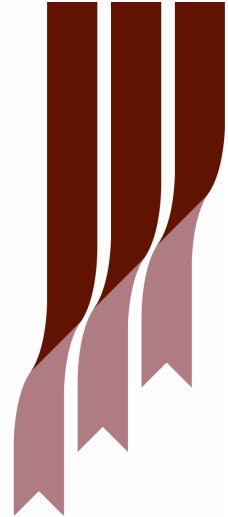


SCOTTISH INSTITUTE
FOR EXCELLENCE IN
SOCIAL WORK EDUCATION



INTEGRATED ASSESSMENT

Involvement of users and carers

Service User and Carer Feedback
on Students' Practice on Placement: a student group exercise
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Aims of Exercise

This exercise was concerned with identifying the issues involved in seeking service user or carer feedback to social work students on their practice and with establishing good practice in this area.

Format and evaluation of exercise

In this exercise, a small group of students (4) was involved in seeking feedback about their practice from service users with whom they had worked during placement. Feedback was sought through a questionnaire which was based on a framework supplied by tutors (Appendix 1). Both students and service users/carers were then asked to complete a semi-structured questionnaire about the process and outcomes of seeking and giving feedback (Appendices 2 and 3). Thereafter, students were asked to prepare a short presentation based on the completed questionnaire but also addressing their feelings about the whole process. Finally, a group discussion explored the ways in which the process and outcome had contributed to the assessment of the student's practice and ways in which this process of could be further developed.

While all involved responded positively to this exercise, the small numbers involved and the low return rate of questionnaires from users and carers (1) make it unrealistic to try and draw wider conclusions from this exercise. As a pilot, however, the questions worked well and it would be worthwhile replicating this exercise elsewhere, involving larger numbers of users and carers and with consideration being given to ensuring a higher response rate.

Discussion points arising from the student presentations

- As social workers we need to be aware of the **broad context** in which service users and carers will 'assess' our practice:

People who help
Social workers
Social work students
An individual social work student

- Service user and carer feedback can be approached by **starting with the broader context and gradually focussing** on the individual social worker's practice. For example, starting with a person's ideas/expectations of a good social worker, and then questions about social work training (giving options as a help for answering), and then moving on to their experience of students on placement and then focussing on the individual student's practice.
- **Asking service users and carers** how they want to complete the process of giving feedback is crucial. Would they prefer having written questions in advance? Do they want to write down answers? Do they prefer to speak directly with the student who will then record the conversation? Where to meet and when?

- **Taking time** to explain the purpose of getting feedback is as important as the collecting of feedback. Use of plain English (not social work jargon) is a priority.
- What is **good feedback**? Students want ‘positive’ and ‘negative’ comments – to confirm good practice and build up confidence, and to get constructive criticism to learn from and to change. But it’s not easy to hear good things about what you’ve done, (just as it can be hard to take criticism). Building up the self-esteem of students so that they can learn through hearing both the positive and negative comments is vital throughout the university course.
- From the service user perspective, it may be difficult **to give feedback** that is both ‘positive’ and ‘negative’. (We will see what service users say in their evaluation of this exercise.)
- **How do we enable** service users and carers to give feedback? There are a number of ideas:
 - By looking at progress over the course of the placement e.g. when we first met..... now 3 months later.....what strengths, what difficulties?
 - By looking at the goals set for work with the service user and looking specifically at each in turn and asking to what extent they’ve been met according to the service user
 - By linking with the service user’s views of what makes a good social worker – and comparing those expectations with the student’s practice
 - By using a set of questions prepared in advance (see examples)
 - Students suggest the service user speaks separately with the practice teacher, as well as with the student, to discuss the student’s practice.
- From the interviews students had with service users for this exercise, it was clear that **core skills** are valued in social work practice (and this is reflected in the literature) e.g. listening skills, honesty and trustworthiness, consistency, sensitivity etc. It is important that these core skills are practiced and developed **over the whole course**, both in the classroom and on placement.
- All the students had relevant feedback which could be included in their **final placement report**. Feedback from service users would be incorporated into work summaries or reflective practice and be part of the learning process achieved in the course of the placement.
- All the students had chosen to do this exercise during a **direct observation** with their practice teacher. There seemed to be benefits for both student and practice teacher in doing this.

Appendix 1

Topic Guide

The areas which the students were asked to address in their questionnaires to service users/carers were:

- How much does the service user/carer know about social work training?
- What does having someone on training offer the service or the agency?
- Identify three things that someone would need to be an effective social worker
- What is needed to be a good social worker in this setting?
- What could a course/training offer or supply that would make a student more effective in this setting?
- What changes, if any, can they identify in the student over the course of the placement? Can they name 2 areas of strength and 2 areas for development/change?

Appendix 2

Student questionnaire

1. How much information/preparation were you given about seeking and using feedback from a service user or carer with whom you were working on placement?
2. How helpful was this information/preparation? Can you identify additional or different information /preparation that would have been useful?
3. What were your feelings about receiving feedback from a service user/ carer?
4. How useful did you find the feedback you received?
5. How useful was supervision with your practice teacher as a means of exploring this feedback?
6. Can you give examples of how you were able to incorporate this feedback into your practice?
7. Are there any ways in which you think this process might be improved?

Appendix 3

Service user/carers questionnaire.

1. When were you first asked if you would be willing to give feedback about a social work student and to comment on their strengths and weaknesses?
2. What information/ preparation were you given about this?
3. How helpful was this information/preparation? Can you identify additional or different information /preparation that would have been useful? (for example, a leaflet).
3. What was the hardest thing for you about giving feedback?
4. Did you feel that your feedback was listened to?