



General
Social Care
Council

Working towards full participation

A report on how social work degree courses, which started in 2003, have begun to involve service users and carers in social work training

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Thanks go to everyone who has contributed to this report. In particular, to:

- ❖ all the service users and carers who took the time to complete the questionnaires, phone us or meet with us, providing invaluable information, ideas and examples;
- ❖ members of the steering group who devised and co-ordinated the gathering and analysis of information and commented on draft reports, namely -
 - Linda Christian
 - Stella Harris
 - Sheila Lyons
 - Lel Meleyal
 - Jane Roe
 - Dave Thomas
 - Paul Webster
 - Helen Wenman
 - Grace Wise
- ❖ Enid Levin from SCIE who acted as consultant for this report and commented upon it;
- ❖ Mary, Dwayne and David who prepared the executive summary; and
- ❖ universities with intakes of students in September 2003, who shared their developments and initiatives on involving service users and carers in the social work degree.

FOREWORD

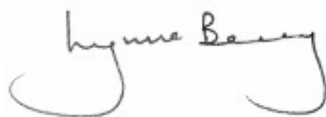
The GSCC is committed to keeping the best interests of service users and the wider public at the heart of our organisation. One way in which we do this is by promoting the participation of service users and carers in all aspects of social work education. We have been supported in this by Government and a range of other national organisations all working to the same end of making service user and carer involvement an integral part of social work education.

The introduction of the new social work degree, which had its first intake in September 2003, provided an important and exciting opportunity to make participation in social work education a reality by requiring that service users and carers be involved in all aspects of course design and delivery, including the selection and assessment of students.

This report uses information gathered by the GSCC from a range of sources to analyse how service users and carers worked together with universities in planning and delivering the first year of the social work degree. It gives examples of the different and creative ways participation was achieved and identifies further areas for development. Service users and carers were involved at all stages of the production of the report and I would like to thank them for the invaluable help they have offered to our officers. The report could not have been written without them.

What emerges from the report is that the requirement to involve service users and carers in the social work degree is starting to make a real difference to the quality of social work education, although, not surprisingly, the participation of service users and carers is more developed in some areas than others.

One of the most important features of the report is its focus on learning for the future. We have identified a number of key learning points, which can be used to inform future action so as to ensure that barriers to participation are lifted and that service user and carer participation continues to grow and develop. In this and other ways, we hope that the report will contribute to the further development of good practice in this key area of social work education.



Lynne Berry
Chief Executive
General Social Care Council

**REPORT SUMMARY
WRITTEN BY SERVICE USERS FOR SERVICE USERS**

Introduction

In the new social work degree programme, people who use services and their carers need to be involved in the training process.

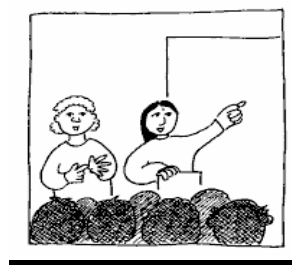


Work that people will be involved in includes:

1) Interviewing people who want to train as social workers



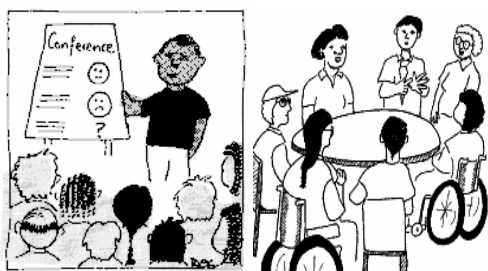
2) Teaching



3) Assessing students work

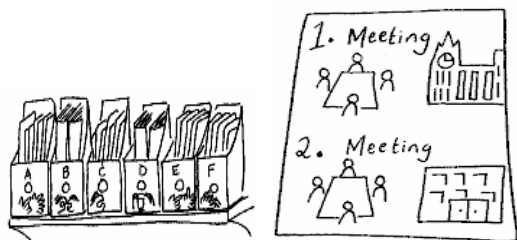


4) Helping to develop the training



Context

There is a lot of work going on in different places.



Department of Health (DH)

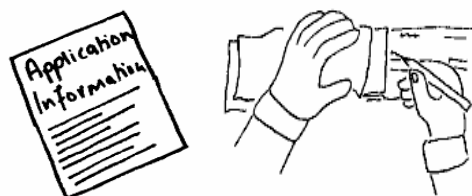
Skills for Care

Social Care Institute for Excellence (SCIE)

General Social Care Council (GSCC)

Shaping our lives and the National Users Forum (SOLNUN)

And other organisations have helped to fund and support work.



All universities will be involved and will need to report on what they have been doing.



Summary of results

Lots of examples of work have been found.

Some universities have started to use people and carers in:

1) Interviewing



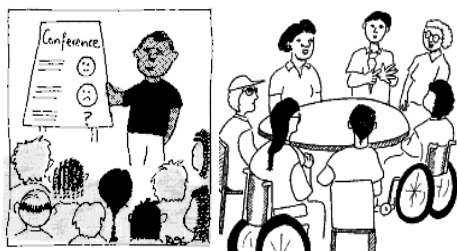
2) Teaching



3) Marking presentations and work.



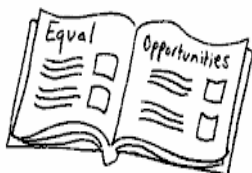
4) Planning how to develop the courses further.



Many people have become involved, contacts made and 'working partnerships' developed.

It is important that people who are involved are:

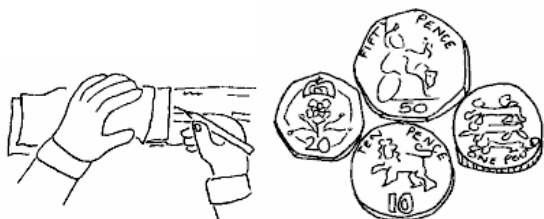
1) Valued



2) Receive training about being involved



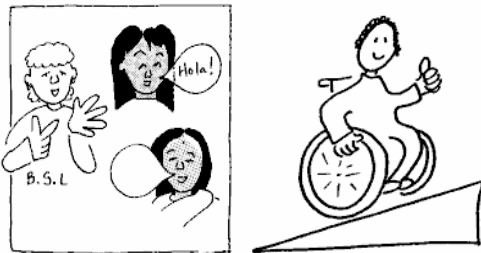
3) Get paid for being involved and this does not affect their benefits.



More improvements are needed. The need to change things has been called '**Breaking down barriers**'.

The barriers include:

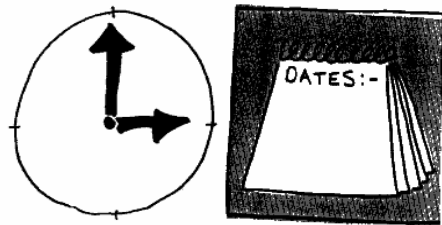
1) Access



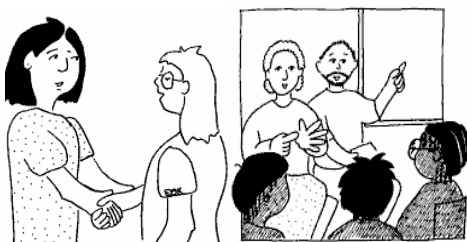
2) Communication



3) Time



4) Support



5) Payment



6) Funding



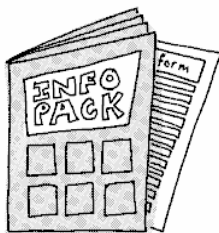
Conclusion

The process has started but will need everyone to continue to work hard.

The areas for improvement need to be thought about and answers found as soon as possible.

Everyone will need to be told the answers.

Information needs to be shared with everyone involved.



INTRODUCTION

The honours degree in social work introduced by the Department of Health (DH) as the new professional qualification for social workers, had its first intake of students at 46 universities in September 2003.

An exciting and important difference about the new degree is that service users and carers should be involved as stakeholders in all aspects of its design and delivery as stated in *Requirements for social work training* (DH June 2002). This involvement aims to support ethical practice and to ensure that students gain a good grounding in service users' and carers' experiences and expectations so that "from the very start of their professional careers, students will treat service users as active participants in service delivery, rather than as passive recipients" (Levin, 2004, p 9).

The General Social Care Council (GSCC) approves universities to offer the social work degree and then monitors the courses regularly to make sure that requirements such as service user and carer participation continue to be met. Approved universities have agreed to make arrangements to work with service users and carers to enable them to participate in:

- student selection;
- the design and development of courses;
- delivery, such as direct teaching;
- assessment; and
- monitoring, review and evaluation.

A steering group was set up to gather and analyse information about how well this was working in the early stages of the degree. We wanted to look in more depth at how universities and service users and carers are working together to plan and deliver the social work degree across England and particularly to see how they are meeting the requirements for participation in all aspects of the degree as listed above.

What this report is about

This report draws on the information that has been gathered by the GSCC about the first intake to social work degree programmes.

The report:

- identifies different ways in which participation is being developed;
- explores how service users and carers are being involved in the different aspects of the degree;
- describes examples of particular initiatives which appear to be working well;
- explores challenges being faced; and
- looks at areas which need further development.

The aim of the report is to share information and an understanding of the issues and to assist networking to promote the initiative.

The report celebrates and shares developments and tries to move the debate forward by identifying some potential barriers and areas for improvement.

Who the report is for

This report is being circulated to:

- universities and colleges who offer the social work degree;
- service users and carer organisations, networks and individuals;
- external examiners for the social work degree; and
- other national organisations who are concerned with social work education.

BACKGROUND

An enormous amount of work has been going on in service user and carer groups and organisations, universities and other national organisations to promote the participation of service users and carers in social work education and training. The work of the GSCC is only a small part of the overall effort being made by many different individuals and organisations.

The DH has provided funding for a number of different projects. Money has been given to Skills for Care to commission training programmes and learning materials that will support service users and carers and help them to feel confident and competent enough to get involved in social work education.

Funding has been given to a project being jointly managed by the Social Care Institute for Excellence (SCIE) and Shaping our Lives, National User Network (SOLNUN). This project aims to develop a strategy to support the participation of service users and carers in social work education, including how to build capacity for user- and carer-led organisations to be involved. It also focuses on building the capacity of the user- and carer-led organisations who are involved.

The DH has given special grants to each university awarding the degree over the last three years as a contribution towards developing participation. This is reported below.

Universities have made a commitment to meet the GSCC requirements regarding service user and carer participation in their social work degree courses. However they are at different stages along the journey to fully embedding these in all aspects of their work. Before we began this piece of work we were already aware that several different initiatives and approaches were emerging (SCIE 2004; GSCC and SCIE 2004). Universities and their service user and carer partners have different priorities depending on:

- the overall stage they have reached in their development;
- geographical/regional issues;
- the strength of existing service user networks; and
- the strength of pre-existing arrangements.

Some had well-developed systems and links with local networks to build upon, for example, involving service users and carers in direct training of Dip SW students. However many were doing so from a low starting point. These differences are confirmed by this report.

“Actively promoting and sustaining participation is a process and not a one off event. It takes time to build up respectful and purposeful relationships and to give attention to practicalities.” (Levin 2004) However it is essential that the involvement of service users and carers continues to be actively promoted and developed and that examples of what works well are widely disseminated.

INFORMATION SOURCES

Information for the report was gathered from the following GSCC sources:

- annual monitoring reports from universities;
- reports from universities about how they have spent the DH grant;
- responses to questionnaires sent to service user and carer groups about their participation;
- visits by GSCC regional inspectors to service user and carer groups; and
- other information which had been sent to us, for example, newsletters and booklets supporting participation.

a) Annual monitoring reports from universities

Universities, which have been approved to deliver the social work degree provide a report to the GSCC each year to make sure they are continuing to meet requirements. This year we asked universities for more information about how service users and carers had been involved in all aspects of their degree courses during 2003–2004. There was a wide variety of responses; some were very comprehensive and detailed, others were minimal. Overall, the responses showed that some universities had made good progress in both developing and implementing strategies for involvement whilst others were still at the planning stage.

The answers from the universities provided both quantitative and qualitative data and have been collated with the responses from other sources to create a current picture of involvement.

b) Reporting from universities on expenditure of the DH grant

The DH has made funding available for universities over the last three years as a contribution towards developing and maintaining service user and carer participation in social work degree courses. Universities that were accredited received the first grant of £6,200 for the period January–December 2003 for development work and a second grant of £5,600 for the period 1 April 2003–31 March 2004. This funding was distributed on behalf of the DH by the GSCC and universities were required to tell us how they spent the money before receiving the next instalment. A brief report was produced in November 2003 giving initial feedback on the use of the first grant based on returns from 39 institutions (Wenman 2003). This present analysis is based on the collation of responses from 46 universities and colleges that began to offer the degree from 2003 and reports how they spent the second instalment of the funding.

The information given varied considerably. Some HEIs have provided a detailed breakdown of amounts spent against specific items and provided a comprehensive report; others have briefly listed the activities for which the grant has been used.

The analysis therefore provides a snapshot of what the money is being used for but does not tell the whole story. For example, it may be expected that all Higher Education Institutes (HEIs) would be using their money for activities such as direct teaching and recruitment and selection. However this has not been universally reported. Many HEIs report using some of their own resources to support service user and carer involvement in the degree; others have received grants from Skills for Care regional committees to take forward particular projects. Universities will not necessarily tell the GSCC about activities funded by other sources.

The reports have shown that payments are made in a number of different ways to support a range of activities. These include:

- **salaries** for dedicated development/project workers to co-ordinate and support the strategy;
- **block payments** through contracts to existing service user carer/networks to provide a range of services to the course;
- **fees** for service user and carer participation in specific activities such as selection and recruitment, direct teaching, attendance at meetings;
- **expenses** to support service user and carer involvement. For example carer costs, personal assistance costs, interpreter costs, travel expenses, hospitality and catering etc.;
- **infrastructure support** such as administrative support, appointment of secretary for one day a week, IT, accommodation/rooms for meetings;
- **funding for training** of service users and carers and other staff to build capacity to undertake their roles – for example selection and recruitment training; and
- **production/purchasing** of service user and carer led teaching materials.

c) Questionnaires

A short questionnaire, devised together with service user and carer representatives, was sent out to 41 service user and carer organisations across England, working with 2003 start degree programmes.

We provided opportunities for the responses to be sent by post, email or telephone. We received 44 responses; 31 by post, six by email, five by telephone and two through group interviews. The majority sent a combined response from their group but we also heard directly from individuals. We estimate that there was a response rate of 70 per cent. However, as we did not require groups or individuals to identify themselves, this may not be totally accurate.

The groups and individuals we heard from included alcohol recovery groups, users of mental health services, people with physical, sensory or cognitive impairment, people with learning difficulties, foster carers, older people,

young people's groups and advocacy groups. There were 12 respondents who identified themselves as carers.

On the whole the questionnaires revealed a great enthusiasm to be involved in the degree and positive experiences with universities and students.

d) Visits by regional inspectors

Regional inspectors are employed by the GSCC to work in 12 regions across England. They advise on and regulate social work training courses including the social work degree.

The majority of regional inspectors visited at least one of the service user and carer networks in their region to discuss how they have been involved in the social work degree in their localities and to gain more in-depth information about specific initiatives. They also learned about what works well and what could be improved.

These visits yielded a wealth of information and examples about activities taking place in a particular region.

e) Newsletters, booklets and publications

A few groups and universities sent us newsletters and booklets to describe what they do. Ideas from these have been incorporated into the results. Anglia Polytechnic University (APU) sent us a valuable resource and reference book called *User and Carer participation in social work: Education, Practice and research* (APU User and Carer Involvement Project 2004). This includes articles and reports about service user and carer involvement and is given to each student on the degree.

f) External Examiners

We had also intended to use information from external examiners to contribute to this report. External examiners are independent people with academic and social work experience who are appointed by universities to comment on the quality of courses and to make sure that standards are being maintained both within the universities and against national requirements. However, most universities do not specifically ask questions about service user and carer involvement since this is not a feature of most degree courses. The majority of external examiner reports from this year provided very little information about service user and carer involvement and was not enough to be included.

The role and feasibility of external examiners being asked to provide this information requires further debate.

SUMMARY OF RESULTS

The responses from all of the sources detailed above have provided us with interesting and useful information on the various ways in which service users and carers have been involved in the delivery of the social work degree. These responses have been used to analyse specific activities and areas of involvement, to consider strategies and contexts that appear to work well and to identify areas for further development and improvement.

Selection

Selection appears to be one of the more highly developed areas of participation. Ninety-four per cent of universities told us that they involved service users and carers in selection in some way and 76 per cent had used DH funding to support this. Service user and carer respondents had been involved in a range of activities such as:

- developing the selection procedures;
- short-listing;
- devising interview questions and topics for group discussion;
- assessing written materials prepared by candidates as part of selection;
- interviewing alongside staff;
- participating in group observation; and
- being members of the decision making panel.

Several universities told us that there was still further work to do in this area.

Almost half of our service user and carer respondents reported that they had been involved in recruitment and selection. This had been a generally positive experience because of the way service users and carers had been approached and supported.

“I was made to feel part of the interviewing panel and received positive and friendly feedback.”

“Service users focused on the qualities of candidates – caring, compassion and patience even if academic results were not too good.”

Others mentioned that this is an area they would like to get more involved in.

Several universities reported that service users and carers were offered training to ensure effective involvement in the recruitment process, usually alongside other stakeholders. This is an encouraging development which was valued by those service users and carers who responded.

“Training for involvement in selection was very helpful and built relationships with social work staff and other service user representatives.”

Regional inspectors' visits to service user/carer groups identified a similar range of activities and exercises.

Below are two examples of current practice.

Lancaster University

At Lancaster University service users and carers are invited to be members of a selection panel alongside academics and social work practitioners or managers. The service user or carer is an equal member of the panel and may be involved in reviewing the application form, identifying and asking questions (including follow up questions) and making the final decision on selection.

Identified benefits include:

- Training sessions as preparation to take part, including observing role play.
- Having a say and being an equal partner in the process.
- Learning by doing and gaining confidence.
- Offering a unique perspective on the selection process.
- Being asked how service users and carers want to contribute to the process, including identifying questions and issues to explore in the interview.
- A good reaction from the prospective students and a challenging experience for them.
- Service users and carers learning new skills.

Identified challenges include:

- Agreeing a common format whilst allowing for different styles and preferences. This includes the format of the interview, but also things like room layout. Planning is the key.
- Building confidence and expertise and not expecting too much too soon.
- Getting over the practicalities, for example, finding somewhere to park at a busy university.
- Finding a way through some of the inevitable 'chaos' of the selection process such as last minute timetable changes, students dropping out etc.

Reading University working with Citizen's Forum

This forum maintains four groups called selection, teaching, shared experiences and research.

The selection group runs the annual arrangements for interviewing and selecting student applicants. Service users and carers are involved in the actual interview days with a service user/ carer being paired with university staff. There is now a pool of about 20 people on call who will slot into the timetable according to their availability.

A training day is run by the admissions tutor for prospective new user and carer interviewers and for experienced interviewers who are being 'refreshed' for the current round of selection. Interviewers receive a £50 fee plus expenses per half-day session.

Participants in the training were skilled at translating the stock interview questions into words that making sense of their lived experience. They were very good at reading applicants' personal statements, getting behind the jargon and clarifying with applicants on the day what they actually meant. They knew what characteristics they wanted in a social worker (for example honesty and respect, reliability and punctuality, actually getting something done, not just being nice). They were good at interview body language and used the response of applicants to them as users as part of their criteria for suitability. They were conscious of the dynamics of power and how applicants deal with this. Some of the interviewers were young people who were aware of the issues of interviewing both young applicants and also mature applicants.

There is a high level of agreement, achieved by scoring against set criteria, about who should be offered a place, although not always for the same reasons. Academic staff bring different perspectives regarding student potential, but these may be challenged. Participants feel that they are making a significant contribution to selection and tutors feel that it is already changing the way they think.

Two universities reported that service users and carers had also been involved in the appointment of staff.

Design and development

Participation in design and development appeared to be less well developed and there was some confusion about what design and development means in practice. Eighty-six per cent of universities reported that service users and carers had been involved in the design of the social work degree and 40 per cent reported that DH funding had been used for this purpose.

Activities ranged from:

- consultation prior to the course being developed;
- planning the content of the course (the curriculum);
- making sure service user/carers views were included across all sections of the course (modules);

- attending validation events and preparing service users and carers for this; and
- supporting service users and carers to produce modules/units of the course.

One HEI reported that some service users are members of teams designing modules for validation. They also prepared the detailed content of each teaching session. In another, a task group meets fortnightly and advises on the content of teaching and assessment of one unit and makes sure service user perspectives are included across all first year units. Another group of service user and carers are members of the e-learning strategy group for the award.

Only one in five respondents to the service user and carer questionnaire reported that they had been involved in designing and planning the new degree. They participated by:

- being members of working groups who decided on the courses content and practice learning arrangements;
- developing guidelines and standards for practice learning; and
- planning and delivering particular modules such as professional practice, inter-professional modules, children and families modules and service user modules.

Advocacy in Action told us that they had 'managed' the user/carer module over three years (DipSW and the degree). This included budgetary responsibility, timetabling, selection, training and support of community presenters and evaluation.

Regional inspectors' visits found similar evidence of service user and carer involvement in the design of modules. An example follows:

Service User Participation Advisory (SUPA) at the University of Lincoln

Members of SUPA have been actively involved in the design and delivery of the Service User Participation Unit, which runs in the first year of the BSc in Social Work. For example:

- members drafted a programme of topics that should be covered by the unit working from the unit's draft learning outcomes ;
- group members worked as seminar leaders throughout the unit and delivered some lectures, shadowed by academic teaching staff;
- a member of the group made a video about her experiences of domiciliary care services to be used in lectures and seminars;
- young people in contact with the group also developed taped and written teaching materials to be used in lectures and seminars; and
- a local group of service users did a days teaching on advocacy.

There has also been service user and carer involvement in other units, for example, teaching on the legal framework and mental health unit.

Members reported to the regional inspector:

“They allowed us to be seminar leaders. They were very open to this” and “They gave us the freedom to say what we wanted.”

Delivery/teaching

Universities reported that 94 per cent of service users and carers are engaged in direct teaching sessions with students in a variety of ways and 76 per cent had used the DH grant to support this. Activities included involvement in induction programmes and providing sessions on service user and carer perspectives on mental health, children and families, communication skills, law, inter-professional practice and diversity training. Service users and carers had been particularly involved in skills development work with students and ‘safety to practice’ sessions.

60 per cent of service user and carer respondents reported that they had been involved in direct work with students across the curriculum. Three had been formally appointed as visiting lecturers. Some respondents described talking about their own experiences – a young peoples’ group had shaped and taught on a children and families module while others contributed days on diversity, discrimination, legislation and the social and medical modules. Respondents were particularly enthusiastic about involvement in skills development work. This included phone and face-to-face role-playing, development of interview skills and giving feedback to students on videos and role-plays. A ‘student conversation’ was part of the assessment for safety to practice.

Another important aspect of delivery is the use of service user/carer-led training materials. These have the added value of enabling individuals to participate who may find it difficult to regularly attend a university for teaching sessions. Some service user and carer respondents reported that they had provided case study and teaching materials for use with students, including making videos to be used by themselves and other HEIs and service user groups.

For example a group linked with Middlesex University have designed, acted in and produced a video about communication. They felt empowered through this process and achieved it with the support of the university media group who set up the studio and will help to edit it.

Universities had used 20 per cent of DH grant money to either purchase service user/carer produced training material or to enable groups to produce

their own training materials including “translating university documents into user-friendly documents.”

“The group has commissioned a video of a play designed by young people, written and video training materials designed by people with learning difficulties and a joint student/user project designing materials for working with young people on topics such as AIDS, sex and sexuality.”

Oxford Brookes and Ruskin College Service Users and Carers Stakeholder group

Because some service users and carers feel anxious in face-to-face teaching, a number have chosen instead to produce teaching and learning videos for students’ learning. A local centre for film and digital media was contacted and has agreed to work with community groups to train and support them in making their own videos. Several organisations are proceeding with this. Another group has taken a slightly different approach. The service users’ support group will run sessions out of which teaching materials will be generated based on their own issues and experiences. A freelancer, who has been a service user himself, was appointed to put together the material.

Regional inspector visits confirmed a wide range of ways in which service users and carers contribute to learning. This mirrored those mentioned by other sources. The following is an example of working with students in skills laboratory work.

Oxford Brookes and Ruskin College Service Users and Carers Stakeholders group

Service users and carers are negotiating their contributions to this module, including evaluating what they see through the one-way window and giving on the spot feedback to students undergoing role plays, mock interviews etc. Service users and carers may also choose to help assess students’ presentations.

The following two extracts show examples of involvement in preparation for practice.

“The best thing about being involved in the social work course has been doing the conversation with students when they’re just starting. The students have a one-to-one conversation with a service user, and really, you’re like equals, sharing stuff. I reckon if you can change one social worker so that they give one service user a better service, then it’s all been worth it.”

(Service users and carers working with Plymouth University)

Citizen's Forum working with Reading University

The Shared Experience (of receiving services) group focuses on delivering the preparation for practice requirement, where users and carers meet with students and are interviewed by them. This module requires of students that they demonstrate genuine respect and honesty in their interactions with service users and carers as a priority. Users were very keen to make sure these skills were taught and assessed. Students in their learning sets are given the responsibility to plan the interview (which is about learning about users experiences of services), organise the setting, and ensure the comfort of the users. Both students and users give feedback on performance, out of which a summary is produced.

Involvement in practice learning

Our information sources provided encouraging evidence of service user and carer involvement in preparation and skills development for safety to practice as well as feedback on, and in some cases assessment of, practice.

As only a few universities offered practice learning opportunities during the first year of the social work degree it was not surprising that there was little reporting of service user and carer involvement in this area.

Four service user and carer respondents mentioned their formal and structured involvement in practice learning.

The Advisors in Mental Health Service group (AIMHS), Croydon, provide placements for service user experience and feedback on student's assessment. Five of their committee have been trained as 'service user mentors' to meet weekly with students in placement and contribute to their learning and assessment. They also provide placements so that students can "understand the service user as citizen as well as service user'."

Advocacy in Action have supervised MA/DipSW student placements and are "planning to achieve formal accreditation for some of our group through a practice teaching award."

Service user and carer involvement in practice learning is currently being developed and evaluated by the Practice Learning Task Force.

Assessment

Four in five universities reported that service users and carers were involved in assessment of students' work and two in five had used DH grant money to support participation in the assessment of either practice learning (including preparation and fitness for practice, assessment of skills laboratory work) or both academic and practice assessment.

A majority of courses ask service user and carers for their views on students' practice. These are then included in a portfolio of evidence which is used to assess their competence. A small number of respondents reported that service user and carer representatives are directly involved in marking work.

The Oxford Brookes and Ruskin College Service Users and Carers Stakeholders group are committed to involvement in formative assessment and in second marking a minimum of one module a year. The group received a sample of formal assessments and provided feedback about possible changes. It is also represented on the assessment monitoring group.

One university described a workshop involving 10 service users and carers that advised on assessment processes for practice learning. This has led to a revised practice assessment panel process that now includes service users and carers.

One quarter of service user and carer respondents reported being involved in assessment tasks. These included monitoring students' written projects on practice and supervising MA students' research projects jointly with a lecturer. A number were on panels for moderating assessment of portfolios and presentations.

Advocacy in Action have been involved in assessing students' course work, using a user-led evaluation tool they have developed. More recently, this has been complimented by an assessment tool for students' readiness for work-based placements.

Regional inspector visits mirrored this picture, with service users and carers contributing to the assessment of presentations, marking and moderating tests and contributing to the students' assessed preparation for direct practice. In some HEIs, service users were representatives on practice assessment panels and assessment boards.

In addition, some universities had provided training for service users and carers to develop assessment skills.

Monitoring, review and evaluation

All universities have ways of monitoring, reviewing and evaluating different parts of the course. This may include questionnaires filled out by students about the teaching they receive on the course or about their experiences on their placements. Service users, carers and employers should also be involved in saying how well they think different aspects of the social work degree are going and what improvements can be made.

Although 67 per cent of universities reported that service users and carers are involved in monitoring and evaluation, only 11 per cent reported using DH funding for this purpose. Funding was used to pay service users and carers to

be part of review meetings or to be members of quality assurance sub-groups. We gathered very few specific examples of participation in this aspect of the degree. This is not to say that it is not happening but rather that it is being interpreted differently and 'hidden' amongst other activities. Several describe activities such as revising a module and suggesting changes to it. Service users and carers were also members of various committees, boards and stakeholder groups whose responsibilities include monitoring and quality assuring courses.

OTHER ASPECTS OF INVOLVEMENT

Consultation and decision making

Twenty-eight per cent of universities reported that service users and carers are members of course management boards and faculty committees, whilst 61 per cent said that service user and carers were consulted. Forty-four per cent of universities reported using their DH grant to pay for expenses and support for service users and carers as members of programme management /stakeholder boards and university committees. This included five who supported service users and carers in attending validation events. Half of the universities used the DH grant to establish and support service user and carer forums or focus groups. These meet regularly to advise/act as a reference point/consultation group to all aspects of the degree. Although there is ad hoc reporting of representation on programme management and assessment boards from all sources, it is difficult to determine where involvement is consultative and where service users and carers are part of the decision-making processes.

Bradford University demonstrates one initiative.

“Total membership of the Bradford Service User and Carer group now numbers 30 organisations within the area and 10 have regular representation within the group. We have adopted a model of ‘core’ steering group with a larger satellite group of individuals/ organisations to be called upon. The core group has a good cross section of service user and carer interests and meets every two months. A constitution has been agreed and has enabled service user participation in recruitment and selection, teaching, learning and assessment in six of the programme modules in the first year. It provides an annual report and representation for the programme management board.”

The University of Middlesex have developed a similar approach.

“Initially jargon (at the meeting) was difficult. Now a pre-meeting group is held with the programme leader. This enables the group to go through the agenda, think about their views and nominate someone to speak for the group on each agenda item. The group feel listened to, respected and involved in the decision making of the programme management board.”

Service users and carers also wanted more involvement in decision-making processes.

“We would like to become more of the fabric of the course, assisting in student support, advising on course structure and content and being involved in directorate meetings.”

“We should bring service user involvement central stage into the governance of HEI’s and the running of the course.”

(AIMHS)

Different models of involvement are discussed in more detail below.

National and regional involvement

Four service user and carer groups told us about working with Government and regional bodies such as Citizens As Trainers who are members of the DH reference group for the evaluation of the social work degree project. The AIMHS (advisors in the mental health services group) had worked with the Practice Learning Task force to develop an electronic placement evaluation tool.

Four of the groups we met were working on articles for the *Journal of Social Work Education – User Friendly edition* to be launched in July 2006, which will be dedicated to service-user and carer involvement in social work education

Developing involvement

We asked service users if there were other ways they would like to be involved. Four said they were happy with the contributions they made. Several mentioned that they would like to be more involved but that there are limitations to how much time they can give. Others were wary about making judgements such as those involved in the selection process or in assessment of students.

The majority commented that they would like to be more involved in the whole range of activities for example selection, curriculum planning, face-to-face work with students and most commonly teaching. It was clear respondents had not been aware of these different activities until we had written to them. Several also wanted to be more involved with both organising and providing placements.

“We need to develop special placements to see service users as citizens with abilities and talents not just as people who need help... and become involved in the training of practice learning managers.”

(AIMHS)

STRATEGIES TO ACHIEVE INVOLVEMENT: WHAT WORKS AND WHAT IMPROVEMENTS COULD BE MADE?

Strategies/protocols to initiate and develop participation

Some universities have negotiated mission statements and principles of participation; several gave full details of strategic approaches and action plans to continue to develop participation. Taken together, all sources suggest that there are a significant number of universities who have worked with service users and carers to establish models of working that will ensure the provision of the social work degree. This includes the setting up of joint university/service user and carer forums, the appointment of dedicated co-ordinators and specific contracts with service user/carers organisations.

Models of involvement

A variety of different models of involvement have been identified which are not exclusive to each other.

a) Appointing a dedicated project leader/development worker

Two fifths of universities had used some of the DH grant this year to recruit staff to develop and support service user and carer involvement. Some posts were jointly funded between universities and social work agencies. In many cases, a dedicated project leader/development worker was appointed to coordinate the strategy and provide a key link between service users and carers and the university. Only a few explicitly stated that this appointee was a service user or carer.

Inspectors' visits also highlighted this strategy. Reported benefits included developing expertise, a clear direction and assuring dedicated time was given to the task.

Oxford Brookes University and Ruskin College asked a member of MIND to take on a co-ordination and developmental role. Her mission, based on the expressed views of service users and carers is to "train social workers to have a real understanding of people's needs and experiences and who can run better and more user focused services." The strategy has included building up a network of individuals and organisations and identifying areas they wanted to engage with. It was clear that it would not happen all at once and raising expectations, while at the same time managing them and keeping things realistic, has been a key point.

b) Contracting out to local service-user led organisations

Some universities have developed agreements with a service user/carers led organisation by contracting that organisation to provide service users and carers to engage in the planning, delivery and monitoring of courses.

Universities of Warwick and Coventry working with Disability West Midlands (DWM) – a service user organisation

Both Warwick and Coventry universities approached DWM separately to negotiate a formal stakeholder agreement which structures DWM's involvement in the social work degree. Under this, DWM provides service users to engage in planning, delivering and monitoring the courses and to routinely undertake specified tasks including:

- attending an annual stakeholder board meeting;
- attending Practice Assessment Panels;
- assisting with processing of university police checks on students suitable for the course;
- assisting with suitability, complaints and appeals procedures; and
- annual course monitoring.

In addition, DWM may provide other inputs including:

- feedback on ideas for course development;
- advice, during periods of course or module review and re-approval; and
- specialist input to teaching on modules.

Strengths include the structured agreements which provide a clear framework for involvement. Challenges centre around both resources and thinking more with HEI partners about philosophical and strategic issues.

c) Establishing service user forums and groups

Many respondents have come together to form a group of service users and carers who are representative of a wide range of service users and carers in the area. It was reported that 45 per cent used DH funding for this purpose. Several reported that forums had established clear constitutions and terms of reference and one had developed a cross-university user and carer group. This is an important new development.

Several different models of service user groups and forums are emerging:

- The university/coordinator brings together different individuals to be members of a stakeholder/service user group which is supported and develops its own identity.
- The university links with particular established groups in the locality. For example, the University of Greenwich has developed particular links with AIMHS and the Greenwich Association of Disabled People, whose members participate in the various aspects of the degree (although not to the exclusion of others).
- Several universities have established a model whereby service user and carer groups in the region are invited to join a network/forum, but

continue to represent their own organisation on this forum. This is reported as having a number of benefits:

- Promoting involvement of a wide range of interests in a manageable way.
- Forum members have a 'constituency' to report back to, consult and draw upon. Forum members also retain their own area of interest and expertise, whilst also having an opportunity to share ideas and expertise across their different organisations.
- Forum membership may also be easier to maintain. For example if a forum member becomes ill or leaves, their own organisation may be able to nominate an alternative representative (temporarily or permanently).

The University of the West of England (UWE) has established a 'hub and spokes' method of working. The hub, which consists of representatives from different service user and carer groups in the region, will monitor the processes by which users and carers are included in the programme. It is described as the "powerhouse for working together to hammer out what user involvement really means for the social work programme". The hub should be a sub group of the management committee and report back as a regular agenda item. The spokes will be where users and carers work with staff on specific functions for example recruitment, teaching and research. The spokes will report back to the hub on their progress.

d) Regional networks

There are a number of universities working together across a geographical area who pool funds and other resources for service user and carer involvement. These include the North East Regional Forum and the Greater Manchester Service User Forum. The benefits include:

- efficient use of resources;
- avoiding duplication; and
- avoiding overload for the same service user and carer organisations/interests.

The University of Salford, Manchester Metropolitan University, the University of Manchester and Stockport College of Further and Higher Education have pooled resources to work together with service users and carers to establish the Learning Link Forum – an alliance of service user and carer organisations in the Greater Manchester area. The forum, which currently has 12 organisations involved, is still expanding and individuals and groups interested in sharing experiences with students on a range of health and social care courses are invited to take part. The forum will facilitate the development of skills and experience within the service user groups linked to the forum and will respond to requests from each of the programmes.

The Learning Link Forum said that "It is an opportunity for service users and carers to improve services, influence change... and have fun with a friendly

bunch of people.”

One of the factors influencing what model emerges is geography. Large centres of population are likely to have a variety of groups representing different interests. In more isolated areas participation may depend on smaller groups and travel to and from meetings may be more difficult. We had several responses from individuals who clearly enjoy being an individual within a loose forum structure which allows them the flexibility to come in and out depending on their circumstances.

PREPARING FOR INVOLVEMENT

Finding and engaging with service users and carers

Many universities have built on links they had already made for delivery of the DipSW, but recognised the need to broaden participation and engage with a wider number and range of service users and carers. This is often a key remit of the development worker.

Universities have continued to use funding to reach out to service user groups in a variety of ways, including publicity, letters, newsletters, questionnaires, meetings, visits to service user groups, regional service user forums and drop-in sessions. A small number had used the DH grant to map service user organisations in the area and construct a directory or database of contacts. In the Northeast, providers had worked with Skills for Care to scope the range of organisations that exist and develop from these a regional group to link with all social work courses.

One third of respondents had used grant money to hold a conference, seminar, workshop or similar event, two of which were held jointly with health related service users.

Broadening participation

In establishing groups and developing involvement, providers were aware of the need to ensure good representation across different groups, particularly those that may be under-represented or that they find it hard to engage with. They were particularly concerned with making links with those from black and ethnic minority communities, young people and older people.

Service users and carers were also concerned about widening participation. Several suggested the need to broaden the range of people involved to ensure more diverse groups, to engage with those who cannot get to meetings or are “hard to reach”, e.g. through outreach work or use of video teaching, to involve more carers and to develop a more flexible roll-on and roll-off service user and carer membership.

“It is important to be flexible, recognising that people have to be able to come in and out when they can depending on circumstances.”

“It is a challenge to think about how to reach and support individuals who are routinely unable to contribute due to frailty, mobility issues and weariness.”

(Service user and carer comments)

Three groups were working to encourage broader participation through writing job descriptions, identifying training needs and through being members of a HUB network which acts as a conduit for wider consultation regionally.

Preparing to work together

Universities and service users and carers stress the importance of adequate preparation for working together by:

- talking (and listening) about working together, including possible barriers and how to overcome these;
- being clear about the nature of the involvement. For example where service users and carers are involved in recruitment and selection, being clear whether they have an equal say in the decision making or not;
- prioritising areas of involvement and taking a planned, staged approach (and avoiding being piecemeal and reactive);
- developing good practice guidelines/protocols;
- agreeing 'task descriptions' for involvement;
- providing induction to university systems;
- identifying existing skills and interests among service users and carers and how they want to be involved;
- identifying training needs (service users, carers and HEI staff); and
- designing and providing training.

Maintaining involvement and sustaining relationships

There were many examples of strategies to achieve this including;

- highlighting the benefits of teams, forums and groups in supporting individuals;
- tools and developments such as newsletters, resource centres, directories of interests and expertise;
- providing on-going support such as a co-ordinator for regular contact, buddy systems etc.;
- reviewing progress together on a regular basis and meeting/de-briefing to discuss how particular pieces of work have gone;
- recognising that change takes time and progress may be about small advances and building on these;
- good preparation, support and de-briefing; and
- opportunities to ask questions.

"I have been made to feel part of the HEI and others in the group have contributed to my skills and self worth."

(Service user)

Feeling valued and supported

All parties stress the vital importance of personal commitment of individuals to nurturing service user and carer involvement and to making it work.

From the perspective of our respondents and the groups we visited, universities appear to be doing a good job in making service users feel valued and welcome. The vast majority gave positive examples of this.

This was primarily achieved through personal responses from staff, students and the wider university.

Courtesy and respect are much appreciated and feedback is immensely important.

"We are treated as valued colleagues with equal status. Our suggestions are welcomed and incorporated into the course where viable."

"We received the utmost respect from staff and students. We were put at ease by staff; able to put questions and concerns."

"The invitation letter requesting my help at student selection calls me an expert - this makes me feel valued and experienced."

Service users welcomed formal evaluations done by students, being asked to come back and do more work, being applauded and thanked. People need feedback, both positive and constructive, in order to continue developing skills.

"I was made to feel part of the interviewing panel and received positive and friendly feedback."

Involvement works well when service users and carers are made to feel welcome by the whole staff team and culture of the university and that they belong.

"Contracting and payment have been carried out with courtesy, conviction and a sense that the university and college staff really want this to happen."

"There is a culture of helpfulness and inclusiveness across the whole university."

(Middlesex group)

"Members feel that they now have a part to play in "their" universities and feel at home there."

Practical issues

Universities have used their grant money to provide practical and infrastructure support for involvement as well as direct payments. These areas are very important to service users and carers who felt valued by the attention given to practical issues such as:

- ensuring access needs are met, including parking permits/spaces and accessible rooms;
- prompt and appropriate payment;
- ensuring equipment is available in teaching rooms;
- staff sitting in on sessions and introducing students;
- good organisation, for example, lots of notice of dates, reminders for meetings and consultation about the timing of meetings;
- preparing students, for example, where service users are involved in assessment;
- refreshments and hospitality; and
- administrative support.

“We were provided with a meeting room, access to office space and equipment, admin facilities and support from one lecturer for two days a week.”

Being able to make a difference

Service users and carers told us that they felt valued because they had been able to make a difference by giving students a different perspective with potential for positively influencing practice.

“I have to deal with a lot of negativity in my role as a carer, but this is a big positive which I can give back to society from my life as a carer. A big thanks to all staff and students at the University of Leeds.”

“One student told me I had empowered her to strive to be a social worker who would help develop new and innovative services.”

“Our involvement has been valued by the many students who have stayed in touch and tell us that our work continues to guide, inform and critically test their practice.” (Advocacy in Action)

Training

We did not specifically ask universities whether they provided training for participants. However, a quarter reported that they had already or were planning to provide training to service users and carers to support their involvement. An increase of 35 per cent reported using grant money to develop training initiatives to support involvement in recruitment and

selection. It was also used for participation in meetings and committees and in research and developing teaching skills. These included access to the City and Guilds 7307 course. One university reported providing workshops to develop the capacity of service user organisations to participate.

A university respondent reported that a service user and carer organisation had been contracted to deliver training to academic staff on working effectively with service users and carers.

Advocacy in Action reflects the aspirations of several user-led groups to become involved in training for participation when they state, "We would like to support other groups and learning establishments to make their journeys toward respectful and non-tokenistic involvement."

Service users and carers reported that some universities designed tailored training for service users and carers and in some cases validated this training. Others are enabling service users and carers to access existing opportunities including both national initiatives and universities own short courses/staff development opportunities or seminars of particular interest. This does not appear to be widespread but is an opportunity which service users who have the time would appreciate.

University of East London (UEL) working with the Refugee and Migrants Project (RAMP)

UEL is concerned that involvement is a mutually beneficial arrangement. Part of the 'package' they offer service users and carers who are involved in the social work degree is an accredited advocacy course which has some funded places available.

Payments

"The principle of paying for service users and carers' time and expertise, travel and other expenses is widely accepted." (Levin 2004) To be paid promptly and appropriately for work done is an essential factor in supporting and maintaining involvement. This is recognised in the contribution made by the DH grant to support involvement. Reporting also shows that universities are using their funding in a variety of ways to ensure this.

However inspectors are aware from their on-going contact with universities that this remains a primary area of concern and difficulty for course providers and service users and carers. This is supported by feedback from our service user respondents and the networks we visited.

Although 10 said they had no concerns, the majority indicated a high level of concern about reimbursements for travel and other costs and a perceived lack of fairness in payment rates. This included three respondents who said that they were not paid anything because of tax problems and because it was so

difficult. One or two were happy to volunteer but the vast majority reported that paying service users continues to challenge HEI systems. Difficulties continue in trying to ensure prompt payments, providing petty cash payments, limiting bureaucracy and earnings rules.

Arrangements for payment vary widely from being paid nothing to £5 per hour, while others are paid visiting lecturer rates.

“We do not believe that service user/carer involvement has been properly costed out and have concerns about exploitation and setting people up to fail because of budget dictated short cuts.”

“Academics don’t appreciate the real costs of service user participation. They don’t come to work for nothing, but sometimes it feels as though we should.”

Others were concerned about not being paid for travel time or preparation.

“I was asked to participate in some research - I would have been paid £5 for one hour’s work but I would have spent 1.5 hours travelling time which is not paid for.”

Others were concerned about the payment procedures.

“There is a lack of flexible arrangements within HEI financial systems to pay service users promptly and in ways they would prefer. They are not geared up to deal with payments that do not fit the payroll system and are often very slow. The procedures are not user-friendly.”

The way that benefit rules limit participation is a well-recognised problem and there has been strong representation to Government about this. Three respondents described having to space out the time claimed to keep within permitted work allowances.

In the meantime, some HEI’s are developing written protocols in partnership with service users and carers and others are discussing with them other forms of remuneration such as library membership and access to training. Two providers had set up a separate bank account so that cash could readily be made available to refund service user and carer expenses.

OTHER KEY MESSAGES

The benefits of involvement

Service users and carers told us that they wanted to be involved and enjoyed being involved in the social work degree.

“It’s great to have an input” and to “have a voice that is getting louder.”

(Service users and carers working on recruitment and selection of students at Lancaster University)

There are benefits for everyone.

RAMP representatives put forward the view that having students in their organisation on placement was another benefit in that students generated energy and interest and could give time to supportive relationships with service users.

Several service users and carers commented on the benefits of their involvement. These included the opportunity to:

- influence students’ learning and, thereby, influence future services;
- provide a challenging learning opportunity for students and make them think;
- raise awareness of service users’ and carers’ real experiences of services (including negative experiences);
- raise awareness of service users and carers real experiences of barriers to being in control of their own lives; and
- communicate a unique and critical perspective.

“Training is where the culture is formed for future practitioners, to enable them to think differently. As students their ideas and perceptions are fluid and open to change. There are stresses and strains within the care system, but the important thing is for the understanding and perspectives of workers to change through education.”
(Middlesex group)

“It is important to use experience that could otherwise go to waste and gives us a sense of worth and feeling and that we have made a difference. We feel we have had some influence over future professionals who may be responsible for our care.”

Personal gains and benefits are:

- personal satisfaction that their contribution has been effective and worthwhile. For example being treated as a valued partner by the HEI as a result of feedback from students;
- improvements in self-esteem and self confidence; and
- the acquisition of new skills and the confidence to use these.

Networking and interests between service user and carer groups improves by:

- providing an opportunity to learn from each other; and
- further developing and improving the service user and carer contribution to social work education through sharing ideas and expertise for working with groups of students.

In some cases involving service users and carers in the social work degree has resulted in similar initiatives on other professional courses.

WHAT IMPROVEMENTS CAN BE MADE?

The majority of respondents were very positive about their experiences but there is still a lot more to be done.

Breaking down barriers

Ten respondents told us that they had experienced no barriers to their involvement. Where difficulties had been experienced they related primarily to access, communication and time.

Access

Despite the requirements of disability legislation, service users and carers reported that some HEIs have been challenged by the need to meet their access needs. Some examples are:

- providing accessible materials for people with a visual impairment;
- access to buildings and rooms;
- reasonable adjustments such as the provision of loop systems and interpreters;
- involving service users and carers from rural areas; and
- the provision of accessible transport and parking.

Similarly, it is important to be able to access photocopying, IT equipment and support. Students and staff including IT technicians should be prepared. Any negative responses should be dealt with firmly and consistently. Tackling these issues has proved time consuming in some instances and a waste of time.

Communication

Feedback has highlighted the need to pay attention to unhelpful jargon and language, different cultures, HEI systems and ensure accessible information. Some documents are very complex and difficult to get into.

Some service users and carers report that it is difficult to understand what is happening at meetings as people do not introduce themselves and there is no time to seek clarification. Occasionally, notification of meetings is too late to arrange participation, meetings are cancelled and venues changed at short notice with service users and carers not always being advised.

There can also be a lack of communication and follow up due to staff changes.

“Information regarding room numbers, numbers of students etc. earlier would have been helpful. Uncertainty and the need to chase up information increased anxiety, which I could have done without.”

Time

Service users and carers point out that they have other commitments (for example work, college, caring commitments) and therefore require discussion about the practicalities of involvement including adequate notice for involvement and the minimising of last minute changes. It is sometimes difficult to fit in with rather inflexible HEI schedules. Rationing demands on service users' and carers' resources including time is critical.

Deadlines at short notice make it impossible to debate important issues fully.

"Being involved takes time and juggling of other priorities; it involves more hours preparation and travelling etc. that aren't acknowledged. If you're a carer what happens to the person you care for?"

Support

A minority said that they would have liked more support.

"There was no support and we did not expect it – a parking space would have been nice though."

"When I taught for the first time I overheard negative comments regarding 'self harmers'. There was no one there to talk to and no chance to debrief; it was upsetting and I broke down in tears. This has now changed and I always have a debriefing with the lecturer."

Some would have welcomed more feedback and more information so that they could set their work in the context of the whole course.

Commitment from the whole institution

Success depends on commitment from the whole department and institution not just a few staff.

"Service user involvement seemed ad hoc and dependent on the initiative of individuals, not thorough going or strategic. This lecturer is now moving on. I don't know if I, or any other service user, will be continuing in the same way in the future."

"Some in the social work team are very committed; others ignore it and don't ask us to be involved. We did not meet other members of the department so there was no sense of whether they valued our work."

Payments

Concerns about payments have already been expressed. It underpins the need for continuing efforts from all involved to try and ensure prompt and fair payment and reimbursement for all service user and carer work. This is a wider issue than social work education involving several Government departments and public policy in general.

Funding

The DH funding has been appreciated by HEIs. All parties have emphasised the importance of adequate funding to be able to support the initiatives and that uncertainty about on-going funding is impinging on long-term planning, delivering and monitoring of courses.

STUDENTS' VIEWPOINTS - National Stakeholder Student Forum

Students were not involved in the initial scoping exercise for this report. However, a recent national stakeholder student forum enabled students to express views about service user and carer involvement. Over 100 student representatives from all GSCC approved courses attended. Six parallel workshops were held, one of which concerned the involvement of service users and carers in social work education. Of the 19 students who attended this workshop, most were in their first year of degree training. The involvement of service users and carers was also raised in other workshops and in the plenary session. Although we cannot identify that these students were from universities who started the degree in 2003 it is useful to briefly share their views.

The overriding message from students at the forum was that the involvement of service users and carers in social work education should be promoted and supported. They asked for more to be done to achieve this.

There was some lack of knowledge about service user and carer involvement. Only a small percentage of students were able to confirm that service users had been involved in their interview and selection procedures. However, where they were aware of involvement in skills training and workshops this was highly valued.

Attendees agreed that:

- service users should be seen as central to their training and be involved in decisions made about them (“The involvement of service users and carers helps students to focus on their needs...and is essential to understanding the ‘whole picture’ and therefore what services should be provided.”);
- service users and carers should be offered training to facilitate their involvement;
- there is a gap between what is taught on courses about service user involvement and what happens in practice – the experience is that practice teachers do not seem to involve service users or carers, or if they do, it is tokenistic; and
- budget restrictions are often used to avoid involving service users and carers - this should be challenged.

CONCLUSION

This report has drawn on information available from across the country and from a number of different sources. The information gained from these different sources is convergent and the messages overlap. It provides key messages and systems for strengthening partnerships. Some information has enabled decisions to be made about whether individual universities are meeting requirements. All the information together has enabled a broad picture to be gained about different ways in which service users and carers have been involved in the first year of the social work degree. The report will enable this picture to be shared to disseminate what appears to work well and where improvements can be made. We hope it will also assist other initiatives, developments and questions for further research.

Most universities have strategies to engage with and support a diverse range of service users and carers in their programmes in some way. However, we have identified that universities are at different stages in progressing to full involvement and that involvement is taking different forms. These developments take time and it is important to work at the pace of service users and carers and to recognise other commitments in their lives. There are pockets where involvement is very well developed in all activities but the majority have some aspects that are more developed than others. This mirrors the development of other initiatives within the social work degree. It is argued that lighter regulation and less prescription leads to flexibility and creativity in course delivery. Within this environment however, minimum standards must be retained and the basic standards of participation met. Without these, the quality of outcomes from the degree may be compromised.

Our data suggests that service user and carer participation is most developed in selection and recruitment and direct involvement in teaching and learning. However even within these areas there are varying degrees and levels of involvement.

Participation in the design of courses, assessment of students and monitoring and evaluation are less well developed, although again there are some good initiatives.

Whilst some HEIs are further along the path than others, the reported benefits of involvement suggest that there is now a need for all to move to systematic, formal, integrated, and comprehensive involvement, with a particular focus on broadening participation of under-represented groups. The sector should aim to move from intentions and plans to active and equal partnerships over the next three to five years.

KEY LEARNING POINTS

- Contributions to funding are appreciated and essential in order to develop and sustain the work of dedicated co-ordinators, contracts with existing service user-led groups and involvement in all activities.
- One of the most difficult areas for the involvement of service users and carers is the appropriate and effective payment of fees and expenses and this features as a barrier to their involvement.
- Universities need to ensure that students are aware of strategies to involve service users and carers in their programme. For example, at selection they need to tell them how service users and carers are involved, even if they are not directly interviewed by them. They also need to include information about how service users and carers will be involved in course materials.
- As the regulatory body, the GSCC needs to ensure that sufficient information is obtained to assess whether each university is meeting the requirements.
- Monitoring of the first year of the degree indicates that involvement in design, assessment, monitoring, evaluation and review is less well developed. The sharing of ideas, strategies and guidelines in these areas would be particularly helpful.
- Further work is needed to engage with diverse groups of service users and carers and for clear information to be given about the many different ways of participating.
- The information gathered indicates that the majority of service users feel supported in their involvement. It is important that this experience becomes consistent across each institution.
- Continuing attention is necessary to meet the challenges and break down the barriers of participation, particularly in relation to access issues, time, communication and attitudes.

NEXT STEPS

- The Practice Learning Task Force and Learning Resource Centres are taking forward work to increase service user-led involvement in practice learning and to develop practice learning opportunities in service user-led organisations. This should be reported to stakeholders on an annual basis
- Training to support service user and carer involvement is beginning to be delivered across the country by different training organisations commissioned by the Care Sector Skills Council. This will usefully supplement those initiatives already being undertaken and should be reported on annually. This is a key area which requires further development.
- Revised arrangements for annual monitoring of the social work degree now requires each university to give the GSCC results of monitoring and evaluation of their degree course/s by students, service users, carers and employers.
- Work will continue with universities to consider how to support external examiners in giving feedback about service user and carer involvement in social work courses.
- Research is beginning to capture and measure the impact of activities as universities move forward with these developments. It is hoped that the DH commissioned evaluation of the social work degree will eventually present a more detailed picture of the impact on students' knowledge and practice of service user and carer participation
- There are a number of issues arising from this report, which have specific implications for the GSCC. These will be taken forward by a project group which will include service users and carers and will be presented to relevant committees of the GSCC for agreement.

Helen Wenman
General Social Care Council (2005)

References:

Levin E. (2004) Involving service users and carers in social work education, SCIE