In order to gather the necessary evidence to achieve this aim, the SSSC commissioned work through key stakeholders (HEI's, social work employers, social work students and people who use social work services) to answer a number of key questions. This report focuses on the area of inquiry designed to further understand how the collective experience of people who have used social work services can be maximised in the design, development and delivery of programmes. The main objectives of this piece of work were to (1) identify models of good practice in service user and carer (SUAC) involvement in social work and/or other professional education in Scotland and abroad and (2) enhance the voice and direct involvement of those people who use – and/or care for those who use – social work services.

In collaboration with colleagues at the University of Strathclyde and the Scottish Inter University Service User and Carer Network (the Network), staff from the University of the West of Scotland gathered information from established SUAC groups in HEIs across Scotland, from academics in social work and other professional education programmes in Scotland, across the UK and abroad and from external organisations and advocacy groups to meet the above objectives.

Key findings

Evidence collected indicates that here in Scotland and the wider UK, we have one of the best developed models of service user and carer involvement in the education and training of social work students. Some of the approaches developed in the HEIs have demonstrable positive impacts on both the student and SUAC experience. There is commitment at programme level to developing excellence in this area and the joint working and sharing of good practice across

the Network of SUAC and academic contacts further supports a shared vision and culture of empowering practice in this area. However, for this model to continue and develop, the data clearly suggest:

- Carrying on doing more of the same is not sustainable;
- Relationships are critical and pivotal to quality outcomes;
- Time is an essential aspect of this model of delivery and needs to be protected;
- Reaching and including the more marginalised service users will take cultural change at all levels;
- A strategic approach is required that embeds partnership working between existing service user and carer groups, the HEIs and regulatory and policy driving organisations;
- A sustainable commitment to resourcing all of the above is crucial.

The key messages supported by previous research and this study point to major issues regarding sustainability of what is essentially a model based on local knowledge and relationships prone to disruption from a range of pressures including workload, absence of coordinated support, key individuals departing, lack of basic resources to facilitate engagement and no strategic vision for the future development of partnerships. Ringed fenced time for all contributors to consolidate what we have before it is compromised through external pressures coupled with a funded national strategy focussed on developing a more sustainable model for delivery is absolutely crucial.

The way forward

In order to address the concerns noted above and to maintain the tradition of excellence in involving service users and carers in social work education in Scotland, it is recommended that resources are provided to establish a national SUAC Network that has the function of coordinating developments within the respective HEIs, liaising with relevant national organisations representing people who use social work services, disseminating examples of innovative practice, coordinating research goals in collaboration with HEIs and partner agencies and leading on a culture change that will be recognised internationally as the gold standard for partnership working with SUAC groups.

Outline of Area of Inquiry

Social work service users and carers are required to be involved in the design, delivery and evaluation of Social Work education in Scotland (Taylor and Le Riche, 2006; Scottish Social Services Council (SSSC), 2003). This research explored ways to maximise the collective experience of people who use social work services and their carers in the design, development and delivery of social work programmes and addressed the following questions:

1. What are the existing strengths of current service user/carer partnerships which we need to continue to enhance?

2. How can we broaden service user and carer involvement in social work education in partnership with employers and communities?

3. What can we adapt and learn from other countries and professions?

Lead partner and team members

Dr Debbie Innes and Jeremy Millar from the University of the West of Scotland undertook this work in collaboration with colleagues from the University of Strathclyde and the Scottish Inter-University Service Users and Carers Network.

Introduction

Since the introduction of the current qualifying honours degree in social work education established in 2003, the involvement of social work service users and their carers in the design, development and delivery of social work programmes in the U.K. has been mandatory (Taylor and Le Riche, 2006; Scottish Social Services Council (SSSC), 2003). This has been linked to social trends in the 1970's and '80's, such as consumerism, the disability rights movement and the development of the social model of disability (Beresford et al., 1994), followed by the development of equality and human rights legislation (Ager et al, 2005; Smith et al., 2013), so it should not be surprising that this requirement is not solely restricted to the education of social workers. All higher education institutions in the U.K that provide social work and health care professional education programmes must involve service users and carers (SUAC) as noted above (Branfield et al., 2007; Care Council for Wales, 2005; Health and Care Professions Council, 2012; Nursing and Midwifery Council, 2010).

Service user and carer involvement in professional education is generally framed in terms of 'partnership working', which itself is a complex concept that can be understood in differing ways (Scottish Executive, 2004). While the SSSC specify that service users and carers should have been or will be "actively involved … in the design, delivery and evaluation … of course provision" (2003, p. 15), there is

no further guidance or defining features of what active involvement looks like (Smith et al., 2013). This is also the case within health care education, and McLaughlin (2007) and Lloyd (2010) point to a lack of a clear definition of 'service user involvement' as a potential barrier to its establishment.

Despite these concerns and barriers, in the past 10 to 15 years there has been a growing body of literature with numerous examples of service user and carer involvement within social work and health care professional education programmes. Evidence abounds that there are strong partnerships and good practice in terms of user/carer involvement in social work programmes (Ager, Dow and Gee, 2005; Baldwin and Sadd, 2006; Duffy, 2012; Farrow and Fillingham, 2012; MacSporran, 2014; Quinney and Fowler, 2013; Stevens and Tanner, 2006), health and social care programmes (Ward and Rhodes, 2010) and healthcare programmes (see Morgan and Jones, 2009 for a review) throughout the UK. One notable example, given the recent legislative developments towards the integration of health and social care in the UK, is provided by Terry and her colleagues (2015) who evaluate a World Café event that involved social work and nursing students, service users and carers and voluntary sector/university staff in all aspects of planning, participation and evaluation. The evidence base for user and carer involvement internationally, however, is sparse, with only a few recent examples of service user involvement within social work programmes in Sweden (Kjellberg and French, 2011) and Israel (Gutman et al., 2012) and in a mental health nursing programme in New Zealand (Schneebeli et al., 2010). Within this body of literature, regardless of the type of professional education programme or its location, service user and carer involvement in social work education in the UK is held up as an exemplar (Kjellberg and French, 2011; McCutcheon and Gormley, 2014; Gutman et al., 2012; Morgan and Jones, 2009).

The breadth of service user and carer involvement in professional education and the benefits of this for both students and service users and carers are consistently documented within the literature. Service users and carers are involved in many aspects of programme delivery, including module development, planning and teaching (Duffy, 2012; Farrow and Fillingham, 2012; Gutman et. al., 2012; Schnebelli et al., 2010; Ward and Rhodes, 2010) sometimes involving aspects of student visits and/or conference planning (Stevens and Tanner, 2006; Terry et al., 2015), mentoring students within practice placements (MacSporran, 2014), joint learning (Kjellberg and French, 2011; Quinney and Fowler, 2013) and more broadly in terms of advising and developing the overall programme (Ager, Dow and Gee, 2005; Baldwin and Sadd, 2006). Students benefit from these partnerships by having their expectations and assumptions about service users (or other professionals) challenged (SCIE, 2009; Stevens and Taylor, 2006; Terry et al., 2015), getting support to see beyond labels (Duffy, 2012; Stevens and Tanner, 2006), increasing their skills in listening, showing empathy and respect (Taylor and LeRiche, 2006) and enhancing their knowledge (Duffy,

2012; Schneebeli et al., 2010; Terry et al., 2015). Service users and carers themselves report benefits such as increased confidence and self-esteem along with a better understanding of concerns and restrictions that social workers face (SCIE, 2009; Stevens and Taylor, 2006; Terry et al., 2015).

A number of factors have been repeatedly identified that either support or constrain the development of partnership working with service users and carers within professional education. Supportive factors include: (1) suitable preparation and training for those involved (Baldwin and Sadd, 2006; Moss et al., 2009; SCIE, 2009; Scottish Voices, 2008; Ward and Rhodes, 2010); (2) options and choice with regard to how – and how much – to be involved (Baldwin and Sadd; 2006; Steven and Tanner, 2006) (3) dedicated and funded time, flexibility, support from managers and administrators and positive working relationships with everyone involved (Ager, Dow and Gee, 2005; Basset, Campbell and Anderson, 2006; Duffy, 2012; SCIE, 2009; Scottish Voices, 2008; Stevens and Tanner, 2006) and (4) recognising and addressing individual needs, in particular in terms of transportation, support and availability of food and drink (Baldwin and Sadd, 2006; Basset, Campbell and Anderson, 2006; SCIE, 2009; Stevens and Tanner, 2006). Factors that may constrain effective partnership working between higher education establishments and service users and carers include the difficulty in involving diverse service users from myriad groups (Stevens and Tanner, 2006) and having sufficient time and resource to recruit participants or to develop more trusting and mutually supportive relationships (Baldwin and Sadd, 2006; Quinney and Fowler, 2013; Scottish Voices, 2008). Further, students, or even the people involved in the partnership working, may hold ingrained (and many times, unconscious) attitudes towards who holds the power (Baldwin and Sadd, 2006; Gutman et al., 2012) or who is meant to do what (e.g., role stereotyping; Terry et al., 2015). Time and again, however, a lack of organisational capacity and infrastructure along with organisational attitudes and cultures unsupportive of change were mentioned as not only a barrier to 'true' partnership working, but as a barrier to 'sustainable' partnership working (McCutcheon and Gormley, 2014; SCIE, 2009; Stevens and Tanner, 2006; Ward and Rhodes, 2010).

Though focused on the impact service user participation within the development and provision of social care services rather than service user and carer involvement within professional education, Carr (2004) also found that sustainability of user involvement within service provision requires adequate time and resources to support service users involvement along with feedback about the impact of their involvement. Carr (2004) further suggests that organisations must commit to changing prior to involving service users, which points to a need to develop an appropriate culture and infrastructure within an organisation to support meaningful and effective service user and carer involvement in professional education (McCutcheon and Gormley, 2014; SCIE; 2009; Ward and Rhodes, 2010) and/or social care service provision. Based on the information available about the factors that support or constrain such involvement, it would

appear from the literature that organisations, universities included, must develop infrastructures that provide the availability of time, resource, open communication, accessibility, diversity and choice – and must operate from a foundation that power must be equally shared – to promote meaningful and sustainable service user and carer involvement within professional education.

Indeed, Beresford and Boxall (2012) argue that the way forward for involving service users and carers within professional education would be to involve organisations developed by and for people who use services or by and for people with disabilities within social work and other professional education programmes. They suggest that this will promote the development of new knowledge more effectively through a collective, and therefore more powerful, voice, which will challenge traditional power structures and shift the current user/carer 'involvement' model from one that is focused solely on process to one that seeks to achieve more meaningful partnership (Irvine, Molyneux and Gillman, 2015). Additionally, Smith and his colleagues (2013) suggest that paying attention to the quality of the relationships established within partnerships with service users and carers, (e.g., the 'softer' more intuitive and relational aspects of practice) and avoiding a focus on linear, hierarchal or instrumental means of creating change has the potential for greater sustainability.

Given the information above, and in the context of a wider review of social work education in Scotland, a research project was commissioned by the Scottish Social Services Council to explore ways to maximise the collective experience of people who use social work services and their carers in the design, development and delivery of social work programmes. The aim of the research was threefold: (1) to ascertain existing strengths of current service user/carer partnerships in social work education in Scotland which we need to continue to enhance; (2) to examine ways in which service user and carer involvement in social work education can be broadened in partnership with employers and communities; and (3) to determine what can be learned about maximising service user and carer involvement from other countries and professions.

The current project

In order to ascertain existing strengths of current user/carer partnerships in social work education in Scotland, the researchers collaborated with the Scottish Inter-University Service Users and Carers Network (the Network), established in 2011 with the aim of sharing good practice ideas and problem-solving when necessary. The majority of the groups constituting the Network have been in operation since at least 2005 and represent a body of knowledge and experience stretching over 10 years. Members of the Network, as part of their regular series of meetings, had worked together to present a compilation of examples of best practice developed on their social work programmes in September 2015. This information was collated to address aim 1 of the research in part.

Further, in order to address all 3 aims, two short, open-ended questionnaires were developed (see Appendix 1), one for service users and carers currently involved in professional education and one for social service employers, community organisations and academics in professional programmes in the UK and abroad.

A total of 40 questionnaires were sent out to key contacts in November and December 2015 who either completed the questionnaires themselves or passed these on (along with participant information sheets and informed consent forms) to appropriate colleagues. Key contacts included academic staff and the individual service user and carers (SUAC) groups linked to the social work programmes based in Scottish higher education institutions (HEIs) and the Open University. Also, a number of UK academics in nursing, criminal justice, alcohol and drugs studies and education were contacted, as were overseas social work academics. Finally, a number of Scottish advocacy groups working with service users were also contacted. Follow-up requests to encourage completion of the questionnaires were sent in mid-January 2016.

In all, 18 responses were received representing academics from 7 of the 8 Scottish HEIs, 5 social work academics from outwith Scotland (England, Denmark and the USA) and 1 academic in nursing. Further, 5 of the 8 Scottish SUAC groups returned questionnaires, either individually or as a group. These latter responses included some external organisations and advocacy groups. Throughout this work, the Network were consulted through their on-going meetings to provide further input with regard to themes emerging from the data collected and to ensure the service user and carer voice remained central throughout.

The findings

Aim 1: Existing strengths and ways to enhance these

Examples of strong partnerships and good practice in terms of user/carer involvement in social work education are abundant and are not restricted to teaching practice but extend to all aspects of university programmes. From a presentation of best practice compiled by members of the Network in September 2015, it was very evident that all HEIs have achieved within their admissions, teaching, course development, practice placement assessment and broader inclusion agendas, congruent approaches that respect local difference and culturally specific engagement. There exists a supportive community of practice that whilst fully committed to providing an ongoing contribution to social work education is at the same time acutely conscious of the pressures bearing down on their ability to sustain this commitment.

Examples include:

- SUAC being involved in the selection of students for admission to the programme. This includes sitting on selection panels and scrutinising the applications.
- Attending student induction events.
- Involvement in readiness for practice assessment with SUAC role playing interviews with students as part of this assessment process.
- Mentoring students on observational placements.
- Inviting students into their homes for an extended period of contact to fully explore the lived experience of SUAC.
- Attending Practice Assessment Panels and Programme Boards.
- Working on course design and the creation of teaching materials such as podcasts, case studies and DVDs.
- Direct teaching with students in class using a range of methods: storytelling, workshops, role playing, leading groups and being interviewed for skills development.
- Organising and contributing to a range of conferences.

The consistent themes inherent in these examples are working in partnership, co-production, strength based approaches, the importance of storytelling and, perhaps most central, the power of the relationship. There is evidence of a wide range of innovative and highly engaging practice on offer across all the social work programmes. This level of expertise has been developed over the past 10 years and is largely attributable to the commitment of key academic staff and SUAC individuals in the respective institutions. The ability for the key players to meet and share experiences and work to support developments has been enabled by the national bodies of initially Scottish Voices and more recently the Scottish Inter University Service User and Carer Network.

Additionally, the following quotations from the questionnaire distributed amongst service user and carer groups articulate their ideas about the current strengths of existing partnerships:

"This module takes place in the student's first term before they have started their first observational placement. It gives students the opportunity to meet a range of different service users from varied ethnicities and hear directly about their life experiences and experience of social work involvement…."

"Service users have reported that they have benefitted from the sessions and valued the opportunity to tell their stories to a receptive audience. The feedback from students has been overwhelmingly positive in that they have valued getting a real sense of service user's lives…."

"As the service users come from a broad range of ethnicities the students were also directly exposed to issues related to asylum, the impact of migration, oppressive structures, loss and trauma."

"Real Life Reference Library available in a safe environment for Students Learning from Real people."

"A world of difference from reading a book to listening to real people and having the ability to be able to question us where you can't from a book. Real emotions from real people."

"Relationship of trust and mutual respect built up over period of years of working together."

"Partnerships root education in reality and the lived experience of SUs & Cs"

"We work well as a team; we learn from each other and share experiences and develop ideas for input. We feel that value is placed on our experiences and voices. We know we make a difference because we get positive feedback from the students. We debrief after teaching input and discuss the feedback."

The responses from the academic community identified many similar themes to those of the service user and carer respondents. The spread of SUAC involvement across the HEIs was similar in that partnerships are successfully embedded with the SUAC groups contributing to the programmes from the point of selection and admission through teaching inputs and placement mentoring to engagement with research, writing and running conferences and other events.

The centrality of relationships to successful engagement was highlighted by all contributors with reference to how this process requires time and resources along with individual personal commitment from key staff members. Overall, the data suggest that strong partnerships are underpinned by a number of features including long-standing relationships built on trust and mutual respect, reciprocity, diversity, feelings of being valued and belonging, working as a team, receiving consistent feedback, mutual learning and development, time and support. Time seems to be a key; partnerships are nurtured through time – the time of service users and carers, the time of university staff (be that lecturers or administrative staff) and the time of students.

The following quote summarises the generally held view from the groups about ways in which current partnerships could be enhanced:

"Ensuring funding is an integral part of all planning processes right from the start and is equally available across universities and, where relevant, community groups and other partners. Having defined policy and clear strategy for such partnerships at government and university level. Clear designation of responsibility within universities for such partnerships with sufficient time and appropriate resource allocation."

One key suggestion related to the further development of a service user led model of provision. This would be based on the relational approach and would be for many the most desirable arrangement in terms of emancipatory practice and sustainability.

Aim 2: Current challenges and ways to broaden service user and carer involvement

In order to understand ways service user and carer involvement could be broadened, we felt it was important to understand the current challenges or barriers to involvement.

The data from service users and carers identified a number of barriers to involvement that revolved around accessibility for SUAC from marginalised and stigmatised groups and the impact of power differentials in relationships. Making time for relationships and actively engaging with under-represented groups is also a challenge as these responses illustrate.

"Lack of confidence; difficulties with spoken English (for several of our service users); the need for a 'supportive friend' or professional who can support their contribution within groups; fear of 'social work' or misconceptions about the role of social work."

"Lack of sufficient time for the development and maintenance of partnerships. No staff with clear responsibility or time as referred to above. Lack of understanding by some staff of the crucial importance of such partnerships."

"People from some minority communities are often not using services, for a variety of reasons, and thus are greatly underrepresented in such partnerships."

"Time and caring commitments; social, communication and physical access; poverty; traditional approaches to such involvement instead of more imaginative ones…"

"People may have a negative experience of social work which deters their want to get involved/contribute to social work education. People need support for attendance (at least travel remuneration and refreshments)."

Many comments from academics identified the challenge in reaching out to those users of services who would be considered non-voluntary and the additional time and resources required to maintain their profile within the various courses. A number of responses referred to challenges inherent in avoiding a tokenistic approach and maintaining a commitment to demonstrating core social work values.

In line with findings from the literature, service users and carers identified the need for resources along with a culture and infrastructure that supports equality of power and 'true' partnership working in all aspects of the design, development and delivery of social work education to broaden user and carer involvement.

> "Funding is needed to recognise the contribution of agencies who would be able to further develop user involvement in social work education."

> "Involving SUs & Cs in the design of policy and strategy from the beginning, not as an afterthought. Involving SUs & Cs in research design and subsequent activity as partners not just in consultation or as 'subjects', especially as research often informs policy and strategy. Providing a collective voice for service users at government level, as there is for carers through the Carers Parliament."

Academic respondents suggested that 'broadening involvement' would mean overcoming common barriers and creating a sustainable partnership less dependent of the variables inherent in more individual orientated relationships. These included developing partnerships with national and local service user and carer networks as well as the range of employers in the sector. It was suggested that this would tap into a wider and more responsive body of experience and skills. The expertise could be further enhanced and consolidated through engagement in shared research projects involving HEIs, employers and campaigning groups. There was clear focus on more reciprocal relationships that enhance a more authentic partnership closer to core social work values. One idea put forward would be for the HEIs to offer accredited courses accessible to service users and carers that would further embed this engagement model in the curriculum and contribute to a more sustainable model of good practice. This idea of embedding was present in many responses and is illustrated with the notion that a cultural change is required such that "this is just what happens in social work education." Other suggestions included "be[ing] present in the community… to demonstrate values and commitments that will encourage participation and trust," develop a clear, comprehensive and co-ordinated strategy including all stakeholders from the outset, and providing sufficient resources (in terms of time, money and staff) to support involvement.

These data suggest that part of broadening involvement necessitates a shift in culture and inclusion of collective groups as noted in the literature; a shift that would enhance the sustainability of involvement.

Aim 3: What can we adapt and learn from other countries and professions

Mirroring the findings in the extant literature, respondents from outwith the UK consistently noted that SUAC involvement was minimal and in one case was described as 'idiosyncratic'. Examples provided of SUAC involvement in other

countries included guest lecturing, service users being involved as participants in students' research projects and students on the course being (or having been) social work service users. One example was given of stakeholder involvement in the development of a professional education programme in the UK (not social work) which included consultation with service users and carer organisations. SUACs and other key stakeholders were asked to identify outcomes that would be valuable in students completing the programme; these outcomes were then passed to module leads who used these identified outcomes to shape module development. It is interesting to note that most people approached to participate in this research from outwith the UK expressed a degree of surprise and interest in this 'different' way of thinking about social work education.

Though the sample size is limited in relation to these results, much like the evidence in the literature, it appears that service user and carer involvement in other countries and professions is patchy, with a handful of examples of good practice, yet also with the same issues noted above in terms of lack of infrastructure, sustainability and resource.

Conclusions and recommendations

Critical to all of the above is the recognition that the best practice developed to date has been achieved through the personal commitment of many individuals and groups over the years rather than building a well-resourced and strategic national body able to bring together the talents and expertise that exist in the sector. The issue of recompense is another key factor whether in relation to payment in some form for individual contributions to financial agreements at an organisational level in the form of service level agreements. There is a community of interest and expertise available from within the HEIs and the variety of groups and organisations that is open to and amenable to creating a national resource sensitive to cultural and local variation, sustainable and able to contribute to the growth from the current solid beginnings to what could be the global gold standard for SUAC participation in social work education and beyond.

However, more of the same is not an option. A strategic approach is required that embeds partnership working between existing service user and carer groups, the HEIs and regulatory and policy driving organisations. The development of an infrastructure is required through which all key stakeholders are given the time necessary – time to develop relationships based on trust and mutual respect and time to develop modules and programmes in partnership. Through that infrastructure and within that space, the cultural and attitudinal shift towards true co-productive practice will be allowed to develop so that effective, meaningful and sustainable service user and carer involvement will become the norm within social work education in Scotland.

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Appendix 1 – Questionnaires distributed

Questionnaire 1: User and Carer Advisory Groups

1. What do you see as the current strengths of service user/carer partnerships in Social Work education which need to continue?

2. How can these partnerships be enhanced?

3. What barriers are there in relation to service user/carer involvement? (OR What are some reasons people may choose not to participate in social work education user/carer groups?

4. How can we broaden user/carer involvement in social work education (particularly in partnership with employers and communities)?

Questionnaire 2: Social Service Employers, Community Organisations and Academics

1. In what areas are service users/carers currently involved in the design, development and delivery of your [social work]/[nursing]/[alcohol and drug studies] programme?

2. What is your idea of 'best practice' in this area?

3. Can you give any examples of best practice in this area?

4. In your view, what enables service user/carer involvement in these areas?

5. What barriers can you identify in relation to service user/carer involvement?

6. In your view, how can these barriers be overcome?

7. How can we broaden user/carer involvement in social work education (particularly in partnership with employers and communities)?